

Science, Psychology, and Religion: An Invitation to Jamesian Pluralism

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Perspectives on the relationship between psychology and religion have run the gamut from integration to mutual suspicion to open hostility. Despite increasing calls for greater sensitivity to the issues surrounding the psychological study of religion, significant conceptual and methodological problems remain. We propose that the pluralistic philosophy of William James provides not only an example of how a radically empirical psychology might be formulated, but also how such an approach allows for a serious psychological investigation of religion and religious experience. We argue that James offers an important corrective to the reductive approaches all-too-common in the study of religion and religious experience by allowing for the possibility that theistic understandings may be taken more seriously in psychological research and theorizing.

Recently, the American Psychological Association (2008) adopted a resolution encouraging the discipline to more carefully and empirically examine religious and spiritual variables in the service of reducing prejudice and discrimination. Likewise, other calls have been made for greater study of the relationships between religion and health (Miller and Thoresen, 2003), the role of religion in coping with pain and trauma (Rippentrop, 2005; Shaw, Joseph, and Linley, 2005), the impact of religious belief on adolescent development (Levesque, 2002), the possible evolutionary origins of religious belief (Boyer, 2001), the significance of religious values in psychotherapy (Richards and Bergin, 2005), and the philosophical assumptions underlying the research methods being employed to study religion and religious experience (Beauregard and O'Leary, 2007; Slife and Whoolery, 2006). While we believe that the discipline's increased interest in studying religion and the psychological context of religious experience reflects a positive and welcome development, we fear that all too often such study is not sufficiently radical to provide a genuinely empirical

or truly scientific psychology of religion. In this paper, therefore, we will argue for an approach to the study of religion that draws upon the pluralistic philosophy and radical empiricism of William James. Such an approach, we feel, can provide an important corrective to the too often myopic and reductive strategies common to the psychological study of religious and spiritual experience by allowing for the possibility of genuinely theistic understandings of such experiences to be taken more seriously in research.

It is well known, and perhaps not particularly surprising, that religious believers often report feeling that psychologists committed to a naturalistic mode of inquiry misunderstand them, their beliefs, and their experiences, especially when such inquiry relies on reductionist forms of explanation (Collins, 1977, 1981; Cummings, O'Donohue, and Cummings, 2009; Philipchalk, 1987; Wulff, 1997). Some religious leaders have even worried that believers will lose their faith as they become acquainted with psychological theory and research (see, e.g., Benson, 1988; Buckley, 1993; Tyler and Grady, 2006). Much of this hesitancy about and prejudice against the psychological study of religion is understandable when considered in light of some of the more explosive critiques of religion that have been offered by leading psychologists. Sigmund Freud (1927/1989), for example, famously called religion "the obsessional neurosis of humanity" that was fostered by a deep psychic need for wish fulfillment, while B.F. Skinner (1965) argued that it was merely a superstitious behavior pattern brought on by accidental contingencies of environmental events, and Abraham Maslow (1964) explained deeply spiritual moments and meanings as "perfectly natural, human peak experiences" (p. 20). And, more recently, neuroscientist V.S. Ramachandran (2003) has announced that religious sentiments are "simply the activity of these little specks of jelly in your head, in your brain. There is nothing else."

However, while it is easy to see how these and similar dismissive comments might irk religious believers, their concern with psychology seems to run more deeply than offense over perceived insults or over-enthusiastic reductions. Religionists are more often concerned with the conflicts generated by a secular science that seems so easily to dismiss many of their most significant lived-experiences. And, while some expressions of this concern may be the product of fundamentalist separatism and anti-intellectualism, many of the religious believers who have articulated these concerns have been well-educated and highly respected scholars from a variety of disciplines (e.g., C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, George Marsden, Michael Polanyi, Sir John Eccles, and Francis Collins). Thus, the matter cannot simply be cast as a problem arising solely from the ignorance of the uninformed or as a lack of sophistication on the part of some who do not understand science or the life of the mind.

