WILLIAM James

EMPIRICISM AND PRAGMATISM

DAVID LAPOUJADE

translated and with an afterword by
THOMAS LAMARRE

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THOUGHT IN THE ACT

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References to James's correspondence are from *The Correspondence of William James*, electronic edition (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex, 2008), which is based on *The Correspondence of William James*, edited by Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, with Bernice Grohskopf and Wilma Bradbeer, 12 volumes (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992–2004).

Preface

Thomas Lamarre

First published in 1997, David Lapoujade's introduction to the philosophy William James anticipated a major shift in French thought, reinvigorating a dialogue between philosophical traditions that had been too neatly demarcated into territories—the Anglo-American tradition versus the Continental tradition, or British empiricism versus French rationalism, or analytic philosophy versus the Kantian legacy. The renewal of this dialogue between philosophical traditions is associated in North America with the work of Gilles Deleuze, where Deleuze's passing characterization of his philosophy as "transcendental empiricism," in combination with his brief but favorable accounts of James and Alfred North Whitehead, eventually inspired a closer look at both James and Whitehead.

Something similar was happening in intellectual circles in France. In Isabelle Stengers's majestic opus *Thinking with Whitehead*, first published in 2002, she expresses her preference for Whitehead over James, yet James is clearly a key thinker for her.[1] References to James's philosophy became increasingly evident in thinkers such as Bruno Latour as well. Impossible, then, to ignore the letters exchanged between Henri Bergson and James confirming the profound connections between their approaches. By the time Lapoujade's introduction was reissued in 2007, a veritable wave of James-related philosophy was unfurling. In 2008, Lapoujade published his monograph on William and Henry James, *Fictions du pragmatisme: William et Henry James* (Fictions of Pragmatism: William and Henry James), and a major monograph on William James by Stéphane Madelrieux appeared in the same year.[2] New essays reconsidering the dialogue between Bergson and James were also on the horizon, such as *Bergson et James: Cent an après* (2011).[3] In addition, Lapoujade's volume on Bergson, *Puissances du temps: Versions de Bergson* (*Powers of*

Time: Versions of Bergson), which came out in 2010, abounds in Jamesian inspiration.[4]

While this new current of thought eventually gravitated toward connections between James and Whitehead and reinvigorated the dialogue between Bergson and James, such connections and dialogues gained traction in the context of a broader transformation in philosophical thinking. These new foci emerged within a new intellectual environment, itself emerging under the influence of theoretical developments in diverse fields, notably in the fields of science and technology studies and in media studies, where references to James are becoming as common as references to Deleuze, Guattari, Latour, and Stengers.

The power of Lapoujade's introduction to William James, still palpable more than twenty years after its initial publication, lies in its articulation of a truly Jamesian manner of thinking. While Lapoujade offers careful readings of the full range of James's work, his goal is not presentation, explication, or exegesis, which tend to impose external limits on a philosophy. His aim is to reveal the inner movement of Jamesian thought, to move with it, to work through its method. Much as Deleuze formulated Bergsonism, or a Bergsonian way of thinking, Lapoujade offers us a Jamesian turn of thought.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James offers a succinct formulation of his method. He writes, "To understand a thing rightly we need to see it both out of its environment and in it, and to have acquaintance with the whole range of its variations."[5] It is precisely this method that enables Lapoujade to make his introduction to James a Jamesian movement of thought, in the process utterly transforming what we thought we knew about James.

