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# Paddling in the Stream of Consciousness: Describing the Movement of Jamesian Inquiry

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## I. The Morning of Painful Hypotheses

"Five, you're late!"

A racing shell seats eight oarsmen front-to-back. In the flurry of practice, the names of the crewmen are lost and replaced by their respective seat numbers—one through eight. The coxswain, the navigator of the boat, shouts direction not by name, but by number. The terms "early" and "late" refer to the tempo and timing of the rowers' sweep. "Early" means that you are ahead of the collective stroke. "Late" means that you are falling behind. I was a novice crewman. I was fifth-seat. I did not know it yet, but I was "late."

"Five, you're late!"

Six-seat's oar handle struck my spine with a solid thump and quickly gave meaning to the coxswain's direction: I was really behind the stroke and needed to pick it up. I came to know my rowing self as I have come to know most things—through a painful process of trial and error.

No amount of yelling or explaining could have imparted the lesson of tempo and pacing. My back had to *feel* the lesson *in practice*. Athletics are only, and always, learned by heart, by the muscles. Coaches and coxswains seem to recognize this fact. They unstiffen our bodies, limber them up, and set them to work. It is in the bodily work of sport that we learn the technique and jargon of the game: I have never forgotten the meaning of being "late."

William James asserts that experience is situated at the heart of any higher forms of understanding. The challenge of explaining *how* experience is situated in relation to human understanding is, in many respects, the principal challenge of American pragmatism. This fact is reflected in the "Present Dilemma in Philosophy," when James notes that the dilemma that pragmatism faces is the task of reconciling two hitherto incompatible mindsets. The first "mental make-up" he describes is the "tough-minded," defined by its commitment to empiricism,

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sensationalism (referring to the bodily senses), experientialism, and pluralism. The second he describes is the "tender-minded," characterized by its rationalism, idealism, intellectualism, and monism. According to James, "most of us have a hankering for the good things on both sides of the line" (1907a, 13). Unlike "most of us," however, the pragmatists "are more than mere laymen in philosophy" and refuse to *randomly* attend to the best of both worlds (14). Instead, a cohesive philosophy is sought to unify aspects of the empiricist and rationalist tendencies. James is not careless in his word choice on this topic: "We are worthy of the name of *amateur athletes,* and are vexed by too much inconsistency and vacillation in our creed. We cannot preserve good intellectual conscience so long as we keep mixing incompatibilities from opposite sides of the line" (14). The project of pragmatism is to illustrate how these tendencies or temperaments are not necessarily "incompatible," and indeed, how they co-emerge in the process of human inquiry.

James maintains that inquiry must begin on the ground of human sensation, with a personal intimacy with the "facts" of the world. He parts company with the traditional empiricist, however, in his insistence that the experience of these facts is, *in some way,* continuous. James does not simply dismiss the notion of cohesive principles, but rather proposes a kind of principled process that is both driven and contained by experience. According to James, "The world of concrete personal experiences . . . is multitudinous beyond imagination, tangled, muddy, painful and perplexed," and, just like the first painful day of practice, is inseparable from a more cohesive understanding or athletic mastery (1907b, 179). He would agree with the sportsman that a youngster cannot learn the principles of rowing, throwing, or jumping without rowing, throwing, or jumping—without a sore back, shoulder, or leg.

Pragmatism assumes the sportsman's common sense by insisting that the truths of philosophy be "world-ready." Truth, like the physical body through which it is enacted, is exposed to the elements of nature, put through the practice of the real world, and bumped and bruised into adaptation. As James writes in "What Pragmatism Means," "Pragmatism unstiffens all our theories, limbers them up and sets each one to work" (1907c, 53). One can "unstiffen" theories and "limber them up" insofar as the theory takes some living, breathing form in the organic world. In the real labor of the everyday, in all of its discontinuities and obstacles, we come to see from what sort of stuff our theories are made.

James' comment that the ideas are in the muscle is usually regarded as another of his anti-intellectualist jabs, as a demand for ideas that have experiential cash value. Here, I hope to take this interpretation a bit further, or at the very least, a bit more literally. A description of rowing musculature, muscular development in the activity of sport, will at once be a description of the pragmatic theory of ideas. Learning to row is simply learning: a mode of inquiry. Indeed, the rower's experience of muscular fitness, with its initial ache and subsequent growth, exemplifies a moment of James' epistemological approach. For American prag-

matists, such as Peirce, James, and Dewey, the connection between the physical construction of the human organism and the structure of human reasoning goes far deeper than simple analogy.