When discussing the relationship between psychological science and religion, scholars from both camps have often framed the discussion in terms of a conflict

(Collins, 1977; Cummings et al., 2009; Griffin, 2000; Russell, 2002; Sappington, 1991). This framing reflects a broader intellectual, political, and cultural debate over the nature of the relationship between religion and science that dates back to the late 1800s with the publication of John William Draper's *History of the Conflict of Science and Religion* and Andrew Dickson White's *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*. Although leading historians have recently begun to cast suspicion on the veracity of Draper's and White's claims that the relationship between science and religion is primarily, or even necessarily, one of warfare (see, e.g., Brooke, 1991; Russell, 2002; Toumey, 1994), the perception that religion and science are in fundamental conflict is nonetheless still commonly held by many psychologists and religionists (Browning and Cooper, 2004; Johnson and Jones, 2000; Vitz, 1994). This common notion that religion and science are fundamentally incompatible stems from a number of assumptions. Perhaps the chief of these assumptions is that for knowledge to be properly established and truth claims to be adequately adjudicated, there can only be one true conception of reality in play. In other words, because it is assumed that reality is ultimately reducible to only one thing, it is also assumed that there can only be one "true" way to talk about this reality. Thus, if religion has the one true understanding of reality, and that reality is fundamentally a supernatural one, then any scientific account of reality that relies solely on naturalism is by definition wrong. Conversely, by implication, if a naturalistic psychology provides the only reliable means whereby psychologists can discover the truth about the nature of human nature, then religious teachings on the subject are in error whenever and wherever they disagree with accepted scientific findings.

Recently, however, Nelson (2006) has argued that psychology's often negative view of religion is the by-product of outdated modes of thought and that conflict between the two is not in fact inevitable. Likewise, scholars such as Richards and Bergin (2005) have made the case that religious perspectives not only are not necessarily hostile to psychological science, but may have much to offer psychology in both its theoretical and practical endeavors. There are in fact a number of scholars who have advocated an integration of psychology with religious beliefs and practices (e.g., Collins, 1981; Jones, 1994; Myers and Jeeves, 2003; Philipchalk, 1987). William James, whose pioneering work on the psychology of religion in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1905), remains to this day profoundly influential and insightful in this respect. His thinking serves not only as a welcome exemplar of the possible integration of psychological science and religious sentiment, but also, especially in his later work *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909a), provides much needed guidance as to how such integration can be accomplished with both theoretical rigor and practical relevance. It is from that later work that we will draw inspiration for our analysis.

Experience Exceeds Singular Explanations

In navigating the many issues surrounding the question of the relationship between psychology and religious experience, James addresses both what is fundamentally real (ontology) and the criteria of human knowing (epistemology). Ultimately, for James, experience is both what is real as well as the way in which we know truth and, therefore, the implications of one apply to the other. In this sense he prefigures some postmodern commentators (e.g., Richardson, Fowers, and Guignon, 1999; Slife and Reber, in press) who have made the case that ontologies and epistemologies are inextricably bound up with one another. That is to say, whatever one's epistemology might happen to be, it is inescapably shaped by certain ontological assumptions about what sorts of things can be known; while, at the same time, one's chosen ontology involves certain basic assumptions about how one might best come to know those things. Thus, for James, radical empiricism proposes both that experience is the fundamental "stuff" of reality and also the means by which reality is known as it is known. Accordingly, then, because experience is open-ended (i.e., we never end our experiencing or, in other words, our learning about the world), the universe is also ever open (plural).

