

**WILLIAM JAMES AND FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE'S
REVALUATION OF TRUTH AND LIFE**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

I have used the following abbreviations while referring to the texts listed below in the bibliography:

By William James: **DD** for “The Dilemmas of Determinism,” **EM** for “The Energies of Men,” **GR** for “The Gospel of Relaxation,” **MM** for “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” **P** for *Pragmatism*, **SR** for “The Sentiment of Rationality,” **VRE** for *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and **WB** for “The Will to Believe.”

By Friedrich Nietzsche: **A** for *The Antichrist* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, **BGE** for *Beyond Good and Evil*, **EH** for *Ecce Homo*, **GM** for *The Genealogy of Morals* translated by Francis Golffing, **GS** for *The Gay Science*, **HAH** for *Human, all too Human*, **TI** for *Twilight of the Idols*, **WP** for *The Will to Power*, **Z** for *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*.

INTRODUCTION

While reacting against philosophical rationalism, late 19th century modernity, and the ethics of their times, the American Pragmatist William James (b. 1842 d. 1910) and the German anti-dogmatic thinker Friedrich Nietzsche (b. 1844 d. 1900) call for a reevaluation of truth in the name of life. Affirming life in its turbulent flux, they reject traditional conceptions of truth for suppressing life's richness. They deplore the latter as a weak and diseased attitude to life, adhering to idealized truths, and vindicate a healthier and more powerful living. Their point is that it takes a strong will to discard the illusions of philosophical dogmas and live attentively in the flux of life. This could be, however, the cure to the sickness of modern man and culture.

At the time they were writing, James and Nietzsche became the targets of considerable opposition for their radical ideas. Today, on the other hand, they are acknowledged as significant thinkers for these same radical ideas. Nietzsche has been praised since the 1960s for his rejection of metaphysics and philosophical absolutes; celebrated as a "pluralist" and "anti-dogmatic" thinker who abandoned "closure" and "system" for the "free-play" of thought and writing. Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Paul De Man, and other contemporary postmodern and deconstructive commentators exemplify such a take on Nietzsche. In *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (1979), for instance, Derrida focuses on the significance of "style" with respect to Nietzsche's attitude to truth as a "play" that "suspends" closure. Contemporary neo-pragmatists in the United States, such as Richard Rorty and Frank Lentricchia, consider James in similar ways. Rorty, in fact, compares Nietzsche with his pragmatism, while celebrating the latter for its "endlessly proliferating variety of styles of life and thought" ("Perspectives: Nietzsche and the Pragmatists" 9). Frank Lentricchia seconds Rorty's emphasis on "contingency" and comments that "for the pragmatic textualist" the text is "the forever unfinished, decentralized text of history – forever supplemented," because "there is no

work of ‘correspondence,’ only of ‘production’” (*Ariel and the Police* 111). What the postmodern Nietzscheans and the neo-pragmatic Jamesians have in common is their celebration of plurality and contingency, while rejecting closure and absolutes.

What is lost, however, in the neo-pragmatic and postmodern readings of James and Nietzsche, is how James and Nietzsche’s critique of truth is not a mere celebration of “pluralism” and “style” for the sake of creativity *per se*, but as an impetus for the will to realize a healthier and more powerful attitude to life. Other interpreters have opposed the neo-pragmatic and postmodern interpretations of James and Nietzsche. Alan D. Schrift, for instance, takes issue with the Nietzsche reading offered by “the French scene” and Derrida in particular, while he cautions that “until such protocols can be specified which satisfy their desire to open the text to the play of interpretation without, at the same time, allowing these interpretations to be ‘executed however one wishes,’ deconstructive reading will continue to run the risk of which Nietzsche himself was aware: ‘*the text finally disappeared under the interpretation*’ (BGE 38)” (118-19). Schrift argues that Nietzsche – with his “demands of both perspectivism and philology” – does specify such “protocols” and sets forth a “new ‘objectivity’ as befitting the task of interpretation” (189). Schrift’s point is that contrary to the “deconstructive *différance*” and its “free play of interpretation” (118), Nietzsche’s “objectivity” of interpretation “requires mastery of the creative multiplication of perspectives as well as a rigorous attentiveness to the text being interpreted” (189). Though I second Schrift’s conclusion that Nietzsche’s critique of truth does not imply a complete disintegration of meaning into the free play of contingency – or “the deconstructive tendency toward underdetermination” – Schrift is equally at loss to acknowledge the impact of “the will” in the name of “life” as intrinsic in Nietzsche’s revaluation of truth. Alexander Nehamas, on the other hand, presumes to recognize the significance of “life” in *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (1985). However, his interpretation of “Nietzsche’s model for the world, for objects, and for people” as “the literary text and its components,” leads him to conclude that Nietzsche’s idea of “the will to power” means little more than “the interconnectedness of everything” and “the view

that there is no general structure of the world to which any linguistic system can ever be accurate.”¹ Hence, despite the promising inclusion of “life” in the title of his book, Nehamas is mostly concerned with the textual interconnection of things – in line with postmodern and deconstructive commentaries – which his praise of and frequent references to Richard Rorty, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida reassert.²

William Gavin’s reading appears somewhat closer to my project. Similarly to Schrift’s critique of the postmodern take on Nietzsche, Gavin objects to the neo-pragmatists’ focus on contingency in their readings of James, arguing against for instance Lentricchia that James’s view of “reality as vague” – which denies “certainty” and highlights the “richness” and “intensity” of life – does not exclude that language and theories are at least “directional – pointing beyond themselves toward life in general” (6). Hence, though theories cannot be exclusively “descriptive” of reality, “encounters” are implied as a possibility. Opposed to the “Derridian sense” of deferral, “the outlook is more optimistic,” asserts Gavin, because “possibilities exist” (10-11). Further, Gavin argues against Richard Rorty that “for James, language does not go all the way down. There is, when one finishes the text, ‘something to be done’; all is not play; there is a tragic sense to life” (187). Hence, beyond Schrift’s objection to the leveling of postmodern readings, Gavin also turns to “the more ‘existential’ side of James, reminding us that life is a real fight” (186). Though he argues that for James, the text “*is* the activity” (similarly to Nehamas’ contention of writing as a successful way of living for Nietzsche),³ Gavin concludes that “for us, readers,” the “texts constitute a spur, that is, an

¹ Ref. Nehamas’ chapter “A Thing Is the Sum of Its Effects.” My quotations are found on pp. 80, 90, and 93. My critique of Nehamas seconds Richard Schacht’s who argues similarly in his chapter “Beyond Aestheticism: Nietzsche, Nehamas’s Nietzsche, and Self-Becoming” in *Making Sense of Nietzsche* (102-17).

² Hence Nehamas concludes that “the will to power offers not a refutation but, to use Derrida’s term, a deconstruction of the notions of subject and predicate, substance and attribute, agent and action” (94).

³ Nehamas argues in his introduction that “Nietzsche exemplifies through his own writings one way in which one individual may have succeeded in fashioning itself ... [i.e.] Nietzsche himself, who is a creature of his own text” (8). Nehamas discusses such aesthetic self-creation further in Part II, “The Self,” in his book on Nietzsche.

invitation to ‘overcome’ them by going further, in application and in conversation;” “a provocation to do something” (191, 193).⁴ However, as it turns out, Gavin’s primary concern is also at the textual level. His mission is to rescue “theory” and “text” from the neo-pragmatists, arguing that “not viewing the texts as inspirational results in ‘neopragmatism,’ wherein theory is taken as superfluous and dispensable” (189). With his own agenda of rescuing the “text,” Gavin thus also diminishes the significance of “life” and “will” in James’ philosophy.

If we want to understand the radical force of James and Nietzsche’s revaluation of truth, we must recognize how their critique of truth inheres in their call for a more powerful will and a healthier life. Rather than simply extracting the issues of “style” and “pluralism” from their philosophies as befits the postmodern scenario, we can thus get a more productive (and profound) understanding of James and Nietzsche’s critique of truth. Here Gavin’s reference to the “tragic sense of life” is important to keep in mind as it elucidates why James and Nietzsche underscore the “power” and “courage” required from the individual in order to live attentively in the flux of life. While seeing the world as both “tragic” and “rich” in complexities, James and Nietzsche are bound to reject any idea of foundational or “essential” truth as a hollow (though perhaps comfortable) ideal, that is false to the nature of things. Such “falseness” is not merely discarded on epistemological grounds, but for being symptomatic of a coward and sick will which seeks to escape the tragic sense of life.

James and Nietzsche’s affirmation of life as “tragic” and “complex” is a significant context for their vindication of the heroic will, which is the incentive for a healthy and creative living in the midst of such a world. Beyond the leveling of contingency and play, intertextuality and postmodern theory, James and Nietzsche incisively connect their ideas about truth with life’s intensity. Though the lack of attention to these vital connections in contemporary postmodern academia may be a quite

⁴ Gavin here claims to be using the concept of “spur” in “the Nietzschean sense of that term” (186).

self-conscious dismissal of aspects in James and Nietzsche considered “untimely” today, it may also be disclosed as symptomatic of a predominant tendency to remain on the ironic surface while dismissing there being anything else beyond (or underneath) it. While reminding us that there *might* be something to life beyond ironic contingencies, James and Nietzsche offer some fresh air to the stalemate of irony.

I have found it quite intriguing to pursue my reading of James and Nietzsche, not only because I contend that there is more to their texts than considered by postmodern theory, but also because so far no substantial comparative work has been written on the two. Though various critics have noted the connections between James and Nietzsche – such as their shared admiration for the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson – these observations amount to singular comments in texts focused primarily on either James or Nietzsche.⁵ Further, there appears to be a certain hostile relationship between the “Jamesians” and the “Nietzscheans.” When Richard Rorty compares Nietzsche and

⁵ Richard Rorty notes the Emerson connection in his article “Perspectives: Nietzsche and the Pragmatists” in which he describes James and Nietzsche as “disciples” of Emerson (9). The Ralph Waldo Emerson-connection is interesting, for though James mentions Nietzsche at least a couple of times, Nietzsche never refers to James. In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche dedicates a section to Emerson which praises him as a “much more enlightened, adventurous, multifarious, refined than Carlyle; above all, happier... Emerson possesses that good-natured and quick-witted cheerfulness that discourages all earnestness” (75). In an appendix to *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche further asserts that “Emerson with his essays has been a good friend and cheered me up even in black periods: he contains so much skepsis, so many ‘possibilities’ that even virtue achieves esprit in his writings. A unique case! Even as a boy I enjoyed listening to him” (340). In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche refers to Emerson as one of the few “masters of prose” (146). Emerson too, in fact, referred to himself as “a professor of the Joyous Science” at several instances, (first in 1841, and also in a significant lecture on “The Scholar” in 1876). In his introduction to Nietzsche’s *Gay Science*, Walter Kaufmann suggests that Nietzsche might have been familiar with Emerson’s “joyous science,” though there is “no evidence that Nietzsche ever read this lecture [i.e. “The Scholar”]” (10). Other connections between James and Nietzsche are noted by for instance Ross Posnock who lists both Nietzsche and James as strong voices of “life philosophy” which reacted against the “sterility of modernity” towards the latter part of the 19th century (*Trial of Curiosity*, 89). Gerald Myers argues that “the existentialist thesis that ethics rest finally upon choice and commitment” is a connection “between James and Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Sartre” (*William James*, 389), Richard Rorty gives both James and Nietzsche credit for having illustrated what he calls “freedom as the recognition of contingency” (*Contingency, irony and solidarity*, 46), and William Gavin argues that James’ “writings, constitute an act of rebellion, or better, of aesthetic sublimation in a Nietzschean sense” (*William James and the Reinstatement of the Vague*, 8). Walter Kaufmann notes the similarities between Nietzsche’s “experimentalism” and pragmatism (*Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 66).

the pragmatists, for instance, he is “inclined to see pragmatism as having duplicated all the best of Nietzsche while avoiding all the bad” (“Perspectives” 9).⁶ Rorty upholds pragmatism as the democratic alternative for us today “in the concrete political sense of the ability of human beings to live together without oppressing one another” (ibid. 9). On the other hand, Hans Joas discusses how American pragmatism in Germany “has remained the least known of the major modern philosophical currents” (94). According to Joas, when James was briefly introduced to the German scene before the First World War, his theory of truth was perceived as a “shallow” version of Nietzsche’s “subversion of truth” (101). Joas explains the reception of American pragmatism in Germany as partially due to “some self-confident assumption of the traditional superiority of German philosophy,” which prevented a thorough discussion of pragmatism until the late 1960s when Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas focused on the philosophy of Charles Peirce. William James and John Dewey are still mostly ignored (116). These receptions of James and Nietzsche’s philosophies – which appear rather ambivalent when both are considered at once – suggest how their ideas may work in different ways in different contexts. Though it is the core of James and Nietzsche’s shared ideas that strike me as significant for us today, their unique characteristics – with their different receptions – are significant. While revealing what our preferences are today, these diverged readings underscore the possibility of other readings, hence that we might reach an understanding which could prove more productive for us today.

