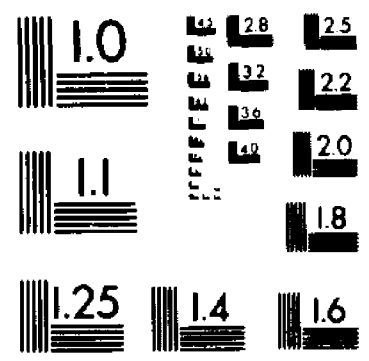
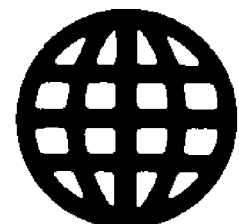


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A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF JAMES'S THEORY OF KNOWER-KNOWN  
RELATIONS IN "DOES CONSCIOUSNESS EXIST?"

*City University of New York*

PH.D. 1986

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A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF JAMES'S THEORY OF KNOWER-KNOWN  
RELATIONS IN "DOES CONSCIOUSNESS EXIST?"

by

ANDREW S. BERNSTEIN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate  
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2/6/56  
Date

Mary Weisman  
Chairman of Examining Committee

2/6/56  
Date

Charles Landmann  
Executive Officer

Henry LeRoy Finch

Gerald Myers

H. Standish Thayer

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

## Abstract

### A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF JAMES'S THEORY OF KNOWER-KNOWN RELATIONS IN "DOES CONSCIOUSNESS EXIST?"

by

Andrew S. Bernstein

Adviser: Professor H. S. Thayer

There is a traditional view concerning the relation between mind and matter, knower and known. It posits a bifurcation between the two, maintaining, as Ryle puts it, that mind and matter are two distinct orders of existence. This traditional view comes, in large part, from Descartes. James rejects the traditional view, arguing instead for a close relationship between thought and object. His argument contains two components. The first stresses the close functional relationship between thought and object in our everyday experience. James argues here that true thoughts do or can lead us to their objects, culminating in prosperous interaction with them. The second part of James's argument holds that in pure experience -- the original flow of data within which all distinctions are to be made -- there is no distinction yet made between mind and matter, knower and known. These distinctions arise only later as conceptual tools for bringing organization to the original presentations. Any given element of pure experience is categorized twice,

once as an element of the physical world, and a second time as an element of the perceiver's own mental history. The conclusion, then, is that James: (a) shows that thought and object work together in a close functional relationship in ordinary experience; and (b) argues that they arise from one homogeneous pure experience.

A number of criticisms were directed against James's view, including: (a) Lovejoy's, arguing that the incompatibilities of thought and object preclude the possibility of their arising from one homogeneous source; (b) Russell's and Perry's, arguing that James's theory is unable to extricate itself from idealism; (c) Miller's and Bode's, arguing that James's view contradicts one of his own important tenets in The Principles of Psychology; and (d) an argument that James is unable to account for the agency by means of which pure experience gets organized.

James can reply plausibly to all of these criticisms including the difficult issue of the self. On this question a consistent understanding of James's basic assumptions is required.

Finally, James's viewpoint offers an interesting critical perspective on certain contemporary theories of mind-brain identity.

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## Chapter 1

### JAMES'S REJECTION OF THE TRADITIONAL VIEW CONCERNING MIND AND MATTER

#### A. The Traditional View

The traditional view concerning mind and matter is succinctly summarized by Ryle who dubs it the "official doctrine." The heart of the doctrine is the belief that mind and matter are two kinds of orders of existence, each inherently different and distinct from the other.<sup>1</sup> As Ryle points out, this belief, deriving in large part from Descartes, is prevalent among philosophers and even among laymen.<sup>2</sup>

The characteristics of these two orders of existence constitute a "polar opposition." Material items are in both space and time, while mental items are in time but not space; material items, of course, are composed of matter or are a function of matter, while mental items consist of consciousness or are a function of consciousness. An important consequence of this is that material objects are situated in a common field or public arena. Material objects can directly act on one another; they are mechanically or causally related. But mental events occur only in separate, encapsulated closets known as minds, and there generally is no direct causal connection between events in one of these closets and events in another.<sup>3</sup>

A further consequence concerns the knowledge available of these two types of existence. Material objects and events are publicly accessible, available to a wide range of observers; but mental events, on the other hand, are secreted away in the interior of a private consciousness, available only to the observer in whose consciousness the events are transpiring. "The mind is its own place and in his inner life each of us lives the life of a ghostly Robinson Crusoe." Each observer has direct privileged access to the workings of his own consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

A still further consequence concerns the relative indubitability of extrospective and introspective claims. Whereas extrospective claims can be mistaken, prone to illusion, confusion or doubt, introspective claims cannot be. The observer witnessing the inner flow of his own consciousness has no possibility of mistaking what he observes. If he experiences a pain, then he has a pain; if he feels joy, then he is feeling joy. His direct access to his own consciousness has a special privileged status unattainable elsewhere. The consciousness which "irradiates" its own states can be under no illusions concerning their content. What a person is thinking or feeling is immediately presented to him with no necessity of inference or intermediary procedures on his part. "The inner life is a stream of consciousness of such a sort that it would be absurd to suggest that the mind whose life is that stream might be unaware of what is passing down it."<sup>5</sup>

As can be seen, the official doctrine posits a fundamental bifurcation between mind and matter. The characteristics of the two classes are dissimilar to an extent warranting us in construing them as two distinct realms, two distinct worlds. The career of one needs description separate from the career of the other. This point is summarized in the conundrum: What is mind? No matter. What is matter? Never mind. An important point that needs to be kept in mind here is that the fundamental distinction adhered to by the official doctrine is that between mind and matter, i.e., between mind and any variety of physical stuff, between mind and physical stuff as such. The fundamental distinction is not between mind and body or between the human mind and the human body. However, this distinction follows in one easy step from the main one, for, the human body being a material thing, its basic structure is distinct from that of the mind. As such, the mind-body dichotomy is a type or species of the mind-matter dichotomy. One of the important ways in which the mind-body dichotomy asserts itself concerns the question of mind-brain relations, as will be discussed shortly.

Ryle refers to this bifurcation contemptuously as the "dogma of the ghost in the machine,"<sup>6</sup> arguing that adherence to it represents a fundamental and wide-spread "category mistake." Whether he is correct or not in his understanding of "category mistake" or in his application of it to the mind-body bifurcation is a matter of controversy.

But he is correct in attributing wide-spread popularity and influence to this bifurcation.

Ryle mentions Descartes as the chief source of the traditional view.<sup>7</sup> But undoubtedly the mind-body or soul-body dichotomy goes back further than that. Plato believed the two were fundamentally distinct, belonging to two different dimensions of reality and unhappily united for a brief duration here on earth. Christianity also subscribes to this doctrine, believing in the immortality of the soul as one major difference between it and the body. With these forebears in its background, it is clear that the "dogma of the ghost in the machine" has an illustrious pedigree.

#### B. James's Early Adherence to the Traditional View

It is a pedigree that included, for a while, William James. His great psychological work, The Principles of Psychology (1890), evinces clear signs of a fundamental mind-matter bifurcation. This bifurcation manifests itself in regard to at least two important issues. One is the question of mind-brain relations; the other is the question of the relation between knower and thing known.

Concerning mind-brain relations, there is a definite element of parallelism present in James's psychology. At various points throughout "Volume One," James directly states or implies that conscious experiences are the direct correlates of brain changes; that empirically the two may be seen to

correspond to each other, but that psychology can offer no explanation of a deeper interaction of the two. Mind states and brain states can be observed to accompany each other, but beyond that science cannot say.

We must . . . ask ourselves whether, after all, the ascertainment of a blank unmediated correspondence, term for term, of the succession of states of consciousness with the succession of total brain-processes, be not the simplest psycho-physic formula, and the last word of a psychology which contents itself with verifiable laws, and seeks only to be clear, and to avoid unsafe hypotheses.<sup>8</sup>

He speaks of the "stream of thought that accompanies the brain's material secretions."<sup>9</sup> In arguing against the atomistic conception of consciousness, he claims that changes in mental content accompany changes in cerebral conditions. The "faithful psychic concomitant" of brain activity alters in ways that correspond to alterations in the brain.<sup>10</sup> As John Wild points out, James's understanding of mind-brain relations in his psychological work contains a large element of parallelism.<sup>11</sup>

There is also a large element of a dichotomy between knower and thing known, between the idea or perception in a knower's mind and the physical object it supposedly knows. He states explicitly that such a dichotomy is a position that psychology must assume.<sup>12</sup> He maintains here that the cognitive relation requires two distinct and irreducible elements, a knowing subject and an object known, each of which exists separate and different from the other:

The psychologist's attitude towards cognition . . . is a thoroughgoing dualism. It supposes

two elements, mind knowing and thing known, and treats them as irreducible. Neither gets out of itself or into the other, neither in any way is the other, neither makes the other. They just stand face to face in a common world, and one simply knows, or is known unto, its counterpart. This singular relation is not to be expressed in any lower terms, or translated into any more intelligible name.<sup>13</sup>

One of the key factors in this regard, James says, is that "the knowledge is constituted by a new construction that occurs altogether in the mind." Knowledge is a subjective phenomenon, it is developed or formulated within the mind of the knower. A subject's knowledge of x, for instance, does not in itself alter x's nature by so much as a single particle. It makes no difference to x whether it is known or not. Nor does x's subsequent fate have any effect on the original knowledge of x. If Mr. Smith knew his 1968 Mustang thoroughly, the fact that it may now be broken into thousands of parts at a local auto junk yard does nothing to undercut or mitigate that knowledge. Mr. Smith's detailed memories of his car do not cease to exist when the car does. A subject's understanding of object x is an altogether different kind of phenomenon than  
<sup>14</sup>  
 is x itself.

It is not the case that, in knowing, the mind is merely a passive receptacle receiving unaltered the imprint of an objective reality. Mind is active, even in sense experience displaying a participatory role in the cognitive process. "Even in mere sense impression the duplication of the object  
<sup>15</sup>  
 by an inner construction must take place." Quoting a long

passage from B. P. Bowne, James argues that to apprehend the physical world we must construct it in our minds, and that knowledge is "but the unfolding of the mind's inner nature." There is a sharp distinction made there between physical object and perceived one.<sup>16</sup>

This bifurcation becomes increasingly evident when one examines a specific section of the long passage from Bowne that James chooses to quote:

The immediate antecedents of sensation and perception are a series of nervous changes in the brain. Whatever we know of the outer world is revealed only in and through these nervous changes. But these are totally unlike the objects assumed to exist as their causes. If we might conceive the mind as in the light, and in direct contact with its objects, the imagination at least would be comforted; but when we conceive the mind as coming in contact with the outer world only in the dark chamber of the skull, and then not in contact with the objects perceived, but only with a series of nerve changes of which, moreover, it knows nothing, it is plain that the object is a long way off.<sup>17</sup>

The knower-known bifurcation is so pronounced here that it is almost difficult to believe that James was going to develop a cognitive theory attempting to eliminate the bifurcation altogether. Given the theory of pure experience that is to follow, it is important to stress that James did indeed subscribe in his earlier thinking to a sharp bifurcation between knower and thing known.<sup>18</sup>

Why is there such disparity between James's earlier thinking on this issue and his later? Ralph Barton Perry, the great James scholar, believes that in his work on psychology

James adhered to the knower-known dichotomy as a provisional doctrine. James, Perry believes, had not yet made up his mind on the question concerning the relation between a state of mind and its object -- and felt as if his later philosophy (which may have been already in the making)<sup>19</sup> was not yet sufficiently developed to provide a firm support for psychological science. So he "multiplied provisional distinctions," i.e., embraced a knower-known dichotomy, seeking to avoid metaphysics in "the interest of noncommittal scientific description."<sup>20</sup>

### C. Problems of the Traditional View

Be that as it may, this bifurcation of knower and known leads to serious cognitive problems that profoundly disturbed James. This position involves the claim that the mind or subject is not directly aware of physical objects, but only of its own ideas or images which somehow resemble the objects. It thereby avoids the logical difficulties of mind-matter interaction -- but, as James puts it, the theory leaves much to be desired epistemologically.<sup>21</sup> One of the crucial reasons why this theory is epistemologically unsatisfying is that cognition does seem to require direct interaction between mental states and the independent world. For when a man sees his car, it is the car that he sees and not his idea of the car. (After all, the characteristics that we directly apprehend about the car are such things as its extension, weight, solidity, capacity for speed, and its capacity to be sub-divided into component

parts, etc., all things pertaining to the physical car. It is not the case that, in seeing the car, the characteristics that we directly apprehend are such things as its clarity or its cognitive relation to our hierarchy of concepts, etc., all things pertaining to the thought of the car).

But this is hardly the only problem of a knower-known dichotomy. James's own early adherence to this doctrine in "The Function of Cognition" points out the problem clearly. There he maintains that in order for our mental state Q to be cognitive it must "stand for" or "represent" an independently-existing Q.<sup>22</sup> However, it is impossible for the feeling Q to discover an independently-existing Q. "Its own Q is the only Q it grasps." The mental state can never discover if it is an independently-existing physical object that it apprehends. In effect, the mental state Q is imprisoned within the confines of consciousness and can never make its way to independent physical reality.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, cognition involves two sundered classes of elements -- perceptions and ideas, on the one hand, and physical objects on the other.

This leads to the view that our ideas "stand for" or "represent" physical things -- and that all we know are our ideas. This theory, known as representationalism, goes at least as far back as Descartes and Locke, and raises grave problems. The gravest is: How could we ever verify or validate the claim that our ideas accurately resemble physical things when, by the theory's own admission, we apprehend only our own ideas, never physical things?

Suppose it is claimed that a certain portrait of a man resembles him closely, that it is an excellent likeness or representation of him. Could we discover if this was an accurate claim? Clearly, we could. All we would have to do would be examine the portrait and the man and then compare them. But if we were, in principle, debarred from access to the man (say he were long dead), could we ever discover whether there was a likeness? Clearly not. The fact requires the ability to compare the two things in question. Failing that, there could be no way to validate it.

But this is the very position that representationalism is in. For it claims that: (1) all we directly know are our ideas; and (2) that our ideas resemble or represent a reality existing independently of them. But if claim (1) were true, it would be impossible to establish claim (2).

Kant sought to eliminate this dichotomy between knower and known by defining them as epistemological correlatives. For Kant, knower and known are not separated in themselves; they are reciprocal elements of our experience. They imply each other. The manifold of intuition requires concepts to order and unify it; the concepts of the understanding require sensory input to provide them with content. Knower and thing known, in brief, are correlative elements of a unified experience.<sup>24</sup>

Kant, in other words, sought to eradicate the dichotomy between knower and object known. However, in so doing,

he makes the problem worse, for the result of his theory is the shifting of a dichotomy into the object. The object known exists for the knower; and it is this very fact that dichotomizes object-as-known from object-in-itself. The result is an object-object dichotomy with human experience and cognition further than ever removed from physical objects.

In James's later writing, it becomes important to lessen this distance between knower and known, to begin the construction of a bridge to span the gap between them. James was never happy with this bifurcation, never content with its model of human experience. Even while provisionally subscribing to it in his work on psychology, he hinted at the metaphysics that was going to reduce it to one homogeneous experience. He attempts this in two inter-related steps: (1) he moves away from a contemplative model of knower-known relations, formulating a dynamic model and thereby lessening the gap between the two; (2) and then he eliminates the gap altogether in his theory of pure experience. That is, he lessens the gap between them in our ordinary experience and then eliminates it altogether in his technical theory of pure experience. He attempts the first task in Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth; and the second in Essays in Radical Empiricism.

#### D. The Beginning of James's Rejection of the Traditional View

Perhaps the key factor in James's pragmatism and understanding of the truth relation is his departure from a theoretical

and representational model of cognition and his move towards a functional and practical one. James seeks to re-define the relationship between thoughts and their objects in these two important works, constantly striving to bring knower and known into a close working relationship. The key point he concentrates on is our understanding of the truth relationship.

True ideas, James says in Pragmatism, are those that we can validate and verify.<sup>25</sup> These processes of verifying and validating are activities that fall within our experience. Truth is not an "inert static relation" that holds between a thought and physical reality. Rather, it is a dynamic process, an ability to guide us, in action, to a direct experience of the thing of which our thought holds.<sup>26</sup> True thoughts are great instruments of human action. They play an invaluable role in promoting the well-being of our practical lives. For example, if a man is lost and starving in the woods and encounters a cow path, it is of great value to him that he think of a human house at the end of it. By following the path and reaching the house, he can come to food and safety. A true thought is one that can lead a person, in action, to its object.<sup>27</sup>

A true thought is one that "agrees" with a reality. The essential part of this agreement is to be guided straight up to the object or into its immediate environs; it is to be put into "working touch" with it.<sup>28</sup> The correct way to interpret the term "agreement," as applying to the relationship between

thought and object, is "any process of conduction from a present idea to a future terminus provided only it runs prosperously."<sup>29</sup>

Truth, for James, is a function that falls entirely within our experience. A true thought is one that can be verified by leading us directly to a perception of the object in question. It is a relationship between knower and known that falls, potentially, within the knower's own experience, possessing no mysterious reference to a reality independent of the knower's experience.

What does it mean to say, for instance, that I, sitting here in New York, know something about the tigers in India? It means that I can be led by my thoughts through intermediary experiences in the world to the tigers themselves, if need be. It means that I would reject a jaguar or a bobcat if it were shown to me instead. It means I can utter statements that are true of tigers and which do not contradict other true statements about them. There is no reference beyond my experience; no relationship between my thoughts, a certain part of my experience, and tigers existing outside of any part of my experience. The thoughts of tigers are one fact of experience; the tigers are another; the intermediary experiences of getting to the tigers from here are a third. There is nothing mysterious about this; no special way of mental existence, as if we had some kind of mental tigers existing in our minds. Rather, "to know an object

is here to lead to it through a context which the world supplies."<sup>30</sup>

James stresses this point over and over again throughout The Meaning of Truth: truth is a relationship within experience, not one that holds between experience and some reality independent<sup>31</sup> of it.

A good example of this point of view and what it means lies in the disagreement about truth and cognition between James and F. H. Bradley. To a thinker like Bradley, James's claim that truth is a relationship holding exclusively within human experience defeats the very possibility of truth. This theory of truth would place it entirely within the province of the knower, eliminating an independent known altogether, thereby removing all traces of objectivity from cognition and the truth relation. Rather than this, truth is to be found only by the reference of mental content to an independent reality beyond human experience. As Bradley puts it, my knowledge that there is a spring nearby does not consist of a series of experienced transitions that terminate with the water, but, rather, simply and solely in the reference by my thought to the water existing<sup>32</sup> independently of it. James, in response to this, says: "Truth here is a relation, not of our ideas to non-human realities, but<sup>33</sup> of conceptual parts of our experience to sensational parts."

It is interesting to note how the bifurcation of The Principles of Psychology has lost much of its sharp edge (if not all) in these later works of James. He no longer speaks

primarily of cognition involving these two distinct, irreducible components -- knower and known; but places his emphasis now on the practical, functional, pragmatic relationship that actually exists between knower and known in the real world in which we live. It is not that our thoughts "represent" or "stand for" some element of reality; but that true thoughts are guides to beneficial action. They lead us into successful working relationships with their objects.

It could be argued that it is one of James's greatest achievements that he succeeded (at least in terms of his own work) in diverting attention from a highly abstract and theoretical model of cognition to one that is heavily rooted in the facts of the world in which we actually live. In the world of our experience we are constantly using our mental processes to accomplish physical goals and to get physical things done. These are common-place occurrences that happen many times each day in the life of a healthy person. We deal with the physical objects of the world by means of our thoughts -- and we do so successfully. This truth is so ordinary, James points out, that it is not even controversial. In light of this, it seems ridiculous to brood over a highly-theoretical problem that has no discernible effect on our actual experience.

There is no question, James says, that if one looks dispassionately and non-prejudicially at the facts of our actual experience, one will find numerous examples of successful

knower-known relationships. Whether or not thoughts in their intentionality can successfully apprehend and deal with physical objects is not open to serious question. They do so all the time. The only question is: How? By what means? What is the ontological explanation of this fact? What must be the case about mind and matter in order to bring this relationship into effect? These are the real questions about knower-known relations that remain to be answered. They concern the ontological basis of successful cognitive relations. That these relations are, in fact, cognitively successful James has already argued for, powerfully and persuasively, in Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth.

James would eventually attempt to answer these ontological questions by development of his "ulterior monistic philosophy." This philosophy of experience, most fully articulated in the Essays in Radical Empiricism, is intimately related to the functional view of cognition that James sets forth in Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth. For in these latter works he was beginning to show that cognitive experience is all of one piece, that it is an integrated fabric of one basic material, so to speak. The two components of cognition -- knower and thing known -- lie on the same line of action, the one leading directly to the other.

Ralph Barton Perry makes the fascinating claim that it was the very consistency of James's empirical method that led him inexorably away from the knower-known dichotomy. That is,

James's acute observational abilities led him to the view that experience provides us with the relations between the objects given in experience, as well as with the objects themselves. Experience reveals conjunctive relations as much as it does disjunctive ones. (This is James's famous doctrine of the "stream of experience").

But here the consistency of his (James's) empirical method betrayed him. His distinctions being construed in terms of experience, and experience yielding conjunctions as well as disjunctions, the distinctions were reduced in the very act of describing them; and James was perpetually being led, despite his profession of dualism and of metaphysical abstinence, to the disclosure of a homogeneous and continuous world.<sup>34</sup>

In this case, Perry says, James's functional view of cognition ties together directly with his belief that the actual relations between knower and known are provided by experience. All the intermediaries between my thought "tiger" and the actual observational tigers themselves lie within experience -- if I choose to exercise my option of following my thoughts to them. None of the intermediary steps by means of which I get to the tigers lie outside of my direct experience. When the theoretical model of cognition (in which consciousness passively perceives the world) is dropped in favor of a functional model (in which consciousness dynamically leads us to action in the world) the excruciating question concerning the possibility of successful knower-known relations melts away. It can then be seen that the relation is there within our experience.

In Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth, James had argued for a particular characterization of cognition and the truth relation. The fundamental arguments presented in these great works fall under the category of epistemology. He is dealing here with such questions as: How do we verify or validate a thought as true? How do we differentiate, in practice, between true thoughts and false ones? The answer that James gives provides, as discussed above, a new attempt at understanding the problem of knower-known relations.

It could be argued that James's attempt to re-define our understanding of the truth relation constitutes a significant advance in our understanding of epistemological issues; for it is certainly an attempt to revise the terribly abstract questions of epistemology, recasting them into the concrete questions of actual human life. This in itself is one of the great achievements of James's great career.

However, as James himself realized, his pragmatic theory of cognition, inspired though it may have been, is only part of his overall task. The bulk of it still remained -- and his attempt to complete it was the development of his "ulterior monistic philosophy," his radical empiricism.

#### E. The Task Remaining

The enormous task was hardly begun, however. The problem loomed: How to define experience so that all relations, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, were seen to fall within its

purview? The cognitive relation being one of the key ones with which James was concerned, it became imperative to establish that finite experience was indeed the kind of process capable of containing all elements of cognition within itself. In Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth, James had argued that all cognitive components do indeed fall within human experience. Now, the deeper problem remained of explaining how the constitution of experience makes this possible. Here, the focus switched from primarily an epistemological one to primarily an ontological one. What is the nature and makeup of experience? What, in real fact, is the fundamental relationship between consciousness and the world, between mind and matter? What is the basic nature of knower and known which permits one, in the cognitive relation, to be led to the other? To identify the basic characteristics which physical objects and thoughts share in common and, which, in turn, make possible the successful cognitive relations that do exist in our experience, is one of the major tasks of the philosophy that James undertakes to develop. This doctrine of radical empiricism, if successful, will serve as the ontological basis of James's epistemology.

In his Essays in Radical Empiricism, James sketches his view, attempting to apply it to some of philosophy's most difficult questions, among them: The problem of the basic nature of consciousness or mind, the question of how different minds can apprehend the same object, and others. Throughout

the work James is concerned to show a world of experience which contains continuity and interconnective bonds amongst diversity. That is, human experience may be a collection of pluralistic and differentiated components; but it is one with unifying bonds amongst the individual components, much like a river is a continuous stream of water molecules and not a widely-spaced series of disconnected individuals.

