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WILLIAM JAMES

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10 The James/Royce dispute and the development of James's "solution"

In philosophy we have a . . . contrast expressed in the terms "empiricist" and "rationalist" . . . The world of concrete personal experiences to which the street belongs is multitudinous beyond imagination, tangled, muddy, painful and perplexed. The world to which your philosophy professor introduces you is simple, clean and noble. . . It is at this point that my own solution begins to appear. I offer the oddly-named thing pragmatism as a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demand.

In a 1900 letter to his colleague – and life-long philosophical interlocutor – Josiah Royce, James confesses: "[W]hen I write, 'tis with one eye on you, and one on the page. . . I lead a parasitic life upon you, for my highest flight of ambitious ideality is to become your conqueror, and go down into history as such . . . in one last death-grapple of an embrace" (*Sel. Letters*, 192). Indeed, it is arguably the case that much of what James has to say concerning a host of philosophical topics is written with an anxious eye on his ongoing public philosophical debate with Royce. This essay is concerned with one such topic.

The aim of this essay is threefold: (1) to argue for a historical claim: that James's conception of pragmatism is shaped in subtle, and not so subtle, ways by his continuing debate with Royce, and that it is through struggling with criticisms leveled by Royce against his earlier formulations of his doctrine that James arrives at his own idiosyncratic conception of pragmatism; (2) to argue for an interpretative claim: that, once viewed against the background of this debate, it becomes possible to make sense of a number of features of James's thought which have puzzled commentators – most notably, James's

late claim that what Royce (and now everyone) calls his "Pragmatic Theory of Truth" is not to be understood as a *theory*; and (3) to provide an overview of how James arrives at his most provocative philosophical claim – that genuine progress in philosophy can only be achieved through the acknowledgment and exploration of the role of temperament in consolidating philosophical conviction – and how that claim bears on James's mature conception of pragmatism.

1 ROYCE'S CHALLENGE

The first round of the debate between Royce and James consists of Royce's initial formulation of a sketch for an argument for his favored conclusion – namely, that the doctrine of pragmatism entails the doctrine of absolute idealism. This initial sketch is buried in Royce's lengthy "argument from error," which he develops in chapter 11 of *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*. Royce's way of putting the implication of his argument that concerns James is to say: pragmatism, insofar as it wishes to confine its account of truth to appeals to the experience of individual knowing subjects, will not be able to succeed in drawing a coherent distinction between truth and falsity. This then prepares the way for Royce's more general objection: pragmatism, insofar as it is unable to furnish a coherent account of truth, is unable to furnish a satisfactory account of what it is to have *objective* knowledge (it offers rather, at best, an account of what it is to have justified beliefs).

Royce claims that he can derive his entire metaphysical position from one indubitable fact, that error exists. The first step is to establish that that fact is indeed indubitable. The second step, the precise execution of which Royce struggles with throughout his career, has a Kantian flavor: to inquire into the necessary preconditions for the possibility of error. Royce argues that only given the possibility (which he takes to be excluded by Jamesian pragmatism) of a certain kind of standpoint ("an absolute standpoint") can the distinction between truth and error be "definitively" drawn. Royce, in order to answer his guiding question "how is the one indubitable fact (that error exists) possible?" says he had to go through "the very heart of skepticism itself" (Royce 1971, 47). The argument proceeds through the heart of skepticism because it provisionally undertakes to doubt everything. Yet even skepticism, insofar as it urges that we can

always be mistaken (i.e., be in error), seems to still suggest that error is possible. Can we get around this? Is there some way to deny even this claim, that is, to go beyond conventional skepticism and deny that error exists? Let us try, says Royce. Let's adopt a wholesale skepticism that refrains from making any objective claim, that only countenances what "seems true" – and not what is objectively true. Royce argues that such an extreme form of relativism – that attempts to rule out any appeal to what is "objectively true" – contradicts itself the moment it attempts to formulate itself. The skeptic recommends his view ("that there is only what 'seems true to me' ") to us as true, and thus, in so recommending his theory, presupposes that there is at least one nonrelativistic truth; but the existence of that truth suffices to refute his original thesis. Thus, in arguing that the content of his thesis is true, the relativist (or, as Royce calls him, "the skeptic") contradicts the content of his thesis. The statement "error exists" must therefore be either objectively (or, as Royce puts it, "absolutely") true or objectively ("absolutely") false.

After Royce concludes that "the doctrine of the total relativity of truth" (since it cannot be coherently stated) "has no real meaning," he goes on to point out that "an empiricist view of truth" – one that he clearly identifies with (at least Peirce's early exposition of) pragmatism, and one that he says he, Royce himself, espoused "until recently" – is no better off with respect to the problem of error. He summarizes his own earlier empiricist view as follows:

[T]he author used to say: "In fact future nature is not given to us, just as the past is not given to us. Sense-data and thought unite at every instant afresh to form a new judgment and a new postulate. Only in the present has any judgment evident validity. And our postulate of causal relation is just a way of looking at this world of conceived past and future *data*. Such postulates avoid being absurd efforts to regulate independent facts of sense, because, and only because, we have in experience no complete series of facts at all, only from moment to moment single facts, about which we make single judgments. All the rest we *must* postulate or else do without them." (Royce 1971, 47)

Royce then goes on to argue that this position is just as vulnerable to the self-refuting consequences of asking itself the question "Does error exist?" as any form of radical skepticism or relativism. For this form of empiricism wishes to assert the following thesis: "all but

the immediate content of the present moment's judgment is doubtful." But what is the status of that judgment? It seems either that it itself is open to doubt (in which case it is not clear why we should accept it as true) or it is not open to doubt, in which case it seems to violate its own strictures. Furthermore, if it is true, it is unable to make sense of the grounds of its truth. It is unable to provide a coherent account of the standpoint from which it judges "everything beyond the present to be doubtful": "for in asserting such a judgment it is making a judgment concerning something 'beyond the present' " (Royce 1971, 47). The notion of error it employs (when speaking of "judgments beyond the present" "being in error") presupposes a standpoint which the view requires be an unattainable one. Hence the notion of error it employs, Royce argues, is itself an unintelligible one.