James and Nietzsche lived as contemporaries, though Nietzsche wrote his main body of work in the 1870s and 1880s until he collapsed into a condition of mental and physical paralysis in 1889, whereas James’ main production of texts stems from about

⁶ Rorty further asserts that “philosophers in the United States have, in the last few decades, developed a new account of the place of Nietzsche in the intellectual history of the West – an account that often strikes our French and German colleagues as pointlessly paradoxical. We have come to think of Nietzsche as the most eminent disciple of Emerson, and as the European version of the pragmatism of another of Emerson’s disciples, William James” (“Perspectives” 9).

1890 when he published his first major text *Principles of Psychology*.⁷ This moment in modern civilization is marked by the changes wrought by industrial growth, the rise of the modern bureaucratic corporation, and urbanization, against which many reacted with a sense of nagging crises, doubt, and neurosis. Even before the *fin-de-siècle* spirit was resplendent, the terms “*tedium vitae*,” “neurasthenic,” “hysterical,” “melancholic” “powerless,” and “doubting” were used in both Europe and the United States.⁸ James and Nietzsche react to these problems of modernity and criticize philosophical conceptions of truth as symptomatic of the “disease” of their time. However, whereas Nietzsche wrote in the midst of European “decadence;” a term which emerged in the 1880s to denote the literary and artistic movement drawn to the eccentric and morbid, as well as the sense of a crumbling European culture, James wrote in what could still be considered a “newborn” America compared to Europe. Hence, James’ America – though temporarily stricken with disease – might more easily be reinvigorated and directed onto a healthy path.⁹

Whereas James served as a public philosopher, engaged in cultural and political debates, working as a respected professor at Harvard University, and famous for his work within psychology as well as philosophy (he had also taught physiology and medicine), Nietzsche experienced a severe loss of his fellow academics’ respect and recognition of his scholarly work as a philologist following the publication of his first book *The Birth of*

⁷ James also published shorter essays and articles in psychology in the 1870s and 1880s, such as “Brute and Human Intellect” and “Remarks on Spencer’s Definition of Mind as Correspondence” in 1878, “Are We Automata?” and “The Sentiment of Rationality” in 1879, “The Association of Ideas” in 1880, “On Some Hegelisms” in 1882, and “The Function of Cognition” – which eventually became the first chapter of *The Meaning of Truth* – was originally published in 1885.

⁸ See George Cotkin’s chapter “*Tedium Vitae*” for a discussion on William James’ use of the term *tedium vitae* and his critique of it. Nietzsche also used this term. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, for instance, he deplores “the pessimist’s mill of *taedium vitae*” (199).

⁹ George Cotkin comments on James’ rather optimistic stance that “James anticipated that the traditions of freedom, democracy, and fair play in America, when combined with the responsibility of intellectuals to educate and lead, would return it to its proper place” (166). Hence, concludes Cotkin, James’ ideas “was essentially a romantic vision, a belief in the organic nature of the American experiment. James saw openness to diversity and acceptance of individualism as the birthmarks of this natural ideal of community and tradition” (167).

Tragedy (1872). He eventually resigned (due as well to his weak health) from the University of Basel in 1879, at which he had worked as a professor in philology for ten years. During the eighties he wrote all of his important books while living (on his modest pension) a rather lonely life in lodgings and hotel rooms mainly in Switzerland and Italy. He never married. Though James (a member of the upper-class and a married family man with four sons and a daughter) received some harsh criticism against his pragmatism, he nonetheless gathered a crowd of followers, whereas Nietzsche was either ignored or rejected by almost all his contemporaries. These different contexts offer some crucial clues to how and why James and Nietzsche differed regarding their posited hope for a potential recovery from the disease of their times. These clues may further assist us today in figuring out the realistic hopes and alternatives for our lives and society.

With their revaluation of truth as a means to overcome the cultural disease of their times, James and Nietzsche uphold philosophy as a significant influence in our lives, for better or for worse. In order to realize the essential connection James and Nietzsche draw between philosophy and life, it is necessary to consider how they criticize traditional philosophy for sustaining a certain a mode of living which they object to. Hence, in Chapter 1 I shall discuss what it is that they find so objectionable in traditional philosophies and ethics, and how they undermine their authority. This chapter also brings up the discussion of how James and Nietzsche attempt a different kind of philosophy beyond the limits of schematizing and the desire for closure. In Chapter 2 and 3 I present more specific cases of the discussion introduced in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 deals with James and Nietzsche's critiques of Spencer's ethics and the philosophies of Hegel and Kant, and Chapter 3 deals with their critique of language. James and Nietzsche's critique of language implies how their revaluation of truth is an attempt to achieve a different kind of attitude to truth, beyond the limits of conceptualized and systematized truths.

In Chapter 4 and 5 I draw on the implications from the first three chapters while I discuss James and Nietzsche's respective revaluation of truth. Important to keep in mind

in this context is their objection to systems and closure, though they do not object to “absolute truth” in favor of “irrationalism” and chaos. It has been the weakness of several critics to accuse James and Nietzsche of committing “systematic failure” as if they “fail” when they avoid coherent expositions of truth. Hence I take issue with Marcus Ford and Ellen Kappy Suckiel’s readings of James, and Maudemarie Clark’s reading of Nietzsche, which attempt to “resolve” the “contradictions” of James and Nietzsche’s ideas in order to discern their “systematic” philosophies. What confound these critics are the apparent contradictions between what James and Nietzsche argue in the various phases of their writings in terms of truth, reality, and experience. All of these critics see it as their project to reconcile these contradictions. It is this desire for reconciliation and coherent systems, that I find faulty towards James and Nietzsche’s original projects. I underscore that it is not philosophic systematization, but a quest for “higher” and “healthier” ways of living which is the core of their projects. Such a quest is opposed to systems and closure, though it is nonetheless a vital goal. In the following I shall draw on texts from different phases of James and Nietzsche’s writings, finding that they all – beyond the explicit discussion of conceptual truth, reality, and experience – relate to their essential objective for life.

A conclusion I draw from my readings of James and Nietzsche in Chapter 4 and 5 is that they posit different hopes for how one may realize their revaluation of truth, and that Nietzsche appears more dubious than James. I discuss this further in Chapter 6 in terms of the ethical implications of their revaluations. In this chapter I pick up their critique of the decadence and disease of their times which I briefly discuss in Chapter 1. Criticizing contemporary morality for suppressing the potentialities of a powerful and healthy will, James and Nietzsche underscore the significance of making a radical break with the present to create new moralities for the future. In this chapter I also deal with the impact of the “tragic sense of life,” pain, and suffering. Though both James and Nietzsche underscore the courage and power of affirming these aspects of life, it is Nietzsche who makes the most out of them. James, on the other hand, posits the overcoming of pain towards a more harmonious “unity” and – contrary to Nietzsche –

upholds the value of religious belief. Overall, James is more optimistic about the inclusion of people and their acts towards a future salvation.

In Chapter 7 I shall discuss the implications of James and Nietzsche's different attitudes towards the individual and the future in terms of their differences as teachers. Whereas James writes as a public philosopher and a teacher at Harvard wanting to convince his students, Nietzsche appears as the esoteric teacher. Whereas James underscores the significance of teachers as models, Nietzsche bids each individual to overcome the present and create for himself. Whereas James gives practical guidelines to his students, Nietzsche demands that his readers follow their own examples. Moreover, Nietzsche is more ambivalent regarding the value of skepticism versus action. In Chapter 8 I expand my discussion on their differences as teachers into a consideration of their different "insights." Whereas James upholds the value of religious belief as a "vision of relief," Nietzsche's Dionysian "insight" implies a looking into the tragic abyss of existence. From these insights James and Nietzsche posit different demands on the individual towards an existential reorientation. However, both James and Nietzsche see significant powers in these "insights" as incentives for man's will. I contend it is the dismissal of the powers of such insights which has led us to the postmodern impasse that seems all too satisfied merely to coast on the textual surface.

CHAPTER 1: AGAINST THE STERILITY OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE DECADENCE OF MODERNITY

James begins his lectures on pragmatism (published as *Pragmatism* in 1907) asserting that philosophy is not at all “a technical matter,” but is rather a product of “our individual way of just seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos” (9). Wanting a universe that “suits” his “temperament,” the philosopher posits that kind of universe which fits it, asserts James (11). According to James, the history of philosophy can in this way be seen as a “clash of human temperaments” (11). James discerns two main tendencies of how the world has been perceived within the history of philosophy and science; “the tender-minded” rationalistic intellectualism “going by principles,” and “the tough-minded” empiricist materialism “going by facts.” By defining philosophies as symptomatic of certain “temperaments,” he undermines their authority as essential truths.

RATIONALISM AS A CRAVING FOR SIMPLICITY

James rejects rationalism or the “sentiment of rationality” as a “passion for simplification” (SR 127). Its philosophic “absolutes” which attempt – through “abstract concepts” – to present the “essence” of the “concrete thing,” is in his opinion symptomatic of a “craving” for “simplicity” that results in “a most miserable and inadequate substitute for the fulness of the truth” (SR 130). In fact, it implies “a monstrous abridgment of life,” says James “which, like all abridgments, is got by the absolute loss and casting out of real matter” (SR 130). James recognizes that there may be a desire for “relief” by finding “simplicity” in “manifoldness” or “chaos” that drives the “sentiment of rationality,” yet he has no compassion for such “craving,” seeing the losses it implies to life (SR 131). It is James’ point that “the actual universe is a thing wide open,” but “rationalism makes systems, and systems must be closed” (P 20). The

“systems” of the rationalists lose sight of the manifold richness of life which is what James deems worthy of attention.

Hence, James criticizes traditional philosophy for having so far offered us merely “abstract outlines” of life and the universe (P 25). On the one hand James objects to the idealism of rationalists of “the absolute mind” such as Plato, Leibniz, Spinoza, and Hegel as “cold literary exercises” making the universe appear as a “closed system.” Their failure is, in James’ opinion, that they have lost “contact with the concrete parts of life” (P 16). James is more favorably inclined toward “fact-loving” empiricists such as Locke, Hume, and Herbert Spencer who “stick to the external senses” (P 44). However, James finds that they too tend toward simplifications and abstractions. Herbert Spencer, for instance, treats “the world’s history as a redistribution of matter and motion solely,” laments James (P 15). Empiricists – though in a different manner than rationalists – thus also confine themselves to a specific way of viewing and explaining the world that diverts the attention away from life’s complexities. James therefore concludes that “Locke, Hume, Berkely, Kant, Hegel, have all been utterly sterile, so far as shedding any light on the details of nature goes” (P 91).

While affirming reality’s “manifoldness,” James refutes the idea of “permanent ‘things’ again,” i.e. to think that things repeat themselves as if according to nature’s “law” (P 87-88). James objects to the fixation of things into a “list” of “kinds;” “What a straightening of the tangle of our experience’s immediate flux and sensible variety does this list of terms suggest!” exclaims James (P 87). James resents “the craving for rationality” which is “appeased by the identification of one thing with another;” a “datum” he scorns for leaving “no otherness” left and giving no space for “further considerations” (SR 131).¹⁰ James objects to the idea of “essential truth” in categorized

¹⁰ Ross Posnock discusses “William James’s renunciation of identity logic” and “James’s Nietzschean transvaluation of values” in terms of the former’s “pluralism” which “begins by questioning the absolute value we have traditionally accorded man’s conceptual abilities” (107). “Pluralism,” explains Posnock, opposes “vicious intellectualism” and seeks to see concepts as useful, rather than tyrannical.

conceptions and upholds the rich complexities of reality which deny categorization and simplification.