In the opening chapter of *A Pluralistic Universe*, James (1909a) notes another "type of thinking" or basic way we in the western intellectual tradition have adopted for relating things and events to explain the world in which we find ourselves. He terms this philosophical approach Monism in contrast to his own view, Pluralism. In the first of these, which he explicitly identifies with Hegelian idealism and any sciences or theologies dependent on it, the things and events of the world are ultimately related by showing how they are, in fact, merely parts or manifestations of some larger system of reality and, as such, have little if any real significance of their own. According to James, a central conceit of monistic philosophy is that "the world is no collection, but one great all-inclusive fact outside of which is nothing — nothing is the only alternative" (p. 36). Thus, "to be, on this scheme, is, on the part of a finite thing, to be an object for the absolute; and on the part of the absolute it is to be the thinker of that assemblage of objects" (pp. 36–37). One's monistic philosophy of the universe, then, leads to a singular explanation for all aspects of life and suggests that this one explanation is the best or even only way to know about the one, true reality of things.

Now, obviously, it is easy to hear in James's remarks and their implications a critique of various forms of fatalistic and stifling theology regarding the absolute dominance of God, the absolute fixity of events in the world, and the absolute reliance on religious authority for knowledge and explanations about the universe. Such a conclusion is certainly a possible reading of his work. However, to assume that James restricts his identification of absolutist monism only to religious dogmatism is to underestimate the scope and prevalence of monistic thinking in

western philosophy and science — a mistake that James does not make. Thus, from a Jamesian perspective, rationalistic psychologies in which human relationships, cognitions, and moral sentiments are merely derivative of the operation of immutable natural laws and non-intentional mechanical processes do not, in fact, escape the problematic conceptual excesses of the very traditional theologies they so often hold in disdain and have so long sought to replace. Rather, they merely replace one form of dogmatism with another.

It is also important to point out here that although James was primarily targeting Hegelian or absolute idealism, and its assertion that only spiritual or infinite things are real because finite things necessarily depend on other finite things for their being, his critique of monism in *A Pluralistic Universe* is applicable to any fundamentally reductionist system of thought. Thus, while his analytic guns may have been trained on idealism, they could just as easily have been turned on traditional, or to use James's term, "bugaboo" empiricism, wedded as it so often is to materialism and mechanical interpretations of naturalism. According to James, then, Monism, in all of its various formulations, fails to seriously address and adequately account for the multiplicities of experience and meaning that constitute the world of actual human engagement because multiplicity of experience and meaning are never taken to be fully real. Rather, such things are seen to be mere manifestations of the operations of some presumably more fundamental metaphysical, material, or mechanical reality.

In arguing against any theory that claims to intellectually explain everything, whether it be the idealist monism of the nineteenth century Hegelians or the empiricist monism of the modern materialists, James protested that our experience of reality is such that one grand explanation or unified theory can never adequately encapsulate or account for everything. James (1909a) argues that, rather than seek a system in which "reason holds all things in solution and accounts for all the irrationality that superficially appears" (p. 85), we must allow for the somewhat contradictory experiences of life to be taken as they are and as they are experienced to be. "Individuality," as James says, "outruns all classification, yet we insist on classifying every one we meet under some general head" (pp. 3–4). Recognition of the fundamentally elusive and overflowing nature of the individual in particular is at the very heart of the pluralistic vision James seeks to articulate. Pluralism, James maintains, is the notion that

there may ultimately never be an all-form at all, that the substance of reality may never get totally collected, that some of it may remain outside of the largest combination of it ever made, and that a distributive form of reality, the *each*-form, is logically as acceptable and empirically as probable as the all-form commonly acquiesced in as so obviously the self-evident thing. (p. 34)

Jamesian pluralism, then, maintains that a monistic view of reality cannot satisfactorily account for all the experiential phenomena that we as psychologists

encounter and study without transforming those individual experiences into something that they are not (and never were). And, as James well knew, this is just as true of religious phenomena and experiences as any other human experiences.