This philosophical story is another pragmatic attempt to describe the physical habits of thought, the reforming embodiment of ideas. It has been intimated that a Jamesian approach to knowledge, and to philosophy itself, must, at points, embrace the coach's timeworn motto: "No pain, no gain." This being said, it seems reasonable to open with a reflection on the suffering and adaptation required in sport, highlighting the family resemblance it shares with philosophic tough-mindedness. Suffering and sacrifice, however, are only one side of inquiry. The painful lessons that perception teaches give rise at precious moments to a cohesive understanding of this experience, give rise to a passing sense of oneness with the world. Inquiry is not always characterized by brutal lessons imparted by the facts of experience; at times, habits of thought seem to coincide with empirical evidence. An intellectual, personal, and bodily flow is experienced—at least for the time being.[1] It seems right to close with a description of these flow states, often mythologized and misconstrued in rowing literature, and do my best to return them to the experiential aches and pains that mark a novice season. In truth, the "hard knocks" of the experienced world engender habits of thought.

Endurance athletes are quick to identify the inextricable connection between the pain of trial and error, the habits of action and thought, and the almost mystical flow that can accompany physical activity. This reconnection seems in line with the work of James, but challenges at least a section of secondary scholarship. The synthesis of the tough- and tender-minded tendencies runs in the face of commentators who insist that James maintained alternative and contrary theories of truth—according to these scholars, James is *either* tough *or* tender, but not both. In recent years, this odd either-or has been construed in many ways: the Promethean or the mystical, the individual or the communal, the active or the passive (Gale 1999). In the end, however, these dueling couplets reveal themselves as iterations of the tough *and* tender, empirical *and* rationalistic, experiential *and* idealistic, pairings. With a hand from the experience of rowing, I hope to flesh out this pairing as being complimentary rather than disjunctive. Henry Bugbee, a pragmatist and rower, addresses the odd communion between experience and transcendence in the tradition of American thought; he too employs the experience of the early morning sport to illustrate this connection. I will occasionally use certain comments made in his *Inward Morning* to supplement the discussion at hand (Bugbee 1976).

## II. Novice Seasons and Novel Ideas

A very early riser might catch a glimpse of a fall-time rowing ritual: the first day of novice practice. In the inky blue of pre-dawn, a ragtag band of underclassmen can be seen sitting on a row of benches on a hill just south of campus.

"Where is the river?"

"Are we going to practice *here?*"

"Do we get to row today?"

The murmured questions swirl and expose the collective character of the group—confused and a bit naive. These are novices. They have rallied themselves and come to practice at the suggestion of others and, despite the chill of early morning, still believe that "this *might* be fun." They have the idea that "this *might* still work out." In this respect, a novice stands as a type of walking hypothesis, not yet validated, not yet disproved. The band of young rowers is sent for a thirty-minute jog, a preamble of things to come. The sun meets them on their return to the hill and exposes another common trait. What the murky darkness once masked now becomes painfully apparent: all novices are, by definition, scrawny. In some cases scrawny can mean thin and agile. Let me assure you, in this case, it is just another word for bony and awkward. A physiologist would insist that these youngsters do have muscles, but their young tissues have, to this point, been inactive and neither function as, nor appear to be, muscle as such.

The first day of practice is also known as "weed out day." The next hour-and-a-half separates the novices who will "make it" from those who may not; it remains the most jarring period of an oarsman's athletic career. Forty-five minutes of wind sprints—now they understand the reason for the hill. Forty-five minutes of step-ups—now they understand the reason for the row of benches that line the hill. Young muscles scream with this understanding, and drown out the idea of heroic oarsmen that brought them to practice. Exposure to the experiential trials and tribulations weed out the less fit, or more accurately, the less determined. The hypotheses that these novices embody, the ideas of rowing grandeur, are slowly adjusted under the pressures of bodily practice. Adaptation to these strenuous conditions takes time, too much time for the muscles of many first-year rowers. The number of drop-outs after the first day often outnumbers the returning novices.

