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Not the Absolute, but the Ultimate:
William James before the Mystery of God

José María Gondra

University of the Basque Country, Spain

A B S T R A C T

After a long inquiry into the fields of psychology, psychopathology, religious experience, mysticism and philosophy, William James arrived at a pantheistic worldview in which God was no longer the Absolute knower of the idealistic philosophy, but an immanent closely linked to human beings and the end of the process of world unification. This article follows William James's evolution from his beginnings as a psychologist and founder of American psychology to his final solution to the philosophical problem of the One and the Many through a pluralistic pantheism. I examine his notions of 'stream of consciousness', feelings of relation and emotions, as well as the super-human consciousness he found in religious mystical states; I then review his doctrine of indeterminism and his overcoming of the logic of identity by a vision of the world as a federal Republic in which Deity is construed as finite, much greater than human beings but nonetheless in need of their cooperation. In the conclusions, I analyze this view of the Divinity in its intellectual and social context as well as the result of William James's personal experience as a psychologist in search of a vision of the world in which God had a more intimate relationship with humans and a leading role in promoting universal good.

No el absoluto, sino el último: William James frente al misterio de Dios

R E S U M E N

Tras una larga trayectoria de investigación en los campos de la psicología, psicopatología, experiencia religiosa, misticismo y filosofía, William James propuso la hipótesis de un panteísmo pluralista en el que Dios no era el conocedor absoluto del idealismo post-kantiano, sino un inmanente estrechamente unido a los seres humanos y la meta final del proceso de unificación del universo. El artículo estudia la evolución de James desde sus inicios como psicólogo y fundador de la psicología experimental norteamericana hasta el panteísmo pluralista como solución al problema filosófico de lo Uno y lo Múltiple. Presta especial atención a la "corriente de conciencia", los sentimientos de relación y las relaciones conjuntivas, junto con la conciencia sobrehumana que James encontró en los estados místicos. Asimismo, examina su doctrina del indeterminismo y su visión del mundo a imagen de una República federal en la que la Deidad es finita, más poderosa que los seres humanos pero, sin embargo, necesitada de su cooperación. En las conclusiones se evalúa esta imagen de la Divinidad en su contexto social, teniendo en cuenta la experiencia de William James en cuanto psicólogo a la búsqueda de una relación íntima con la naturaleza, el mundo humano y un Dios personal que es el fundamento de la ética y la moralidad.

Introduction

The last article that William James wrote for publication before he died on August 26, 1910, was about the philosophy of his friend Benjamin Paul Blood (1832-1919), author of the pamphlet *The Anaesthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy* (Blood, 1874). In contrast to the skepticism displayed in his earlier review of this little book on the metaphysical intuitions generated by nitrous oxygen inhalation (James, 1874), now he enthusiastically praises Blood's pluralistic philosophy for his criticism of conceptual reasoning as well as his creativity based on the immediate experience (James, 1910/1978b).

Blood insisted that intellectual knowledge could not reveal the ultimate nature of our life experiences because it only played the secondary role of witnessing their development and succession. Since human life was full of new, unexpected and unique events that escaped conceptual thinking, philosophical thought should rely only on the immediate experience despite the risks and dangers it could entail. As James summarized Blood's anaesthetic insight:

> Philosophy must pass from words, that reproduce but ancient elements, to life itself that gives the integrally new. The 'inexplicable,' the 'mystery,' as what the intellect, with its claim to reason our reality, thinks that it is in duty bound to resolve, and the resolution of which Blood's revelation would eliminate from the sphere of our duties, remains; but it remains as something to be met and dealt with by faculties more akin to our activities and heroisms and willingnesses, than to our logical powers. This is the anaesthetic insight, according to our author. Let *my* last word, then, speaking in the name of intellectual philosophy, be *his* word: - "There is no conclusion … There are no fortunes to be told, and there is no advice to be given. - Farewell!" (James, 1910/1978b, p.190).

This farewell given through a quote from Benjamin Blood could be James's last farewell to his readers, aware that his heart condition would not let him live much longer. But, more importantly, his last panegyric of Blood's anaesthetic revelation shows his growing fascination with mysticism, a major issue throughout his career (Barnard, 1997), which was also the subject of a short paper published the same year he died (James, 1910/1978a).

After a long journey through the fields of science, art, psychology, psychopathology, religion and philosophy, William James arrived at a worldview in which God was no longer the Absolute postulated by idealistic philosophy but an immanent closely linked to mankind, and the end of the unification process of the universe.

In this article, I follow the development of his ideas about divinity from the beginning when he experienced the conflict between his religious faith and objective science until his last attempts to reconcile unity and multiplicity in a pluralistic pantheism that stands out for its vitality, dynamism, freshness and proximity to popular religiosity.

Between Science and Religion

William James' philosophy owes much to the religiosity of his father, Henry James Sr. (1811-1882), an affluent and original theologian influenced by the works of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) and the utopian socialism of Charles Fourier (1772–1837), who sought to provide his children the best sort of education by enrolling them in well-known schools of England, France, Switzerland and Germany (Habegger, 1994). Henry James Sr. tried to combine Christianity and democracy by showing how Christ presented himself in our dying to the 'natural man' and our reborning to a new life as a social creature. Human perfection was possible only within a social context, so that salvation was something like the perfect life of friends.

The young William James passionately lived the conflict between his father's romantic religion and the new scientific developments. In particular, the determinism of experimental physiology seemed contrary to individual free choice, which for him was the foundation of ethics and morality. Upon completing his studies in medicine at Harvard University in 1869, he experienced a worsening of the depressive condition that had affected him since 1861, when he gave up studying painting with a renowned artist and decided to try natural science as a way of earning a living. Health problems, indecision regarding the future and the lack of a strong intellectual foundation left him in an almost hopeless condition (Barzun, 1983).

Most biographers of William James agree that 1870 marked a turning point in his life (Bjork, 1983; Feinstein, 1984; Myers, 1986; Perry, 1948; Richardson, 2006; Simon, 1998). By the end of April of that year, he felt a dreadful panic after having fancied the image of an epileptic patient whom he had met in an asylum. A few days later, a definition of free will he found when reading a book by the French philosopher Charles Renouvier (1815-1903) helped him to recover his faith in himself. As the young James wrote in a diary entry dated April 30: "I think yesterday was a crisis in my life. I finished the first part of Renouvier's second "Essais" and see no reason why his definition of Free Will – "the sustaining of a thought *because I choose to* when I might have other thoughts" need be the definition of an illusion … My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will" (James, 1870/1967, p.7).

Although what James meant by 'crisis' is uncertain (Feinstein, 1981), the fact is that during the spring of 1870 his general condition began to improve. On the other hand, meetings with the young philosophers of the Metaphysical Club of Cambridge, led by Chauncey Wright and Charles S. Peirce (Menand, 2001), helped him to resolve the conflict between science and religion, and thereafter he became the founder of American experimental psychology and a man looking for a new vision of God more in keeping with his personality, modern science and democratic values. In 1875, he taught the first course in experimental psychology and founded the first laboratory for the new discipline at Harvard University. Three years later he began writing the textbook *Principles of Psychology*, which would take him twelve long years to complete (James, 1890a).

James accepted Darwinism as a plausible theory and tried to introduce uncertainty into the domain of legitimate intellectual inquiry. His philosophy, Paul J. Croce has pointed out, "was a response to the proposed certainties that he saw all around him in the scientific and religious assumptions of his culture, in his father's ideas, in his teachers, and even to a certain extent in the scientific thought of Chauncey Wright and Charles Peirce" (Croce, 1995, p. 223).

