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Respectability and the Wild Beasts of the Philosophical Desert: The Heart of James's *Varieties*

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This commentary was suggested to me in part by a colleague's remark that it would be nice if we could make William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* "respectable." The implication was that though there was something redeemable about the book, it somehow wasn't philosophically or scientifically proper. The remark awakened me to—or at least reminded me of—the fact that this has been a traditional take on James's text. As Julius Bixler points out, ridicule began soon after the book was published: "*The Varieties of Religious Experience,* appearing at about the same time as Ernest Thompson Seton's book of animal stories, was soon nicknamed 'Wild Religions I Have Known'" (1926, 1). My awakening to this attitude—a prevalent if not a pervasive one among contemporary intellectuals—led me to consider that it would be better, and crucially important to James himself, to keep James "unrespectable." James may have been a renegade and anti-professional philosopher, but he knew what he was doing.

I begin my assessment of *Varieties* by identifying myself with one of James's self-referential remarks: "I have no real mystical experience of my own, but just enough of the germ of mysticism to recognize the region from which their voice comes when I hear it" (Perry 1935, 330). Thus, like James, I write as an inquiring but sympathetic outsider. But James knew that being a sympathizer was hardly more respectable than admitting to having a religious experience. Indeed, he was well aware that many who had not had religious experiences

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were not sympathetic, and he worried about the effects of their blindness to religious experience:

> The first thing to keep in mind (especially if we ourselves belong to the clerico-academic-scientific type, the officially and conventionally "correct" type, "the deadly respectable" type, for which to ignore others is a besetting temptation) is that nothing can be more stupid than to bar out phenomena from our notice, merely because we are incapable of taking part in anything like them ourselves. (1961, 100–101)[1]

James was well attuned to the dismissive attitude of "the deadly respectable" academics who find more comfort in denying the possibilities of religious experience than in investigating its actuality. His aim was to write, in a non-dismissive way, about the human significance of religious experience.

The heart of James's unrespectability is located in his radical empirical attitude, the attitude he first identified in "The Will to Believe" and which he considered the groundwork of his own pragmatism. James's empirical attitude was doubly radical. First, it was willing to examine and take seriously all aspects of human experiences. Most notably, James pointed to the fact that relations are experienced no less than particular things or relata. Moreover, a radical empiricism investigates *all* experiences, the marginal and extreme as well as the ordinary. In *Varieties* he suggested that religious experiences are as common as many other experiences we consider "normal," and therefore should be given a fair hearing. The second side of the radical attitude involved the method of inquiry. James was willing to use any form of inquiry that yielded insight or knowledge concerning experience. He did not limit himself to (though he certainly did not exclude) the tools of traditional positivistic science—the measurement of nominalistic, and often arbitrarily designated, things and events. James's scientific method included a wide range of investigatory means: standard verification, sympathetic apprehension, biographical description, valuation, and direct description, which we might now call, somewhat loosely, phenomenology (see Wilshire 1979). He believed the scope of traditional science was far too limited to capture the range of human experience. In the conclusion to *A Pluralistic Universe,* in addressing the central questions of human existence, James argued for his inclusive method:

> *it is high time for the basic discussion in these questions to be broadened and thickened up.* It is for that that I have brought in Fechner [speculative cosmology] and Bergson [intuition], and descriptive psychology and religious experiences, and have ventured even to hint at psychical research and other wild beasts of the philosophical desert. (1912, 330)

In short, then, James's epistemology was as pluralistic as his ontology, at least until he might have good reasons not to think so. In *Varieties* he drew heavily on

these wild beasts, especially descriptive psychology, biography, and psychical research.