In the introduction to *The Will to Believe,* James suggests:

> Let us give the name of *hypothesis* to anything that may be proposed to our belief; and just as the electricians speak of live and dead wires, let us speak of any hypothesis as either live or dead. A live possibility is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed. (1956, 2)

For James, inquiry begins as a "good guess," as the idea that "this might work out." Such initial hypotheses emerge from the darkness of confusion somewhat

randomly—they simply show up. The life of some hypotheses, however, like the tenure of some rowers, is relatively short. Neither the idealistic thoughts of shells and oars nor the muscles that person-ify these naive thoughts have been tested out. In "What Pragmatism Means," James restates Charles Peirce's initial explanation of ideas as rules for action, reflecting a belief that these "rules" are en-*acted* by organisms that face the real-world consequences of these hypotheses: "Ideas, which are themselves but parts of our experience, become true just in so far as they help us get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience" (1907c, 47). Rather than bringing us into "satisfactory relations" with other parts of our experience, many hypotheses lead us astray, alienating us from the experiential world and, in some cases, harming our physical bodies. These "rules for action" are found to be misguided, out of synch with the preexisting body of experience (56). Indeed, these unfortunate casualties of the philosophic weed-out day may simply disappear, never to be seen again on the field of ideas.

It is true that a few ideas remain on this field despite their inability to cut the experiential muster. These chronically weak ideas, unable to "pull their own weight" in the demanding real world, are typically relegated to the upper echelons of the academy, the proverbial "junk boat" of thoughts. It is also true that these rarified ideas may reemerge on the practical scene, just as the muscles of the junk boat might be promoted to the B boat or even to the A shell. This promotion, however, occurs only after a great amount of time and after an even greater amount of adaptation.

## III. The Growth of Habits of Thought

This brings us to the crux of the Jamesian theory of ideas: adaptation. Just because an idea survives its initial trial by fire does not mean that it has acquired the needed muscle and coordination for the task at hand; no hypothesis comes fully equipped to deal with the problems of the everyday. According to the pragmatist and the coach, the young ideas of young muscles have a long way to go and may still prove unfit for the challenges of life and the more particular challenge of rowing. In the *Principles of Psychology,* James sheds light on certain forms of muscular evolution that mesh nicely with the experience of those sore oarsmen who return from weed-out day and endure their novice season. He uses the section entitled "Habit" to explain how tissue, the embodied form of ideas, is transformed in active practice. James writes:

> The habits of an elementary particle of matter cannot change. . . . Because the particle is itself an unchangeable thing; but those of a compound mass of matter can change . . . either outward forces or inward tensions can, from one hour to another, turn that structure into something different from what it was. That is,

> they can do so if the body be plastic enough to maintain its integrity. . . . All these changes are rather slow; the material in question opposes a certain resistance to the modifying cause, which it takes time to overcome, but the gradual yielding whereof often saves the material from being disintegrated altogether. (1950, 105)

The "structure" in this particular case is the muscle of the athlete. In this sense, the rigorous demands of practice, the variable and unforeseen obstacles of the empirical world, might be considered the "modifying effects." The "resistance" to which James refers is embodied in the tightness of the unused muscle and is immediately reflected in the pain felt by all novices as their tissues stretch and work for the first time. The novice hypothesis must be "weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once" (105). The investigation of rowing, the search for the principles of a complex process, will be cut short if the empirical facts reject rather than reform the body of inquiry.

James exposes a basic understanding of physiology by noting that repeated bodily activity leaves an "organic impression" on the structure and arrangement of tissue. For example, "our nervous system grows to the modes in which it has been exercised" (110). It physically adjusts to novel impulses; over time, such readjustments streamline these impulses and create a new set of nerve-nets. The stress of a novice season leaves its impression on the bony awkwardness of the novice and by mid-March, or in some unfortunate cases, by mid-May, a kind of muscular and ideological transformation occurs. Their ideas of rowing shift with their muscles; "this *might* work" becomes "this *is* work." They slowly develop an understanding of rowing as a mode of work best executed in compliance with certain rules and principles. James describes the experience of exercise: "Thus we notice after exercising our muscles or our brain in a new way, that we can do so no longer at that time; but a day or two of rest, when we resume the discipline, our increase in skill not seldom surprises us" (110). He characterizes the body as "regenerative," "reproductive," "rebuilding," and "reparative," emphasizing an organism's capacity to recover from trauma (110).