True to James's method, Lapoujade begins with extraction. James is dug out of the environment in which his work has gradually become entrenched—the lineage of pragmatism, the discipline of American philosophy. Lapoujade thus opens with a challenge to those formulations of pragmatism, notably those of Richard Rorty, which circumscribe James's thought, restricting it to Americanized territory. The first gesture, then, is to consider James outside this Americanized territory, to counter this territorialization of James. In the name of radical empiricism, Lapoujade unearths and unroots James. The goal of such excavation is not, however, to purify the thing, to unify radical empiricism by reference to some transcendent position outside it. On the contrary, as Lapoujade remarks,

"Each thing that we attempt to pry loose bears with it a halo of connections, its region." The second move, then, leads to an up-close view of what is excavated, to consider how it all holds together. When thus isolated and magnified, radical empiricism turns out to be a set of functions with connections among them that allow the set to hold together (instead of a rationally unified object). In this way, Lapoujade comes "to have acquaintance with the full range of variations" of radical empiricism. This is also how Lapoujade demonstrates that radical empiricism is not over and done. He pursues it in the making, where series appear, variants yet to come.

There is another, pragmatic phase to the Jamesian movement of thought: taking another look at the thing in its environment. As James writes of the saint, "We must judge him not sentimentally only, and not in isolation, but using our own intellectual standards, placing him in his environment, and estimating his total function."[6] Thus Lapoujade offers another look at the Jamesian thing, in its environment. But after Lapoujade has explored the full range of variations of radical empiricism, the environment in which he resituates James is profoundly different from the Americanized territory of Rorty. Lapoujade arrives at another America, a world of nomadic labor and spiritual movements, of vast open spaces crisscrossed with networks of communication and transportation.

In keeping with James's defiant stance toward nationalism and imperialism, Lapoujade's Jamesian take on America is not a utopian vision. It does not envision unity coming to this land in contractual, rational terms, or even in ethnic and linguistic terms. What Lapoujade brings into view are transitions related to material flows, which arise where networks of communication and transportation do not mesh smoothly, where their interface implies gaps. Such transitions make for a patchwork holding-together alongside the rationalized networks. This is also where nomadic workers live, in transition. This is where those deemed mentally ill are forced to abide. This is also where spiritual and political movements arise. For communities of interpretation arise precisely where some sort of "wrong correspondence" is felt, which must be navigated empirically and pragmatically. The Jamesian America unearthed by Lapoujade is one of wrong correspondences and ill adaptations, which are precisely what make it function.

This Jamesian way of seeing America is not calculated to be a neutral description of a place over there, at a safe distance, or in the distant past, to be considered as fundamentally incommensurable with, say, France. Lapoujade's way of exploring claims to a territory is in keeping with

James's claim that some forms of knowledge cannot be carried out in neutral or rational fashion. James insists there are forms of knowledge that demand us to meet the object halfway. To meet James halfway, Lapoujade must to some extent pry himself loose from his environment. As such, the dialogue between what is called American philosophy and what is called French philosophy does not take place in some stripped down, objectivized, comparative space. Instead, what communicate are the wrong correspondences that run through each thing and its environment, holding the whole together. What communicate are the variations, which Lapoujade styles as the "halo of connections" or "region." The dialogue, then, takes place through variant series, as if we were reading two stories about the same event recounted from different perspectives. On James's side, for instance, may arise a "mosaic" series, with edged pieces and conjunctions. A variant series occurs on Lapoujade's side, an "archipelago" series, with disjunctive regions and halos. Where the mosaic series meets the archipelago series, terms change direction, taking on new conceptual force. The series meet halfway, becoming variant series.

These procedures based on variant series are also of great interest from the point of view of translation. The Jamesian turn in Lapoujade's thought involves a good deal of translation from English into French. The process is, in a sense, reversed in the present translation. Here, James in French is "returned" to English, while Lapoujade's French is translated into English. It becomes evident, however, that the initial process of translation was not linear and reversible to begin with. As a term is pried loose of its environment, something of its prior environment clings to it, even in the new environment. Of course, such effects may be muted or deadened. Keeping such effects alive is integral to Lapoujade's manner of thinking, however. The result is not a blurring of distinctions between the two languages, but a keener sense of their distinctions, which keeps them in communication through differences that remain nonconscious, imperceptible. French does not come to resemble English, any more than English starts to look or sound French. But a strange sense of their affinity arises, as if yet another language, yet another region, were in the offing. Their relation is one of semblance. The present translation strives to prolong such semblance: even as the passages by James are ostensibly returned to their original, this translation tries to sustain the entangled semblance that happens through Lapoujade's articulation of Jamesian concepts in French, but in the now English environment. What enters translation is neither one language nor

the other, but both. Between the two arises the dark precursor, the uncanny intercessor.