This pluralism of radical empiricism, James's aversion to intellectual thinness, brought his thinking directly into conflict with the two dominant intellectual outlooks at the turn of the century: absolute idealism and the normal science of the time. These outlooks were the contemporary measures of intellectual correctness. They established the various standards and constraints of respectability with which James had to contend. The rationalism of the idealist tradition and its related theologies established conceptual clarity and deductive consistency as conditions of philosophical respectability. James responded by claiming that this meant that respectability was purchased at too high a price. Conceptual clarity, he argued, brings with it a thinness that is unable to do justice to our actual religious experiences. Moreover, since for James the world and human experience are shot through with contingency, deduction is at best a tool for inquiry, as fellow pragmatist Charles Peirce described it. Thus, though James recognized important fruits of the idealist tradition, he denied its claim to be the sole model for philosophical respectability: "Nevertheless," he maintained, "if we look on man's whole mental life as it exists . . . we have to confess that the part of it of which rationalism can give an account is relatively superficial" (1961, 74).

Not only does its thinness fail to do justice to religious experience, but rational idealism more generally fails to originate or sustain religious belief. James argued that philosophy has deceived itself when it has tried to lay claim to religious belief. Of philosophical reason he said, "It amplifies and defines our faith, and dignifies it and lends it words and plausibility. It hardly ever engenders it; it cannot now secure it" (1961, 341). In short, reasoning about and idealizing religious faith in the deductivist manner of idealisms such as that of Josiah Royce or A. E. Taylor is primarily a backfilling operation. Religiosity is found in the thickness of individual experience where feelings, vague articulations, and chosen virtues reign: "[W]e are dealing with a field of experience where there is not a single conception that can be sharply drawn. The pretension, under such conditions, to be rigorously 'scientific' or 'exact' in our terms would only stamp us as lacking an understanding of our task" (48). Thus James eschewed philosophical respectability and looked for avenues of inquiry and understanding that begin to address the thickness of human experience. Such avenues, at least in 1902, seemed to run only in the wilder and stranger places of philosophical activity.

The second primary antagonist to the respectability of James's radical empiricism was mainstream science. It was then, and is now to an even greater degree, a more difficult foe. It was more difficult not only because it became tremendously successful and popular as a mode of inquiry, but also because, in being at heart empirical, it shared a fundamental outlook with James's philosophical method. From the point of view of this mainstream and practically positivistic, science, James's approach in *Varieties* seems like a naive imitation: much too loose, too subjective, too unmethodical, and too unmathematical. The science that James encountered operated with three central assumptions, assumptions

that have since been disputed within the scientific community, but which nevertheless have not gone away in the everyday practices of science and more generally of American culture (see James 1907, 282).

The first assumption, James indicated, is a monism that is "something with which all experience has got to square" (1937, vii). Science, ironically, borrows a steady-state conception of the universe from the rationalists. The practice of science thus becomes a jigsaw puzzle activity in which inductive inquiry moves steadily toward the closure of a block universe—no loose ends, no real possibilities. Induction, pragmatically speaking, is simply deduction without a God's eye view. In this way, science's monism is coupled with a straightforward causal determinism. This determinism is consistent with the other two assumptions that concerned James: (1) that the world is essentially matter and (2) that things are best understood through a reduction to their causal origins.

James persistently rejected these assumptions of conventional science, and, as a result, he was (and is) considered by many a naive thinker whose scientific work in psychology was merely at a primitive stage. But his resistance to such "respectable" science was the result of a considered philosophical outlook, and his aim was to revise contemporary conceptions of science. His central claim was that reduction was not itself a scientific or empirical activity. Rather, he considered it a speculative or philosophical act of closure resulting from the long-standing British habit of identifying empiricism with a materialistic, deterministic monism.

