William James:

On the Moral Life and Social Reform

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Contents

Abstract:

This thesis is on the ethical philosophy of William James. The main point being argued is that scholarship into James' ethical philosophy would greatly benefit if more consideration was afforded to his works on Psychology, as well as his notes, lecture manuscripts, and practical papers on the problems he saw in society. To make its point, this thesis examines the criticisms of three different critics of James and demonstrates how each of these critics made mistakes that easily could have been avoided had these other papers been factored into each critic's respective interpretation of James' work. In dealing with these critics, this thesis also offers an interpretation of James that is informed by these other works. Lastly, this interpretation of James—judged on its own ability to provide the reader with guidance for how to live an ethical life—can also be seen as its own form of evidence to consider when determining whether it is valuable to heed these other papers when studying the ethical works of James.

Introduction:

The body of present-day scholarship into the thoughts of William James is riddled with a recurring problem that is stifling the possibility of good Jamesian scholarship; namely, the view that the tradition of American Pragmatism is a unified enterprise. I mean by this that many commentators on James mistakenly view American Pragmatism as a unified project that is working towards some overarching goal. Consider, for instance, the following passage penned by Cornel West:

> I consider Peirce and James as profound pioneering figures standing, in part, on the shoulders of Emerson. Yet I believe that it is with Dewey that American pragmatism achieves intellectual maturity, historical scope, and political engagement (*AoP*, 6).

West's remark that it is in John Dewey that American Pragmatism achieves its intellectual maturity tells us that he sees Pragmatism as a unified project that Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Sanders Peirce, and William James all contribute to, but with Dewey ultimately continuing and 'maturing' said contributions. West is not the only scholar to think this way. Cheryl Misak and Robert B. Talisse serve as another example of scholars viewing the tradition of Pragmatism as a unified enterprise. The pair write in a joint essay that:

> …pragmatism has been a constant and dominant force in professional philosophy in the US and elsewhere for nearly 100 years. As far as philosophical idioms go, pragmatism is among the most successful in the history of the discipline (Pragmatism Endures, 13).

A force, of course, is simply the word we use to describe the action of something being pushed in a particular direction. A constant force is one that is always pushing in one direction. You cannot have a force that pushes in more than one direction at a time. Thus, what Misak and Talisse seem to think is that Pragmatism has always been pushing professional philosophy in one direction and one direction only, towards a singular end that all Pragmatists strive for—whether they know it or

not. It is for the purpose of resisting views like the ones demonstrated by West, Misak and Talisse that I write my thesis.

The problem with viewing Pragmatism as an enterprise is the way it relates the various Pragmatic thinkers towards one another. As we see in West's view, Peirce, Emerson and James are treated as being juvenile thinkers—in need of Dewey to bring them into maturity. Ultimately, early contributors to Pragmatism are often portrayed by those who write on the history of the American Pragmatist tradition as being like 19th century pre-Socratics, with half-baked ideas and juvenile thoughts.[1] They are not portrayed as scholars one should take seriously.

The narrative that early Pragmatists, such as James, possess an underdeveloped account of what it means to be a Pragmatist is harmful to the scholarship of these thinkers because it discourages scholars from taking these thinkers seriously enough to try to thoroughly understand them. Furthermore, if James and the other early Pragmatist are read at all, what is read is largely limited to the most popular works, such as *Pragmatism* or "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life". Less popular works are left unread and neglected. Yet, as we shall see in my paper, James is greatly misunderstood, and many of these misunderstandings are easily revealed as such by passages in lesser read works, such as "The Moral Equivalent of War" or "The Social Value of the College-Bred".

To push back against the 'Pragmatism is an enterprise' narrative and to show that James is worth taking seriously as a thinker—especially in regard to the study of ethics—I wish to demonstrate the value in reading James seriously by providing an interpretation of him that I find

[1] In contrast, I think it is more accurate, and more rewarding, to view the tradition of American Pragmatism as being a collection of *Weltanschauung*—worldviews—that strive after their own philosophic ideals but still carry a familial resemblance to one another. Dewey, for instance, is doing something different from Pierce, who is doing something different from James. None of these philosophers should be seen as finishing or refining what the others started, and each should be treated as working towards maturity in their own unique way.

rich and rewarding—one that is informed not only by James' most popular texts, but his lesser known practical and empirical discussions as well. To this end, I have focused on two main topics that I believe could benefit from my specific approach: namely: the challenges of living an ethical life—that is, how to create a morally satisfying world; and secondly, James' thoughts on the direction of social reform. My paper is divided into two chapters, with each chapter being dedicated to a respective topic.

In Chapter One I show how James' practical and empirical discussions can be used to address common misconceptions. In the first part of the first chapter, I offer a discussion on the nature of ideals—what James takes to be the subject matter of moral inquiry. This serves as introduction to the key concepts of Part Two, which focuses on explaining what James' moral project is and the demands it makes of a moralist. Then, in the next three parts of the chapter, I look at concerns raised by Scott F. Aiken, Robert B. Talisse, and James Campbell about James' views on the demands of an ethical life. I meet these challenges by showing they stem from misconceptions that would never have arisen had these scholars attended to "The Moral Equivalent of War", "What Makes Life Significant" and *The Principles of Psychology*.

In Chapter Two, as a continuation of my demonstration of the value of James' practical and empirical discussions, I respond to James Campbell's concern that James' individualism prevents him from realizing the true value of a social reconstruction of our institutions (EF, 234). I go over Campbell's argument and show why I believe that practical papers, such as "The Social-Value of the College-Bred," challenge Campbell's interpretation. I also draw upon James' *Lecture Manuscripts,* as well as various letters and articles, to show that James not only does not believe that institutions must necessarily be obstacles to a fulfilling life, but that it is important to the

overall goal of James' ethics—i.e. making this world into the best version of itself that it can be—to reform our institutions holistically—a claim that Campbell would dispute.

If I can give the reader the impression that looking at James' practical and empirical work is key to understanding James' position on the demands of an ethical life and on social reform, then this paper will have succeeded. I also hope that by addressing these particular criticisms that I can help prevent others from making such mistakes. Finally, I hope that by exploring James' comments on resolving moral conflict and on social reform, I can show James' ethics is deeper, richer and ultimately more coherent than what one otherwise might think.

Chapter One: William James and Moral Philosophy

Part One: On the Nature of Ideals

Before delving into what James thinks it means to pursue ethical inquiry and live the life of a moral philosopher, it is important to understand his view on the main subject matter of ethical inquiry—namely, ideals (MPML, 142). In this section, I wish to push back against the idea that the class of things James refers to when he uses the word "ideals" is identical to the class of things he refers to when he uses the word "goods". I argue that, when using the word 'ideal,' James is referring to a certain possible future realities where specific sensations, experiences, and feelings[2] are felt and the drive to arrive at such a world, as opposed to using the word 'ideal' to refer more broadly to any sort of desire.

James says that "[a]n ideal is a possibility which has made connexion already with some portion of reality. It is *somebody's* possibility: 'Hurrah!'" (*MEN*, 220 [Original Italics]). He also writes "[a]n ideal not only antecedes, it prefigures; so an ideal seems a peculiarly privileged ground of possibility. It is then somebody's possibility, something says hurrah for it." (*ML*, 310). What James means is that ideals are not merely future possibilities but are future possibilities with a special connection to reality constituted by something or somebody willing and working towards the realization of that future possibility.[3]

This special connection is an ideal relation. Ideal relations are produced when "certain elements of experience, and certain arrangements in time and space, have acquired an

[2] James treats the words 'sensation', 'experience', and 'feeling' as synonymous.

[3] It is important to understand that James envisions ideals as being like trains awaiting the right of way on a railroad (*PPII*, 1153-54). The trains or ideals are always ready to go but require the right of way before they can get on with their destination. A person could have an ideal, that is, desire certain possibilities, but never get around to working towards it because so far other ideals have been given the right of way instead. Such a person, despite not practically working for the realization of that particular possibility, can still be said to be holding that ideal since their ideal is in the ready state and would be worked towards should certain other ideas no longer be pursued.

agreeableness [to a consciousness] which otherwise would not have been felt" (*PPII*, 1235). This agreeableness must not be understood as hanging *in vacuo*, but as something that is felt in response to the interactions of other impressions upon the mind (*PPII*, 1264). According to James, "when certain impressions come before our mind, one of them will seem to call for or repel the others as its companions" (*PPII*, 1264-65). Our experiences of the world are not neutral things, implicit within them are demands to either feel or not feel certain other possible experiences.

For instance, the sensory impression left by a partially played musical chord often leaves us with a feeling that a specific note *should* follow. This feeling of 'should-ness', that the specific note at hand needs to follow, is an effect that is produced when the impressions we had of the preceding notes interact with each other and our faculty of hearing (*PPI*, 162) in such a way that the final note being played is anticipated as a potential development in reality (*ML*, 310). So long as that final note remains un-played, yet is called for, there exists an ideal relation between the potential reality where the note is played and our own. By extension, this potential reality where the note is played is an example of what James would refer to as an ideal.

It should be noted that while ideals are future possible realities where certain experiences are felt, James does not treat them as passive entities. James writes that "ideals gather strength" (*ML*, 310). James means by this that ideals are experienced as drives within us to accumulate "ideas" and "motives" in the service of bringing them into reality *(ML*, 310) This is to say that ideals have an effect on us such that, if needed, such as in the case of deliberation due to uncertainty, we experience a push to develop useful concepts, plans, strategies, potential actions we might take to bring them about, as well as encouragement to conceptualize ways to interconnect them with other ideals, so as to draw in a stronger motive force (*PPII*, 1139). The 'goal' of an ideal is to excite the will enough to discharge itself in the form of a motor-action directed at bringing

about the ideal (*PPII*, 1130-35).[4] The word 'ideal,' then, for James, can both refer to the possible future reality where one experiences one's preferential experiences and to the drive we feel to bring about that reality.

It should be noted that James does make a distinction between the "æsthetic, moral, and theoretic combinations" (PPII, 1280) that make up our "æsthetic, moral, and intellectual life" (*PPII*, 1225). By this I mean James' believes that the ideal relations that can grow between our reality and future realities can be of an aesthetic, moral, or intellectual nature in the sense that the experiences that allows specific possible future realities to be our ideal are of three different qualitative types—aesthetic, moral, and intellectual.

In the above example, the "should-ness" that a specific note should follow after another note is an example of the ideal aesthetic relation between the hearing of the partial chord and the possible hearing of the future note. Relatedly, the desire we have to fix our thinking and get it into a proper order when we feel we are being irrational is an example of us having a certain intellectual ideal (*WB*, 58).

Regarding moral ideals, James' discussion about a hypothetical man who shot his wife's paramour in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" provides us with an example of the sort of things that moral ideals concern themselves with. Essentially, James believes that if we learn about a situation that is like the one described, but then later learn that the husband and wife have reconciled and are comfortably living together once again, then we would be filled with "disgust" (MPML, 144). Presumably, James thinks learning about the cheating and the murdering would fill us with a certain set of feelings and emotions that would lead our minds to yearn for a reality where

[4] By "Motor-Action" I mean any sort of action or set of actions that are directed at achieving some goal—for instance, the action of going into a voting booth and voting for a specific candidate.

we have the knowledge that the murderous husband and cheating wife were made accountable for their misdeeds, and that disgust would be the result of a failure for such a thing to happen.

Nevertheless, even though James distinguishes ideal relations into three qualitative types, it is still true that regardless of whether we are talking about aesthetic, moral or intellectual ideals, the nature of all ideals is such that they are alluring potential future realities where we have successfully combined certain sensations, feelings and experiences with whatever sensations, feeling and experiences will make an agreeable combination. For instance, in the example of the frustrated moral ideal, reading about the murderous husband would be to us as that first note was to the listener in the aesthetic example in the sense that both the listener and ourselves would be filled with a desire to combine the feelings presently being felt with some other set of feelings which would make the undergoing of the first set of experiences 'better'.

What I wish to stress about ideals is the molecular nature James' ascribes to them. James' ideals are small. James' ideals never specifically aim at big things like world peace or curing cancer. James' ideals simply are drives to take certain sets of sensations and feelings and combine them with other sets of sensations and feelings that "go with" each other (MPML, 144). Consider the following snippet by James: "[t]he more minutely psychology studies human nature, the more clearly it finds there traces of secondary affections, relating the impressions of the environment with one another" (MPML, 144). The traces of secondary affections that relate our impressions of the environment with one another (into ideal relations) that James is talking about are what ideals are, and as the line tells us, these traces are more readily found in proportion to how minutely one is studying human nature. This already suggests to us that if we really want to learn about ideals, we should be turning a microscope towards human nature. We should not be looking at the parts of human nature that are readily available to the naked eye.

The reason I wish to stress the molecular nature of ideals is because it is my belief that James sees the aesthetic, moral, and intellectual combinations that our ideals drive us to create as the 'atoms"[5] that help constitute the class of things that James calls 'goods'. The word 'goods', with a lowercase 'g', is used by James to refer to the things people want or desire (*PPII*, 1159).[6] Lowercase 'g' goods are not necessarily things that are actually 'good' in the sense they possess the property of goodness, though they are often thought, rightly or wrongly, to possess such a property. There are even some 'goods', as we shall see, that are plainly recognized by everyone to not be Good but are still nonetheless a 'good' by virtue of the fact that they are desired (*PPII*, 1159). A person's good might be a new house, a life partner, the chance to prove one's worth, the act of climbing a mountain, world peace, an illicit affair, vengeance on an enemy, the feeling of absolution, and many more. This is to say that goods can be material objects, opportunities, certain acts, certain facts about the world being true, certain feelings, certain knowledge, etc.

Essentially, I hold that James sees goods as being like banknotes for certain aesthetic, moral, and intellectual combinations. I mean by this that securing a good is like cashing in a bank note, but instead of getting money, one experiences a corresponding combined set of aesthetic, moral, and intellectual combinations. Each good is unique in the sense that each cashes out to a different set of ideal combinations.

To illustrate, consider a scenario where a father is forced to make an important decision. His child is participating in her first ever piano recital. In this scenario, the little girl is extremely

[5] To be clear, by referencing 'atoms', I do not mean to say that James thinks that goods are made up of fixed units of inherent and immutable good. Rather, I mean that James holds that goods are typically complex in nature, and they derive their true moral worth—as opposed to their apparent moral worth—from the level of harmony that exists between the different ideals they represent—just as material objects derive their properties from how the various molecules that make them up interact with one another.

[6] When James is talking about the class of things that are actually good, not just apparently good, he uses the word "Goods" with a capital 'G' (*PPI*, 129)

nervous, and the father knows it would mean a lot to her for him to be there. That said, the father's boss has offered to send him to an important conference where he has a very good chance of landing some important clients. The boss has even said that if the father lands one of these clients, he will get a big end-of-the-year bonus. With this extra money, the father would have enough to take the whole family on a dream vacation that they have all been dreaming about for a long time.

In this scenario, the father must choose between two goods; namely, being there for his little girl or getting the opportunity to earn enough to take the whole family on their dream vacation. Each of these goods, if chosen, will lead to the creation of a unique timeline where reality unfolds in a different way, and is fitted to produce for the father a different total set of experiences than he would have had in the other timeline. Within each of these total sets of experiences are certain aesthetic, moral, and ideal combinations. Some of these combinations will be experienced in both timelines, but many will not. By choosing one good over the other, the father is choosing a particular set of ideal combinations over the other. This is what I mean by saying that goods are like banknotes—they can be seen as each representing a certain set of ideal combinations that one can have if one successfully takes it to the bank—that is, chooses to pursue it over a different good.

That said, it is important to stress the disjointed relation between goods and ideal combinations. As I said, goods are things that are desired; however, do not make the mistake of interpreting me as holding that James sees the degree to which a good is desired as having a one-to-one relation with how agreeable the set of ideal combination it represents is. We very rarely—if ever—know how reality will unfold if we choose one good over another, and, thus, it is unlikely we will ever, in advance of our decision, get the true picture of what each good cashes out to. As such, goods can be thought of as having an apparent level of aesthetic, moral or intellectual

agreeableness that is different from the good's real level of aesthetic, moral or intellectual agreeableness (*ML*, 184).

If this point is not clear already, then allow me to make it clear that James also tells us not all goods are desired because by pursuing them we will be led to the satisfaction of at least one of our moral ideals. Things might be a good from our perspective because they satisfy other, non-moral ideals of ours, such as our aesthetic ideals. James even alludes that certain goods might even morally frustrate us in a discussion about whether the total class of good things is identical to the total class of things we find pleasurable. James writes:

> But almost as little as under the form of pleasures do our acts invariably appear to us under the form of *goods.* All diseased impulses and pathological fixed ideas are instances to the contrary. It is the very badness of the act that gives it then its vertiginous fascination (*PPII*, 1159).

James' remark that diseased impulses and pathological fixed ideas are instances where a good is not a form of pleasure implies that there are at least some things James considers to be a good that are only such because of diseased impulses and pathological fixed ideas. James gives us an example of such a good in the form of the morbid obsession to jump out of a very specific window belonging to a boy who recently saw a classmate attempt suicide by jumping out of that very window earlier (*PPII*, 1159). Even though he was terrified at the very notion, because a small part of him desired it, jumping out of that window became a good for that boy.

It must be admitted that James also says that "there are no non-moral goods" (MPML, 158). Even though certain goods are desirable to us despite not satisfying any of our moral ideals and even potentially offending them, James considers them to be of a certain moral nature. What I believe James is referring to here is his belief that the human mind cannot help but make it so that all goods are inter-related with one another. Consider the following discussion by James:

> Take judgments of justice or equity, for example. Instinctively, one judges everything differently, according as it pertains to one's self or to someone else. Empirically one notices

> that everybody else does the same. But little by little there dawns in one the judgment "nothing can be right for me which would not be right for another similarly placed"; or "the fulfilment of my desires is intrinsically no more imperative than that of anyone else's"; or "what it is reasonable that another should do for me, it is also reasonable that I should do for him"; and forthwith the whole mass of the habitual gets overturned (*PPII*, 1265-66).