Feelings of Relation

On February 9, 1883, just a month after the death of his father, William James attended an informal meeting in London of the philosophical group known as the "Scratch Eight" (Allen, 1965). There he submitted a paper "On some omissions of introspective psychology" (James, 1884), which later became a part of the 'stream of consciousness' chapter in *Principles of Psychology*. The main target of his criticism was David Hume (1711-1776), leading exponent of the British Associationistic School, who in his critique of human knowledge had denied direct experience of relations between different thoughts. According to James, the omission of the feelings of relation was the major failure of introspective psychology.

Using the familiar metaphor, 'you cannot step into the same river twice', he imagined mental life as an alternation of flights and landings, like a bird's life. The resting-places were occupied by sensorial images, whereas the places of flight were filled with thoughts of relations between the objects envisaged in the periods of rest. Since the speed of the current greatly hampered the perception of those relations, Hume wrongly concluded that they did not exist.

James argued that directly felt relations were more numerous than supposed by Hume's followers, who generally reduced them to likeness and unlikeness, or coexistence in space and sequence in time (Spencer, 1855). As he wrote: "the relations are numberless, and no existing language is capable of doing justice to all their shades" (James, 1884, p. 5).

The feeling of the continuity of consciousness through experienced relations would become the center of his radical empiricist philosophy (Taylor & Wozniak, 1996); but the study of tendencies and felt relations demanded a drastic revision of psychology textbooks, a task that William James set for himself when writing his monumental *The Principles of Psychology*.

This book marked the beginning of American psychology, known as psychology of adaptation for its emphasis on the functional meaning of the mind (Boring, 1950). The human mind was primarily teleological, in the sense that the "*pursuance of future ends and the choice of means for their attainment are thus the mark and criterion of the presence of mentality* in a phenomenon" (James, 1890, I, p 8). The ends, in turn, depended on the emotional and practical interests that directed thought processes through voluntary attention.

Feelings of relation were discussed in the section on the obscure processes that surrounded images in the 'fringe' of consciousness and gave them meaning. By insisting on their crucial role in mental life James wanted to show "that 'tendencies' are not only descriptions from without, but that they are among the *objects* of the stream, which is thus aware of them from within, and must be described as in very large measure constituted of *feelings of tendency*, often so vague that we are unable to name them at all" (James 1890a, I, p. 254).

To ensure the scientific status of the new discipline, James left aside metaphysical problems, such as the mind-body relationship or the nature of 'Ego knower', but nevertheless challenged the notion of mental representations as unchanging substances. In his opinion, the associationists confused the association of ideas with the association of things, and this confusion incapacitated them to give an adequate explanation of human knowledge.

Although James did not deal with the philosophical problem of the 'Ego knower', he studied the 'empirical self' in a chapter on 'the consciousness of self' that became a classic in the psychology of personality. Among its constituents were the 'social self', defined as the recognition a person gets from his companions and friends, and the 'potential social self', the most interesting of all empirical selves by reason of its connection with our moral and religious life. James wrote as follow: "Yet still the emotion that beckons me on is indubitably the pursuit of an ideal social self, of a self that is at least *worthy* of approving recognition by the highest *possible* judging companion ... This judge is God, the Absolute Mind, the 'Great Companion'" (James 1890a, I, pp. 315-316).

The limitations of the prevailing model of experimentation in natural science were evident (Morawski, 2005), especially with regards to its inability to explore the unconscious tendencies surrounding thought images. Because of this shortcoming, James gave up the discipline he had contributed to establish in America with the known phrase "this is no science, it is only the hope of a science" (James, 1892/1984, p. 401).

Over the next decade, James explored the darkest areas of mental life through the study of abnormal psychology, hypnotic phenomena and psychical research. It was he who introduced in the United States the French psychology of the subconscious (James, 1890b), and devoted special attention to the spiritualistic phenomena of trance mediumship (Gondra, 2000, 2001; Knapp, 2017; Taylor, 1996). Besides teaching a graduate course on psychopathology during the period 1893-1898, he registered his latest insights of psychotherapy, neurology, and psychiatry in his unpublished 1896 *Lowell Lectures on Exceptional Mental States* (Taylor, 1982). Moreover, during the 1890s he discussed more extensively the philosophical issues.

Philosophy, Chance and Pluralism

William James was deeply dissatisfied with the main philosophical approaches of the time, namely, associationistic empiricism and post Kantian idealism, because their theoretical positions were too dogmatic and philosophical discussions were removed from reality of life. In particular, in the problem of the One and the Many, which for him was the most pressing of all philosophic problems, the idealists accounted for unity but avoided peculiarity and plurality, while empiricists gave good account of plurality but neglected the unity and continuity of experience.

In the 1885 essay "On the Function of Cognition," James used the distinction between 'knowledge as acquaintance', or familiarity, and 'knowledge about', or conceptual thought, made by a British moral philosopher (Grote, 1865), to argue that conceptual reasoning operated on reality only indirectly through percepts, which were the only reality we directly knew. Consequently, conceptual thinking always had to eventually lead to a corresponding percept.

Ten years later, in his presidential address to the American Psychological Association (APA) on "The Knowing of Things Together," James reconsidered his position in *The Principles of Psychology* by stating that "no conventional restrictions *can* keep metaphysical and so-called epistemological inquiries out of psychology books" (James,

1895, p.124). Leaving the dualism implied in the differentiation between knowledge and known object, he argued that mental states were as complex as the thought objects themselves. This complexity in the unity led him to develop a pluralist philosophy much closer to the facts of perceptual experience.

In 1897, James published his first book on philosophy under the title *The Will to Believe and other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (James, 1897/1979). He brought together ten essays on religion and moral philosophy published between 1879 and 1896 in order to defend the legitimacy of what he called 'over-beliefs' (O'Connell, 1984). Given the passional nature of the human being, claimed James, his willpower exerted its influence before, during and after the formation of any belief, directing and controlling the search in accordance with his current interests.

In the preface, James presented his radical empiricism as a philosophic attitude rather than an elaborate philosophy, although he did not discuss it. It was empiricism because "it is contented to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience" (James, 1897/1979, p. 5). Moreover, it was radical because it subscribed pluralism although not in a dogmatic way.

James regarded the world as composed of many separate parts of the same kind united by relations that epistemically were as irreducible as the elements of British empiricism. Consequently, philosophy could not interpret in monistic form the variety of real possibilities, crises, catastrophes, things and beings that are part of the universe. It was necessary to try a new empiricism halfway between philosophical idealism and British empiricism.

The first essay, "The Will to Believe," was an address given in 1896 to the philosophical clubs of Yale and Brown universities that James characterized as "a defence of our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced" (James, 1897/1979, p. 13).

To those like the evolutionist Thomas H. Huxley (1825-1895), or the mathematician William K. Clifford (1845-1979) who considered illogical to believe in God because there was no objective evidence of its existence (Clifford, 1879), James replied that they were also taking the same 'leap of faith' that reproached religious believers when asserted that scientific evidence was the sole source of human knowledge. Given the volitional and passional nature of human beings, science could not be free from the influence of subjective factors. Consequently, if a person decided to believe in God because this faith helped him to overcome the trials of life and gave morality an ultimate sanction and permanence, then that person had a perfect right to believe in God despite the lack of objective evidence.

Religion could not be separated from morality because there were moral goods that only religious faith could plausibly bring about (Slater, 2009). Hence the four first essays on religious faith were followed by another four on moral and social philosophy from a theistic and voluntarist point of view. The first of them, "The Dilemma of Determinism," was a defense of the doctrine of will-freedom or chance, as James called it, against those who thought that it was an unacceptable illusion.