James's response to this sort of thinking appeared early in his 1878 Lowell Lectures on "The Brain and the Mind." "I know of nothing more deplorable," he argued, "than this undiscriminating gulping down of every thing materialistic as peculiarly scientific" (1988, 29). In *Varieties* his resistance to positivistic science appeared in both the introduction and the conclusion. At the outset he attacked the "medical materialism" that reduces all human beliefs and faiths to some physical condition. "Medical materialism," he said, "finishes up Saint Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being an epileptic" (1961, 29). He questioned the reduction not only because it is a speculative move and therefore not thoroughly empirical, but also because we, as persons, experientially reject it: "[W]hen other people criticize our own more exalted soul-flights by calling them 'nothing but' expressions of our organic disposition, we feel outraged and hurt, for we know that, whatever be our organism's peculiarities, our mental states have their substantial value as revelations of the living truth . . ." (29).

Toward the end of the book James staked his claim more pointedly, stating that the "scientist, so-called, is, during his scientific hours at least, so materialistic that one may well say that on the whole the influence of science goes against the notion that religion should be recognized at all" (1961, 370). The force of James's claim is still easily felt today. Indeed, this is precisely the reason, especially among intellectuals and academics, that *Varieties* seems to many to be

unscientific and consequently unrespectable; James doesn't *use* science to dismiss religion. To those who hold a standard conception of science as a "body of knowledge" set against a materialist ontology James will continue to seem naive.

Again, James was clear that his aim was to revise science and to radicalize empiricism, to preserve the integrity and openness of inquiry within the limits of human reason and experience. As Charlene Haddock Seigfried points out, "James incisively undercuts the naivete of the presumption that the scientific method alone discloses the real world by situating science along a continuum of selective, creative activity" (1990, 161). His radical empiricism is conjoined with his pragmatism such that instead of seeking understanding of an experience simply in its causal origin, we also look for meaning in its possible and actual consequences. "In other words," he said, "not in its origins, but *the way in which it works on the whole,* is Dr. Maudsley's final test of belief. This is our own empiricist criterion" (1961, 34). In the subsequent line, he aligns his method with that of Jonathan Edwards, a claim no doubt intended to ensure his lack of respectability among medical materialists and positivists: "In the end it had to come to our own empiricist criterion: By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots. Jonathan Edwards' *Treatise on Religious Affections* is an elaborate working out of this thesis" (34).

So, James's work in *Varieties* is not just an uninformed attempt at a science of religion. It is an attempt to revise what a science of religion might be; it is an open inquiry into religious experience from a philosophical outlook that embraces pluralism, the possibility of immaterial reals, a pragmatic notion of meaning, human freedom, and the precariousness of the cosmos. Radical empiricism demands a thick look at religious experiences as they occur for individuals. Pluralism precludes us from preemptively reducing all such experiences to a single niche in the universe. Pragmatism demands that we examine the actual effects these experiences have for individual lives—this is the task of James's discussion of saintliness. What, then, is the cash value of *Varieties*? What does James accomplish by confronting the standards of philosophic and scientific respectability?

1. Two Moods of a Saintly Temperament: Some Consequences of James's Unrespectability

James believed that the upshot of the narrow, positivistic version of science would be to dry up the importance of religious and other human experiences like sawdust tossed on an oil spill. It would leave us at the mercy of dogmatic and overbearing technical "knowers," who would wrap up the universe through reductions to causal origins. "There are," he said, "plenty of persons today—'scientists' or 'positivists,' they are fond of calling themselves—who will tell you that religious

thought is a mere survival, an atavistic reversion to a type of consciousness which humanity in its more enlightened examples has long since left behind and outgrown" (1961, 107). For James, this outlook was little removed from nihilism because it either distrusted or rejected human creativity. Pragmatically understood, positivists claim that science "has proved that personality, so far from being an elementary force in nature, is but a passive resultant of the really elementary forces, physical, chemical, physiological, and psycho-physical . . ." (106). The consequence of this scientistic account of human experience is an ultimate barrenness in our existence, the very sort of *Brave New World* barrenness that has been the core concern of a variety of social movements in the late twentieth century—movements as various as existentialism, the beat generation, hippiedom and the subsequent dead-heads, punk culture, postmodernism in its various guises, and, more recently, the green movement. Thinking pragmatically, James noted a sadness that "lies at the heart of every merely positivistic, agnostic, or naturalistic scheme of philosophy" (124). This sadness seems rooted in the implicit loss of the "tender" features of human experience.