James' point is that humans, by nature, are not truly content to live in a world ruled by pure subjectivism, were everyone is in possession of their own private notions about what is good. Within all of us is at least a subtle compulsion to discover certain moral beliefs that oblige us to treat all other moral beliefs as subordinate and secondary. As James writes in *Pragmatism*, "[t]his need of an eternal moral order is one of the deepest needs of our breast" (*P*, 55). James does admit, however, that "[the habitual] gets *seriously* overturned only in a few fanatical heads".[7] James' point is that while this compulsion is in all of us, not many people are sensitive enough to it to revolve their lives around it.

This desire to figure out which goods are the most obligatory is an expression of the ideal of the moral philosopher. Upon becoming aware of the disorganized body of goods that exist, which he refers to as a "multifarious jungle" (ML, 184), James believes the philosopher is driven by a compulsion, similar to the frontiersman upon seeing the untamed wilderness, to bring order to this chaos so that "system and subordination may reign" (MPML, 147). James sees this ideal as the basis for moral philosophy (MPML, 58). Accordingly, it is because all goods relate to this ideal that James sees all goods as being moral in nature.

At this point, I wish to elaborate on why I think I am justified in holding that James sees ideal combinations as being atoms that make up goods. My argument is that scattered through James' work are numerous mentions that there exists in ethics certain forces that only operate on microscopic or molecular levels:

[7] By habitual, James means our ordinary way of thinking and acting in relation to our sense of right and wrong.

For instance, James writes that there are “invisible molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual” (*The Correspondence of William James: Volume 8*: 1895 - June 1899, 546). James’ use of the word ‘molecular’ when referring to these moral forces tells us that he views these forces as being like molecules in the sense that they are tiny or that they operate on tiny things. Another example would be how James tells us that “the elementary forces in ethics are probably as plural as those of physics are.” (MPML, 153). In physics, the term ‘elementary forces’ refers to the forces of nature that define how the smallest units of physical matter in our world combine with one another. James’ use of the term “elementary forces in ethics” again implies that James believes there are moral forces that operate only on the smallest unit of ethical matter.

Furthermore, James uses the term “invisible molecular forces” in essays like “Great Men and their Environments” to refer specifically to the phenomenon of “spontaneous variation” in biology (*WB*, 168). Accordingly, James’ use of the term ‘invisible molecular MORAL forces’ [emphasis added] then must refer to a certain set of forces that produce “spontaneous variations” in the moral ecosystem. As it happens, James remarks in *The Principles of Psychology* that ideal relations “are all secondary and brain-born, 'spontaneous variations'” that vary from person to person (PPII, 1235). Given that ideal relations are produced when ideals lead us to merge sets of experiences into agreeable combinations, the elementary forces of ethics that only work on a micro level must be ideals.

The point I am getting at is that James’ allusions to elementary forces and spontaneous variations when talking about ideals suggest that we understand them as individually being very small in scope but contributing to the production or re-production of larger ethical units (goods) by producing smaller ethical units (ideal combinations) that ultimately define the true moral value of these goods by virtue of how these smaller ethical units configure with one another. It is my

belief that understanding ideals and goods to be related in this way is key to how James would help himself out of certain criticisms regarding his moral project. I will address these criticisms and show how, by understanding ideals as being molecular, James could sidestep those problems down below, thereby demonstrating the worth of interpreting James in this way and the value of understanding James' moral theory through the lens of his writings on Psychology. That said, before I can get to this point, we must understand James' moral project, the topic of the next section.

Part Two: James' Moral Project

According to James, the moral philosopher's "aim is to find an account of the moral relations that obtain among things, which will weave them into the unity of a stable system, and make of the world what one may call a genuine universe from the ethical point of view" (MPML, 141). As James' passage indicates, the moral philosopher is looking for an account of the world's moral relations that will fulfill two inter-connected goals:

First, this account must weave these moral relations into the unity of a stable [ethical] system. According to James, to build an ethical system, let alone a stable one, "means that one admits the distinction between apparent goods and true goods, and demands that one's own ethical judgments shall be true" (*ML*, 184). I mentioned above that there is a difference for James between a good's apparent moral agreeableness and its real moral agreeableness—here is where we see this difference come into play. Another way to describe the first goal that James thinks belongs to the moral philosopher is to figure out which of the things people say are good are actually Good—Good in this case refers to the goods of this world that will lead to the most morally satisfying version of this world if pursued—and which are mere farce.

Second, when James says this account must "make of the world what one may call a genuine universe from the ethical point of view" (MPML, 141) he means that this account, if acted upon, will reveal to us, for having followed and believed in it, that the world as a whole is more agreeable from the standpoint of the moral philosopher's ideal. On this point, if we recall from the previous section, the moral philosopher's ideal is a compulsion for there to come to be a moral order to the universe. Implicit within the ideal of the moral philosopher is the notion that "[a]mong the various ideals represented, there must be, he thinks, some which have more truth or authority" (MPML, 147).

While James admits that different ideals are experienced as imposing different degrees of obligation on people, obligation itself cannot be the basis in which we measure how true a belief is that a particular ideal is good, as he claims, "non-moral or even immoral impulses" may feel just as obligatory in the sense that they give "us no peace till we do it, or that of returning to plague us if we do the opposite" (*ML*, 183). Such as in the instance of "diseased impulses and pathological fixed ideas" (*PPII*, 1159). As such, finding true beliefs about which ideals, and by extension, goods, are actually Good is not something we can do by simply finding goods that we all find compelling or by trying to figure which desire is felt generally to be the strongest.

James also does not believe that we can distinguish which are the true goods through appeals to higher principles or religious teachings that tell us which goods are right to chase after. James' reasoning is that such principles and teachings themselves would need to be able to prove themselves to be right to believe in first (MPML, 149). In turn, whatever other beliefs they would appeal to justify that they are in fact the right thing to believe would, in turn, need to prove itself as being the right ones to believe in… and so on and so on.

Instead, James believes that if we want to determine which of our beliefs about which goods and ideals are the true ones and which are not, we can do so by demonstrating the soundness of our ethical theories through participating in a practical project where we "consider *every* good as a real good, and *keep as many as we can"* (*ML*, 185 [Original Italics]). When James says that we should consider every good to be a real good, he means that we should treat every sort of thing a person might believe to be among the class of good things as being on a theoretical par with one another in terms of their overall moral worth. No person's alleged good should, in advance of working on our goal to secure as many goods as we can, be thought of as being of more moral worth than any other. By telling us that we should try to keep as many goods as we can, James is telling us that we should try to make the world such that as much of these good things are brought into this world.

The reason why James believes that this practical project will lead us to be able to distinguish between true and apparent goods is that the impartial nature of reality itself will weed out the apparent goods from the true ones as we work towards realizing our goal. Implicit within James' thought is the notion that the challenge that defines what it means to live an ethical life is the fact that "the ideal and real are so far apart" (*WB*, 200). According to James, "[t]o eat our cake and have it, to lose our soul and save it, to enjoy the physical privileges of selfishness and the moral luxury of altruism at the same time, would be the ideal" (*WB*, 200). Nonetheless, it is plain to see that many of these personal goods are incompatible with one another. For instance, it is impossible to enjoy both the pleasures of selfishness and the fruits of radical selflessness. Much of the goodness that we feel has been invested in the world has been gained at the cost of forgoing other kinds of goodness. As James says, "[t]he actually possible in this world is vastly narrower

than all that is demanded; and there is always a pinch between the ideal and the actual which can only be got through by leaving part of the ideal behind." (MPML, 153).

In our quest to satisfy as many ideals and secure as many goods as we can, we will inevitably be forced to jettison some for the sake of realizing the best whole. Complicating the issue is that if we ask "'Whose pleasure? Which perfection?" etc etc. shall be sacrificed' (*ML*, 185), and we say "the pleasure of the *best* person, or the *best* kind of perfection etc." (*ML*, 185), then "we are right back on our problem again, by what test shall the best be known" (*ML*, 185). There can be no absolute principle which will decide for us which ideals are best to sacrifice.

As such, before us lie many possible ways forward, with each way forward being a strategy informed by a particular ethical theory as to which goods are the true goods worth preserving and which are merely the apparent. Each of these paths forward serve as a hypothesis to be tested. If there is indeed a hierarchy of goods to be found, then one of these ways forward, though we know not which, is indeed the objectively best in the sense that if followed, will lead us to create the world most capable of satisfying the moral philosopher's ideal, which would only happen if all the true goods were realized. By testing and comparing the practical success of each potential strategy's capacity to capture as much true Good as possible, we can systematically eliminate the inferior strategies from the pool of consideration until we are left with the one that is indeed the objective best.

At this point, a big question dangles in the air; namely, how do we determine the practical success of a particular attempt to produce the greatest world of true Good? After all, we do not already possess a formula for determining the difference between true Good and apparent Good. How do we know whether one attempt at creating the universe with the greatest amount of true Good has actually secured more of the true Good that exist than any other attempt when we do not

know what is in fact true Good and what is merely apparent? The answer is that we are clued into the success of our attempts at preserving the greatest amount of true Good by considering the practical differences between the possible worlds that each possible strategy is fitted to create.

To elaborate, by acting upon the belief that it is more important to the overall goal of satisfying as many ideals as we can to champion certain ethical beliefs over acting upon other similar beliefs, a concrete difference between the way the world is now and how it could have been should alternative strategies be taken will be produced. It is the overall level of moral agreeableness belonging to this concrete difference that James believes will clue us into whether we have correctly distinguished between the ideals that are important to preserve and the ones that are not.

James' discussion in "The Sentiment of Rationality" illustrates my point. According to James:

> [t]he verification of the theory which you may hold as to the objectively moral character of the world can consist only in this—that if you proceed to act upon your theory it will be reversed by nothing that later turns up as your action's fruit; it will harmonize so well with the entire drift of experience that the latter will, as it were, adopt it, or at most give it an ampler interpretation, without obliging you in any way to change the essence of its formulation (*WB*, 86-87).

As James says, he holds that theories about the objective moral character of the world can *only* be verified by proceeding to act upon your theory—that is, by making a practical project out of it. Ultimately, it is how well your theory 'harmonizes' with "the entire drift of experience" that determines whether your theory about the moral character of the world is verified or not. Whether your theory 'harmonizes' depends on the nature of the fruit sowed by the actions you took when acting upon your ethical theory. If the fruits are morally agreeable, then you are on your way towards harmony, but if the fruits are morally repugnant, then you know that the casuistic scale in which one is championing needs changing up. Either something is missing, or you are championing an ideal that should not be championed.

All this said, it is important to clarify what I mean when I claim that James holds that the fruits or practical consequences of having acted upon a theory about the ethical nature of the universe determines whether one's theory is valid or not. The "fruits" James is talking about are not the same 'fruits' pursued by the Christian Calvinist. That is, James is not saying that whether an ethical theory is valid or not depends on whether it brings one material reward. Rather, the 'fruits' James is concerning himself are feelings of how morally satisfying one's experiences of reality are (WB, 86). This is to say that James' wants to know, for having acted upon a certain ethical theory, can one say that living in the world is more ethically satisfying than it would have been had one acted differently. Whether the answer is yes determines whether one's ethical theory remains for now as valid.

One last crucial component of James' ethical project to consider is the social dimension. While on the one hand, James' project, as I have thus far described it, might seem largely individualistic since it revolves around moral agents trying to make the world as morally satisfying as it can be to them personally, what may not be apparent is the fact that our actions do not take place in a social vacuum. If the world is remade in accordance with a certain set of ideals that a certain segment of the population finds to be the most morally satisfying combination that they have yet discovered, but other people in the world still feel unsatisfied, then these other people will continue to work to change the world so as to make it more morally satisfying to them. This, in turn, would lead the groups of people into conflict with one another as one set wants to keep the world as it is so that they might continue to enjoy the moral satisfaction that they have been enjoying, while the other group tries to change the world so that they might escape the moral dissatisfaction they have been feeling. As James explains,

> The anarchists, nihilists, and free-lovers; the free-silverites, socialists, and single-tax men; the free-traders and civil-service reformers; the prohibitionists and anti-vivisectionists; the

> radical darwinians with their idea of the suppression of the weak—these and all the conservative sentiments of society arrayed against them, are simply deciding through actual experiment by what sort of conduct the maximum amount of good can be gained and kept in this world (MPML, 157).

James sees this struggle between the various factions of this world as being part of society's progression towards true moral unity. James is "confident that the line of least resistance will always be towards the richer and the more inclusive arrangement, and that by one tack after another some approach to the kingdom of heaven is incessantly made" (MPML, 157). In other words, since no person can ever enjoy a truly stable moral universe so long as other people remain morally discontent, eventually, once people recognize this fact, we will begin working towards making a universe that is as morally satisfying as it can be to as many different people as possible so that we might enjoy the greatest amount of stability when it comes to moral satisfaction. James' moral project then is *not* to find a way to make the world as morally satisfying as it can be for me *but to find a way to make the world as morally satisfying as it can be for each and every person*—so that we might have moral unity and stability, thereby meeting the moral philosopher's ideal.

Part Three: The Tyrant and Betty Hood

James' moral project, in the simplest terms, is built upon putting away preconceived notions about what really is good and what is merely apparently good, and instead tasks us with figuring out empirically which combination of goods, if championed over all other goods, will lead to the most stable and morally satisfactory world for us all to live in among all other possible worlds. It asks us to put to a practical test our deepest held moral beliefs and see if they can stand up to reality. For many, this is a frightening thing to request. It is a very real possibility that one concludes that one must leave behind one or more of one's dearest ideals for the sake of some set of other ideals that one does not yet personally feel. Furthermore, the notion that one must treat,

from a theoretical point of view, in advance of inquiry, all ideals as being equally deserving of satisfaction is a bitter pill to swallow for many.

For instance, Scott F. Aiken and Robert B. Talisse cannot get behind the idea that we must treat all ideals as being morally on par. In their paper, "Three Challenges to Jamesian Ethics", they push back against this demand. The following two parts of my thesis will deal with the first two of their challenges. I wish to go over these challenges because the questions and concerns Aiken and Talisse raise are questions and concerns that many people unfamiliar with James also raise, and by turning to James' lesser read practical and empirical discussions to answer these challenges, I can further demonstrate the value of these text to anyone who wishes to understand James.

In their first challenge, Aiken and Talisse argue that James' claim that "everything which is demanded is by that fact a good" does not follow from his prior arguments (TCJE, 6). Specifically, they say that "it simply does not follow from the premise that 'nothing can be good or right except so far as some consciousness feels it to be good or thinks it to be right' that 'everything which is demanded is by that fact a good'" (TCJE, 6). Aiken and Talisse point out that James' premise only seems to entail that "whatever is good is good because someone in fact desires it" (TCJE, 6). It does not entail "that whatever anyone in fact desires is ipso facto a good" (TCJE, 6). To put it another way, they are claiming James is committing the logical fallacy of 'affirming the consequent.' Just because all good things are demanded does not mean anything demanded is a good thing.

What the two misunderstand is that everything James argues in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" is as a 'moralist' and a 'philosopher'. The first paragraph of James' discussion begins:

> First of all, what is the position of him who seeks an ethical philosophy? To begin with, he must be distinguished from all those who are satisfied to be ethical sceptics. He will not be

> a sceptic; therefore so far from ethical scepticism being one possible fruit of ethical philosophizing, it can only be regarded as that residual alternative to all philosophy which from the outset menaces every would-be philosopher who may give up the quest discouraged, and renounce his original aim (MPML, 141).

For James, ethical skepticism represents the giving up of moral philosophy. James defines ethical skepticism as the belief that there is no true goodness or evil to find and that "individual minds are the measures of all things" (MPML,147). In contrast, as discussed above, the moral philosopher takes the opposite position—that independently of what any given mind thinks of any of the various ideals that may exist, "among the various ideals represented, there must be, he thinks, some which have the more truth or authority; and to these the others ought to yield, so that system and subordination may reign" (MPML, 147). Consequently, James believes that "if we are true philosophers we must throw our own spontaneous ideals, even the dearest, impartially in with that total mass of ideals which are fairly to be judged" (MPML, 151).

To see why this is important, let us return to the context in which James wrote the line of interest. James writes:

> But do we not already see a perfectly definite path of escape [from the temptation to fall into skepticism] which is open to him just because he is a philosopher, and not the champion of one particular ideal? Since everything which is demanded is by that fact a good, must not the guiding principle for ethical philosophy (since all demands conjointly cannot be satisfied in this poor world) be simply to satisfy at all times as many demands as we can? (MPML, 151).

James' first line tells us that the following line, "everything which is demanded is by that fact a good", is only the case if one be a philosopher. James believes philosophers are, in advance of inquiry, practically obliged—if they want to possess moral truth—to treat all ideals as being on par with one's own; hence James' claim that they are not the champion of one particular ideal.

As discussed earlier, James writes in the *Principles of Psychology* that moral philosophers are particularly sensitive to the problem that if they take their own sense of obligation to their particular ideals as being justification for their belief in the morality of pursuing that ideal, then

they are obliged to treat everyone else's ideals as being as morally justified (*PPII*, 1265-66). Since, at this point in the inquiry, James does believe—based on his own feeling of obligation—that the moral philosopher's ideal is something morally worth pursuing, then, for the moment, James must necessarily—despite how loathe to do so he is—accept that everyone else's ideals are on a moral par with his until he finds a way to justify certain moral ideals that do not depend on the presence of a feeling of obligation. Hence, he must state for now that "everything which is demanded is by that fact a good" (MPML, 151). Accordingly, Aiken and Talisse's argument that James' claim that "everything which is demanded is by that fact a good" (MPML, 151) does not follow from what he previously argued is wrong.