There is precedent for such procedures in James. Famously, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James presents his personal battle with depression and his spiritual crisis as those of an unnamed French correspondent, whose words he has translated into English for his audience.[7] It is possible to construe his gesture in a number of ways. Perhaps he is addressing those in the audience who already know him intimately, who understand that the experience is his. Perhaps his gesture constitutes a return of the repressed; precisely what he does not want to avow openly, he presents in an encrypted form. Both interpretations are possible, but there is a broader one. In James's bid to present his experience through translation between French and English is an oscillation between anonymous and personal experience, between reality and fiction. James tries to generate an experience of semblance, an uncanny experience, resonant with the experiences of sick souls, madness, and exceptional states, which put us in touch with transversal forces.

Likewise, Lapoujade, in the wake of his discovery of variant series through James, would explore in his next book, *Fictions of Pragmatism*, the relation between the James brothers. At the outset, he proposes, "The world of the brothers James is above all a world of relations."[8] Extracting the brothers from the separate territories in which they have usually been placed, Lapoujade is able to take a closer look at the full range of their variations. At the same time, when he "returns" them to their initial environment, that environment is a changed world. Now the two brothers are like coauthors of a single oeuvre, variant series within an ensemble, a world of relations. Thus, Lapoujade succeeds in looking at their differences differently, distributing them otherwise: "The entire oeuvre of the James brothers is built on [the] difference between direct relations and indirect relations. Indeed, above and beyond what they have in common, it may be what so profoundly differentiates the work of the philosopher from that of the novelist."[9]

The Jamesian turn applies to Lapoujade as well. As a student of Deleuze, he is commonly situated within a Deleuzian environment. Indeed, his introduction to William James has been widely hailed for its Deleuzian reading of James. Yet the Jamesian movement within Lapoujade's thought invites us to uproot him from "his" Deleuzian environment, to consider the full range of his philosophical variations. His masterful account of Deleuze's philosophy, *Deleuze, les movement aberrants* (2014), translated as

Aberrant Movements: The Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (2017), then appears in a different light. Is Lapoujade's account of Deleuze not as Jamesian as his account of James is Deleuzian?

Ultimately, however, Lapoujade's thought is not best construed as Deleuzian or Jamesian. Nor is it to be understood primarily as a philosophy of relations, as pragmatism, or as a concatenation of radical and transcendental empiricism. It is above all about thinking across variations and series, about variant series, about exploring the full range of variations with an eye to the emergence of new worlds and regions—regions of experience whose conceptual and geopolitical contours do not correspond to those on our received philosophical maps.

Introduction

William James is best remembered for contributing to psychology the famous phrase "stream of consciousness," and for establishing the doctrine of pragmatism, principally through his instrumentalist theory of truth: "Our account of truth is an account of truths in the plural . . . having only this quality in common, that they *pay*. . . . Truth for us is simply a collective name for verification-processes, just as health, wealth, strength, etc., are names for other processes connected with life, and also pursued because it pays to pursue them."[1] Truth is what brings a return, what "pays"; it is about favorable actions that succeed. A simple reversal of this phrase is enough to make pragmatism look like nothing more than a caricature of the symbols of American-style success: health, wealth, strength are the sole truths.