For James, speaking a word for the varieties of religious experience is a performative resistance to this positivistic barrenness. "If any one phrase could gather its [religion's] universal message," says James, "that phrase would be, 'All is *not* vanity in the Universe, whatever the appearances may suggest'" (1961, 47). Thus, the upshot of James's radical empirical, pragmatic, and pluralistic engagement with religious experiences is a description and pragmatic defense of their human importance. They bring unity to the experiencers and, in different ways, make the experiencers at home in the universe. Religious experiences bear weight through their consequences: "[T]he best fruits of religious experience are the best things that history has to show" (211). It is through a steady stream of autobiographical descriptions that James tries to bring this home to his readers.

In a letter to Frances R. Morse, James laid out the difficulties he faced in resisting respectability:

> The problem I have set myself is a hard one: *first,* to defend . . . 'experience' against 'philosophy' as being the real backbone of the world's religious life . . . and *second,* to make the hearer or reader believe, what I myself believe, that, although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), yet the life of it as a whole is mankind's most important function. (Perry 1935, 326–27)

This "most important function" is cashed out in human endeavor. Religious experience is the widest and deepest experience of humanity. In underwriting the importance of aesthetic value and moral commitments, religious experience keeps us alive to the meaning and significance of the humanities in general. It awakens us to the living realities of goodness, beauty, strength of character, and jus-

tice, ideals that, should we lose them, would strike us with helplessness "in handling the real world" (James 1961, 61).

James works out the consequences of religious experience through the categorial structure of two sorts of souls: the healthy-minded souls, who step into divinity almost innocently, and the sick souls, whose internal division requires conversion and rebirth. Each type, through religious experience, reaches the condition of saintliness where the consequences of the experience are made manifest in actual, individual lives.

Bixler has given clear articulation to what many have noted in James's descriptive accounts of religious experiences. There appears, he says, to be a direct tension, if not a flat-out contradiction, between the two types of soul, one exemplifying freedom, the other submission.[2] To resolve the conflict, Bixler argues that ultimately James opted for the priority of the healthy-minded soul:

> James was attracted by two different kinds of religious value whose claims were at variance with each other. When his powers were at their height and the active impulses were dominant, he believed that the only religion worth having was that which encouraged human achievement. When, on the other hand, he felt the need of outward support and assurance, the religion which appealed to him was that which brought comfort. We have seen in detail that in his writings now one mood and now the other gives evidence of being dominant. His final decision was in favor of the more aggressive attitude toward life, and the pluralistic religion which it implied. (1926, 199)

Bixler's reading of *Varieties* is insightful, but his attempt to make James ultimately choose between the two types of soul seems somewhat hasty. James did opt for pluralism simply by describing the two types, but a more experientially pluralistic reading is that James did not choose between the two types of soul. Rather, he lived with the tension of the two, seeing them as different moods of a religious temperament. As with his rejection of positivistic science, what is important lies in the consequences. For James, both types of religious experience could lead to ameliorative effects, both individual and social. If there is to be a unifying moment of the two souls, it will be in their effects as religious moods and as reciprocal conditions of human creative endeavor. And these effects are something we can see and feel in the world we inhabit.