Furthermore, even though James says that in advance of this inquiry "everything which is demanded is by that fact a good", he does not believe every good is in fact in possession of true Goodness. The pinch is, however, that we cannot know which goods are truly Good in advance of inquiry, which is why we must conduct inquiry before we can say which of the things demanded are really good.

Nonetheless, Aiken and Talisse still claim that James' call to "satisfy at all times as many demands as we can" (MPML, 155) flies in the face of the "obvious" fact "that some demands should not be met" (TCJE, 7). They use two examples to make their case. I address each one in turn.

For Aiken and Talisse "[t]he demands of the tyrant are a clear example" (TCJE, 7) of demands that ought not to be met yet, according to James' view, it seems we have a *prima facia* obligation to satisfy them. While admitting it is far-fetched to suppose James truly thinks a tyrant's demands ought to be satisfied—even given his claim that all demands impose a certain degree of obligation upon us—they still take issue with his account of why they are not entitled to be met.

In their own words, “James could argue that the demand of the tyrant ought not be satisfied because the tyrant’s demand is too costly given the overall economy of demands in the world.” (TCJE, 7). In other words, they say that James could dismiss the tyrant’s demands as not worthwhile by showing that satisfying the tyrant would lead to a world where a greater number of demands are left unsatisfied than a world where the tyrants demands had not been satisfied. In support of this reading, James does claim that “those ideals must be written highest which prevail at the least cost, or by whose realization the least possible number of other ideals are destroyed” (MPML, 155).

While Aiken and Talisse admit that James might well reply “that in order to realize the tyrant’s ideal we would have to sacrifice too many other ideals; hence it is permissible to leave the tyrant dissatisfied” (TCJE, 7), they argue nevertheless that this “reply misses the point” (TCJE, 7). It ignores the fact that many people would dismiss the tyrant’s demands not simply because “they conflict with other, more easily realized demands” (TCJE, 7), but because they believe that what the tyrant demands is simply and inexplicably immoral and makes no legitimate claim on us.

As before, I take issue with Aiken and Talisse’s interpretation. It is my impression that they, along with many other Jamesian scholars, are misconstruing James’ use of the word ‘ideal’. The two seem to be running with the interpretation that an ideal is a desire for anything that can be desired. Contrarily, as discussed in Section One, James’ writings in the *Principles of Psychology* tell us that ideals are simply desires to combine certain sets of experiences into agreeable combinations, and that the ideal combinations that our ideals compel us to create are the atoms that define the true moral value of goods. As a consequence, when we speak of goods as being desired, in many instances the desire for that good is actually a combination of many demands.

James alludes to this point in the *Principles* when he discusses things that are desired as ends versus the things that are desired as means. According to James, "[t]he consciousness must everywhere *prefer* some of the sensations which it gets to others; and if it can remember these in their absence, however dimly, they must be its *ends* of desire" (PPI, 85 [Original Italics]). What consciousnesseses do is prefer or desire specific sensations over others. The sensations a consciousness prefers are its 'ends of desire'. James also writes if the consciousness "can identify in memory any motor discharges which may have led to such ends, and associate the latter with them, then these motor discharges themselves may in turn become desired as *means"* (*PPI*, 85 [Original Italics]). Things that help the consciousness experience those specific sensations, such as motor discharges, may end up being 'desired as means.'

The point I wish to stress is that according to James' breakdown, only sensations can be desired as ends. This implies that any sort of good that is not itself a sensation is only good provisionally. Desires for more macro goods, such as world peace or creating a cure for cancer, can only be understood as aiming at a thing that has value in and of itself if we understand the desiring of world peace or a world where cancer is cured as being an abstract representation of all the individual desires for the agreeable sensations that would result from living in a world with world peace or a cure for cancer.

The reason why I bring this up is that by understanding that many of the things people want are, in reality, many smaller demands for a wide assortment of sensations, then Aiken and Talisse's criticism that James' misses out on the real reason we should not meet the demands of the tyrant—its inherent immorality—cannot be true.

For instance, let us consider the tyrant. The tyrant thinks certain things are good that we find to be reprehensible—such as being a tyrant. My contention is that James would advise us,

should we get the chance, to understand the psychology of why the tyrant thinks being a tyrant is a good thing to be. As James says, anything that is desired that is not itself a sensation, is merely something that is desired as a means to an end. As such, to understand the tyrant's true demands, we must break down the more macro-beliefs and figure out what ideal combinations it is that the tyrant actually wants. We may find that many of the ideal combinations that lead the tyrant to desire to remain a tyrant are not similarly reprehensible.

For example, while it might be cliché, it is possible that one of the reasons that the tyrant values tyranny is because it gives the tyrant respect that he was denied earlier in his life. Having a desire to feel respected is not inherently a good or bad thing. In other contexts, it would be perfectly acceptable for someone to want to be respected by others, especially if their merits as a person genuinely have been overlooked by their peers. Other reasons why the tyrant may value tyrannic power is because they felt it was the only way certain wrong doers who were not properly being held accountable were punished, because they felt it was the only way in which they could properly deal with traitors and spies, or because they felt that it was the only way to bring democracy to France, as might have been the case in the example of Maximilien Robespierre's brief stint as a tyrant. Again, the desire to feel that wrongdoing is properly punished, to feel safe from traitors and spies, and the desire to enjoy the pleasure of living in a democratic France are not inherently bad things and, in many instances, may lead to someone being called a hero. Yet, in certain combinations with other ideals and certain knowledge and misunderstandings, even these ideals can lead to the doing of terrible things.

My point here is that James would push back against Aiken and Talisse's claim that the real reason we should not meet the tyrant's ideals is because it simply is inherently wrong by arguing that if you heed his moral psychology, and the molecular nature of ideals, you will see that

there is, in fact, no such thing as an inherently wrong demand. As James says, "[i]n point of fact, there are no absolute evils…" (MPML, 158). While James' may find the tyrants' love of tyranny horrifying, it is completely possible that James may agree with certain atomistic moral needs that led the tyrant to love tyranny in the first place and think that these needs are demands worthy of meeting—just not in the way the tyrant wants. In other words, just because I take on some of the ideals of another, does not mean I am bound to attempt to bring them about by pursuing the same outcomes they do.

The upshot of my contention that James envisions ideals as only being desires to merge certain sets of sensations into ideal combinations which serve as the atoms that define the true moral value of macro goods is that we should expect James to be more concerned with meeting people's underlying demands rather than meeting the very large and big things that they say and think they want. In fact, this is just how James proceeds in "The Moral Equivalent of War". Here, James takes on the task of trying to convince the Peace Party—those who believe that society should move beyond the need for war—and the War Party—those who believe that it is good for society to either be in a state of war or preparing for war—that war is not really what the War Party wants in life, but rather that war to them is actually just a means to having certain ideals realized and that the Peace {arty can better pursue their ideal of abolishing war by embracing James' alternative means to realizing the specific ideals so alluring to the War Party, thereby allowing the War Party to live a life just as rich and meaningful as they would during times of war but without requiring war and the death and destruction it brings.

As I suggested James would with the tyrant, his first step is to identify the various conditions, whether sociological, psychological, biological, theological etc., that lead the War Party to see war

as a good thing. He also wants to determine why either party cannot simply proceed in such a way so as to pursue their own ideals while accommodating the ideals of the other.

Regarding the War Party, James claims the militaristic mind of his time valorizes war because they think it makes life worth living. The War Party considers war to be a spiritual mission (MW, 165-66). War gives culture and life meaning and purpose by allowing the militaristic mind to work on something greater than themselves. As James puts it:

> All reflective apologists for war at the present time take it religiously. It is to them a sort of sacrament; its profits are to the vanquished as well as to the victor; and quite apart from any question of profit, it is an absolute good, we are told, for it is human nature at its highest dynamic. Its horrors are a cheap price to pay for rescue from the only alternative supposed, of a world of clerks and teachers, of co-education and zoophily, of 'consumers' leagues' and 'associated charities,' of industrialism unlimited, and feminism unabashed. No scorn, no hardness, no valor any more! Fie upon such a cattleyard of a planet! (MW, 166).

In short, for members of the War Party, a world at perpetual peace means the end of valour; it means emasculation, and a denial of life *in extremis.* War, by contrast, necessitates intrepidness, bravery, selflessness, and obedience (MW, 170). These characteristics are what James calls the warrior virtues or martial values. These virtues and the purposefulness that accompany them makes living in a war-making society worthwhile, death and destruction notwithstanding.

On the flip side, James claims those of the Peace Party of his day were typically socialist and utopian (MW, 169). They have big dreams and lofty ideals about the future of humanity; namely, they not only wish to move society beyond the need for war, but they also wish to free humanity from the need to do difficult and dangerous labour. They are moved by "[u]topian dreams of social justice" despite its "impracticability and non-adaptation to present environmental conditions" (*VRE*, 287).

Essentially, James defines these utopian thinkers as being driven by ideals that are not *yet* fitted for this world. They require a tremendous effort and a huge change in conditions to come into being. For this very reason, utopian thinkers attempt to change those very conditions to realize

their ideals. James believes that the dreams of utopians are "analogous to the saint's belief in an existent kingdom of heaven" (*VRE,* 287) This is to say that, for James, like saints, pacifists are willing to surrender many other goods in favour of realizing their ultimate good; namely, a peaceful and at-ease Utopia. Ultimately, pacifists and other utopic thinkers are "authors, *auctores*, increasers, of goodness" (*VRE,* 285). They imagine new ideals and goods that previously have gone unappreciated by humanity. They look to change current social conditions, not simply adapt to them.

Unfortunately, the Peace Party is so enamored by the worth of their ideals that they become myopic and fail to see the moral motives that drive the War Party to see war as a good. They completely fail to recognize the idea that the warrior virtues have moral value and can give life meaning (MW, 169). James writes:

> So long as anti-militarists propose no substitutes for the disciplinary function of war [i.e., no way to replace the martial values] no moral equivalent of war, analogous, as one might say, to the mechanical equivalent of heat, so long they fail to realize the full inwardness of the situation. And as a rule they do fail. The duties, penalties and sanctions pictured in the utopias they paint are all too weak and to touch the military-minded (MW, 169).

According to James, the conflict between the War Party and the Peace Party remains because those who wish to offer humanity a newer and more peaceful direction to follow fail to understand the "full inwardness of the situation" (MW, 169). James means that the Peace Party is erroneously assuming what is good for them is good for everyone and what is at odds with their ideals has no value at all.

In James' mind, the Peace Party is like a love-sick man so blinded by the beauty of his beloved that he does not recognize certain things about her that he might normally find inadequate—such as a tendency to take her shoes off on airplanes. This is to say that the Peace Party is failing to thoroughly evaluate the type of world they want to build as best as they potentially could. From James' perspective, he can see that as morally satisfying as it would be to

live in a world free of war, there exists even more goodness contained within a world where war is eradicated, but not at the cost of the warrior virtues or the purposefulness that war brings. James thinks if the Peace Party could just see that what the War Party wants is valuable too, they would see how their ideal threatens something dear and precious and worth preserving.

Due to their lack of sympathy for the ideals of the other side, the Peace Party ultimately fails to see how their own proposed future for humanity can be made all the richer, and therefore enticing, if they were to just see and accommodate the fact that there are things worth valuing outside of their own purview of what they consider good. Overcoming the exclusive nature of either party's position requires James to prove to the Peace party that to abandon war without replacing it with something of equivalent ideal worth would depreciate the ultimate moral value of this universe.

We see in this move that James embraces the notion when it comes to desires for more macro goods, that the underlying moral motives that in combination make up macro goods are of the two strata of demands the truer and the more important to meet. As James says in his notes, "the smaller & more intimate is the truer" (*ML*, 311) We can ignore the War Party's demand for war because war is not what they *really* want, what they want is a sense of meaning and purpose, as well as to feel that the warrior virtues are necessary and useful to the life that they live. Similarly, while the Peace Party may have a specific picture in their head as to how their ideal should be realized, James is able to treat it as merely being simply one means among other means to satisfy their demand for a peaceful world.

In the Peace Party's stead, James proposes a path forward that he believes will accommodate the ideals of both groups. Here is how James introduces his solution:

> If now—and this is my idea —there were, instead of military conscription, a conscription of the whole youthful population to form for a certain number of years a part of the army

> enlisted against *nature,* the injustice would tend to be evened out, and numerous other benefits to the commonwealth would follow. The military ideals of hardihood and discipline would be wrought into the growing fiber of the people… (MW, 171-72).

James recommends the virile and vigorous energies of young people, regardless of class, be directed away from militarism, and turned to building roads, working on the railroad, constructing bridges, or gathering lumber etc. in attempt to improve the commonwealth for the better. He writes:

> To coal and iron mines, to freight trains, to fishing fleets in December, to dish-washing, clothes-washing, and window-washing, to road-building and tunnel-making, to foundries and stoke-holes, and to the frames of skyscrapers, would our gilded youths be drafted off, according to their choice, to get the childishness knocked out of them, and to come back into society with healthier sympathies and soberer ideas (MW, 171-72).

James believes that the realization of his proposal will not only secure for us all the value that comes from living in a peaceful society, but also will secure for us both the value that results when it is the case that people rightly feel that their labour and use of the warrior virtues is necessary and contributory to the collectivity (MW, 171).

What "The Moral Equivalent of War" demonstrates is that James does not feel the need to try to accommodate either of the things that the parties think they want. Instead, James attempts to offer both of the parties something he believes will meet their underlying ideals even better than whatever it is that they believe is good for them.

As it stands, I do not think there is any reason to think that James must necessarily debase himself by trying to realize the terrible things that the tyrant thinks he wants. As James himself says:

> But how to decide conflicts?…Sacrifice all wills which are not organizable, and which avowedly go against the whole. No one pretends in the main to revise the decalogue, or to take up offenses against life, property, veracity, or decency into the permanent whole. If those are a man's goods, the man is not a member of the whole we mean to keep and we sacrifice both him and his goods without a tear (*TCWJ*, 221).

It is clear that while James thinks the underlying motives of the tyrant are important to consider by virtue of the fact that they are ideals, neither the tyrant, nor his more macro goods, are things we should seriously try to meet.

Furthermore, Aiken and Talisse completely ignore how even ideals themselves, though treated from the outset as being on par, through the process of moral inquiry, are eventually divided into true goods and apparent goods. Moral inquiry, to be clear, is the process of distinguishing real goods from apparent goods by comparing how each good, if secured, would contribute to how morally satisfying the universe is to live in. If the tyrant's ideals cannot add to the creation of a more morally satisfying world by harmoniously merging into an ethically satisfying combination of ideals, then they are not true ideals. It seems Aiken and Talisse simply want to skip the entire process of moral inquiry and dogmatically say that the tyrant has nothing of value to add to the world from the outset.

It is also worthwhile to point out that James says, "we are born into a society whose ideals are largely ordered already" (MPML, 154). In practical terms, no moral philosopher starts from scratch. While the philosopher must—from a theoretical stance—consider all ideals—in advance of inquiry—as being on a par, a great deal of inquiry has already been performed throughout human history. We already have some idea about the practical cost of realizing certain goods in certain ways, and based on this knowledge, we are largely justified in dismissing and deriding anyone who continues to try to strive after these goods without at least offering some new spin on them. If there really are unique and perverted ideals at play that drive serial killers, such as Paul Bernardo or Luka Magnotta, to do what they do, and there *really* is no context in which we could innocently satisfy them, then we, in moral terms, are not bound to see them as worthy of

accommodation and what justifies this is our experiences that allowing the Bernardos and Magnottas of this world to satisfy their atrocious appetites simply makes the world feel wrong.

Nonetheless, let us turn to the second example belonging to Aiken and Talisse's first challenge. They ask readers to imagine Robin Hood having a more socially discerning cousin named Betty Hood. Instead of merely stealing from the rich to give to the poor, Betty Hood steals only from the *super-rich*—people so rich that they ultimately would not notice nor be dissatisfied by Betty's minor pillaging of their enormous bank accounts. As they explain the main point:

> Betty's activities… help to satisfy the demands of the poor and they do nothing to frustrate the demands of the super rich. It seems, then, that James could have no objection to Betty's activities; in fact, James might have to take the view that Betty's actions are morally right, and possibly obligatory (TCJE, 7).

Against this, they argue that:

> The fact that Betty steals from people who will not miss the money and then gives that money to the needy seems morally irrelevant. Betty Hood's activities are morally wrong simply because they are instances of stealing. We might insist that the wrongness of stealing is independent of the calculation of the cost of stealing in the economy of demands (TCJE, 7).

Aiken and Talisse believe that James' ethical system leads us to the conclusion that Betty's stealing is morally permissible—even though, as they see it, stealing is, from an absolute standpoint, regardless of any context, wrong. They think this shows that James' ethical philosophy is an inadequate account of the authority of our moral judgements because, according to them, "Betty Hood's activities are morally wrong simply because they are instances of stealing. We might insist that the wrongness of stealing is independent of the calculation of the cost of stealing in the economy of demands" (TCJE, 7).[8]

[8] It should be noted that the two make no argument as to why we should believe stealing is wrong independently of context or what anyone thinks about it. While James also thinks there is often no way to account for why certain things are bad, he still grounds it in concrete experiences. He can point to the world with crime and say "that is my proof why crime is bad". In other words, evilness is defined ostensively.

Ultimately, I disagree with Aiken and Talisse's interpretation that James' ethics leads to the conclusion that Betty Hood's activities are necessarily morally permissible. While James may possibly believe that pursuing a world wherein there is economic equality would be more morally worthwhile than maintaining a world where the sanctity of property is respected absolutely, I suspect that James would believe that an even more worthwhile world than both is a world where it is true that we have both a lack of economic inequality and the sanctity of property is preserved.