James disclaimed any pretension to prove that his belief in free will was true, since there was no evidence of an external kind for or against. He only hoped to induce his readers to follow his example in assuming and acting as if it were true. He then characterized determinism as admitting that the future was rigidly predetermined by the past, and the present was the only one compatible with the unique totality. Indeterminism, on the contrary, stated that the laying down of one part of the world did not necessarily determine what the others ought to be. Indeed, James continued, "to that view, actualities seem to float in a wider sea of possibilities from out of which they are chosen; and *somewhere*, indeterminism says, such possibilities exist and form a part of truth" (James, 1897/1979, p. 118).

In discussing possibilities, facts had practically no role, James argued. It was feelings that really took the initiative and, in his opinion, the aversion to the idea of 'chance' led determinists to think that it involved the denial of all intelligibility. But anything that happened by chance was not necessarily something of an irrational sort, because 'chance' only meant that the thing that was predicated turned out to be disconnected from all the others, and there was something in it that was not unconditionally owned by the whole; the parts of the universe had both limited liabilities and limited powers.

James focused in the judgments of regret people make for acts of cruelty, such as a murder committed by a notorious assassin. Obviously, determinists regretted this action they judged morally wrong and thought that something else would have been better in its place. But nevertheless, their philosophy held that such action was necessary from eternity and nothing else could have been put in its place. Now, if the murder has been determined by the rest of the universe, then they were espousing a kind of pessimism when assuming that it was a vicious symptom belonging to a vicious whole.

The only escape from this pessimism was to give up judgments of regret and held that a certain amount of evil is a condition by which a higher form of good is brought. Thus, James wrote, "our deterministic pessimism may become a deterministic optimism at the price of extinguishing our judgments of regret" (James, 1897/1979, p. 127).

However, if judgments of regret are eliminated as errors, that means that in the deterministic universe what ought to be would not be possible. To avoid this paradox, a deterministic group claimed that the necessary acts we regret may be good, provided we assume that the world is a contrivance for deepening our theoretic consciousness of what goodness and evil really are. For this group, to which James called 'subjectivistic', what really mattered was not doing good or evil but knowing what is good and evil.

James's main objection to subjectivism was that it fostered a sort of spiritual, moral, and ethical indifference, together with a certain passivity and neglect of action. In his opinion, the only escape to this inanity was to make action the ultimate fact of our appreciation: "No matter how we feel; if we are only faithful in the outward act and refuse to do wrong, the world will in so far be safe, and we quit of our debt towards it" (James 1897/1979, p.134).

The essence of James's indeterministic philosophy was the willingness to feel at peace after bringing about some external good, since our responsibility ended with the fulfillment of that duty; the rest was up to the higher powers, a plurality of semi-independent forces, each one of which could cooperate with the others at work in the universe.

Indeterminism represented this world as vulnerable and liable to be injured by the wrong actions of some of its parts, but these actions were a matter of accident. "It gives us," James wrote, "a pluralistic restless universe, in which no single point of view can ever take the whole scene; and to a mind possessed of the love of unity at any cost, it will, no doubt, remain forever unacceptable" (James, 1876/1979, p.136).

James added a few final words just to show that this configuration of the world was not incompatible with the notion of God's Providence and explained this compatibility with the analogy of two players before a chess board, one an expert and the other a novice. The skilled player cannot foresee exactly what any one move of the beginner may be, but he knows all the possibilities which confront him and how to meet each of them by a move of his own which leads in the direction of victory; and this will arrive after several moves in the one predestined form of check-mate to the novice's king.

Evidently, the expert player was God, described as the "infinite mind in which the universe lies" (James, 1897/1979, p. 139). Before creating this world, he decided to leave open ambiguous possibilities at various points but knowing what to do to keep things directed towards the result. The realization of these possibilities would be left to chance, but the rest of the plan, including upshot, would be rigorously determined once for all.

Religion and Life: Reality of the Unseen

The end of the nineteenth century brought important changes in the life and health of William James. On February 15, 1898, the blowing up of the United States battleship Maine in the Havana harbor revived militarism of American society. A few months later, he joined the Anti-Imperialist League and made public speeches against the 'barbaric' patriotism of his countrymen (Allen, 1967). James's pacifism at a time when the war was again taking over American culture brought him many attacks but nevertheless he continued to proclaim his belief in the reign of peace and to urge nations to find a moral equivalent to war (James, 1910/1982).

In the summer, James went by himself to the Adirondack camp to take a break before traveling to the University of California for lecturing on Pragmatism. On the morning of July 8, he spent five hours climbing a high mountain with a heavy pack on his back, and then went down to the camp to meet a group of students and friends. His mind was mostly on the lectures on religion that he had agreed to deliver at the University of Edinburgh. With these thoughts on his mind, he spent one of the most memorable nights he had ever experienced. As he wrote to his wife, Alice Howe Gibbens, in a letter dated on July 9:

> I may have slept a little during the night, but I was not aware of sleeping at all … The temperature was perfect either inside or outside the cabin, the moon rose and hung above the scene before midnight, leaving only a few of the larger stars visible, and I got into a state of spiritual alertness of the most vital description. The influences of Nature, the wholesomeness of the people round me, … the thought of you and the children, the problem of the Edinburgh lectures, all fermented within

> me till it became a regular Walpurgis nacht. I spent a good deal of it in the woods, where the streaming moonlight lit up things in a magical checkered play, and it seemed as if the gods of all the nature-mythologies were holding an indescribable meeting in my breast with the moral gods of the inner life. The two kind of gods have nothing in common – the Edinboro lectures made quite a hitch ahead…. It was one of the happiest lonesome nights of my existence, and I understand now what a poet is. He is a person who can feel the immense complexity of influences that I felt and make some partial tracks in them for verbal statement (Skrupskelis & Berkeley, 2000, pp. 390-391).

This extraordinary experience, which looks like one of the peak experiences described by Abraham Maslow in his books on humanistic psychology (Maslow, 1969), is a clear testimony to James's inner life, fondness for mountaineering, and feelings of friendship towards loved ones. He was a person who loved nature and, in the summertime, used to take refuge in his house on the shore of Chocorua Lake in New Hampshire, a place full of trees in a narrow valley between the lake and a steep hill. The episode, however, had dire consequences for his health. A long hike over several mountaintops the next day, when he had barely slept the night before, did permanent damage to his heart which would ultimately cause his death.

In 1898, James delivered the "Ingersoll Lecture on the Immortality of Man" published under the title of *Human Immortality: Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine* (James, 1898). Against the materialist view of mental phenomena as byproducts of nerve activity, he suggested a transmission theory according to which the function of the human brain was not only to produce thought processes but also to receive messages of a higher consciousness hidden behind the veil of material things.

Individual consciousness was connected to a broader consciousness very much like the 'earth-soul' containing the memories of the inhabitants of the planet suggested by Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801-1887), the founder of modern psychophysics. As Fechner had demonstrated, psychophysical activity must overcome the 'threshold of consciousness' in order to be detected. Now, if the threshold fell greatly, then he hypothesized that the messages from this cosmic consciousness would enter the individual conscience. In other words, when the waves of the 'mother-sea' overflowed the dikes, consciousness was flooded by feelings and thoughts hitherto unknown.

This continuity between collective and individual consciousness was further explored by James in his Gifford lectures on natural religion delivered at the University of Edinburgh, in which he argued that religion was the most important function of mankind. Published under the title of *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (James, 1902), it was an intellectual landmark that paved the way for the current study of religious life (Carette, 2004).

James focused on the experiences of people eminent in their religiosity rather than on the different religious doctrines. After describing the various forms of religious life, with a special attention to the phenomena of conversion and mystical ecstasies, he provided a natural account of them based on the notion of 'subliminal mind' which

he took from Frederic W. H. Myers (1843-1901), one of the founding members of the Society for Psychical Research (Gondra, 2003).