In the essay "Does Consciousness Exist?" James deals with the issues of the fundamental relationship that exists between consciousness and its objects, striving to explicate the basic similarities they share which permit them to interrelate as parts of one homogeneous experience. Here he deals with such crucial questions as: What is the basic nature of consciousness? Is experience internally dichotomized into mind and matter, knower and known? Is it the case that these distinctions we perceive in experience are actually only a product of some basic "stuff" engaging in different systems of external relations? and others.

The basic purpose of this famous essay is to show that the distinction between mind and matter, knower and known arises because of the diverse categorizations that we impose on a homogeneous original experience. As such, he is attempting to formulate a metaphysical hypothesis in which an ultimate bifurcation between mind and matter, knower and known is completely denied, and in which these distinctions are reduced to an original experience which, in itself, possesses

neither mind nor matter, knower nor known. James undertook this task primarily in the one essay named above; and his detailed attempt to complete it will be the subject of the next chapter of this dissertation.

FOOTNOTES

- 1  
Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind (New York, Barnes and Noble Books, 1949), p. 13.
- 2  
Ibid., p. 11.
- 3  
Ibid., p. 13.
- 4  
Ibid., p. 13.
- 5  
Ibid., pp. 13-14.
- 6  
Ibid., pp. 15-16.
- 7  
Ibid., p. 11.
- 8  
William James, The Principles of Psychology, The Works of William James (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 182.
- 9  
Ibid., p. 108.
- 10  
Ibid., p. 229.
- 11  
John Wild, The Radical Empiricism of William James (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1970), p. 353.
- 12  
The Principles of Psychology, Works, p. 216.
- 13  
Ibid., p. 214.
- 14  
Ibid., pp. 214-15.
- 15  
Ibid., p. 215.

16

Ibid., p. 215.

17

Ibid., pp. 215-16.

18

See William James, The Meaning of Truth, The Works of William James (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 15-22, including the statement: "But at the end we must confess that the notion of real cognition involves an unmediated dualism of the knower and the known," p. 20n.

19

The Principles of Psychology, Works, p. 216.

20

Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1935), V. 2, pp. 72-73.

21

William James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, The Works of William James (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 7-8.

22

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Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason (New York: MacMillan, 1929), A 104-06.

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Pragmatism, The Works of William James (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 97.

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Ibid., pp. 96-97.

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Ibid., p. 98.

28

Ibid., p. 102.

29

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30

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31

Ibid., pp. 46, 50-51, 53, 55, 59, 62-64, 76, 81, 87, 91-92, 95.

32

F. H. Bradley, Essays on Truth and Reality (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 155.

33

The Meaning of Truth, Works, p. 51.

34

Perry, op. cit., V. 2, p. 73.

## Chapter 2

### JAMES'S ALTERNATIVE TO THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

#### A. Introduction

James's radical empiricism is a theoretical attempt to explain (among other things) the successful mind-matter, knower-known relations that occur in our world. It is important to understand that this is a metaphysical hypothesis, an attempt on James's part to offer a theoretical explanation of the successful mind-matter relations that actually occur in our world. James believes that an ultimate bifurcation is inadequate to account for the mind-matter relations that actually occur in our world. An alternative metaphysical view is necessary to explain them. This is one major task that his theory of radical empiricism is designed to solve.

The key concept in James's theory is that of pure experience. This concept provides the foundation of his metaphysics and his world view. By use of it he attempts to show that the world of our ordinary experience, including minds and matter as it does, is all originally of one piece, excluding any fundamental mind-matter dichotomy. The theory of pure experience is ultimately a homogeneous doctrine, with all differentiations and distinctions made within it.

The concept of pure experience is a hypothesis, an attempt to explain knowing and the relations between knower and

known, thought and thing. It offers a better explanation of these (according to James) than the traditional view.<sup>1</sup>

### B. The Nature of Pure Experience

In order to fully understand James's metaphysics, it is necessary to understand the structure or makeup of pure experience as he envisions it. It is a difficult thing to do for two reasons: (1) James is not always clear in expressing his ideas about it; and (2) it involves "bracketing" and avoiding all of our assumptions of mind-matter bifurcation. These assumptions are deep-set in our thinking, making James's enterprise a difficult one. These difficulties will be addressed one at a time in this chapter. The first question is that of the structure of pure experience itself. What is it -- and what is it not?

James tells us several important things about pure experience -- both about what it is and what it is not. The first point is that pure experience is not a stuff. "Although for fluency's sake I myself spoke early in this article of a stuff of pure experience, I have now to say that there is no general stuff of which experience at large is made."<sup>2</sup> Pure experience is not to be thought of as a substance of any kind. The natural tendency to think of whatever it is that ultimately constitutes our world as a kind of substance or stuff must be avoided if James's concept of pure experience is to be understood.

What pure experience is, is a stream of sensations, a flow of feelings. It is the input or raw data presented to each individual perceiver.

There are as many stuffs as there are 'natures' in the things experienced. If you ask what any one bit of pure experience is made of, the answer is always the same. "It is made of that, of just what appears, of space, of intensity, of flatness, brownness, heaviness or what not."<sup>3</sup>

Pure experience is simply the world as it is originally presented to us in all its teeming multiplicity. It is "the immediate flux of life," a "blooming, buzzing confusion."

(The question of whether or not James is accurate in describing pure experience as a "confusion" will come up later in this dissertation. As will be seen, James argues for pure experience as having regularities and a structure of its own.) It is the original stream of feelings or sensations which, by use of our conceptual categories, we structure into our world of everyday experience.<sup>4</sup> The nouns best suited to describe pure experience are "stream," "flow," or "flux," terms that do not denote enduring entities or substances, but processes or activities. These terms refer to areas or centers of activity.

James describes pure experience in terms that denote action, not objects. He calls it an "immediate flux," says that it is "changing throughout" and doing so "confusedly;" and when identified by a perceiver, "flows as if shot through with adjectives and nouns, etc."<sup>5</sup> One commentator (borrowing James's term) refers to pure experience as "quasi-chaos," arguing that "the continuity of the flux is real and provides

the basis for many transitions." The events in a world of pure experience are limited to "transitions, departures, and arrivals;" and "experience as a whole is a process in time."<sup>6</sup>

Pure experience can be best understood as a stream of feelings or sensations. It is a process or series of activities -- a flashing swirl of color sensations, knocks and noises, smells and sounds. It is a riot or kaleidoscope of sensory impressions, where motion and change are recurring elements. It is a dynamic world that James envisions, a world of action. This needs to be stressed: the world as originally presented to an individual perceiver (according to James) is not a world of stable and enduring substances, but a flow of ever-changing sensory impressions. (It is important to remember that in this context it is inappropriate to think of sensations or feelings as subjective phenomena. These terms, in our language, are loaded with traditional assumptions that are inappropriate to James's enterprise in the Essays in Radical Empiricism. Sensations are normally thought of as a means by which a knower apprehends some object. James accepts this traditional distinction in The Principles of Psychology.<sup>7</sup> However, in his later thought he conceived of pure experience as the original stream of data within which the distinction between mind and matter is formulated. Here, the term "sensation" or "feeling" should probably be replaced by the more neutral term "datum" or "data.")

A. J. Ayer comments on this point. He notes that any

given experience is "ephemeral;" and that a "persistent object" in our world is not a single experience, but a series or process of changing experiences over time. For example, the room in which a man sits is not a single experience, but a flowing procession of experiences. A single experience, in other words, is a fleeting presentation; it appears to one for a moment and then flees, to be replaced by another feeling or sensation. What we refer to as persistent objects are constructs, on our part, from the series of flowing experiences. (However, it must be noted that there is one crucial difference between James's view here and Ayer's. Ayer adopts an atomistic theory of experience whereas James propounds the theory of experience as flowing stream. Nevertheless, the difference is not crucial here, because for both views experience is a dynamic process. The difference concerns whether or not the substantives flowing through our experience are linked in relations that are themselves experienced.)

It must be observed here that pure experience is not a totality, even though James describes it as "the world." Pure experience is an individualized stream of sensations; it is the input presented to an individual perceiver. Perhaps the natural inclination to think of pure experience as the sum or totality of existence is itself an indication of our commitment to thinking in terms of substances, rather than processes. We think of the primordial elements of our world as independently-real entities that are "out there" in contrast with our minds

which are "in here." This is a basic bifurcation in our world view. But in James's view, a perceiver's world is not originally comprised of a sum total of objects, but of an individualized flow of data. Perceiver and perceived are originally elements of one homogeneous flow of neutral data.

One main point needs to be stressed here, even at the risk of redundancy. Pure experience, i.e., the primordial data originally presented to each individual perceiver, is not comprised of entities, substances, minds or material objects. All of these things, these elements of our ordinary experience, are products of the conceptual categories we employ to bring order to these primordial presentations. James makes an important distinction between pure experience and ordinary experience, one which is crucial to his overall enterprise. This will become obvious shortly.

But first, it is important to become clear on another point -- the exact sense in which James's doctrine of pure experience avoids the traditional dichotomy. There are two points to be made here, one broader and the other narrower.

The broader point is that the world as originally presented is a series of elements belonging to one class only. All things in their primordial makeup are data. All differentiations between particular items of our experience are made within this broad class. There are different kinds of data, it is true -- nevertheless, data they remain. Whether the datum is blue, solid, cold, dry or what have you, it is

still a datum, a basic presentation or deliverance of experience. As such, all items of our experience have the characteristics distinctive to data; none have the characteristics of non-data. Therefore, there is no fundamental dichotomy to our world in its original makeup.

The second point follows directly from this one. If there are no primordial dichotomies in pure experience, then there is no mind-matter dichotomy inherent there. The dichotomy between mind and matter is inapplicable to pure experience. Pure experience is neutral regarding this dichotomy: the basic data comprising pure experience contain neither mental nor material characteristics in themselves. The bifurcation between the two arises not in experience in its pure form, but only in its conceptualized and categorized form.

This being the case, it then becomes very difficult to think and speak clearly about pure experience. An intelligible discussion of pure experience requires a vocabulary cleansed of the traditional bifurcation, a set of concepts true to James's view. But the ordinary vocabulary of our natural languages is heavily saturated with assumptions of mind-matter bifurcation. For example, our language is filled with substantive terms. We think of the world in terms of "substance," "stuff," "bits," "pieces," etc. These are the real things of the world, as distinct from "mind" or "knower." There is a conceptual split here between mind and matter, knower and known, that is difficult to avoid. James himself often fails to avoid

it. He speaks of pure experience as the basic "stuff" of the world; calls data "bits" of pure experience; and distinguishes between "real" things and "mental" ones.

It is impossible to understand pure experience with this kind of vocabulary. Since pure experience is postulated as logically - prior to any mind-matter bifurcation, it is necessary that we approach it with a vocabulary stripped of these assumptions, with our belief in this dichotomy suspended. James's view cannot receive a fair hearing in any other way. This is a difficult task to accomplish because of the deep entrenchment of these traditional assumptions in our ordinary thinking. As will be seen, several of James's best-known critics fail to extricate themselves from these assumptions concerning experience, thereby exposing their criticisms to serious counter-charges.

The main question here is not whether or not there is a knower-known bifurcation. Obviously, there is; the question here is whether or not such a distinction is basic to experience. Our ordinary vocabulary typically assumes that it is. Therefore, it is important to be constantly wary of our vocabulary, for primordial mind-matter, knower-known distinctions lurk everywhere.

It thereby becomes imperative to explain these common-sense distinctions in terms of something more basic, something more fundamental. This is the task James tackles in "Does Consciousness Exist?"

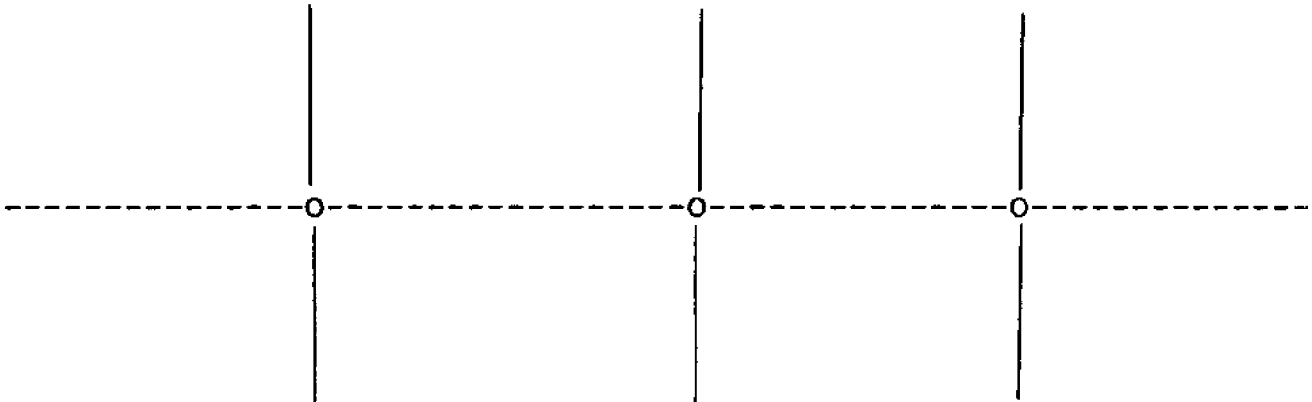
C. The Concept of Pure Experience Applied to the Traditional Bifurcation

He begins by disagreeing with Moore, who had argued that a direct glimpse of consciousness itself was possible. Moore believed that experience is comprised of a basic distinction between knower and known, consciousness and its object; and that by abstracting away the object, we would be left with a glimpse of naked consciousness itself. Consciousness, as it were, is discoverable by a process of subtraction from the larger whole in which it characteristically obtains. (Moore does stress, however, the transparency or diaphanousness of consciousness. ". . . the element which I have called 'consciousness' . . . is extremely difficult to fix . . . It seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent -- we look through it and see nothing but the blue (content)." If ever we try to isolate consciousness, it seems always to elude us, leaving only its specific content for an observer to apprehend. "Yet it can be distinguished if we look attentively enough, and if we know that there is something to look for."<sup>10</sup>

James turns Moore's position around. Knower is separated from the known, not by a process of subtraction but by a process of addition.<sup>11</sup> That is, if we start with a given pure experience, the distinction between knower and known is arrived at only by categorizing it twice. For example, James says, let a person take the room in which he is sitting. In the immediate presentation he has of the room, no distinction is made between knower

and known. There is only the raw data of experience. A distinction is made in this situation only when the raw experience is categorized twice, i.e., when it is classified as a member of two great systems of external relations, one of these being the knower's personal history and the other being an object of the physical world.<sup>12</sup> The known room is therefore in two places at once, both in the physical world and in the knower's mind. This is not a difficult paradox to explain for James's theory. It is similar to the question of how one point can simultaneously be placed on two lines. It can be if it is situated at their intersection. Similarly for the room: when known, it lies at the point of contact between the two great systems under which it is to be classified.<sup>13</sup> James, of course, is speaking here metaphorically. The mental system does not lie in space and does not literally come into contact with the physical system. This metaphorical language causes problems, however, as will be seen below.

On page thirty-six of The Meaning of Truth, James includes a diagram that is helpful on this point. The same object, O, he says, appears in the mental histories of numerous observers. Let this fact be shown by the vertical lines below. But the same experience is also an element of the physical world. Let this fact be shown by the horizontal lines below. The result is that when different perceivers perceive O, there is only one O which takes part in two "great associative systems" -- one we term the mental system and the other the physical system.



(James is somewhat guilty of sloppy formulation, because there are certainly more than two associative systems here; in the diagram there are four, the physical world and the mental histories of three observers; and in actual fact there are often countless observers.)

The distinction between knower and known is a matter of external relations in which any given pure experience engages. It is a matter of conceptual categorization, not of raw experience; it is a derivative aspect of the world, not a primordial one. It is a distinction that we apply to the original facts for reasons of our own.

It is important to note that, for James, the distinctions between knower and known, mind and matter, are the products of retrospective conceptualizations on the part of human beings. The knower-known distinction is a category that we impose on the original flux of pure experience in the attempt to bring a specific kind of order to it. It is not primordial or irreducible, i.e., not inherent in the structure of things. It is an inductive

generalization that we arrived at in time because of its usefulness to us.<sup>14</sup> Prior to conceptualization, a pure experience is an unorganized area of the stream or flux.

The notion of a first in the shape of a most chaotic pure experience which sets up questions, of a second in the way of fundamental categories, long ago wrought into the structure of our consciousness and practically irreversible, which defines the general frame within which answers must fall, and of a third which gives the detail of the answers in the shapes most congruous with all our present needs, is, as I take it, the essence of the humanistic conception.<sup>15</sup>

For James, then, neither consciousness nor independent physical world are necessary pre-requisites of experience in its pure form. They are consequences rather than conditions of pure experience. Consciousness does not exist as an original container seeking to cognize independent physical objects. It is simply a functional element that arises within a more basic experience. (As will be seen later in this dissertation, there are serious problems concerning the self that emerge from this theory of pure experience and its denial of consciousness as an original element of experience.)

It is interesting to note that this problem occupied James's mind for at least several years before the publication of "Does Consciousness Exist?" A look at his notebooks from before 1901 (perhaps from 1900) reveals a diagram similar to the one discussed above. Here it is accompanied by a brief discussion of how two minds can know the same object, a problem in James's thought stressed later by both B. H. Bode and Dickinson Miller, as will be seen below.

James's discussion here contains several paragraphs relating this problem to his belief in pluralism. He wonders if the problem of devising a single world-view to unite both the "subjective and objective worlds" is due to the pluralistic make-up of things. Everything is multi-directional and multi-dimensional in its external relations; and, after pursuing one line of inquiry, an observer must "go back" and start in a new direction in order to apprehend the object's other relations. "No one point of view or attitude commands everything at once in a synthetic scheme."

He provides a concrete example here of what he means. The notebook in which he is writing, he says, can be examined from two related but distinct perspectives. Followed in one direction it leads into the "dimension of matter, paper-mills, etc."; while followed in a different direction it leads into "that psychologic life of mine of which it is an affection." Both systems of relations are contiguous with the notebook, but one must be ignored while the other is being explored. "They decline to make one universe in the absolute sense of something that can be embraced by one undivided stroke of apprehension."<sup>16</sup>

James's view is Kantian in that it envisions a raw, factual input being structured into our world of ordinary experience via the application to it of conceptual categories. It differs with Kant in that it holds that our categories are not timelessly fixed once and for all, but are pragmatically

and inductively developed over time by the human race. Even James's Kantianism reveals its rejection of a static world view in favor of dynamism, evolution, and change. As one recent history of philosophy puts it: James is a Kantian in that order in nature is, to a great degree, imposed on it by the knower. But, for James, there are alternative means of categorizing and systematizing. ". . . it is not the static Kantian structuring of knowledge, unmodifiable by humans in terms of their purposes, but a structuring which must constantly answer to its function."<sup>17</sup>

According to Kant, the categories are a priori conditions of all possible experience -- or, put more exactly, they are "the conditions of thought in a possible experience . . . They are fundamental concepts by which we think objects in general for appearances, and have therefore a priori objective validity."<sup>18</sup> Kant's view of the categories is expressed in terms of their epistemological function: they are rules by which the sensory intuition becomes organized into an intelligible structure. One important result is that, on Kant's theory, it becomes possible to argue for the existence of synthetic a priori judgments, thereby laying foundation for the view that causal relations are an inherent feature of human experience, with all that this implies for the natural sciences.

James's view, enunciated most clearly in his essay "Humanism and Truth" in The Meaning of Truth, contains important differences. Two of these are important for our purposes. The first is that our conceptual categories are formed by the species over time

via a process of trial and error. (However, they are now so deeply ingrained into our world view as to be "practically irreversible.") The second difference is that, for James, the criterion of a concept's acceptability is its ability to promote human prosperity. This ability to enhance human satisfaction is the standard of truth value, and the basis upon which the species has evolved its world view.<sup>19</sup>

A helpful point along these lines is made by John Dewey in a letter to James on November 21, 1904. Dewey points out that it is important for us to organize experience in such a way as to maximize its yield to us. In this way, our conceptual categories of knower and known, with the differing characteristics applied to experience by each, are greatly beneficial to us. "That the mental fire doesn't burn is the first prerequisite of our managing the fire that does burn -- of having it burn when, how and where we wish."<sup>20</sup> In other words, we apply this particular structure to experience; and we do so by choice, because it works for us. Dewey here shows far better insight into James's attempt to explain the mind-matter, knower-known distinctions than do many of James's critics. He understands that, according to James, we organize pure experience so that the knower is enabled to deal most effectively with the known.

(There is one important qualification that needs to be made concerning James's inductive theory of the development of human categories. In the final chapter of The Principles of

Psychology, "Necessary Truths And The Effects Of Experience,"

James denies that all our modes of thinking are ultimately derivable from experience. Some are produced by outward-directed experience, it is true; but some are produced by the organic structure of the brain itself.<sup>21</sup> All aspects of our knowledge are produced by natural agents; but in some cases the natural agents produce perceptions aware of themselves, and in other cases not.<sup>22</sup> The brain itself evolves, in James's view,<sup>23</sup> so that the a priori structure of our thinking is still not the fixed, unchanging pattern that Kant envisioned. Nevertheless, it is not the case that all our modes of thought develop inductively. All are natural -- but not all are experiential.)<sup>24</sup>

#### D. The Distinction Between Pure Experience and Ordinary Experience

This, then, is the heart of James's attempt to explain the mind-matter, knower-known distinctions by reference to his hypothesis of pure experience. It must be stressed again that the doctrine of pure experience is a theoretical attempt to reduce these distinctions to a homogeneous original presence. James is not here attempting to provide a description of the world as adults normally experience it. He is postulating an aboriginal or primordial element of our experience that adults normally do not receive in its pure form. Speaking of the "aboriginal presence in experience," he says:

We may glimpse it, but we never grasp it; what we grasp is always some substitute for it, which previous human thinking has peptonized and cooked for our consumption.<sup>25</sup>

Pure experience is a pre-conceptual, pre-verbal, pre-intellectual flow of data. As such, only "new-born babes, or men in semi-coma from sleep, drugs, illness or blows, may be assumed to have . . ." it.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it needs to be sharply differentiated from ordinary experience.

James bases his argument for this hypothetical element of our experience to a large extent on pragmatic grounds. On this issue of whether or not there is a sensible core to reality, the truest account is "the one that finally proves the most satisfactory."<sup>27</sup> This pragmatic criterion, which arises so often throughout James's writing, is applied by him to the theory of pure experience, as well. For it envisions a world not yet completed, one waiting to be altered to our purposes, thereby increased in value. James's view of reality as a stream of data able to be structured according to human needs is one stressing the malleability of our world. As such, its "cash-value"<sup>28</sup> seems great to him.

Our ordinary, everyday experience of the world, on the other hand, is not a stream or flux of swirling data; it does not consist of a stream of color flashes, smells, knocks and bangs, etc. Our experience is of a world of enduring, relatively stable entities. An empirical description of the world as it is actually presented to us in everyday life would consist primarily of objects, not raw data. This is the world experienced by healthy adults, i.e., those not suffering from illness, blows or drug addiction, etc.

The world as we ordinarily encounter it does not present us with experience in its "pure" form, i.e., as an unconceptualized, unverbilized stream of data. The world that we receive in ordinary experience is a constructed world, one that we have ordered and arranged to suit our purposes. Human experience in its ordinary form is pure experience rendered impure, i.e., pure experience verbalized and categorized, saturated with the diverse theoretical beliefs that a multitude of people bring to it. <sup>29</sup> Pure experience gives the raw building blocks of our everyday world (if it can be thought of metaphorically for the moment in terms of a substantival concept like "building blocks") but not the finished product. More exactly, pure experience is the initial input that we, by use of our theoretical beliefs formed inductively over time, mold into a world of enduring minds and material objects.