THE CURE OF HEALTHY-MINDED HABITS

James refers to the “sentiment of rationality” as symptomatic of the *tedium vitae* of late 19th century America and argues that the absolutist “instinct” is a “weakness of our nature from which we must free ourselves” (WB 110). Though “objective evidence and certitude are doubtless very fine ideals to play with” they constitute nonetheless, laments James, a “tremendously mistaken attitude” (WB 110). What James contends as his preferred alternative, is for us to become strong characters who will “go on experiencing and thinking over our experience,” and not to hold on to one opinion “as if it never could be reinterpretable or corrigible” (WB 110). James mourns the lack of such admirable characters and deplores Americans’ “mental mood” of “weakness,” “fear” and “over-tension” (GR 30).

Opposed to the *tedium vitae* of “moral tensions” and “fatigue” among his contemporaries, James upholds the “voluntary path to cheerfulness,” asserting that if “we wish our trains of ideation and volition to be copious and varied and effective, we must form the habit of freeing them from the inhibitive influence of reflection upon them,” and thus release our “spontaneity” and “effective power.”¹¹ While in this way “regulating the action, which is under the more direct control of the will,” James argues that “a courage-fit will very likely replace the fit of fear” (GR 23). James deplores the “fatigue” of his contemporaries as a “habit of inferiority to our full self” which prevents the realization of the power and resources that individuals actually have (EM 45). James’ point is that there are other more “healthy-minded and optimistic” ways to live and think, and it is those that he advocates. Hence, opposed to “the worthless ones among us” who “escape” from life’s difficulties “by averting their attention,” James vindicates “the heroic man” who does not “lose [his] hold on the situation” when “life as a whole turns up its dark abysses

¹¹ “Gospel of Relaxation” pp. 23, 30, 33, 34, 35.

to our view,” but who can “face” it and “*stand* this Universe” (“The Will” 83). The “heroic man” thus has a “head for risks” and a “sense for living on the perilous edge,” asserts James (“The Will” 83). Rather than clinging to rationalistic ideals, the “heroic man” can “face the world” for he finds “a zest in it” and thus “affirms” it in all its complexities.

THE MORBIDITY OF THE PHILOSOPHER’S “WILL TO TRUTH”

Nietzsche – like James – undermines philosophical truths as products of instincts and sentiments, hence he deplores the philosopher’s “will to truth” as a “crippled will,” “secretly directed and compelled into definite channels by his instincts” (BGE 35). Nietzsche scorns his contemporaries adherence to such a sick will which they dress up in the “shop windows” as “objectivity,” “scientificity,” and “pure will-less knowledge;” – “And where does one not find this cripple sitting today ... and frequently so dressed up!” (BGE 137). Parallel to James critique of “the craving for simplicity,” Nietzsche criticizes the philosopher’s “will to truth” as driven by a “strong inclination to assimilate the new to the old, to simplify the complex, to overlook or repel what is wholly contradictory,” while it “arbitrarily emphasizes, extracts and falsifies to suit itself certain traits and lines” (BGE 160). Further the “will to truth” is characterized by “a sudden decision for ignorance, for arbitrary shutting-out, a closing of the windows, an inner denial of this or that thing, a refusal to let it approach, a kind of defensive posture against much that can be known, a contentment with the dark, with the closed horizon” (BGE 161).

According to Nietzsche, religion, philosophy, science, and ethics have denied the “real” while imposing their “ideals” as “truths.” Hence man has had to pay “an enormous price” for the “ideals” of “reason, seriousness, [and] control over his emotions,” says Nietzsche (GM 194). Both “the desire to stop short at the brute fact, the fatalism of *petits faits*,” as well a “the belief in a metaphysical value, in that absolute value of ‘the true’” are rejected by Nietzsche as symptomatic of the “philosopher’s continence” and “abstinence” which refrains from real “life, nature and history” (GM 287, 288). What

modern science and philosophy ignore is “the very essence of life,” asserts Nietzsche, because it “overlooks the intrinsic superiority of the spontaneous” and “denies” the “active and shaping” “will” (GM 211). Opposed to the closed and dark systems of philosophy and science, Nietzsche underscores the complex, spontaneous, and active powers of life. Hence he further – like James – denies the idea of truth as copying a reality consisting of identical entities, arguing that “the belief that *identical things* exist,” or that there is a “thing in itself” which language can copy, is the base result of a “bad habit” to “thoughtlessly imitate old forms.” Nietzsche objects to the stagnating forces of such “age-old habits of sensation” ignorant of the “*becoming*” of life.¹²

According to Nietzsche, modern “scholarship” is “the most recent manifestation of the ascetic ideal ... a desire to hide and suppress something” (GM 285). “The ascetic ideal,” explains Nietzsche, “arises from the protective and curative instinct of a life that is degenerating and yet fighting tooth and nail for its preservation,” hence by setting up ideals the ascetic man attempts to attach value to his own life as a relief from his degeneration (GM 256). The “ascetic” man strives “to be different, to be elsewhere,” says Nietzsche, in his “struggle” against “*taedium vitae*” and “exhaustion” (GM 256-57). Like James, Nietzsche recognizes the desire for relief in philosophical “ideals,” but he deplores such “ideals” for failing to affirm “real” life and nature. According to Nietzsche, the ascetic’s adherence to imposed ideals is symptomatic of a “fed-upness” and “weariness” which *negates* life (GM 257). It is therefore the “morbidness of civilized man,” according to Nietzsche, that he – while fighting for life – suppresses life as its “great negator” (GM 256-57). Nietzsche concludes that the adherence to philosophical “ideals” is the symptom of a “nihilism” – a “will to nothingness, a revulsion from life, a rebellion against the principal conditions of living” – ravaging late 19th century Europe (GM 299).

¹² Nietzsche’s critique of identity logic is quoted from *Human, All Too Human* pp. 17, 26, 27, 29.

TEDIUM VITAE OR THE DECADENCE OF MODERNITY

It is James and Nietzsche's contention that traditional truths within philosophy – which strive for “identification,” “systematization,” and “closure” – fail to consider the rich “flux” and “becoming” of life. They reject such sterile philosophy as suppressing a healthy and more truthful living in the midst of the abounding ambiguities of life, hence a cause of the disease and *tedium vitae* of their times. James and Nietzsche thus discuss “health” and “disease” on a cultural as well as an individual level. James, for instance, argues that “the American over-tension and jerkiness and breathlessness and intensity and agony of expression are primarily social, and only secondarily physiological, phenomena. They are *bad habits*, nothing more or less, bred of custom and example, born of the imitation of bad models and the cultivation of false personal ideals” (GR 30). However, the cultural disease disseminates to the physiological and mental level and appears as “breakdowns,” “bad moods,” “wear and tear and fatigue” (GR 31). Even in the facial expression, which is characterized by an “anxiety of feature,” and the voice, which has “a tired and plaintive sound,” is the cultural disease of Americans evident, according to James (GR 31).

Parallel to James' discussion of the *tedium vitae* amongst Americans, Nietzsche criticizes the “decadence” of modernity as the cultural decay of his time, as well as the mental and biological sickness of man. The term “decadence” appears in Nietzsche's published writings only in 1888; however, the synonymous term *Entargung* (degeneration) appears as early as 1883 in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where it is deemed “bad and worst of all.”¹³ In *The Antichrist* (1888) Nietzsche criticizes modernity as “the *corruption* of man” with its “*decadence-values*” as “its supreme desiderata” (572). The connection between cultural, moral, and organic decay is asserted in the metaphor of “the deity of decadence, gelded in his most virile virtues and instincts,” which, according to Nietzsche, “becomes of necessity the god of the physiologically retrograde, of the weak”

¹³ Zarathustra's speech “On the Gift-giving Virtue” (187). See also Daniel Conway's discussion on Nietzsche's use of the term in his chapter “The Economy of Decadence” (22-66).

(A 583-84). Moreover, he finds that “Europe is beginning to stink” of an “intolerable” and “bad” smell; “the smell of failure, of a soul that has gone stale,” because “man” has become “tame, hopelessly mediocre, and savorless” (GM 176-77). Nietzsche attacks “modern virtues,” arguing that “*this* modernity was our sickness: lazy peace, cowardly compromise, the whole virtuous uncleanliness of the modern Yes and No” (A 569). According to Nietzsche, Christian moral virtues and asceticism have “crept ... into politics,” hence politics is “sick” from a “lack of courage” while enmeshed in a war, “hostile to life,” against “happiness on earth” (A 619). Nietzsche, finally, criticizes “modern culture” for not only denying the real, but for violating and exploiting it; “our whole attitude toward nature, our violation of nature with the help of machines and the heedless ingenuity of technicians and engineers, is *hubris*” (GM 248). Opposed to the exploitation and “hatred of reality” in modernity, Nietzsche presents himself as the defender of life and nature.

FOR A “NEW CULTURE:” THE WILL TO POWER, LIFE, AND NATURE

According to Nietzsche, the “deity of decadence” appears “wherever the will to power declines in any form” (A 583). Modernity is thus symptomatic of a “sickness of will ... distributed over Europe unequally,” says Nietzsche (BGE 137). Moreover, it is characterized by a lack of “pride, courage, self-assurance, intellectual energy, responsibility, [and] *freedom of the will*” (GM 253). In order to cure this disease, modern man must therefore regain a powerful will which is the sign of health.

Nietzsche attacks traditional philosophy and philosophers as a cause of the disease of modernity while distorting the issue of truth and thus suppressing life and man’s vital will. He has little respect for philosophers and scholars who are “fundamentally merely schematizers,” characterized by their “faith in proof,” “good workmanship,” and desire for “the finished job” (GS 290). Such scholars deny, says Nietzsche, “the really fundamental instinct of life,” which is the “will to power which is the will to life” (GS 292). They belong in this sense to the “common people” who wish only “to preserve” themselves,” deploras Nietzsche, whereas “the fundamental instinct of

life” aims at “*the expansion of power*” (GS 292). Opposed to these bookish “scholars,” Nietzsche situates himself among those who do not “have ideas only among books” (GS 322). Rather, “it is our habit,” says Nietzsche, “to think outdoors – walking, leaping, climbing, dancing, preferably on lonely mountains or near the sea where even the trails become thoughtful” (GS 322). “We read rarely,” continues Nietzsche, for in scholarly books “cramped intestines betray themselves,” as does “closed narrowness” (GS 322). Nietzsche scorns the philosophers who were “afraid of the senses” and thought that “the senses might lure them away from their own world, from the cold realm of ‘ideas,’ to some dangerous southern island” (GS 322). This kind of philosopher “no longer listened to life insofar as life is music; he *denied* the music of life” (GS 322). Nietzsche objects to the life-denying books of scholars and philosophers. Like James – who calls for “healthy-minded habits” of “experimenting and thinking” while “living on the perilous edge” – Nietzsche upholds his favorite habit of thinking outdoors, climbing on mountain trails.

Nietzsche further, like James, underscores the significance of “temperament.” A change in temperament is required to create a “new culture” with “a much simpler life,” more “cheerful” than the “grumbling” “traits of old dogs and people” (HAH 42). This would be a “good temperament,” assures Nietzsche; “a stable, mild, and basically cheerful soul,” and its life would be “more purified of affects than at present” (HAH 42). Beyond the decadence and tensions of modernity, Nietzsche suggests a life in which “we would finally live among human beings and with ourselves as if in *nature* ... as if at a play, feasting upon the sight of many things that had previously only made us afraid” (HAH 42). Like James, Nietzsche upholds – opposed to the sterility of philosophy – an attitude to existence that is more attentive to “nature” and its many possibilities.

CHAPTER 2: JAMES AND NIETZSCHE VERSUS HEGEL AND KANT

Since James wrote his main body of works later than Nietzsche's productive years, he is also arguing against some different philosophers (e.g. the British logician Bertrand Russell) as well as contemporary critics in America unknown to Nietzsche. It should be clear from the above that James and Nietzsche nonetheless hold a very similar position in terms of their reactions against philosophy and science. In this chapter I shall give some specific examples of how James and Nietzsche explicitly react against the same philosophers to reinforce this established connection.

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) is one of the major opponents for both James and Nietzsche. Both dispute Spencer's theories of evolution as an "integration of matter" and "concomitant dissipation of motion;" away from an "indefinite incoherent homogeneity" towards a "definite coherent heterogeneity." Nietzsche criticizes Spencer's ethics of absolute "reconciliation" between egoism and altruism, finding it blind to "the really great problems and question marks."¹⁴ He scorns, moreover, "the faith with which so many materialistic natural scientists rest content nowadays, the faith in a world that is supposed to have its equivalent and its measure in human thought and human valuations – a 'world of truth' that can be mastered completely and forever with the aid of our square little reason" (GS 335). Nietzsche deplores the "positivism" of Herbert Spencer as an example of how such scientists have "degraded" the "rich ambiguity" of existence "reduced to a mere exercise for a calculator and an indoor diversion for mathematicians" (GS 335).