Positivistic science could not understand the sense of reality experienced by men and women entering a state of mystical ecstasy because conceptual thinking could never reach the deeper emotional layers of human personality; and, as James made it clear, "in the metaphysical and religious sphere, articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of same conclusion" (James, 1902, p. 74). The saints found a new source of spiritual energy that brought them to the highest degrees of perfection and represented a positive force for the spiritual progress of mankind.

His last lectures dealt with the theoretical dimension of religion to demonstrate that the truth of religious experience could not be established in strictly rational terms as claimed by Josiah Royce (1855-1916), leader of the American idealistic philosophers. After reviewing a variety of states of consciousness different from our normal waking awareness, James analyzed the religious mystical states and concluded that they were "*on the whole pantheistic and optimistic, or at least the opposite of pessimistic*" (James, 1902, p. 422). However, there were exceptions to that pantheism; for example, the Spanish mystics, for whom the union with God was "much more like an occasional miracle than like an original identity" (James, 1902, p. 425).

James's allusion to mystical pantheism seems to indicate that he was considering the possibility of a new pantheism in which divinity would be much more intimate than in the theologies of the time. After all, theological formulas seemed secondary compared to emotions, the main source of religious life. And religious people strongly felt that the better part of their personality, James wrote, "*is conterminous and continuous with a MORE of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of him, and which he can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board of and save himself when all his lower being was gone to pieces in the wreck*" (James, 1902, p. 508). A few pages later, this wider 'more' was called "by the name of God" (James, 1902, p. 516).

In James's view, God was an unquestionable reality because he produced tangible effects on our personal centers of energy and helped us to reach the highest degree of perfection possible. But God could also benefit from our assistance to make good prevail in this world, as suggested by the final question with which the book ended: "Who knows whether the faithfulness of individuals here below to their own poor over-beliefs may not actually help God in turn to be more effectively faithful to his own greater tasks?" (James, 1902, p. 519).

The Principle of Pure Experience

Varieties of Religious Experience was followed by a series of philosophical essays on humanism and radical empiricism published between 1904 and 1906 that were posthumously edited by Ralph B. Perry in the *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (James, 1912/1976).

In 1905, James delivered a series of five lectures at Wellesley College and in Chicago, followed by the Lowell lectures at Columbia University in 1906 and again in early 1907, which formed the basis of the book *Pragmatism* (James, 1907/1975). Two years later, he published a collection of articles on his pragmatic theory of truth in *The Meaning of Truth* (James, 1909/1975). Finally, in the spring of 1908, James delivered the Hibbert lectures on 'The Present Situation in Philosophy' in England at Oxford University. Published as *A Pluralistic Universe* (James, 1909/1977), they offer his latest vision of the Divinity, a God deeply committed to the salvation of the individual and to energizing human activity (Bixler, 1923).

In the first of his philosophical essays, entitled "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?," James advanced his doctrine of the 'pure experience' in response to the post-Kantian philosophers, who claimed that the structure of human experience was dualistic. He began by suggesting that the idealists had transformed Kant's transcendental Ego into a 'consciousness' devoid of the form and personal activity that was traditionally associated with thinking. Hence, he wrote, "I believe that 'consciousness,' once it has evaporated to this state of pure diaphaneity, is on the point of disappearing altogether. It is the name of a nonentity, and has no right to a place among first principles" (James 1904/1976a, p. 3).

This denial of consciousness as a substantial entity storing the objects of thought did not mean a refusal of its function of knowing, defined as a sort of relation between different portions of the 'pure experience'. As James wrote: "The relation itself is a part of pure of experience; one of it 'terms' becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge, the knower, the other becomes the object known" (James 1904/1976a, pp. 4-5).

It could be said that 'pure experience' was the same as primitive experience, that is, simple sensation devoid of any further qualification. Or, as James said, "plain, unqualified actuality or existence, a simple *that*" (James, 1904/1976a, p. 13). Psychologically, it was a continuous flow without divisions like the 'stream of consciousness' of *The Principles of Psychology*. It was later intellectual analysis that separated its outgoing parts and considered them as mind or body in the context of their different associates. For example, paint in a pot at a paint shop, along with other paints, served as saleable matter, while spread on a canvas, with other paint around it, it represented a feature in a picture, and performed a spiritual function. "Just so," wrote James, "does a given undivided portion experience taken in one context of associates play the part of a knower, of a state of mind, of 'consciousness'; while in a different context the same undivided bit of experience plays the part of a thing known, of an objective 'content'" (James, 1904/1976a, p.7).

The notion of 'pure experience' considered as the primal stuff in the world might indicate a kind of panpsychism (Ford, 1982), but James corrected himself by adding that "there are as many stuffs as there are 'natures' in the things experienced" (James 1904/1976a, p.14). Apparently, he was using the term 'pure' only to classify an experience as perceived and not yet reflected upon, leaving aside ontological questions (Levinson, 1981). Although he never explicitly supported panpsychism, he seemed to sympathize with it, as indicated by the testimony of some of his contemporaries (Bush, 1924; Flournoy, 1917).

In the following essay "A World of Pure Experience," James laid the foundation for a pluralist worldview more in accordance with pantheism (James, 1904/1976b). He began by noting that conjunctive relations made the difference between classical and radical empiricists. Both emphasized the parts, but radical empiricism did

not neglect conjunctive relations as James Mill did in stating that similar things had nothing in common. Connections were as real as disjunctions because they were directly given in the experience.

James ordered conjunctive relations in a hierarchy according to their degree of intimacy and inclusiveness. The relationship of being with another in a universe of discourse ranked lower while the self-organization stood on its apex. As he wrote: "The organization of the self as a system of memories, purposes, strivings, fulfillments or disappointments, is incidental to this most intimate of all relations, the terms of which seem in many cases actually to compenetrate and suffuse each other's being" (James, 1904/1976b, pp. 23-24).

Personal identity could be regarded as the paradigm for conjunctive relations, but the continuity of human experiences was not perfect, since personal history was subjected to change over time, and change itself was also immediately experienced. Then, if reality was as dynamic and changing as human biography, James argued, personal identity could be defined as something relative, not absolute, and 'things' could be 'themselves' and 'something else' as the result of changes over time. Therefore, the numerical identity logic did not apply to metaphysics.

Hitherto James had challenged the logical identity principle in connection with Hegel's criticism of Aristotelian logic, but he did not dare to disregard it entirely. Now personal history allowed him to overcome the main obstacle to a pluralistic pantheism, namely, the problem of the union of multiple finite consciences to a superhuman consciousness.

The Many and the One

One of the liveliest debates in philosophy at the beginning of the nineteenth century centered on the issue of whether reality was ultimately only one actuality of multiple actualities, as post-Kantian idealists suggested, or rather a plurality of elements linked by external relations, as associationists claimed. Around the same time that James was writing "A World of Pure Experience," he began drafting a systematic philosophical treatise that he never finished. In a draft titled 'The Many and the One', he planned to lay the foundations for his view of a world populated by a plurality of beings in search of unity with experimental methods, and only achieving it at the end as the last result.

James began by saying his two main sources of inspiration were mental and social life, both characterized by continuous growth either by adding new experiences, individuals and institutions, or by eliminating the old ones. Then, he imagined in this universe the existence of larger souls, whether connected or disconnected with the larger material aggregations; but none of them, even the greatest of all, could embrace it in a single act of thought or will. As he wrote: "I disbelieve in the omniscience of the Deity and his omnipotence as well. The facts of struggle seem to deeply characteristic of the whole frame of things for me not to suspect that hindrance & experiment go all the way through" (James, 1988a, p. 5). A God without a history and an external environment seemed incompatible with a worldview where novelty and creativity were possible.