The concept of a mind-matter, knower-known distinction is one of the main theoretical beliefs by means of which we order pure experience. <sup>30</sup> We merely make the error of thinking this distinction is inherent in the world, not realizing it is a belief of ours which we bring to our original presentations of the world. These distinctions are a feature of ordinary experience, but not of pure experience.

This distinction between pure experience as a metaphysical hypothesis and ordinary experience as the constructed world of our everyday observations is one that commentators often do not make. John Wild, for example, rejects pure experience as

a metaphysical hypothesis that is neutral in regard to mind-matter, knower-known characteristics. He interprets pure experience as "life as it is actually lived through." Pure experience is the "life world," one that contains, in itself, characteristics of both mind and matter, knower and known.<sup>31</sup>

One problem with this interpretation is that it contradicts what James himself repeatedly states about pure experience. But even more than this, it ushers the traditional bifurcation into James's world view -- and this, for James, is unacceptable. Wild makes some extremely valuable points concerning specific issues in James's radical empiricism; but on this major issue he is seriously mistaken. James's distinctive approach rests on understanding the distinction he makes between pure and ordinary experience, i.e., on understanding that pure experience is prior to the traditional bifurcation and all other theoretical beliefs we bring to it. It is ironic that Wild recognizes that an understanding of James requires us to "bracket" our assumptions of the traditional view, failing himself to achieve this in such an important way.

#### E. Pure Experience And Intentionality

Wild expresses his conception of a traditional bifurcation in James in terms of intentionality. Experience is inherently intentional in structure, he says.<sup>32</sup> But, for James, the question of intentionality in experience, i.e., of the relation of a knower to the known, is complicated by the differing conceptions of experience that he holds. Concerning intentionality, it is

important to examine James's differing conceptions of experience individually.

In pure experience there is no such distinction. Intentionality concerns the relation between thought and thing, mental state and physical object. It involves the differing ways we can intend or relate to an object, e.g., knowing it, remembering it, desiring it, daydreaming about it, etc. Wild is quite right in claiming that intentionality involves a distinction between knower and known; right again in claiming that ordinary experience is structured in this form; and right a third time in claiming that James's conception of pure experience as a neutral metaphysical hypothesis is not intentional in makeup.<sup>33</sup> (Wild is mistaken in claiming that this last point is not the central theme developed in James's radical empiricism.)

It should be clear that pure experience as a metaphysical hypothesis is not intentional in structure. The stream of original data has not yet been differentiated into perceiving subject and perceived object, into thought and physical thing. There can be no question yet of how a mental state relates to its object, for no distinction between mental state and object has yet been drawn. As Perry puts it, the purity of pure experience consists of its pristine character, of its priority to all distinctions, especially that between knower and known, thought and thing.<sup>34</sup> As such, no intentional relationship can arise in it.

Things are quite different with ordinary experience, however. Here there is an obvious distinction between knower

and known. The question concerns the exact nature of the distinction.

The primary purpose of Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth is to explain this distinction. The relationship between a true thought and its object is a functional, dynamic one, as discussed in chapter one of this dissertation. True thoughts lead us, in action, to their objects, leading us into successful dealings with them. We work with physical nature in accord with our thoughts, constantly seeking to remold and restructure it in accord with our wants. As will be further discussed in chapter five, there is a continuous world-shaping process going on, according to James. First we shape the raw data of pure experience into objects by means of our general categories; and then we further shape these objects into ones more useful to us by means of acting on our specific thoughts, e.g., remodeling a house or fixing a car. The first process shapes pure experience into ordinary experience; the second process shapes ordinary experience into a world favorable to our needs. Ordinary experience therefore, displays constant knower-known interaction, the ceaseless struggle of the human species to revise its physical environment to fit its survival requirements.

James provides us with a simple account of intentionality in ordinary experience. It postulates only one kind of relationship between a mental state and its object -- the functional relationship of leading us to the object in practical action.

As James understands them, our thoughts, indeed virtually all our mental states and processes, originate as guides to practical action. (There are several serious criticisms that can be brought against James's theory of truth and intentionality. These will be discussed in the following chapters.)

James concentrates, of course, on the cognitive relation, providing an explanation of truth. But, for him, truth is a value, subordinate always to the satisfaction of human wants. If our thinking processes are essentially guides to practical action, it is because our desires, emotions, passions, et al., are essentially motivators to practical action. We have certain personal wants that our thoughts, if true, enable us to satisfy. James's analysis of intentionality in Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth concentrates exclusively on this issue of value achievement.<sup>35</sup> Our thinking process is directed by these value interests, leading us to the satisfaction of our purposes.<sup>36</sup>

James's analysis of intentionality is consistent with his overall purpose in philosophizing: his attempt to explain human experience as a self-sufficient world order amenable to continual improvement by means of purposive human action. Practical, value-directed action was always a concept at the heart of James's philosophizing.

James's conception of intentionality contrasts interestingly with Husserl's conception of it. Husserl stresses that differing kinds of conscious activities intend their objects in differing ways, and that there are as many kinds of intentional relationships

as there are kinds of conscious processes. There are many ways, for example, that a man can intend his car. He can think about it, daydream about it, remember it, desire it, feel anger toward it, etc. Each conscious act intends the car in its own distinctive manner.

Husserl's general contention is that consciousness is always consciousness - of, and an object is always an object - for - consciousness. Therefore, intentional acts and intentional objects are correlatives, logically entailing each other. Each intentional act has its own object: the car seen is different from the one remembered, valued, understood, etc.<sup>37</sup>

The differences in these two accounts of intentionality are important. Both are attempts to escape the epistemological dualism inherent in the Kantian tradition. But Husserl's is basically a cognitivists' attempt to achieve certainty. He attempts to achieve detachment and a state of suspended judgment concerning the independent existence of the physical world.<sup>38</sup> This is part of his larger program of providing the sciences with a firm theoretical base. Here, he is very much in the Cartesian tradition.

James, on the other hand, is not passionately concerned with achieving theoretical certainty. On the contrary, he is quite content to live with some degree of uncertainty in his world. He is, however, passionately concerned with achieving practical human prosperity. He is characteristically a doer,

an activist, a pragmatist. His account of intentionality reflects this; just as Husserl's account reflects his dominant concern for cognitive clarity.

It will be argued in chapter five that James's functional account of intentionality ties in perfectly with the "uncompleted world" presented in his theory of pure experience; that the call to dynamism issued by his pragmatic methodology is an appropriate response to the original flux postulated by his radical empiricism. It will be argued there that James's philosophizing is all of one piece; that it flows consistently from his theory of pure experience.

But before the question of internal consistency becomes important, it is first necessary to see how the theory of pure experience stands up to criticism. If James's concept of pure experience can withstand the powerful objections directed against it, then, the next question to be examined will be that of its place within James's overall system. The doctrine of pure experience was subjected to rigorous scrutiny by some of the leading thinkers of James's day. It was probed and critiqued from several different perspectives by a variety of critics, notably Arthur Lovejoy, Bertrand Russell, Dickinson S. Miller and B. H. Bode. The criticism of these last two thinkers is, in particular, very powerful -- and these, along with the objections of the other above-mentioned figures, must be dispassionately examined and appraised in order to get a balanced picture of James's theory. To these criticisms we will turn then in the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES

- 1  
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- 27  
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- 28  
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- 29  
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- 30  
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31 John Wild, op. cit., pp. 354-55.

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34 Perry, op. cit., V. 2, p. 388.

35 Pragmatism, Works, pp. 42-44.

36 H. S. Thayer, Meaning and Action (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), pp. 141-44.

37 Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), par. 14.

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## Chapter 3

### SOME MAJOR CRITICISMS DIRECTED AGAINST JAMES'S ALTERNATIVE THEORY

#### A. General Overview

So far this dissertation has attempted to do two things: (1) formulate the traditional view and its problems; and (2) discuss James's alternative to this view. These were the two central themes explored in the first two chapters. These chapters looked at James's theory in a dispassionate, uncritical way, concerned exclusively with understanding the doctrine of pure experience, and not at all concerned with criticizing it. But the continuing viability of a theory obviously depends upon its ability to withstand critical scrutiny. It is important therefore to examine both the criticisms directed against James's alternative theory and the responses James could or did make to them. The first of these tasks will be undertaken in the present chapter.

Several of the major thinkers of James's day subjected his theory of experience and mind-matter relations to rigorous scrutiny, arguing, for the most part, that his theory suffers from serious deficiencies. Philosophers such as Arthur Lovejoy, Bertrand Russell, B. H. Bode, Dickinson S. Miller, and James's student Ralph Barton Perry, among many others, critiqued James's theory carefully. It is important for any serious student of James that he be familiar with these criticisms.

There are several distinct lines of attack made on James's theory: Lovejoy, in his major work, The Revolt Against Dualism, attacks James's claims that mental and physical things can be identical, advancing several powerful arguments to the contrary. Lovejoy makes one principal point against James: That it is impossible for the same thing to be both an element of the physical world and an element of a cognitive process. This broad point is broken down into basically three sub-divisions: (1) things with different sets of qualities (such as physical objects and thoughts) can be identical if and only if those qualities are compatible -- something which is not the case, Lovejoy claims, concerning physical objects and thoughts; (2) James admits this point, Lovejoy argues, when he maintains that physical objects and thoughts behave in different manners, standing in incompatible causal relationships; and (3) James's analogy of the point at the intersection of two lines is inapplicable to this issue.

Lovejoy also presents a fascinating critique of James's position on the existence of consciousness. James, Lovejoy says, holds that it is independently-existing physical things that are apprehended in perception; and that this is done despite the fact that consciousness neither has any distinctive means of awareness nor performs any distinctive processes of awareness that are independent of the specific content of awareness. James's view of consciousness, he says, is: a

connected grouping of its objects. (That is, according to Lovejoy's understanding of James, physical objects are apprehended as they are. Consciousness is not anything in particular; it is merely the sum of its own content. If we think of thoughts as analogous to cookies, then consciousness is not a box: the cookies are all there is.) However, this view of consciousness, says Lovejoy, is more appropriate to James's opponents on this issue -- to the representationalists or epistemological dualists who claim that mind never apprehends independently-existing physical objects, but only its own mental states. This kind of theorist, Lovejoy argues, might plausibly dispense with the necessity of methods and processes for consciousness; but it is difficult to see how one taking James's position can ignore the how of perception: How can a perceiver perceive an independent world without the benefit of intermediaries? (Lovejoy's argument that epistemological dualists can dispense with the means of consciousness is a somewhat dubious one, although not necessarily damaging to his position, as will be discussed below.)

Bertrand Russell, in The Analysis of Mind and elsewhere, attacks James's use of the concept "experience," accusing James of being unable to escape idealism. Russell engages in careful analysis of the concept "experience," raising two inter-related questions: (1) is experience actually co-extensive with the stuff of the world, as James seems to say?; and (2) if so, how can we explain the fact that real events

occur in the world that seem to go entirely unexperienced? It would seem, says Russell, that if all things are indeed experience, and experience is a process of consciousness, then James's position amounts to nothing other than a form of idealism, a position acutely embarrassing for James, considering his explicit arguments against idealism.

Russell also raises two other interesting objections to James's position: (1) it might be argued, he says, that sensations possess both physical and mental characteristics; but physical objects and images of them do not. These possess different sets of properties and adhere to different sets of causal laws, one class falling under the laws of physics and the other under the laws of psychology. Therefore, he maintains, it is terribly difficult to see how James could possibly establish his claim that the two classes are actually identical elements of experience.

Russell's second objection concerns the possibility of ordinary experience. According to Russell, James's understanding of experience is so different from our understanding of everyday experience that it is possible, in the world as James views it, that everyday experience need never have arisen at all. That is, if experience involves no necessary knower-known interaction -- but is the basic stuff of the world itself, existing prior to any distinction between knower and known -- then it becomes difficult to see how ordinary experience could have arisen at all. For, he asks in effect,

if we start with neither knower nor known, how are we going to end with ordinary experience?

Ralph Barton Perry, in his massive work The Thought and Character of William James, raises a number of important questions concerning James's thought. Although a student and a great admirer of James, Perry is not blind to the problems that exist in regard to James's theories. One of the main criticisms he raises concerns James's ability to reconcile the conflicting elements of realism and idealism in his thinking. The specific problem, according to Perry, involves the status of those things lying beyond the mental reach of man. If, in themselves, they are experiences, but, insofar as we know, nobody's experiences in particular, then the question arises: whose experiences are they? And if experience is not the kind of thing that has to belong to a particular agent, then in what sense are they experiences at all?

In a way that ties together with Russell's arguments, Perry maintains here that if all things are experiences in the ordinary sense of the term "experience," then it appears that idealism of a sort is the logical consequence. But if James argues for a natural realism, and claims that experience does not require the functioning of some consciousness, then in what sense are all things experience? Concerning this, Perry raises an important question concerning the internal consistency of James's philosophical position. It will be of the greatest philosophical importance for James that he

be able to answer Perry's questions on this point. For if he is unable to reconcile the competing realist-idealist tendencies in his work, the philosophical consistency of a crucial area in his thought will be endangered.

Another very difficult problem emerges for James because of one of his most distinctive theories in The Principles of Psychology. In this great work James had stressed the uniqueness and individuality of each personal stream of consciousness. For instance, the particular items in Mr. Smith's series of conscious states are so endowed with specific characteristics stemming from his personal background and context that there is no way they could appear identically in the conscious states of Mr. Jones or anyone else -- for they too have their own unrepeatable series of experiences endowed with the properties of their own unique backgrounds. Psychologically in one sense, each stream of experience is an island, absolutely unique and distinctive -- for no other stream can be quite like it. As Perry puts it: "Every state of mind was deemed so impregnated with its context as to be incapable of repetition."<sup>1</sup>

At this time in his work, Perry points out, James was still unwilling to break away from the traditional view, making a distinction between thoughts and physical objects. This bifurcation enabled James to claim that physical objects possessed the commonness and permanence that mental states lacked. That is, some degree of commonness and a shared world could be ushered into each unique stream of experience, thereby mitigating

its isolation. This, of course, would help allow for normal communications and interaction. If this commonness and permanence of objects is removed, it would seem that the inevitable result would be the desperate position of solipsism.<sup>2</sup>

But in the Essays in Radical Empiricism James had renounced the traditional view and had only "experiences" in place of thoughts and physical things. If these experiences possess the uniqueness and unrepeatability of thoughts, then it would appear that they must lose the commonness and permanence of things. This would result in cutting each man off from a "public" world shared in common with his brother men. If these experiences possess the commonness and permanence of things, then it would appear that they could never "enter directly into the uniquely individual conscious experience." This, of course, would threaten the claim (which is so eminently plausible psychologically) that each stream of consciousness is imbued with its own peculiar context and is highly personalized and individualized. The problem can then be seen clearly: "How to conceive experience so that it would retain both sets of properties, composing both the immediate and the transient life of the subject and the stable world of common objects -- that was James's problem."<sup>3</sup>

Dickinson S. Miller and B. H. Bode, in a series of journal articles written shortly after the turn of the century, emphasize this internal problem in James's thought. Again, it becomes crucial for James to be able to reconcile these

conflicting strands of his thinking. If he cannot, then either one of two alternatives must be accepted: (1) one of the conflicting doctrines must be surrendered; or (2) the incompatibility of them must be openly admitted. Either alternative would be highly distasteful for James to have to accept.

These then are the major objections to James's alternative theory that this chapter will examine. Each one is a serious challenge directed at some crucial point of James's philosophical system, either at: (1) the possibility of an identity relation between physical objects and thoughts (Lovejoy); or (2) James's understanding of the concept "experience" (Russell); or (3) his ability to reconcile competing elements of realism and idealism in his overall position (Perry); or (4) his ability to reconcile his theory of experience with his psychological theory of the uniqueness of each stream of consciousness (Miller and Bode). The first criticism to be looked at will be that of Arthur Lovejoy.

#### B. Lovejoy's Criticisms

Lovejoy summarizes James's position as follows: There is a neglected logical point that solves the problem of reconciling a mind-matter distinction with the claim that we perceive external reality directly. That is, that one thing can, without contradiction, be a member of two or more classes simultaneously. The question of how a physical object that we are aware of, e.g., a rock, can be in two places at once, both in the mind and in the outer world, is the same puzzle as how

one identical point can be situated on two lines. It can, if it lies at their intersection.<sup>4</sup>

(The problem of how one thing can be in two places at once raises interesting questions. For instance, one thing can be in any number of places at the same time: a person can be on Flatbush Avenue, in Kings County, in New York City, in New York State, in the United States, and in North America all at the same time. Further, in a certain sense, it is no mystery that a thing could be both in a mind and in the outer world, e.g., for me, somebody else's thought is both in his mind and in the outer world. No, the question concerns how one thing can be in two places that do not overlap or conjoin in the sense required. For example, a thing can be in The Bronx and the United States; but it cannot be in The Bronx and California, even though both are part of the United States. In the same way, a thing can be in my mind and in Manhattan (when I am in Manhattan) -- but how can it be in my mind and in Manhattan when I am in Westchester, e.g., the World Trade Center and my idea of it?

(Lovejoy could argue here that a point at the intersection of two lines is only in one place, not two. That two lines, or twenty lines, cut across this place does not alter the fact that it is only one place. As such, the analogy of the point at the intersection does not apply to the above-mentioned question. For my thought of the World Trade Center, when I am in White Plains, is clearly in a different place than is the World Trade

Center itself. Here, we are definitely dealing with two places, whereas in James's example we are not. However, Lovejoy does not argue in this manner.

(Further, and most important, the application of spatial terms to thoughts is highly dubious. A strong case can be made that a crude confusion is involved here. James discusses the problem in these confused terms, and Lovejoy follows. This will be discussed further in the following chapter.)

Lovejoy goes on to summarize James's argument that a physical object and a thought of it are identical but belong to different systems of relations. By this means, James concludes (says Lovejoy), that a distinction between knower and known can be admitted in the perceptual situation, while the numerical duality of thoughts and their objects, and the ontological disparateness of physical objects and thoughts, can be denied.<sup>5</sup> (It is important to note here that James's analogy of the point lying at the intersection of two lines, and the immediate use he makes of it to draw comparisons with perception, are the only arguments of James's in favor of thought-physical object identity that Lovejoy considers here. This issue will come up again later in the dissertation).

James, Lovejoy continues, overlooks the basic reasons for holding the traditional bifurcation. The argument for it is based on more than the puzzle of how one identical thing can be situated in two places at once. It is based on the claim that the characteristics of physical objects and thoughts

are too divergent to permit them to be one identical thing existing in different systems of relations. It is true, he says, that it is possible for a thing known to have properties abc to be numerically identical with a thing known to have other properties xyz. But identity is possible if and only if properties abc are compatible with properties xyz. But if xyz are incompatible with abc, it is not then possible for there to be one identical object possessed of both sets.<sup>6</sup>

Lovejoy obviously bases his claim on the contention that the properties possessed by physical objects are incompatible with those of thoughts. Presumably, he is arguing that while a physical fire burns wood, gives off heat, and consists of red tongues of flames, my thought of a fire burns no wood, gives off no heat, and consists of no red flames. It is a contradiction, Lovejoy's argument goes, to claim that one identical thing simultaneously can and cannot burn wood, does and does not give off heat, and is and is not red. Lovejoy's argument assumes that physical objects and thoughts do not possess sets of mutually compatible properties. In The Essays in Radical Empiricism, James gives a list of properties<sup>7</sup> shared in common by physical objects and thoughts of them. Now, of course, it could be argued that James's list is useless if there is even one pair of incompatible properties. Nevertheless, the point is that Lovejoy ignores it entirely. He evidently does not consider it important enough to examine or criticize. This is surely an omission of his critique.

James himself, Lovejoy claims, recognizes the vast differences between the attributes possessed by thoughts and those possessed by physical objects. James admits, after all, that mental fire will not burn physical sticks, that mental water will not douse physical fire, and that even the sharpest mental knives will not cut physical wood.<sup>8</sup> Why, Lovejoy asks, is this the case? Why will physical fire burn wood, but mental fire will not? Why will physical water douse fire, but mental water will not? The answer seems fairly obvious, he believes. It is because the attributes of the two classes of entities are fundamentally dissimilar and incompatible.<sup>9</sup>

Lovejoy concludes that the very attributes James assigns to the two classes are clearly irreconcilable with the claim that the classes are numerically identical. If the knife of either my true or fanciful perception is incapable of cutting physical wood, it does not have the same characteristics of physical knives. Though it is possible to take an individual thing as belonging to two different contexts, this does not mean that it can have and not have the same relation to a given other thing, or that it can cause and not cause the same effect. James, Lovejoy believes, has relapsed here into the strict bifurcation he was trying to escape.

Lovejoy's criticism becomes stronger when it is realized that James makes no distinction between sensations and thoughts here. Both our concepts and our percepts are held to be identical

with their objects. James is very clear on this point in "Does Consciousness Exist?" Our concepts or thoughts, just as much as our sensations, are identical to the objects they intend.<sup>10</sup> Our non-perceptual experiences have "objectivity" as well as "subjectivity," he says.<sup>11</sup> A concept too is seen as one experience that gets "counted twice over, just as a perceptual experience does, figuring in one context as an object or field of objects, in another as a state of mind."<sup>12</sup>

There are two major problems with James's view here. The first is that it is strongly counter-intuitive. For, when I am sitting in the New York Public Library thinking about the tigers in India, it is very clear to me at that time that my thoughts of the tigers are quite different from the tigers themselves. If I were in India directly perceiving the tigers, then James's claim has much more plausibility. For, my direct perceptions of the tigers are capable of rendering me, while my thoughts of them are not. How, then, can my thought of the object be identical to the object? It is very clear that it cannot be.

Further, James is here treating concepts as if they were elements of pure experience to be diversely classified. But pure experience is, by his own theory, a pre-conceptual flow of data. It is by means of concepts that pure experience becomes classified. Our concepts themselves cannot be treated as elements of the original flux.

These are two major problems of James's theory that Lovejoy

could, but does not, raise. This is an omission of his critique. He should clearly state that James's theory of identity is much more plausible in regard to percepts than it is in regard to concepts. Perhaps, in Lovejoy's defense, it can be said that he considers the distinction irrelevant, holding that any theory of thought-physical object identity is mistaken. Lovejoy is trying to establish the stronger point that James's identity theory is mistaken, not merely in regard to concepts but in regards to percepts, as well. It is likely that he regards James's identity theory in regard to concepts as simply a blatant and obvious error on James's part, unworthy of serious criticism. But, if so, he should state this.

It is obvious from his comments that Lovejoy is deeply immersed in the conceptual scheme of the traditional view. The very way in which he formulates his argument rests heavily on assumptions of the traditional bifurcation. He speaks constantly of the difference between "real" objects and "mental" ones, a confused terminology (which James also uses) that could be taken to imply the unreality of mental states.

Lovejoy's criticism begins with an undefined adherence to the traditional view, assuming a basic distinction between enduring entities "out there" and minds "in here." If this is other than an uncritical acceptance of the traditional view on his part, it is nowhere made clear in his critique. Interestingly, he employs the same terminology as James, who, for all his contrary beliefs, was unable himself to escape

from assumptions of the traditional view. Lovejoy's assumptions of the traditional bifurcation seem so deeply ingrained in his world view that one wonders if he can extricate himself from them sufficiently to understand James's enterprise. It seems, rather, that James's theory is baffling and somewhat unintelligible to him.

That James himself relapses into traditional assumptions and terminology shows us the difficulty of escaping the traditional view, a difficulty shared with Lovejoy and, probably, the rest of us, as well. Although James believed that such beliefs are mere inductive generalizations that developed over time, still, they are now embedded so deeply in our world view that for all practical purposes they are virtually ineradicable.<sup>13</sup> The traditional vocabulary and assumptions that James himself keeps lapsing into are proof of this difficulty. The question, of course, between James and Lovejoy, does not concern the difficulty of James's attempt, but the possibility of it; for Lovejoy does not hold that it is difficult to eradicate the traditional bifurcation from our world view so much as it is impossible.

Lovejoy's criticism of James centers around James's claim that physical objects and thoughts have compatible sets of characteristics and can, therefore, be numerically identical things. Clearly, Lovejoy believes this is false and offers specific reasons for his claim. However, as noted above, he omits consideration of one of James's central supporting

arguments for this thesis. In the next chapter, an examination of James's full argument will be made, focusing on the use James can make of it in responding to Lovejoy's criticisms.