James reaffirms Nietzsche's critique against Spencer while noting Spencer's "dry schoolmaster temperament" and "the hurdy-gurdy monotony of him" whose principles are "all skin and bone" (P 26). It is James' point that Spencer's "materialistic science"

¹⁴ *The Gay Science* no. 373, pp. 334-36. Walter Kaufmann also notes the connection between Nietzsche and James' critiques of Spencer in a footnote to *The Gay Science* (334).

falls short of asserting the richness of life, hence he rejects it as utterly “depressing” and void of any “spontaneity and courage” (P 15). James criticizes Spencer as a proponent of “determinism” which sees the world as “a machine whose final purpose is the making real of any outward good” (DD 165). Spencer’s ethics is thus deplored by James for representing the end of history as a “final consummation of progress” that concludes in a “ladylike tea-table elysium” (DD 168). For both James and Nietzsche Spencer’s theory of progressive evolution and integration fails to recognize the abundant intricacies and ambiguities of reality which do not lend themselves to such neat schemes. Both Nietzsche and James view the world as far more complex than what Spencer’s scientific schemes allow for. They therefore oppose Spencer’s narrowing down to one specific, or “scientific,” meaning of the world. In their view such an interpretation not only ignores the “flux” and “rich ambiguity” of life, but implies essentially a loss for our lives by preventing spontaneity and courage in the midst of a world not reduced to the simplicities of scientific schemes.

On similar lines, James and Nietzsche criticize the philosophies of Kant and Hegel. They both deplore Hegel’s philosophy as “seductive” and reject its systematic and dialectic idealism of history which – though in a different way than Spencer’s positivism – fails to recognize the complexities of the world. In his paper “On Some Hegelisms” James scorns Hegel’s philosophy which “mingles mountain-loads of corruption with its scanty merits” (263). He rejects his logic “with all the senseless hocus-pocus of its triads” in its attempts to make the “real” identical with the “ideal;” with its “principle of totality” and the “identity of contradictories” (292). Hegel’s “system,” murmurs James, “resembles a mouse-trap, in which if you once pass the door you may be lost forever” (275). Nietzsche too finds Hegel’s “idealism” “seductive” and therefore “dangerous.” Hence he shuns the German philosopher and lists him and Leibniz among the “‘unconscious’ counterfeiters” that are “all mere veil makers” (EH 321).

When it comes to Kant, both James and Nietzsche are more ambiguous. James acknowledges Kant for his recognition that “experience” doesn’t come “ticketed and labeled,” but that we classify and connect our experiences in a conceptual system (P 84).

He argues against Kant, however, that the categories we impose on our experiences are *historical*; “far from being the intuitions that Kant said they were,” categories are “constructions as patently artificial as any that science can show” (P 87). Nietzsche too pays some credit to Kant while recognizing that he forced us to “doubt with [him] the ultimate validity of the knowledge attained by the natural sciences” (GS 306). Asserting that we live in a world of “representation,” Nietzsche acknowledges Kant’s contribution to the question of appearance or phenomena versus the “thing in itself.”¹⁵ In fact, he is at times quite in favor of Kant’s ideas, particularly in his first work *The Birth of Tragedy*, where he suggests an access to the “original Oneness” through the Dionysian festivals and art.¹⁶ Nietzsche, however, scorns the philosophical idea of a “thing in itself” as if it were something one could gain “objective” truth about. It is “the dupe of linguistic habits,” laments Nietzsche, that one has not got rid of “those changelings” called the Kantian “thing-in-itself” and the “subject” as if there were an “agent” or a “being” behind the “doing” and “acting” (GM 179). Like James, Nietzsche thus rejects the “essential” aspects of Kant’s philosophy.

In line with their description of philosophies as products of individual temperaments, both James and Nietzsche deny the foundational idealism of “immediate access” to the “thing in itself” and assert that names and concepts are human constructs. Hence, they support Kant’s distinction between the “thing in itself” and “appearance” and the categories imposed upon them, but they see such labels and “categories” as historical and contingent upon the individual perspective and temperament, and therefore they deny the idea of categories as products of essential “intuitions” or as centered in a “subject.”

¹⁵ See for instance Chapter 1, section 16 in *Human, All Too Human* in which Nietzsche discusses the “genesis” of “the world of representation” that makes an essential separation between “appearance” and “thing in itself.”

¹⁶ For a further discussion on Nietzsche’s attitude to Kant, see for instance John Wilcox’s chapter on “Kant, the Thing-in-Itself, and Nietzsche’s Skepticism” in which he discusses the development of Nietzsche’s attitude to Kant; suggesting the romantic idea of insight (through tragic art) to the “thing in itself” in *The Birth of Tragedy*, while denying this idea later (111).

Opposed to Kant, James and Nietzsche deny that there is any universal or absolute way of perceiving – or applying categories to – the world.

According to Nietzsche, the Kantian “changelings” are also the cause of man’s suppression of his instincts, body, and nature (GM 179). Hence he shuns Kant’s “categorical imperative” as presupposing a superior faculty to the body and its natural instincts, for it threatens to “endanger life itself” (A 577). Kant’s crime was “to invent” a “path” on which one could “sneak back to the old ideal” of “morality,” argues Nietzsche; a morality which posits a superior “soul” or “being” and hence demeans reality (A 577). James also attacks Kant for his “categorical imperative” as an idea of a “substantial self” or a “spiritual soul.” Opposed to such a “transexperiential actuality” James focuses on the self as a series of experiences.¹⁷ While emphasizing the physical flux of reality, James and Nietzsche deny any authority to spiritual ideals or “souls.” Nietzsche in fact rejects the belief in an “ego” as “being” or “substance” as the cause of the erroneous conceptualization of “things,” because its believer “*projects* its belief in the ego-substance on to all things” and “only thus does it *create* the concept ‘thing’” (TI 38). Opposed to the idea of a mastering ego or soul, James and Nietzsche emphasize “temperaments,” “instincts,” “experiences,” and “perspectives” which underscore the bountiful intricacies of reality.

¹⁷ See Marcus Ford’s chapter on “Important Aspects of James’s Psychology” in *William James’s Philosophy* (1982) for James’ critique of Kant (9-25).

CHAPTER 3: THE CASE OF MAN-MADE LANGUAGE

It is one of James and Nietzsche's main tasks to oppose anything that appears to simplify existence while they vindicate other ways of relating to life and reality as more attentive to the manifold richness and ambiguities of the world. The idea of language as a tool by which one may achieve to access and explain the absolute truths of reality is therefore not only criticized by James and Nietzsche as epistemologically "false," but because language thus perceived becomes a dangerous weapon for authoritarian simplification which they object to. Their critique of language is thus central to their reevaluation of both truth and life.

According to James, language is "man-made" (P 117). Hence, the idea of foundational or "absolute truths" in philosophy or science has to be dismissed, because the way we describe and perceive "reality" is by a continuous "truth-making." Every conceptual truth is made by man and varies according to his or her perspective, asserts James, hence no theory can be an absolute transcript of reality, because "what we say about reality thus depends on the perspective into which we throw it" (P 118). It is James' point that we construct our reality out of our own "sensations" of it, and how we do this depends upon our own "interests" and "perspective" (P 117-118). Even in "the field of sensation," asserts James, "our minds exert a certain arbitrary choice" by our "inclusions and omissions" (P 119). We read and class according to our own will while imposing our "mental forms" on reality. There is therefore "no purely objective truth," says James (P 37). At our "own will" "we break the flux of sensible reality into things," and thus "we create the subjects" as well as "the predicates" according "to our feelings" (P 122). "Our nouns and adjectives are all humanized heirlooms," concludes James, "and in the theories we build them into, the inner order and arrangement is wholly dictated by human considerations" (P 122). Theories, language, and truth are enmeshed in the human subjective, and therefore "objective truth" cannot exist.

Opposed to the “rationalistic” idea that reality stands “ready-made and complete from all eternity,” James underscores that man’s imposition of “names” implies that “we humanly make an addition to some sensible reality” (P 121). “We *add*, both to the subject and to the predicate part of reality,” says James, and thus “the world stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hands” (P 123). James underscores that “reality is in the making,” and that the “world is timeless. Possibilities obtain in our world” (P 127). Hence, James’ rejection of “absolute truth” allows him to keep the issue of truth open for the future and what he posits as more productive alternatives realizable by a healthier and more powerful will.

Parallel to James’ critique of truth and language, Nietzsche describes language as made by man, hence there are “no absolute truths” or “eternal facts” (HAH 17). Language has been used by human beings to “set up a world of their own beside the other one,” argues Nietzsche in *Human, All Too Human*, while they believed “in the concepts for and names of things as if they were *aeternae veritates*” (HAH 21). According to Nietzsche, it has become a predominant illusion to see language as allowing for an immediate access to the “real” world. Opposed to this fictive ideal, Nietzsche argues that language – and even the faculty of cognition – are historical constructs. But this status has been either forgotten or suppressed. Man’s slavery to the belief that language conveys eternal truths is thus a product of his own obliviousness.

While asserting the tyranny of logic and language, Nietzsche asks us what value there is in “truth.” “*What* really is it in us that wants ‘the truth’?” asks Nietzsche (BGE 33). Questioning the “will to truth,” Nietzsche invites us to consider “*why not rather untruth? And uncertainty?*” as of greater interest to our lives (BGE 33). Nietzsche wonders “what value a system of conventional signs such as constitutes logic can possibly possess” when we are in fact “*necessitated* to error, to precisely the extent that our prejudice in favour of reason compels us to posit unity, identity, duration, substance, cause, materiality, being” (TI 36-37). It is Nietzsche’s point that language and logic have been venerated as “hollow idols” that have not even been recognized as “hollow.” These “hollow idols” have, says Nietzsche, been set up by philosophers who – as “conceptual

idolaters” – have only been handling “conceptual mummies” (TI 35). Against the “becoming” of death, change, age, as well as procreation and growth, philosophers have “dehistoricized” things; killed and stuffed them while escaping the history of becoming.

Nietzsche judges the practices of “idolatrous philosophers” a “falsification of the evidence of the senses” in so far as “the senses show becoming, passing away, change” (TI 36). Nietzsche therefore rejects the idea of a “real” world conveyed by thought and language, opposed to the “apparent” world of physical appearances, and dismisses it as “an empty fiction lyingly added” (TI 36). Language belongs in its origin to the “rude fetishism” of this falsification of reality, argues Nietzsche; a “fetishism” he compares to religious beliefs: “I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar” (TI 38). The “other” world set up in language is deplored by Nietzsche as an ethereal ideal.

Contrary to the blind belief in language as containing knowledge of the world, Nietzsche argues that we never get in touch with the “essence of the world in itself” or the “thing in itself” (HAH 21). Rather, we are in the realm of “representation.” Nietzsche calls it a “coarse sensualistic prejudice that sensations teach us truths about things” (WP 280). Hence he discards “the belief that we are *able* to form concepts” so that the concept “not only designates the essence of a thing but *comprehends* it” (WP 280). “Truth” is on the contrary a will to be “master over the multiplicity of sensations: - to classify phenomena into definite categories,” argues Nietzsche (WP 280). Opposed to such desire for mastery, Nietzsche underscores that the world is in “a state of becoming,” and thus cannot be “comprehended” or “known” in the strict sense (WP 281).

Like James, Nietzsche underscores man’s subjective perspective on reality. According to Nietzsche, “*perspective* itself, [is] the basic condition of all life” (BGE 32). It is, explains Nietzsche, “the essence of phenomenalism and perspectivism” that “the world of which we can become conscious is only a surface- and sign-world” (GS 299). The human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself in its own perspectives, and it is thus “a hopeless curiosity that wants to know what other kinds of intellects and perspectives there *might* be” (GS 336). The world is on the contrary “infinite” to us, “inasmuch as we

cannot reject the possibility that *it may include infinite interpretations*" (GS 336). Nietzsche discards the idea of final truths and conclusions, arguing that everyone sees the world through his or her own perspective and interpretation. However, this does not imply a denial of the world as meaningless. The implication is rather a positive affirmation of the infinite potentialities of future interpretations that might be more mindful of the "becoming" of life, opposed to the categorization of logic.