In *Varieties of Religious Experience,* James accepted the moral attributes of God, although he understood them in a way somewhat different from that of traditional theology. According to him: "being holy, God can will nothing but the good. Being omnipotent, he can secure its triumph. Being omniscient, he can see us in the dark. Being just, he can punish us for what he sees. Being loving, he can pardon too. Being unalterable, we can count on him securely" (James, 1902, p. 447). However, James meant by omnipotence only the power to secure the triumph of good, and omniscience referred to Gods' awareness of all that is happening as opposed to his having complete foreknowledge of the future (Paulsen, 1999).

On the other hand, the picture of a world in which inquiry was incidental to struggle, both mental and social, set the context for James's new understanding of knowledge as a social historical enterprise. He now interpreted the universe after a social analogy, as a plurality of individuals with relations partly external, partly internal yet living together and working for a better order. This worldview could be called 'humanism', as the philosopher Ferdinand C. S. Schiller (1864-1937) did in his volume of philosophical essays (Schiller, 1903), but James preferred the name *Pragmatism* for the book that popularized his personal version of Peirce's pragmatic method (James 1907/1975).

As is well known, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) outlined pragmatism as a method to clarify the logical meaning of ideas by defining them according to their effects or practical consequences (Schwartz, 2012). James, meanwhile, added the effects and practical consequences in the lives of people in order to apply the pragmatic method to the religious and moral questions (Stuhr, 2010; Whitehead, 2015). As we saw earlier, if the idea of God leads people to a life more in keeping with their human condition and the demands of their experiences, then religious beliefs are justified as true.

However, Darwinism and the progress of cerebral physiology had rendered obsolete the old conception of an omnipotent and eternal God, maker of heaven and earth. More congenial seemed the notion of an immanent God postulated by absolute idealism, but it was too abstract and remote from the facts of human life. Hence James's attempt to rebuild idealist monism by means of a radical empiricism that, free from the anti-religious bias of empiricist philosophy, did not lose sight of the multiplicity of beings living in this world.

When dealing with the problem of 'the One and the Many' in lecture IV, James found the following meanings for the phrase 'world is one' applied to the universe: the world as a subject of discourse; the parts of the universe hanging together; and, finally, the multiple lines of influence that held the parts together as electricity, gravity or light. This unity, however, was broken by the opaque and inert bodies that interrupted continuity.

There were indeed several systems of union created by human beings, such as the colonial, postal, consular, and commercial organizations, whose parts were following definite influences inside the system. Since they were united by special relations, it could be said that the 'world is one'; but as the unity of the system showed many discontinuities, it could also be said that the 'world is not one.' Hence, James concluded:

> 'The world is one,' therefore, just so far as we experience it to be concatenated, one by as many definite conjunctions as appear. But then also *not* one by just as many definite disjunctions as we find. The oneness and the manyness of it thus obtain in respects which can be separately named. It is

neither a universe pure and simple nor a multiverse pure and simple (James 1907/1975, p. 73).

This was James's solution to the philosophical problem of the One and the Many. Unity and multiplicity were on par, so that the One was not superior to the Many as idealists claimed, nor the Many was superior to the One, as empiricists did. According to James, the hypothesis of a world continuously growing in unity through the social organization was the most likely of all. Minds inside a society that systematized spontaneous interpersonal relationships according to human needs were more powerful than isolated minds.

If these systems were developing, argued James, "total oneness would appear at the end of things rather than at their origin. In other words, the notion of the 'Absolute' would have to be replaced by that of the 'Ultimate.' The two notions would have the same content – the maximally unified content of fact, namely – but their time-relations would be positively reversed" (James, 1907/1975, p.78).

The idea of social evolution allowed James to substitute the empirist notion of an ultimate in time for the transcendentalist idea of an Absolute in eternity. The perfect union with Divinity postulated by idealism did not have to be the starting point but the final goal to achieve through the cooperation and solidarity of human beings.

In the lecture on 'pragmatism and religion' James held a doctrine of meliorism against optimistic idealism, claiming that salvation or deliverance from chaos should be understood as a probable hypothesis rather than as a necessary principle. Pragmatic analysis of the word 'possible' in relation to the salvation of the world indicated that meant, among other things, that some of the conditions of the world's deliverance did exist. The more of these conditions and the fewer thwarting conditions, the greater was the salvation's possibility.

James went on by saying that meliorism stood midway between optimistic idealism and the pessimism of philosophers like Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). Salvation was a possibility which, he wrote, "becomes more and more of a probability the more numerous the actual conditions of salvation become" (James, 1907/1975, p. 137).

There were a lot of people willing to live according to altruistic ideals, moments of perfection becoming realities when put into action. This accomplishment of the parts, rather than their total surrender to the Absolute, contributed to making this world better, and 'perfection' was synonymous with 'salvation.' The world was growing piecemeal by the contributions of its different parts and perfection depended on each part doing their work the best they could.

Thus, world salvation was real adventure with real danger; but James was eager to contribute his personal effort to the service of this ideal in the hope of achieving the final victory. He did not feel alone in this enterprise, but helped by the rest of cooperating forces including God, to whom religious people, he wrote, "has always viewed as but one helper, *primus inter pares*, in the midst of all the shapers of the great world's fate" (James, 1907/1975, p. 143).

Pluralist Pantheism

Shortly after *Pragmatism* came out, the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) published *L'Évolution créatrice* (Creative Evolution), a book challenging the mechanistic theories of evolution (Bergson, 1907). Bergsonian philosophy turned around the notion of 'duration,' understood as the flow of experiences in the consciousness, intimately intertwined but at the same time different; it was a notion similar to James's 'stream of consciousness,' which was also a continuous process that could not be broken into separate moments.

According to Bergson, duration could only be grasped though intuition, a kind of sympathy that brought us to the inside of things to see what is unique and inexpressible about them. James, however, interpreted it in terms of his own theory of perceptual knowledge: if we look at our life, we will see that it is a continuous flow of new experiences; not things already done but things in the process of becoming that cannot be grasped by our fixed and unchanging concepts.

Encouraged by this critique of intellectualism, James proceeded to launch his pluralistic pantheism in *A Pluralistic Universe* (James, 1909/1977). He began by making it clear that philosophical systems could ultimately be reduced to schemes representing visions and feelings forced by life experiences as the best working attitude. Generally, people with a cynical temperament tended to lean towards materialistic systems, while those with a compassionate one tended toward spiritual philosophies of two varieties: monistic pantheism of post-Kantian idealism and theism of scholastic philosophy.

Old scholastic philosophy pictured God and his creation as entities distinct from each other, leaving the human subject outside of the deepest reality in the universe. God was neither implicated in his creative act nor involved in his creation, so that the human beings were mere subjects under his mandates instead of his intimate partners. This conception of God as an absolute monarch was unacceptable for contemporary democratic mentality.

The pantheistic vision of God as the indwelling divine admitted two modalities, namely, idealistic monism and radical empiricist pluralism. Both identified human substance with the divine substance, but the former held that human substance became divine only in the form of totality, whereas radical empiricism argued that a distributive form of reality, the 'each-form,' was logically as acceptable and empirically as probable as the 'all-form.'

Absolute idealism, however, made God almost as distant from world as dualist theism did, and remained decidedly irrational because the Absolute was the ideally perfect whole and yet its parts were imperfect. Opposed to the emphasis of some idealists on the timeless character of the absolute (Bradley, 1893), James argued that nothing in the universe was so great as to have no history. Every goal, thought, motive, reason for sadness or joy that we feel occurred in the world of finite multiplicity, the only one where things really happened.