As mentioned above, Lovejoy also develops another line of criticism against James's position. He begins it by briefly summarizing James's theory of consciousness and the relation it stands in with its objects. There is no consciousness as such on James's view, he says, no process or means of awareness independent of its specific content. Consciousness is nothing more than a connected grouping of its objects, an integration of specific cognitive items. "Experience consists of 'thoughts' in their concreteness, and includes no such insensible stuff as pure thinking."<sup>14</sup>

The objects of consciousness are independently-existing reals, on James's theory (according to Lovejoy). When perceived, they enter without modification into transient external relations with the perceiving organism. The objects of consciousness in totality comprise the sum of consciousness. There is no distinctive nature to consciousness and no processes that it performs. There is only the sum of its content. Therefore, consciousness does not "condition" or "work over" or "structure" its specific content. It merely takes its content in untouched, as it were. Consciousness has no characteristic means by which to "process" its content; it merely takes its experiences as they come.<sup>15</sup>

This combination of views has a serious problem, according

to Lovejoy. The problem arises because James attempts to combine two distinct viewpoints here: (1) that we are in direct cognitive contact with independently-existing physical things; and (2) that we achieve cognitive relationships without any specific means of doing so. In effect, what Lovejoy is saying is that if consciousness has to "reach out" beyond itself to touch an independent realm, it has need of some means of its own by which to carry out this activity. If it does not, if it has no method or means of its own, then it is impossible to maintain that this activity can be carried out. A man can walk only because he has legs, and a bird can fly only because it has wings. Similarly, if consciousness were able to directly apprehend an independent existence, it would be able to do so only because of the distinctive means it possessed which would be the source of the activity. Failing the possession of this means of awareness, that type of awareness simply could not take place.

Lovejoy's argument could be made stronger if he argued that even the epistemological dualist or representationalist cannot plausibly dispense with the necessity of specific means of awareness. This is true even though on this view we do not bridge the gap between ourselves and independent reality, apprehending our own mental states. For we still engage in distinct processes of consciousness in regard to our representations, e.g., we learn about them, remember them, desire or spurn them, etc. Further, for an epistemological dualist like Kant, it is

the very processes of consciousness itself that cuts us off from independent reality, leaving us with an apprehension of phenomenal reality alone. Lovejoy's argument could be made stronger here: on any view of cognition, whether realist, representationalist or any other, it is impossible to deny the necessity of specific means, activities, or processes of awareness. The challenge for James is to show that the distinctive processes of consciousness do not inevitably separate our apprehended objects from independently-existing ones.

It can now be seen that Lovejoy attacks the same conclusion of James's from two different perspectives. He denies James's claim that thoughts and physical objects can be identical things; and he denies James's claim that consciousness can directly apprehend an independently-existing world without modification. These two claims of James are basically the same point. Both claim that thoughts are identical with the physical objects of which they are aware. Lovejoy, of course, denies this point in both of its incarnations, and for the same reason: that the characteristics possessed by the two classes of things are so radically incompatible that an identity relation is a logical impossibility. Concerning this overall point, Lovejoy is adamant; and the next chapter will examine James's possible reply to this traditional counter-attack on his theory.

### C. Russell's Criticisms

Whereas Lovejoy launches a powerful attack on one of James's crucial conclusions, Bertrand Russell disputes one of James's key premises. James's concept of "experience" or "pure experience" is central to his attempt to overcome belief in the traditional bifurcation. Russell is at once positively influenced by this view of James's (as his doctrine of "neutral monism" indicates), and also negatively influenced. He criticizes it sharply in The Analysis of Mind and elsewhere. These criticisms need to be examined by any serious student of James's theory. Russell, as with Lovejoy and the other critics here discussed, developed criticisms of James that are both powerful and relatively well-known. As such, it is imperative that James be able to respond.

But first, it must be pointed out that Russell was positively influenced by James's rejection of the traditional view, explicitly acknowledging it on several occasions. He describes James's view as "revolutionary," and claims that it contains "important new truth."<sup>16</sup> He also believes that James is correct in "rejecting consciousness as an entity," and believes James's view is correct in regard to sensations,<sup>17</sup> a theory of Russell's that will be discussed below. Further, in a manner similar to James's, he rejects a conscious subject as a "logical fiction," paving the way toward a theory of "neutral monism."<sup>18</sup>

Russell explains his theory of neutral monism elsewhere, describing it in terms similar to James's and openly acknowledging

his debt to James.

There is no simple entity that you can point to and say: this entity is physical and not mental. According to William James and neutral monists that will not be the case with any simple entity that you may take. Any such entity will be a member of physical series and a member of mental series . . . I ought to proceed to tell you whether neutral monism is true or not . . . But I do not profess to know whether it is true or not. I feel more and more inclined to think that it may be true.<sup>20</sup>

Even this brief discussion should be sufficient to indicate the positive influence of James on Russell. However, this should not blind us to the criticisms of James's view formulated by Russell.

Although Russell's own philosophical views changed over time, there is a consistency to his critique of James in the respective works of his that will be here examined. Russell begins one critique by summarizing James's basic position on pure experience: it is the one primal stuff or material out of which everything in the world is composed. Knowing is a particular kind of relation between two elements of pure experience. There is no basic split between mind and matter, knower and known.<sup>21</sup> The key to this theory of James's is what is understood by the concept "experience," Russell says. This is the key term in the argument, and it must be subjected to analysis.

Common sense, Russell continues, holds that many events occur that are not experienced, e.g., events on the dark side of the moon. Idealists, e.g., Berkeley, deny this and argue

that what is not experienced, i.e., not an element of some consciousness or other, is not an element of the world. Now, depending on what James takes the term "experience" to mean, he might very well be in this position. If he means by it the standard common-sense view, then how are things like the dark side of the moon to be explained? For, if all things are experience, and experience is taken to be a finite process between a specific observer and some specific objects or events in the world, then it would seem that whatever is not part of such a process, like the dark side of the moon, is not part of the world. But, in that case, how are we to explain such things as the dark side of the moon?

Russell attempts to make the problem clearer by explicating the concept "experience." The best way to start, he says, is to ask the question: "What is the difference between an event which is not experienced and one which is?" For example, if we see or feel rain falling, it is experienced, but rain falling in an area where there is no life, e.g., a desert wasteland, is not experienced. Therefore, there is no experience where there is no life. However, he continues, experience is not co-extensive with life. Many things happen to an organism that it may not notice. These, then, are not experienced. It would seem, then, on this view of Russell's, that experience requires awareness or consciousness of something, call it x. Experience requires awareness of x, or, to translate this into James's terms, it requires, not only that

x is, but also that it gets reported, that it is observed or perceived.

If this is the case, Russell concludes, it is difficult to understand exactly what James means when he says that experience is co-extensive with the stuff of the world. After all, if a person sticks his hand into a fire, he will experience pain, but if a metal poker is placed in the fire, it experiences nothing. In this latter case there is nothing that could justifiably be called experience, yet the event is undoubtedly a real occurrence in the world. James, Russell concludes, has no valid reasons for claiming that the very stuff of the world itself is experience.<sup>25</sup>

Although Russell's history of philosophy is primarily a popularized account for laymen, there are ideas presented here that are suggestive for a deeper criticism of James's view. Russell develops these ideas more fully in The Analysis of Mind.

Here (where he also acknowledges indebtedness to James's view) he argues that if experience is taken in its common-sense meaning of facts being observed by some knower, then it, like consciousness, must be a product of the world and not part of its primary stuff. To claim that experience, in this meaning, is the basic stuff of which the world is comprised, is to argue that the world itself requires the functioning of some kind of awareness. This, Russell argues, is a vestigial remnant of the very idealism that James is combatting, e.g., James's

disputes with Bradley concerning the unity of human experience.  
26

This is certainly a serious charge that can be directed against James's position. For experience, on our common-sense view, involves the very type of knower-known relation that James denies. If the world is experience in the sense in which common-sense understands it, then Russell's charge of idealism would be a plausible one. However, it is clear that this is not what James understands experience to be. Then in virtue of what, Russell asks, is this basic stuff of the world to be thought of as experience? How is it possible to make sense of James's claim? Everything about experience points to it being a product of knower-known interaction; and there is no evidence to credit the belief that experience takes place without a conscious agent. Russell's examples here of a man's hand being placed in a fire, yielding the experience of pain; as opposed to a metal poker being placed in it, yielding no experience whatever -- are good ones. If this primal stuff of the world precedes consciousness and knower-known distinctions, how can it be experience? According to Russell, it cannot.

On Russell's understanding, James's theory either tends toward idealism or unintelligibility. It is important for James that he be able to answer this accusation; that he be able to show that his theory is both intelligible and non-idealistic. This is so because in The Meaning of Truth and

elsewhere, James professes allegiance to natural realism in no uncertain terms. It is doubtful that James would ever himself adopt an idealist interpretation of experience. On the contrary, judging from what he says in The Meaning of Truth, nothing could be further from his mind. For this reason, for the sake of the internal consistency of his overall philosophy, James must be able to define "experience" so that it is compatible with his advocacy of natural realism. An idealist understanding of experience might very well threaten the integration of his overall system. This point ties in directly with Perry's argument that James was never able to reconcile the conflicting elements of realism and idealism in his thinking, a point that will be discussed shortly.

(The question of realism is a difficult one for James, and will be discussed at length in the next chapter. One of the options consistent with his understanding of pure experience is to relinquish advocacy of natural realism. As will be seen, this can be done without lapsing into idealism in any form.)

Before turning to Perry's criticism, however, it will be instructive to look at two other comments that Russell makes concerning James's view, both of which are highly fascinating. One of them concerns James's claim that one experience can possess both physical and mental characteristics. Concerning one set of things -- sensations -- Russell agrees with James's claim; but concerning two other sets of things -- thoughts and physical objects -- Russell does not.

Sensations, Russell says, have just these characteristics: they belong both to the mental world and the physical world, they come under both the laws of psychology and the laws of physics. Insofar as this goes, Russell says, James's doctrine of pure experience can be understood and accepted -- if this is all that James means. However, Russell continues, not everything is comprised of this dual kind of stuff, not everything is a sensation. Thoughts belong only to the mental world, while occurrences outside of any person's experience belong only to the physical world. There are two different sets of causal laws, one belonging to physics and the other to psychology. The law of gravity is a physical law, while the law of association is psychological. Sensations, he says, by being subject to both, are dual in nature; but entities, by being subject only to physical laws, and thoughts, by being subject only to psychological ones, are not. These latter two phenomena are purely physical and psychological respectively.<sup>27</sup>

Russell is presenting a common-sense kind of three-part theory here. According to Russell, physical things adhere exclusively to the laws of physics while mental items such as images adhere exclusively to the laws of psychology. These two sundered realms appear to be conjoined, however, by a third group of items -- sensations -- which possess the same characteristics of both the other groups, and which obey the same laws as they do. On Russell's account, sensations operate as a

link between mind and world, as a bridge spanning the chasm between the knower and the known.

This theory of Russell's also serves as a criticism of James's later theory of thought-physical object identity, arguing for the impossibility of an identity relation holding between physical objects and thoughts. For if physical objects obey only the physical laws of motion, and thoughts obey only the psychological laws of association, then, if these two sets of laws state very different things (as they do), it would follow that physical objects and thoughts are very different kinds of things. It would follow from this, of course, that the two sets of things could not then possess compatible sets of characteristics. In this line of attack, Russell is agreeing completely with the main line of criticism that Lovejoy directs against James.

Russell develops another criticism against James in The Analysis of Mind. This one revolves around James's understanding of "pure experience." Russell says that if the self-same experience can enter into both physical and mental relations, then it would seem possible that, in itself, this "stuff" might possess properties of neither -- that is, that it might be construed as a neutral kind of "stuff." It could be argued that this is so because only a neutral kind of thing can enter into relations with other things possessed of incompatible sets of characteristics. If this is the case, Russell claims, then troubling consequences follow. Russell projects

one of these consequences in the following way.

Experience as we know it, he says, is vastly different from James's concept of "pure experience," and could never qualify as neutral in regard to physical-mental characteristics. His argument runs as follows: If experience is taken to be some neutral kind of stuff possessing neither physical nor mental characteristics (that is, is not experience as common-sense understands it), then it must be the case that experience, as we know it, need never have arisen in the world. "It must be possible, if James is right in his main contention that roughly the same stuff, differently arranged, would not give rise to anything that could be called 'experience'".<sup>28</sup> The problem is that experience, as we know it, involves knower-known interaction, while "pure experience," as James understands it, evidently does not -- and Russell wants to know how we are to get the first out of the second. It would be like having a planet devoid of hydrogen and oxygen, and then seeking to derive water. How "pure experience," as James understands it, brings about ordinary experience, as we receive it, is unclear to Russell. That is, if we start with a situation empty of either knower or known, how are we going to get ordinary experience, which is a consequence of knower-known relations? If the first two do not exist, then the third would never come into being.

It can be seen that this criticism of Russell's is merely one specific variation of his primary objection to James's

theory: that experience, as we receive it, is nothing like pure experience, as James conceives it. Russell employs an analytic method here on the concept of "experience," with the overall conclusion that James has no basis whatever for applying the term "experience" to his understanding of the world's primary stuff. In this specific variation he attempts to show that James's concept of "pure experience," devoid of knower-known relations as it is, would find it terribly difficult to give rise to ordinary experience, with its built-in relationship between knower and known. In its general form, Russell's criticism states that experience, in the only way that we can understand it, inherently involves the functioning of some consciousness or other; and if this is presented as the basic stuff of the world, then the theory in which it is presented must necessarily be considered an idealist one. Russell, of course, repudiates idealism, claiming that consciousness and experience arise only within the world, and could never, in themselves, constitute the very stuff out of which the world itself is composed.

The heart of Russell's criticism is based on the realist contention that certain facts must be held to exist independently of any conscious functioning. If the world itself is experience in some form, then the obvious question becomes: what is the status of those things that lie outside of the entire range of human experience?

This criticism, that facts not consciously experienced

by a human mind are terribly difficult for James's view to accommodate, is one that surfaces over and over again. Even one of James's greatest admirers feels compelled to raise a question here. Is it not the case, he asks, that in view of James's repeated affirmation of natural realism, that it becomes a terrible puzzle as to what to do with facts not consciously experienced by a human mind? It would seem that either they lie outside of experience (and, therefore, reality) altogether; or else that they are experienced by themselves; or else that they are experienced by the Absolute.<sup>29</sup> Another critic of James believes that, despite James's claim that experience is prior to the distinction between the knower and the known, "experience," as James uses it, invariably turns out to be subjective,<sup>30</sup> i.e., belonging to some particular conscious agent.

#### D. Perry's Criticisms

Perry claims that the "purity" of James's "pure" experience means its original or pristine character, its priority to all distinctions, particularly that between knower and known. James had abandoned idealism, Perry argues, and construed experience as a larger area within which consciousness and self come to be.<sup>31</sup>

However, Perry continues, James never became clear on the crucial issue between realism and idealism -- the status of those parts of nature lying beyond the mental reach of

man. These consist of further experiences, no doubt -- but whose? The best solution for James, Perry argues, is to have rejected this whole issue as a false question on the grounds that if pure experience is prior to consciousness and the self, then experience is not necessarily someone's. However, he does not consistently do this, at times treating those parts of nature as possible experiences of man, as something that could enter into human awareness.

32

The criticisms mentioned here of Russell, Perry and Fite are all founded upon the same crucial assumption: that experience, by virtue of its very internal structure, requires a mind to do the experiencing. Therefore, the question is constantly raised against James of: whose experience? Perry claims that James should have repudiated the entire question and argued that pure experience being prior to the entire mental-physical distinction causes the question of whose mind does the experiencing to be completely inapplicable. Now, this might be a plausible stance to adopt in light of the many problems here -- but it is not itself without problems. For one, Russell's criticism becomes acute here: if an experience is not someone's, then by virtue of what are we justified in calling it an experience at all? James's theory has a serious problem here.

Russell's point is accepted by the majority of critics discussed here so far. Russell, Perry, Fite and probably Lovejoy agree that experience, by its very nature, inherently

involves a mind or consciousness who does the experiencing. The critics here agree that James's theory, as stated, has a pronounced list toward idealism in some form. There is disagreement over the specific form in which that idealism manifests itself, however.

Fite claims that "experience," as James actually employs the concept, invariably signifies human experience. In effect, Fite argues that James places the world itself within the range of human consciousness, i.e., that James's theory in fact amounts to saying that the world itself is nothing more than the content of human awareness. Fite, therefore, construes James in an utterly subjectivist manner. Part of his rationale for this extreme interpretation of James's theory (an interpretation to which James himself is vehemently opposed) is that James, he says, holds human sensations to be the real objects which comprise the world. Fite interprets James's protestations of allegiance to natural realism in this way: sensations are the real objects of the world. James, in effect (says Fite) holds phenomenalism as a new kind of realism.<sup>33</sup>

Perry makes no such specific claim on this issue. He merely points out the possibilities contained in the claim that experience is the very stuff of the world. On his view, it is the case that the objects of the world (according to James) are the experience of either (a) human minds; or (b) themselves, who, as knowers, turn their awareness upon

themselves; or (c) an Absolute Mind. As for those things lying beyond the reach of human experience, they would have to be either the experience of (b) or (c) or else they are not elements of reality at all. No matter which of the alternatives one chooses, idealism in some form is the inescapable conclusion. Even if James defines real objects as possible experiences, it is still the case that reality itself is being described in terms of the functioning of some consciousness or other. Given these interpretations to which James's theory of pure experience is open, it is not surprising, Perry concludes, that James was obliged to constantly restate his adherence to realism and antipathy to idealism.

That James's theory of experience is open to idealist interpretations is fairly clear. "Experience," as we normally construe the term, involves a flow of states within a consciousness. It is understandable, therefore, that Russell, Perry and Fite should be concerned about this; and equally understandable that they should level the charge of idealism against James. James himself, however, would not agree with this interpretation at all. In fact, it is probably the case that James could scarcely disagree with a philosophical position more passionately than he disagrees with idealism. In A Pluralistic Universe he inveighs against it heavily; in The Meaning Of Truth he repeatedly stresses his commitment to realism. Pragmatism, he says, is directly based on realism. This is a serious problem for James, therefore; and the next

chapter of this dissertation will devote much of its focus to a possible attempt by James to solve it.

#### E. The Miller-Bode Criticisms

Serious though this problem is, however, it is not the only serious problem that James's theory faces. There are others, as well. Some of the most difficult of these are those raised by Dickinson S. Miller and (especially) B. H. Bode, a group of questions collectively known as "the Miller-Bode objections."

Bode points out the nature of the problem very clearly in his article entitled "Pure Experience and The External World."<sup>36</sup> His purpose in this article, he says, is not to discover whether the concept of pure experience has any validity whatever, but the more modest one of arguing that any attempt to explain everything by reference to this one category is doomed to failure. The reason any such attempt is doomed, says Bode, is that it tends heavily in the direction of solipsism.<sup>37</sup>

There are three problems with James's viewpoint that Bode criticizes briefly in this article. These are: (1) that James's theory of relations makes it difficult to see how objective reference could take place; (2) the problem of providing a numerically identical world for distinct percipients; and (3) the question of the reality ascribed to those parts of the "objective series" that are not contained within the experience of some finite individual.

Bode's second criticism -- that it is difficult for James's theory to account for a common world shared among various perceivers -- will be the first one examined here.

This is the problem, mentioned above, of trying to reconcile James's theory of pure experience with his psychological doctrine that each individual flow of experiences is unique and unrepeatable. In order to be clear on the problem that Bode is pointing out, it is necessary to understand the Jamesian doctrine (in The Principles of Psychology) to which he refers. A brief look at "Chapter Nine," "The Stream of Thought," will provide the information that is needed.

James states very clearly in this chapter his belief that thought is in constant change and, specifically, that "no state once gone can recur and be identical with what it was before."<sup>38</sup> Concerning sensations, he says that there is no proof that a person ever receives the same bodily sensation more than once. What can be received more than once is the same object. We can hear, smell or see the same object or characteristic over and over again; and we are lulled by this continuing objective identity into believing in a continuing subjective identity, even though no such thing exists in fact. The sensations by means of which we are presented with these objects differ over time, even though they may present the same objects.

The realities, concrete and abstract, physical and ideal, whose permanent existence we believe in, seem to be constantly coming up again before

our thought, and lead us, in our carelessness to suppose that our 'ideas' of them are the same ideas.<sup>39</sup>

As proof of this claim, James offers the following evidence. First, the eye's sensibility to light is at its height when first exposed; and sleep or rest will enable it to see things much more brightly than when tired. Further, our bodily condition and age plays a major role in determining the structure of our sensations. "We feel things differently according as we are sleepy or awake, hungry or full, fresh or tired; differently at night and in the morning, differently in summer and in winter, and above all things differently in childhood, manhood, and old age." These are merely some of the changing conditions with whose alterations our sensations vary.<sup>40</sup>

It is further the case, James says, that cognitive activity takes place only within a context of brain activity. "Every sensation corresponds to some cerebral action." Activity in the brain goes on endlessly, with one neural state succeeding another in rapid procession. Since sensations depend so intimately on brain states for their existence, it follows that the recurrence of an identical sensation would require the existence of an unmodified brain -- and this is a physiological impossibility; "for to every brain-modification, however small, must correspond a change of equal amount in the feeling which the brain subserves."<sup>41</sup>

It is impossible for the same thought or feeling to ever occur twice even within the same person. The cognitive and

physiological contexts differ at different periods, thereby precluding this possibility. If this is the case, how much more impossible is it for the same thoughts or feelings to occur within two or more different persons? It is impossible. The only conclusion that can be arrived at is that each person's flow of conscious content is unique and distinctive to him, each individual item of which varies with the continuous variations of his own peculiar circumstances.

This theory (of the distinctive nature of each individual flow of experiences) did not cause James great problems in The Principles of Psychology primarily because of his acceptance of the traditional bifurcation. Despite the claim that each individual stream of consciousness varied in the above-described ways, there was no pressure towards solipsism. This is so because of the commonness and permanence possessed by the object of awareness. An individual knower can observe or think of the same object more than once; and, similarly, different knowers can observe or think of the same object. Even though the means by which awareness occurs differ, the objects of awareness can and do recur identically.

Without this traditional bifurcation (which posits a world of common objects accessible to us all) James's "stream of experience" theory might be faced with grave difficulties. For, if all of our cognitive states were private to us, and there was no public world to allude to, it would follow that each individual would be locked inside his own distinctive

stream; that each individual would be cut off from each other, with no public world to gaze on and no route by which to reach others. Solipsism would be the end result if James's traditional view was removed from its position at the foundation of his psychology.

But, it can be argued, this is precisely what occurs in Essays in Radical Empiricism. The theory of experience that James develops in this work does away with any sharp distinction between knower and known, leaving experience itself in place of them. If objects as we know them -- common, enduring, and publicly-accessible -- are now to be removed altogether from the cognitive scene, then the solipsism described above would be the inevitable outcome.

Bode stresses this point. He points out that there must be points in the experience of one percipient that are numerically identical with points in the experience of other percipients -- or else "each percipient is to dwell in a world apart." Yet, he points out, James's Principles of Psychology shows that no state of consciousness can be exactly duplicated within one's experience, "and it would appear that essentially the same proof will apply in comparing the experience of  
<sup>43</sup>  
different individuals."

If James wishes to retain his theory of the distinctiveness of each individual flow of consciousness and still be able to avoid solipsism (as he does), then it behooves him to define experience in such a way that it possesses not merely these

private characteristics of the individual mind, but also the public characteristics of the external world, as well.

The problem, of course, is that any attempt to combine both these sets of characteristics in one self-identical thing appears to be hopelessly contradictory. It is very difficult to conceive how the self-same thing can have the characteristics of both a private, mental state and a public, physical object. In this form, the problem is the same one pointed out by Lovejoy: one thing can possess two different sets of characteristics only if the characteristics of the two sets are compatible with each other. It does not appear that James's private, inner states can possess characteristics compatible with those possessed by public objects.