The work of James is often seen as a philosophy of unfettered capitalism, with ideas that pay, truths that "live on credit," that is, everything that might commonly be taken for "pragmatism" today, as a sort of capitalist ready-made. Max Horkeimer, for instance, thus denounces pragmatism from Charles S. Peirce to John Dewey: "Their philosophy reflects, with an almost disarming candor, the spirit of the prevailing business culture."[2] Great effort has gone into drawing an image of a specifically American philosophy—direct, naïve, mercantile—of which James's pragmatism would be the liveliest incarnation. Oddly, the idea of a properly American philosophy is more commonly invoked when it comes to James than to his contemporaries, such as Peirce or Josiah Royce. James is presented as the one who gives America its national philosophy, much as James Fenimore Cooper and Walt Whitman are said to provide its literature.

Yet nothing could be further from James than the recent "neo-pragmatist" theses of Rorty, for instance, who proposes to establish specifically American criteria for universal democratic conversation, and to promote the

United States as an indigenous source of fundamental values. Nothing could be less pluralist or less in keeping with James's thought (or with Dewey's), despite Rorty's claims to follow it. James's efforts to clear up such misunderstandings have come to naught: pragmatism remains the philosophy of the American businessman, and the term no longer holds any meaning other than opportunistic action. Yet it was none other than William James who denounced, time and again, the imperialist ambitions of the United States, its generalized mercantilism, and its cult of money and financial success.[3]

Nor is James's pragmatism a "philosophy of action," in the sense of aiming to establish a theory of action, or describing which of its mechanisms make for greater efficiency, or in the sense of constantly calling on action as an ultimate end. The alleged "let us be practical" does not mean that everything will have to work out, at any cost, regardless of underlying conditions, provided a satisfactory return is had. The pragmatic definition of truth does not come down to validation through action, even if James maintains that the truth of an idea lies partly in its "practical consequences." His interpreters persistently identify the field of practice with the domain of action. Yet, for James, the term "practical" does not necessarily refer to the domain of action as opposed to the field of theoretical reflection; it refers above all to a point of view: "practical" means that reality, thought, knowledge (and also action) are considered in terms of their making. In a general way, James's philosophy is a philosophy of how humans are made in a world that is itself also being made. The reason he objects to rationalists and absolutists (especially the Hegelians, even though they were the first to introduce movement into concepts) comes of how they step in too late, after things have happened, "when a form of life has grown old," and the world has put forth everything it may put forth. As James says, "What really *exists* is not things made but things in the making."[4] Any reality is to be considered in the moment of its creating. Nonetheless this gesture should not be construed as making for a philosophy of the self-made man (that is, individualism, of which some have accused him), for it is evident that the individual could not be made if she were not at the same time caught up in tremendous flows of the world, traversed by the incessant movement of what is in the making. This problem is one that runs through all of James's philosophy: How can knowledge, truth, and belief be made if the world in which we live is open to perpetual novelty? Thus, for instance, it is not enough to say that an idea is thought

within the mind, or that the mind represents an idea. Such a definition is deprived of movement and, in this respect, is largely incomplete; what must be demonstrated is how the idea is made in the mind, and how the mind is made by it. What must be introduced into its definition is what James calls "practical consequences," essentially pragmatic criteria. The idea is defined no longer as a representation or modification of the mind but as a process by which mind is made.

Key advances in psychology around the years 1880–90 had already introduced such an approach.[5] In *Principles of Psychology*, psychological realities are treated as a veritable mishmash of intertwining and interpenetrating flows. Consciousness is not defined as a substantial reality, nor even as a reflexive act; consciousness is the movement of what is being made conscious. Such work shows, in effect, how consciousness never stops marking its limits within thought, how consciousness expands or contracts away from the unconscious bordering it.

James later (around 1904) takes up the same question but considerably enlarges it when he inaugurates "radical empiricism," introducing the notion of pure experience. Now it is a matter of showing that a plane of thought exists that precedes all the categories of psychology and traditional philosophy, and that those categories, far from being constitutive, must, on the contrary, be constituted on the basis of this plane of thought. Subject and object, matter and thought, are described not as givens or a priori forms but as processes that are being made within thought or alongside it. Freeing the movement of what is in the making on the psychological plane, as on the philosophical plane, invariably implies a critique of the forms in which we usually tend to partition flows of life, thought, and matter.