Science and Religion are Worldviews

A common assumption in contemporary psychological science is that all human phenomena should be methodically examined through a (single) worldview that is not only value neutral and objective but also theologically neutral (literally “a-theistic”). As Slife and Whoolery (2006) argue, many psychologists have come to believe that although assumptions may introduce bias at the level of theory, method is “divorceable from these biases, and thus can be viewed as essentially unbiased or neutral” (p. 218). Thus, it is often thought that while particular scientists may have certain theological biases or values, the scientific method itself is literally “a-theistic.” That is to say, because the scientific method is objective and value-neutral it engenders no commitment one way or the other on the question of God, his existence, or involvement in the world. It is a-theistic, some might say, in the same way that it is a-moral, meaning that the method itself neither assumes nor entails any particular theological or moral views. The scientific method, it is commonly held, is simply a set of analytic rules or techniques one follows in order to establish empirical facts (Slife and Williams, 1995). Consequently, it is only once the relevant facts have been established in an objective fashion that the inherently biased and value-laden enterprise of theoretical reflection and speculation begins.

However, as numerous philosophers of science (Feyerabend, 1988; Gadamer, 1960/2005; Kuhn, 1970) have shown, a defining feature of any method — be it scientific or otherwise — is the profound influence that its basic philosophical assumptions and pre-investigatory biases play in both the formulation of the method and the interpretation of the findings it generates. In other words, all methods not only entail certain constitutive assumptions and values, but these very assumptions and values give rise to the methods themselves. Indeed, the common notion that objectivity and value-neutrality are and should be the hallmark of scientific investigation is itself a philosophic assumption that reflects a certain set of defining values. And furthermore, although seldom recognized as such, the defining methodological value of theological neutrality is itself a value about the efficacy or relevance of religious activity in the object of investigation. In other words, the notion that one’s methods of investigation can be theologically neutral or “a-theistic” is ironically to make the *particular* assumption that it is possible to give an adequate account of a particular phenomenon of interest without needing to make reference in any way to theistic involvement or relevance. In short, the belief that one can offer a sufficient explanation of some event without needing to consider or account for the possible

involvement of deity is to make the theological assumption that deity is in some profound and significant way passively uninvolved, conceptually unnecessary, or ultimately non-existent. And this is, at its root, a theological claim about the nature of God and, as such, it is hardly neutral in nature. Thus, it has been suggested by some (see, e.g., Beck and Demarest, 2005; Gantt and Slife, 2000; Porpora, 2006; Slife and Whoolery, 2006) that the differences between various methods of investigating the world is not that some are religiously or theologically neutral while others are biased, but rather that each have particular theological biases, biases that are almost always unexamined and unacknowledged. Unfortunately, though such biases are seldom acknowledged or explicitly addressed, that does not mean that they have no significant effect on the course and content of scientific investigation.

James (1909a) argued that the primary danger of conducting science in a way that is blind to the presence and possible impact of one's pre-investigatory biases is that in so doing one "will always omit something and fail to reach completely adequate conclusions" (p. 306) about our experiences. "When conceptualism summons life to justify itself in conceptual terms," James wrote, "it is like a challenge addressed in a foreign language to someone who is absorbed in his own business; it is irrelevant to him altogether — he may let it lie unnoticed" (p. 291). For James, then, monism, in whatever its particular guise, encourages a profound mismatch between the methods and assumptions of our science, on the one hand, and the way in which events in the world reveal themselves in actual human experience, on the other. As our science becomes absorbed in the business of monistic methodology actual human experience is marginalized, relegated to a sort of afterthought in comparison to the priority given to fulfilling the vision of monism. Thus, in addition to being antithetical to the spirit of genuinely scientific inquiry, a lack of awareness of the hidden assumptions and conceptual commitments of one's own investigatory framework may not only significantly restrict the scope and relevance of one's research questions and findings, it may also seriously distort and confuse them.