This is especially true when we consider how if everyone felt ethically compelled to steal from the super-rich, preventing the super-rich from noticing that they were being stolen from would be unsustainable and ultimately impossible to do. Accordingly, Betty's justification—that her theft is unnoticed and therefore cannot be said to be harming the super-rich—for why it is good to steal from the super-rich only really remains true if she knows that the rest of the world holds that stealing from the super-rich is a bad thing to do—thereby depending on the moral pluralism that James seeks to overcome. By moral pluralism I mean a world where there are disagreements between what things are really good and right.

To build on this point, James would likely say that while it is possible that Betty's actions might be contributing to making a slightly better world for tomorrow, Betty's view that her thefts from the super-rich are good is itself a bad thing in relation to the goal of ethical philosophy. As a reminder, the goal of ethical philosophy is to bring about a world where we have a stable moral unity. The reason Betty's view is bad in relation to the goal of ethical philosophy is because so long as she continues to hold it, Betty necessarily maintains a position of moral pluralism and a stable moral unity cannot come into being. A stable moral unity is a world where everyone agrees what the good things are, not because of any feeling of moral obligation to them specifically, but because of all the empirical evidence that tells us that, if we organize our world around a certain

combination of goods and ideals, then we will experience the greatest degree of moral satisfaction that we would in comparison to any other world we might possibly have built. Thus, if Betty continues to believe that it is good to steal from the super-rich, and that it is good for only her to think it is good to do so, then Betty believes it is good to not join the stable moral unity, thereby preventing it from ever coming to pass.

Overall, I think Aiken and Talisse' first challenge falls flat. It is riddled with misinterpretation that would plainly be cleared up should they have looked at the *Principles of Psychology* or "The Moral Equivalent of War", and they seem to just ignore the purpose James' moral project serves. Furthermore, their strategy is baffling. They conclude the first challenge by writing that:

> There is a lot more to say. However, it is clear that there are certain commonsense moral commitments that James cannot accommodate. We tend to think that tyranny and theft are wrong regardless of the costs of satisfying the demands of the tyrant and thief. We tend to think that certain demands are in themselves immoral, because we tend to think that certain moral claims are valid independently of who demands what (TCJE, 7).

It is unclear why the fact that James cannot accommodate certain commonsense moral commitments would be a reason to think, as they claim, that James "cannot supply a viable ethics" (TCJE, 9). While it is certainly true that many people think certain demands are absolutely and independently immoral, James spent a large chunk of "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" explaining why this is incorrect. Rather than offering a reason why we should believe certain demands are absolutely and independently immoral, they seem to simply rest on the fact that it is "commonsense".

It is possible that their contention is that an inability to accommodate certain commonsense moral commitments leads to the unviability of James' ethics because what people want from an ethics is a way to justify their common-sense moral commitments. Underpinning their thought would be the recognition that for James, from the pragmatic point of view, interests of any type,

even practical interest, can be considered as the driving force for why someone might find a reason to believe or disbelieve something. For instance, James admits that if two ideas are equally valid from a scientific standpoint as one another, but one idea appeals to a person more than another, then that person would be reasonable in treating the preferred idea as being true over the other rather than holding both in suspension (*WB,* 66). What they seem to be driving at is that James' ethical system is susceptible to being overturned by a system that better meets the personal demands of the inquirer. This is reinforced by the fact that they conclude their discussion by specifically emphasizing the word "practical" in their conclusion, writing "[w]e take these three challenges to highlight the *practical* shortcomings of James's ethics" (TCJE, 9 [Original Italics]).

The problem with this approach is that it completely fails to account for the context in which James' ethics emerge. As I discussed above, James' ethics is a response to the ideals of the moral philosopher. The moral philosopher wants to distinguish between true and apparent goods with true and apparent goods being defined only by the metric that they satisfy the moral philosopher's ideal. As James says, "[a]t the outset of his inquiry [the moral philosopher] ought to have no other ideals" (MPML, 142). If the moral philosopher were to heed any other ideal, then the true goods the system distinguished from apparent goods would only be true goods as considered from the point of view of these other ideals. They would not be true goods as considered from the perspective of being free from all partialities beyond one's partiality to discovering true ideals. In other words, they would not be objectively true beliefs. Aiken and Talisse's first challenge is thus unconvincing so long as one thinks that it is important that one's system of ethics be built up on objective moral truth.

Part Four: Tolerance and Religious Exclusivism

The second challenge offered by Aiken and Talisse attacks James' claim that we should "act so as to bring about the very largest total universe of good which we can see" (MPML, 158, TCJE, 7). They begin their argument by citing the fact that James believes "x, y, and z could all be goods without having anything in common other than that each is desired by some person" (TCJE, 7). Aiken and Talisse say that "[i]t follows [from the above point] that the 'largest total universe of good' is the universe in which the greatest number of demands is met. Hence the core prescription of James's ethics: act so as to satisfy as many demands as possible" (TCJE, 7-8). Aiken and Talisse claim that "[t]his overlooks the fact that certain kinds of ideals are such that to hold them is necessarily to judge certain other ideals to be immoral and thus unworthy of realization" (TCJE, 8).

As an example, Aiken and Talisse point out that there are "certain forms of Christianity" that "hold that Hindus are not simply following a different religion, but rather are pursuing a false religion" and to "adopt this form of Christianity is necessarily to judge the Hindu ideal to be idolatrous since it does not recognize the divinity of Jesus" (TCJE, 8). Aiken and Talisse write that "[t]o say, with James, to this kind of Christian that she should try to practice her Christianity in a way 'which will also satisfy' the Hindu demands is to say to the Christian that she must regard the Hindu ideal as an ideal worthy of accommodation" (TCJE, 8). Yet, they say, "this is precisely what she cannot do; to regard the Hindu demand as worth satisfying is to commit blasphemy, and thus to violate her own ideal" (TCJE, 8).[9] Thus, by virtue of embracing James' guiding principle, the

[9] It is not clear what Aiken and Talisse mean "the Hindu ideal" since they switch constantly between talking about Hindu demands in the plural, to a singular Hindu ideal that is also demanded. I interpret them as meaning that life in adherence to Christian doctrine and life in adherence to Hindu doctrine each form respective ideals. Each of these ideals contain certain demands of the world.

Christian fundamentalist finds herself unable to live in accordance with her own ideal. The Christian fundamentalist must then choose between either her faith or James' guiding principle.

According to Aiken and Talisse, "religious exclusivism shows when we are dealing with certain kinds of moral conflict, we are confronted not just with conflicting demands, but with conflicting views of what is morally tolerable" (TCJE, 153). From the Christian fundamentalist's perspective, the ideal of the Hindus to live in accordance with the teaching of Hinduism has no value, while Hindus obviously believe it does. This conflict is seemingly different than the ones that James typically describes where the issue is not a question of whether this good is truly good, but a question about whether this good or that good will ultimately lead to a greater securing of real goods.

Aiken and Talisse believe it is through the fact that "we are often divided precisely over the question of which states of affairs should count as good" that James' "injunction to bring about the largest total [amount of good]" reveals itself to be "nearly vacuous" (TCJE, 8). Their point is that when moral conflict stops revolving around the question of whether this good or that good will better lead to the better universe and instead turns to the question of whether the ideals a person believes in are *really* good at all, it is of very little help to anyone involved that one should satisfy as many demands as one can since there is a very real risk that one might be incorporating a false ideal that will make the world overall worse.

Aiken and Talisse even go as far as to say that since James implores us to bring about the largest total amount of good, and that "[o]ur Christian believes that a world in which no Hindu demands are satisfied is a world with more goods in it than a world in which the Hindu ideal flourishes" (TCJE, 8), then "[o]ur Christian, then, should act so as to bring about a reduction in the number of Hindus." (TCJE, 8). Conversely, Aiken and Talisse claim that there may be "certain

Hindus who hold that Christianity is a wrong-headed ideal" (TCJE, 8-9). Such Hindus could also believe if the Christian fundamentalists' demands were satisfied, it would make the universe an ultimately worse place. As such, Aiken and Talisse write, "[f]ollowing James, we should say that the radical Hindus have good reason to act so as to bring about a reduction in the number of Christians in the world" (TCJE, 9).

The point the pair is making is that when there is a question about not only whether someone's ideals are *really* good or just apparently good, but about whether they are in fact an evil in disguise, there is a very real possibility that one could come to the conclusion that as part of one's obligation to produce the largest total universe of good which we can see one is obligated to put a stop to the realization of those 'false ideals' by any means possible. Aiken and Talisse conclude that "[b]oth the fundamentalist Christians and the radical Hindus seem to be acting in accordance with [James'] prescription [act so as to satisfy as many demands as possible], but the result is war between the conflicting parties. It is difficult to see how this makes for a better world" (TCJE, 9). Without a higher authority to appeal to, it would seem that each side is entitled, based on their own private feelings, to endlessly wage war against one another over whether the other side's ideals are good or evil.

Like their first challenge, I think that Aiken and Talisse misunderstand a lot. I also think that their argument has many holes in it. That said, it must be admitted that Aiken and Talisse's claim that James overlooks how much moral conflict is the result of a disagreement about what ethical beliefs are tolerable has some credence to it. Throughout the entirety of "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" James only ever seems to discuss and frame moral conflicts as being such that both sides are championing ideals of genuine worth and that the question one must simply ask is which of these competing ideals is the better one to pursue from the point of view of satisfying as

many ideals as one can. Given that James' lesser-known works are rarely read, it has become a common view that James does not explicitly make a distinction between true and apparent goods. Ruth Anna Putnam, for instance, writes, "James, I admit, does not explicitly introduce the apparent/real distinction" (RTPJE, 25).

Such a view is plainly and obviously revealed to be false when one considers that James writes in his lecture manuscripts that the ultimate goal of seeking an ethical system is to distinguish between real and apparent goods. As James says, "[w]hat does one mean by seeking a *system*, of ethics? It means that one admits the distinction between apparent goods and true goods, and demands that one's own ethical judgments shall be true" (*ML*, 184 [Original Italics]). First, this is further evidence of just how unfamiliar commentators on James are, even those who are not Aiken and Talisse. Secondly, as the quote demonstrates, James clearly is aware and is reacting to the question of whether this good *really* is good. Once again, Aiken and Talisse skip over the fact that true goods are distinguished from apparent goods through the process of moral inquiry.

Nevertheless, what if it is the case that the Christian fundamentalist concludes its far more efficient in her quest to build a universe wherein a moral unity reigns is to simply eliminate anyone, such as Hindus, who disagree with what the Christian fundamentalist takes to be 'the moral truth' of the universe, Aiken and Talisse claim that by virtue of James' injunction to bring about the "very largest total universe of good which one can see", "our Christian, then, should act so as to bring about a reduction in the number of Hindus" (TCJE, 9). Is this necessarily true? I do not believe so.

Putting aside the fact that, even after centuries of religious crusades, pogroms, and religious colonialism, humanity has not yet demonstrated that eradicating all non-believers is an efficient way to produce a moral unity, it must also be understood that James did not say that we should

"bring about the very largest total universe of good which one can see" (MPML, 154) in a vacuum. While James does refer to the injunction as an "unconditional commandment" (MPML, 154), it is only unconditional in the sense that there is no set of conditions in which the moral philosopher *qua* moral philosopher should deviate from trying to bring about the very largest total universe of good. The should-ness of the remark is still very much conditional to the goal of the moral philosopher; namely, to distinguish between true and apparent goods. As part of that goal, one is supposed to treat all ideals in advance of inquiry impartially and as being on par with one's own.

This seems to have fallen by the wayside in Aiken and Talisse's argument since their Christian Fundamentalist never puts her beliefs on a par with the Hindu's beliefs. Rather she takes her own belief that it is wrong to believe anything other than Christian Fundamentalism as a given, which leads her to necessarily treat the Hindu's belief as idolatrous. If she were a true Jamesian, she would, in advance of inquiry, suspend her judgement about which of the two sets of beliefs are true, and develop a way to empirically test which sets of beliefs lead to a more morally satisfactory world to live in. It is unclear what Aiken and Talisse aim to prove when they argue that a bunch of religious fanatics could use James' injunction, after they have divorced it completely from the context in which it was said, to justify their religious war.

Ultimately, I think this challenge falls flat. It completely misunderstands what James is trying to do and tries to elevate a principle that James believes should only be followed in the context of trying to live the life of a moral philosopher to the status of a universal principle—divorced from everything else James tells us is important about living an ethical life.

Part Five: Does James Forbid Us from Criticizing?

Another critic who takes issue with James' claim that we must regard all ideals—regardless of who holds them—as being equally worthy of fulfillment is James Campbell. Campbell takes up

the view that James believes it is impossible to legitimately criticize the way people live their lives (EF, 227).

In "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" James attempts to demonstrate the value of living life by the phrase "live and let live" (*TT*, 4). He writes in the introduction to his book, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals,* that "[r]eligiously and philosophically, our ancient national doctrine of live and let live may prove to have a far deeper meaning than our people now seem to imagine it to possess" (*TT*, 4). Specifically, James says that "[s]uch a passionate inner meaning they [The American People] may easily acquire again if the pretension of our nation to inflict its own inner ideals and institutions *vi et armis* upon Orientals should meet with a resistance as obdurate as so far it has been gallant and spirited" (*TT*, 4). To this end, James uses "On a Certain Blindness…" to build up this resistance to American Imperialism by showing through it that there are many ways in which people find personal fulfillment *(TT*, 135, 138, 139, 141, 145)—not just through an American way of life. James thinks that if people could just understand the difficulties that American Imperialism brings to the Philippine people, how it stifles their ability to live the most fulfilling lives that they can, that the American people would see that is not a good thing to try to force your goods upon others, and that it is better to let people find their own personal fulfillment in whatever way they harmlessly can.

James concludes his discussion by saying:

> It [the results of James' discussion of moral blindness] absolutely forbids us to be forward in pronouncing on the meaninglessness of forms of existence other than our own; and it commands us to tolerate, respect and indulge those whom we see harmlessly interested and happy in their own ways, however unintelligible these may be to us (EF, 226-27) *(TT*, 263-64).

Campbell interprets this passage as a demand that "if we cannot fully understand another's life, neither can we legitimately judge that person's conduct - just as we expect to be unjudged" (EF,

227). To do any sort of judging would be to be forward in pronouncement because we cannot ever fully understand another person and given that we believe we should not be judged by those who do not understand us, we are bound to believe that we should not judge others in turn. Thus, we cannot engage in legitimate criticism.

The reason I think Campbell's interpretation is wrong is that it interprets James as believing that it is always forward to judge someone's conduct because we cannot ever fully understand them. (EF, 227). Yet, if we read the paper James wrote as a follow-up to "On a Certain Blindness…", that is, "What Makes Life Significant" we see that this cannot be true.

James uses his paper to find "some principle to make our tolerance [towards the lives of others] less chaotic" (*TT*, 151) by determining what makes a life morally significant enough to tolerate and not interfere in—essentially to be beyond moral reproach. Through the course of the paper, James evaluates several sorts of lives—precisely what Campbell claims James forbids us from doing—to see if they could tell us how to live a morally significant life.

First, he ponders life at the Chautauqua Institute—an education center and summer resort for American adults *(TT*, 152). Life there is filled with art, music, higher learning, as well as being free of strenuous labour. James briefly considered whether this could be the ideal life for which we should all strive *(TT*, 152). It, after all, seems to be what civilization has been struggling to actualize—a model community where all needs are met. *(TT*, 152). Yet, to his own surprise, once he left the institute, James found he was relieved upon getting out, signifying that there is something important missing in the Chautauquan lifestyle. It seemed to James that the life he was living was without any struggle or anything at stake. *(TT*, 152).

He then considered whether the life of a labourer would be a more meaningful and morally significant life *(TT*, 154). James says that "the sight of a workman doing something on the dizzy

edge of a sky-scaling iron construction brought [him] to [his] senses very suddenly" (*TT*, 154). Inspired by the same sort of image that would later become the subject matter of the incredible 1932 black and white photo 'Lunch Atop a Skyscraper', James realized he had been previously "steeping… in pure ancestral blindness and looking at life with the eyes of a remote spectator" *(TT*, 154). Like the Peace Party discussed in "The Moral Equivalent of War", James had been blind to the value of the virtue of courage and living life *in extremis.* Once again James states that heroism and courage are not only things to be found in war and in battle. Rather, he says they can be found:

> in every railway bridge and fireproof building that is going up to-day. On freight-trains, on the decks of vessels, in cattle-yards and mines, on lumber-rafts, among the firemen and the policemen, the demand for courage is incessant; the supply never fails. There, every day of the year somewhere, is human nature *in extremis* for you *(TT*, 154).

The laborer's life—unlike life at Chautauqua—is filled with strenuous activity and one can directly experience how one's efforts contribute to the advancement of human civilization. James initially saw such lives heroically struggling for a greater tomorrow, whilst putting everything—including their lives and bodies—on the line.

James' cites Leo Tolstoy, writing that the heroics of everyday labour have led James to pass "into a vein of feeling similar to [Tolstoy]" *(TT*, 154). Particularly, James says he shares with Tolstoy an "abhorrence of all that conventionally passes for distinguished" and an "exclusive deification of the bravery, patience, kindliness, and dumbness of the unconscious natural man" *(TT*, 154). James' point is that when it comes to determining the moral value of life he, in light of Tolstoy and the heroics of labour, does not think there is much practical worth in considering "the differences of social position, of intellect, of culture, of cleanliness, of dress, which different men exhibit, and all the other rarities and exceptions" *(TT*, 154).

Rather, James believes that "[t]he exercise of… courage, patience, and kindness, must be the significant portion of the whole business [of evaluating the moral value of a life lived] *(TT*, 154). James advises us to be wary that we do not "end once more by thinking that creation can be for no other purpose than to develop remarkable situations and conventional distinctions and merits" (*TT,* 156*)*. This is to say that James, at this point in his story, holds that the greatest and most significant lives most deserving of toleration and non-interference belong to those who most exercise the virtues of courage, patience and kindness—regardless of any other difference between the lives people live—and that titles, material wealth, renown, an access to incredible experiences—such as sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll—are distractions to the "true" value of a life.