Throughout his subsequent work, Royce further hones his argument for the claim that James's theory of truth comes down to a "what-is-true-for-me" view. Insofar as pragmatism restricts itself to what is verifiable in a single person's experience, Royce argues it is essentially solipsistic; for, strictly speaking, all that is immediately verifiable, in the relevant sense, are statements concerning immediate private experiences. In mounting (what I will call) his "argument from solipsism," Royce seizes on James's incessant talk of accepting truths "on credit":

Truth lives, in fact, for the most part on a credit system. Our thoughts and beliefs "pass," so long as nothing challenges them, just as bank-notes pass so long as nobody refuses them. But this all points to direct face-to-face verifications somewhere, without which the fabric of truth collapses like a financial system with no cash-basis whatsoever. You accept my verification of one thing, I yours of another. We trade on each other's truth. But the beliefs verified concretely by *somebody* are the posts of the whole superstructure. (P, 100)

Royce seizes on this metaphor of taking the experience of others "on credit" because he sees in it James's attempt to legitimate (from within the narrowly empiricist confines of his early pragmatism) talk about possible experiences which are not part of the pool of one's actual experiences (where the latter are the only experiences that can be put to the test of immediate direct verification). But "a note or other evidence of value is good if it *can* be turned into cash at

some agreed upon time, or under specified conditions" (Royce 1969, 697). Royce argues that it is just this condition that James's account of credit values fails to satisfy and hence that the resulting economy must end in bankruptcy.¹

Royce goes on to mount an additional argument against the pragmatist theory of truth which might be called "the argument from the meaning of 'truth'." James was fond of urging that one of the great virtues of pragmatism – as against absolute idealism (which "offends the common man's sense of reality") – is that it respects the common man's understanding of things. Royce tries to turn this "appeal to the common man" against James. Royce, at a number of junctures, simply calls upon his reader to consult his own intuitions about what he means by the word "truth":

May we venture to ask ourselves, then: Is this pragmatism a fair expression of what we mean by truth? (Royce 1969, 984)²

Royce is willing to concede that the pragmatist does some justice to our intuitions about these matters when he speaks, for example, of true ideas as being those ideas that are successful. Yet Royce is not willing to settle for such a characterization. For everything hinges here on what our views are concerning what makes a successful idea "successful":

And yet, and yet all this still leaves open one great question. When we seek truth, we indeed seek successful ideas. But what, in Heaven's name, constitutes success? (Royce 1969, 985)

In particular, Royce has his doubts about any characterization of the meaning of the word "truth" that attempts to explicate the nature of this "success" in terms of considerations of expediency:

Of course, we mortals seek for whatever verification of our truths we can get in the form of present success. But can you express our human definition of truth in terms of any collection of our human experiences of personal expediency? (Royce 1969, 986)

Royce's challenge here is that when James equates the notion of truth with that of expediency he is doing obvious violence to our intuitions concerning the proper usage of the word "true." When we say something is "true," Royce insists, we mean something quite different than "expedient." To reinforce this point, Royce asks us to consider the swearing in of a witness in a courtroom. We ask the witness "to

swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Royce asks us to focus on this latter phrase: "nothing but the truth." What do we *mean* by the word "truth" here? What are we asking the witness to exclude from his testimony? Among other things, we are asking him to put aside all considerations of utility or expediency – particularly those of *personal* expediency. Insofar as the witness fails to live up to our expectations in this regard, we have grounds for concluding that either (1) he does not understand the word "truth," or (2) he understands the content of his oath and has failed to abide by it. The pragmatist, Royce contends, cannot do justice to what the word "truth" means in such a context. For his account of truth blurs the very distinction we call upon the witness in the courtroom to keep clearly fixed in his mind's eye.³ Royce concludes that the pragmatist cannot make sense of the ordinary meaning of the word "truth" which we all spontaneously understand and rely upon in such a context (cf. Royce 1969, 988). The distinction (between truth and expediency) that the pragmatist fails to draw here is one that is embodied in our ordinary usage and forms an integral part of our common sense.⁴ So, insofar as pragmatism is unable to accommodate this "perfectly universal" and "commonplace" distinction, it fails to meet its own criterion (of not doing "unnecessary violence to common sense") for what would count as an adequate account of truth.

The conclusion that Royce is after with each of these arguments – one which he aims to put to his own dialectical purposes – is that pragmatism's own criterion of truth is too narrow to be able to accommodate the claim that the pragmatist's theory of truth is itself true:

The proposition "These are the actual, and, for the purposes of a given test, the logically relevant workings of the idea that is to be tested," must itself be true, if the empirical comparison of any one of these workings with the facts of experience is to be of any worth as a test. (Royce 1951, 117)

Consider the proposition (from James) cited in quotation marks in the above passage. This proposition is put forward as true; yet it is not able to accommodate the possibility of an account of its own truth. For such a proposition to be true on its own account its truth must be experientially verifiable, and yet its claims outstrip the possibility of such verification:

The truth of the proposition just put in quotation marks is a truth of a type that no one man, at any instant, ever personally and empirically tests. In every special case it may be, and in general must be, regarded as doubtful. Yet, unless some such propositions are true, Pragmatism becomes a meaningless doctrine; while, if any such propositions are true, there is a sort of truth of which Pragmatism gives no account. (Royce 1951, 117–18)

Either “the whole pragmatist account of truth becomes simply meaningless” or pragmatism stands in need of supplementation:

In brief, Pragmatism presupposes a certain unity in the meaning and coherence of experience taken as a whole – a unity which can never at any one moment be tested by any human being. Unless the propositions which assert the existence and describe the nature of this presupposed unity are themselves true, Pragmatism has no meaning. But if they are true, Pragmatism presupposes a sort of truth whereof it gives no adequate account. To say this is not to say that Pragmatism gives a wholly false view of the nature of truth, but is only to insist upon its inadequacy. It needs to be supplemented. (Royce 1951, 118)

Without supplementation there is no way that the pragmatist can assert that his own theory of truth is truth; in the absence of such supplementation, it is unclear that we have been offered something that can be dignified with the title “a theory of truth.” This specifies the agenda for James’s pragmatism: to find a method of stating a pragmatist theory of truth that avoids the problem that it refutes itself the moment the theory’s own criterion of truth is applied to the theory itself.

Having established the indubitable fact that error exists, Royce proceeds (in not altogether convincing fashion) to bootstrap the rest of his doctrine out of the slender foundation provided by that single anchor of support. He does this by engaging in a Kantian transcendental inquiry into the conditions necessarily presupposed by the fact that “error is plainly possible in some way.” Royce offers a series of arguments to show that all commonsense views of what those conditions could be are clearly inadequate and need to be supplemented by presuppositions that transcend (but do not contradict) anything suggested to us by common sense. Royce then tries to force the following dilemma on James: either (1) you restrict yourself to an analysis of error that remains immanent in human experience and thereby commit yourself to a doctrine which ultimately refutes itself; or (2) you

permit your analysis of how we arrive at judgments of error to be supplemented with an account of "the logical conditions" of error – where the only tenable account, Royce claims, will be one which permits itself an appeal to a "higher inclusive thought" – one which is capable of relating the isolated judgment to all other actual and possible judgments concerning the intended object of judgment. It is when he turns to unpacking this notion of a "higher inclusive thought" that Royce pulls his absolute idealist rabbit – that is, the "absolute knower" – out of what at first looks to be a perfectly ordinary hat. For Royce goes on to argue that the intended object of our every thought is "embraced" in a *single* overarching "infinite thought" – and such an "infinite thought" presupposes the existence of an Absolute Being who thinks it. If the pragmatist wishes to render the distinction between truth and falsity (which he presupposes in his theory of truth) intelligible, he must ultimately concede the existence of such an absolute knower as a foundation which underlies the possibility of all judgment – this is Royce's challenge to James.