A genuinely or radically empirical and, thus, pluralistic philosophical framework, on the other hand, allows for theistic approaches to the study of religious phenomena to be given genuine consideration alongside naturalistic explanations, such that both might be evaluated and critiqued respectfully and fairly. Furthermore, this pluralistic engagement of phenomena could prevent their reduction to naturalistic factors. Thus, rather than merely examining religious variables in terms of their existence and behavior in some larger, monistic system of mechanical laws and material causal forces, James would suggest we explore the varieties of religious experience in a genuinely empirical manner that appreciates a plurality of rigorous methodological approaches and valid interpretive possibilities. This suggests a fundamentally pluralistic worldview in which the complexities of religious experience cannot be reduced to merely

biological or behavioral causes. It likewise cautions against embracing overly simplified views of scientific phenomena that can be found in some religious accounts (e.g., explanations of psychopathology as merely possession by spirits). However much one particular explanation seems to describe an experience, "something always escapes . . . something else is absent and unreduced to unity" (James, 1909a, pp. 321–322). Recognition of this basic feature of human experience has become increasingly commonplace in our postmodern age (see, e.g., Ferre, 1998; Levinas, 1961/1969; Rosenau, 1992) and speaks to James's prescience in these matters.

Science, or indeed any investigatory approach, that adheres to only one way of looking at things, one narrow worldview, cannot grasp the entirety of lived human experience, even if its approach is guided by reason, logic, and the dictates of experimental observation. James was by no means an enemy of rationality or the logic underlying experimentalism. Rather he held that these approaches ultimately rely too heavily on abstractions and "will always omit something, and fail to reach completely adequate conclusions" (James, 1909a, p. 306). Religious experiences should not, then, be understood as anti-logical or irrational nor should they only be studied as if they were necessarily counter-factual. Rather such experiences are always *more than* our abstract conceptualizations of them. Of course, such a phenomenological view need not be limited to religious experiences. As James (1909a) remarked, all "life exceed[s] logic" (p. 329). Like many others, James realized that there were fundamentally meaningful aspects of life that went beyond the logic of the syllogism and the walls of the laboratory. However, more than this, James also understood that genuine science has no need (methodological or otherwise) to cut itself off from a careful and attentive study of such things. As noted James biographer Gerald E. Meyers (1986) notes, while "James applauded the investigations of Ebbinghaus and others" and "never doubted the illumination gained from laboratory studies," he relentlessly maintained that "such studies were nevertheless bound . . . to remain fragmentary as explanations" (p. 179). Experimental observation and measurement, James (1899/1958) himself noted,

can give us useful information only when we combine them with observations made without brass instruments, upon the total demeanor of the measured individual, by teachers with eyes in their heads and common sense, and some feeling for the concrete facts of human nature in their hearts. (p. 98)

If the "much-at-onceness" of life (James, 1911, p. 50) exceeds our explanations of it, then it immediately follows that any explanations we create for the psychological aspects of life must necessarily be incomplete or insufficient, even if true. As incomplete explanations, they have particular biases and focuses that may give us *some* truths about the phenomena, but do not give us *all* truth about it. As James (1911) noted:

Concepts . . . being thin extracts from perception, are always insufficient representatives thereof; and although they yield wide information, must never be treated after the rationalistic fashion, as if they gave a deeper quality of truth. The deeper features of reality are found only in perceptual experience. (p. 54)

If an explanatory framework is limited, then the methods that sustain and support such a framework are likewise partial in their power to reveal a complete accounting of their object of interest.

We are perfectly willing to admit that the tendency to avoid invoking theistic explanations in scientific research may often be a pragmatically useful bias for explaining many of our interactions with the world. However, an adequate understanding of lived-experience demands more than such a narrow framework can provide. As James (1909a) says:

There are resources in us that naturalism with its literal and legal virtues never reckons of, possibilities that take our breath away, or another kind of happiness and power, based on giving up our own will and letting something higher work for us, and these seem to show a world wider than either physics or philistine ethics can imagine. (p. 305)

Such experiences call for alternate worldviews that illuminate the human truths that scientific naturalism either ignores or is incapable of adequately addressing. Fortunately, in James's pluralism, alternate viewpoints and assumptions need not negate our current ones. In fact, pluralism requires there be multiple ways of viewing the events of our lives.