If empiricism is, strictly speaking, James's philosophy, what are we to make of pragmatism? Pragmatism is not a philosophy. It is a method, nothing other than a method, of which the general maxim, borrowed from Peirce, is as follows: "There is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice."[6] It is true that James, from 1907, gives a double definition to pragmatism that allows us to think that it is something other than a simple method: "Such then would be the scope of pragmatism—first, a method; and second, a genetic theory of what is meant by truth."[7] Yet this theory is an effect of the method itself and is thus inseparable from it. Now we may begin to clarify these two aspects of pragmatism.

In the first instance, pragmatism is a method of practical evaluation. It examines ideas, concepts, and philosophies, not from the point of view

of their internal coherence or their rationality but as a function of their "practical consequences." We have to evaluate ideas in light of how they propose to make us act or think. It all comes down to the following question: What makes possible the truth of our ideas? Or, how does an idea become true? How is a true idea made? Thus, in the second instance, the pragmatic method is inseparable from a tool of construction (or a genetic theory of what is meant by truth, to use James's turn of phrase). Pragmatism thus responds to the question of how to produce ideas for acting or thinking. The only thing it can do, as a method of evaluation, is to help us choose, from among philosophies, religions, and social ideas, those that are most beneficial to our action or thought. For example, it is odd that we can equally well characterize the same world in terms of generalized determinism as in terms of sovereign free will, as if this changed nothing. Yet, if we can in theory choose indifferently between determinism and free will, such is not the case in practice. Our action is not the same if we support the one or the other. Pragmatism is not a philosophy but a method for choosing among philosophies. As a tool for construction, however, what it must do is to help us create ideas that may be of use in acting or thinking. As such, it becomes a tool of creation. *How are ideas made, and what do we do with ideas?*—these are two axes of the pragmatic method. In general terms, pragmatism conceives of ideas as spurs for action, which allow us to create and evaluate. This is where things get difficult: it is not a method about creating but a method for creating.

These two inseparable aspects of pragmatism echo two expressions that often overlap in James: reality is made; reality is in the making. There is a sort of moral exigency to becoming: the world is in the making at the same time that it has to be made. This means that action, far from being a solution, has become a problem. Acting and thinking are now problems insofar as they entail risk. "In the total game of life we stake our persons all the while."[8] Of course, not all our actions or thoughts entail risk; yet, before turning into settled habits, they initially involved experimentation. This is the moment that interests James. Speaking generally, pragmatism is addressed to someone who, in some area or another, is no longer capable of acting, precisely someone for whom acting constitutes a problem or a risk. You cannot take risks, however, unless you have *faith*.

Such a theme is not original to James. Transcendentalism already invoked it as an essential condition.[9] It insistently called on faith. The individual must be the pioneer who has faith in himself, in his strength, in

his judgment, just as he has faith in the power of Nature with which he is unified in a feeling of fusion (even if it entails distrust of conformism within society and the city, as with Emerson as well as with Thoreau when he calls for "civil disobedience"). Faith is inseparable from a Romantic union with the Whole. As Emerson says in *Self-Reliance*, the prayer of the farmer kneeling in his field to weed is heard throughout nature.[10] He enters into communion with the all-encompassing unity of the Over-Soul. There is thus no faith in self without faith in human beings, in all humanity, in nature, and in God. Such a great circular trinity, Divinity-Nature-Humanity, is also found in another great transcendentalist, William James's father Henry James Sr.[11]