On this view, it would seem that the working class offers, among most other lifestyles, the greatest opportunity to acquire moral significance since such a life constantly requires one to exercise the virtues of courage, kindliness and patience. That said, as James considers more types of lives, his notion of what makes for a morally significant and tolerable life grows, and he becomes somewhat disillusioned by the life of the labourer.

James sees in the first-hand accounts of Walter Wyckoff and Philipe Brooks that it often seems to be the case that working-class labourers mostly seem to be merely surviving and are not moved by inner ideals *(TT*, 162). Many labourers merely work to survive; they do not do it because they are chasing after something grand. The life they live typically is, according to James, "barren" and "ignoble" *(TT*, 162), as well as exploitative. James asks himself:

> Is it so certain that the surroundings and circumstances of the virtue do make so little difference in the importance of the result? Is the functional utility, the worth to the universe of a certain definite amount of courage, kindliness, and patience, no greater if the possessor of these virtues is in an educated situation, working out farreaching tasks, than if he be an illiterate nobody, hewing wood and drawing water, just to keep himself alive? (*TT*, 159).

This is to say that James begins to wonder if Tolstoy is "overcorrecting our social prejudices, when he makes his love of the peasant so exclusive and hardens his heart towards the educated man as absolutely as he does (*TT,* 159). Surely, if all else equal, would it not make for a more morally agreeable life if the virtues of a person could be shaped and molded so that they intelligently aim at particular ends rather than simply being exhibited to keep oneself alive? After all, what good is courage, kindliness and patience if it is aimed dumbly by a person bumbling around?

Accordingly, James further develops his views on what makes a life morally significant enough to be as least deserving of interference and censorship as possible. He now writes:

> If there *were* any such morally exceptional individuals, however, what made them different from the rest? It can only have been this —that their souls worked and endured in obedience to some inner *ideal,* whilst their comrades were not actuated by anything worthy of that name (*TT,* 163).

In other words, James, for the moment, believes that morally speaking, the best lives are those who intentionally apply their virtues in service of inner ideals. They are those who live life according to an ideal they have self-imposed, not one that is imposed as an object of social convenience upon them. As James says, "we are led to say that such inner meaning can be *complete,* and *valid for us also,* only when the inner joy, courage, and endurance are joined with an ideal" (*TT,* 163). James holds up as an example of lives that possess such moral significance as belonging potentially to labour unionists or converts to the Salvation Army; namely, those who live a life of toil, but also aim after higher ends.

Yet still, James finds his account of what makes a life morally significant to tolerate to be incomplete once he considers the nature of ideals themselves. James points out that:

> [I]deals are the cheapest things in life. Everybody has them in some shape or other, personal or general, sound or mistaken, low or high; and the most worthless sentimentalists and dreamers, drunkards, shirks and verse-makers, who never show a grain of effort, courage, or endurance, possibly have them on the most copious scale.

If not all ideals are equally worthwhile to pursue, then it is not enough for our metric for whether a life is beyond the need for interference or criticism to be simply whether the person is intelligently applying their virtues in service of an ideal. Again, what good is it if the bigot has the courage to stand up for her views, or the patience to enact her plans to remake the world in accordance with her ideals? There must be then, when considering the moral significance of a life, in addition to a consideration about whether one is intelligently applying virtues to an ideal, a consideration about whether one has intelligently and responsibly chosen an ideal in the first place (*TT*, 164).

James arrives at the conclusion then that "the thing of deepest—or, at any rate, of comparatively deepest—significance in life does seem to be its character of *progress,* or that strange union of reality with ideal novelty which it continues from one moment to another to present" (*TT*, 164) and that "[t]o recognize ideal novelty is the task of what we call intelligence" (*TT*, 164). James means by "ideal novelty" the practical consequences of pursuing an ideal—the things only true of the world precisely because one pursued this ideal and not others. As such, what James is saying is that the most important thing to consider as to whether a life is morally significant enough to tolerate and not interfere with is the character—or moral agreeableness—of the practical consequences of having lived a life in pursuit of a particular ideal—and that we need to develop our faculties of moral intelligence if we are to discern which sort of lives we could live demonstrate the most moral value.

That said, James does not believe moral intelligence is the only factor important to determining whether one's life is morally significant to be beyond moral reproach. In fact, James writes:

> Not everyone's intelligence can tell which novelties are ideal... So if we are to choose which is the more essential factor of human character, the fighting virtue or the intellectual

> breadth, we must side with Tolsto[y], and choose that simple faithfulness to his light or darkness which any common unintellectual man can show (*TT*, 164).

This is to say that James thinks that whether someone's faithfully applying their virtues to their inner ideals should be of more weight than whether one thinks that their ideals are *really* worthwhile to pursue when considering whether their life is morally significant enough to tolerate.[10]

James concludes his inquiry into how we might determine whether a particular way of life is morally significant enough to be beyond the need for criticism or interference by admitting that he seems "to be just taking things up and dropping them again" (*TT*, 164). As he explains, "[f]irst I took up Chautauqua, and dropped that; then Tolsto[y] and the heroism of common toil, and dropped them; finally, I took up ideals, and seem now almost dropping those" (*TT*, 164-5). Yet, James stresses that we should pay attention to the sense in which he drops them; namely, it is "when they pretend *singly* to redeem life from insignificance" (*TT*, 165). James' position is that "there must be some sort of fusion, some chemical combination among these principles, for a life objectively and thoroughly significant to result" (*TT*, 165).

In other words, James believes that when we want to determine whether a particular way of life is morally significant to not be deserving of interference or criticism, we must consider whether such a life leads to "culture and refinement", that is, a better society and a better world, whether there are "ideal aspirations" at play, and whether they are being combined with "pluck and will" and "dogged endurance" (*TT*, 165). This is to say that James holds that whether we think a life is morally insignificant enough to justify our criticism and interferences should depend on

[10] James' reasoning is that you, as the moral adjudicator, never truly know if you have failed to recognize the true goodness belonging to the practical consequences of someone having pursued a particular ideal (*TT*, 150). You are, however, much more justified in your right to criticize and interfere in the life of another if you see that they are not being faithful to the ideals they themselves profess to believe in.

us thoroughly evaluating the practical consequences fitted to be produced by ideals they live by, how faithful to them they are, and how they make the world a better place by being as faithful as they are to them.

James admits however that "this is a somewhat vague conclusion" (*TT*, 165). In response, however, James writes that "in a question of significance, of worth, like this, conclusions can never be precise. The answer of appreciation, of sentiment, is always a more or a less, a balance struck by sympathy, insight, and good will. But it is an answer, all the same, a real conclusion" (*TT*, 165). James' point is that determining whether you are justified in interfering or criticizing someone's way of life is not something that you can do by just plugging some variables into a formula and arriving at an answer that will be true for all inquirers. James knows different people will come up with different results—even though they may be asking the same question.

Yet, as James says, it is a real answer to the question as to whether a principle might exist to make our tolerance less chaotic. I take this to mean that James holds that our interpretation of how to apply James' three-factor metric by which he believes we should determine whether we should tolerate a particular way of life is something that, in turn, can be empirically evaluated through practical action. I mean by this that even though James gives us three factors by which to consider the moral worth of various ways of life; namely, whether one is motivated by ideals, how faithful one is to those ideals, and the value those ideals—if pursued—will add to the world, the weight we attach to each factor or how to determine how much value a way of life must have to be considered significant, as well as numerous other things, is up to our interpretation. Nevertheless, by making such an interpretation and acting upon it, we produce practical consequences of our own, which we can evaluate, and in turn, let them guide us to continually

refine our interpretation of James' metric until we can no longer improve further—assuming that there is a best interpretation to find in the first place.

The point of explicating this is to show that James is unafraid to judge and appraise the value or moral worth of various lives. He clearly believes that it is possible to understand someone's way of life enough to judge whether it possessed enough moral significance to not need criticism or interference. Instead of Campbell's interpretation—which in light of "What Makes Life Significant" seems flat-out false—we should interpret James' line that we are forbidden from being "*forward* in pronouncing on the meaningless of forms of existence other than our own" *(TT*, 149, emphasis added) as meaning that we are forbidden from being too bold and presumptuous when claiming that a life lived other than our own is without moral significance. We must be humble enough to be sure to thoroughly investigate each life before we judge a life to be morally meaningless.

The second reason I think Campbell's interpretation of James' line forbidding us from being forward in pronouncing that the lives other people live are meaningless is wrong is that James is not talking about every kind of judgement; he is talking about a specific kind of judgment—a judgement that some life other than our own is "meaningless". In the essay in which this passage comes from, "On a Certain Blindness of Human Beings", James explains that we are often blind to the meaning of someone's life *(TT*, 132-33). We fail to see the ideal motives that are driving a person's life.

Specifically, we sometimes fail to see how the activities a person performs relate to their own effort to overcome specific and unique kinds of ideal dissatisfaction that prevents them from being able to find life as worthwhile as they could. Instead, thanks to our own inner ideals, we have a notion of what needs to be done to make the world more worthwhile for us live in, and

when we see that people's activities fail to bring the world into line with our personal notion of what would improve the moral character of the world, we tend to see those activities as things that are not worth anything in the grand scheme of things.

For instance, James had thought that the clear-cutting of the forest by the mountain squatters was an ugly blight upon the landscape *(TT*, 133). He could not yet imagine that the creation and maintenance of these bare patches of the forest, which he calls 'ulcers', were in any way a worthwhile activity to do *(TT*, 133). Yet, to these mountain people, these 'ulcers', so hideous to James, were a worthwhile endeavor because it meant "safety for self and wife and babes" and when they looked upon what they have created they see "a symbol redolent with moral memories and sang a very pæan of duty, struggle, and success" *(TT*, 134). James admits he was blinded by the ugliness of the clear-cut areas and failed to see the meaning of such patches in the lives of the mountaineers, but later comes to a sympathetic understanding as to what the squatters see in the circles of clear-cut forest, and while James may not agree with them about the worth of the patch, he can still see that it is not wanton destruction, but a serious endeavor to make the world a better place to live.

My point is that even if James were forbidding us from making judgements about people's lives, which I still contend he does not, it would only be in the sense that we should not assume that there is no underlying meaning or value behind a person's way of life. He says nothing about abstaining from judging a life from other kinds of standards—such as whether the ideals that motivate such a way of life are as good to pursue as they are thought to be.

That said, James does write that the conclusion of his discussion in "On a Certain Blindness of Human Beings" commands us to "tolerate, respect and indulge those whom we see harmlessly interested and happy in their own ways" (*TT*, 149) Yet, as discussed, "What Makes Life

Significant", James makes it clear that we do not need to be endlessly tolerant, and how tolerant to the lives of others we should be is up to how we interpret James' three-factor metric for evaluating the moral significance of a way of life. This seems like a contradiction, but I do not believe it is.

I believe James' point in "On a Certain Blindness…" is simply that a lack of a perceived meaningless cannot be used as justification for not tolerating their way of life. However, if one conducts moral inquiry, and comes to the belief that criticizing or interfering with the particular way of life at hand will produce a more morally stable and satisfying universe, then one is justified on the basis of this belief to suspend one's tolerance and engage in the way one sees as most morally fit. The reason why one is justified in suspending one's tolerance is that once one concludes that a particular way of life stands in the way of making the world more morally stable and satisfying, then that way of life stops being harmlessly interested in its own way; it becomes inimical to the quest for moral unity.[11] Thus, while Campbell mistakenly believes that James forbids us from taking up a critical stance altogether when it comes to ways of life that do not violently threaten our own, I contend that James believes that individuals, along with their unique

[11] While it might seem at first to be a bit quick to say that if a way of life does not contribute to the realization of a morally unified world it must then be inimical to the project, if one understands the following, the soundness of the claim should be apparent. First, a stable moral unity is only possible if there is agreement among all people about what and which things are good and right and what and which things are bad and wrong. If there continues to be disagreement about what ideals are really worth pursuing, then we continue to remain in a moral pluralism. Second, all ways of life revolve around particular values. Living life, making decisions, taking actions are all goal driven behavior that aims at the realization of certain ideals. Thirdly, ideals contribute to a stable moral unity by proving themselves capable of harmoniously coexisting with the whole host of other ideas already deemed worth preserving. As such, if a way of life is deemed to not contribute to the overall project of building a stable moral unity, what is actually being said is that the ideals that drive that way of life are incapable—at the current moment—of coexisting with the other ideals. This is to say that the realization of these ideals can only be attained at the cost of forgoing other ideals already determined to be important to the project of realizing a stable moral unity. Consequently, if a person were to continue trying to live a life in accordance with these ideals, then they would be working against the moral unity—hence why I say that a way of life that does not contribute to the production of a stable moral unity is inimical to moral unity.

ways of living life, can and should occasionally be subjected to criticism and a guiding hand as we collectively work out how best to create the most stable and richest sort of moral universe possible.

Part Six: Concluding Remarks for Chapter One

There are two main things I hope I have demonstrated in this chapter of my paper. The first is how James' critics' misunderstandings could have been avoided if only they read James' more empirical and practical papers rather than only his abstract ones. If, for instance, Aiken and Talisse had focused more on reading about ideals in *The Principles* or about how James' attempts to mediate conflict in "The Moral Equivalent of War", I suspect that they would have realized that the tyrant challenge and Betty Hood examples are non-starters. Similarly, had Campbell focused more on "What Makes Life Significant", I believe he would never have concluded that James forbids us from criticizing. By looking at how James personally resolves moral conflict, we can ward off many misinterpretations of his more abstract work. James was deeply dedicated to solving the problems he saw in the world and wrote a lot about them; it is a shame that scholars tend to neglect what he wrote.

The second thing that I hope I have demonstrated in this chapter of my thesis is that one of the biggest pitfalls a person can make when reading James is to look for fixed principles. Aiken, Talisse, and Campbell are all guilty of this. They all took single elements of James' thoughts, such as his "unconditional commandment" or his remark that we must not be forward in judging a life to be meaningless, and tried to read into them rules that would be applicable for every and all situations. James eschews rigidity in the way of philosophy and emphasizes the need to adapt to different contexts. As James says, he is "against the fossilized & fixed, in science, art, religion, custom, government" (*ML*, 311). This is why it is so important to not limit Jamesian scholarships

to a few works—such as *Pragmatism* or "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life". James adapts his thinking to the present demands of a concrete world. If you want to understand how he thinks, you must turn to his writings about those concrete demands. There is simply no other way to understand James.

Chapter Two: William James and Social and Institutional Reform

Part One: Campbell's Account of James' View of Institutions

In this chapter of my thesis, I return to the criticism of James Campbell. This time I focus on his criticism that James undervalues institutions as being conditions for a meaningful life. Campbell claims James "*opposed institutions as obstacles* rather than *used them as means* to the fulfillment of individuality" (EF, 230 [Original Italics]). Here, I consider the passages Campbell uses to support his argument. In Part Two and Three, I argue that Campbell overestimates the threat James believes institutions pose to our capacity to live fulfilling lives and fails to see how within James' view we can attain the vital ideals of the individualist while at the same time securing the goods that institutions offer.

To begin, Campbell believes James detests institutions. The word "institutions" here is being used to refer to established laws, practices, and customs. According to Campbell:

> [James] could not emphasize the need for social reconstruction of our institutions as a means to fuller lives because the institutions themselves, reconstructed or not, were deadening (EF, 230).

Campbell believes James especially disregards the value of institutions designed specifically to reconstruct society, such as economic programs meant to alleviate wealth inequality, because he believes institutions stand in the way of personal fulfillment.

With a little digging into James' writing, we seem to find evidence for Campbell's interpretation. For example, his position seems to be supported by James' discussion of how something that begins as a person's personal religion can grow into, or, rather, devolve, into a religious institution.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, James insists "on the distinction between religion as an individual personal function, and religion as an institutional, corporate, or tribal product" (*VRE*, 268). James describes personal religion as "the inner dispositions of man himself which form the center of interest, his conscience, his deserts, his helplessness, his incompleteness" (*VRE,* 32), although he later allows us to more crudely refer to it as a person's conscience or morality (*VRE*, 33). Another way to put it is that a person's personal religion is simply a bundle of different beliefs a person found to settle their ethical needs in a variety of different situations.

According to James, some individuals possess moral belief systems capable of attracting groups of sympathetic followers. He claims that once these groups get strong enough to organize themselves, they become "ecclesiastical" and take on "corporate ambitions of their own" (*VRE,* 268). Once this happens, "[t]he spirit of politics and the lust of dogmatic rule are then apt to enter and to contaminate the originally innocent thing" (*VRE*, 268). When one's moral system is merely personal, one is free to add and drop various elements in response to one's experiences with reality, but once institutionalization is needed, the freedom and flexibility of the original personal belief system is necessarily lost. The implication then is that participating in such institutions often leads to the stifling of one's moral growth.

If all Campbell means by his claim that James found institutions to be deadening was that the adoption of a moral system that was an "institutional, corporate, or tribal product" (*VRE,* 268) has the *possibility* of obfuscating our capacity to recognize the Good as potentially having value

when we see it, then I think the evidence agrees with him. Yet, Campbell goes further than this. As quoted, Campbell is of the opinion that James thinks there is no way to reconstruct an institution to make it not deadening (EF, 230). Campbell seemingly believes James' position is that any institution, in virtue of being an institution, is deadening and that participating in one inevitably leads to a deadening of one's moral growth.

For instance, as Campbell states:

> For James, [our disposition towards violence] is fostered in groups, as his discussions of jingoism and lynching indicate (EF, 230-31).

In other words, Campbell holds that James thinks that human relationships become more antagonistic than otherwise when put in the context of a group.