In *Pragmatism* and elsewhere in his writings, James marked out his fundamental empirical assessment of our world as a precarious place: "I find myself willing to take the universe to be really dangerous and adventurous, without therefore backing out and crying 'no play'" (1907, 296). This fact, as James saw it, existentially conditions religious experiences. "I offer you the chance," he said, "of taking part in such a world. Its safety, you see, is unwarranted. It is a real adventure, with real danger, yet it may win through" (290). In such a world, there is human work to be done. This is James's meliorism; we have a chance to

improve our world though we have no guarantees of the outcome. In such a world, both religious moods may have roles to play. The healthy-minded exemplify free human action toward fulfilling human possibilities; the twice-born reveal the importance of submission to what is higher. Here are to be found the specific fruits of religious experience as they are found in the saintly life. James follows Leuba in giving import to the human consequences of divine activity: "Not God, but life, more life, a larger, richer more satisfying life, is, in the last analysis the end of religion" (James 1961, 392). For James, religious experience, even if it should lead to immortality and another life of some sort, must first earn its keep in this life. If it is to earn respect, over and against the conventional respectability of philosophy and science, it must do so through its effects on our lives. In a note to himself concerning *Varieties* James wrote: "Yet I must shape things and argue to the conclusion that a man's religion is the deepest and wisest thing in his life" (Perry 1935, 328).

The two routes to saintliness, taken as complementary religious moods, reveal both independent and conjoint avenues to meliorating life. Taken separately, healthy-mindedness discloses the power of a free will at work and the reborn sick soul emphasizes the guidance available through submission to ideals. Taken together, they provide a fuller picture of the powers of human creativity.

The healthy-minded mood is Whitmanesque, marked by its attention to personal empowerment and freedom. It is an active mood, engendering a creative meliorism. The healthy-minded soul enjoys a romance with the world, in which she sees herself as making a difference, as contributing to the world's well-being. This mood's sense of empowerment was precisely what was, as we saw earlier, rejected by traditional science in denying that "personality" is "an elementary force in nature" (James 1961, 108). James's own experiential resistance to this denial came, under the influence of Renouvier, when he asserted his freedom as an initial act of freedom. Science's block universe offered no more hope than those of Hegel and Royce. And James believed that most of us sense this free power at some juncture in our lives. He gives expression to the importance of the healthy-minded mood in his assessment of the mind-cure movement:

> That the controlling energies of nature are personal, that your own personal thoughts are force, that the powers of the universe will directly respond to your individual appeals and needs, are propositions which your whole body and mental experience will verify. (1961, 108)

Under the influence of this religious mood, we see ourselves as contributors, as empowered to make a difference—our individual acts and human creativity are directly important to and for the universe. We see the aesthetic powers of Michelangelo and the moral efficacy of Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Mother Theresa; we experience our own possibilities for making a difference, say, in the life of a child, in the comfort of a dying friend, or in the beauty of a local envi-

ronment. The "saintly methods" are, James says, "creative energies"; and the saints themselves "are impregnators of the world, vivifiers and animaters of potentialities of goodness which but for them would lie forever dormant" (284).

The mood of the converted soul is somewhat different—less innocent, more reflective, and culminating in an active passivity. It discloses a second, complementary and crucial dimension of our creative endeavors. At the heart of the sick soul's religiosity is a moment of submission to something higher, to a living ideal. James applauds Starbuck's claim that the experiencer

> must fall back on the larger Power that makes for righteousness, which has been welling up in his own being, and let it finish in its own way the work it has begun. . . . The act of yielding, in this point of view, is giving one's self over to the new life, making it the centre of the new personality. . . . (James 1961, 175)

The self-surrender or submission, ironically, leads to a rebirth, not a death of the self. The converted soul feels empowered in ways that she or he had not previously experienced (see Clebsch 1964, 168–69). The difference from the free power and agency felt by the healthy-minded is that the personal power now has a clearly self-transcendent source: a living ideal or power. The converted soul finds herself or himself living in a wider life where things can be seen more clearly. The final result is that the Tolstoy-like, converted believer gains ownership of an ideal, experiences self-revision, and sees the possibilities for further self- and social-revision.