James himself sees this problem clearly and sums it up concisely:

In my psychology I contended that each field of consciousness is entitatively a unit, and that its parts are only different cognitive relations which it may possess with different contexts. But in my doctrine that the same "pen" may be known by two knowers I seem to imply that an identical part can help to constitute two fields. Bode and Miller both pick up the contradiction.<sup>44</sup>

Pressing though this problem is, it is only one of the difficulties that Bode points out in James's theory of experience. Another closely-related problem that Bode raises concerns James's ability to reconcile his doctrine of relations with the possibility of objective reference. James's theory of relations is equivocal, he states, in effect; it "plays fast and loose with the concept of objective reference," thereby hiding

its solipsistic tendencies. On the one hand, Bode points out, James insists that experience never transcends that which is available to finite consciousness. The pointing of thoughts to physical things is merely the fact that our thinking leads us to their objects within our experience. In effect, this doctrine represents this pointing at the world as an encapsulated little world, self-contained within the cognitive processes of each individual person. A person never escapes his own experience during this process. This, of course, is very much a solipsistic process.<sup>45</sup>

However, Bode continues, the solipsistic tendency of this doctrine is effectively masked or concealed by the spatial metaphor contained within it. That is, the cognitive relation is depicted as "reaching out, pointing towards, leading on," and "becomes, by the irrepressible suggestion which it conveys of a beyond, a workable substitute for, or rather a disguised form of, the objective reference which was rejected at the outset." James's theory of cognitive relations gives an aura or impression of objective reference, but, in fact, is a purely subjective doctrine, restraining the subject inevitably within the confines of his own experience, never allowing him an escape outlet to an independent world.<sup>46</sup>

Any doctrine which claims that all relations are self-contained within the limits of an individual's own subjective processes would seem unable to avoid solipsism. This is so because objective reference, the actual awareness of a public

world by our mental items, requires that the cognitive relation, at least, be able to transcend the narrow limits of one's own experience. If the cognitive relation is locked up with all others in the closet of one's own experience, then it becomes impossible for one to cognize a reality in common with other men. With James's intra-experiential interpretation of the cognitive relation, all reference to a common world is lost.<sup>47</sup>

The last problem mentioned by Bode in this article is the oft-repeated question concerning the "kind of reality ascribed to those parts of the 'objective' series which are not experienced by any finite individual." Are these already included in some connected experience of a higher order? This is one possibility that might be taken; but it is one very similar to the absolute idealism to which James was so strongly opposed. (Because of this factor it seems extremely unlikely that James would opt for this alternative). However, Bode continues, the problem with this alternative is strikingly-similar to the one raised in discussing the numerical identity of differing perceivers' experiences. There, the problem was that the mere inclusion of an experience within one perceiver's cognitive stream would necessarily differentiate it from its inclusion within the cognitive stream of another. The problem is the same here: x's appearance within the Absolute's stream of awareness would be radically different from its appearance within the stream of awareness of any finite observer.<sup>48</sup>

There is another major problem for any theory which, like James's, argues that consciousness is nothing more than a collected grouping of its content. On James's viewpoint, the distinguishing mark of consciousness is that its facts or contents are grouped together in a specific collection. There is no difference between facts as they exist in the world and these same facts as cognized by an observer. As one philosopher describes this state of affairs:

For example, at a single moment a certain number of objects, or more or less distinct aspects of objects, are in a peculiar sense together, while those objects and other objects are not in this sense together. One looks across the room, and at a single moment of one's looking certain portions of the wall, the rug, the table, the sofa are conjoined. They are, as the phrase is, "in one field of consciousness." Meanwhile the rug and the window behind me are not in this sense conjoined.<sup>49</sup>

Consciousness, that is, is taken (by advocates of this theory) to be nothing more than its specific contents arranged in a certain type of external relationship. One of the important questions that arises at this point is: What is the exact nature of this relationship? Does it, for instance, involve a relation to a third thing, called mind; or a relation to all the pertinent brain processes of the observer; or "whether it may be simply a superadded tie between things themselves, which keep at the same time all their physical qualities undisturbed?" Further, does it mean that when a thing is simultaneously a member of different groups (i. e., when many observers are all perceiving it) that there must be an equal number of copies of it as there

are groups to which it belongs? These are all important questions for this theory to answer.  
50

This theory adopts an "externalized" view of consciousness, i.e., consciousness is viewed as simply a relationship among external facts, all of which are somehow ushered into it unaltered and unaffected. The theory wishes to defend epistemological realism, claiming that our thoughts of objects are identical to the physical objects, i.e., that the physical ones enter into cognition without being changed.

The danger with this point of view is that consciousness may become so externalized that it loses all significance. If consciousness is solely a collection of its objects, one that is simply an external series of relations among these objects, then it becomes no different than eggs in a basket (except that, in this metaphor, there is no basket). My awareness of cookies is no different than the cookies. In other words, there seems to be no room for cognition or awareness as processes in the world that are distinct from eggs in a basket.

But, in fact, it would seem that somebody's awareness of the eggs is a different type of thing than the eggs themselves.  
51

Bode argues that this theory rests on what he calls "the fallacy of the external observer." His argument is structured in the following way: it is impossible for us to distinguish between conscious and non-conscious groupings of objects, because any distinction that we draw has to be

already within consciousness. If I distinguish between the pen and paper currently within my observational purview and the furniture in the next room, the very distinction itself requires that both groups of things be already contained within my field of awareness. Both groups must be cognized by me in order for me to distinguish between them. (James's view is particularly susceptible to Bode's criticism here. For, in "Does Consciousness Exist?" he claims that our thoughts of objects are as much a part of our experiential field as are direct observations of them.<sup>52</sup> That is, no distinction between thoughts and sense perceptions can be drawn to help James here. Both are part of the immediate experiential field before our consciousness). Bode's initial conclusion then is that the distinction this theory requires cannot be drawn by us. As he puts it: "In some sense both situations must enter into<sup>53</sup> experience in order to be discriminated from each other."

What then does this distinction actually rest on? If there are no criteria by which we could mark off the facts within our awareness from those outside of it, there is only one device that could make it appear plausible. This is to suppose that there is some intelligence standing outside of both groups, capable of looking independently at each one and observing the demarcation between them. In other words, if we imagine God (or some other observer external to us) gazing down on our lives from Heaven, He could clearly distinguish between those groupings that constitute a finite

consciousness and those that do not. It is only some assumption of this kind that makes the distinction seem plausible. The whole case for consciousness remaining distinctively consciousness (according to Bode), even though it is essentially similar to eggs in a basket, rests on this fallacy of an external observer.<sup>54</sup>

This problem ties in with the one discussed above, namely, that the inclusion of an object in one stream of experience necessarily differentiates it from its inclusion in another. On Bode's view, consciousness cannot be merely a grouping into which objects are ushered unaltered. Entrance into a conscious process changes a thing: it is a different thing simply by virtue of being experienced. The physical object *x* is different in many ways from my thought of object *x*; and both are different again from the thought of object *x* held by others. A thing is altered when it enters into a cognitive context; and it is altered differently when it enters into different cognitive contexts.<sup>55</sup> So even if there were this fictitious external observer, his perceptions of *x* would differ from ours.

Bode also believes that another problem results for this Jamesian view from the external observer fallacy. James's theory that a thought is verified as true when it leads us to its object, is, according to Bode, also dependent upon belief in an external observer. For example, suppose that our original thought is of the World Trade Center, and

that it occurs to us to go there while strolling in Central Park. We walk to the subway station, get on the IRT, and ride downtown to our destination. The original thought points us there and leads successfully to it in action. But, Bode asks, once having arrived there, so what? How does this verify the original thought as true? Presumably, a thought can be noted as true when it compares accurately with its object, a process requiring both thought and object to be available simultaneously. But nowhere in the above-described series of activities does this ever happen. The original thought was presented in Central Park and "pointed towards" the World Trade Center, which last was absent. The current observation of the World Trade Center is present and points back to the original thought -- but this last is absent. As Bode puts it: ". . . the 'thing meaning' remains sundered from the 'thing meant' by the whole intervening territory which we have just traversed with the original pointing as our guide." The two are never together in the same experience for us. It is only by imagining an outside observer who can hold the entire process in one frame that this becomes a plausible account of verification.

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It can be seen then that Miller and Bode present a series of serious objections to James's viewpoint. Though all of these may be fascinating criticisms in themselves, the most pressing is the one that claims James's view cannot provide a common world for differing perceivers; that each

perceiver is a little solipsistic system, cut off from a common world and from communications with others. James took this problem most seriously and worked strenuously in an attempt to answer it. The next chapter of this dissertation will look at James's attempted solution of this problem.

#### F. Some Final Criticisms

There are at least two other problems with James's view that need to be raised here. One concerns his theory of intentionality; the other, his view of the self.

It will be remembered that James's theory of intentionality is exclusively concerned with the functional relation of leading or guiding: an idea, when true, either leads or could lead us into successful practical interactions with physical objects. A true idea leads us to its object and enables us to interact with it prosperously. Two inter-related problems emerge from this view. The first concerns the extent to which the theory applies; the second concerns the plausibility of the theory.

James's theory of the truth relation has a surface plausibility when referring to observable entities, e.g., buildings, trees, etc. But is it plausible when dealing with more abstract ideas, e.g., those in psychology, mathematics, esthetics or religion? Is an idea true in these fields by virtue of leading us to its object? If so, which object? If a man makes the statement: "I love Miss X," is the statement true because it leads him to her or a florist or a jewelry store or an altar or anywhere? No, rather the statement is true, if it is, because it properly identifies a state

of the man's emotional life. As a consequence then it can lead him to the altar, etc.

Further, is not the same thing true with physical objects? Bradley's criticism (mentioned above) should be well taken here. My thought that there is a caged vulture at the Bronx Zoo is not true by virtue of the transistional states I experience in traversing the distance between here and there, but, rather, by virtue of the fact that my thought correctly apprehends a fact of the world.

This leads directly into the second problem with James's view of intentionality. That my thought of the object leads me to the object cannot be the criterion of the thought's truth, for my thought had to be true of the object in order for it to have led me there. At most, James's theory provides a method for verifying the truth of a thought; it does not provide a criterion of truth. In effect, my thought was already true -- the leading me there merely confirms it. James here confuses the truth of a thought with the verification of that truth. As such, the relation of a true thought to its object is more complex than James maintains.

Another serious problem for James concerns the self. There are neither selves nor physical objects in pure experience, according to James. Both result as a product of conceptual structuring of the original data. The question in its clearest form is: who does the structuring? It is human personalities who value and conceptualize. But if it is held that the human personality is itself a product of

conceptualization, then we are moving in a hopeless circle. Again, it is Bradley who put it so well: "Mr. Bain collects that the mind is a collection. Has he ever thought who collects Mr. Bain?"<sup>57</sup> The question Bradley raises against Alexander Bain is the same one raised here against James: By what agency are these acts of person - making performed?

The problem arises in a number of forms for James, each directly related to the arguments against fundamentality of consciousness in "Does Consciousness Exist?" One form involves James's argument concerning the pragmatic development and application of the categories, as discussed above. Briefly restated, James's argument claims that our conceptual categories are developed historically as means of structuring our primordial experience in forms most suitable to the satisfaction of our needs. Now, this may very well be a major advance over Kant's view. But the question that emerges in this context is: what is the nature of the original "our" or "we," who, receiving experience in its pure form, attempts to organize it in ways that are personally or socially satisfying? On James's view, there must be a self or community of selves who approach experience value-laden. Is this compatible with what James says about consciousness in "Does Consciousness Exist?"

If James, like Kant, held that the knower originally approaches experience in an exclusively-cognitive manner, then his position would be a little better, although not much. For, at least then the original self is limited to a

bare minimum of pure categories and perceptual forms, with values, desires and wants not yet present. But the original self according to James's pragmatic view is one who approaches experience laden with a variety of wants. How is this expanded view of the self to be reconciled with the claim that selves, minds, and personal histories are retrospective conceptualizations of an original experience?

Further, James describes pure experience as the stream of sensations or feelings (called data herein) had by individual observers. But, if pure experience is held to be more basic than the distinction between knower and known, then who is it that is doing the sensing or feeling? Also, sensing is normally held to be a process performed by an individual self. What is a sensation or experience that is not someone's (Russell's question)? That is, sensations are cognitive items that belong to individual knowers. Therefore, if pure experience is comprised of sensations, then it requires the prior existence of the self.

Another form of the same problem surfaces in James's diagram of the knower-known distinction. There, for example, a man's perception of a pen is considered identical to the pen. A distinction arises only by retroactively categorizing the same experience twice. Well, fine. But who is it that is performing the retroactive categorization? It has to be the knowing agent, meaning that pure experience must be dependent upon the prior existence of the knower.

The problem of the self is a difficult one for James; and, as will be seen in the following chapter, the attempts to solve it from his assumptions may not be as strong as with the other problems.

These, then, are some of the major criticisms that were or could be directed against James's attempt to overcome the traditional bifurcation. As can be seen, several of them are quite powerful, notably the Miller-Bode criticisms, which go right to the heart of James's theory. If James is unable to plausibly respond, then his theory is seen to possess serious deficiencies. Whether or not this is the case will remain for the next chapter to discuss.

FOOTNOTES

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- 32  
Ibid., V. 2, p. 388. See also The Meaning of Truth, Works, pp. 34, 53, 67-68.
- 33  
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- 34  
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## Chapter 4

### JAMES'S ATTEMPT TO REPLY TO HIS CRITICS

#### A. General Overview

In chapter three of this dissertation we looked at arguments directed against James's theory by a number of major critics: Arthur Lovejoy, Bertrand Russell, Ralph Barton Perry, and Miller-Bode. It was seen that each one of these critics (or group of critics, as in the case of Miller and Bode) formulated a distinctive line of attack on James's position. Several of these attacks inter-relate closely, even intimately, arriving in several cases at the same basic conclusions. However, for the sake of clarity it is best to unweave the fabric that holds them together, and examine each criticism individually.

When this approach is followed, the distinctive focus of each of the four attacks becomes apparent. These are: (1) Lovejoy -- who criticizes James's claim that physical objects can be identical with thoughts of them; and who puts forth a number of reasons purporting to demonstrate that this cannot be the case; (2) Russell -- who conducts a vigorous analysis of James's understanding of "experience," contrasts it with the common-sense understanding of that concept, and concludes that James's view has a difficult time escaping from idealism; (3) Perry -- the great James scholar who looks at the entirety of James's work and wonders

if it is possible for James to reconcile the conflicting elements of realism and idealism in his thought; and (4) Miller-Bode -- who question whether James can integrate his theory of pure experience with his psychological doctrine of the uniqueness of each individual stream of consciousness -- a psychological doctrine that, for several reasons, rests on a philosophical basis of the traditional bifurcation.

These are the four major lines of criticism that the dissertation has examined. Each one represents a distinctive approach on the part of its author, attacking James's theory from varying perspectives. Each one raises a serious philosophical objection to James's theory, and, consequently, each attempt to reply will rely on different elements of James's thought. In some cases, James's replies may seem more convincing than in others. However, it is the case that he can offer a coherent response to each of these criticisms, powerful though some of them may be. It is not the case that anybody ever developed a truly devastating argument against James's theory. Rather, as is often so in philosophy, several specific arguments were developed, but none threatening the whole itself. In defending himself, therefore, James needs to do it in a piecemeal manner, replying to one specific attack after another.

These specific replies of James's can be placed into two distinct categories: (1) the actual ones that James himself made to his critics; and (2) ones that either James himself or

a defender of James could make, basing the reply on James's stated position. Of course, any hypothetical reply such as this latter type must be consistent with the views that James explicitly holds. In this regard, the development of a reply by a would-be defender of James must be exceedingly careful. For if not, the defender could conceivably formulate a defense to which James may be more opposed than he is to the original criticism.

James himself devoted much effort to an attempt to answer Miller and Bode. On the other hand, arguments will have to be formulated to defend James against the attacks of Lovejoy, Russell, and Perry. These latter two thinkers accuse James of being unable to escape idealism; and although James was no longer alive to be able to answer their charges, he did reply to other charges that were levelled against him along similar lines. The Meaning of Truth is a fertile ground for such discussions. The defender of James can, therefore, by studying James's responses to similar criticisms, attempt to formulate a consistent answer to the problems raised by Russell and Perry. Something like this will be attempted later in this chapter. But first, however, James's answers to Lovejoy's questions will be examined.

#### B. Reply to Lovejoy

It will be remembered from the third chapter that Lovejoy argued for the incompatibility of physical objects and our thoughts of them. He claimed that they possess

incompatible sets of characteristics and that they stand in opposing sets of causal relations. Given this, he concludes that they cannot be one identical thing which differ only in that they participate in diverse systems of external relations. A thing does not acquire two sets of characteristics incompatible with each other merely by engaging in differing series of relationships.

For example, Lovejoy might argue, take the following situation: A hammer is an everyday object that might be employed in widely divergent uses. In its ordinary employment it could be used to hang a painting by hammering nails into a wall. However, it could also be used in other, highly-imaginative ways, as well. A particularly adept juggler might use its uneven weight as a challenge to his skill, juggling it in combination with his usual assortment of balls and bowling pins, etc. Or an interior designer with a Dali-esque sense of beauty might use it as a decoration, interspersing it in his living room amidst sundry vases, paintings, and throw rugs, etc.

All of this is possible. The hammer could conceivably engage in a wide series of external relationships. However, no matter which relation it is taken in, the hammer remains the same. It is an object comprised of wood and steel in all its relations; it has the same shape, the same texture, and the same atomic weight in all its relations; and it remains a man-made object throughout all its relations. It is not possible for the hammer to acquire incompatible sets of

characteristics solely by engaging in varying sets of external relations. Different does not equal incompatible. No thing can acquire incompatible sets of properties merely by participating in different sets of relationships.

But this is exactly what James's position amounts to, Lovejoy says. For, in fact, thoughts and physical objects do possess incompatible sets of properties. They could not be one identical thing. Yet, James says they can be, and explains their differences by reference to the different relationships to which they belong. Lovejoy concludes that this is a serious error on James's part. If two things possess incompatible sets of properties, then they cannot be one thing; and no amount of appeal to external relations can ever alter this basic fact.

But there is one crucial point that needs to be made here in defense of James. This is, that Lovejoy seriously misconstrues James's hypothesis of pure experience. Lovejoy's criticism presupposes that a given bit of pure experience is a specific object, and, therefore, that it could not possess conflicting sets of characteristics. (Even the term "bit" in this context is misleading, for it conjures up an image of a little chunk of stuff, e.g., a piece of cork or a sliver of aluminum. It is a substantival term, and as such, inappropriate to James's conception of pure experience. Once again, however, it is James himself who is guilty of employing inappropriate terminology.) Lovejoy's argument supposes that pure experience is comprised of entities like axes which (according to his

understanding of James) then enter into different groups or contexts. In other words, Lovejoy confuses the concept of pure experience with that of ordinary experience, imagining that it is ordinary objects that get categorized twice. At a deeper level, Lovejoy's argument assumes the traditional bifurcation, that it is bits of pure experience themselves that possess the characteristics of physical objects and thoughts.

Unfortunately, James himself is partly responsible for this misconstrual, because he too slips at times into this traditional way of talking about pure experience. However, when James is being careful, it is clear that he conceives of pure experience as being prior to the distinction between mental and physical characteristics. Pure experience is neutral in regard to this distinction.

Lovejoy's criticism of James is effective if we conceive of pure experience as specific objects. It would be impossible for these objects to acquire incompatible sets of characteristics merely by joining different contexts. This much is certainly true. Unfortunately for Lovejoy, this is not James's conception of pure experience at all. Pure experience, according to James, is not a collection of specific objects, but a series of original presentations, raw data undiluted by conceptual input. Pure experiences are not entities or enduring substances. They are not static in any way. They are active, changing, flowing impressions -- a dynamic flow of

raw data. They are not specific objects.

James makes this clear, claiming that a pure experience is a "that which is not yet a definite what, tho' ready to be all sorts of whats . . ."<sup>1</sup>

When understood in this way, James's claim that the same pure experience can enter into both our mental and physical classes becomes much more plausible. A flowing and dynamic area of the original flux may be categorized by us in any number of ways. On the one hand, we may subsume it under our physical category, structuring it in accord with physical characteristics; on the other, we may subsume it under our mental category, structuring it in accord with mental characteristics. The same pure experience is taken twice over, being regarded as a physical object in the one taking and a thought of the object in the other. That the characteristics of the two classes are truly incompatible (as Lovejoy correctly points out) presents no problem for any pure experience; for it never possesses incompatible characteristics at the same time and in the same respect. It possesses mental characteristics only when we subsume it under our mental category, and physical characteristics only when we subsume it under our physical category. The incompatible characteristics have their source in our conceptual categories and are manifested in our ordinary experience. Pure experience is free of them entirely.

Pure experience is prior to any distinction between

physical objects and thoughts of them. As such, it does not manifest an identity relation between the two classes. Rather, it is that the two classes are grounded in an original homogeneity, that they both arise from an identical primordial source. This is the meaning of James's hypothesis positing an original identity of the two classes. Lovejoy has misunderstood this, rendering his main criticisms irrelevant to James's theory.

There is also another point against Lovejoy that needs to be raised here. This concerns the analogy of the point at the junction of two lines. As such, the criticism applies to James as well, for the analogy is originally his. James had wondered how a thing known could be in two distinct places at once -- both in the physical world and in the knower's mind; and had proposed to answer the question by reference to the analogy. Lovejoy accepts this as a serious question and proceeds to critique it. And yet, the question itself is highly suspect. For, in ordinary experience, my thought of my neighbor's cat is not, strictly speaking, in any place whatever. The cat is in this place or that, but the thought of the cat is not in any place at all. Further, in pure experience, as James conceives it, there is no distinction between the cat and my thought of the cat. There is only the original data which we categorize this way and that. Therefore, James is confused here in even forming the question in these terms; and Lovejoy, in following this formulation,

gives one more indication of his misunderstanding of James's theory of pure experience.

Lovejoy has concentrated his attack on James's conclusion that physical objects and thoughts could be fundamentally-similar kinds of things. However, this is not the only possible line of attack on James, as has been seen. There are others, as well. Whereas Lovejoy stresses the question of thought-thing compatibility, other philosophers focus elsewhere in their probing of James's position. Russell, as was discussed in the third chapter, focuses his attention on an analysis of the concept "experience." He seeks to show that James's understanding of the term is crucially different from our common-sense understanding of it; and that James has no basis whatever for applying the term "experience" to his conception of the world's constituent stuff. Russell contends that experience, according to our common-sense understanding of it, involves the functioning of a consciousness that is utterly distinct from the physical objects it experiences. Now, if this view is correct, it would follow that the world being comprised of experience, it is thereby comprised of elements of consciousness -- and this, Russell concludes, is the type of idealist view to which James himself was strongly opposed.

### C. Reply to Russell

It can be seen from this that Russell's argument rests on a traditional common-sense understanding of "experience."

His analyses always conclude with the claim that an experience of x inevitably involves the apprehension of x by some consciousness that is distinct from it; and that if x exists far removed from any consciousness whatever, then no process takes place in regard to it that can properly be termed "experience." Russell concludes, in effect, that upon careful analysis this is what the concept "experience" means, and that is an end to the matter. The meaning of the term inherently involves some type of knower-known relation; and, therefore, James has no business applying this term to a situation which he (James) envisions as prior to any knower-known relation. Russell's argument, then, rests on two crucial components. These are: (1) the common-sense understanding of "experience" as its content; and (2) an analytic approach to the question as its method. If either or both of these components are shown to be inadequate, then Russell's argument will be greatly undercut. It is with these two questions that a defender of James against Russell might begin.

James, of course, never had an opportunity to read, or reply to, Russell's The Analysis of Mind. So it is impossible to determine exactly what he might have said in reply to Russell. However, a response on behalf of James by a supporter of his position need not be affected by this. There are still two ways in which James's writing can be used to provide an answer to Russell. These are: (1) a direct application of the arguments James himself actually used in somewhat

different contexts, to the current problem; and (2) an indirect use of James's own arguments, i.e., reasoning from what James did say to a position consistent with his thinking (although not actually enunciated by him) and using this position as a means of replying to criticisms. The first method can be profitably employed here.