II JAMES'S INITIAL ATTEMPTS AT A REPLY

James's first reaction to Royce's argument is simply to be dumbfounded by it. He writes to Carl Stumpf in 1887 of Royce's new book:

The second half is a new argument for monistic idealism, an argument based on the possibility of truth and error in knowledge, subtle in itself, and rather lengthily expounded, but seeming to me to be one of the few big original suggestions of recent philosophical writing. I have vainly tried to escape from it. I still suspect it of inconclusiveness, but I frankly confess that I am *unable* to overthrow it. . . . I can assure you that, if you come to close quarters with it, you will say its author belongs to the genuine philosophic breed. (*Letters*, 1:265)

James goes back and forth for six more years, finally expressing in a letter to D. S. Miller (partly inspired by some of the latter's objections to Royce's view) the resolve to make up his mind on the issue one way or the other:

. . . with the help of God I will go at it again this semester, when I settle down to my final bout with Royce's theory, which must result in my either *actively* becoming a propagator thereof, or actively its enemy or destroyer. It

is high time that this more decisive attitude was generated in me, and it ought to take place this winter. [*Letters*, 2:18]

James makes a start on this task by contesting Royce's claim that the only way to avoid solipsism is to postulate an "absolute knower." Now, as we saw, Royce (in his "argument from solipsism") presses the following dilemma onto James:

- (a) the only way the experiences of others (that temporarily are accepted on credit) are ultimately "cashed in" is through immediate direct verification in one's own experience;
- (b) these experiences accepted on credit are verified in some other way (than through direct experience) that does not require ascertaining their directly verifiable cash-value.

If James chooses option (a), Royce will show that his theory reduces to an essentially solipsistic theory that is self-refuting in precisely the way that the " 'true' means 'what seems true to me' " theory is. If James attempts to opt for (b), then Royce will ask: how do you plan to cash in all these credit-values and make good your promissory note? What is this "other way" by means of which we can make out the truth of experiences that are not directly verifiable?

Now the above criticism is no doubt invited by some of James's prose; but, partly in response to these objections, James makes it clear that he wishes to conceive of pragmatic verification in both holistic and intersubjective terms.⁵ His frequent appeals to experience are now to be interpreted as appeals to the totality of human experience, including both (diachronic) appeals to the past and future of mankind as well as (synchronic) appeals to the collectivity of human experience. James goes out of his way in a number of places to make it explicit that he fully endorses Royce's claim that any form of radical epistemological individualism cannot supply a coherent foundation for a "theory of the empirical success of ideas." Any appeal, so long as it restricts its scope to the confines of a solitary individual's experience, can never transform itself into an intelligible claim to truth. As James puts it in his discussion of "moral solitude" in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," a universe in which only one person exists is a universe in which truth does not exist:

In such a universe as that it would of course be absurd to raise the question of whether the solitary thinker's judgments of good and ill are true or

not. Truth supposes a standard outside of the thinker to which he must conform. (WB, 191)

The above passage is virtually a paraphrase of one of Royce's central contentions. The sentence summarized what James takes to be the correct moral to be drawn from Royce's "argument from error." Pragmatism, just as much as absolutism, requires "a wider knower" – but not too wide. The crucial question for James becomes: where, if not in the Absolute, does one locate the source of objectivity? – where does one situate the "standard outside of the thinker to which his thought must conform"? His answer to this question is further clarified in the next round of the debate.

James's philosophical ambitions, at this point in the debate, also become somewhat more modest. Against Royce's claim that only one coherent alternative is open to the philosopher, James's philosophical project becomes *to show that there is a coherent alternative to absolute idealism*. His project is no longer to show that this alternative conception is itself true. He takes Royce to have demonstrated that a consistent and forthright pragmatist must acknowledge that the resources needed to cash such a promissory note will forever be beyond his means. His project becomes simply to show that there is indeed a genuine alternative open to the philosopher – that pragmatism remains a "live" option. But, Royce counters: for a hypothesis to be a live option for us, we must at least be able to know what it would mean for it to be true. James is thus still left with the task of responding to Royce's "argument from the meaning of 'truth'."

James's strategy for avoiding Royce's "swearing-in" objection mirrors the rule-utilitarian's attempt to fend off the standard objection to act-utilitarianism (i.e., the objection that utilitarianism must be false since the theory licenses us to commit actions which are self-evidently morally abominable). The strategy (in both cases) is to modify the theory so that it only applies to the justification of practices (rather than individual actions). James claims that the ultimate grounds for the *practice* of honesty – on which our community rightly places a premium – can be fully accounted for in pragmatic terms without in any way licensing an individual engaged in an isolated instance of such a practice to invoke those pragmatic grounds in his own personal deliberations. All that the witness in

the witness-box should do (unless he has come across some remarkable ground for impugning our practice as a whole) is just what we all already want him to do – what our practice properly requires of him: “to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

If James’s formula (those beliefs are “true” which “guide us successfully through experience”) is to be understood in terms of what guides each of us *individually*, Royce’s argument from solipsism would have force here. For “successfully” would then simply refer to what is “expedient for me.” But, as we have seen, James affirms that truth presupposes a standpoint external to the *individual* judging subject. He wants to be able to say to Royce: we do not disagree about the nature of truth, we just disagree about the necessity of postulating the Absolute.⁶ The form of the challenge James faces at this point can be put as follows: to formulate an account of the relevant standard (with which a judgment must accord in order to have a claim to truth) so that it satisfies the following desiderata: (1) the standard must remain fully external to each individual thinker,⁷ and yet (2) somehow be a function of the collective experiences of the aggregate of individual thinkers. So we find James saying things like this: true beliefs are those which most benefit mankind over the long run, which most conduce toward flourishing individual lives and a harmonious overall social life, and so on. James wants to agree with Royce that “truth supposes a standard outside the thinker,” and yet to eschew appeal to a Roycean absolute standpoint “beyond the experience of all possible thinkers,” by locating the source of truth in the collective experience of finite judging subjects. James now needs to be able to show how the standard of truth precipitates out of “the agreements of the community.” The trick lies in pitching this appeal to “the agreements of the community” at the right level.