In submitting to an ideal, the sick soul identifies with it and not only gains, as it were, an aesthetic insight to an ideal, but also acquires a strength of commitment which it had not previously known. Stories of this sort abound among those who have participated in Alcoholics Anonymous, one of several movements inspired by James's thinking (see James 1961, 217–18). As Starbuck puts it, "the effect of conversion is to bring with it 'a changed attitude towards life, which is fairly constant and permanent. . . .' The persons who have passed through conversion, having once taken a stand for the religious life, tend to feel themselves identified with it, no matter how much their religious enthusiasm declines" (210). Such a deep and steady commitment is a potent tool for the melioristic outlook and action James saw as the fruit of the saintly life. Through equanimity, fortitude, and patience, converted souls have found the strength, for example, to care for lepers and, more recently, AIDS patients. As William Clebsch suggests, "Ultimately we act with the gods to reshape humanity's social reality" (1964, 169).

Thus, both moods lead to the possible bettering of a risk-filled world. Moreover, both have disclosed their effects in biography and history: the healthy-minded by direct engagement with human possibility and the reborn soul through self-revision and the empowerment of an ideal. The tension between the routes

of the two moods is not ultimately paradoxical because it reflects a lived tension that many experience in basic creative acts. Consider, for example, the creation of a painting. The artist is free in choosing a medium, an originary mark on the canvas, generic content, and so forth. The artist is to some degree healthy-minded. However, that artist must also submit to an ideal as it develops itself on the canvas. The artist must give over some will and allow the painting to become what it can be; there is a moment of submission to a developing ideal. This is not a new phenomenon in human experience, but a perennial one to which James's focus on the two moods draws our attention. Insofar as the saints' methods are "creative energies," they should reveal both features to us, and James used *Varieties* to show us that they do so in exemplary fashion. The "genuine saints," he says, "find in the elevated excitement with which their faith endows them an authority and impressiveness which makes them irresistible in situations where men of shallower nature cannot get on at all without the use of worldly prudence" (1961, 284). This irresistibility—personal creative energy—is, for James, what keeps religious experience alive and well even in the face of political and cultural oppression.

If we push James's description of the saintly life a bit, we might say that for him the creators and discoverers of human meaning are all, at some level, religious characters. They are champions, heroes, and preservers of the varieties of goodness. Again, for James, religious experience plays a central role in meliorating the world:

> From this point of view we may admit the human charity which we find in all saints, and the great excess of it which we find in some saints, to be a genuinely creative social force, tending to make a real degree of virtue which it alone is ready to assume as possible. The saints are authors, *auctores,* increasers, of goodness. (1961, 285)

If the saints, of both moods, are denied their efficacy—if they are denied a place in the world—the world might quickly become a different place. A good place for cynics and manipulators, who both, in different ways, reject the possibility of betterness.

In these various consequences of idealism, positivistic science, and James's pluralism, we see the definitely practical and political edge of James's work. Rationalism and scientism each fails to comprehend a wide range of human experiences, including most importantly religious experiences. At best, they provide a generic, conceptual shorthand for actual experience. Rationalism reduces us to puppets of some absolute power and medical materialism to physical, chemical, and biological causes. Especially in the latter world, experiences of love, sacrifice, honesty, and the like are reduced to their causes, and religiosity is at best a kind of disease or medical impairment. As James noted, "One disciple of the school [of medical materialism], indeed, has striven to impugn the value of works

of genius in a wholesale way (such works of contemporary art, namely, as he himself is unable to enjoy, and they are many) by using medical argument" (1961, 32).

The consequences of this initial failure to understand human experiences, James believed, held even more dire consequences when acted upon. In the absence of religious, artistic, and moral experiences, the human problems of the world must be addressed only by the conventional notion of science. While many scientists then and now claim not to associate with the assumptions of medical materialism, I believe James is correct in suggesting that in their scientific moments they do in practice succumb to them. Indeed, I believe that as a culture we are living with many of the consequences James predicted. Take, for example, our educational practices. How do we understand good teaching and learning? Our present answers are almost universally given in terms of cognitive psychology and by way of trivial sociological and psychological studies. A long-standing example is our measurement of good teaching in colleges and universities by way of student "evaluations." James's point is that as we stare directly into the face of experience, we *know* that cognitive psychology does not in and of itself make better teachers. In the opening chapter of *Talks to Teachers,* he made this point directly: "The best teacher may be the poorest contributor of child-study material, and the best contributor may be the poorest teacher" (1899, 14). Yet instead of looking out for and paying attention to the humanistic features of good teaching—caring, sympathetic apprehension of others' outlooks, and so on—we persist in measuring our teachers and in preparing them by way of studies in educational psychology.