It should be fairly clear from preceding discussions that whatever it is exactly that James means by "pure experience," it is certainly not what Russell means by "experience." In effect, these two great philosophers are literally not discussing the same things. This can be more clearly seen by taking a closer look at what James does understand the concept of "pure experience" to mean.

The main point to keep in mind is that pure experience is a pre-conceptual phenomenon. According to James, pure experience is a stream of sensations not yet structured and organized by conceptual categories. It is a steady stream of knocks, bangs, color flashes, feelings of heat or cold, etc. Prior to any conceptual understanding of these phenomena, they appear as raw data. They have not yet been organized into the world of entities, and no conceptual distinctions yet apply.

Further, James makes it clear that he regards pure experience as simply a collection of the specific things that we actually experience in our lives. Pure experience "is made of that, of just what appears, of space, of intensity, of flatness, brownness, heaviness, or what not." It is the sum of raw information

that we receive immediately from whatever is out there.<sup>2</sup>  
 Experience, in its "pure" state, he tells us, is that  
 "instant field of the present;" it is "plain unqualified  
 actuality, a simple that . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, no person who is conducting conceptual  
 business as usual, i.e., no healthy human being who has  
 progressed beyond the infancy phase, can ever receive ex-  
 perience in its pure form. Healthy human adults inevitably  
 process experience through intellectual beliefs which they  
 hold about the world. We take the raw sounds and smells,  
 etc., with which experience provides us, and via our con-  
 cepts such as "enduring entity," "cause and effect," "knower  
 and known," etc., organize them into an orderly world that is  
 intelligible to us. By the time we have reached adulthood these  
 common-sense categories are so deeply ingrained in us by per-  
 petual use that they are virtually ineradicable.<sup>4</sup> This is  
 the fundamental reason why pure experience is accessible only  
 to infants and men in a semi-coma. They either have not yet  
 imbibed our common-sense conceptual framework or their's is  
 not functioning.

Now this view of James's is precisely what Russell  
 does not mean by experience. To him, experience is only  
 made possible by the antecedent existence of knower and  
 known. Knower and known are necessary conditions of ex-  
 perience, says Russell, It can never arise in the world  
 without them. For Russell, then, a distinction between

knower and known is a necessary pre-condition of any type of experience; while, for James, a distinction between knower and known is applied to pure experience by human common sense as one tool for bringing order to that experience.

Now Russell might very well agree that James is discussing something altogether different from what he is discussing. Russell's point is that whatever it is James is discussing, he cannot properly apply the term "experience" to it. Why cannot James do this, according to Russell? Because the state James is discussing is not what is meant by the term "experience." This is not what common sense understands "experience" to mean.

There is no doubt, a supporter of James might argue at this point, that Russell's claim is true: common sense does understand "experience" to be something entirely different from James's conception of "pure experience." But at this juncture the supporter of James would most likely refuse to accompany Russell any further in his conclusions. Rather, James's defender would probably say: it is far from clear that the common sense meaning of "experience" is completely accurate; nor is it clear that this is the only meaning which can be ascribed to the term "experience;" nor is it at all clear that we are even discussing meanings in the first place. Rather, it can be argued that James is describing a natural development in the world, and not merely the way in which most, or even all, men employ the term "experience." James

is here attempting to discuss an original and primordial element of experience; and to this point the manner in which men deploy the concept "experience" is irrelevant, although it might be interesting in itself.

It is important for any student of James to differentiate between pure experience and ordinary experience. Pure experience, again, is pre-conceptual, pre-knower-known stream of data. Ordinary experience is our everyday world of objects, entities, knowers, etc. For James, ordinary experience is a construction out of pure experience; it is pure experience organized and categorized via the application to it of our conceptual beliefs. The concept of pure experience is a device of theoretical explanation; ordinary experience is empirical fact.

In his specific criticism of James, Russell does not take this distinction into account. This is puzzling in light of the view that he himself develops in The Analysis of Mind. For, in this work, he denies the reality of a conscious subject, asserting the identity of sensation and sense-datum, a position remarkably similar to James's own.<sup>5</sup> And yet, in the same work, Russell says that experience and consciousness both must be products of the world, and not elements of its constituent make-up.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Russell's criticism of James rests on assumptions of the traditional bifurcation, while his own developed position denies it. This inconsistency in Russell's thought is not sufficient to refute his objections

to James, of course, but merely points out that Russell's objections to James, like Lovejoy's, rest on certain traditional assumptions. Unfortunately, it is impossible to appreciate James's enterprise on these assumptions.

In light of this, it is a mistake for Russell to criticize James's theory on the grounds that he does. That he succeeds in explicating the common-sense meaning of the term "experience" there is little doubt; but that this explication is relevant to James's description of pure experience, there is a great deal of doubt. In this part of Russell's criticism, he has truly accomplished something; but, unfortunately, it is something that is simply irrelevant to the enterprise in which James was engaged. It can be argued that Russell is guilty here of the fallacy of irrelevant thesis -- for his case has indeed made point (a); but in rejecting James's conclusions on the basis of it, he is attempting to make point (b), and this quite bluntly is a point that he has not made.

However, in fairness to Russell, his analysis of "experience" does uncover another, related criticism that is applicable to James. This is his claim that a theory which argues that experience, in any form, is the basic stuff of the world is an idealist theory. Here, Russell's case against James is stronger. This is so, because pure experience, as James defines it, is a flow of data or sensations, i.e., a process of consciousness.

This is really all that Russell's criticism needs in

order to be effective. For, if James says that the basic constituents of our world are sensations (as he does); and if sensations are elements of consciousness (as they are); then it follows that the basic constituents of the world itself (according to James) are elements of consciousness. This is an inescapable conclusion, given the premises contained in the argument. It is then a simple matter for Russell to point out two things. These are: (1) any theory claiming the world is comprised of elements of consciousness is an idealist one; and (2) this contradicts James's oft-repeated attacks on idealism and protestations of allegiance to natural realism. At this point, the internal consistency of James's overall position is in grave danger.

(An interesting side-issue emerges here. If sensations are construed as processes in the brain (as Place and Smart construe them), and sensations are understood to be the basic constituents of the world itself (as James himself says), then we have a theory which holds that the world itself is perceiver-dependent. However, rejecting consciousness as something distinct from matter, as it does, it is not an idealist theory. It may be called "subjective materialism." *Esse est percipi* -- but not in Berkeley's sense of this phrase. However, this theory is as incompatible with James's realism as is Berkeley's, for "subjective materialism" makes the world every bit as much perceiver-dependent as subjective idealism does. As such, James would undoubtedly reject it.)

#### D. Reply to Perry

This, of course, was a major objection that Ralph Barton Perry raised against James, as was discussed in chapter three. Perry says that James was unable to work out an answer to the question: what is the status of those things lying beyond the mental reach of man? In what sense are these things still to be considered experiences? It is primarily from his attempt to answer this specific question that insight into James's thinking on this issue will be obtained.

One can understand Perry's concern on this issue. Given James's stated commitment to realism, his description of the basic constituents of the world as a stream of sensations and data is troubling. For these are the basic elements of the cognitive process; they are elements of consciousness. If pure experience is the "immediate flux of life," if it is the experience of "new-born babes or men in semi-coma," etc., if it is simply another name for "feeling or sensation," it is difficult to see how James can escape the charge, discussed in chapter three, that his version of experience always reduces to a subjective version. It would seem that James's view is really a variety of idealism, reducing the world to the flow of experience possessed by a collection of cognitive processes. Hence the question: What happens to real objects?

There is some evidence in James's writing to warrant this interpretation. In discussing the relationship between thoughts or representations and presently-observed things,

he says, "But this present object, what is it in itself? Of what stuff is it made? Of the same stuff as the representation. It is made of sensation; it is a thing perceived. Its esse is percipi, and object and representation are generically homogeneous."<sup>7</sup> In reference to the question of when conceptual knowledge is fulfilled, he answers: "when the sensible percept which is the object is reached."<sup>8</sup> If the objects of the world, indeed the world itself, is made of sensations, if its essence is to be perceived or experienced, then James's critics are right: James does not escape idealism.

However, there is a confusion on the part of his critics regarding the interpretation of James's theory of experience. Russell claims that a theory holding that the world itself is experience is an idealist theory. Perry claims that James was unable to reconcile realism and idealism in his thought. It is easy to see how they come to this viewpoint. For experience is part of a cognitive process; and if the world itself is made up of a cognitive process, then this seems to be idealism. But there is a problem with this interpretation. For idealism, among other beliefs, involves belief in consciousness as an item distinct from its own content. For example, Berkeley's subjective idealism involves belief in a personal subject of awareness, an enduring self or ego who holds all of his perceptions and thoughts within the confines of his own consciousness. It is important to note here that on Berkeley's idealist view, consciousness is not merely a collection of its own content.

This is exactly the view that James denies. He goes to great pains in "Does Consciousness Exist?" to tell us that consciousness does not exist, if by consciousness is meant something distinct from a collected grouping of specific cognitive items. James's view is that the world does not include consciousness in this sense at all; belief in it is a myth, so to speak. His doctrine that the world itself is comprised of experience or sensation is not an idealist one, but rather, a phenomenalist one. Sensations are the primordial elements or presentations of the world -- and these involve consciousness only as a collection of them, not as an entity distinct from them who somehow possesses them.

Another key point here is that James, throughout The Meaning of Truth and elsewhere, limits knowledge to items of our experience; but he repeatedly states that he does not limit reality to items of our experience. The world is not mind dependent, for James. In this sense, the term "phenomenalism" seems to better suit James's theory than does "idealism."

The trouble for James is that phenomenism too raises problems for his realism. For one crucial question applies to both phenomenists and idealists. This is: What about independently-existing objects? What about those objects which seem to exist, but which are not elements of someone's consciousness or stream of experience? This is the question that James needs to answer. So it may be seen that although James's view

of experience is not an idealist one, still, being open to a phenomenalist interpretation as it is, it is confronted by the same problem as idealism. In this way, James's critics may be guilty of sloppy formulations, but, more importantly, they have pressed home the right question. Hereafter, the critics' charge of idealism will be referred to as a charge of phenomenism.

James makes an explicit commitment to natural realism over and over again, insisting that the truth of an idea is its ability to lead us to, or terminate in, the independent things of the world. At times he says that truth is not something that exists exclusively in the relationship between elements of a subject's cognitive process, but between that subjective process and facts existing independent of it. An independent reality, he says, is a fundamental presupposition of the pragmatic conception of truth. "This notion of a reality independent of either of us, taken from ordinary social experience, lies at the base of the pragmatist definition of truth. With some such reality any statement, in order to be counted true, must agree."<sup>9</sup> He remains, he says, an "epistemological realist."<sup>10</sup> However, the way he understands the term "realist" here is probably open to interpretation as involving a relationship between a person's thoughts and his sense percepts, not a relationship involving independently-existing reals; just as in the quote before it he refers to reality as "taken from ordinary social experience."<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, Perry's criticism here is well-taken. It is most important for James that he be able to resolve his view on the issue of realism versus phenomenalism. What is the status, according to James, of rain falling unperceived in a desert wasteland? Is it an independently-existing real? A potential human experience? Is it experienced by itself? What is the status in human life of real occurrences that we do not experience? The key to understanding James's view on the issue lies in examining his concept of "pragmatic realism."

James's version of realism is a pragmatic version. There are different worlds or orders of reality. In The Principles of Psychology, he distinguishes between seven different "sub-universes."<sup>12</sup> From among these, he considers the world of physical objects as presented to our senses to be the most important. The "things of sense," he tells us, are the "absolutely real world's nucleus."<sup>13</sup> This is so, because it is the world of sensory objects that affects us most intimately. From a pragmatic viewpoint, therefore, it has the greatest import.

The crucial question here concerns the ontological status of these physical objects. Are they independently-existing reals or are they human constructs from the flux of experience? James's answer to this question is clear: the world of physical objects is shaped and structured from pure experience via the imposition of our inductively-developed categories.<sup>14</sup> "Pragmatic realities, then, are constructed, and the construction proceeds by means of the stream of experience becoming conceptualized . . ."<sup>15</sup>

James's constructivist theory of this pragmatic reality consists of two elements: on the one side is the purposeful subject with his goals and needs; and on the other is the stream of his experiences. The subject (who is himself part of the flow of experience) then organizes his sensory input into a structured world most amenable to his purposes. "On the basis of his interest and his interest-laden conceptual categories, the individual selectively attends to the complex sensory flux impinging upon him and organizes it in certain ways."<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, in James's view, the physical objects apprehended by our senses are not absolute realities, i.e., are not independent of us; but are pragmatic realities -- constructed by us, but real in that they affect our lives so deeply.

This understanding of James's realism is the one most consonant with his radical empiricism. For, by hypothesis, James's radical empiricism holds that fundamental reality consists of a stream of sensations which, in themselves, have characteristics of neither mind nor matter. It is not consistent with this metaphysical hypothesis to claim that there is an independent world beyond our experience, a world of physical objects independent of us. For then the question would arise of the relationship between pure experience and this independent world; and pure experience as the basic constituent of reality would be called into serious doubt.

Nor is it consistent with James's pragmatism and theory of truth. An independent world of real objects in this sense is but a belief of common sense, hypothetical and problematic. 17

The theory of external reals, as a metaphysical hypothesis, has been replaced by James by the theory of pure experience. This theory of external reals, as a metaphysical hypothesis, is intimately bound up with the traditional view; for it posits a world of physical objects "out there," and a different world of ideas and thoughts "in here." As such, it has no place in James's metaphysics.

James's claims of allegiance to natural realism are puzzling because of this. If natural realism means the metaphysical hypothesis of external reals, then it is inconsistent with James's own metaphysics. If it means pragmatic realism as described above, then he does not make this sufficiently clear. Either way, one central point becomes clear here: in his metaphysics, James is primarily a phenomenalist. Realism, for him, equals pragmatic realism, not metaphysical realism. His realism is not a metaphysical doctrine, but a practical one.

Given this understanding of James's realism, it becomes necessary for him to take the phenomenalist bull by the horns in reply to Russell and Perry. The status of something supposedly lying beyond anybody's stream of sensations is entirely problematic and unknown. How could anybody claim to know in such a case? If somebody were to ask: what about x, which

is an existent lying completely beyond anyone's experience at this time? the only philosophically-acceptable answer must be: well, what about it? If it lies utterly beyond our experience at this time, then surely it is beyond our capacity to speak further about it. Let the range of experience be expanded to include it, and then serious cognitive discussion may be conducted in regard to it. Only then could it become a pragmatic reality for us.

It must be pointed out that this in no way undercuts the legitimacy of belief, opinion or theoretical inference. We can still infer things about objects supposedly existing beyond the range of our experience, as well as believe in them and hold opinions about them. The criterion of legitimacy here is "cash-value" impact in human life -- the inferred or believed-in entity must make an observed difference in the practical life of the believers.

This, or something like it, should be James's reply to Russell and Perry. He needs to champion his phenomenalism openly. Instead he wavers on the point. (See the ambiguous statements from The Meaning of Truth quoted above.) This wavering on James's part lends credence to Perry's claim that James never became clear on this issue in his own mind. However, this brief discussion points out that his position is consistent, and that it can generate a plausible reply to the criticisms of Russell and Perry.

This reply to Russell and Perry is, of course, largely

hypothetical. James himself might very well have repudiated it. However, it has two virtues: (1) given James's stated beliefs, it is a consistent and plausible reply to Russell and Perry; (2) it connects James's realism to his cherished pragmatism, emphasizing the role of the latter in his overall thinking. Of this last point, at least, James would probably approve.

Whereas James might very well disagree with this attempted defense against Russell and Perry, there is no similar problem with his attempted defense against Miller and Bode. He was himself familiar with their criticisms and devoted a great deal of effort to devising defenses against them. He wrote pages of private notes attempting to work out the problem, trying to resolve the tendency towards solipsism with which his theory stood accused.

#### E. Reply to Miller and Bode

Briefly re-stated, the essence of the problem is the following: James holds in his psychology that a person's experiences are so saturated with his own personal context and background that they are entirely unique to him. His radical empiricism holds that there is nothing that is not experience (in some form). Now, if experience is all there is, and each person's experience is peculiar to him, it seems to follow that each person has a distinct set of experiences from every other person, i.e., that he lives in a different world from every other person. Solipsism would follow from this; because

if all of my experiences are uniquely and peculiarly my own, then my experiences of other people are likewise peculiar to me, i.e., other people, as I know them, are only elements of my experience. Solipsism is a position compatible neither with James's belief that our categories are socially shaped nor with his pragmatism-humanism (this last because his humanism places such great emphasis on practical benefits to human life, and it would be hard to imagine something more disastrous to a person than to be cut off from all human companionship and sharing). How, then to resolve the problem and restore a commonly-shared world to men?

In his psychology, James's adherence to the traditional bifurcation resolved the problem; for even though each man's experiences were unique to him, they were always experiences of objects in a common world. In effect, people had experiences of the same things, and merely held these experiences in differing backgrounds and contexts. But now, common objects as things distinct from our experiences are gone (except as things whose existence we can posit or believe in). Something is needed to take their place. But what?

The approach that James takes in his answer to this problem grows directly from his pragmatism and humanism, his emphasis on practical action. His theory of knowledge and the nature of thought is largely a functionalist one; and he falls back on this in his effort to resolve the current dilemma. It is true, he might say, that my thought of a chair is different

than your thought of it; but this theoretical difference has no practical significance whatever, for my thought leads me in action to perform the same activities in regard to the chair that yours does: We both sit in it. Thoughts are merely tools or instruments of human activity, their sole purpose being to generate human harmony and prosperity. Purely intellectual or theoretical differences between people's thoughts count for little or nothing if those thoughts lead them to perform harmonious or compatible activities in the world.

Whatever intellectual differences between our experiences and thoughts, in action they lead us, many times, to shared activities and common goals. We use our thoughts, no matter how various they may be in theoretical content, to meet and live in a shared world. My experiences may be different than yours, but in thousands of everyday occurrences they lead me into the same kinds of actions that your experiences lead you into. It is this identity of function and action that makes a common world possible for us, rendering solipsism an inappropriate accusation against James. As James so concisely expresses this point: "Oneness, epistemologically deemed so impossible, is realized dynamically all the while, through my actions on my objects influencing yours."<sup>18</sup>

James makes a distinction between cases of actual and virtual knowing that comes into play here. A thought, he says, is actually true if it does lead us to its object. In this case, the object retroactively verifies the original thought

as true. But it is not true that all cases of thinking actually lead the thinker to the object of the thought. The thought is true, James says, if it could lead us to its object. This is what he refers to as "virtual" knowing, claiming that most of our knowledge is held in this form.

This distinction is appropriate in this context. For, although my thought of Grand Central Station may exist in a very different cognitive context than yours does, it is still possible for both of us to arrive successfully at Park Avenue and Forty-Second Street. Our thought, though different, can lead us to the same terminal (literally). In other words, Grand Central Station is "out there" in a certain sense, i.e., it is the same virtual or potential experience (in action) for all of us. Of course, the different experiences of Grand Central (virtual or actual) will be cognitively different (varying with the perceiver's personal history and circumstances), but still, as a guide to practical action, my virtual experience of Grand Central is the same as yours; and as a fulfillment of certain action, my actual experience of Grand Central is likewise the same as yours. Nothing else is required to ward off solipsism in the real human world in which we live.

There is also an allied argument that might be adduced on James's behalf by a supporter of his here. It is based on James's own theory as presented in "Does Consciousness Exist?" and ties directly in to this problem. James says very clearly

that an experience of  $x$  is one thing which enters into two broad systems of relations, one being an objective world and the other being a perceiver's subjective history. The trouble seems to be that it can only enter different perceiver's subjective contexts by being a different thing, in effect, to each one. This leads us presumably to the problem of solipsism.

But it might be argued that, in an important way, the claim that James's theory leads to solipsism is mistaken. The reasons for this are as follows: Take any particular object, a rock sitting in Mr. Smith's garden, for example. According to James, there is one rock which enters the two broad classes of objective and subjective events. Now each of these classes can be regarded as a genus which is subdivided into thousands of specific differences. For example, the "objective world" is not one undifferentiated slab of objectivity with which the rock enters into one undifferentiated relationship. Rather, the world is a teeming multitude of diverse things with which the rock engages in many diverse and separate relations. The roses to the left of the rock (with which the rock engages in a certain type of spatial relationship) have an altogether different nature, context and history than do the marigolds to the right of the rock (with which the rock also engages in a certain type of spatial relationship). The rock engages in hundreds or thousands of specific external relations with the various other elements of the objective order. The broad class of an experience's objective relations must be subdivided into these varying specific relations if we are to understand

the situation adequately.

There is no difference when we examine the subjective order. The rock becomes part of Mr. Smith's personal history, as well as those of Mrs. Smith, their children, the neighbors, etc. Each one of these people brings a different set of personal experiences to the relationship, thereby experiencing the rock uniquely and individually. This, supposedly, is the problem.

But why? Surely the relationships between the rock on the one hand and the soil, flowers, grass and trees on the other are equally unique and individual. Would we, for all that, claim that it is a different rock-experience in each of the various relationships? Probably not. We would probably say that it is the same rock belonging to dozens of differing external relations. Specific variations in the external relations of  $x$  in the objective order would not induce us to claim variations in  $x$  itself. The experience of  $x$  relates to just as many diverse backgrounds and contexts in the objective order as in the subjective. If it remains the same experience through one of these systems of relations, it should surely remain the same throughout the other. There is no basis on which to differentiate between these two.

This argument might be deployed as the theoretical underpinning of James's functionalism. An experience of a rock or a chair can enter diverse subjective relations, and be cognized differently in each one, without changing the crucial functional nature of the experience; just as it can

enter diverse objective relations, and interact differently in each case, without changing its nature. An experience of a rock remains an experience of a rock, whether it is related to a tree or a flower, on the one hand, or to Mr. Smith and Mrs. Smith on the other.

However, the critic might respond to James in the following way: it is true that our thoughts do lead us into shared activities in real life. Solipsism is mistaken. This is not the question here. The question is: Can James's metaphysical hypothesis of pure experience plausibly account for the falsity of solipsism? Can James reconcile the fact of a commonly-shared world with his metaphysical theory? That is, in his defense James has shown that solipsism is false; but he has yet to explain the ontological basis of that falsity. Reality, in James's view, consists of individualized streams of sensations, each unique in itself. How can my stream be similar to your stream? This is the question James must explain. The problem simply stated is: How can two minds know the same thing?

The problem, James says, fundamentally is not how one experience can enter into two consciousnesses, but how it can enter into one. An experience, originally pure, becomes mine by virtue of retrospective conceptualization on my part, i.e., by later actions of consciousness, I relate the original pure experience to the elements of my personal background. It is these later actions which appropriate the original experience,

making it my own.

When this is realized, it becomes fairly clear how two minds can know the same thing, according to James. What transpires is simply a second appropriation, similar to the first, of the original experience.

All that we should have to postulate would be a second subsequent experience, collateral and contemporary with the first subsequent one, in which a similar act of appropriation should occur. The two acts would interfere neither with one another nor with the originally pure pen. It would sleep undisturbed in its own past, no matter how many such successors went through their several appropriative acts. Each would know it as 'my' percept, each would class it as a 'conscious' fact.<sup>21</sup>

But it might be argued against James that this does not answer the question either. For, on James's view, expressed so clearly in The Principles of Psychology, retrospective conceptualizations would not be necessary to differentiate Mr. Smith's pen from Mr. Jones's. They are already differentiated by being elements of different sensory streams. Bode makes a good point here: James's argument is made plausible by smuggling in the idea of objective reference, i.e., by saying that the two pens are similar, he implies the existence of a real pen independent of the various sensory streams, even though this contradicts his hypothesis of the reality of experience (see chapter three above). James cannot answer Miller-Bode by reference to his doctrine of retrospective conceptualization. He needs to explain the manner in which distinct sensory streams can be

structured into a world of objects shared in common among distinct percipients.