Lecture VI on 'Bergson and his Critique of Intellectualism' tried to explain how a plurality of consciences exist in a pantheistic worldview. After reading Bergson's book, James saw clearly that trying to understand life with only intellectual knowledge was the same as trying to cut up movement into bits.

For conceptual logic, the same is nothing but the same, and all sames with a third thing are the same with each other. Not so in concrete experience: two spots on our skin, each of which feels the same as a third spot when touched along with it, are felt as different

from each other. "What really *exists*," James wrote, "is not things made but things in the making. Once made, they are dead, and an infinite number of alternative conceptual decompositions can be used in defining them" (James, 1909/1977, p. 117).

In the lecture on 'The Continuity of Experience,' James stated that conjunctive relations were part of the sensational flux, as well as the disjunctive. The inner complexity which idealists attributed to the Absolute also occurred in perceptual experience. In the pulse of inner life immediately present in each of us there was a little past, a little future, a little awareness of our own body and that of the others, as well as of the topics we were talking about.

On the other hand, the psychology of the unconscious had shown that simultaneous characters overlapped each other in our consciousness, and that the subconscious possibilities hidden in the 'fringe' belonged also to our self. Bearing in mind that every bit of us is part and parcel of a wider self, James asked himself: "may not we ourselves form the margin of some more really central self in things which is co-conscious with the whole of us?" (James, 1909/1977, p.131).

The answer was yes, our finite minds might be co-conscious with one another in a greater intelligence like the soul of all things that Fechner called God. Invoking the psychological arguments of the divided personality, mediumship and mystical experiences, James insisted on the continuity of our consciousness with a wider spiritual environment in which our life runs.

A Finite Deity

James ended his lectures by insisting that the religious experience of being born to a new life after painful moments of despair demonstrated that there was a 'more' operating in the universe that saved men and women from the wreck. The analogies with these experiences and those of ordinary and abnormal psychology, he wrote, "establish, when taken together, a decidedly *formidable* probability in favor of a general view of the world almost identical with Fechner's" (James, 1909/1977, p. 140).

James himself had the strong feeling of being united to this superhuman consciousness, although he could not express it in appropriate words. He pointed out that its outlines remained vague and the number of individuals linked to it problematic, but its existence allowed him to escape from the problems and perplexities posed by a monistic universe. This superhuman consciousness, he added, "however vast it may be, has itself an external environment, and consequently is finite" (James, 1909/1977, p.140).

The notion of a finite deity was the natural consequence of James's refusal to accept the divine attributes of omnipotence and omniscience as taught by dogmatic Christian theology. However, it was coincident with the God of the Bible, as he said in the lecture on 'Hegel and his Method:'

> I can hardly conceive of anything more different from the absolute than the God, say, of David or of Isaiah. *That* God is an essentially finite being *in* the cosmos, not with the cosmos in him, and indeed he has a very local habitation there, and very one-sided local and personal attachments. If it should prove

probable that the absolute does not exist, it will not follow in the slightest degree that a God like that of David, Isaiah, or Jesus may not exist, or may not be the most important existence in the universe for us to acknowledge (James, 1909/1977, p. 54).

The God of Abraham was indeed a loving God profoundly involved in the destiny of his chosen people. And the God of Jesus was the father of the parable of the prodigal son who granted him his fullest and absolute forgiveness. These representations of God were different from the Absolute, since they described him as a personal being with whom faithful people could be socially related.

James linked the term 'finite' to the fact that God had to have an external environment and, consequently, did not comprise the whole reality, although there was very little that escaped him. As he went on saying:

> The finite God whom I contrast with it may conceivable have *almost* nothing outside of himself; he may already have triumphed over and absorbed all but the minutest fraction of the universe; but that fraction, however small, reduces him to the status of a relative being, and in principle the universe is saved from all the irrationalities incidental to absolutism (James 1909/1977, p. 61).

James advanced several reasons for postulating a finite God, such as the possibility to meet the theoretical problems of the existence of evil in the world, the mystery of universal determinism, or the riddle of an eternal universe without history. But he did not develop them in more detail, and they do not seem very reliable (Suckiel, 1996). In fact, the intimacy argument was the most frequently used: God must be limited to be approachable. Apparently, a God who always employs his limited power is more lovable than a God of unlimited power who fails in many instances to use this power to avoid evil (Fontinell, 2000).

On the other hand, if God had the least infinitesimal other beside him, then empiricism and rationalism could be reconciled. Both would make use of all analogies and data to build up the most probable idea of what the divine consciousness concretely might be like. Moreover, human beings would become internal parts of God instead of external creations, so that foreignness might be banished from our world. As James wrote: "having an environment, being in time, and working out a history just like ourselves, he escapes from the foreignness from all that is human, of the static timeless perfect absolute" (James, 1909/1977, p.144).

James argued that his worldview was not irrational, as idealists claimed, since besides logical rationality there were other classes, such as aesthetic, ethical and practical rationalities. Absolute idealism lacked practical rationality, while radical empiricism was much better in the ability to respond to novel situations in effective ways. Thus, pluralist pantheism represented the highest degree of intimacy.

Pragmatically interpreted, pluralism meant that there was no reality that included or dominated over everything. Consequently, James wrote: "the pluralistic world is thus more like a federal republic than like an empire or a kingdom. However much may be collected, however much may report itself as present at any effective center of

consciousness or action, something else is self-governed and absent and unreduced to unity" (James, 1909/1977, p. 145).

A federal republic was the social analogy that James needed for his new pantheistic worldview (Levinson, 1979). Whatever order, coherence or harmony the universe could have came from the independent powers inhabiting it. On the other hand, the analogy recapitulated the emphasis of his father, Henry James Sr., in the form of society enunciated in the motto of his country: *e pluribus unum* (one out of many). In a republic of this kind everyone realized that every bit of experience was a member of a plurality, and that, without losing its identity, a part could either take up or drop another part and be connected by intermediary things with something with which it had no immediate or essential connection.

If the 'each-form' were the form of the reality, argued James, the world would be coherent because every part was in connection with every other part. This type of union, he concluded, "is not a universal co-implication, or integration of all things *durcheinander* (messed). It is what I call the strung-along type, the type of continuity, contiguity or concatenation" (James, 1909/1977, p. 147).

James was a pantheist because he pictured whatever was conscious as continuing in a concatenated way instead of participating in one collective consciousness. Simultaneous characters living in the same communities overlapped each other in their activities and their lives; they kept their own forms of manyness-in-oneness, the oneness continued into one another by intermediary terms without the total 'oneness' of the Absolute ever becoming absolutely complete. This kind of pantheism matched perfectly well with the democratic mentality of James and his respect for the individual rights of every person.

The 'Faith-Ladder'

James challenged his listeners to choose between a pantheism in which the manyness-in-oneness was a property only of the Absolute or, on the contrary, a pluralistic pantheism according to which the finite elements had their own aboriginal form of manyness-in-oneness. According to James: "This world *may,* in the last resort, be a block-universe; but on the other hand, it *may* be a universe only strung-along, not rounded in and closed. Reality *may* exist distributively just as it sensibly seems to, after all" (James, 1909/1975, p. 148).