A similar phenomenon pervaded the medical profession of the twentieth century. James recognized the tremendous value of the scientific and technical advances in medicine—he was after all a pluralist. But he also believed that good medical treatment involved human dimensions such as care, trust, honesty, and hope. Moreover, he did not discount the possibilities of other kinds of healing practices including some that are related to religious experience:

> Science gives to all of us telegraphy, electric lighting, and diagnosis, and succeeds in preventing and curing a certain amount of disease. Religion in the shape of mind-cure gives to some of us serenity, moral poise, and happiness, and prevents certain forms of disease as well as science does, or even better in a certain class of persons. (1961, 110)

In the world of scientism, the problems of education and medicine are left without alternatives—there is only respectable science to answer our questions and address our concerns.

The cost of intellectual respectability, then, is a world that is morally, aesthetically, and religiously challenged: an academic world in which one must hide or apologize for being religious or for even having an interest—other than a

respectable academic interest—in spiritualism or mysticism, and in which we have come to persistently deny or overlook the beneficial effects of religious experience for some lives and cultures. The consequence of James's work is not anti-science but a more inclusive science, a more radical empiricism: "[T]he science and the religion are both of them genuine keys for unlocking the world's treasure-house to him who can use either of them practically" (1961, 110). Living in such a barren world—a world even as barren as ours where we have in practice given our lives over to respectable experts—seemed to James an unfortunate and ultimately unacceptable consequence of the dominance of conventional science. The experiential fact is that calculative, rational thinking on its own does not produce good moral practices any more than it produces great art. For that, we need to take all human experiences seriously and to examine their effects on our lives.

2. Conclusion

As James noted in commenting on his task in *Varieties:* "The struggle seems to be that of a less articulate and more profound part of our nature to hold out, and keep itself standing, against the attempts of a more superficial and explicit or loquacious part to suppress it" (Perry 1935, 327). James's own courage in resisting not only the popular intellectualism of closed idealisms but also the dominance of a narrowly construed and implicitly deterministic science is something of which we are presently desperately in need. Though present day humanists who themselves have acquired an anti-religious dogma may overlook it, James's work in *Varieties* creates space not only for religion and religious experience, but for all of the humanities: our romances with poetry, art, and music; our interests in history; and our own philosophical engagement. His openly unrespectable "science of religion" underwrites the importance of the creative human endeavors that, as he saw it, allow us to meliorate our existence, to pursue breadth and depth in the meaning of life. Meliorism in *this* world requires that we occasionally call on the wild beasts of the philosophical desert. Instead of making James respectable, we should focus on why he insisted on remaining unrespectable. James wants to give us a fighting chance to avoid the inevitable resignation that besets a world driven by positivism and rationalism. This is the fruit he hoped his work might bear: "For practical life at any rate, the *chance* of salvation is enough. No fact in human nature is more characteristic than its willingness to live on a chance" (James 1961, 408).

Notes

1. It is interesting to note that James includes religious officials in this rejection of religious experiences. It was certainly an issue among religious intellectuals who did not want religion's

integrity muddied up with actual religious experiences. This remains an issue today, for example, among mainline Christian Protestant groups.

2. Richard Gale (1999) argues for a systematic and irreparable division in James's life and work. His claim is that a "mystical" James eventually overcomes a "Promethean" James. Though I am not fully convinced of the victory of the mystical James, I am convinced that Gale's work is an important contribution to the reading of James's religious work.

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