In order to sidestep Royce-style objections, James knows he must repudiate all three of the following interpretations of his theory: (1) that his appeal to the community be understood along ethnocentric lines (as merely referring to the norms of *our* culture), (2) that the relevant concept of “agreement” be understood in a conventionalist manner (truth resting on underlying contingent stipulations), or (3) that truth be analyzed in purely communitarian terms (truth as *de facto* consensus) – each of these three alternatives is unmasked by Royce as a disguised version of relativism. James tries to avoid (1) by claiming that the relevant community is the largest possible one (the

collective experience of "mankind as a whole over the historical long run"), to avoid (2) by declaring that what is at issue is an "ultimate agreement" regulated by an "ideal standard" which is itself always "liable to correction" (*MT*, 142),⁸ and to avoid (3) by introducing the notion of convergence (à la Peirce⁹) toward an "ideal limit."¹⁰ But, despite all this finessing on James's part, Royce can counter that these modifications of his original doctrine still leave the pragmatist no better off with respect to the fundamental problem. For he still lacks the requisite means for genuinely distinguishing what is right from what merely seems right. The appeal to the "convergence of opinion" toward an "absolute consensus" (*MT*, 143) simply postpones the original problem by now identifying "right" (instead of with "what seems right to me") with "what will seem right to all of us in the future." But this will not do. Any adequate theory of truth, Royce maintains, must be able to accommodate the possibility that our entire community may be in agreement about a particular matter and yet be mistaken. Insofar as James's theory is unable to accommodate this possibility, it continues to deprive our judgments of objectivity: it merely substitutes one form of subjectivity for another – the subjectivity of the first-person plural for the subjectivity of the first-person singular. As with the previous example (of the witness), Royce can reply that there remains a question we ought to be able to ask but which the pragmatist tells us we cannot ask. We should be able to ask: "Even though such-and-such a judgment seems true to all of us, all the same, *is it true?*" We have no difficulty understanding the meaning of this question. As long as the pragmatist's theory implies that his perfectly intelligible question lacks intelligibility, it continues to do violence to our commonsense understanding of the meaning of the word "true."¹¹

III JAMES'S "SOLUTION": APPLYING THE WILL TO BELIEVE TO PRAGMATISM

In the final round of the debate, James makes a surprising move: he endorses both of Royce's conclusions. He, in effect, ends by agreeing: (a) that the pragmatist cannot speak of the truth of his own "theory of truth," and (b) that, strictly speaking, it is misleading therefore even to call what he offers a "theory." What James does instead is to reexamine the force of Royce's original rationalist refu-

tation of skepticism. In his article "The Pragmatist Account of Truth and its Misunderstandings," James reports Royce's objection, thinly disguising it as that of "a correspondent":

Fifth misunderstanding: What pragmatists say is inconsistent with their saying so. A correspondent puts this objection as follows: "When you say to your audience, 'pragmatism is the truth concerning truth,' the first truth is different from the second. About the first you and they are not to be at odds; you are not giving them liberty to take or leave it according as it works satisfactorily or not for their private uses. Yet the second truth, which ought to describe and include the first, affirms this liberty. Thus the intent of your utterance seems to contradict the content of it." (MT, 107)

This is a lovely summary of Royce's favorite objection against pragmatism. It is also a substitution instance of the argument he employs to demonstrate the untenability of skepticism. What James does at this point is reopen the question whether Royce's original argument really does kill off the possibility of maintaining a skeptical outlook:

General skepticism has always received this same classic refutation. "You have to dogmatize," the rationalists say to the skeptics, "whenever you express the skeptical position; so your lives keep contradicting your thesis." One would suppose that the importance of so hoary an argument to abate in the slightest degree the amount of general skepticism in the world might have led some rationalists themselves to doubt whether these instantaneous logical refutations are such fatal ways, after all, of killing off live mental attitudes. General skepticism is the live mental attitude of refusing to conclude. It is a permanent torpor of the will, renewing itself in detail towards each successive thesis that offers, and you can no more kill it off by logic than you can kill off obstinacy or practical joking. This is why it is so irritating. Your consistent skeptic never puts his skepticism into a formal proposition – he simply chooses it as a habit. He provokingly hangs back when he might so easily join us in saying yes, but he is not illogical or stupid – on the contrary, he often impresses us by his intellectual superiority. This is the *real* skepticism that rationalists have to meet, and their logic does not even touch it. (MT, 107–8)

James emphasizes here that in order for Royce's refutation of skepticism to go through, the skeptic has to assert and affirm a skeptical thesis. He has to formulate it into a proposition and proclaim it as a general truth. If he does so, Royce has him where he wants him. However, what Royce's argument cannot touch is "the live mental

attitude" of the skeptic. For this is a scrupulously inculcated habit rather than a proposition (let alone a theory).¹² Hence skepticism as an existentially embodied attitude toward life is not something that is susceptible to being eliminated via "instantaneous logical refutations." The Roycean critic is correct to conclude that the skeptic will never be able to propound his skepticism in the form of a coherent philosophical theory. However, the skeptic does not seek to formulate a philosophical theory, so he should not experience his inability to do so as a cause for concern.¹³ James is preparing the way here for the claim that mere logic is similarly unable to kill off the pragmatist's conviction. But a problem remains: The skeptic's "live mental attitude" is said to be immune from refutation only insofar as he refrains from formulating it as an assertible proposition. James, however, does formulate his pragmatic conception of truth, doesn't he? In order to take up this line of defense, James must repudiate his former ambition of formulating "a pragmatic *theory* of truth" – that is, something which must assume a propositional form and the integrity of which turns on its immunity to "instantaneous logical refutations." If he seeks to remain "irreproachably self-consistent," the pragmatist should restrict himself to proposing "a live mental attitude" that he recommends we adopt, cultivate, and embody in the context of our lives:

The pragmatist's idea of truth is . . . a challenge. He finds it ultra-satisfactory to accept it, and takes his own stand accordingly. But, being gregarious as they are, men seek to spread their beliefs, to awaken imitation, to infect others. Why should not you also find the same belief satisfactory? thinks the pragmatist, and forthwith endeavors to convert you. You and he will then believe similarly; you will hold up your subject-end of a truth, which will be a truth objective and irreversible if the reality holds up the object-end by being itself present simultaneously. What there is of self-contradiction in all this I confess I cannot discover. The pragmatist's conduct in his own case seems to me on the contrary admirably to illustrate his universal formula; and of all epistemologists, he is perhaps the only one who is irreproachably self-consistent. (*MT*, 108)

The "pragmatist's conduct in his own case" should be viewed as "irreproachably self-consistent," because he is not offering a theory but rather a "*conception* of truth" – a proposal concerning how we should lead our lives:

Pragmatists . . . themselves play the part of the absolute knower for the universe of discourse which serves them as material for epistemologizing. They warrant the reality there, and the subject's true knowledge, there, of it. But whether what they themselves say about the whole universe is objectively true, *i.e.*, whether the pragmatic theory of truth is true *really*, they cannot warrant – they can only believe it. To their hearers they can only *propose* it, as I propose it to my readers, as something to be verified *ambulando*, or by the way in which its consequences may confirm it. (MT, 108)¹⁴

James is prepared here both to concede the validity of Royce's claim that the so-called pragmatist theory of truth cannot put itself forward as true (whether what the pragmatists "themselves say about the whole universe is objectively true, *i.e.*, whether the pragmatist theory of truth is true *really*, they cannot warrant") and to declare himself undisturbed by it. He can only "propose" (James italicizes this word) his pragmatist credo to us as something we can "verify" as we go along in life.¹⁵

James is not offering any arguments which will logically compel us to assent to a particular thesis. He proposes pragmatism not as a theory (something which might be true or false), but as a guide for action (something which might or might not serve us well in "our conduct of the business of living"). But we might ask: So what if he proposes it? Why should we accept it? If James is unable to argue for the truth of his "conception," what rational court of appeal remains open to him?