James and Nietzsche underscore the individual's perspective and refute the idea of language as affording an immediate access to the "essence" of reality. Though concepts and truths are thus bound to reduce reality, James and Nietzsche do not reject the utility of language. Their concern is rather to caution us not to idolize it as if it were offering a final conclusion to the world. Moreover, their rejection of essential truths does not imply a negative denial of meaning, but a positive vindication of how the world thus opens up for us. Nietzsche contends that "perspectivism" posits the world as "infinite," and James asserts that for pragmatism "possibilities" exist. Far from concluding that the absence of "absolute truth" means utter denigration of truth into chaos void of meaning, James and Nietzsche underscore the potential "truthfulness" in perspectives and interpretations that are – contrary to fixed and concluded ideals – attentive to the rich flux and becoming of reality.

CHAPTER 4: JAMES' "PRAGMATIC TRUTH"

It is James and Nietzsche's central agenda to move beyond the limits and confinements of philosophical systems that prevent a recognition of the complexities and contingencies of a life in becoming. Their point is therefore not to offer a new philosophy of truth as a "system," but rather as a method and an attitude to life. It appears as a general weakness amongst some commentators not to pay sufficient attention to this agenda when the quest of the commentator is revealed as an attempt to pin down the thinker's "system." It is in a sense quite ironic that a significant amount of scholarship has been dedicated to the pursuit of finally concluding what James' pragmatism is all about and to define James' metaphysical position and philosophy of truth, when James personally disapproved of final answers and conclusions. Moreover, since James underscored that pragmatism is a "method only" which avoids "dogmatic answers or conclusions," it seems to me quite impertinent to accuse James of committing "systematic failure."

Marcus Ford for instance, concludes in *William James's Philosophy: A New Perspective* (1982), that "for all its originality and insightfulness, James's thought is unsystematic and often confused" (92). James is in fact, argues Ford, "ill-suited to construct a well-rounded system" (8). Ford nonetheless postulates that "his philosophy may be systematized – the confusions may be resolved and the inconsistencies reconciled." It is Ford's point that James' philosophy must for this end first be amended by the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead whose aim was to "rescue" James' philosophy.¹⁸ Ford is thus off to a misplaced project from the beginning, though he himself purports to give a final clarification of James' ideas about truth, arguing that "the

¹⁸ According to Ford, Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy offers "the other side of the arch" of James' "system" (8). See p. 91 for Ford's assertion that James' philosophy may be "systematized." In Chapter 6 Ford discusses Whitehead's "rescue" of James ("James and Whitehead and A Theory of Relations," 91-107).

majority of James's interpreters have misconstrued his thought," especially with respect to his "theory" of "truth" and "reality" or his "metaphysical position" (1). Ford lists several factors as responsible for "the traditional misunderstanding" of James' pragmatic theory of truth, one being caused by what Ford sees as "James's own confusions" and attempts "to harmonize his earlier views with his later views" (2). Ford takes issue with various James' interpreters, for instance Patrick Dooley who argues that James' pragmatic theory of truth is "an articulation of his final philosophy of humanism" (2).¹⁹ According to Ford, Dooley fails to consider that James does offer a "metaphysical position," a position which Ford explains as "panpsychic" or a "pansubjectivism" (2).²⁰ Ford argues that "James is a metaphysical realist" and that "his pragmatic theory of truth ... presupposes a correspondence between ideas and objects that exist independently of anyone else's experience of them" (2). Ford thus objects to those who see James's theory of truth as "nonrealistic" or "proto-phenomenologist," while he commends his own commentary as amending such "misunderstandings" of James.

Ellen Kappy Suckiel is one of those who see James as a "protophenomenologist." In her book *The Pragmatic Philosophy of William James* (1982) Suckiel explains "protophenomenology" as the position that "common-sense objects as constituted by the subject within lived experience are the ultimately real physical objects of our world" (139). Since James posits "physical objects" and "facts" as "real," Suckiel admits that

¹⁹ Patrick Dooley: *Pragmatism as Humanism. The Philosophy of William James*, 1974, (115). Dooley argues that it is James' theory of man which "is the key to a unified understanding of his thought."

²⁰ Ford explains "pansubjectivism" as "a variety of metaphysical or ontological realism in that it holds that there exists in some mode of actuality a plurality of individual entities that are not dependent upon anyone (at least anyone *else's*) awareness of them" (4). Hence, Ford reacts to the idea that "reality" is merely a construct of one's own ideas, perspectives, or interpretations.

...commentators who have called James a realist are correct in recognizing that on his view of perceptual knowledge, the subject is in direct contact with the real, common-sense physical objects of the world. Nevertheless, James is not a realist, if this requires that the subject's real world is external to his experience of it, or independent of all experience. For as we have seen, James holds that while the object known is a real physical object, it is nevertheless constructed by the knower and reducible to experience. (138)

Suckiel concludes from this lucid reading that the concept of "realism" is "inapplicable to James's philosophy," and that he fits better within the category of "protophenomenology" (139). However, according to Suckiel, there would still be unresolved aspects to the question of James' theory of truth. Suckiel finds beyond her categorization of James, a "contradiction" in his ideas about reality that are on the one hand labeled as "individual experience," and on the other hand constitutive of a "common objective world" in which people share a common pool of truths (109). Finding these ideas to be "necessarily at odds," Suckiel concludes that James was not able to "fully achieve his end" (115).

Rather than dismissing James as unable to "fully achieve his end," I would argue that it is Suckiel who fails to achieve her end because of the character of her project. In her preface Suckiel explains that it has been her project "to establish the value of his [James's] pragmatism as a technical and systematic philosophy" (x). Regardless of James' rejection of systematic philosophies, both Suckiel and Ford want to establish James as creating one, hence it is *their* attempts to systematically define and explain James' philosophy which fail, though they judge it as if it were either James's philosophy that "falls short" (Suckiel 121), or that James was unable to complete "the arch" of his philosophy since "system-building was not his forte" (Ford 8). James scorned abstractionism and rationalism as a "vicious intellectualism" that blinds philosophical debates to concrete realities. In this light Suckiel and Ford are symptomatic of a "vicious intellectualism," ignorant of James' concrete project which objects to systematic expositions of truth.

When we discuss James' ideas about truth I contend that it is crucial (if we attempt to be truthful commentators) to keep James' *project* in mind. This project is underscored as a method opposed to closure. However, beyond that it is a project attempted to cure the disease of his contemporary Americans and the prevailing "weakness" and "craving" for simplistic "rationalism" or "absolutism." James' reevaluation of truth is a project in the name of courage and health to improve men's lives.

As George Cotkin reminds us, James was above all a "public philosopher" who wanted to educate his audience about life. In *William James, Public Philosopher* (1990) Cotkin contends that "all too often analysts of philosophy – and certainly students of James may be included in this indictment – are guilty of failing to place philosopher and philosophy within the historical moment," – a crucial point in my opinion (2). Cotkin argues that one may find certain "problems in expression" in James' texts, such as "the jarring rhythms of his metaphors and analogies" (13). Cotkin explains these "problems" as a result of "the public aspects of James's philosophizing" and "the impetus to simplify and compose philosophy in accessible fashion" (13). This, continues Cotkin, prevented at times James's discourse from "climbing to a summit of high exactitude, sustained exposition, and logical force" (13). It was, however, in his role as a "public philosopher" that James was able to avoid "systematization and abstraction" and to engage in "philosophy as an act of edification and education" (14). In the role of a "public philosopher" James had found a medium which fit his distaste for systematization and closure, while it allowed him to vindicate what he conceived of as healthier ways of living and creating truth for our lives.

AGAINST "ABSTRACT RIGMAROLE" AND "TOWARDS ACTION"

James found the "*technical* writing, on *philosophical* subjects" of his generation of professional philosophers to be a lot of "abstract rigmarole" which – failing to pay sufficient attention to the quality of human life – acted as "a crime against the human race" (qtd. in Cotkin 15). In James' opinion their writings thus served to "obscure the

truth.” However, “truth with a capital *T* was not the concern of the edifying philosopher,” comments Cotkin; “self-knowledge, playful probing, and fuller intercourse with the world were his imperatives” (14). Finding traditional philosophy inadequate for a healthier and more truthful attitude to reality, James was in favor of “energetic questioning, movement, and new ways to conceive and approach old problems” (Cotkin 15). Rather than to conclude with answers, James asserted the importance of moving away – in healthier directions – from the “rigmarole” of philosophy.

James rejects the notion of “*the Truth*” as “a perfect idol of the rationalistic mind” (P 115). Though it may be comfortable and reassuring to cling to such an idol, it is James’ point that it does not get one any closer to the truths about reality. On the contrary, James criticizes “abstract ideas” for opposing and negating “real life” and “experiences;” “the open air and possibilities of nature” (P 31). Instead, assures James, he chooses to “turn away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins . . . artificiality and the pretence of finality in truth,” while turning “towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action, and towards power” (P 31). He underscores that his “pragmatism” “does not stand for any special results. It is a method only” (P 31). “An attitude of orientation, is what the pragmatic method means” (P 32).

While reformulating “truth” in terms of an on-going process of continuous efforts to see the flux of reality, James offers an attitude and a method rather than a theory of conclusions. James’ pragmatism is an attempt to reformulate truth in order to avoid closing the path of inquiry. James does not deny that there is a “reality,” but since we have no immediate access to the “essence” of reality that we may pin down, pragmatism implies instead “a program for more work” and “an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be *changed*” (P 32). James rejects the idealism which holds one absolute and true way of perceiving the world, however, he contends that there are better and worse ways of relating to the world. Hence, he asserts the significance of “change” and “work” as important steps towards a potentially better attitude towards reality.

We've seen that James describes names and categories as constructed by contingent perspectives and therefore bound to be abstractions. However, a word – though “abstracted from experience” – may serve as a “definite instrument” to reflect one “back into sensible realities,” asserts James (P 127). Hence, concepts are “useful one[s] to plunge forward with into the stream of our experience” (P 127). James proposes an “instrumental” view of truth, stating that “ideas ... become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience” (P 34). It is James' point that some truths work better – or more “satisfactorily” – in thus relating us with reality. Oversimplified absolutes would, for instance, not work satisfactorily in James' opinion, because they exclude a recognition of any experience that contradicts its systematized truth of the world. However, James admits that “rationalistic hypotheses” may have some value if they should happen to redirect man “fruitfully” into the flux of experience instead of binding him to a concluded and sterile ideal (P 128). James thus posits the “practical cash-value” of each word when set “at work within the stream of [one's] experience” (P 32). The “value” of a word would then be measured in terms of its “agreement” with other experiences of reality; i.e. to the extent that it allows for the recognition of multiple experiences without being refuted. James describes truths which “agree” with reality as tolerated by reality; “reality tolerates the addition” when our truths “fit it,” says James (P 121). Hence, though our truths do not afford an immediate access to reality, they can be more or less attuned to it.²¹

The relationship between truth, reality, and experience in James' philosophy has confounded James' readers, such as Suckiel and Ford who, as we've seen above, attempt to overcome their perplexity by systematizing James' ideas. On the one hand, according to James, we do not have any immediate access to truth as the essence of the thing or the physical object, because ideas cannot “copy definitely their object” (P 96). “All our

²¹ This idea of “truth” as “tolerated” by and in “agreement” with reality seems to be in accordance with William Gavin's discussion of the text as “directional” which I mention in the introduction. Gavin argues that the text may be “taken as *directional* rather than descriptive,” i.e. though the text has no immediate descriptive access to reality, it may at least point toward it and work so as to get closer to it (11).

truths are beliefs about ‘Reality,’” states James, but “the *first* part of reality from this point of view is the flux of our sensations” (P 117). “Sensations,” explains James, “are forced upon us, coming we know not whence ... *they* are neither true nor false; they simply *are* (P 117). Sensations are thus “beyond our control,” however, “*which* we attend to, note, and make emphatic in our conclusions depends on our own interests ... We read the same facts differently” (P 118).