One key to James's answer lies in his pragmatic conception of the development of human categories; a second in his belief that pure experience itself provides a definite "push" concerning how it is to be structured.

The first point is an extremely general one. That is, that the conceptual structure that we form and with which we organize experience is generally uniform. (This can certainly be strongly argued at least within a specific culture.) In his essay, "Humanism and Truth," James discusses the point succinctly.<sup>22</sup> In this essay he argues that certain ways of viewing the world have been developed by the human race over centuries, and are now so thoroughly entrenched in our world view as to be virtually ineradicable. (One of these is the traditional bifurcation between mind and matter.) Insofar as we employ the same inductive categories to organize our experience, our ordinary experiences are going to be similar to that extent.

This point of James's is certainly true. For all the differences people have in their perceptions of the world, does anyone doubt that there are also profound similarities, as well? As James argues in his essay, "The Function of Cognition," the similar activities performed by distinct individuals point to shared perceptions on their part.

. . . my feelings act upon the realities within

my critic's world. Unless, then, my critic can prove that my feeling does not 'point to' these realities which it acts upon, how can he continue to doubt that he and I are alike cognizant of one and the same real world? If the action is performed in one world, that must be the world the feeling intends.<sup>23</sup>

One of the reasons why there are important similarities in our experiences (which enable us to act in harmony) is that the basic categories we employ to organize our sensations are identical. There are certain ways of viewing the world that have proven useful to men and which have, therefore, been passed down from generation to generation. The examples of these which James provides are: one space and one time as continuous receptacles; the distinction between mind and body; between substance and attribute; the conception of genus and species; and of causality.<sup>24</sup>

A child growing up in any particular culture absorbs the common language of that culture with all its built-in assumptions and mechanisms for organizing our experience. A common language is public, accessible to all members of a culture, a bond shared with countless other individuals. Further, there is an organic basis for many reactions to experience shared in common by differing individuals. Differing people, all having their hands placed too close to a fire, will react in the same way because of similar biological structures and adaptive techniques. James, in the concluding chapter of The Principles of Psychology, argues for an organic basis for many of the structural forms we bring to experience.

Many of our basic categories, he says, may well be derived from our organic structures, rather than from the "sensible presence of objects." As examples of these, he cites space and time, and our notions of resemblance and difference.<sup>25</sup> James's view here is Kantian refined with an organic, evolutionary interpretation.

These are some of the ways in which our apprehension of the world will be shared similarly with other people. If the main question of Miller-Bode is: Where is a common world to be shared among individual perceivers? The answer is: our common world lies in our common structure of that world.

But this is a very broad reply. It concerns the general structure of our world, but not the specific content. It says, for example, only that we generally organize our experiences into enduring entities; but says nothing about the specific entity that any given experience(s) is to be organized into. If two people look in the direction of the Brooklyn Bridge, why is it that both see a bridge? Why does not one see a bridge and the other a skyscraper or airline terminal? The answer to this question does not come from the structure we provide for experience, but from experience itself.

There is a "push" or an "urgency" that comes directly from experience itself. It "coerces our attention" and "drives us in a direction that is the destiny of our belief."<sup>26</sup> Experience pushes us in a certain way; and an individual who fights against it brings nothing but trouble upon himself.

Our experience meanwhile is all shot through with regularities . . . Truth, in these cases, meaning nothing but eventual verification, is manifestly incompatible with waywardness on our part. Woe to him whose beliefs play fast and loose with the order which realities follow in his experience: they will lead him nowhere or else make false connections.<sup>27</sup>

Different individuals may organize and interpret their experience in different ways -- but there is a limit to the amount of differing organizations that may be imposed upon experience. If a man walks (with a group of his friends, all of whom are in different professions) past the old house in which he grew up, the various views of the experience will be very different. The man will "see" the house in its former glory with all his warm memories attached to it; his friend, the realtor, will "see" a piece of property to be bought and sold; another friend, a contractor, will "see" a ramshackle house to be knocked down and replaced by a high-rise apartment complex. In each case we have a "that" becoming a "what." All of these are very different interpretations of the experience, it is true; but each one of them has a core content that remains constant throughout. Each one of them is an experience of a house and of the activities related to a house. None of them is an experience of something else.

The push that is provided by experience is explained by Suckiel via the following metaphor. Imagine a window screen and an individual desiring to trace a design on it from point a to point b. There are any number of paths that the individual can follow -- but not an infinite number. The

amount of paths is limited by the screen itself. So it is for experience. The amount of interpretations that can be placed on any given experience is limited by that experience itself.  
28

A question might conceivably be raised by a critic of James at this point. What is this mysterious "push" that pure experience is supposed to possess? When examined in practical terms, the idea is unclear. For example, according to James, if two people stand next to each other and look in the same direction (at, let us say, the Empire State Building), they will have similar experiences. There is a "push" to the experience itself that limits the interpretations it can receive. But how? If one person's stream of sensations is distinct from another's, why should their experiences be at all similar? They should vary greatly. Again, Bode's point about objective reference surfaces here. James's theory is plausible, the critic might say, only because it smuggles in an implied independent reality. That is, it makes sense to claim that there is a "push" to our sensations only on the assumption that there are independent objects "out there" doing the pushing. Both people have sensations of the Empire State Building only because it is at the Empire State Building (as an independent physical object) that they are both looking.

This question brings us back to the phenomenalism-realism issue discussed above. The best that can be said about the hypothesis of independent objects is that it has a

great deal of pragmatic value. But it has no theoretical certainty whatever. What we can be entirely certain of is that our experience is generally regular and often similar. It is certain that different perceivers often have similar perceptions, i.e., that experience does have this definite "push." That this "push" is brought about by independent objects doing the "pushing" is a theoretical attempt to explain this basic fact. It is a plausible hypothesis -- but a hypothesis it remains. Pure experience consists of the stream of original facts; the claim that there is something more basic than the original facts of experience is yet to be established -- and may, perhaps, not be the kind of claim susceptible to being established at all. James clearly prefers to take his stand on the composition of experience itself.

Here, James's pragmatic realism again plays an important role. For, he believes in the independent existence of physical objects; such a belief has profound pragmatic consequences, and his argument here can accommodate the belief that it is the "pushing" of independent objects that provides the "push" or structure to experience.

It can be seen then that a common world is a tendency or direction moved in from both ends of the cognitive process. Experience itself provides a limit that cannot be entirely ignored and our conceptual categories build upon this limit in generally common ways. The result is a world of ordinary

experiences in which, as James puts it, our hands can meet on a rope which is an object common to us both.<sup>29</sup> The conclusion, then, is that the common world of ordinary experience can be accounted for by James's hypothesis in a way that satisfactorily answers the objections of Miller-Bode.

#### F. The Problem of the Self

No, the most difficult problem for James is not the specific objections of Miller and Bode, but a problem closely related to it -- the question of the agency by means of which pure experience gets organized into ordinary experience, i.e., the question of the self. If pure experience originally contains no conscious knower, then who imposes conceptual structure on it, and in accord with what purposes?

James's rejection of the traditional bifurcation is in trouble here. For, according to him, neither conscious selves nor physical objects are elements of pure experience. Rather, they both get formed by conceptual arrangement. The question concerns, of course, the means by which the conceptual arranging is performed. For, if pure experience does not originally contain a valuing, conceptual knower, then there seems to be no means by which it is to be organized; and if it does originally contain a knower, then pure experience is not more basic than the distinction between knower and known. But neither alternative is acceptable to James. How, then, to solve this problem?

Suckiel attempts to rescue James in the following way:

From the pragmatic point of view, different common-sense objects can be constructed by subjects relating differently to the flux of experience. From the point of view of radical empiricism, there are of course neither subjects nor objects, but only pure experience. 'Subjects' and 'objects' are reduced to sets of pure experiences which can be distinguished within the continuous flux. These distinguishable sets are related in certain ways. For a subject to constitute a common-sense object out of the flux of experience, translated into the language of radical empiricism, is for a given set of experiences (the 'subject') to be united with other sets of experiences (the 'object') through a specific relation. The relations may be 'knowing,' 'believing,' 'perceiving,' or the like.<sup>30</sup>

But this does not solve the problem. For the question remains of the means by which these relations are to be effected. How are the various sets of experiences to be united? Neither James nor Suckiel provide an answer.

And yet, there is a direction James could take here that is fully consistent with his overall position. For this criticism concerning the self is based upon an assumption that, from James's point of view, is entirely gratuitous. The assumption is that the structure of experience must be applied to it from without, i.e., from a valuing self. Now this assumption is very much tied up with the traditional bifurcation that James is rejecting. And even though James's pragmatism views the situation in these terms, there is a deeper examination that needs to be made. But in order to carry out this deeper examination, it is necessary to first bracket our belief in the traditional view on this issue. Perhaps James

himself did not do this consistently enough. Nevertheless, it can be done.

What is seen then is the possibility of arguing for a structure or organization already contained within the flow of pure experience. James himself hints at this, not merely by claiming that there is a "push" to pure experience -- but also by use of the nouns he applies to it. For, if pure experience is a "flow" or a "stream," then this implies order and organization within it, not merely a swirling chaos. The theory of pure experience is, in principle, no different from any other metaphysical hypothesis in this regard. For just as a materialist could posit built-in lawfulness, whether mechanistic or dialectic, to physical processes, so James can do the same.

At this point it becomes possible to argue that it is the very nature or organization of pure experience itself that gives rise to knower and known as discernible elements within the stream. This knower then engages in a number of relations with the known, both cognitive and evaluative, constructing the world of our ordinary experience. On this understanding, then, it is the orderly activity of pure experience itself that gives rise to a valuing knower who proceeds to construct ordinary experience; and the question of who structures ordinary experience never arises.

#### G. Conclusion

This chapter has selectively focused on only some

of the criticisms that were discussed in chapter three. There are several reasons for the omission of others. One is considerations of length. But, more importantly, the different criticisms raised by each of the particular critics discussed tend to be intimately related, e.g., Russell's criticisms tend to form one integrated package, as do those of Lovejoy, as do those of Miller and Bode. In replying to these criticisms, it seemed more important to show two things: (1) that James had an overall direction to take (or could have taken) in his responses; and (2) that this overall direction was plausible and effective. For, if a theorist is able to plausibly reply to even some of the most expert criticisms directed against him, it would indicate the overall strength and viability of his theory.

In general, it is clear that James is able to generate stimulating and effective replies to many of the most serious criticisms that were directed against his doctrine of pure experience. That he is able to do so raises an important question for philosophical consideration. This is: Is his theory still viable in metaphysics and philosophy of mind? James prepared this hypothesis as a means of overcoming the problems inherent in the traditional bifurcation. The questions, therefore, are: How effective is James's hypothesis in explaining knower-known relations? And: Does it avoid the problems of the traditional view? These questions will be discussed in the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Essays in Radical Empiricism, Works, p. 46. See also Ellen Kappy Suckiel, The Pragmatic Philosophy of William James (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), p. 133.
- 2 Essays in Radical Empiricism, Works, pp. 14-15.
- 3 Ibid., p. 36.
- 4 The Meaning of Truth, Works, pp. 42-43.
- 5 The Analysis Of Mind, pp. 141-42.
- 6 Ibid., p. 24.
- 7 William James, "The Notion of Consciousness," reprinted as Appendix Three in Essays in Radical Empiricism, Works, p. 264.
- 8 The Meaning of Truth, Works, p. 64.
- 9 Ibid., p. 117.
- 10 Ibid., p. 106.
- 11 Ibid., p. 119.
- 12 The Principles of Psychology, Works, pp. 921-22.
- 13 Ibid., p. 923.
- 14 The Meaning of Truth, Works, pp. 42-43.
- 15 Suckiel, op. cit., p. 128.

16  
p. 144. Ibid., pp. 127-28. See also Thayer, op. cit.,

17  
Pragmatism, Works, pp. 81-94. See his essay "Pragmatism and Common Sense," in

18  
Perry, op. cit., V. 2, p. 753. See also pp. 752, 754, 759-61, 764-65; and Essays in Radical Empiricism, Works, pp. 38-41.

19  
117-118. The Meaning of Truth, Works, pp. 53-54, 67-68, 114,

20  
Essays in Radical Empiricism, Works, p. 64.

21  
Ibid., p. 65.

22  
The Meaning of Truth, Works, pp. 37-60.

23  
Ibid., p. 23.

24  
Ibid., p. 42; Suckiel, op. cit., p. 141.

25  
The Principles of Psychology, Works, p. 1228.

26  
The Meaning of Truth, Works, p. 45.

27  
Pragmatism, Works, p. 99.

28  
Suckiel, op. cit., p. 130.

29  
See also pp. 40-42. Essays in Radical Empiricism, Works, pp. 38-39.

30  
Suckiel, op. cit., p. 136.

## Chapter 5

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JAMES'S THEORY

#### A. Introduction

This dissertation has attempted to do two things so far: (1) present the theory by means of which James attempts to solve the recurring problem of knower-known relations; and (2) critically examine the merits and flaws of James's theory. This having been done, it still remains to evaluate the overall significance and continuing viability of James's theory of pure experience. It is this task with which the present chapter will be concerned.

This evaluation will break down into two subdivisions: (1) an examination of the consistency of James's position, i.e., of how well the theory of pure experience ties together with his pragmatism; and (2) a brief look at why James did not subscribe to materialism as the means of solving the problems of the traditional bifurcation.

The conclusions reached concerning these questions will be: (1) James's doctrine of pure experience integrates smoothly with his pragmatism, providing the ontological framework in which pragmatism becomes an appropriate methodology; and (2) James rejects materialism because it incurs more

problems than his own theory. The conclusions reached here, then, will be very favorable to James, arguing that his theory of pure experience has current interest and importance, meriting the scholarly attention it has received again in recent years.<sup>1</sup>

The first question that needs to be considered is that of the internal relations of James's theory. How well does the theory of pure experience relate to the rest of James's philosophizing, especially to his cherished pragmatism, which is central to his thinking?

#### B. Pure Experience and Pragmatism

James himself is ambivalent concerning the relation between pragmatism and radical empiricism. On the one hand, he says that there is no logical connection between pragmatism and radical empiricism -- that one may reject radical empiricism and still be a pragmatist.<sup>2</sup> But he also states later that there is a logical connection between the two doctrines, that the pragmatic conception of truth is crucial to the establishing of radical empiricism.<sup>3</sup> Now, these two beliefs may very well be compatible with each other; the point is, however, that James himself seems unaware of the intimate connection between his two philosophical theories. The close bond that exists between them can be shown in the following way.

It is a dynamic world that James's philosophizing discloses. It is a world whose basic constituents are a flow

of sensory events; and a world in which human beings must remain continually active in order to survive. First, we must structure and organize our sensory flow via the application of conceptual categories; and second, we must physically act in the world to bring about physical results that are most beneficial to us. This is the full meaning of James's claim that it is an uncompleted world. We do not and cannot passively receive the imprint of an established reality on our minds; cognition is not primarily a mirroring of the world. It is primarily the attempt to transform the world, in thought and action, into a place more amenable to our needs. We are not passive spectators of the world, but dynamic and purposeful actors in regard to it. Our purposeful action is made necessary by the flowing, uncompleted nature of the world.

We must be cognitively active and dynamic in regards to the world. Thought does not merely copy the world, says James, but revises and revitalizes it. "Rather is thought itself a most momentous part of fact, and the whole mission of the pre-existing and insufficient world of matter may simply be to provoke thought to produce its far more precious supplement."<sup>4</sup>

James's conception of mind is essentially a teleological one. Our minds have a role in organizing a world whose primary characteristics include novelty, flux and disorder. We bring

order and organization to this sensory flux; and the particular order or organization that we bring depends on our own purposes, interests and desires. These "subjective interests" constitute the a priori element in cognition. They determine the manner in which we organize the flux of our experience and the way we act in regard to physically altering and changing the world in which we live. In this sense, these subjective interests play the primary role in cognition.<sup>5</sup>

The intimate connection between James's pragmatism and his conception of pure experience should be clear. It is because pure experience is this sensory flux that our organizing and structuring activities are of such importance. Our lives and well-being depend upon shaping experience into forms that are beneficial to us. If the world were presented to us as a completed product in itself, then the structuring activities possible to us (and those that would be necessary for us) would be severely limited. Such a world, if structured in a way that was basically hostile to human survival, would be very difficult to alter in our favor. Amelioration would be difficult, if possible at all. Fortunately, James claims the world is not pre-fixed at all, so that it cannot be pre-set against human interests. The world is alterable to suit our needs and should be altered to suit them. It must be stressed here that for James it is these passional, desiring elements of the subject that comprise the a priori element

of cognition. It is these that the subject brings to experience and in accordance with which he organizes and acts on it. Again, the doctrine of pure experience serves as the basis for James's pragmatic-value theories.

The connection between pure experience and James's pluralism also should be clear. His pluralism holds that the world is comprised of a series of diverse parts that are connected to each other by means of external relations; that the world is not an organic unity in which each thing is entirely conjoined with other things. The world is many, not one; its parts are related, but not fused; and it is uncompleted, not completed.<sup>6</sup>

This describes his conception of pure experience, as well. For, it is a teeming diversity of data. Change and novelty are of its essence; and external relations between the various parts are real members of the sensory stream. Again, the concept of pure experience provides the basis for James's pluralism -- and for the moral-practical considerations that follow from his pluralism. Human beings, says James, are distinct individuals, tied together by complex patterns of external relations; they are not organic units of an all-encompassing totality. As such, they feel at home in a world understood as a flowing stream of particulars, united by external relations. Realization of a pluralistic universe has beneficial effects in our lives, both emotional and motivational to practical action.<sup>7</sup> The

theory of pure experience can be understood as providing a deeper explanation of the compositional elements of a pluralistic world.

These strands of James's thinking are consistently integrated. It is this consistency that gives James's theorizing great power in dealing with the question of knower-known relations. His dynamic view of pure experience combines with his dynamic view of the truth relation to provide an action-oriented explanation of knower-known relations within the framework of ordinary experience.

This brings us to the major point concerning James's advocacy of a dynamic-world theory. As has been argued throughout this dissertation, James's focus is often on practical action in the world. (Of course, not all thought is a guide to action, for James. Esthetic and religious beliefs, for example, may be primarily contemplative. But the main point is that they bring emotional benefit into the person's life, and, in this sense, have great practical value.) He presents a functionalist view of thought and cognition. It is in a functional, action-oriented sense that James's theory of pure experience must be understood. Thoughts and physical objects are part of one world with literally countless connections between parts. They exist on the same level of action: thoughts lead us in practice to their objects. There is a continuous line of interaction and intercourse in the world between these two classes of things.

According to James, the commerce runs both ways between the classes. Objects give rise to thoughts, and thoughts lead us to objects. When perceived statically (substantivally), thoughts and physical objects seem incompatible. But when we dispense with this model and view the situation dynamically, we see that no two classes of things anywhere are as compatible as these two are. In our world, they meet and prosperously interact constantly. These two classes are active members of an uncompleted world. Thought goes hand in hand, in action, with the physical furniture of the world. Thought applied in action (by us) is the means by which the world is more fully completed.

(It must be noted here that thought and physical objects do not always interact prosperously; there are plenty of problems, as well. There are recalcitrant problems with which thinking must struggle, and some that it can not solve at all. Thought, on James's pragmatic view, is primarily a tool of practical problem solving, and sometimes the problems are very difficult indeed. The main point here is that the possibility of practical success often exists -- there are many instances in which the problems can be solved or mitigated, and in which our thoughts lead us successfully to their termini in physical objects.)

In this way, it can be seen that James's theory of pure experience is a fuller explication of his pragmatism. His pragmatism emphasizes that the truth of a thought lies in its

ability to promote human well-being, i.e., it is the ability to lead us into beneficial interaction with its object that constitutes its truth value. His theory of pure experience points out the same fact from a somewhat different perspective: it stresses the fundamental fact that, in the world, thoughts and physical objects can meet and merge dynamically. James's pragmatism and humanism are basically epistemological doctrines, stressing that human prosperity is the proper standard of judging truth value. His theory of pure experience, on the other hand, is basically an ontological doctrine, stressing that the various constituent parts of the world interact smoothly and successfully (at times) in dynamic action. The key is that the two are harmoniously united concerning the relationship between thoughts and physical objects.

James's theory of pure experience is also intimately bound up with his pluralism. For the principle tenet of James's pluralism, that the world is a series of individuals united by external relations, is fully compatible with the principle tenet of the theory of pure experience -- that the constituent elements of our world are the flow of sensory data or presentations we receive. In this context, the theory of pure experience can be understood as a fuller explication of James's pluralism, providing, as it does, a description of the individualized elements comprising our world.

James's theory of pure experience is an ontological theory that pictures a world amenable to human improvement.

It is a world full of data upon which we can wreak revisions in accord with our purpose (to at least some degree). The key point here is that the world is not immutably and eternally fixed -- it is not like a realm of Platonic Ideas. It is alterable. Further, since it is not pre-fixed at all, it is not pre-fixed against man's interest. It is a world in which human values can be created and achieved. It is of the utmost importance that James's theory of pure experience be understood as an intimate ally of his pragmatism. That all things are experiences has, as its cash value, the consequence that our lives can flow in prosperous interaction with the things of our world; that, led by our thoughts, we can work successfully with material objects. The integration of thoughts and physical objects in our everyday lives lies in the inherent possibility of successful process: The world is such that it is possible to achieve smooth theoretical-practical, mental-physical relationships in action.

(It should at least be mentioned here that James's theory of pure experience can be understood as an epistemological doctrine, especially in regard to the question of the knower-known distinction. For, pure experience can and should be thought of as the original data that are going to be built up into the stable world of common sense. This has particular relevance for the question of the knower-known distinction, which, on this theory, is to be explained by reference to the various ways that we classify these original presentations.

(However, it is also true that James often refers to his theory of pure experience as a "metaphysical" one, and for good reason. The basic facts that comprise the sensory stream are to be taken as our starting point, the given. The relation between knower and known, as one example, is to be explained as arising within this broader framework. One profound consequence of this is that common-sense belief in independent physical objects becomes reduced to a mere hypothesis, one which can be subscribed to on pragmatic grounds alone.

(The problem with an epistemological interpretation of pure experience is that the data are then classified and categorized by us, making pure experience dependent on the prior categorization of the knower, something which is inappropriate to James's understanding of the problem. It is by interpreting the theory of pure experience in a metaphysical sense, as discussing the basic facts of the world, that this problem is overcome -- for then both knower and known are seen as derivative manifestations of the same primordial factual stream. It is precisely at this point, for reasons discussed previously, that James's theory is confronted with the difficult problem of the agency by means of which these derivative manifestations are produced.)

The problem of mind-body polarity bequeathed Western thought by Plato and Christianity, and wrestled with so manfully in modern times by Descartes and Kant, may be profoundly mitigated by employment of James's action-oriented world view.

Plato's Ideas belonged to another dimension of reality, as did moral, spiritual and intellectual values, according to Christianity. The other-worldliness of these principles undercut their ability to promote human well-being in this world. The greatest virtue of intellectual activity in ancient and medieval times was held to be contemplation and/or faith. It was in the Renaissance that men realized that knowledge is power, that thought has great causal efficacy. But even with this realization and the beginnings of scientific advance, philosophical discussion of mind-matter, knower-known relations remained at a highly theoretical level. Descartes thought of mind and matter as distinct substances -- enduring, virtually passive -- and wondered how the two could interact. Kant shifted this subject-object split into the object, differentiating between object-as-is and object-as-known, thereby leaving our minds as cut off from physical reality as in Descartes' view.

James is one of the first to emphasize that the relationship between mind and world is not primarily a passive, intellectual one, but an active, practical one. Thoughts are in the world, at work there in the process of benefiting human life. The real question of philosophy is not: Can we know the world by means of our thinking? But: How can we improve the world by means of our thinking? James is one of the first to translate the Renaissance's realization that knowledge has great practical efficacy

into purely philosophical terms. That is, his action orientation provides a theoretical basis for this belief. As such, he here shows his distinctively American roots; for perhaps no country is as much a product of the Renaissance as is this country of technicians and engineers.