In the opening lecture of the *Lectures on Pragmatism*, James seems to be urging pragmatism on us on the grounds that it will suit some of our temperaments better than any of the other available alternatives on the philosophical market. He offers us his famous twofold classification of tough-minded and tender-minded philosophies and then appears to suggest that some among his listeners (namely, those who temperamentally incline more toward one of the two extreme sorts of sensibility) will be correct in concluding the pragmatism is not for them. In other words, James seems perfectly willing to concede that some of his readers *should* adopt a philosophy drawn from one of the two enemy camps, if such a philosophy is "best suited" to their particular temperament. This concession to the enemy can seem difficult to square with a further suggestion that is also unmistakably present: namely, that an attraction to either of the standard philo-

sophical options, tough-minded and tender-minded alike, is indicative of a certain deformation and impoverishment of human personality. Under the pressure of our more extreme philosophical impulses, James suggests, we tend to cultivate "a certain blindness in ourselves," stunting our capacities for vision and response. (Where our blindspots lie depends upon which extreme we incline toward.) James freely admits that most *philosophers* belong to one of the two extreme persuasions, but he suggests that this has mostly to do with the way in which the pursuit of philosophy as a professional activity both attracts and produces "men of radical idiosyncrasy" (*P*, 11). He urges that we should not allow this preponderance in philosophy of "very positively marked men" (*P*, 11) to obscure for us the fact that "the healthy human understanding" of the ordinary man or woman – insofar as it remains uncorrupted by excessive exposure to (what he calls) "technical philosophy" – will tend quite properly to incline to a position that lies somewhere between the extremes.¹⁶

James declares that he is simply making explicit the (usually carefully concealed) fact that temperament plays a decisive role in clinching a philosopher's fundamental convictions:

The history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments. Undignified as such a treatment may seem to some of my colleagues, I shall have to take account of this clash and explain a good many of the divergences of philosophers by it. Of whatever temperament a professional philosopher is, he tries when philosophizing to sink the fact of his temperament. Temperament is no conventionally recognized reason, so he urges impersonal reasons only for his conclusions. Yet his temperament really gives him a stronger bias than any of his more strictly objective premises. It loads the evidence for him one way or the other, making for a more sentimental or a more hard-hearted view of the universe, just as this fact or that principle would. He *trusts* his temperament. Wanting a universe that suits it, he believes in any representation of the universe that does suit it. He feels men of opposite temper to be out of key with the world's character, and in his heart considers them incompetent and "not in it," in the philosophic business, even though they may far excel him in dialectical ability. (*P*, 11)

What should strike the reader as far more shocking than James's revelation that temperament often plays a pivotal role in the adoption of a philosophical position is his further suggestion that it is perfectly in order that it should play such a role.¹⁷ This suggestion

emerges in the context of his saying what it is that he suspects the majority of his audience (are temperamentally inclined to) want in a philosophy and why it is that they remain unsatisfied by the usual polarized alternatives:

What you want is a philosophy that will not only exercise your powers of intellectual abstraction, but that will make some positive connexion with this actual world of finite human lives. You want a system that will combine both things, the scientific loyalty to facts and willingness to take account of them, the spirit of adaptation and accommodation, in short, but also the old confidence in human values and the resulting spontaneity, whether of the religious or of the romantic type. And this is then your dilemma: you find the two parts of your *quaesitum* hopelessly separated. You find empiricism within humanism and irreligion; or else you find a rationalistic philosophy that indeed may call itself religious, but that keeps out of all definite touch with concrete facts and joys and sorrows. (*P*, 17)

James offers his own "proposal" to those members of his audience who are accurately portrayed in the above description on the grounds that it will furnish them with what, given the nature of their temperament, they cannot help but crave:

It is at this point that my own solution begins to appear. I offer the oddly-named thing pragmatism as a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demand. It can remain religious like rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts. (*P*, 23)

James speaks of a particular point in the discussion – namely, the point at which it emerges that alternative philosophies are unable to "satisfy" the "cravings" of his audience – as being the one at which his "own solution begins to appear." James's theory is superior to its competitors because it, and only it, can satisfy both kinds of fundamental demand.

What sort of "solution" is this? Isn't it the height of irrationalism to suggest that philosophical positions should be adopted on temperamental grounds? The reason James does not think so is, firstly, because he holds that temperamental grounds, under certain circumstances, constitute legitimate reasons; and, secondly, because he holds that there is a special class of cases in which they constitute the only legitimate reasons. The argument for this view finds its classic expression in the essay "The Will to Believe." James begins by laying down three conditions that must be fulfilled by a postulate

in order for the argument of the essay to apply to it: the postulate must involve an option that is (1) *forced*, (2) *living*, and (3) *momentous*. Later on in the essay, James adds a critical (and often overlooked) fourth condition: the option in question must be one which “cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds.”¹⁸ Having made it clear that he is only concerned with options that meet these four conditions, James advances his central contention:

Our passionate nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, “Do not decide, but leave the question open,” is itself a passionate decision – just like deciding yes or no – and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth. (WB, 11)

This argument is extended by James, in the final round of his debate with Royce, so as to apply not only to ethical and religious choices but also to the choice of whether one should adopt the pragmatist credo. In order for this extension to be legitimate, however, the pragmatist “proposal” must meet the four conditions on options which are “lawfully decided by our passionate nature.”