On the other hand, James also asserts that our sensations and experiences will direct and “correct” our truths and interpretations as experience has “ways of *boiling over*” (P 106). Hence, we are not completely dancing on the path of contingency. In fact, truth defined as “agreement” also implies, according to James, that they are “verified.” “Agreement” or “truth” occurs when the process of verification is completed, asserts James, meaning that our posited truths are led to “the face of directly verifying sensible experiences *somewhere*, which somebody’s ideas have copied” (P 103). Truth is thus “made” in the “course of experience.” James explains:

To ‘agree’ in the widest sense with a reality, can only mean to be guided either straight up to it or into its surroundings, or to be put into such working touch with it as to handle either it or something connected with it better than if we disagreed. (P 102)

In other words, though mediated by sensations, experiences, perspectives, and language our truths can come very close to reality and will thus be in a productive “touch” with it. If they do not come close, they are in “disagreement” and will not be “tolerated” by our other experiences which “boil over” and thus refute them. Hence, there are better or worse “truths” in that there are various degrees of being connected closely (in “agreement”) with reality.

James rejects “absolutes” and attempts to reach an understanding of truth that is more inclusive towards a pluralism of experiences. Hence he vindicates “truth as something essentially bound up with the way in which one moment our experience may lead us towards other moments which it will be worth while to have been led to” (P 98). James admits that “this is a vague enough statement,” yet he begs us “to retain it, for it

is,” argues James, “essential” (P 99). Because James wants us to see reality as something complex and rich, he favors those ideas and truths that guide us into “the particulars of experience again,” rather than remaining at the level of abstract ideals (P 99). He esteems the former for creating an “advantageous connexion” creating “*a leading that is worth while*” because they encourage a broader attentiveness to the rich flux of experiences.

JAMES’ “PRAGMATISM” AS A STRENEOUS RESPONSE TO THE “ABYSS”

When considering why James “begs us to retain” his vindication of truth as generating a “leading that is worth while,” we must keep in mind James’ project of curing the “disease” and “neurasthenia” of his time. James’ concern was above all to energize his contemporary Americans from their diseased fatigue and neurosis. According to James, “men the world over possess amounts of resource which only very exceptional individuals push to their extremes of use” (EM 41-42). Hence he asserts the need of “a particular spur or effort” to “energize” men’s will in order to attain “a higher *qualitative* level of life” (EM 43). It is James’ point that by “unlocking energies” we may reach better ideas; “ideas that are healthy-minded and optimistic” (EM 55). James is more concerned to “unlock energies” and to energize the “will,” than to direct the will and make his “statement” about truth more specific. For James, there is a significant value in truths that activate our will and “lead” us on toward other experiences and ideas.²²

James lists “*excitements, ideas, and efforts*” as capable of unlocking men’s energies and thus productive of an activation which may cure man’s tediousness and “carry us over the dam” (EM 45). Opposed to the rationalistic version of reality – which “substitutes a pallid outline for the real world’s richness” – James is “devoted” to a “real world of sweat and dirt,” i.e. a world that requires our zestful efforts (P 40). It is the “rationalist’s fallacy,” argues James, to extract “a quality from the muddy particulars of

²² Cornel West comments that “James’s claim that whatever the verification process leads to will be worthwhile is but a statement of his Emersonian faith that powers which feed on provocation enhance personalities. For James, the problem is not the deleterious ends this process may lead to, but rather ‘our powers ... [and] ... our means of unlocking them or getting at them’” (66).

experience” and oppose it as “a higher nature” or “truth with a big T” (P 110). Pragmatism, on the other hand, is concerned with that which has “a value for concrete life,” asserts James, and it therefore affirms not only life’s richness, but the pains of real life towards which the strenuous individual acts for the better. (P 40).

According to George Cotkin, we may read James’ vindication of “strenuosity, passion, and heroism” as James’ “strong responses to the metaphysical problems of his earlier days” (16). During these earlier years of his intellectual life, James struggled with various philosophical issues dominating European and American thought in the nineteenth century: the questions of free will or determinism, idealism or materialism, optimism or pessimism. In *Principles of Psychology*, James’ first major work (which he began in 1878 and finished in 1890), he describes the self as an active instrument bringing order to the flux of reality in accord with the individual’s attention and needs. “Active rather than passive became the signature of James’s description of the psychological reality of the individual,” concludes Cotkin (65). Whereas the philosophical disputes he encountered as a young man offered no conclusions on how to live and relate to reality, it is James’ decision to assert his *will* to act in an attitude of “meliorism;” neither optimistic nor pessimistic, but capable to strive towards better ways of living and conceiving truth.

Cotkin explains James’ early philosophical quandaries in the light of his “vocational indecision”(James was for a while drawn to the arts and especially painting), “physical and mental debilities” (he suffered from weak health), as well as his “failure to serve in the Union army” during the Civil War (in which others found answers to their indecision and problems). Cotkin concludes that James, during the 1860s and 1870s, encountered the “abyss” of existence. James later admitted that he “was entirely broken down before [he] was thirty,” and that he had in fact been “on the continual verge of suicide.”²³ During his years of debility James depicted the universe as an “abyss of

²³ James’ personal statements quoted in Cotkin (40, 50).

horrors.”²⁴ In a letter to his brother Henry in 1868, James contends that “the modern world of flux, indeterminacy, and uncertainty could only be faced by Hamlet with ‘groans’ and aches” while “the deep ‘mystery of things’ immobilized him” (qtd. in Cotkin 58). Considering this remark, Cotkin compares James’ years of depression and doubt with Hamlet’s vision of existence: “Hamlet was confronted by a world without an inner rationale or with a rotten core; reality was marked by deceit and manipulations” (58). Darkened by a Hamletian vision in his youth, James finally responded to his uncertainties as an “actor,” away from the immobilized “doubter,” and made this response the chore of his pragmatic theory of truth.

Cotkin compares James not only to Hamlet, but also to Nietzsche, finding that both James and Hamlet’s experiences are similar to “what Nietzsche called the certitude of the abyss” (9). According to Cotkin, James offers a more “realistic” response than Nietzsche when faced with “the dread of a universe either fully indeterminate or determined – the Nietzschean abyss or the evolutionary Elysium” (176).²⁵ Whereas “Nietzsche demanded a heroic response to the abyss,” James chose a “more realistic” response, contends Cotkin (102). James moreover, while warning that “what might work for those blessed with ‘the explosive will’ would only result in neurasthenic escapism for the majority of men and women,” was concerned to vindicate alternatives which would work for the majority (102). As an edifying philosopher James wanted to accommodate the concerns of his entire society. His pragmatic theory of truth inheres in his all-inclusive attempt to bring a plurality of ideas and experiences into consideration.

THE QUESTION OF UTILITY

In his introduction to James’ *Pragmatism*, A. J. Ayer notes how James’ use of such phrases as “it is true because it is useful” or “the true is only the expedient” was “unfortunate,” because “it encouraged his critics to infer that he was simply equating truth with utility, so that all that was required to make a belief true was that the

²⁴ In his diary April 4, 1873 (qtd. in Cotkin 56).

possession of it satisfied some purpose” (xxiv). Hilary Putnam seconds Ayer’s objection and refers to the “howls of indignation” which James *Pragmatism* evoked from those of his readers “who thought that James identified truth as whatever it gives us ‘satisfaction’ to believe,” hence they believed that James’ pragmatism amounted to “irrationalism” (166). Ayer and Putnam dismiss such criticism which reduces James’ pragmatism to a mere quest for utility or a rejection of reason in favor of utter irrationalism and subjective relativism. Cornel West, moreover, asserts that though James’ “popular terms like the ‘cash-values’ of an idea or the ‘expediency’ of a concept suggest a vulgar practicalism or narrow utilitarianism,” this is so “simply because James accents the active and dynamic character of truth-achieving against the abstract and passive versions of rationalism of his day” (67). James did not posit “usefulness” for the sake of “usefulness,” but asserted the value of “truths” that “work” when they assist people in relating to their experiences and plunging ahead into the flux of human life. For James, it was the “active” engagement of the individual – towards the future development of connecting our experiences – that counted.

Far from upholding a notion of “utility” that would support an entirely relativistic subjectivity, James is – in his desire to move forward and “add on” to our “common pool” of truths – strongly opposed to any subjective relativism or irrationalism. Though James may on the one hand declare that the world is “infinite” and that the world has “endless possibilities,” he also asserts that the world is becoming more of a “unity” – suggesting that even “absolute truth” can be “*made*” – in fact, according to James, “human efforts are daily unifying the world more and more in definite systematic ways” (P 67).²⁶ It is in this combined emphasis on the usefulness and positive development of

²⁵ The “evolutionary Elysium” refers to Spencer’s ethics of evolution which is discussed in chapter two.

²⁶ The “regulative notion of a potential better truth to be established later, possibly to be established some day absolutely,” is upheld by James as one among other “pragmatist notions” which “turns its face ... towards concreteness of fact, and towards the future” (P 107). “Like the half-truths, the absolute truth will have to be *made*, made as a relation incidental to the growth of a mass of verification-experience,” explains James (P 107).

conceptual truths, theories, and beliefs to assist human kind in moving forward, that James differs most significantly from Nietzsche.

James also differs from Nietzsche in his emphasis on the continuity with the past. Whereas Nietzsche is keenly skeptical about traditional conceptions of “truth” in philosophy and science, and calls for a “revaluation of all values” to the point of declaring “war” against the status quo, James asserts continuity with the past and is content to remold the present: “New truth is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions” in which the influence of “the older truths” is “absolutely controlling” (P 35). Cornel West explains that “just as his cultural mission is one of reconciliation, so James’s conception of truth attempts to unite the novel and the familiar with a minimum of friction and a maximum of openness to the future” (64). While attempting to cure and convert his audience to become healthier and more vital “doers,” James is concerned not to appear too radical, and seeks instead to assure his audience about the practical and amiable character of his pragmatism.

James thus defends his pragmatism against “unjust criticism” while underscoring the conformity of his ideas (P 35). He “insist[s] on the fact that truth is made largely out of previous truths” (P 107). According to James, “a new opinion counts as ‘true’ just in proportion as it gratifies the individual’s desire to assimilate the novel in his experience to his beliefs in stock” (P 36). Hence, “our knowledge grows *in spots*. The spots may be large or small, but the knowledge never grows all over: some old knowledge always remains what it was” (P 82). James further reflects upon the “wonderful supremacy” of “common-sense categories.” Though he ends his chapter on common sense in *Pragmatism* with the conclusion that “we have seen reason to suspect it [i.e. common sense],” his point is not to discard it all together (P 94). He finds, however, that common sense contradicts philosophic and scientific criticism, and that the latter two show further disagreements within themselves. Hence he contends to consider them all instead in “the pragmatistic view that all our theories are *instrumental*, are mental modes of *adaptation* to reality, rather than revelations or gnostic answers to some divinely instituted world’s enigma” (P 94). Common sense, philosophy, and science may in this way all have “the

value for some purposes of each thought-level,” assisting us as we consider our experiences of reality.

James esteems his ladylike pragmatism profoundly “democratic” and “genial;” “she will entertain any hypothesis, she will consider any evidence” (P 44). “Her only test of probable truth,” continues James, “is what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of experience’s demands” (P 44). “Her conclusions,” assures James, are “as friendly as those of mother nature” (P 44). Common sense is a “natural mother-tongue of thought,” and relying on common sense “we make our plans and plot together, and connect all the remoter parts of experience with what lies before our eyes” (P 88). Whereas Nietzsche “philosophizes with a hammer” and attacks common sense, James reassures his audience about the friendly and inclusive characteristics of his pragmatism.

CHAPTER 5: NIETZSCHE'S "NEW OBJECTIVITY"

While discussing James' public philosophy, George Cotkin compares James to Nietzsche, describing their philosophies as "conversation;" a "playful yet serious and enlightening confrontation with philosophical and cultural issues" (14).²⁷ Cotkin's implicit equation of Nietzsche and "the fully indeterminate" – with his "unrealistic" and "dangerous" heroism – contradicts, however, this metaphor and ignores Nietzsche's desire for truth and knowledge. I referred in the introduction to Alan Schrift's assertion that Nietzsche – though he rejects "Absolute truth" – by no means rejects truth all together. Rather he introduces a new kind of "objectivity" consisting of a philological close reading and a multiplication of perspectives in order to grasp the text better. Richard Schacht argues in similar ways in his essay "Nietzsche's kind of philosophy" (1996) that Nietzsche does not discard "truth," "knowledge," or "philosophy," despite his rejection of "eternal truths" and the idea of truth as correspondence between thought and the "thing in itself." Discussing Nietzsche's "perspectivism," Schacht argues that "far from associating the idea of 'perspective' with the dissolution of the notion of 'truth,' Nietzsche here directly links the recognition of the former with the attainment of the latter" (171). Schacht asserts that Nietzsche's "perspectivism" has "comprehension as its aim," searching for "perspectives" from which something new may be learned (162). Hence, opposed to Cotkin's comparison of Nietzsche and the "fully indeterminate," Schacht underscores that Nietzsche avails himself of multiple perspectives so that he may develop and sharpen his "eyes" towards a growing and deepening comprehension. Nietzsche, concludes, Schacht, applies different perspectives as a "dancer" not to be "frozen" within any one of them, thus always keeping the possibility open of both broadening and sharpening his view.