The fate of a live hypothesis is a grueling one. The pragmatic method insists that our "theories become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest" (1907c, 53). A well-equipped hypothesis, like a natural-born athlete, "appears less a solution, then, than as a program for more work" (53). Certain hypotheses will warrant lengthier examinations than others, but eventually every good guess shows its Achilles' heel; it is at this particular weak spot or pressure point that revision takes place. The good coach is slow to praise his players for fear of instilling a sense of complacency. He has been around the experiential block and knows just how hard to push on certain athletes, challenging their skills without breaking their spirit. The good pragmatist, playing with all of his empirical equipment, is slow to praise his "truths" for fear that they will fail to shoulder the complexity of the living world. James comments that "conceptual

knowledge is forever inadequate to the fullness of the reality to be known" (1921, 81). He has been around the experiential block and knows that the twists and turns of experience inevitably cast doubt on working concepts. Accordingly, most ideas are behind the experiential times. They are horribly "late." These thoughts, however, are never seated in the "boat" of experience and have yet to receive a solid "thump" to instill the lesson of their lateness. In "The Notion of Truth," James criticizes the rationalistic tendency to view truth as an "inert static relation." According to the Absolutist, "when you've got your true idea of anything, there's an end of the matter" (1907d, 200).

As opposed to this static vision of traditional epistemology, James comments that "Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, it is *made* true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of verifying itself, its veri-*fication*" (201). This "verification" is never finished; it outlines truth, it delimits by recognizing what is *not* possible and what is not in synch with the situation at hand. Sometimes concepts are used quite effectively. On other occasions, it is precisely these concepts that lead some-*body* astray in the midst of unforeseen events.

## IV. Unforeseen Events and Conceptual Disasters

Henry Bugbee rightly comments, "You might have thought that races were the moments of definitive rowing, and there is no doubt that we used to enter upon them with a special sense of being called upon" (1976, 50). There are times in this life when such a call remains unanswered or simply drowned out in the quiet sinking of a capsized boat. I cannot remember if it took place in Pittsburgh or in Boston; in truth, I have done my best to forget the event. I do remember that it was my first race.

"Ready all, row."

A head-race begins in a moving start. The shells are taken one-by-one in time trial form. The stopwatch starts as the shells round the first bend in the river and, at least in most cases, stops six kilometers later.

"*Thunk*."

One—two—three.

"*Thunk*."

One—two—three.

A "*thunk*" and a "*thump*" mean two very different things. A "*thump*" is the sound of being speared in the back with another rower's oar. A solid "*thunk,*" on the other hand, is the *sound of unison,* the sound of eight oars flipping into place at the same time. I *knew* we were together—it *sounded* good and *felt* alright. In retrospect, one might say that I let the concept of timing and pacing, the three-count that kept me on the stroke, guide my movements. This concept maintained

my position, my pace, my state in the boat—at least for a time. James notes in the "Stream of Thought" that, "If a new state comes, the inertia of the old state will still be there and modify the result accordingly. Of course we cannot tell, in our ignorance, what in each instance the modification ought to be" (1950, 242). In other words, one does not know when the wind is going to pick up, when the percepts of the empirical world are going to impinge on the habits of thought, on the concepts that habitually guide our action.

The six-kilometer race is a long one. The opening thousand and the closing thousand demand complete attention; the middle four kilometers, however, can be rowed in a kind of cruise-control. Partly-seasoned rowers have practiced for several months and, with considerable pain and frustration, have developed a habit, a concept, of rowing. They employ this concept whenever they step into the boat and often employ it without regard to unexpected circumstances. James writes:

> Habit diminishes the conscious attention with which our acts are performed . . . our lower (thought) centres know the order of these movements, and show their knowledge by their "surprise" if the objects are altered so as to oblige the movement to be made in a different way. But our higher thought-centres know hardly anything about the matter. (115)

Indeed, our "higher thought-centres" may attend, not to rowing itself, but to the riverfront shops, the birds on the shore, the crowd on the bank, the wind in the trees.

And those trees were *blowing*. In hindsight, I am sure my oar had been catching water for some time. Three of my fellow oarsmen had been sharing in my inattention and were equally surprised when we caught simultaneous "crabs." A rower "catches a crab" when the back sweep of the stroke never clears the water and the blade pitches further under the surface. As the oarsman attempts to regain control of the submerged blade and elevated handle, he invariably shifts his weight in the shell, which in most cases temporarily "throws the balance" of the boat. In this instance, the balance was thrown, and so were we—into the water. It is hard to swamp an eight-man shell. It is even harder to live it down when you do.