There is no doubt that, in some respects, pragmatism is a prolongation of transcendentalism. Like transcendentalism, pragmatism calls for individual action, for risk, and for faith. A fundamental break nonetheless occurs: it is no longer possible to maintain the great fusional harmony between Humans, Nature, and God. To give but one example, as James remarks, when you consider the development of sciences, in the plural, and the disorder and indetermination they introduce into the structure of our universe, the existence of a single God whose archetypes we copy becomes difficult to believe in. Pluralism breaks fusional unity much as Darwinism broke harmonic finality. The previous sort of naïveté and confident optimism is no longer possible for us moderns. James makes a similar observation, but on another plane, when in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* he describes numerous cases in which belief collapses, in which an individual is no longer capable of belief, not only in God or in ideals, but also in himself and in the very world that lies before him. When we go through such crises, the world suddenly loses all meaning. The diverse connections that bind us to the world break, one after the other. In sum, we can no longer believe as we did before; action becomes impossible because we have lost faith.

Pragmatism is born of such observations. It is not the triumphant echo of America but, on the contrary, the symptom of a profound break that ruptures the wholeness of action. It does not follow the movement of what is in the making without struggling against the movement of what is being unmade. It is in this sense that action is a problem for James, and not in the least a universal solution. James's diagnostic is akin to that of Nietzsche: we no longer believe in anything. Nietzsche diagnoses it through the symptom of nihilism, primarily in the "nothingness of will" of active nihilism. James diagnoses it in the profound loss of faith that translates into a profound crisis of action. The one who no longer believes,

the one who no longer has faith, remains immobile and without reaction, *undone*. She is as if stricken with a death of the senses.[12] Of course, we continue to act as we always do, and undoubtedly even with a considerable "return," but do we still believe in our actions? With what intensity? Do we still believe in the world that makes us act? How can we feel faith in others, have faith in ourselves, and even have faith in the world? Which philosophy, which doctrine, will restore our faith? Such questions are so many subsets of the central problem.

The task of philosophy is thus not to seek the true or the rational, but to give us reasons to believe in this world just as the religious person is disposed to find reasons to believe in another world. The pragmatic method is inseparable from this general problem. When James asks, "What is a true idea?" he really means, "What are the signs in which one can have faith?" For, ultimately, it is never signs in general in which we do or don't place our faith—but specific signs, which the pragmatic method allows us to find. For instance, others express themselves through signs, and yet we must have signs other than those they explicitly manifest if we are to know whether we can believe in what they say. The signs by which I understand what someone says are not the same as those by which I believe in what someone says. Likewise when we say that we no longer believe in this world: this really means that we cease to believe in certain signs that constitute its existence for us. In other words, pragmatism requires a new theory of signs.

Pragmatism is not a philosophy, but it demands with its every fiber a philosophy that permits us to act once again, not a philosophy in which we can believe, but rather a philosophy that makes us believe. There is no lack of ideas in which to believe and on which to act—God, Self, Revolution, Progress—but something is broken in our power to believe. And it remains broken unless the pragmatic method of evaluation makes clear to us that pluralism, more than any other philosophy, provides us with motives for action. The question then becomes: What is it exactly about pluralism that makes us act? And correlatively, what is about other philosophies that they do not produce such an effect?

The paradox is that James sees in pluralism the form most capable of restoring such belief, while other thinkers, on the contrary, see in it pure and simple relativism, the form that generates all our skepticisms. Is it not the plurality of spaces in geometry that makes us doubt the truth of axioms, and the plurality of philosophies that makes us doubt the truth of each doctrine, and so forth? Why the form of pluralism? Someone

who affirms the existence of a single truth, of a single science, of a single dogma, whom James calls the "absolutist," he too believes. He believes more fervently than the pluralist. Why then claim that pluralism is the most capable of making us believe when, on the contrary, it gives us more reasons for doubt than does absolutism? It is imperative to try to resolve this question: How does the pluralism of radical empiricism foster faith (when it is presumed to engender doubt and suspicion)? Put another way, how do we make pluralism in general an object of faith?