READING “RIGHTLY” VERSUS READING “WELL”

Nietzsche worked as a professor in philology at the University of Basel for ten years (1869-1879), and he often refers to the discipline of philology as a recommended method.²⁸ Nietzsche, however, situates his own philology outside of the academic circle. While commending his favored kind of philology as “the art of reading well,” he scorns the philologists who are driven by the one-sided desire of “reading rightly” – i.e. by the philosophical standards of “unity,” “identity,” and “closure” – which believes that “absolute truths” can be retrieved in the text. Nietzsche criticizes theological exegesis as such reading which is more concerned to project its own truths onto the text, instead of listening to the text. Hence he deplores the Christian theologians as characterized by an “*incapacity for philology*” while he upholds the art of philology as “reading facts without falsifying them by interpretation, without losing caution, patience, delicacy, in the desire to understand” (A 635). The point is not that we can do without interpretation. However, opposed to the theologians’ single-minded application of their teleological interpretation, philology is an “*ephexis* [indecisiveness] in interpretation – whether it is a matter of books, the news in a paper, destinies, or weather conditions” (A 635). The task of philology is to guard against “teleological” interpretations while keeping the question of interpretation open. Nietzsche’s favored philologist refrains from moving too quickly and attempts to control his interests while letting the text speak. Nietzsche upholds “true” and “proper interpretation,” or the “science of hermeneutics,” as “the skill to ruminate” upon the text, opposed to a mere “reading it off” until it becomes “deciphered” (GM 157). Though one cannot “decipher” the text, it can become more comprehensible if one applies the skills of “reading well” and takes the time to ruminate and reflect upon it.

²⁷ Reading James’ philosophy as a “conversation” Cotkin is drawing upon some of the distinctions developed by Richard Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979), 365-94.

²⁸ According to Schrift, Nietzsche sought to introduce a “new philology” with *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). However, the book was “almost universally rejected in philological circles,” hence “he relinquished any expectation of rescuing philology from the philologists” (162). Nietzsche thus came to view his philology as “eccentricity” and “experiment” outside the center (162-63).

Nietzsche's emphasis on "the art of reading well" asserts how he – similarly to James' contention that "truths" and "ideas" can be more or less in "agreement" with reality – posits readings that can come closer to the text than others which do not "let the text speak." Consistent with this attitude, Nietzsche further asserts the significance of seeing things in new ways in order to enlighten our view of reality. Nietzsche recommends "radical inversions of customary perspectives and valuations," while asserting that "it is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect on its road to final 'objectivity' to see things for once through the wrong end of the telescope" (GM 255). Nietzsche underscores that "'objectivity' is not meant here to stand for 'disinterested contemplation' (which is a rank absurdity) but for an ability to have one's pros and cons within one's command and to use them or not, as one chooses" (GM 255). As noted above, Nietzsche argues that "all seeing is essentially perspective, and so is all knowing," hence, "the more emotions we allow to speak in a given matter, the more different eyes we can put on in order to view a given spectacle, the more complete will be our conception of it, the greater our 'objectivity'" (GM 255). Nietzsche thus asserts that though there is no "pure reason" or "absolute knowledge," we may nonetheless avail ourselves of perspectives that can assist us in our striving towards fuller knowledge, more attuned to reality.

While recommending a reversing of one's perspectives, Nietzsche's other point is that one may in this way free oneself from "valuations, by means of which the human mind has all too long raged against itself" (GM 255). It is, therefore, assures Nietzsche, "of the greatest importance to know how to put the most diverse perspectives and psychological interpretations at the service of intellection" (GM 255). As Schacht concludes, Nietzsche's philosophy was "a concern with the *character and quality of human life*" and what has "*value for life*" (op.cit. 154). Nietzsche had little interest in the disputations of "the traditional literature and textbooks of philosophy" and discarded them as idle diversions to "the development and advocacy of more satisfactory alternatives" in philosophy as significant to "the enhancement of life" (ibid. 156, 161). Just as for James, Nietzsche's primary concern was not to lay out a "systematic"

exposition of “objectivity” or “truth,” but to overcome the idle sterility of philosophy and the disease of modernity.

Since Nietzsche’s goal is not to lay out a systematic exposition of truth, his writings may seem – like James’ texts – problematic to those who attempt to pin down a unified understanding of truth. Maudemarie Clark, for instance, argues that what Nietzsche says about truth appears “problematic and perhaps even self-contradictory” (ix). In fact, says Clark, “Nietzsche’s claims about truth seem hopelessly confused” (1). However, Clark also contends that “Nietzsche has something important to say about truth,” and she concludes that by focusing on “the development in Nietzsche’s position” one may argue that “Nietzsche’s position was contradictory in its early and middle formulations, but that he progressed toward and finally arrived at a coherent and defensible position in the works of his final two years” (1). Clark sets out to clarify and explain this “position” in her book *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (1990) and concludes that “we can defend Nietzsche’s position (his apparent denial of truth) only if we distinguish a metaphysical from a common sense version of the correspondence theory and take him to reject only the former” (30-31). This gives us, states Clark, “a neo-Kantian understanding of truth” which is what she attributes to Nietzsche.

Clark’s work deserves respect for its thorough treatment of Nietzsche’s texts, but it ignores *why* Nietzsche did not present a “coherent position” on truth. Though Clark argues that her reading of Nietzsche as offering a neo-Kantian conception of truth, “was worked out in a dialectic with Nietzsche’s text,” she admits that she did so while trying “to make sense of his position and to see what was defensible in it, in accord with the philosophical views I held at that time” (31). It is her conclusion that “Nietzsche could reach an acceptable position on truth ... only by arriving at the one I attribute to him” (31). While thus amending Nietzsche’s “failure” to present a neo-Kantian position himself, Clark fails to consider what Nietzsche was concerned to do when he did not attempt to expose such a position.

I argued above that paying attention to the format of James’ texts as public lectures not only enlightens us as to what James was interested in doing, but also reveals

the impertinence of dismissing his philosophy as a “failure” while seeking to extract a coherent system from his texts. Hence, if we reflect upon the form of Nietzsche’s texts, I contend we might gain a more productive insight into what Nietzsche was attempting to do as a philosopher, and why he did not present his ideas about truth as a coherent position. Clark notes that Nietzsche was not only “a great thinker,” he was also “a great writer.” But, states Clark, “I barely touch on that aspect of his work and genius here” (ix). I contend that it is Clark’s main weakness that she chooses her priorities in this way, since it is the form of Nietzsche’s *writing* which underscores his rejection of idle disputations in favor of a different mode of writing, - a writing that might spark a kind of thinking truer to the enhancement of life. It is the textual outlook of Nietzsche’s writings which tells us not only that it would be a deluded attempt to look for a concluded system of truth in his texts, but why.

WHAT IS TRUTH? THE QUESTION OF STYLE AND METAPHORS

As discussed above, Nietzsche criticizes language and concepts as unable to convey any essential knowledge about the world, and it is important to keep this critique in mind when focusing on how Nietzsche uses language. Nietzsche had already in 1873 – in *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* – formulated a thorough critique of language. As in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche here asserts the historical construction of concepts as “essential truths,” declaring that it is a “linguistic legislation” which “furnishes the first laws of truth” (44). Hence, “only through forgetfulness can man ever achieve the illusion of possessing a ‘truth’” after man has made it himself (45). “What, then, is truth?” asks Nietzsche, before he answers as follows:

A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms - in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins. (46-47)

It is clear from Nietzsche's answer that he is astutely aware of the problems of how to speak if he wants to transcend the confinements of language and to exchange "worn out" metaphors with new ones.

In *Nietzsche and Metaphor* (1993, first published in French in 1972) Sarah Kofman discusses Nietzsche's use of metaphors, how he multiplies his perspectives, and diversifies his styles. Kofman explains that "in order to dispel the metaphysical seductions and the misconstructions produced by deceptive interpretations, Nietzsche, strategically, turns himself into a poet: he multiplies metaphors, repeating the traditional metaphors and attaching them to less usual ones, or pushing them to their ultimate consequences to see just where they can lead" (101-02). Kofman's discussion of Nietzsche's writing serves to clarify why there is no systematic exposition of "truth" in Nietzsche's texts. Nietzsche suspected and avoided the form of philosophical treatises, and exulted instead in aphorisms of both a fragmentary and poetic style.

In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche describes his style as "brevity."²⁹ "There are truths," says Nietzsche, "that are singularly shy and ticklish and cannot be caught except suddenly – that must be *surprised* or left alone" (345). According to Nietzsche, "the development of language and the development of consciousness" grew out under "*the*

²⁹ Regarding the title of this book, Walter Kaufmann writes in the "Introduction" that "what Nietzsche himself wanted the title to convey was that serious thinking does not have to be stodgy, heavy, dusty, or in one word, Teutonic" (5). Rather, it can be "southern" and gay, filled with laughter and passion. Thus, concludes Kaufmann, "the title of the book has polemical overtones: it is meant to be anti-German, anti-professorial, and anti-academic," while is meant "to suggest 'light feet,' 'dancing,' 'laughter' - and ridicule of 'the spirit of gravity'" (7). Kaufmann's interpretation of the title serves the book well, which does not allow itself to be fixed into a dry and dusty "academic" framework.

pressure of the need of communication” (298-99). Language is thus a tool for man’s “social or herd nature” whereas “all our actions are altogether incomparably personal, unique, and infinitely individual” (299). Hence, all becoming “translated” into language and consciousness implies becoming “shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, sign, herd signal ... a great and thorough corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalization” (300). In other words, if Nietzsche wants to say something that does not imply becoming “shallow” or a false superficial corruption, he cannot use the language of consciousness and traditional philosophy or even of ordinary language. “I approach deep problems like cold baths,” says Nietzsche; “quickly into them and quickly out again” (343). Nietzsche applies a language of “brevity,” because he “must say many things briefly in order that they may be heard still more briefly” (345).

Not only “brevity,” but “the ability to contradict” is celebrated by Nietzsche. “The ability to contradict, the attainment of a good conscience when one feels hostile to what is accustomed, traditional, and hallowed – that is still more excellent and constitutes what is really great, new, and amazing in our culture” (GS 239). Nietzsche has thus made himself unassailable to those who would choose to accuse him for articulating “contradictory” statements about truth, or for failing to present a coherent exposition on the same matter. Nietzsche not only favors contradictions, but the art of writing so as not to be understood: “One does not only wish to be understood when one writes; one wishes just as surely *not* to be understood” (GS 343). Hence, it is “not by any means necessarily an objection to a book when anyone finds it impossible to understand: perhaps that was part of the author’s intention – he did not want to be understood by just ‘anybody’” (GS 343). Evidently, if one is left with the option of using a language which “falsifies” and “makes shallow” in order to be understood, not being understood would be preferable.

A book incomprehensible to “anyone” will, however, “open the ears of those whose ears are related,” says Nietzsche (GS 343). “I don’t want either my ignorance or the liveliness of my temperament to keep me from being understandable for *you*, my friends,” assures Nietzsche (GS 343). Nietzsche wants to be heard, but only by those whose “ears are related” and who will hear without “falsifying.” “Those who can breathe

the air of my writings,” explains Nietzsche, “know that it is an air of the heights, a *strong* air” (EH 218). To understand Nietzsche thus requires a certain condition. In his preface to *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche further elaborates on the skills his texts require in order to be understood: “Should this treatise seem unintelligible or jarring to some readers, I think the fault need not necessarily be laid at my door. It is plain enough, and it presumes only that the reader will have read my earlier works with some care – for they do, in fact, require careful reading” (157). Nietzsche recognizes that “the aphoristic form may present a stumbling block, the difficulty being that this form is no longer taken ‘hard’ enough.” An aphorism cannot be understood by simply “reading it off,” asserts Nietzsche; it requires, on the contrary, “a whole science of hermeneutics” (157). “One skill is needed – lost today, unfortunately,” concludes Nietzsche; “the skill to ruminate, which cows possess but modern man lacks. This is why my writing will, for some time yet, remain difficult to digest” (157).