The example at hand seems to reflect James' suspicion that these habits of thought, these principles for action, are brought to bear on perception as a way of making sense of the jumbling, buzzing confusion of experience (179). Habits of thought arise from, and are molded by, experiential situations. James writes, "you can see the little lines of cleavage running through the character, the tricks of thought, the prejudices, the ways of the 'shop,' in a word, from which the man can by-and-by no more escape than his coat sleeve can suddenly fall into a new set of folds" (121). These cleavages of thought, the remnants of its experiential origins, are *system*-atically overlooked in the treatment of concepts as things rather than as instruments to be used. According to James, despite their *apparent*

seamlessness, even the pure forms of mathematics and logic are all "abstracted and generalized from long forgotten perceptual instances" (1921, 52).

In the pragmatic use of concepts, these generalized forms return to the particulars of the world as tentative ways of understanding the experiential state of affairs. The pragmatic use of ideas is tentative insofar as the seasoned pragmatist, unlike the second-year oarsman, is attentive to the way in which conceptual schemas might fall short in making sense of the flux of life. The partly seasoned rower applies concepts *as if* these abstractions could *double* for the continuity of experience. This mistake may eventually "tip the boat" of intellectual life such that it reveals itself as incongruous with the purposes of the present moment. James describes the inability of the conceptual realm to take account of the superfluity of the empirical world. He writes that "Since the relations of a concept are of static comparison only, it is impossible to substitute them for the dynamic relations with which the perceptual flux is filled . . . [concepts] can only cover the perceptual flux in spots and incompletely" (81).

Inasmuch as habits of thought or concepts can mislead one in the midst of novel conditions, James suggests that concepts be employed "only when they help." One ought to "drop them when they hinder understanding; and take reality bodily and integrally up into philosophy in exactly the perceptual shape in which it comes" (101). Notice the move to take up reality in "the perceptual shape in which it comes" does not herald the death of philosophy, but rather encourages its enlivenment, or—more accurately—its *enlivening*. This openness to felt experience does not compromise the value of abstract knowledge; indeed, it is this openness that grants the very possibility of a falsifiable thought.

The evolution of concepts, the life and death and rejuvenation of thoughts and the individuals who embody them, is taken up in Bugbee's description of "immersion." He writes, "There is a continuing passage from thing to thing in which a kind of sameness or continuity of meaning deepens—ever confirming and ever relevant" (1976, 52). This "sameness" of the perceptual world, however, cannot be unified and expressed in its unbroken continuity as conceptual knowledge. The moments of the perceptual flux are the "same," but are the *same* only insofar as each arises in relation to our concepts independently, unexpected, *differently* from the previous moment. *Any* reflection on the moments of experience falls short of perfect description, and, in turn, begs its own revision. We may, at any moment, find ourselves radically out of place. As James highlights in the "Stream of Thought," during certain intervals, concepts *seem* to find rest in the experiential world; they are stirred only so slightly by the "truth" of the felt moment (1950, 243). However, these brief intervals in which static generalization seemingly holds sway are just that: brief. Bugbee echoes this sentiment, noting that "it is not by generalization that omnirelevant, universal meaning dawns . . . there is this bathing in the fluent reality which resolves mental fixations and suggests that our manner of taking things has been staggeringly a matter of habituation" (1976, 83). The "dawning of things themselves" revises the habit and fixation of

belief. Interestingly, it is also in this dawn when partly seasoned rowers return to the site of conceptual disaster, to the memory of capsized boats and overturned "habits of thought." They return to the water, to the sound, to the feeling, to the experience of practice, and begin to re-turn to their concept of rowing again—for the first time.

## V. Rowing, Witnessing, and the Re-turning of an Oarsman

What happens to an inquirer when inquiry is temporarily overturned by the world of experience? Certain students, like certain rowers, tend to repeat the process of conceptualization described above and, unfortunately, merely repeat the excruciating and drenching effects when this concept proves out of joint with novel environmental conditions. Their concepts may be expressed in a slightly different form, but their determined and unreflective character remains the same and produces similar disastrous consequences. For others, however, this process of conceptual decentering goes far deeper, and in these cases what appears again is not simply another determinate thought, concept, or meaning. What is decentered, in this case, is not inquiry per se, but rather, more significantly, the inquirer herself.

James often comments on the ways in which abstract knowing is alienated from the knower. It is overlooked—or *consciously forgotten*—that abstract concepts are embodied, developed, and expressed in the body of inquiry, that is to say, in the flesh and blood of the inquirer. *It is forgotten that we, as human beings,* are *questioning.* For these forgetful individuals, the revision of concepts rarely translates into the revision of lives. Insofar as concepts are always embodied, the possibility of this type of personal revision always underpins the transaction of inquiry. It is, however, only in rare cases that this possibility is actualized.