We should not, for all that, presume that James's philosophy was for him a means of "getting out" of psychology. Pragmatism also needs a psychology. James's thought is always defined as pluralism, and this pluralism as perspectivism. To each consciousness, taken in itself, the question is posed of how to believe and act. In this sense, the pragmatic method may be defined with good reason as "democratic."[13] It cannot dictate a universal rule. Such a stance makes clear why pragmatism needs a psychology, since it examines the effect produced by ideas on a consciousness. Yet this way of putting it is still too general. It does not address what is specifically of concern: Why is it that the problem of faith requires a psychology of consciousness conceived in terms of flow?

By definition, flow never ceases to vary, to pass through dips and rises, and the field of consciousness corresponding to these variations never stops expanding and contracting. Thus a consciousness believes and acts when the variations that traverse it cross a certain threshold—whence a psychology that studies variations of the field of consciousness, a psychology of intensity. Now, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James shows that a field of consciousness enlarges and expands its connections as a function of the extent of its faith. This means that variations in intensity of consciousness are nothing other than variations in the feeling of faith. It is a psychology of faith or, if one prefers, for the problem of faith. In this way, far from being independent of pragmatism, such a psychology is the only one possible for the general problem that James poses, for which he must find a solution: What does a consciousness need for signs to have a meaning? Or in other words: What is needed for signs to spur consciousness to action? Which is, in still other words, the same as asking: What is needed for signs to lead a consciousness to produce other signs, actions, or thoughts in connection with the first ones? In this summary form, three distinct axes emerge: pragmatism, whose problem consists of determining which signs or ideas lead to our being able to act or to augment our power

to act; radical empiricism, whose problem consists of determining how signs are constituted and the rules according to which they are organized; and to a lesser extent, psychology, whose problem consists of determining what allows consciousness to give meaning to the signs it perceives and how consciousness responds to them through variations in its flow. These are the three problems that we must attempt to resolve.

Notes

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6. *Varieties*, 295.

7. See John E. Smith's introduction to *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Harvard University Press, 1985), xvii.

8. Lapoujade, *Fictions du pragmatisme*, 7.

9. Lapoujade, *Fictions du pragmatisme*, 15.

INTRODUCTION

1. William James, *Pragmatism*, in *The Works of William James*, electronic ed. (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex, 2008), 104. Emphasis in the original.

2. Max Horkeimer, *The Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum, 1992), 52. See also the first chapter of Ludwig Marcuse's work *La philosophie américaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 8–45, where the author notably quotes Bertrand Russell's phrase, "I find love of truth is obscured in America by commercialism, of which pragmatism is the philosophical expression," from "As a European Radical Sees It," *Freeman* 4 (March 8, 1922): 610.

3. In a letter to H. G. Wells, September 11, 1906, James denounces "the moral flabbiness born of the exclusive worship of the bitch-Goddess SUCCESS. That—with the squalid cash interpretation put on the word success—is our national

disease." *The Correspondence of William James*, electronic ed., 19 vols. (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex, 2008), 11:267.

4. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, in *Works of William James*, 117. Emphasis in the original.

5. James was born in 1842. He initially directed his studies toward physiology and medicine, but under the impetus of Wilhelm Maximillian Wundt and Hermann von Helmholtz, whom he admired, he turned toward psychophysiology. From 1877, after becoming a teacher, he published his first important essays. Most of the articles from this period, with revisions, formed the basis, after some twelve years of work, for the publication of *Principles of Psychology* (1890). Soon to follow were *The Will to Believe* (1897), *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), *Pragmatism* (1907), and *The Idea of Truth and Philosophy of Experience* (1907). He died in 1910, leaving an unfinished work, *Introduction to Philosophy*, and a series of articles collected under the title *Essays in Radical Empiricism*.

6. In "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," Peirce writes, "The rule for attaining the third grade of clearness of apprehension is as follows: Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object." *The Writings of Charles S. Peirce—A Chronological Edition*, electronic ed. (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex, 2003), 3:266.