Specifically, Campbell is referring to James' discussion of mob mentality and how a few fanatics may whip up a group of people into an angry mob, blinding their judgement and their compassion for others (*ECR*, 172). James writes:

> One or two real fanatics there may be in every lynching, actuated by a maniacal sense of punitive justice. They are a kind of "reversion," which civilization particularly requires to extirpate. The other accomplices are only average men, victims, at the moment when the greatest atrocities are committed, of nothing but irresponsible mob contagion, but invited to become part of the mob and predisposed to the peculiar sort of contagion, by the diabolical education which the incessant examples of the custom and of its continued impunity are spreading with fearful rapidity throughout our population (*ECR*, 172).

Campbell takes this remark to show that "[James'] discussions of jingoism and lynching indicate" his view that "human atavisms are fostered in groups" (EF, 230-31). Conversely, Campbell believes that "there is nowhere in James the suggestion that individualism itself could lead to social problems; or diversity, to anarchy" (EF, 230).

Furthermore, Campbell's suggestion that participating in something greater than oneself leads to losing out in the ideality of an unfettered existence (EF, 231) suggests that by participating within groups of people there is some ideal that one misses out on when one subordinates oneself

to external authority. A passage that seemingly supports what Campbell is saying is, "[m]any as are the interests which social systems satisfy, always unsatisfied interests remain over, and among them are interests to which system, as such, does violence whenever it lays its hand upon us." (TD, 97). What James is saying is that quite simply there are certain values that are incompatible with the systemization of society.

Campbell also argues that another reason why James sees institutions as "obstacles" rather than tools to advance personal fulfillment is because, according to Campbell, James thinks institutions are largely irrelevant to personal fulfillment (EF, 229-23). Campbell cites the following passage as evidence:

> Society has…got to pass toward some newer and better equilibrium, and the distribution of wealth has doubtless slowly got to change: such changes have always happened, and will happen to the end of time. But if, after all that I have said, any of you expect that they will make any *genuine vital difference* as to whether people will live fulfilling lives] on a large scale, to the lives of our descendants, you will have missed the significance of my entire lecture *(TT*, 166 [Original Italics]).

Campbell views this as evidence that James fails to acknowledge that, if individuals are to enjoy the privilege of living fulfilling lives, then, in a vast number of cases, a fairer distribution of wealth is needed. (EF, 229-230). Since he thinks James is blind to how economic conditions may limit or stifle one's capacity to live a fulfilling life, he is consequently blind to how reforms in our laws, practices and customs regarding their economic consequences may work to help individuals live more fulfilling lives (EF, 229-230).

Summarily, Campbell believes James believes that institutions necessarily prevent us from living lives that are as fulfilling as they could be. Campbell builds his argument on two main points: 1) that James believes living a life of personal fulfillment requires one to be open to the possibility of personal experience, that is, allowing one's life to unfold in such a way that is informed by one's personal experiences and following one's consciousness over dogmatic rules;

2) that James believes institutions necessarily stifle one's capacity to be open to personal experience.

Part Two: A Closer Examination of the Evidence

In this part of the thesis, I look at passages that Campbell uses or could have used as evidence to support his view that James sees institutions as obstacles rather than tools to individual fulfillment. My aim is to show that while James believes the presence of institutions in our lives increases the chances that our moral growth will be stifled, by always maintaining the view that institutions exist for the sake of people, and not the other way around, the risk institutions pose in virtue of being institutions is combatted.

As it stands, Campbell thinks that James opposes institutions because he sees them as at best being irrelevant to the actual pursuit of a fulfilling life. At worst, he sees them as deadening and limiting, as promoting violent tendencies in individuals, and incompatible with individualistic values. Yet, despite his many criticisms of institutions, James does not shy away from espousing the need for certain institutions.

For instance, James, in "The Social Value of the College-Bred", is optimistic about the future role of universities in the quest to build a better world (*ECR,* 106-12). He argues that it should be the role of universities to "help you know a good man when you see him." (*ECR*, 106). In other words, he believes it is the role of universities to teach their students the standards of excellence in both the humanities and sciences, to teach them to recognize value and discern good practices from bad practices, so that they may choose good leaders who demonstrate those practices (*ECR,* 109-10).

James ties the need for students and teachers to learn to distinguish good leaders from bad leaders to the contemporary demands of democracy (*ECR*, 110). He writes:

> Our democratic problem thus is stateable in ultra-simple terms: Who are the kind of men from whom our majorities shall take their cue?... In this very simple way does the value of our educated class define itself: [the college-bred] more than others should be able to divine the worthier and better leader (*ECR*, 110).

Simply put, if democracy is a good that has a role to play in making the world a more fulfilling place to live, then, a university-like institution can help this process by teaching us what sort of people are worth following and which are not. In this way, institutions are believed by James, contrary to Campbell's claims, to be able to provide valuable moral instruction that can go a long way in helping us make our world a fulfilling one.

It is clear then that James does see the importance of at least some institutions. As such, this leaves his interpreters in a difficult spot. On the one hand, institutions pose the possibility of being a serious threat to our ability to react and respond accordingly to all the moral challenges life throws at us. On the other hand, institutions, such as universities, can better prepare us to meet these challenges head on. This leads us to wonder what James' true position is. Is he contradictory? Does he really detest all institutions as Campbell complains about, or is there perhaps a way to consolidate these two sentiments?

Campbell did not quote the following passage, but it is in the same vein as the ones he did. In his eulogy to Thomas Davidson, James writes:

> The memory of Davidson will always strengthen my faith in personal freedom and its spontaneities, and make me less unqualifiedly respectful than ever of 'Civilization' with its herding and branding, licensing and degree-giving, authorizing and appointing, and in general regulating and administering by system the lives of human beings (TD, 97).

The point James is making is that civilization, and presumably its institutions, systemizes human activity. This is seen by James and Davidson as a sort of phasing out the need for a self-determination that is informed by a sympathy and understanding of others since our civilization's various institutions determine for us what is and is not valid and acceptable practice.

For instance, James protested a proposed bill that found itself before the Massachusetts Legislation in 1894. If passed, it would have been illegal to practice any sort of medicine in Massachusetts without being licensed—which would require one to pass a state examination (*ECR*, 58). Essentially, it would have made it illegal to practice alternative medicines, such as those practiced by the mind-cure movement—otherwise known as the New Thought movement—or homeopaths (*ECR*, 58). James protested this bill for several reasons, but the one relevant is that the bill did not address the root cause of people seeking out alternative medicine. According to James:

> A people that loves quacks will have them, laws or no laws. Instead of crying for legal protection, the medical profession ought to educate the people better. They must remember that the aversion which they find in the public, and from which they suffer, has historic roots. The history of medicine is a really hideous history, comparable only with that of priestcraft; ignorance clad in authority, and riding over men's bodies and souls. Let modern medicine dispel all those inherited prejudices by living the historic memories down. It may well be questioned whether a *régime* of license and monopoly will tend to hasten that event as much as one of freedom and conciliation (*ECR*, 62).

According to James, at least part of the reason why some Americans reject modern medicine and turn to quacks and frauds is because of the historic abuses performed by earlier practitioners of medicine. What this bill would do is restrict people's access to frauds, but it would not address the reason people seek out these quacks in the first place. It is like trying to fix a drug epidemic by just arresting drug dealers and traffickers and not addressing the reasons why people are getting hooked on drugs in the first place—such as an over prescription of opioids by doctors to manage pain. Unless there is a genuine attempt by the science-based medical community to engage in a re-conciliation with the communities harmed by their forebearers, people will keep returning to these frauds.

The point I am making is that James sees this sort of regulation as a flight from the need to use sympathy and understanding so as to work to restore people's faith in science-based medicine.

He believes that, when we, as a society, face problems, we cannot always automatically delegate the responsibility of addressing those problem to the realm of laws and regulation. By overly relying on laws and regulation and imposing legal and institutional sanctions as a knee-jerk reaction to any sort of problem we face in society, James worries that there is a very real possibility that our citizenry's ability to actually address these problems at their root will atrophy, and they will become mere automatisms.

According to James, "[h]abits and methods make a prisoner of a man, destroy his readiness, keep him from answering the call of the fresh moment" (TD, 91-92). In other words, much like James' description of what he takes to be the typical transition of personal faith to an institutional religion, wherein politics and dogma seep in and rots the potential for the group's individual members to grow and change and adapt in response to novel moral demands made on them by the universe, so too does James believe that society's systematizing of our lives lead to an increasing unfitness to respond to the world's moral challenges.

While similar to what Campbell writes of James, there is a deeper nuance that Campbell misses; namely, that while any sort of participation within any sort of collective larger than oneself does pose a risk of falling into a deadened state, that a person does fall into such a position is not guaranteed. Note the following passage:

> My dear Mack, we "intellectuals" in America must all work to keep our precious birthright of individualism, and freedom from these institutions [millionaire syndicates, the church, army etc.]. Every great institution is perforce a means of corruption—whatever good it may also do. Only in the free personal relation is full ideality to be found (*The Correspondence of William James*. Electronic Edition: Volume 9: July 1899 – 1901, 41).

James ends this passage by saying that full ideality will only be discovered in the free personal relation. This line immediately raises two key questions. First, what does James mean by full ideality? Second, what is the free personal relation?

Regarding question one, one might interpret the full ideality James is looking for as being the life of the unfettered individual. It is likely this is Campbell's interpretation. Yet, I offer a different interpretation. In Chapter One, I recounted how James seeks to preserve goods wherever he can. It would be out of character for him to consider a life without any of the goods that institutions offer as possessing its 'full ideality.' At the very least, he would want to find some way of offering something of equivalent value to replace the goods that institutions currently offer.

Regarding the second question, Campbell seemingly interprets the free personal relation as the absence of institutions, but James' eulogy to Thomas Davidson should challenge this interpretation. James writes:

> I have to say that it lay in the example [that Thomas Davidson] set to us all of how, even in the midst of this intensely worldly social system of ours, in which each human interest is organized so collectively and so commercially, a single man may still be a knight-errant of the intellectual life, and preserve full freedom in the midst of sociability. Extreme as was his need of friends, and faithful as he was to them he yet lived mainly in reliance on his private inspiration (TD, 96-97).

James' point is that the life of Thomas Davidson proves to us that it is possible to retain full freedom despite our lives being so organized "collectively and so commercially" (TD, 96-97). If the full ideality belonging to individualism can only be found in the free personal relation and Davidson, an individualist, was able to enjoy "full freedom"—despite being in the midst of society—then it would seem that it would be erroneous to assume that what James had in mind when he said that the free personal relation is a world free of institutions and the pressure of social conformity.

Rather, I interpret the "free personal relation" as a particular way of relating oneself to society such that one lives "mainly in reliance on his private inspiration" (TD, 97). James describes Davidson's self-reliance as "[a]sking no man's permission, bowing the knee to no tribal idol, renouncing the conventional channels of recognition" (TD, 96). James' point here is that being

self-reliant means never allowing something external, like a Church, or the Law, to override with dogma what one already knows to be right in one's heart, while allowing one's personal moral experiences to shape one's personal development.

"Life must be flexible" James says, "[t]he real thing to aim at is liberation of the inner interests. Give a man possession of a *soul*, and he will work out his own happiness under any set of conditions" (TD, 92 [Original Italics]). James' point that happiness, i.e., ethical satisfaction, can be worked towards under any set of conditions, tells us that regardless of whether there are institutions or not, so long as one is free to pursue one's inner interests, that is, one's personal religion or one's conscience, one can work out a way toward realizing their ideals. Another passage by James elaborates on this sentiment:

> The bigger the unit you deal with, the hollower, the more brutal, the more mendacious is the life displayed. So I am against all big organizations as such, national ones first and foremost; against all big successes and big results; and in favor of the eternal forces of truth which always work in the individual and immediately unsuccessful, under-dogs always, till history comes, after they are long dead, and puts them on the top (*LWJII*, 90).

While it is true that James believes large institutions tend to make one more hollow, brutal and mendacious, their mere presence does not guarantee that the "eternal forces of truth which always work in the individual", i.e., personal experience, will not eventually have their day. (*LWJII*, 90).

Given this, why not choose a life where one both possesses the boons of various institutions while at the same time living a life where one relies on one's own inspiration? We can participate and work with and inside various institutions so long as the range of behavior expected by them is satisfying, and we can resist or change them when participation within them is no longer so. We can also be cautious and skeptical and always dare to wonder if there is a better way of doing things. By doing so, I do not, and I believe James did not, see any contradiction in living in 'Civilized Society' and living a life of self-reliance where one remains true to oneself and one's ideals.

Campbell is too hasty when he interprets James as condemning institutions as merely deadening. They may potentially be so, but they offer many vital goods as well, as James espouses in "The Social Value of the College-Bred". James, like always, will want to take the side that does its best to secure as much good as it can.

James' true issue with institutions is not, as Campbell claims, that they bind us up with too many rules and necessarily prevent us from following our consciousness or that they draw out our violent natures. Rather it is that they tempt us to see them as more than being merely abstract entities created for the purposes of more expediently meeting certain concrete demands made by real and concrete individuals. Specifically, institutions tempt us to see them as not only being themselves concrete beings that are capable of making their own demands independently of any human, but that the demands they make are of even greater moral worth than any of the demands made by real humans.

For instance, James lambasts the American people's belief "in a national destiny which must be 'big' at any cost" (*ECR*, 157). He presents the inner thoughts and resignations of a person stricken by such a belief as the following:

> We are to be missionaries of civilization, and to bear the white man's burden, painful as it often is. We must sow our ideals, plant our order, impose our God. The individual lives are nothing. Our duty and our destiny call, and civilization must go on (*ECR*, 157).

According to James, those who subscribe to the notion that America's destiny is to be dominant and on-top of everything, even at the cost of human lives, view individual lives as 'nothing' in comparison to the abstract ideal imagined to be America's future. The American Imperialist's thinking echoes a line by Leibniz that James similarly lambasts. Leibniz writes that "[t]he evil will appear as almost nothing in comparison with the good, if we once consider the real magnitude of the City of God" (*P*, 19). James claims such a line reveals Leibniz's "feeble grasp of reality" (*P*, 19).

James believes that Leibniz and the American Imperialist have a feeble grasp on reality because they have lost touch with the with "what the universe is" (*P*, 21) in the sense that they no longer are in working touch with the facts of life that give reality as we know it its true moral value. The American Imperialist is only able to subordinate human life to America's corporate and imperialist interest because he does not understand the true value of human life. Similarly, Leibniz is only able to say that this world among all other possible worlds is the best one because he is turning a blind eye to all the needless suffering that happens in the world.

The point I am making here is that James sees people who subordinate human lives to the interests of institutions—no matter how big—as having a feeble grasp on reality. As James writes, "the individual, the person in the singular number, is the more fundamental phenomenon, and the social institution, of whatever grade, is but secondary and ministerial (TD, 97). Elsewhere, James writes that "the smaller & more intimate is the truer, the man more than the home, the home more than the state, or the church" (*ML*, 311). James' point in saying that the individual is more fundamental than the institution is that he thinks that the individual should be thought of as the center of gravity in which society revolves around, while social institutions should be treated as being "ministerial". James is using the word "ministerial" in a way that is now archaic, where, to say something was "ministerial", one means that something is a means to an end. In this case, James is saying that institutions should revolve around the individual—not the other way around.

For instance, time and time again, we have seen parents, politicians, academics, coaches, members of the clergy, members of law enforcement etc., turn a blind eye to reprehensible acts of evil because to do otherwise would ultimately hurt the institutions they belong to. When these individuals ask themselves what the right thing to do is, they fail to consider the question from the

perspective of the individual victims; rather, the only metric they considered was what was best for the institution.

The reason why James believes that individuals are the more fundamental phenomenon ties back to James' psychology. James writes "no possible number of entities (call them as you like, whether forces, material particles, or mental elements) can sum *themselves* together (*PPI*, 161). James' point is that nothing in reality can combine together to become something completely foreign to the things that make it up. If things do combine, the individual parts and their natures still exist within the combination, and any properties the new thing has depend entirely on the internal nature of its constituents. James uses the relation between water and the individual elements that make it up to illustrate his point. He writes:

> Let it not be objected that H2 and O combine of themselves into 'water,' and thenceforward exhibit new properties. They do not. The 'water' is just the old atoms in the new position, H-O-H; the 'new properties' are just their combined *effects*, when in this position, upon external media, such as our sense-organs and the various reagents on which water may exert its properties and be known (*PPI*, 161).

James is saying, for instance, the cohesive property of water—i.e. its tendency to stick to things—is not a new property that emerges when hydrogen and oxygen combine, but rather is a behavior that follows and is defined by the internal logic of the nature belonging to hydrogen and oxygen molecules. To describe the cohesive property of water is to describe a certain dynamic that occurs when two hydrogen molecules interact with a lone oxygen molecule. The same is true for any other property of a complex thing—including moral demands.

If we understand that institutions are instances where people have combined themselves together for some purpose or another, we see that the institution cannot be understood as being anything other than a bunch of people working together to do specific things. It would be wrong to see an institution as having properties, including those of a moral nature, that are completely foreign to the nature of the people who make it up. Consequently, it would be wrong to see the

goals or objectives that the institution aims for as being of any greater moral importance than what we could possibly attribute to a moral demand made by a similarly sized group of people. Yet there are many who treat institutions as entities greater—and with properties that are completely foreign—to the people who make them up.

For instance, the alleged 'divine right of kings' holds that the authority that is said to belong to the demands made by the monarchal institution supervenes God and does not supervene the nature of any individual that makes up the institution. This is to say that those who believe in the divine right of kings believe that there is no way for any other person or institution to acquire such authority except through the will of God.

Those with similar beliefs as those who believe in the divine right of kings—that is, those who believe that institutions can have properties that do not supervene on the nature of the people who make it up are prone to making the mistake that when such an institution expresses a moral demand, that moral demand possesses a greater moral weight than a different collective of humans could produce precisely because it came from that institution—and not because of the nature of the moral demand itself as decided by the actual moral relations of the world and the people within.