Jamesian pluralism offers a viable alternative to the "either-or" mentality that so often takes precedence in contemporary discussions of scientific psychology and theistic religion. Once we begin to recognize, however, that not only does religion have its reasons but that science has its beliefs will we understand that they are both worldviews that take certain beliefs as pre-eminent and validate certain ways of knowing over others. Whereas some sciences might value sensory experience as primary, some religions might esteem revelation as fundamental.¹ James's own radical empiricism values experience chiefly and his pragmatic theory of truth allows any impactful experience to be considered worthy of serious consideration. This allows for a plurality of perspectives to function and have meaningful space in the same world, a truly pluralistic universe.

In allowing for multiple views to inform our explanations, we can begin to see our assumptions as assumptions and perhaps more fully begin to evaluate and re-evaluate their worth to us (Slife, Reber, and Richardson, 2005; Slife and Williams, 1995). It may be that some explanations of religious phenomena do

¹Note the use of "some" in both cases — Jamesian pluralism challenges the idea that there is only "one science" and "one religion." In summing up all religion into one type of belief system or set of practices we surely do violence to the idea of religious diversity and acceptance. Likewise, when we reduce science down to one method or set of established questions, we do violence to the essentially open-minded and curiosity-driven spirit of genuine scientific inquiry.

not explain religious phenomena at all, but merely explain them away (Gantt and Williams, 2008). Such explanations, though often presented as scientific and credible, contribute little to our understanding of religious phenomena *qua* religious phenomena and usually serve only to widen the gap of suspicion between the psychological researcher and the religious believer. The recognition of valid alternative views of the phenomena that might lend real credence to the meaningful experiences of religious individuals will surely do something to address the often conflictual relationship between psychology and religion mentioned earlier.

We wish to make clear here, however, that we are not advocating the replacement of secular scientific investigation with a mode of inquiry biased in favor of religion. We are, rather, advocating not only the acceptance of a plurality of research methods in psychological inquiry but also a Jamesian conception of pluralism that would serve to legitimize a project of psychological investigation employing diverse methods. Further, inasmuch as there are multiple religious perspectives and multiple secular perspectives, each of which may have something important to say about reality, we are asking that they each be allowed the chance to bear fruit in the scientific community. Echoing the sentiments of James, Polkinghorne (2006) has recently argued that:

The great mistake of the grand, but in the end unsuccessful, project of modernity was to suppose that there is a single universal rationality that applies across the board. The ghost of this misapprehension still lingers on, particularly in forms of scientific reductionism that seek to cut down the rich variety of human experience into a truncated form that can then be forced to fit into the Procrustean bed of a crass kind of physicalism. The essence of rationality is to seek to conform our thinking modes to the actual nature of the objects of our thought. This means that we have to employ a variety of forms or rational expression to fulfill the task of gaining understanding, because the entities that we encounter are not all of one kind What we need is a temperate recognition that different forms of rational discourse are needed for different forms of encounter with reality, but the nature of these forms is controlled by the nature of the reality encountered. (pp. 50–52)

Granted, not every perspective will be as helpful as every other for getting at the truth of a particular issue, but we agree with James, Polkinghorne, and many others that the dogmatic insistence of *one* epistemological perspective or explanatory strategy as the best-and-only one at the expense of all others will not allow us to get very far with either our philosophy or our science.