As to the first condition, a choice qualifies (at least according to the letter of James’s definition on WB, 3) as *forced*, if it involves what James calls “a complete logical disjunction.” That is, if it only allows for two mutually exhaustive alternatives. The choice to adopt the pragmatist “proposal” (like most choices) can easily be framed so as to satisfy this condition: either (a) one resolves the matter in favor of the option or (b) one fails to do so (and thus either by deliberation or by default chooses not to adopt the proposal). In this minimal sense, many options that have essentially no bearing on the practical conduct of our lives qualify as forced. The problem is that, on this definition, choices which anyone would be happy simply to ignore (rather than have to resolve through deliberation) count as forced. James, at subsequent points in his argument, clearly takes himself to be working with a far more restricted notion of what it is for an option to be forced than this. In this more restricted sense, an option counts as forced only if it is one which is in some sense unignorable – one which is forced on us – so that one does not feel able simply to shrug off the question of what to do. (This is, I think, the best way of understanding what James means when he

says there is no genuine possibility of not choosing in such cases.) It is therefore important (for the applicability of this condition of the argument from "The Will to Believe" to the pragmatist proposal) that James thinks philosophical questions are experienced by most people as inescapable. The urge to ask philosophical questions and to yearn for answers to them constitutes fundamental aspects of what it is to be human: "philosophy is as indestructible a human function as art is" (*MEN*, 3). Philosophical questions, as often as not, are ones we do not feel able to ignore. We can, of course, leave them unresolved – and often do – but they continue to haunt us.

The choice (as to whether one should become a pragmatist or not) also qualifies as a *momentous* one. This both for an indirect and a direct reason. It is, James argues (particularly in the final lecture of *Lectures on Pragmatism*) indirectly momentous, since the decision to adopt a philosophy can, in turn, indirectly affect (either by underwriting or undermining) important and deeply held (ethical or religious) beliefs concerning how one should live. This already suffices to qualify the choice as a momentous one; but to break off the argument (concerning the applicability of the second condition) at this point would be to understate James's understanding of how philosophy matters.¹⁹ For not only does James think that it is a necessary feature of a flourishing human life that one be exercised by philosophical questions, he holds that even the possibility of a (rational adult) person's experiencing her life as meaningful – and hence as worth living – ultimately rests to some degree upon an underlying philosophical attitude which (either consciously or unconsciously) informs that life. Hence the *Lectures on Pragmatism* begin:

I know that you, ladies and gentlemen, have a philosophy, each and all of you, and that the most interesting and important thing about you is the way in which it determines the perspective in your several worlds. . . . [T]he philosophy which is so important in each of us is not a technical matter; it is our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means. (*P*, 9)

That the choice in question, thirdly, involves a *living* option for most of his readers, James adduces from their evident dissatisfaction with traditional philosophical alternatives and their restless desire to find a philosophy which is genuinely satisfying. (This is, of course, quite consistent with James's thinking that pragmatism may

not be a living option for some members of his audience.) The clinching irony comes with the question of the applicability of the fourth condition. For it turns out to have been the great service of Royce to have shown that the pragmatist credo also meets this condition (i.e., that the option of adopting it cannot be decided on intellectual grounds). James therefore finds a way to enlist Royce's carefully tailored argument against pragmatism to his own purpose, now claiming to find a virtue in the very feature of Royce's argument that he had previously most feared (namely, the thesis that any attempt at an intellectual justification of pragmatism can be shown to be self-contradictory).²⁰

If the option of adopting the pragmatist "proposal" satisfies all four conditions, the argument from "The Will to Believe" may be extended to it. James is then free to conclude that "our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide" a philosophical question of this sort for us. If we are confronted with an option that is both living and momentous, it would be ludicrous for us *not* to attempt to resolve it in one way or other. If it is a forced option, then we are not genuinely free to leave it unresolved. The only alternatives left open to us are to attempt to resolve it self-consciously and reflectively or unreflectively and by default. Finally, if (as James comes to believe is the case with pragmatism) the option cannot be decided on intellectual grounds, then we are forced to decide it on passional grounds. We should be careful, however, about the sense in which we are "forced" here. It is not that we are now obliged to make a resolute philosophical choice.²¹ It is, rather, that whatever choice (or nonchoice) we make in this area is one whose justification rests on passional grounds. ("To say, under such circumstances, 'Do not decide, but leave the question open,' is itself a passional decision.")

But what does James mean when he writes, in his response to Royce, "I propose pragmatism to my readers, as something to be verified *ambulando*"? In "The Will to Believe" (and in "The Sentiment of Rationality"), James goes on to offer a second argument, building on the first. He argues that there is a further narrowly circumscribed class of beliefs that have the peculiar characteristic that, by virtue of one's having adopted them, they become true – not in the banal sense that one now discovers that they happen to be true – but in the sense that, in the course of allowing the conduct of one's life to be informed by them, one actually brings into being (or at least con-

tributes to bringing into being) the very conditions which make them true. James's way of putting this (in "The Sentiment of Rationality") is to say: "There are then cases when faith (in a belief) creates its own verification" (WB, 97). To say that the justification for pragmatism can only emerge for a person *ambulando* means that it can only emerge in the course of living a life informed by the pragmatist credo. James therefore, in his reply to Royce, extends this second argument (also originally tailored so as only to apply to the justification of moral and religious beliefs) to philosophical conceptions as well. There may be no "abstract argumentation" which would allow one to demonstrate that pragmatism is a true theory, but one may (through one's adoption of it) nonetheless be able to bring into being the conditions under which one will be justified *ex post facto* in one's choice. Pragmatism's claim to our allegiance turns on its being able to "earn its way" in "the theatre of life" – its fruitfulness can only show itself within a human life and cannot otherwise be demonstrated. A pragmatist therefore is – not just someone who affirms a particular thesis after a chain of argument has convinced him of its truth but rather – a kind of person one *becomes* through a particular way of life.

The procedure by means of which one verifies such philosophical proposals is not only a messy a posteriori business, it is also one which is bound to exhibit in its results a certain degree of agent-relativity. This is an ineliminable consequence of the structure of James's arguments. His first argument decrees that you should adopt a philosophy only if that philosophy arouses a "sympathetic response" in your "passional nature"; it may not. His second argument asks you to look for verification *ambulando*; but, in order for "faith to create its own verification," you first have to be both willing and able to achieve the relevant sort of faith. Whether you are so willing and able will depend in large part on who you are and what sorts of choices are live options for you. So it is starting to look as if James owes us an answer to the question: "Are you only recommending pragmatism to *some* of your readers – namely, those who are most like you?" Some admirers of James no doubt would be pleased to have him answer this question in the affirmative and to let the matter rest at that. Let us reformulate the question so as to bring closer to the surface the difficulty which such a reading of James would pose. How are we to square (1) James's saying that we should adopt pragmatism *only* if it finds a

"sympathetic response" in our "passional nature" (thus apparently recommending it only to some of his readers), with (2) his recommending it to *each and every one of us* evidently on the grounds that it is inherently superior to its competitors (in that, for example, it can satisfy two fundamental "kinds of demand" – neither of which should remain unsatisfied – whereas other philosophies can satisfy at most only one)? James needs to be able to reconcile the following two claims: (1) that the criteria upon which each of us should base our choice of a philosophy are, in an important sense, "personal," and so a sound application of those criteria may lead a reader properly to reject pragmatism; and (2) that James himself is nonetheless fully justified in commending pragmatism to that same reader.