To this point in the discussion, the account of rowing has been a description of what James calls in the *Varieties of Religious Experience* "the negative and tragic principle" of life (1997, 230). It has been framed as the strenuous, and even brutal, play between perceptual realities and embodied conceptual life. From this play, concepts are ingrained in the body of thought. This thought-ful body temporarily serves as the effective mediator between raw facticity and the situation of rowing. At unexpected moments, however, this embodied mediation falls short of its task and is, itself, laid low by the bare fact of reality. In my framing of the subject, I have also attempted to highlight the attitudinal shifts that can accompany the undergoing and doing of pragmatic investigation.

The novice, by definition, knows nothing of rowing and feels the aching immanence of experience, the uncomfortable disjunction between initial hypothesis and empirical fact. During this first movement, the novice is painfully aware of his body in the undergoing of experience. The partly seasoned athlete uses the

painful lessons of empirical testing to reconstruct the idea of his rowing situation. Through this process of undergoing, of *being affected,* habits are ingrained by experience and, ever so slowly, begin to "talk back" to the perceptual world. For the first time, the rower attends to the "doing" rather than the simple undergoing of the situation. Ever more abstract in their conceptualization and increasingly unconscious in their utilization, these habits interpret experience haphazardly and arrogantly, leading the knower astray at the most inopportune of moments. While the perceptual pain of the novice season is continual and chronic, the trauma of the conceptual disaster is acute and wholly unexpected. Bugbee describes this process of inquiry: "One moment we understand, the next we may be lost. One moment we are lifted gratefully along with the gentle stream, another we are stranded, gasping and writhing, estranged from the element in which it is given to us to live" (1976, 100).

The third metamorphosis of the knower arises slowly and in parts—that is to say, if it arises at all. Many a rower, like many a knower, simply ignores this conceptual capsizing and preserves their abstract knowledge of the world. In other cases, however, a novel way of understanding begins to unfold. Just as habits of thought were molded from the bumps and bruises of the empirical world, this new understanding, according to the pragmatists such as James and Bugbee, grows from the painful inadequacy of objective conceptualization.

Experience creates habits of thought in the rower who, in turn, uses the concepts to readdress experience. It might be said that experience tries to talk about itself through this conceptualization. In a concept's attempt to reinterpret experience, a space opens between perception and abstraction. In certain cases, a proverbial chasm separates the two; the rower finds herself radically out of time, out of synch, out of place. She is encouraged to revise not only the working concept of rowing, but the very way in which conceptualization is approached.

The third moment is a shift in disposition and outlook—a shift in personal attitude. What changes is not simply the way in which the rower approaches the water on any *given* morning, but also the way in which the person approaches morn*ing,* dawn*ing,* row*ing,* itself. This shift in the nature of inquiry does not only yield new and more suited answers, but issues in a mode of inquiry that has been hitherto overlooked. For some rowers, the space exposed *between* the empirical and the rational, *between* the passive and the active, *between* the "undergone" and the "done," *between* the interrogative and the assertive, is discovered as a space to be quietly occupied.[2]

It is worth noting that this shift in understanding is rarely accompanied by the fanfare or braggadocio of partly seasoned rowers. Indeed, it is almost always a quiet shift preceded by some first-race "crab" or other conceptual mishap in which habitual understanding is unreflectively applied to the novel flux of experience. Indeed, the athlete may seem sullen, despondent, reclusive—embarrassed by the unsuited idea that he once embodied. In most cases, however, this attitudinal shift is not *simply* a shift to despondence, but rather the assuming of a quiet attentive-

ness that characterizes a new *way* of thought. Note, that this assumption is *not* a thought, but rather a *way* of thought.

There is a way in which the second-year rower flaunts her habits of thought and drives them noisily into the river of experience. Her bold manipulations drown out the directions of the perceptual world, the conditions of the moment. This oarsman and her concepts will eventually be overturned, but, with any luck, will emerge from the water and the accident with quieter concepts. In quieting the absoluteness of her rowing ideas, she is able to *hear* the wind pick up, *feel* the waves hit the boat, *think,* and *act* accordingly. This oarsman rows between the first two moments of her sport and, in so doing, embodies a third that continually mediates between the dejected undergoing of the novice and the arrogant manipulating of the partly seasoned athlete.