Pluralism and Relativism

Discussions of pluralism are almost always punctuated by concerns about relativism. By our lights James avoids the epistemological and moral problems of relativism in two basic ways. First, unlike a committed skeptic or relativist, James does not foreclose on the possible validity of “universal” truth claims. As Stone (2006) has shown, James’s conception of truth is often misunderstood

and mischaracterized. While James certainly demands that truth accord with or be verified by experience, he never suggests that truth is only a matter of the verification of experience. Likewise, though James rejects the notion that truth corresponds to some hidden or ideal reality, he neither denies the notion of reality altogether, nor claims that truth has no objective or substantive meaning. On the contrary, he maintains that, while reality is not the sort of thing that can be known objectively or independently of experience, we nonetheless live in a reality that guides us "straight up into it or into its surroundings" (James, 1907, p. 212). This reality, Stone (2006) notes, "inspires our ideas and beliefs" and "because we are entrenched in 'actual' reality, we may assume that those ideas that prove *post facto* to work with experienced reality are ideas that guide us toward actual reality" (p. 557, italics in the original). And, as James (1909b) states in an essay on his pragmatist account of truth, "It is the *inherent relation to reality* of a belief that gives us that specific *truth*-satisfaction, compared with which all other satisfactions are the hollownest humbug" (p. 194).

Indeed, James's commitment to pluralism is such that he is perfectly willing for the contradictory truth claims of differing individuals or traditions to both be valid insofar as the relevant historical and experiential context for those claims are taken sufficiently into consideration. Thus, the learning of a new scientific truth does not automatically destroy a previous religious truth, and religious truth need not imply the necessary rejection of scientific understanding. The Jamesian caution is simply that we must be open to continual "revelations" of truth and to the ongoing challenges to our limited understandings that vibrant nature of human experience necessarily entails. Because we are not the monistic all-form, we must always be humbly ready to learn more, even if it seems to contradict what we knew before. This need not be taken to mean, however, that the truth of previous experience is of no value or that what was known before must have been entirely false, but rather that our *post facto* explanations of experience and the world are always open to refinement, revision, and further clarification. In this spirit, James (1909a) concluded his lectures on *A Pluralistic Universe*, quoting the French philosopher Maurice Blondel, "'We use what we are and have, to know; and what we know, to be and have still more.' Thus do philosophy and reality, theory and action, work in the same circle indefinitely" (p. 330).

The second (and perhaps more significant), though related, way in which James proposed to avoid the perils of relativism was by grounding his pluralism in the concrete reality of actual lived-experience. We are not, James maintained, justified in believing anything whatsoever we wish. The world is simply not so elastic as to permit us the unbridled freedom to believe whatever we might want to about it. Rather all of our claims to knowledge and truth must be grounded in those things which are somehow manifest in our experience. As James (1912) noted:

Nothing shall be admitted as fact . . . except what can be experienced at some definite time by some experient; and for every feature of fact ever so experienced, a definite place must be found somewhere in the final system of reality. In other words, everything real must be experienceable somewhere, and every kind of thing experienced must somewhere be real. (p. 160)

Whether found in the controlled conditions of the experimental laboratory, the varied settings of naturalistic observation, the sudden moment of spiritual impression, or the practiced paces of worshipful ritual, actual human experience must not only be the primary object of our psychological interest but also the standard by which we judge the adequacy and honesty of our theoretical and explanatory efforts. This is not to say, of course, that in all instances human experience must always be taken only at face value or that it inevitably trumps critical rational reflection — the problem of self-deception, for example, is a very real one that demands careful attention in any radically empirical psychology (for more on these issues, see, e.g., Warner, 1997; Yanchar, Gantt, and Clay, 2005).

The humility implicit in the Jamesian deference to lived-experience serves, we believe, as a powerful protection against the temptations of relativism. After all, in much the same way as its conceptual opposite, absolutism, and for much the same reasons, relativism is, in fact, a kind of monism. Relativism, while on the surface seeming to be pluralistic in its embrace of difference and specificity, nonetheless, devolves down to the monistic and, ironically, absolutistic claim that there is ultimately only one truth of the world — and, that is, that there is no genuine reality or truth to be found. “The truth of an idea,” James (1907) writes,

is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its *veri-fication*. Its validity is the process of its *valid-ation*.” (p. 201)

James offers a more radical conception of truth than either absolutism or relativism, and one which avoids the monistic pitfalls of both by grounding the essence of truth in the concrete event of truth revealed in actual human experience and relationships. Thus, Jamesian pluralism, rather than dictating at the outset what form the world must take, or what meaning psychological phenomena must have, allows for scientific inquiry to be led (paraphrasing Husserl) by the things themselves. Indeed, James (1907) held that his brand of pragmatism “gets her general notion of truth as something essentially bound up with the way in which one moment in our experience may lead us towards other moments which it will be worthwhile to have been led to” (pp. 204–205). In such a scheme, far from being ephemeral or nonsensical, truth is real and tangible.