Each of the two options had a different ethical appeal to James, who believed that our world depended partly upon our acts, and these in turn depended on following our faith tendencies. After making beliefs dependent on our vision of the probable things in *The Will to Believe,* in 1906 he referred to the psychological process by which we arrive at our beliefs as the 'faith-ladder' (Wernham, 1990). The 'faith-ladder' had a form analogous to that of logical *sorites*, as can be seen in this quote from *A Pluralist Universe*:

> A conception of the world arises in you somehow, no matter how. Is it true or not? you ask.
> It *might* be true somewhere, you say, for it is not self-contradictory.
> It *may* be true, you continue, even here and now.
> It is *fit* to be true, it would be *well if it were true*, it *ought* to be

true, you presently feel.
It *must* be true, something persuasive in you whispers next; and then – as final result –
It shall be *held for true*, you decide; it *shall be* as if true, for *you* (James 1909-1977, p.148).

Not one step in the process was logical, but our acting thus might be a means of making it securely true in the end. "It is life exceeding logic," James wrote, "it is the practical reason for which the theoretic reason finds arguments after the conclusion is once there. In just this way do some of us hold to the unfinished pluralistic universe" (1909/1997, p.148).

The incompleteness of this universe challenged us to work with the divinity in promoting human development towards a more just and good society. Thus, the justification of religious belief relied ultimately on an ideal of moral evolution together with the human capacity to make significant strides in the direction of moral perceptibility of the world (Suckiel, 1996). God, in his finitude, could benefit from our assistance if we put forth the effort required to make goodness prevail in this world. Our very act of believing in God and the conduct generated by it contributed to create that dimension of moral value of which God was not only the source and cause of goodness but also its embodiment in the world.

Conclusions

We have examined William James's image of God from the beginning of his career when he experienced the tension between his scientific training and the demands of the inherited culture of Protestant Christianity (Hellinger, 2004), until his final view of God as a personal Thou with whom he could cooperate in building a moral universe. This view of a finite Deity working out his own history and helping people to fulfill their purposes was closely linked to his personal experiences in the American society in which he lived.

The United States underwent a major transformation after the American Civil War from 1861 to 1865, including economic development from the Industrial Revolution and the ensuing sociocultural changes. As the industrial and natural sciences came to dominate America's pictures of reality, human effort was conceived as mechanical rather than creative, which brought about a loss of the integrity of the self. Moreover, religious confessions failed to respond convincingly to the questions posed by a scientific positivism that was challenging the notion of the self as reflective of a higher order (Ramsey, 1993).

Born into an upper middle-class family, William James did not enlist in the Union army because of his poor health after renouncing his vocation as a painter. Not having participated in the Civil War probably heightened the awareness he suffered during his depressive crisis of having done nothing in life (Cotkin, 1990).

It is interesting to note that James began his career by studying art, a field focused on natural facts, and then moved to medicine to understand the physiological factors in the working of the mind. This early empirical activity helped him to reject the artificiality of the interpretations of experience from both materialistic science and

spiritualist religion (Croce, 2018). On the other hand, his resistance to this kind of reductionism has been considered the hallmark of his contribution to the American intellectual revolution of the 1880s and 90s (Ramsey, 1993).

When young James overcame his depressive crisis, the decision to believe in his free will was accompanied by a firm decision to act accordingly. He felt the insistent call of the will to achieve, together with the more passive desires for assurance, stability, peace and intimacy with God, the higher power capable of helping him to find a meaning in his life.

As a psychologist, James insisted on the leading role of emotional interests in thought processes, in accordance with the new German physiological psychology that also stressed the role of voluntary attention in human knowledge (Gondra, 1993). Moreover, in the social self-concept chapter of *The Principles of Psychology,* God was the partner whose judgment of approval we valued most.

After leaving experimental psychology, James spent several years studying the extramarginal consciousness he found in hypnosis and psychical research. At the same time, he began to deal with epistemological and metaphysical matters when, on December 1, 1880, he became assistant professor of philosophy at Harvard University. Since the two main philosophical systems of the time, British empiricism and post-Kantian idealism, were too dogmatic, he thought it was needed to attempt a new empiricism halfway between the two.

Before the end of the eighteenth century, James presented his radical empiricism in *The Will to Believe*, the book in which he defended religious beliefs with the pragmatic method (Wernham, 1987), and argued for indeterminism against those claiming that everything was determined either by the laws of physical causation or by the will of the Absolute. James's universe consisted of a plurality of semi-independent forces, including Divinity, which cooperated in bringing about good into the world. This pluralist worldview, however, was not irreconcilable with the notion of Divine Providence, explained by the chess game analogy. When planning the universe, God would leave to chance the realization of some details, but the rest of the plan, including its upshot, would be determined once and for all.

Chance was present in James's universe due to the influence of Charles S. Peirce, whose theory of tychism made it a real factor operative in the world. So, in his notes for "Syllabus of philosophy 3: The philosophy of Nature (1902-1903)," James wrote that "in a world without previous hindering necessity, everything may come as a chance; the more stable chance products will accumulate, and if connected, will make a universe which will grow in unity also" (James, 1988b, p. 270). Apparently, his purpose was to articulate a worldview that admitted real chaos on the one hand but real reparation of chaos on the other (Hare, 1979).

In January 1898, the University of Edinburgh made James its Gifford Lecturer on natural religion for two upcoming courses, which gave him the opportunity to study the writings of the most relevant mystics of major religions. Although not being mystic, James acknowledged possessing a "mystical germ" (Barnard, 1997, p.19), which probably was nurtured by experiences such as the "Walpurgis Nacht" at the Adirondacks or his experimenting of the effects of nitrous oxide (James 1910/1978a). The insistence of mystical people on their union with Divinity renewed his interest in pantheism.

In November 1898, James advanced the hypothesis of a cosmic consciousness that envelops individual consciousness the same as the 'earth-soul' of Gustav Th. Fechner. This continuity between individual and collective consciousness was further explored in the Edinburgh lectures (James, 1902), where religious people were depicted as experiencing an intimate union with a God who comforted them in their trials and helped them to reach the highest possible degree of perfection. This description perfectly matched James's condition after his quasi-mystical experiences at the Adirondacks and his heart injury climbing mountains. He longed for an intimate relationship with a God he needed more than ever.

In the philosophical essays that followed his Edinburgh lectures, James laid the foundation for his new pluralist pantheism by arguing that conjunctive relations were as real as disjunctive ones. Personal history was for him the most intimate and the paradigm of all conjunctions, but its continuity was not perfect because people changed much over time. If reality changed the same as human biography, things could be themselves and 'something else' as result of the changes, which clearly did not fit with the principle of numerical identity logic. Thus, finite consciousnesses linked to the superhuman consciousness could keep their manyness in the oneness.

In his 1903-1904 notes on 'The Many and the One,' James realized that personal life runs in a social sphere, and this idea of social life led him to think thatbet there were larger souls than his own, but none of them, even the greatest of all, could embrace the rest in a single act of thought or will. Consequently, God was neither omniscient nor omnipotent.

James presented his pluralist view of the universe in *Pragmatism,* the book in which he popularized his version of Peirce's pragmatic method (James 1907/1975). As he saw it, monist pantheism had to be reconstructed by means of a radical empiricism that did not lose sight of the multiplicity of beings working together in the universe. If the world was continuously growing in unity through social organization, then total oneness would appear at the end rather than at the beginning, which meant that God was not the absolute in the eternity, as post-Kantian idealists claimed, but the ultimate in time, as empiricists claimed; and perfect unity was the goal to achieve through the solidary action of each one of the parties. While James did not develop this notion of divinity as the ultimate goal of cosmic evolution, he did however pave the way for later theology, as we shall see.

James subscribed the doctrine of meliorism according to which world's salvation was a possibility which became a probability if the number of favorable conditions outnumbered those preventing it. And he believed that this condition was already met, given the high number of people living according to altruistic ideals.