7. *Pragmatism*, 37. See, too, Emmanuel Leroux, *Le pragmatisme américain et anglais: Étude historique et critique* (Paris: Alcan, 1922), 163n2. In 1904 pragmatism only designated a method (undoubtedly because of the influence of Peirce), and the term "humanism" was reserved for the theory of truth (because of the influence of Schiller), as is evident in James's *The Meaning of Truth,* in *The Works of William James*. If James happens to speak of "pragmatist philosophers," it is simply for tactical reasons, to make pragmatism into a war machine against rival philosophical currents. In a letter to Wilhelm Jerusalem on September 15, 1907, he writes, "Pragmatism is an unlucky word in some respects, and the two meanings I give for it are somewhat heterogeneous. But it was already in vogue in France and Italy as well as in England and America, and it was *tactically* advantageous to use it" (*Correspondence*, 11:448).

8. *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, in *Works of William James*, 78.

9. A note on transcendentalism and Anglo-Saxon Hegelianism: under the influence of Thomas Carlyle, the transcendentalism of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Ralph Waldo Emerson gravitated toward the thinking of a Whole-Nature inspired by German Romanticism, as was the case with William James's father, whose philosophy drew a great deal of inspiration from Emanuel Swedenborg. All things tend to merge, becoming absorbed in the great unity God-Nature. The subsequent confusion of the transcendentalist themes of Fusion and the Over-Soul (Emerson) with Hegelian philosophy made for a favorable reception of Hegel. J. H. Stirling's *The Secret of Hegel* (1865), the most detailed study, would have considerable influence on the next generation. A new school developed around the *Journal*

of Speculative Thought, founded by William T. Harris, with T. H. Green and the Caird brothers, Edward and John, as major contributors. The American use of Hegel was primarily concerned with the notion of totality—under the influence of transcendentalism—while largely ignoring dialectical progress. Not until Royce (a friend and colleague of James) published *The World and the Individual* (1899–1901), and the Englishman Francis H. Bradley published *Appearance and Reality* (1893), did a more rigorous development of Hegelianism appear, based on a logic of relations, entirely different from Hegel. These are the thinkers that James takes on when he issues his challenge to absolutism. On these questions, see Hubert W. Schneider, *A History of American Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), 477; Gérard Deledalle, *La philosophie américaine* (Lausanne: De Boeck University, 1983); and Leroux, *Le pragmatisme américain*, beginning at p. 19.

10. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "History," in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 2, *Essays, First Series*, electronic ed. (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex, 2008), 44.

11. On these questions, see Schneider, *History of American Philosophy*, especially chapters 3 and 5; and Deledalle, *La philosophie américaine*, 36: "Emerson insists on this last point: having confidence in yourself, is to have confidence in humanity, in all humanity." On Henry James Sr., see Deledalle, *La philosophie américaine*, 43–45.

12. James went through a similar crisis, as he confides in a letter to Oliver Wendell Holmes, September 17, 1867: "My external history . . . resembles that of a sea anemone." Subsequently he speaks of the "deadness of spirit thereby produced" (*Correspondence*, 4:220).

13. *Pragmatism*, 44: "But you see already how democratic she [pragmatism] is."

1. RADICAL EMPIRICISM

1. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Toronto: Broadview, 2011), 72.

2. James, *Principles of Psychology*, in *The Works of William James*, 263. Emphasis mine.

3. *Principles of Psychology*, 261.

4. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 38–39.

5. James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, in *The Works of William James*, 81.

6. *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 4.

7. *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 114: "This will be a monism, if you will, but an exceedingly basic monism absolutely opposed to the so-called bilateral monism of scientific or Spinozist positivism." Translator's note: One of the essays collected in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* appears in French. "La Notion de Conscience" was delivered at the 5th International Congress of Psychology in Rome, April 30, 1905. I here translate James's French original cited by the author into English.

8. This is the meaning of a profound remark by Bergson to James, February 15, 1905: "The existence of some reality outside all actual consciousness is certainly not the existence *in itself* touted by the old substantialism; and yet it is not actually