For instance, monarchies, religious organizations, and even political parties can acquire this distinction where certain people will do anything and everything asked of them by high-level members of that institution. Such people will carry out these demands—even at great possible risk to themselves—such as covering up illicit acts or interfering with an election—without any clear idea about what the success of the institution will even mean in practical terms. This is to say that, to these people, the demand of the organization to succeed trumps any concrete value that may be added to an actual person's life.

As long as we see institutions for what they are; namely, groups of people working together after specific aims, filled with people who have their own personal demands as well, and we refrain from seeing them as abstract entities imbued with supernatural properties, then much of the danger that institutions represent as institutions *qua* institutions is negated. This does not mean of course that specific institutions cannot be dangerous or pose as obstacles to our goal of living a fulfilling life, but if there are such institutions, it is not because they are institutions, but because of how the specific thoughts and actions of the people that make up those institutions are causing the individuals within the collectivity to act. This is to say that if an institution is bad or flawed, it is bad and flawed because the people who make up the institution are thinking bad and flawed thoughts and doing bad and flawed things.

Regarding Campbell's point that James could not see how institutions may positively help people overcome certain social conditions, like poverty, which may be limiting their ability to pursue fulfilling lives, I contend that Campbell again misses James' point. James does not say that a redistribution of wealth is unimportant to any one's personal fulfillment, but that there is more to fulfillment than simply a redistribution of wealth and that even in a perfectly economically just society where no one is hungry or thirsty, where everyone has clean water, and a place to sleep, the problems of what to do with one's life remain. One still must figure out how to make one's life fulfilling.

While James does say "[g]ive a man possession of a *soul*, and he will work out his own happiness under any set of conditions" (TD, 92) [Original Italics] it is important to keep in mind that James says the man will work out, not attain, his happiness in any set of conditions. Drop a person into any situation and observe how they get on; so long as they are not bound to some external cause leading them to go against what experience tells them, such as a dogmatic religion

or social convention, they will find ways to work towards living a happier and more fulfilling life. James' point was merely to illustrate that so often it is our dedication to external causes, such as customs, religions, and laws that blinds us and prevents us from correctly adducing what should be done to make the world a better place to live in.

Undoubtably, James still thinks factors, such as starvation, will impair one's capacity to live a fulfilling life as possible. James himself even expresses the point that exploitation of the labouring class prevents many of those who make it up from living a maximally fulfilling way of life *(TT,* 162) and he contends that, to at least some degree, the conflict the labouring class creates with the owning class in order to alleviate these problems is healthy *(TT*, 165).

James also writes to the *Republican* that:

> Du Bois and Washington are champions of coordinate & equally essential interests, in my humble opinion; they are citizens of whom our country may be equally proud; and I should esteem it a national calamity if either of them gave up the cause for which he fights (POTN, 193).

James is referring to the debate between former student W. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington over whether it was more important, in the grand scheme of things, for Black Americans to fight for economic security (Washington) than political power (Du Bois). James plainly states that he believes both ideals are equally essential to the wellbeing of the American people. Again, this shows how James is not blind to how important economic security is to maximizing our moral satisfaction; he thinks it is just as important as is political freedom and expression.

What both these examples show is that James, in other words, is not so naive as to think social conditions cannot have serious ramifications for the type of life one can live and there is no reason to think that he would be opposed to institutions that may alleviate such conditions. What I hope to have shown is that the 'evidence' that Campbell relies on to argue that James sees

institutions as obstacles is far more nuanced than he presented it as being and does not reveal James to be nearly as anti-institutional as Campbell claims.

Institutions may trap us in a web of politics, dogma, and simple convenience. They may also negatively influence our lives by preventing us from securing the particular values that will most benefit us. They may even tempt us to fall into the trap of putting their interests ahead of the interests of concrete individuals. Yet institutions may also help us. While they may negatively influence our lives by preventing us from securing the particular values we want, they often, in other situations, positively influence it by helping secure those very same values. All in all, so long as we can fend off the temptation to judge the worth of things by their benefit to various institutions and social systems, there is no definitive evidence that suggests James thinks institutions are absolute obstacles to moral growth and personal fulfillment.

Part Three: Can Institutions be Reconstructed?

Earlier I noted that according to Campbell:

> [James] could not emphasize the need for social reconstruction of our institutions as a means to fuller lives because the institutions themselves, reconstructed or not, were deadening (EF, 230).

Just above, I argued that James does not hold that institutions are necessarily deadening. That said, admittedly, Campbell could argue that while James does not see institutions as necessarily threatening to the goal of living a fully fulfilled life, it still could be the case that James believes personal fulfillment is obtained in spite of institutions. In this part of my thesis, I wish to explore whether there is any evidence to suggest that James believes institutions could actually be useful to the goal of a life of fulfillment. To this end, I wish to look at whether James believes institutions could be reconstructed so as to make them into useful tools for living a fulfilling life. If there is evidence that James does believe this, then it stands to reason that James does not believe that

personal fulfillment can only ever be obtained in spite of institutions. To this end, there are several examples where James does indicate that he does think such a reconstruction is possible. I will give two examples below.

Between 1885-1886, Harvard had a problem with rowdy behavior among students after certain celebrations causing "nuisance" to the surrounding community. (*ECR*, 122). In "Concerning Student Celebrations and Self-Government", James proposed a self-admittedly radical solution to the problem. He proposed making the students themselves responsible for their peers' behavior, arguing that by doing so it would develop in the students' valuable moral virtues.

To illustrate this point, consider the following passage by James:

> [I]f, every year, twenty men with position, resolution and tact, would make it their business to resent offenses against the tone of the college in character and conduct, we should end by imbuing the very atmosphere with an honor, manliness, pride and delicacy, to which all things could be entrusted, and which would be the most precious thing a young fellow coming here would gain,—worth far more to him than his learning or his degree (*ECR*, 123-24).

James' point is that Harvard should change how the rules of Harvard are being enforced. James does not want it to be the case that a member of the staff takes on the judicial role of adjudicating what conduct is and is not inside the bounds of acceptable behavior and what is and is not an appropriate response to certain transgressions. Rather, the first people granted such judiciary power should be the students themselves. James' believes that if these students were empowered by Harvard in this way, then they could more effectively rein in the misbehaving students than the staff could. Furthermore, James believes that by imbuing the "feeling in each student that he is in some degree responsible for the behavior of the community" (*ECR*, 124) the student body as a whole would be less tolerant of those within it who bring it shame. If the students are successful in curbing misbehavior, then for having put in the work to do so, James thinks that the students will be rewarded with feelings of "honor, manliness, pride and delicacy" (*ECR*, 124).

James has other suggestions about how to improve the lives and character of the students by making certain changes to Harvard practices, such as by shortening how long it takes to complete a college course (*ECR*, 33). In this instance, James believes that reducing the length of courses is important for several reasons. One such reason is that he believes that the:

> …listlessness, apathy, dawdling, sauntering, the smoking of cigarettes and living on small sarcasms, the 'Harvard indifference,' in short, of which outsiders have so frequently complained, are the direct fruit of keeping these men too long from contact with that world of affairs to which they rightfully belong (*ECR*, 37).

James' point is that the length of Harvard courses isolated students from the community for too long, and it compromised their character.

While this may seem to back up some of Campbell's claims that James' believes that any participation in institutions is inimical to one's spiritual wellbeing, James' second reason refutes this. Specifically, the second reason why James believes it is important to reduce the length of courses is because it will make university more accessible (*ECR*, 38). James anticipates a specific criticism of his suggestion to reduce the length of Harvard's courses. He asks himself: "Would you lower the value of the Harvard degree? Would you degrade and cheapen a thing which we have laboriously brought up to a high significance by many years of strenuous toil?" (*ECR*, 38). In response, James says:

> Yes! I reply, by all means lower, degrade and cheapen what proves too high for the country to afford. If our colleges are deserted as our population grows, something must be wrong with the system. And since our requirements are higher than those of Germany, we may be pretty certain that not the country, but the requirements are to blame. The great problem is to make our colleges tell in our national life: the leaders of every generation should as far as possible be college-bred men (*ECR*, 37-38).

James' position is that while the Harvard degree would be cheapened by reducing how long it takes to complete a course at Harvard since students will have less time to accrue the benefits that going to Harvard brings, it is still worth doing if more people are able to go to Harvard as a result.

In other words, James believes that the quality of Harvard graduates can decline a little so long as it comes at the cost of a higher quantity of Harvard graduates. Despite the fact that Harvard is an institution, James wants more people to go to it.

Contrary to Campbell, James is clearly emphasizing the importance of reconstructing the institution of Harvard University so as to not only secure certain vital ideals that he believes will make the students' lives more fulfilling, but to bring in more students. Yet, to a limited extent, Campbell has a point that James is unlikely to believe that it is enough to reconstruct institutions so long as all we mean by reconstruct is to make some top-down changes to various institutional practices. Meliorism is an important theme in James. This is because James believes the universe to be melioristic in nature. According to James, the "melioristic universe is conceived after a *social* analogy, as a pluralism of independent powers. It will succeed just in proportion as more of these work for its success. If none work, it will fail. If each does his best, it will not fail" (*ML*, 418). In other words, a thing is melioristic when it is a thing that can only be maximally "ameliorated", that is, turned from a bad thing into a good thing, when the individual parts that make up that thing are all invested with and take advantage of the power to ameliorate their individual selves as well.

For instance, James' suggestion of how to deal with unruly students at Harvard illustrates what meliorism in practice means for James. If we recall, James' suggestion was to empower the students to police themselves. James' view is that the best way Harvard could fix its relation to the wider social world was not for change to be only imposed from the top down, but for change to result from a small part working on its own behalf to get itself into a proper working order—namely, the students themselves. Many of James' solutions to social problems revolve around this notion that meaningful reform comes from within, from each individual part of a social system

consciously taking on the duty of putting into proper order the small part of the whole that is within their scope to change.

In fact, I argue that James sees that the path towards a better world lies upon the cultivation of a rising consciousness of a duty to perfect that which one is in control of on all levels of society. Undergirding this thought is the recognition that James sees the social world as stratified in terms of different levels of intimacy with reality. For instance, James writes, "the smaller & more intimate is the truer, the man more than the home, the home more than the state, or the church (*ML*, 311). My point is that James sees the salvation of this world as being, from a practical standpoint, conditional on each of these levels, the man, the home, the state, etc., acting *as if* they were conscious of a duty to perfect what it is that each has dominion over for the sake of building the best possible world.[12]

James expresses such a belief in papers such as "The Social Value of the College-Bred". Therein, James writes that he believes that the educated class "ought to have our own class-consciousness." (*ECR*, 110). This is to say that the "social-value" that James believes that universities should bring us is that they should better foster in the educated class or "college-bred" the ability to live up to what James takes to be the true purposes of the educated class; namely, to be to society as a tiller is to a boat in the sense that it keeps society on course towards moral enlightenment. James believes that "the mission of the educated intellect in society is not to find or invent reasons for the demands of passion, it reduces itself to this small, but incessant criticizing, or equalizing function" (*ML*, 105). James' point is that what we need from the educated class as a

[12] Of course, more abstract social entities like families, churches or states cannot actually be conscious, but if the members that make up those organizations are themselves conscious of the need for the family, church, state etc. to play a certain vital role in the quest to build a better world, then, along with a willingness to carry out their duty, the more the organization will act as if it were conscious of some duty it is required to play to build a better world.

society is not for them to find or invent reasons to justify our desire for what we already want. Rather, the educated class should incessantly criticize the existence of demands for things that are not worth demanding.

James elaborates by saying that the educated class should never forget the "normal perspective, of interests, and keeps things in their proper places in the scale of values" (*ML*, 105). According to James "[f]or this it has to blow cold upon the hot excitement, and hot upon the cold motive" (*ML*, 105). The point James is getting at is that he believes that the educated class should use public criticism to keep the passions of the populace pointed at true and noble ends by re-directing their energies away from less worthy leaders and their goods to more worthy ideals. As he explains:

> If you ask me in what direction it seems to me to day [sic] that the weak but steady pressure of the highly educated is to be exerted congruently with the everlasting pull of truth and justice, I should say of course that in general it is in the direction of deeper realities, as opposed to shows and shams and transient unreal values, and in particular that it turns away from some of the ideals of success that in the world about us reign almost undisputed (*ML*, 105).

James' point about turning away from "some of the ideals of success" is worth explaining. One of the things James was deeply worried about was that many institutions were instilling in people a feeling of apathy towards their moral obligations. This was not because of any inherent nature belonging to them as institutions, but rather this was a growing problem that was taking over various institutions due to a growing obsession with success for the sake of success.

For instance, if we look at the parts of American culture that James finds contemptible, we see how James bemoans the fact that a fear of failure has led the American people to turn a blind eye to injustice. James writes to H. G. Wells,

> When the ordinary American hears of [injustice], instead of the idealist within him beginning to "see red" with the higher indignation, instead of the spirit of English history growing alive in his breast, he begins to pooh-pooh and minimize and tone down the thing, and breed excuses from his general fund of optimism and respect for expediency. "It's

> probably right enough"; "Scoundrelly, as you say," but understandable, "from the point of view of parties interested"—but understandable in onlooking citizens only as a symptom of the moral flabbiness born of the exclusive worship of the bitch-goddess Success (*LWJII, 260).*

As James says, Americans "pooh-pooh and minimize and tone down [injustice], and breed excuses from his [sic] general fund of optimism and respect for expediency" (*LWJII*, 260). When faced with an opponent too big and too strong to overcome, people not only fail to listen to their empathetic consciousnesses and stand up for what is right because they cannot imagine winning, but they seek to deny that it even is an injustice.

James makes a similar point in "The True Harvard". In the article, James identifies what he believes makes universities ignominious and what he believes makes them worthy of praise. One thing he despises about universities is that they offer "no sure guarantee for anything but a more educated cleverness in the service of popular idols and vulgar ends" (*ECR*, 76). James sees people using the reasoning capacity they were taught at school to simply invent reasons for doing whatever it is they *wanted to do* or, more specifically, *not doing* whatever it is they were *supposed to do*.

James once again believes this wheedling behavior is the result of the apathy born out of worshiping the idol of success for its own sake. He writes that "swindling and adroitness, and the indulgence of swindling and adroitness, and cant, and sympathy with cant" are "natural fruits of that extraordinary idealization of 'success' in the mere outward sense of 'getting there,' and getting there on as big a scale as we can, which characterizes our present generation" (*ECR*, 76). James provides examples of some of the horrible things Harvard students have done because they are so driven by the need to 'succeed' that they ignore their morals. He writes:

> Harvard men defend our treatment of our Filipino allies [the colonization of the Philippines] as a masterpiece of policy and morals. Harvard men as journalists pride themselves on producing copy for any side that may enlist them. There is not a public abuse for which some Harvard advocate may not be found (*ECR*, 76).

Again, the point James is making is that the American people are so scared of not being successful that they talk themselves out of caring about things that deep down they really do care about if they believe that it is a doomed cause or will frustrate their chances to "succeed" in their career or education, etc.

My point in explaining all this is that James sees the educated class's role as combating the rising moral apathy that is growing out of an overvaluation of the "idols of success" with a rising consciousness among practitioners of pedagogy of the need and duty to prevent students from attributing too much value in success for success's sake. This is what James means when he says the intellectual class needs to "blow cold upon the hot excitement, and hot upon the cold motive" (*ML*, 105). The hot excitement is whatever current idol the social tribe is obsessed with, in this case, success for success' sake, and the cold motive is the need to address injustice and exploitation. The intellectual class needs to whip the student body into shape, getting rid of that moral flabbiness, so that those students may be morally fit enough to go on and in their own way work to make this world a better place.

Yet, for the educated class to be able to even step up to this role, James believes that our universities and colleges must be improved, which in turn requires both changes in certain practices and that the individuals who make up universities and colleges see that there is a vital need in society for universities to produce people capable of keeping civilization on the course towards moral enlightenment.

Unfortunately, as James' discussion in "The Present Dilemma of Philosophy" tells us, the people who are meant to keep society on the right track towards enlightenment are generally unfit for the role required of them. To explain this point, I need to explain what this "present dilemma in philosophy" is, which requires me to explicate a certain amount of the chapter.

One of James' first moves in the chapter is to make a crude distinction between two kinds of modern-day thinkers—the Rationalists and the Empiricists. He explains that the Rationalist type of mind is someone who wants a personal philosophy to provide them an escape from the conclusions of materialism (*P*, 16*)*; they want it to show that religion is still an intellectually responsible thing to participate in (*P*, 15), they want it to return "the old confidence in human values and the resultant spontaneity" (*P*, 17); they want a reason to believe in free-will (*P*, 13*)*, and they want reason to be optimistic about salvation (*P*, 13).

James uses Leibniz as his archetypal example of a Rationalist. Leibniz engages in Theodicy, that is, he wishes to provide a justification for the ways of God. In his quest to exonerate God from the problem of evil, Leibniz concludes that "the evils [of the world] may be almost-nothing in comparison with the goods that the Universe contains" (*P*, 19). In other words, any concrete example of evil in the world is not *really* evil because, in the grand scheme of things, it is necessary to bring about the "City of God" (*P*, 19). It exists to bring about the greater good.

In contrast to Leibniz, James, in an unexpected move, instead of using someone such as Hume or Mill as his archetypal empiricist, uses *Human Submission*, a book by Anarchist and labour activist Morrison Swift, as an example of what the Empiricist wants instead from the discipline of philosophy (*P*, 22). James begins introducing the Empiricist temperament by quoting the very beginning of Swift's book, wherein Swift had compiled a very macabre series of newspaper articles and obituaries—all featuring ghastly instances of people dying terrible deaths from starvation, murder, suicide, and murder-suicides in response to the terrible conditions of the working class (*P*, 21*)*. For instance, Swift had included a report of a man who had drunk carbolic acid (phenol acid) because an illness had left him unable to provide for his family (*P*, 21*)*.