James solves this problem by following the spirit, if not the letter, of Royce's most fervent recommendation to him. He supplements pragmatism with grounds only available from a further vantage point – one from which he can, without self-contradiction, commend pragmatism to all of his readers equally without qualification. But the further perspective from which he now asks us to consider the issue is not that of the Absolute, but rather one supplied by his heroes Emerson and Whitman: the vantage point of each person's "unattained but attainable self" (Emerson 1983, 239). Still determined to spurn Royce's Absolute Mind, James can only address his appeal to the sensibilities of finite thinkers. But he is able to distinguish two sorts of appeal: (1) an appeal to each person's actual present self and (2) an appeal to each person's ideal future self. The argument from "The Will to Believe" (in addressing a particular proposal to each of us, as we are presently constituted) must restrict itself to an appeal of the first sort; but James, when he speaks in his own voice, can without inconsistency – and often does – address an appeal of the second sort to his readers (rebuking them for being constituted as they presently are). There is no inconsistency in maintaining (1) that a person's choice of a philosophy should be a function of what is "best suited" to her present temperament; but (2) that human temperament, however apparently inertial, is subject to both criticism and change, and that there is therefore a further vantage point from which our choice of a philosophy is liable to censure, depending upon how well it accords with our latent possibilities for attaining our (Whitmanesque/Emersonian) "higher self."²²

It is our higher self James must be understood as addressing (if he is to avoid inconsistency) when, for example, he rebukes us for failing to attend to the task of shaping and educating our temperaments. Philosophers, of course, come in for special censure in this regard; for they, above all, try to sink the fact of their temperaments. "There arises thus a certain insincerity in our philosophic discussions: the potentest of our premises is never mentioned" (*P*, 11). By obscuring the role played by individual sensibility in the attainment of philosophical conviction – placing it beyond the reach of criticism – philosophers, James suggests, tend to make themselves the victims of their own temperaments. The implication James draws from his claim that "temperaments with their cravings and refusals" are what "determine men in their philosophies" (*P*, 24) is not the time-honored one (i.e., that the philosopher should learn to transcend the influence of his temperament, permitting himself to be swayed only by "conventionally recognized reason"). James concludes, on the contrary, that what the philosopher needs to learn to do is to take *responsibility* for his temperament. Taking responsibility here requires openly acknowledging the role that temperament plays in consolidating one's philosophical convictions (hence the importance of cultivating a sensitivity as to when in philosophizing one should and should not be speaking in the first-person singular). It also requires subjecting to criticism those aspects of one's temperament which blind one to when and why others recoil, as from "a monstrous abridgment of life" (*WB*, 69), from the very philosophy which so attracts one (hence the importance of identifying the sources of one's feelings of philosophical temptation and compulsion). For most philosophies, James says – like all abridgments – are "got by the absolute loss and casting out of real matter" (*WB*, 69). Pragmatism seeks to redress this hitherto endemic feature of philosophy. It does so by taking as its point of departure the principle that no philosophy is acceptable which – in compensation for its other (metaphysical, logical, or explanatory) virtues – asks us to settle for such monstrous abridgments. "The entire man, who feels all needs by turns, will take nothing as an equivalent for life but the fullness of living itself" (*WB*, 69). James's unqualified recommendation of his pragmatist "proposal" is based on such an appeal to the "entire" person in each of us.

NOTES

This essay is indebted to Stanley Cavell's writings on perfectionism; to conversations about James with Steven Affeldt, Thomas Carlson, Richard Gale, and Hilary Putnam; and to comments on a previous draft by Cora Diamond, Richard Gale, and Ruth Anna Putnam.

- 1 Here is how Royce summarized the way in which he takes James's financial metaphors to spell bankruptcy:

If we must, then, conceive recent pragmatism under the figure of a business enterprise, – a metaphor which my colleague's phraseology so insistently invites, – I am constrained therefore to sum up its position thus: First, with a winning clearness, and with a most honorable frankness it confesses bankruptcy, so far as the actually needed cash payments of significant truth are concerned. Secondly, it nevertheless declines to go into the hands of any real receiver, for it is not fond of anything that appears too absolute. And thirdly, it proposes simply and openly to go on doing business under the old style and title of the truth. "After all," it says, "are we not, every one of us, fond of credit values?" (Royce 1908, 346–7)

- 2 Royce repeatedly admonishes his fellow philosophers for their "thoughtless trust in abstract words" and directs them to attend to those

matters at once familiar . . . as well as too much neglected in philosophy. When we use words . . . we easily deceive ourselves by the merely abstract meanings which we associate with each of the terms taken apart from the other. We forget the experiences from which the words have been abstracted. To these experiences we must return whenever we want really to comprehend the words. (Royce, 1915, 15–16)

- 3 Royce outlines his example as follows:

Well, as to our concept of truth, let us consider a test case by way of helping ourselves to answer this question. Let us suppose that a witness appears, upon some witness stand, and objects to taking the ordinary oath, because he has conscientious scruples, due to the fact that he is a recent pragmatist, who has a fine new definition of truth, in terms of which alone he can be sworn. Let us suppose him, hereupon to be granted entire liberty to express his oath in his own way. Let him accordingly say, using, with technical scrupulosity, my colleague's definition of truth: "I promise to tell whatever is expedient and nothing but what is expedient, so help me future experience." I ask you: Do you think that this witness has expressed, with adequacy, that view of the nature of truth that you really wish a witness to have in mind? (Royce 1969, 987)

- 4 Here's Royce on how pragmatism offends common sense:

But I, in answer, insist that common sense well feels this belief to be indeed from moment to moment expedient, and yet clearly distinguishes between that expedience and the truth which common sense all

the while attributes to the belief. The distinction is precisely the one which my fancied illustration of the pragmatist on the witness stand has suggested. It is a perfectly universal distinction and a commonplace one. Tell me, "This opinion is true," and whatever you are talking about I may agree or disagree or doubt; yet in any case you have stated a momentous issue. But tell me, "I just now find this belief expedient, it feels to me congruous" and you have explicitly given me just a scrap of your personal biography, and have told me no other truth whatever than a truth about the present state of your feelings. (Royce 1969, 989–90)

5 See, for example, *P*, 35–6, 44, 83.

6 Thus James denies Royce's frequent claim – as found, for example, in the following remarks in Royce's preface to *The Philosophy of Loyalty* – that he and Royce disagree about the nature of truth:

I have had to engage in a certain polemic regarding the problem of truth, – a polemic directed against certain opinions recently set forth by one of the dearest of my friends, . . . my teacher for a while in my youth; my honored colleague for many years, – Professor William James. . . . But if he and I do not see truth in the same light at present, we still do well, I think, as friends, each to speak his mind. (Royce 1908, x–xi; this preface is not reprinted in Royce 1969)

In reaction to the above remarks, in a 1908 letter to Royce, James claims he and Royce agree on the important thing (the nature of truth); it is merely – James mischievously says – a trifle concerning which they disagree:

Dear Royce, –

. . . I am sorry you say we don't see truth in the same light, for the only thing we see differently is the Absolute, and surely such a trifle as that is not a thing for two gentlemen to be parted by. (Perry 1935, 2:822)

7 Royce puts the challenge as follows:

For the question simply recurs: In what sense are these propositions about my own possible experience true when I do not test their truth, – yes, true although I, personally, *cannot* test their truth? These credits, irredeemable in terms of the cash of my experience, – wherein consists their true credit value? Here one apparently stands at the parting of the ways. One can answer this question by saying: "The truth of these assertions (or their falsity, if they are false) belongs to them whether I credit them or no, whether I verify them or not. Their truth or their falsity is their own character, and is independent of my credit and my verification." But to say this appears to be, after all, just the intellectualism which so many of our modern pragmatists condemn. (Royce 1969, 698)

8 This is, of course, just what Royce insists he must say. The question they continue to disagree over is whether James can support his claim that the standard in question is one which is genuinely liable to *correc-*

tion (rather than merely open to revision in accordance with the changing whim of the community).

- 9 But minus the Peircean claim that we are *fated* to so converge.
- 10 "Truth absolute, [the pragmatist] says, means an ideal set of formulations towards which all opinions may in the long run be expected to converge" (*MT*, 143).
- 11 Dewey, who continues to try to refine James's theory (by identifying truth with warranted assertibility under ideal epistemic conditions), eventually (in his *Logic*) accedes to this criticism of Royce's and simply bites the bullet, declaring that he is no longer out to tell us what we mean by "true" but is rather simply scrapping the commonsense notion and offering a revisionist account of truth. Insofar as James's account often resembles Dewey's, some commentators have felt entitled to conclude that James also intends to be in the business of offering a revisionist account of truth. But the preponderance of the textual evidence speaks against the claim that James proposes his theory in this spirit. For he keeps saying to his reader: my account (unlike Royce's) accords best with your own natural understanding – the understanding of the common man; and he keeps saying to Royce: we don't disagree about the nature of truth, we just disagree about the necessity of postulating the Absolute.
- 12 I am going to pass over the question as to whether this distinction (between asserting something as a general truth and holding it as a live mental attitude) can do the work James wants it to do. (I am inclined to think it cannot.) I am simply interested here in how James, in availing himself of this distinction, believes he has found a way simultaneously (1) to maintain that pragmatism is not a "theory" and (2) to recommend pragmatism to his readers as a "philosophy."
- 13 One could read James here as saying to Royce: your arguments may short-circuit new-fangled modern (Cartesian) skeptical theory, but not old-style ancient (Pyrrhonic) skeptical praxis.
- 14 It is quite clear from the context that James is here responding to Royce.
- 15 If one is to make any sense of this at all, the meanings of both the words "proposal" and "verify" must both be understood in light of the claim that what is at issue here is the adoption – not of a theory, but rather – of a live mental attitude.
- 16 In a similar spirit, James writes elsewhere: "No philosophy will be deemed permanently rational by all men which (in addition to meeting logical demands) does not to some degree . . . make a direct appeal to *all* those powers of our nature which we hold in highest esteem" (*WB*, 110; emphasis added).
- 17 This suggestion invites the charge that James conflates the question of

the psychological causes of our beliefs with the question of the normative grounds for their justification. It is thus worth emphasizing that James himself elsewhere (for example, in the first chapter of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*) attaches great importance to distinguishing a person's "justifiable reasons" for holding a belief from "the causal antecedents" that may have led to the belief.

- 18 James would be the first to agree that it would be the height of irrationalism to apply the argument of the essay to most questions (insofar as they do not meet these four conditions). In particular, scientific questions do not qualify since they do not satisfy the fourth condition; in such cases James holds (contrary to what most commentators maintain) that one should wait patiently (even if the matter happens also to be *living, forced, and momentous*) for it to be decided on "objective intellectual grounds."
- 19 "Hast any philosophy in thee, Shepherd?" – this question of Touchstone's is the one with which men should always meet one another. A man with *no* philosophy in him is the most inauspicious and unprofitable of all possible social mates (*SPP*, 11).
- 20 Royce would surely deny that his argument delivers what it is here advertised as delivering: namely, the requisite materials for satisfying the fourth condition. From Royce's point of view, the correct conclusion to draw is that James equivocates in his use of the phrase "X cannot be decided on intellectual ground," failing to distinguish two very different sorts of cases: (1) the sort of case in which one is able to understand the meaning of a question, and to understand what it would be to decide it on intellectual grounds alone, and then, in the light of this understanding, rejects the possibility of its being so decidable; and (2) the sort of case in which the very attempt to raise the possibility of deciding the question on intellectual grounds itself causes us to lose our handle on the intelligibility of our original question.
- 21 The argument is insufficiently powerful to yield such a conclusion, especially given the role that an appeal to temperament plays in the argument. For whether individuals incline toward resoluteness is itself something which varies with temperament. One can always conclude: "None of the available options satisfy me." Indeed, by James's lights, very few of us will ever succeed in being philosophically resolute. Nothing in "The Will to Believe" argument, taken in isolation, equips James to criticize such irresoluteness. Nevertheless, it is clear that [elsewhere in his writing] he seeks a vantage point from which he can criticize us for dithering philosophically (and hence, in his view, existentially). I suggest in the closing pages of this essay that the vantage point presupposed by this dimension

of James's thought cannot be comprehended apart from an examination of (what one might call) his Emersonianism.

- 22 The perfectionist moment in Emerson and Whitman to which James resonates is also what most attracts him to the philosophy of John Stuart Mill. James's claim that pragmatism is best suited to the temperament of our higher self is, at bottom, a variation on Mill's defense of his own doctrine (which also promises not to leave our true nature "stunted and starved" as other philosophies do) by means of the claim that we only assess the relative merits of the higher pleasures once we have experienced them. The Millian way of formulating James's defense of pragmatism would be to say that once we properly experience the higher satisfactions pragmatism affords we will have a rational basis (not otherwise available) for rejecting our former self's one-sided temperamental affinity for a philosophy that can only satisfy one of our (higher self's) two fundamental "kinds of demand." This helps explain why the book – in which James so frequently quotes Whitman and in which his "own solution" (i.e., that "oddly-named thing pragmatism") is put forward "as a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demand" (*P*, 23) – might be dedicated to Mill.