The theory of pure experience describes the nature of the world in which James's pragmatic methodology becomes an appropriate one. What kind of world is it that makes it possible, indeed necessary, for human thinking and action to reshape itself so thoroughly?

James's theory provides one plausible answer to this question. It is a world in which thoughts and objects are fundamentally the same kind of things. They are experiences. There is no gulf or disparity separating fact from understanding. The two do not confront each other across an impassable chasm. Rather, they are harmonious, the one flowing into and blending with the other. There is no ontological separation between the mental and the material; and because of this there is no epistemological separation between them.

Another point that needs to be made here is the way in which pure experience is related to ordinary experience in regard to an "uncompleted world." The flux of pure experience is organized or further completed by the application of our general categories in order to suit our purposes. This organization yields the world of our ordinary experience. This world of ordinary experience is then further completed by

human action in accordance with our specific thoughts, i.e., we act to make the world of ordinary experience more in accord with the way we think it could and ought to be. James's conception of the world can be understood in this way of building, by means of thought and action, upon the original foundation of pure experience. Starting with the original facts of pure experience, we build these into our everyday world, and then further mold this world in practical action in accord with our specific desires. At every level of this process, we work within the broad framework of experience, never departing from it in search of an elusive "beyond." Russell's suggestion of "unexperienced real occurrences" never enters into this world view; the world that we can understand and improve via practical action is that which is present to us in experience at some level. It is this world of experience that we are continually re-arranging and re-shaping, striving to further complete it in our own image. Again, James's concept of pure experience is the ontological basis for much of his value theory.

This may be one of James's deepest philosophical insights. It can be argued that this humanistic approach is something that philosophy needs more of today. In an intellectual environment in which the existentialist tradition looks at the world only to despair of its absurdity; and the analytic tradition at times does not look at it, devoting its attention to abstract questions of language

and logic; James's beliefs here offer a welcome change. His hardheaded fact orientation and his benevolent optimism together form an extremely endearing combination. In contrast to the analytic philosophers, his focus is more on facts, not on meanings; and in contrast to the existentialists, his reaction to these facts is extremely optimistic, not pessimistic. His enthusiasm for the possibility of human prosperity is contagious. In this, he may again be the most American of philosophers. But chauvinism aside, philosophy today might benefit from a dose of his distinctive approach and method.

The theory of pure experience, therefore, is seen to work very closely with James's pragmatic conception of cognition to provide a consistent world view. These close ties between pragmatism and the theory of pure experience may also provide the key to answering one final question, which may be posed in the following way: Granted that James was seeking to reduce the mind-matter, knower-known distinctions to an original homogeneous base, and given his emphasis of the intimate relationship between mind states and brain states in The Principles of Psychology, why, then, did he not turn in the direction of materialism? It is important to at least mention here just how plausible materialism would have been given a number of James's statements on the subject.

James either states or implies a number of times that mental states are equivalent to specific types of physical

states. He directly states that the stream of thinking is but another name for the stream of breathing -- and that the "assets" of consciousness are increased by "intracerebral muscular adjustments." Consciousness, he says, is fictitious, although "thoughts in the concrete" are real. "But thoughts<sup>8</sup> in the concrete are made of the same stuff as things are." Further, he praises Spencer's claim that biological and psychological phenomena are essentially one, arguing that this claim realizes that "minds inhabit environments which act on them and on which they in turn react."<sup>9</sup> It is this last point in part which prompts Dewey to argue that James should have further developed this biological materialism as his primary means of eliminating consciousness. James, Dewey believes, should have argued that the subject is an organism whose sole existence lies in interaction with environing conditions. This would have led to the conclusion<sup>10</sup> that it is organisms, not minds, which inhabit the environment. If James had gone in this direction, he not only could have reduced the traditional bifurcation to a homogeneous base, but could have done so in a manner consistent with his scientific psychology.

Why, then, did he not do so, developing his hypothesis of pure experience instead? For one thing, James never seemed to become clear in his own mind concerning the exact relation between mental and bodily states. But there are other, more important reasons, as well. These will become clear after

exactly what is meant by materialism is defined.

### C. James's Rejection of Materialism

There is a specific version of materialism that deals exclusively with the question of human nature. Theorists of this type attempt to explain human nature entirely in physical-chemical terms. References to consciousness as a faculty distinct from physical processes, in some form, are deleted from these attempts at explanation.<sup>11</sup> There is also a more generalized version of materialism that attempts to explain all nature exclusively in physical terms. The atomism of Democritus is a good example of this version of materialism. The two are, of course, intimately related. The establishment of the first version is a major step toward the establishment of the second, because it is the human mind whose properties and functioning are so difficult to explain on materialist premises.

For a variety of reasons, James stands opposed to both versions of materialism. As a scientific psychologist, for example (albeit in an era when research methodology in the area was relatively unsophisticated) James saw little or no evidence to credit the theory that mind states are fully explicable in terms of brain states.<sup>12</sup> The Principles of Psychology, as discussed above, contains a pervasive element of the traditional bifurcation. This view of consciousness as a phenomenon requiring explanation distinct from that of

brain functioning informs, not only his detailed study of psychology, but also his deep interest in psychical and mystical phenomena.

As president of the Society for Psychical Research, and as an observer deeply interested in religious, mystical and supernatural phenomena, James believed that the evidence pointed toward the accreditation of supernatural and psychic beliefs, claims difficult to explain on materialistic assumptions. "The drift of all the evidence seems to me to sweep us toward the belief in some form of superhuman life with which we may, unknown to ourselves, be coconscious."<sup>13</sup>

The Varieties of Religious Experience is filled with:

(a) references to religious conversion and mystical states of consciousness; and (b) a reverent treatment of these subjects indicative of the author's deep respect for the beliefs he is describing. The book is largely description, but hardly a neutral one; it is description couched in such glowing, loving terms as to leave little doubt concerning the author's stand on the reality (and value) of the states he is describing.<sup>14</sup>

James describes mystical states as ineffable, admitting of no intellectual expression, and providing "states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect."<sup>15</sup> Mystical states come in many forms, ranging from those with no special religious significance to those with strong religious significance. An example of the former is the sudden, inexplicable feeling of having been here before;<sup>16</sup>

an example of the latter is an incommunicable meditation  
of the divine being.<sup>17</sup>

James holds that states of mystical intuition may be very sudden extensions of the ordinary field of consciousness; that our normal waking consciousness is merely one specific type of consciousness, and that all around it "lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different." These deeper forms of consciousness can provide a "kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance." When the ordinary field of consciousness is expanded suddenly, for whatever reason, the larger panorama is then perceived,<sup>18</sup> filling one with exhilaration and a sense of mental power.

Now, if James is correct in regard to the cognitive claims he makes concerning these mystical states and psychic phenomena, then it would be very difficult to explain them entirely in physical-chemical terms of any kind. The materialist view would have a number of problems in explaining these phenomena. One problem concerns the claim of "ineffability" James makes in regard to some of these mystical states. If these ineffable states provide depths of insight, then it becomes difficult to see how they could be about physical processes -- for, what kind of physical process is it that requires apprehension in a non-discursive form? Even some purported state of insight into the origin and grandeur of the universe as a totality, e.g., the "big-bang" theory, is capable of full articulation.

Another problem is that James evidently believes in cases of psychic possession (see note twenty-six below) in which the spirit of person a occupies the body of person b. Now, perhaps such a belief may be explained by reference to physical processes, i.e., in which "spirit" or "soul" is taken to refer to a specific type of physical process or object. However, this view of the detachability of the soul is normally associated with the traditional bifurcation, where, in its Christian version, it goes together with belief in personal immortality, a theory of Heaven and Hell, etc. In its religious version, belief in the detachable soul may be affirmed by the type of mystical, ineffable states in whose cognitive importance James believed. These kinds of states may very well be the only evidence that could be presented on behalf of this religious view. But if the detachable soul were to be construed in physical terms, then presumably physical evidence could be given for it. No doubt, James the research psychologist would expect it, and, none being forthcoming, would reject it.

The conclusion, therefore, is that this combination of James's mystic and psychic beliefs could not be easily explained on materialist assumptions. This is one of the reasons why James finds materialism unattractive. But there are also others.

One is that James's pragmatism requires a very open-minded world view. In regard to value questions, there are

situations in which a person must choose and act without benefit of intellectual certainty, and in these cases it is a person's right to believe in whatever principles actually bring beneficial consequences into his life. If it is best for him to suspend belief and refrain from action until more conclusive evidence comes in, then this is his right; but if it is best for him to believe and act on the evidence he has, then this is also his right. An empiricist, James holds, believes in the possibility of knowledge, but holds that no bell tolls to let us know for certain when we have it. The upshot of this is that in many practical cases we must commit ourselves even though we are uncertain that we are right; we must take risks. In such cases a man must have the right to follow his own heart.<sup>19</sup>

James's own personal preference is for a world view that leaves the option for religious belief a viable one. There are some questions that the intellect alone is unable to answer.<sup>20</sup> In such cases, each individual must be free to follow the dictates of his own conscience. The intellectual evidence for or against religious belief is inconclusive. The main arguments in favor of religious skepticism, he says, are based on fear of being duped, a consideration that is itself <sup>21</sup>passional in nature, not intellectual.

There is one fundamental reason why the general materialist thesis may be viewed as incompatible with James's own religious inclinations. It is that God's

existence becomes strongly suspect on premises holding all reality to be fully explicable in terms of physical-chemical principles. God is held, by most modern religions, to be a spiritual being incapable of complete explanation in physical terms. There are good reasons for this. To cite merely one: material entities have a finite life span, and although their constituent components continue to exist in some form, the entities themselves cease to exist. Certainly, the God of neither Judaism, Christianity nor Islam could be explained on these principles. Now, one is certainly free to believe in a God very different from that of these traditions, perhaps even one who is compatible with the general materialist thesis. But this would involve a type of divine being very different from those believed in by the overwhelming majority of religious figures described in The Varieties of Religious Experience. James's descriptions of these beliefs in this type of God show how deeply he himself was impressed with this point of view, and helps to explain why the general materialist thesis held no attraction for him. (However, it should be pointed out that, on the principles laid down in "The Will To Believe," a person would have the right to believe in a supreme being compatible with the general materialist thesis if such a belief brought beneficial consequences into his life.)

But there is another value-based reason for James's antagonism to the general materialist thesis, one not

necessarily based on religious considerations but often going hand in hand with them. This involves James's advocacy of indeterminism. The general materialist view follows physics, which in James's day was deterministic.<sup>22</sup> James is, of course, a powerful critic of the deterministic doctrine.

If determinism is correct, he begins, then the horrible things that occur in the world, e.g., the Nazi exterminations during World War Two, are inevitable consequences of the world's basic structure; they could not have happened otherwise. Now, aside from the fact that this provides a justification for any would-be killer, it also introduces a profound pessimism into our world view -- for it claims that the universe is irremediably flawed, that it results inevitably in viciousness and destructiveness.<sup>23</sup> The determinists' one escape from pessimism, according to James, is to claim that our feelings of regret are inappropriate. That is, if we saw events from a larger perspective, we would note that all things occur ultimately for the best. (However, James is wrong in claiming this as the only escape from pessimism for the determinist, although it certainly is one. For the determinist might repudiate this naive optimism as well as pessimism, and argue instead that the universe is basically neutral. Given, that is, that everything happens by necessity, it is senseless to call things good or bad, for they simply are. What is, must be; and our proper reaction to this realization is neither joy nor regret, but a serene acceptance. It is futile to prescribe courses of action,

because action will take place as it must. Statements involving "ought" or "should" would be inappropriate here. Things do not happen for either the best or the worst; they simply happen. However, James might concede this other alternative and still make his next point.) For, whether our regrets at the world's horrible events are inappropriate due to optimism or serene acceptance, they are still inappropriate. People's lives are filled with regrets, however; and determinism being true, these inappropriate regrets are determined by reality. Therefore, the determinist may have escaped the conclusion that the world necessitates many evils, only to find himself facing<sup>24</sup> the conclusion that the world necessitates many errors.

James's argument here is subtle. If the determinist says that regret at the world's atrocities is appropriate, then he is committed to saying that a better world (one without the atrocities) is impossible; but if he says that regret at the world's atrocities is inappropriate, then he is also committed to saying that a better world (one without the sadness, unhappiness, despair, etc.) is impossible.

Our determinism leads us to call our judgments of regret wrong, because they are pessimistic in implying that what is impossible yet ought to be. But how then about the judgments of regret themselves? If they are wrong, other judgments, judgments of approval presumably, ought to be in their place. But as they are necessitated, nothing else can be in their place; and the universe is just what it was before -- namely, a place in which what ought to be appears impossible.<sup>25</sup>

This dilemma of determinism is not the only reason for James's rejection of it in favor of indeterminism. He also believes that indeterminism is a doctrine much more readily compatible with moral responsibility than is the doctrine of determinism. There is neither zest nor excitement, he says, in achieving the right way if the wrong way is not also open to us. And there is no sense in condemning ourselves for doing wrong if we had no opportunity of doing right.<sup>26</sup>

This is a brief summary of James's argument against determinism. In his day, as mentioned, these arguments would constitute an anti-materialist argument as well. However, it needs to be at least mentioned here that, even if James's anti-determinist argument be considered a powerful one, it is not necessarily an anti-materialist argument in our day. This is so because a contemporary version of the general materialist thesis, following physics with its principle of indeterminacy, can be construed in a way that is not deterministic.<sup>27</sup> This point is a very complex one, however, and far outside the present topic. It needs only to be mentioned here. The main point though is that in James's day this indeterminist interpretation of the general materialist thesis was not a philosophical option.

There is at least one more factor that can be raised regarding the incompatibility of materialism with James's overall philosophizing. This is that materialism can be

viewed as, in James's terminology, an "intellectualist" doctrine, positing the presence of an already-completed universe. Materialism in James's day viewed the world as a closed physical system, all activity determined by rigid physical law. Our most appropriate mental attitude toward such a world is one of a relatively-passive spectator, observing and seeking to understand the vast panorama of physical nature. Amelioration in such a world is severely undercut due to the recalcitrant structure of its physical constituents. Materialism mitigates the possibility of humanly-initiated changes in two inter-related ways: (1) as a determinist doctrine, it holds that the evils which befall us are unavoidable; and (2) it holds that the world itself is already essentially completed, its laws and rules fixed for all eternity, with all of history merely its concrete unfolding. Both of these beliefs run counter to James's advocacy of an uncompleted world in which amelioration plays such a vital role.

These, then, are the basic reasons why much of James's philosophizing leads him away from materialism. It is an open question whether the theory of pure experience is more readily compatible with some of James's other beliefs, e.g., his interest in psychic and mystic phenomena, than is the materialist theory. The problem again for James concerns the issue of the self. For, if one has a sudden deepening of one's awareness, a deepening that provides one with

metaphysical insight in an ineffable, non-discursive form, then this would be difficult to explain on the assumptions of the theory of pure experience. For, whence comes the mystic insight when consciousness is construed as merely a collected grouping of its experiences? And to whom does it come when the self is merely a conceptual ordering of experience? Now, it may very well be possible to answer these questions from within the framework of the pure experience theory. But how much more plausible James's mystic and psychic beliefs are when held within the framework of the traditional bifurcation that he accepts in The Principles of Psychology.

A perfect example of this occurs in his famous chapter on "The Consciousness of Self." In the section on insane delusions, James makes clear his belief that some cases of purported spiritual possessions have strong evidence to credit them. <sup>28</sup> Surely, belief in the phenomenon of one spirit taking over and occupying the body of another is more compatible with adherence to the traditional bifurcation than with adherence to the theory of pure experience. The reason for this is that if the spirit of Mary Roff (who had died twelve years before) can take over the body of Lurancy Vennum, then spirits and bodies must certainly be detachable from one another, and very likely different in the manner that the traditional Christian-Cartesian view maintains. On this issue, any attempt to reduce the traditional bifurcation

to a homogeneous base would be unsatisfactory -- for belief in such phenomena is most compatible with the traditional mind-matter bifurcation. Here, James's own theory of pure experience is no better than is the theory of mind-brain identity.

However, James's arguments against materialism may still be viewed as having contemporary relevance. They are effective against a specific variety of the mind-brain identity thesis that is prevalent in our own day.

D. The Contemporary Viability of  
James's Arguments Against Materialism

Philosophers like U. T. Place and J. J. C. Smart have advanced arguments claiming that mind-brain identity is at least a possibility, and that its verification is a scientific, and not a philosophical, matter.

The statement "consciousness is a brain process," says Place, is neither necessarily true nor necessarily false. It is not a logical issue at all, but an empirical, scientific one. <sup>29</sup> This is so, because of the difference between the definitional use of "is" and the compositional use of it. The term "is" is used quite differently in the statement "a cat is a feline animal" than in "his table is an old packing case." The first is an analytic statement, the second an empirical one. The belief that identity of mind and brain can be denied on logical grounds alone is based on <sup>30</sup> a confusion of these two senses of "is."

It is true, of course, that the meanings of "consciousness" and "brain process" are very different; but it is still the case that both terms can provide an adequate characterization of the same state of affairs, just as can the terms "table" and "old packing case." The denial of neither of these contingent identity statements constitutes a logical contradiction. Both statements might be empirically true.  
31

Smart summarizes this position similarly. To point out that "brain process" means something very different from "sensation" is not sufficient to deny the possibility of identity between the two. In many person's contexts of knowledge, "lightning" means something quite distinct from "electrical discharge from a cloud of ionized water molecules," yet the two are, in fact, identical. A person can know something is an A without knowing it is a B, even when they are identical.  
32

The focus of both Smart's and Place's arguments is that the identity thesis cannot be refuted on logical grounds alone; it is an open scientific question, one to be decided by empirical research. The conclusion both of them arrive at is that it is at least possible that mental states are equivalent to brain states. This, in effect, is a negative argument, not presenting positive evidence on behalf of the identity, but arguing that no logical considerations could refute it.

There are a number of objections against materialism

that have been raised by contemporary philosophers. James's arguments are much less technical than many of the contemporary ones; by comparison, they are simple. Nevertheless, they offer a different perspective on the question. James's objections to this specific version of materialism are of two kinds, one cognitive and the other pragmatic.

As an empirical psychologist, James had grave doubts that the identity thesis could satisfactorily account for the observed facts of mystic, psychic and abnormal phenomena. The irony is that when he later developed his own metaphysical view, it could no better account for these phenomena than could materialism. However, the failure of James's own metaphysics here is no objection to his arguments against materialism.

Against these considerations, the identity thesis is hardly left defenseless. The materialist could argue that, in principle, the phenomena of pathological psychology may be fully explicable by reference to chemical and neurological breakdowns in brain functioning. Further, he could claim that psychic, spiritualist and mystic phenomena have been debunked many times, <sup>34</sup> so that these phenomena, in the end, are essentially no different than those of pathological psychology. However, the onus of proof is on the materialist here to establish that the diverse phenomena of pathological psychology are fully explicable in terms of breakdowns in brain functioning. Are all mental problems physical problems of a certain type? Certainly, much current cognitive

psychotherapy, in practice, works very differently, despite the leanings toward materialism by many theoreticians of psychology.<sup>35</sup> The materialist could respond to this that if a sufficient amount of research were done, then, yes, mental breakdowns could be explainable by reference to physical breakdowns. This leads directly into James's other, pragmatic, objection to materialism.

In a situation in which the evidence in favor of materialism is so inconclusive, then, if one's well-being requires the rejection of the theory, one has the right to reject it. James is quite right (and right in an important, fundamental way) that living must continue regardless of theoretical indecision or paralysis. Prosperous living is the end here towards which proficient theorizing is but a means. So, for example, if one's peace and serenity require acceptance of the traditional Christian doctrine of the separability and immortality of the human soul, then no theory as inconclusive as the Place-Smart version of the identity thesis need stand in one's way. One's proper attitude here would be: let the identity be established. Then and only then will I relinquish my hopes. James's advocacy of the will to believe and pragmatism, properly understood and applied, could have beneficial results for both contemporary philosophizing and contemporary living -- for its emphasis is on living informed by philosophizing, and not on technical philosophizing itself. This is but

one tiny example of it.

This last point is indicative of the overall conclusion of this dissertation: that James's theory of pure experience, for all its problems, especially with the question of the self, combines with his pragmatism to give a world view placing great emphasis on the possibility of human improvement and prosperity. James's world view merits the scholarly attention it has been receiving again in recent years. It is the sincere hope of this writer that the spirit and approach of James begins to have more of an impact on thinkers of the analytic and existentialist traditions. Philosophizing and, more importantly, living, could only benefit.

FOOTNOTES

- 1  
For example: Seigfried, op. cit.; Suckiel, op. cit.; Wild, op. cit.
- 2  
Pragmatism, Works, p. 6.
- 3  
The Meaning of Truth, Works, pp. 6-8.
- 4  
Ibid., pp. 50-51.
- 5  
Thayer, op. cit., pp. 141-45; Suckiel, op. cit., p. 127.
- 6  
See his essays, "The Types of Philosophic Thinking" and "Monistic Idealism," in A Pluralistic Universe, The Works of William James (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 7-23 and 25-42. For a contemporary viewpoint with strong similarities to James's see Nelson Goodman, "The Way the World Is," in Problems and Projects (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), pp. 24-32.
- 7  
A Pluralistic Universe, Works, pp. 26-28.
- 8  
Essays in Radical Empiricism, Works, p. 19.
- 9  
The Principles of Psychology, Works, p. 19.
- 10  
John Dewey, "The Vanishing Subject In The Psychology of James," The Journal of Philosophy, 37 (October, 1940), pp. 589 and 591.
- 11  
There is, of course, disagreement among materialists concerning the specific explanations to be given. For example, Skinner, Armstrong, and Place-Smart offer three contemporary materialist views which differ markedly with each other. See Readings in Philosophy of Psychology, V. 1, edited by Ned Block (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 37-47, and 191-99; and The Philosophy of Mind, edited by V. C. Chappell (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962), pp. 101-109 and 160-171.

- 12  
The Principles of Psychology, Works, pp. 182 and 647. See also George A. Miller's 'Introduction' to the same work, p. XIX.
- 13  
A Pluralistic Universe, Works, p. 140.
- 14  
 William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: Longmans, Green, 1902), p. 379.
- 15  
Ibid., p. 380.
- 16  
Ibid., p. 383.
- 17  
Ibid., pp. 402-405.
- 18  
Ibid., pp. 387-388. See also William James, "A Suggestion About Mysticism," in Collected Essays And Reviews (New York: Longmans, Green, 1920), pp. 500-503.
- 19  
 William James, The Will to Believe And Other Essays In Popular Philosophy, The Works of William James (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 20-21 and 25-33.
- 20  
Ibid., pp. 32-33.
- 21  
Ibid., pp. 30-31.
- 22  
 See Ernest Nagel, The Structure Of Science (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), pp. 278-285 for a discussion of the manner in which classical physical theory is deterministic.
- 23  
 William James, "The Dilemma Of Determinism" in The Will To Believe And Other Essays In Popular Philosophy, Works, pp. 125-126.
- 24  
Ibid., pp. 125-127.
- 25  
Ibid., pp. 126-127.

26

Ibid., p. 135.

27

For a concise discussion of this highly technical point see Nagel, op. cit., pp. 305-316.

28

See especially his description of the case of Lurancy Vennum in The Principles of Psychology, Works, pp. 374-77.

29

U. T. Place, "Is Consciousness a Brain Process?" in Chappell, op. cit., p. 102.

30

Ibid., pp. 102-103.

31

Ibid., p. 103.

32

J. J. C. Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes," in Chappell, op. cit., pp. 164-165.

33

See, for example, Saul Kripke, "Identity and Necessity," in Identity and Individuation, edited by Milton Munitz (New York: NYU Press, 1971), pp. 135-164; and Arthur Collins, "Could Our Beliefs Be Representations In Our Brains?" The Journal of Philosophy, 76 (May, 1979), pp. 225-243.

34

See, for example, Martin Gardner, Fads And Fallacies In The Name Of Science (New York: Dover Publications, 1957). See also a remarkable recent novel on this theme, Kay Nolte Smith, Mindspell (New York: William Morrow, 1983).

35

See, for example, Aaron Beck, Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders (New York: New American Library, 1976).

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