Finally, in the Hibbert lectures published as *A Pluralist Universe*, James clearly opted for pluralistic pantheism versus the declining post-Hegelians philosophies that, in his opinion, made the Absolute a metaphysical monster removed from the real world. He accused them of a "vicious intellectualism" that confused logic and reality by excluding from the fact named what the name's definition did not include, and lamented their irrationality which proposed that the Absolute was the ideally perfect whole and yet its parts were imperfect. Pluralist pantheism was more rational both in terms of vision and as practical value for life.

According to James, our finite minds could be co-conscious with one another in a greater intelligence like Fechner's soul of all things, but he did not accept the monistic implications of this higher consciousness enveloping the others, because if nothing escaped his power, then God would be responsible for everything including evil, and this would be incompatible with his goodness. The superhuman consciousness had to have an external environment so that a part of reality, no matter how small, was not entirely of his own making. Therefore, he concluded, God had to be a finite Deity, "either in power or in knowledge, or in both at once" (James, 1909/1977, p. 141).

The idea of a finite God, radical and controversial as it may seem, was not entirely new, since it had been proposed by other scholars of the time (Butler, 1909; McConnell, 1924; McTaggart, 1906; Schiller, 1891). James, meanwhile, did not considered it incompatible with the God of the Bible or with the popular theism in which there were separate beings such as the angels, the Devil, the saints, and God was pictured as a loving person willing to help people fighting in the good fight.

God's finitude seemed to solve the problem of the evil in the world, but James's arguments were not conclusive, as stated above. Not holding God responsible for the existence of evil in the world would suggest, as Eugene Fontinell wrote, "a kind of Manichaean account whereby evil originates outside God" (Fontinell, 2000, p. 151).

On the other hand, the argument that God must be limited to be approachable can also be objected to, because if we made God fully equal to humans, then God would cease to be God. Throughout history there have been two contrasting pictures of God, namely, the distant and timeless God of Natural Theology and the living and evolving God of James. We can emphasize one or the other but avoiding either extreme and always recognizing that no idea of God, however pure and perfect, is adequate to express him as he really is. Ultimately, God is a mystery beyond our human understanding.

Pragmatically interpreted, James went on saying, a pluralistic world was like a federal republic where the different states were self-governed. The image of a republic like the United States, constituted by a plurality of independent powers, seemed to explain how many different consciousnesses could be one consciousness despite the principle of logic identity.

James ended his Hibbert lectures by urging people to choose between a monist pantheism or his pluralistic pantheism. Both options were possible, but the second one meant a greater ethical appeal, since it challenged us to work with the Divinity in promoting human development towards a more just and good society. Thus, James's justification of his pantheism relied ultimately on an ideal of moral evolution together with the human capacity to make significant strides in the direction of moral perceptibility of the world.

This in brief is James's evolution from a romantic theism inherited from his family to a pluralistic pantheism in sharp contrast to idealistic pantheism. It is a necessarily incomplete review because the vast variety and richness of James's thought cannot be summarized in a few pages. One of the most intuitive and free thinkers of his generation, James was an explorer of new territories rather than a map builder, always guided by his intuitive vision and personal spontaneity. As the late Robert D. Richardson wrote: "James's universe is unimaginably rich, infinitely full and variegated, unified only in that every bit of it is alive" (Richardson, 2006, p.4).

James was convinced his theory was tentative, since it was dealing with probabilities rather than evidence, and never intended to claim scientific materialism or absolute idealism were false, but merely less probable than his pluralist pantheism, and probability was an important concept in his philosophy. Life was for him much more important than conceptual thinking. In a letter to Thomas Davidson on January 8, 1882, he wrote that "In saying 'God exists' all I imply is that my purposes are cared for by a mind so powerful as on the whole to control the drift of the Universe. This is as much polytheism as monotheism. As a matter of fact it is neither, for it is hardly a speculative position at all but a merely practical and emotional faith which I fancy" (Skrupskelis & Berkeley, 1997, p. 195). Hence, as Gordon Allport remarked, "James was not afraid of contradiction. The only way to erect a self-consistent theory is for one to blind oneself to the magnificent variety or mental life" (Allport, 1961, p. xxi).

James's vision of God, as well as his worldview, is complex, much like his personality (Gale, 2005), and not exempt of contradictions. He was a pluralistic pantheist because he thought that the fluidity of life could not get into the rigid categories of the logic of numerical identity, but it must be admitted that he ignored what contemporary logic understands by logic of identity (Lamberth, 1999).

His concept of the finite God is problematic, as stated above. James was longing for a personal God with whom to have an intimate relationship; yet his ethics called for a God that was not all-pervasive and could allow real moral choice for everyone. Unfortunately, he never tried to harmonize these contradictions. On the other hand, his mentions of panpsychism were philosophically underdeveloped and he left unfinished the metaphysical book in which he hoped to express his views with greater precision (James, 1911/1979). Most of his writings were public lectures, in which he used a popular style with many concessions to the audience to arouse their attention. On the other hand, when attempting a vivid, rich and suggestive philosophy, there were necessarily inconsistencies.

These criticisms, however, are relatively unimportant compared to the richness, variety and depth of his insights about God, which were ahead of their time. In June 21, 1896, just when he ended the manuscript of *The Will to Believe,* James wrote to Henry William Rankin that he saw himself "as a mediator between scientific agnosticism and the religious view of the world (Christian or not). I may be more *useful* than if I were myself a positive Christian" (Skrupskelis & Berkeley, 2000, p.155).

Aware of the divorce between science and religion, a science dominated by positivism and a theology based on the static categories of the Greco-Roman world, James attempted to facilitate the dialogue between the two. His criticism of scholastic theology and his emphasis on the values of the modern world were not unfounded. Even today there are voices claiming for a new reading and interpretation of the sacred texts considering the new paradigm of modernity (Monserrat 2010).

James's dynamic view of a God involved in an environmental and social model of reality was further developed by the process theology of the English mathematician-philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) and his disciple Charles Hartshorne (1897–

2000). Process theology also was influential in the movement of Evangelical Christian philosophers known as "free-will theists" or "open theists," whose understanding of God closely matches that of William James.

In their book *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Pinnock et al. 1994), the authors conceive of God as a morally perfect person who is working out a history in time within an external environment that includes a community of free human agents with whom God is socially related. However, in the issue of creation they hold fast to the traditional doctrine of "Creatio ex nihilo", and claim that God's limitations are ultimately of his own doing and, thus, instances of divine self-limitation (Paulsen, 1999). James, on the other hand, saw God's external environment as consisting of entities and principles co-original with himself and hence as imposing constraints that were not merely a matter of self-limitation.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1957) could also be included among process theologians. The French Jesuit attempted to reconcile Christian thought with modern science and saw the process of organic evolution as a sequence of progressive syntheses whose ultimate convergence point is that of God (Teilhard, 1957). God was for him an evolving God, the animating principle of the future of the cosmos who was transforming himself in some way when he performed his creative work.

These are but a few examples of the attempts of modern theology to find an image of the Divinity more in line with modern science and democratic societies of our time, and which show the relevance and the impact of James's religious work.

But we should not forget that, above all, William James was a psychologist interested in the individual and the deepest emotional layers of human personality which connected him with the rest of the universe. Therefore, I would like to conclude with this poetic description of the continuum of cosmic consciousnesses he wrote almost at the end of his life:

> Our lives are like islands in the sea, or like trees in the forest. The maple and the pine may whisper to each other with their leaves, and Conanicut and Newport hear each other's with their leaves, and Conanicut and Newport hear each other's foghorns. But the trees also commingle their roots in the darkness underground, and the islands also hang together through the ocean's bottom. Just so there is a continuum of cosmic consciousness, against which our individuality builds but accidental fences, and into which our several minds plunge into a mother-sea or reservoir (James, 1909/1986, p. 374).

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