He then quotes Swift at length to show the Empiricists' "interpretation of the Universe" (*P*, 21*)*. It is worth quoting these passages because, in them, we see the true dilemma that James is worried about. Swift begins by quoting some philosophic peers of James: "[w]e are aware of the presence of God in His world" says Josiah Royce while F. H. Bradley says, "The Absolute is the richer for every discord, and for all diversity which it embraces" (*P*, 21*)*. Swifts says in response that Bradley "means that these slain men [the ones in the clippings] make the universe richer, and that is Philosophy" (*P*, 21). Yet, "while Professors Royce and Bradley and a whole host of guileless thorough fed thinkers are unveiling Reality and the Absolute and explaining away evil and pain, this is the condition [the conditions of pain, suffering and exploitation of the labouring class detailed in the reports] of the only beings known to us anywhere in the universe with a developed consciousness of what the universe is" (*P*, 21*).* Swift's point is that it is only the labouring class who have a working knowledge about the true worth of the universe while philosophers like Leibniz, Royce or Bradley turn a blind eye by denying that there is anything truly wrong with reality as it is now. This is because, according to Swift, "[w]hat these people [the labouring class] experience is Reality. It gives us an absolute phase of the universe. It is the personal experience of those most qualified in all our circle of knowledge to have experience, to tell us what is" (*P*, 21*).* Swift writes, "[t]his Cleveland workingman, killing his children and himself [another of the cited cases], is one of the elemental, stupendous facts of this modern world and of this universe. It cannot be glossed over or minimized away by all the treatises on God, and Love, and Being, helplessly existing in their haughty monumental vacuity" (*P*, 22*).* According to Swift, the murder-suicide "is one of the simple irreducible elements of this world's life after millions of years of divine opportunity and twenty centuries of Christ. It is in the moral world like atoms or sub-atoms in the physical, primary, indestructible" (*P*, 22). To try to spin it as good by virtue of necesssity, Swift

thinks, is to deny what it is. It is absurd to say that this world is the best of all possible world since we can easily conceive of a world where such tragedies do not happen.

What the murder-suicide shows is the "imposture of all philosophy which does not see in such events the consummate factor of conscious experience. These facts [of evil and suffering] invincibly prove religion a nullity" (*P*, 22). According to Swift because Rationalists, such as Leibniz and Hegel, have turned a blind eye on such evil for too long, "Man will not give religion two thousand centuries or twenty centuries more to try itself and waste human time; its time is up, its probation is ended. Its own record ends it" (*P*, 22).

Swift ends his point with a vague threat, which James includes in his book. He writes:

> And the mind of mankind—not yet the mind of philosophers and of the proprietary class—but of the great mass of the silently thinking and feeling men, is coming to this view. They are judging the universe as they have heretofore permitted the hierophants of religion and learning to judge them…. (*P*, 21).

The point Swift seems to be getting at here is that there is a rising class consciousness among the labouring class where these "thinking and feeling" individuals are coming to judge the state of the world for themselves in accordance with their pain and suffering and a threshold will soon be reached where the workers will render a verdict on the value of these "hierophants of religion"—that is, philosophers and other educated members of society.

According to James, "[s]uch is the reaction of an empiricist mind upon the rationalist bill of fare" (*P*, 22). Swift sees religion and philosophy as useless to humanity and James says such a claim, "tho possibly less tensely charged with feeling, is the verdict of every seriously inquiring amateur in philosophy to-day who turns to the philosophy-professors for the wherewithal to satisfy the fulness of his nature's needs" (*P*, 22).

According to James, anyone who turns to philosophy professors for the means to satisfy the "fulness of his nature's needs… becomes thus the judge of us philosophers" (*P*, 23). I interpret

James' point as building on the belief—which I discussed above—that society has a need for the educated class to guide it towards moral enlightenment. Swift, as James quotes, has come to the conclusion that "Man will not give religion [or philosophy] two thousand centuries or twenty centuries more to try itself and waste human time" (*P*. 22). By saying that such a claim "tho possibly less tensely charged with feeling, is the verdict of every seriously inquiring amateur in philosophy to-day who turns to the philosophy-professors" (*P*. 22), James indicates that he believes that most amateurs in philosophy would generally agree with Swift. Yet, James says, "[n]one of us [philosophers] may treat [a mind like Swift's] verdicts disdainfully, for after all, his is the typically perfect mind, the mind the sum of whose demands is greatest, the mind *whose criticisms and dissatisfactions are fatal in the long run*" (*P*, 23 [Emphasis Added]).

It is important to carefully parse out the nuance of James' lines. James means by saying that Swift, and others like him, have typically perfect minds that Swift sees reality as it really is. He understands the true moral value of the current universe—which is a lot lower than most people recognize; hence why, out of all other people in the world, people like Swift have the greatest sum of demands, their awareness of how broken the world is leads them to want the greatest amount of things fixed. By saying that Swift's mind and those like it is such that "his *criticisms and dissatisfactions are fatal in the long run",* James is evoking Swift's threat; namely, that soon there will come a time when people like Swift hold philosophers accountable for their turning a blind eye to all the suffering and evilness contained within this world and not providing any way guidance on how to fix it. The fact that James thinks not meeting the criticisms and dissatisfactions will be fatal in the long run suggests that he believes the future of philosophy is indeed dire—suggesting that Swift and this threat is the titular "present dilemma of philosophy".

Yet, immediately after saying that the criticisms and dissatisfactions of people like Swift will be fatal in the long run, James says:

> 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 the rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts (*P*, 23).

In other words, James sees Pragmatism as the solution to the threat that Swift and those like him pose to philosophers. He offers a new way philosophers might secure some of the things Rationalist want from philosophy, such as a way to justify their religious faith, a way to preserve "the old confidence in human values and the resultant spontaneity" (*P*, 17), and reasons to believe in free-will, but without continuing to deny how wrong and ugly reality is, thereby attempting to address Morrison Swift's concerns.

My point is that James believes that philosophers and, by extension, the rest of academia, are incapable of keeping society on the right track towards moral enlightenment because they have turned a blind eye to the concrete evils in the world. Yet, James thinks Pragmatism can help solve this problem by helping philosophers become "cordial" with the facts of this world while not alienating philosophers and the religiously minded from the more spiritual aspects of reality. Through Pragmatism, James believes that philosophers can be awoken to the needs of society—leading to the rising of a class consciousness among the educated intellect that James believes we so vitally need.

What is relevant to our discussion is the fact that James sees it as his duty to use Pragmatism to become—as Marx believes the proletariat ought—conscious of certain social facts; namely, injustice, exploitation, and pain and suffering. It is only by becoming truly conscious of such facts that the duty one has to make the world a better place becomes apparent. The point I wish to press is that pedagogical institutions are an example of what James believes ought to be true for all

institutions—that is, that the individuals that make up institutions, such as the Church or the State, ought to become consciousness of the experiences of others, such as the pain and suffering, so that the true duty of the institution as a whole becomes apparent to those who make it up.

For instance, James critiques certain commonly held beliefs among common-law judges and school masters of his day. He writes:

> Common-law judges sometimes talk about the law, and school-masters talk about the latin tongue, in a way to make their hearers think they mean entities pre-existent to the decisions or to the words and syntax, determining them unequivocally and requiring them to obey. But the slightest exercise of reflexion makes us see that, instead of being principles of this kind, both law and latin are results. Distinctions between the lawful and the unlawful in conduct, or between the correct and incorrect in speech, have grown up incidentally among the interactions of men's experiences in detail; and in no other way do distinctions between the true and the false in belief ever grow up (*P*, 116).

We see in this discussion that James believes these common-law judges and schoolmasters are wrong to try to adjudicate rightness and wrongness in accordance with certain alleged abstract entities. Rather, he thinks that even with the slightest bit of reflection—thereby suggesting that he thinks that these common-law judges and schoolmasters are not reflective whatsoever—that they will see that rightness and wrongness in the realm of Law and Latin is born incidentally among the interactions of people and their experiences. My point here is not solely that James believes that law and language exist to serve the practical needs of humans—not the other way around—but also that the discussion plainly indicated that James believes that judicial and pedagogical institutions ought to be more conscious and reflective about what it is that they do and how it relates to the interactions of the concrete experiences of real people.

Similarly, if we recall, one of the major ways in which James sought to resist the colonialization of the Philippines was to combat a "certain blindness in human beings" that "we all are afflicted in regard to the feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves" (*TT*, 132) by instilling in people a growing awareness of their own relation to the world and the

necessary conditions of a fulfilling life (*TT*, 4). An important passage to consider in this line of thought is James' critique of the imperialist consciousness:

> The worst of our imperialists is that they do not themselves know where sincerity ends and insincerity begins. Their state of consciousness is so new, so mixed of primitively human passions and, in political circles, of calculations that are anything but primitively human; so at variance, moreover, with their former mental habits; and so empty of definite data and contents; that they face various ways at once, and their portraits should be taken with a squint (*ML*, 158).

James' point is that the imperialist movement is made up of individuals who lack any cohesive consciousness of what their movement stands for or what they even want out of it. The movement is at odds with everything they previously habitually professed to value and seems out of touch with the facts of the world at large. The imperialists are not even reflective enough to know whether they sincerely want the things they call for.

Again, we see here that James lambasts a lack of reflection and consciousness of the more intimate facts of the world. James wants people to wake up and recognize plainly and clearly the concrete instances of injustice, of exploitation, of pain and suffering that exist in this world. On this point, James thinks that much of the unhealthiness that pertains to class conflict—that is, the part of class conflict that will not lead to a better world—consists "solely in the fact that one-half of our fellow-countrymen remain entirely blind to the internal significance of the lives of the other half" (*TT*, 164-65). Specifically, James believes that both the rich and the poor:

> miss the joys and sorrows, they fail to feel the moral virtue, and they do not guess the presence of the intellectual ideals. They are at cross-purposes all along the line, regarding each other as they might regard a set of dangerously gesticulating automata, or if they seek to get at the inner motivation, making the most horrible mistake (*TT*, 165)

Essentially, James believes that neither the rich nor the poor understand each other and fail to recognize the vital values that each believes is conditional for life to be significant and meaningful for them. Just as the War Party and the Peace Party were locked into an interminable conflict

because neither side could provide the other side with a way forward that secured the vital ideals of the other, the same can be said of the rich and the poor. By this I mean that James thinks the conflict between the rich and the poor continues to remain interminable, stagnating progress, because neither side can offer solutions that secure whatever very important ideals are driving the opposition. It is important to James that we find a way to secure the vital ideals that belong to both the rich and the poor.

To this point, James proposes that his own idea of conscripting the youthful population (both the youth of the rich and the poor) to build railroads and skyscrapers, clear forest, till farms, etc. will make it so that "no one would remain blind, as the luxurious classes now are blind, to man's real relations to the globe he lives on, and to the permanently solid and hard foundations of his higher life" (MEW, 174). The rich, for instance, by experiencing for themselves the hardship that labour requires will better understand the true cost that labour exacts from the human body, and can make more informed decisions when deciding upon the health and safety standards for their companies. This is to say that James thinks that building an understanding between the rich and the poor towards each other's experience is the first step in finding a solution to class conflict that will be tolerable to both parties.

My point in explicating this is simply to make it clear that time and time again James champions the need for us to become conscious of the experiences of others, especially in regard to their pain and suffering. By extension, it is important to James that the practices of our institutions are imbued by those who make up those institutions, such as in the case of judges and teachers, or unions and millionaire syndicates, an awareness of others' concrete experiences and deeply held ideals. This is to say that the policies and regulations that institutions enforce must be intelligently created in response to the fresh demands of the concrete moment. In the case of law,

for instance, if a particular law leads to certain unexpectedly harmful practical consequences on the lives of many members of society, the value of such a law must be revaluated to see if whatever good the law can practically offer is really worth the practical harm it creates.

If we now, at last, return to Campbell, we see even more clearly that James does not believe in the non-importance of institutions. More importantly though, we see that the ambivalence and hostility towards institutions that Campbell documented were indications that James' view on reconstructing institutions was much more complicated than Campbell anticipated. Institutions must be reconstructed from the top-down, but also, crucially, from the bottom-up. James believes that the people who make up our institutions, such as our Churches, our Governments, our Judicial systems, and our Capitalist enterprises, need to become more conscious and attentive to the experiences of people in this world so that those institutions in turn make be more conscious and attentive to human need.

Part Four: Concluding Remarks for Chapter Two

Once again, by going over Campbell's criticism, I hope to have shown to the reader that when trying deduce James' position on a topic, whether it his thoughts on ethical philosophy or his views on social reform, his works on Pragmatism, Psychology, his papers on practical problems in society, and even his notes, letters and manuscripts are all incredibly useful as tools to help us figure out James' true position. As demonstrated in this paper, Campbell regularly mischaracterizes James because he has not considered James' other works.

Campbell is not alone in sharing this anti-institutional reform view of James, unfortunately; many scholars perpetuate this mistaken view as well. For instance, Cornel West writes: "[l]ike Emerson, [James] is prohibited by his individualism from taking seriously fundamental social change; instead he opts for a gradualism supported by moral critique" (AoP, 60). Yet, as I sought

to demonstrate in the previous part of my thesis, James does take seriously the topic of fundamental social change, it is just that his calls for such change is always tempered by a reminder that we cannot just change the social conditions of the world, believing that all will be right in the world if we create just laws, and overcome economic inequality. We must improve the inner conditions of our private lives as well. If Campbell or West had read "The Social-Value of the College-Bred" or "What Makes Life Significant", for instance, it is likely that they never would have come to the conclusion that James abhors institutions and sees them a necessarily deadening or that James does not treat the need for fundamental social change seriously. Hence why it is so important for Jamesian scholars to read these works.

Final Remarks:

James' numerous essays, books, talks, and letters show that the moral philosopher and the life that they need to live is incredibly complicated. James is drawn in numerous directions, from individualism, to being more community focused, to being tough-minded, yet tender-minded, religious, but scientific. He approaches every topic holistically and from the broadest perspective possible, but always remains laser-focused on the concrete effects that our actions and beliefs have on individual lives. This makes James very hard to pin down and define, especially if one limits oneself to just a few texts by James.

As I said in the introduction, the aim of this paper was to show the value of using James' more empirical and practical papers to inform our interpretation of James' more theoretical papers on ethics and morality. Throughout my paper I provided a number of concrete examples where reading James in such a way is fruitful and can ward off misconceptions, as well as examples of scholars plainly mischaracterizing James. As stated earlier, I believe that James' notes, his writings on Psychology, his practical papers, and even his letters are key to understanding his ethical

thought. Had any of the critics I have discussed taken seriously these papers, I do not think they would have made the same mistakes that they did. Hopefully, as future scholarship into James' ethical thought continues, more attention will be paid to these oft neglected works.

In my own attempt to summarize James, I have emphasized that James denies that there are absolute principles, standards or rules external to our personal feelings that might allow us to permanently know what ideals in life are worth pursuing. Far from dooming us to live in a subjectivist quagmire where everyone's feelings are on a par with one another, James believes objective appraisal is obtainable. He believes that if two people have a moral disagreement about which goods are worthy of pursuit, we can determine who has the better perspective by considering which goods will lead to production of a greater amount of positive moral experiences and how those experiences will lead us to produce the greatest possible moral universe.

That being said, we live in a fallibilistic world and we cannot know for certain whether we have considered enough of the definite differences. There may always be a particular set of consequences that we are overlooking that otherwise—if taken into consideration—would drastically change our appraisal. Far from being a curse, the chance to earn our salvation fills our lives with zest and tingle, leading us to live more strenuous and active lives.

My hope—as a final bid to convince the reader that it is worth it to interpret James' ethical thought with his Psychology and his more practical writings in mind—is that, having explicated James' ethical thought and theory through the lens of these writings, the reader finds value in the thoughts presented here as James' as guidance or insight into one's own moral life. As I discussed earlier, James himself would say that when two theories are equal in all else, but one is more agreeable to our aesthetic, moral, or intellectual ideals, then it is not intellectually irresponsible of us to pick the more agreeable theory or interpretation over the other. Personally, I feel James'

thoughts and theories on ethics—as I have presented them in this thesis—are invaluable to the trials and tribulations we face in the modern world—and I hope that the reader sees this too, and for this reason sees that it is indeed good to understand James' in the manner I have prescribed.

Relatedly, I also hope that by addressing some common misconceptions made by scholars of American Pragmatism who are not familiar with James that I have sowed some doubt in regard to the soundness of the view that Pragmatism is a unified enterprise—where each subsequent thinker is building upon and refining the thoughts of their forbearers. It is clear that many scholars of Pragmatism are not nearly familiar enough with earlier thinkers, such as James, to have an informed opinion on whether or not the latter thinkers are improving or maturing the thoughts of the earlier thinkers. It is my hope that future scholarship into the tradition of American Pragmatism recognizes the importance of discovering just how developed and matured each thinker was in regard to their own unique and respective projects—not in relation to some abstract and imagined collective goal.

I began my closing words by writing that James' position is incredibly complicated… but on the other hand, James' moral philosophy is quite simple. It asks us to imagine a world that uses sympathy and compassion as a means to produce a world where we all are morally satisfied. James writes that "the philosopher is just like the rest of us non-philosophers, so far as we are just and sympathetic instinctively, and so far, as we are open to the voice of complaint" (MPML, 159). This is to say that a philosopher's capacity to be seen as a fair and just judge of moral ideals is not a special skill owing to the philosopher's unique cultivation of a certain sagacity or the memorization of a particular set of rules, but because the philosopher has taught themselves how to earn the trust of others, to be sympathetic and fair with them and proved to them that one ultimately cares deeply about their lives. James' philosophy is thus open to us all.

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