Conclusion

In closing, then, and in the spirit of what is best in our western scientific tradition, we echo James's call for a suspension of absolutist decrees on the universe. We *cannot* say with any finality that the universe is only made up of one thing (e.g., matter) and that everything else is merely epiphenomenal. We must allow for the real possibility that there *are* real possibilities, genuine alternatives to our current explanations and forms of understanding. In our psychology we cannot say that religious experiences are only variations on a theme (i.e., delusions of some sort). Rather we must come to grips with the real possibility that a person's religious experiences might be valid and not just consider the real possibility that their beliefs might be nothing more than neurological states (or functions of the liver, to use the language of James's day). In a pluralistic universe the acceptance of one reality does not immediately or necessarily rule out the possibility of another. Indeed, James held, it does not even rule out the possibility of monism. Instead, it allows the practical consequences from divergent belief systems and truth claims the possibility to "grow up together" (see, e.g., James, 1909a, pp. 303–331).

It is clear that Jamesian psychology validates the experience of the individual. James argues that all individuals do not experience life the same way and therefore our scientific explanations should be open to these different ways and avoid ruling out any other way prior to any serious consideration or investigation simply because it seems incompatible with our own. Jamesian radical empiricism (and the pluralistic worldview upon which is rests) is far broader than the common variety empiricism that takes into account only those things which are available to the physical senses. It includes all experience without reducing either sensory or non-sensory experiences to the mechanics of physiology. James rightly recognized that such reductions were ultimately self-stultifying for any human endeavor, whether scientific or religious in nature.

In addition to arguing that religious worldviews and implicit theologies need to be made explicit, we are also arguing that the varieties of belief help inform the varieties of experience, and vice versa. As psychological scientists, we not only seek to draw upon worldviews from the variety of theistic and non-theistic traditions, but also firmly believe that such traditions will in various ways genuinely inform our understandings of actual human experiences as well as help to move forward the scientific endeavor of psychology. Many have suggested that current psychological research parcels out religion as a variable and in doing so transforms it into something unrecognizable by those who live it (see, e.g., Farrer, 1966; Gantt and Williams, 2008; Slife and Whoolery, 2006). James suggests that it may be better to study the varieties of experience in context, even if only to highlight the fact that our theories do not account for them entirely. Employing such a contextually sensitive, ontologically pluralistic, and

radically empirical approach in our psychological research and theorizing is itself a better reflection of reality; for, as James (1909a) himself noted: "Since when, in this mixed up world, was any good thing given us in purest outline and isolation?" (p. 315).

By recognizing the limitations of an all-too-often monistic science, and providing for a genuine pluralism (both religious and secular) to inform our psychology, we may find that we are able to do our science on a wonderfully deeper level and discover more truths than were previously allowed or imagined. In conclusion, we echo this plea of James (1909a): "Let empiricism once become associated with religion, as hitherto, through some strange misunderstanding, it has been associated with irreligion, and I believe that a new era of religion as well as of philosophy will be ready to begin" (p. 314). However, should such a plea be as yet too radical for some to accept, we would say, then, as James did in concluding his lectures on *A Pluralistic Universe*, that at the very least "it is high time for the basis of discussion in these questions to be broadened and thickened up" (p. 330). On the hundredth anniversary of these words, let us associate the full weight of rigorous scientific investigation in all its forms with religious thought and experience in all its forms and, thereby, begin a new era of psychology.

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