Bugbee emphasizes that *what* the knower knows is not some objective *thing;* one never *possesses* experience in its rawness as one might possess a specific thing. Instead, Bugbee writes that "a philosophic interest in knowing, in action, and in reality might be served by thinking of these matters we wish to understand, as matters about which our position is less akin to that of knowers and more akin to that of testifiers, witnesses" (1976, 96). Bugbee's notion of witnessing speaks to the foundation of pragmatic understanding, for it is the witness who stands at that precarious junction between perceptual appearance and conceptual articulation. It is the witness who stands open to the wonder of experience. It is the witness who may, *for the time being,* provide articulation of this endless stream. Witnessing is open to, and an opening for, the way meaning unfolds. The witness is aware, in a certain sense, of the way experience flows in its flowing. Less cryptically put, the witness not only experiences the "tragedy" of life, but comes to embrace its tragic play, comes to anticipate the overcoming of certain concepts.

This open anticipation is a far cry from traditional and determinate modes of knowing. Bugbee concludes: "We must learn to bear witness to the meanings that dawn on us with respect to them, and this may be quite different from advancing propositions which we can claim to demonstrate" (96). Beneath the poeticism of Bugbee's comment lies the kernel of pragmatic inquiry. James reframes the point in slightly different language, writing, "Experience is remolding us every moment, and our mental reaction on every given thing is really a resultant of our experience of the whole world up to that date" (1950, 234). This sentiment seems appropriate in the description of the novice and in the description of the second-year oarsman. The younger oarsmen, however, fail to recognize the import and bearing of this statement on their own experience.

It seems patently obvious to say that a rower rows, yet it seems odd to suggest that the rower is *also rowed*. The seasoned oarsman is precisely the conscious embodiment of this odd contradiction. Just as the witness *is* and *is not* what is witnessed, the mature oarsmen rows only to the extent that he is *rowed* by the stream of experience. The traditional notions of self and other, of activ-

ity and receptivity are compressed, and dilate, and co-terminate in those quiet mornings of experience.

In the midst of sport, in an investigation of physical embodiment and practice, we sweep, and have been swept, into a rather unexpected crosscurrent. We maintain our course and maintain the attention paid to embodied inquiry, yet another aspect of this course has emerged—another current, so to speak. In our reading of James' physiological approach, we have been led to his metaphysics, or, at the very least, to a description remarkably akin to James' account of mysticism. This crosscurrent is unexpected, but not entirely surprising. James explains in the *Varieties of Religious Experience* that the enchantment of the mystic can be described by the theologian as "a gift of God's grace," but can simultaneously be explained by the physiologist as "a gift of our organism" (1997, 69).

It is a statement that is often glossed or simply attributed to "the sentimental James," but here, in the midst of the physical, biological, and experiential, a mystical suggestion rings true: "There is a state of mind, known to religious men, but to no others, in which the will to assert ourselves and hold our own has been displaced by a willingness to close our mouths and be as nothing in the floods and water-spouts of God" (228).

I have often heard—and sometimes said—that rowing is a religion. This "willingness" to "be as nothing" is perhaps the stance of the seasoned rower. In his notes on mysticism, James observes that most mystical experiences are brought on by going through "certain bodily performances," but when a certain consciousness sets in, "the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power" (403). The passivity that claims the mystic, however, is always of the active variety, always strangely attentive, always oddly purposive. Bugbee, in his quiet account of rowing, underscores this understated mysticism. After a session in the boat, the kind of session that "rounds out in an incorruptible song," the young Bugbee returns to the dock. Upon his return, he passes his coach, John, in the boathouse. John's remark is simple, almost koan-like: "You was moving" (1976, 51). In the dusk of a career, some athletes come to understand that what moves—is moved. Its simplicity is rivaled only by its complexity: *one is simply moving.* It is in this twilight when the "dawning of things themselves" shows itself again, for the first time. Things are witnessed not only as a particular immanence, but also as immanent repetition—a sort of transcendence that never leaves the ground of experience.

## Notes

1. The qualification, "for the time being," is of crucial importance in a discussion of these flow states. According to James, these states are, by definition, brief. They are, on his account, those silent moments in which the personal and universal co-terminate. I suggest in the final section that these states dawn in an opening that shows itself between percept and concept, between experience and one's understanding of it.

2. The terms “undergone” and “done” are being used in the sense that John Dewey used them. See Dewey (1989, 51–53).

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