GENUINE PHILOSOPHY AS A WRESTLING METHOD AND YES-SAYING

Like James, Nietzsche asserts the significance of methods as opposed to dogmas. Demanding a “revaluation of all values” and “war” against “ancient conceptions of ‘true’ and ‘untrue,’” Nietzsche comments that “the most valuable insights are the *methods*” (A 579). Moreover, while observing the decadence and nihilism of his time, Nietzsche knows that he is not the only one to distrust the truths of philosophy. However, he dismisses the “color blindness of the utility man who sees in philosophy nothing but a series of *refuted* systems and a wasteful expenditures which ‘benefits’ nobody” (BGE 130). Both a “philosophy reduced to ‘theory of knowledge’” as well as “the arrogant disdain for philosophy” are deplored by Nietzsche (BGE 130-31). Nietzsche’s favored “genuine philosophers” would, on the other hand, take “delight in experiment ... critical discipline and every habit conducive to cleanliness and severity in things of the spirit” (BGE 140-41). Opposed to the decadence of nihilism and the “arrogant disdain for

philosophy,” such philosophers would firmly avail themselves of critical approaches to reality.

Hence, Nietzsche does not discard the significance of either philosophy or rigorous discipline. In fact, he asserts the significance of a “steady and laborious process of science” to reveal that “what we now call the world is the result of a host of errors and fantasies” (HAH 27). Moreover, when discussing the “*actual philosophers*” “who reach for the future with creative hand,” Nietzsche asserts that “they possess for this task the preliminary work of all the philosophical labourers” (BGE 142). However, he also “insist[s] that philosophical labourers and men of science in general should once and for all cease to be confused with philosophers,” asserting that only the latter ones are those who have truly traversed the whole range of human feelings so that they may “gaze from the heights into every distance” (BGE 142). He concludes that “rigorous science can really free us only to a small extent from this world ... insofar as it essentially cannot break the force of age-old habits of sensation” (HAH 27). Though it can “gradually, step by step, elucidate” matters,³⁰ it is Nietzsche’s contention that it can only lift us “momentarily above the whole process” (HAH 27). According to Nietzsche, a truly “purifying knowledge” belongs to a future “new culture” (HAH 42). Such “purifying knowledge” would be conducted by he who “continues to live only in order to know better.”³¹

While pursuing problems, the “knowing ones” who live “truthfully” assert, like James and his pragmatism, the impact of experience and experiment. “We others who thirst after reason” (i.e. who are not seduced by the “will to truth” in philosophy), “are determined,” declares Nietzsche, “to scrutinize our experiences as severely as a scientific experiment – hour after hour, day after day” (GS 253). It is “the idea that life could be an experiment of the seeker for knowledge” that “makes it truer,” says Nietzsche (GS 255)

³⁰ Nietzsche is here specifically addressing the history of the genesis of “the world of representation;” i.e. the creation of the “thing in itself” opposed to “appearance.”

³¹ Joan Stambaugh comments in this context that “Nietzsche’s critique of reason ... is by no means simply a *rejection* of reason but, rather, a *caution* against the vast overestimation of reason that has occurred in Western philosophy” (6).

Nietzsche opposes those who see knowledge as “a bed to rest on” (GS 255). “For me,” asserts Nietzsche, “it is a world of dangers and victories in which heroic feelings, too, find places to dance and play. ‘*Life as a means to knowledge*’ – with this principle in one’s heart one can live not only boldly but even gaily, and laugh gaily, too” (GS 255). Like James who vindicates a healthy-buoyant will which acts in opposition to the relief sought in “rationalistic Absolutes,” Nietzsche upholds the heroic will which relishes in experiment and refuses to rest on “comfortable beds.”

While emphasizing the “hard” and “dangerous” task of “knowledge,” Nietzsche scorns the idea that “knowledge” or “what is true” should consist of “agreeable feelings” and “pleasure” (A 632). Moreover, to see “knowledge” as that which we have made “familiar,” i.e. as “what we are used to,” is utterly distasteful in Nietzsche’s consideration, because “what we are used to is most difficult to ‘know’ – that is, to see as a problem” (GS 300-01). It is his point that making “familiar” implies a simplification which ignores the profounder and more difficult problems of life in order to maintain knowledge as “agreeable.” Contrary to this longing for “pleasure,” Nietzsche underscores that “the experience of all severe, of all profoundly inclined, spirits teaches the *opposite*,” “at every step one has to wrestle for truth” (A 632). “Genuine philosophers” view things in a different and unfamiliar way in order to “know” and are thus profound “skeptics.” “Strength, *freedom* which is born of the strength and overstrength of the spirit, proves itself by skepticism,” asserts Nietzsche, whereas “convictions are prisons” (A 638). According to Nietzsche, because the “great spirit” is free from the sick sufferer’s “reason to lie his way out of reality,” he does not falsify, devalue, or negate it as the person in the sickbed does who judges it “reprehensible” while he opposes it to a comforting and fictitious “ideal.” Nor does he rest content with the pleasurable familiarity of viewing things.

“Let us beware,” demands Nietzsche, of perceiving “only on the crust of the earth and make of it something essential, universal, and eternal” (GS 167). Opposed to the philosopher’s “will to truth” and desire for “comfort,” Nietzsche sees a counteraction “by that sublime inclination ... which takes a profound, many-sided and thorough view of

things” (BGE 161). Nietzsche posits a “will to knowledge on the basis of a far more powerful will” (BGE 55). The philosopher with such a healthier “will to power” will “be *harder*” and “will not consort with ‘truth’ so as to be ‘pleased’ by it or ‘elevated’ and inspired” (BGE 141). Opposing the “closed horizon” of dogmatic philosophies, he will “welcome every experience” and bear “the burden and duty of a hundred attempts and temptations of life” (BGE 132). Such a truthful philosopher “risks *himself* constantly,” concludes Nietzsche; “he plays *the* dangerous game” (BGE 132). While upholding a healthier way of living in the name of knowledge, Nietzsche underscores the great power it requires and asserts its risks.

Nietzsche personally sees himself as one of those “who have the *courage* to be healthy” (A 633). “I favor any *skepsis* to which I may reply: ‘Let us try it!’” (GS 115). “I no longer wish to hear anything of all those things and questions that do not permit any experiment,” continues Nietzsche, “for there courage has lost its right” (GS 115). Nietzsche wants instead to be a “Yes-sayer,” exclaiming “*amor fati*” (GS 223). – “I welcome all signs that a more virile, warlike age is about to begin,” says Nietzsche, “which will restore honor to courage above all” (GS 228). The human beings of this “warlike age” are characterized by “cheerfulness, patience, unpretentiousness” and they will be “more fruitful human beings, happier beings” (GS 228). “For believe me,” says Nietzsche, “the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is – to *live dangerously!*” (GS 228). “Living dangerously” implies “great health;” those who “have suffered shipwreck and damage often enough” are “healthier than one likes to permit” (GS 346). Rejecting “convictions” and “closed horizons” is a dangerous task, but it restores honor to courage and it brings health where disease and sickness of the will ruled.

ON “UTILITY” ONCE MORE

While fighting “convictions” and the ideals of “familiarity” in knowledge, Nietzsche appears far more suspicious of traditional truths than James who maintains the truth-value of even “rationalistic hypotheses” and old-stock truths when they prove

“useful” and “work” in favor of human life. Whereas James is concerned to arrive at useful truths and asserts “common-sense,” Nietzsche is critical of a defense of truth cast as either “common” or “useful.” We’ve seen that Nietzsche opposes the “shallowness” of language as a tool for communication, and he argues further that what “may be *useful* in the interests of the human herd” implies a “mere belief” in “utility” which is “perhaps precisely that most calamitous stupidity of which we shall perish some day” (GS 300). Nietzsche deplores the “common” as produced by the “need” of men to come together in which “only such human beings as could indicate similar requirements, similar experiences by means of similar signs” could join (BGE 206). Moreover, he scorns “the whole easy *communicability* of need” as not only produced by “the more similar, more ordinary human beings,” but sustained and encouraged in “the continuing development of mankind into the similar, ordinary, average, herdlike – into the *common!*” (BGE 206). The commonality of language is thus perceived by Nietzsche as an increasing danger against the “higher” and the “profound” which cannot be conveyed through the communicability of language, but exist as “the more select, subtle, rare and harder to understand.”³²

While reflecting upon the limits of language, Nietzsche argues that the significant question is not about “truth” or “falseness,” but rather “to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating” (BGE 35). This assertion does not contradict James’ priorities, however, whereas James incorporates his priorities of life and will into his pragmatic truth of “common sense,” Nietzsche posits a philosophy beyond traditional standards of “true” and “false,” “good and evil.”

³² This indication of the “higher” and “profound” appears similar to Nietzsche’s ideas about the “intuitive.” In *On Truth and Lies* Nietzsche discusses how the world that becomes conscious is “only a surface-and-sign-world” which becomes “shallow,” “false,” and “thin” as opposed to that which “goes over” our “horizon.” Further, he argues that “the man who is guided by concepts and abstractions only succeeds by such means in warding off misfortune, without ever gaining any happiness for himself from these abstractions, whereas the “intuitive man” “reaps from his intuition a harvest of continually inflowing illumination, cheer, and redemption” (qtd. in Sadler, 34). Ted Sadler discusses the “intuitive” in terms of “philosophical truthfulness” which Nietzsche upholds against “abstract, conceptual and linguistic truth” (34). The intellectual optimism of Socratic rationalism is philosophically false because it is a non-

According to Nietzsche, “the falseness of a judgement is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgement” (BGE 35). In fact, argues Nietzsche, “the falsest judgements” may serve as “the most indispensable for us,” because “without accepting the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the unconditional and self-identical, without a constant falsification of the world by means of numbers, man could not live” (BGE 35). Nietzsche concludes “untruth as a condition of life.”³³ When Nietzsche revalues truth in terms of what is “life-preserving,” he thus posits a transformed morality which “risks” moving “beyond good and evil” (BGE 36). It is Nietzsche’s point that only by viewing things in this way may one get rid of the “tyranny” of “truths” and “logic” for the enhancement of life.

attunement to reality whose essence is the tragic and terrible abyss. I discuss this tragic aspect of existence further in Chapter 6.

³³ See also *The Gay Science* in which Nietzsche reflects that “even the most harmful man may really be the most useful when it comes to the preservation of the species; for he nurtures either in himself or in others, through his effects, instincts without which humanity would long have become feeble or rotten” (73).

CHAPTER 6: A QUEST FOR A NEW ATTITUDE IN MORALITY

James and Nietzsche revalue truths in terms of their “value for life.” Their concern with truth has thus evident ethical implications which they address in line with their critique of philosophical truth. Both Nietzsche’s “revaluation of all values” and James’ discussion of “the moral life” share a common impetus: to refute the idea of morality as a domain of essential values while they underscore the significance of creativity and novelty in life. In line with their discussion of truth, they regard morality in terms of man’s will, health, power, and courage while they define it as a method, rather than a system.

THE WILL TO CREATE BEYOND

Nietzsche scorns “the idiotic guilelessness and blind confidence of ‘modern ideas’” – “the whole of Christian-European morality” – which “suffers from a feeling of anxiety” (BGE 127). Further, he deplores socialism for committing a “*collective degeneration of man* down to that which the socialist dolts and blockheads today see as their ‘man of the future’ ... or, as they say, to the man of the ‘free society’” (BGE 127). It is Nietzsche’s conclusion that “*morality is in Europe today herd-animal morality*” which – with its ideas of “free society,” “equal rights,” and “democracy” – fails to respect what “could be *cultivated out of man*” (BGE 125, 127). However, “nothing is ‘given’ as real except our world of desires and passions,” contends Nietzsche (BGE 66). Hence, he vindicates “a morality of method” and “the ‘will to power’” (BGE 67). For “many other, above all *higher*, moralities are possible,” asserts Nietzsche, but it requires that someone – a “new” philosopher – set it as his “task” to create them (BGE 125). While deploring contemporary morality as “mediocre,” Nietzsche upholds the “will to power” capable of creating beyond, and calls for “spirits strong and original enough to make a start on

antithetical evaluations and to revalue and reverse ‘eternal values;’ towards heralds and forerunners, towards men of the future” (BGE 126).

James also asserts “that there is no such thing possible as an ethical philosophy dogmatically made up in advance,” while he contends that “we all help to determine the content of ethical philosophy so far as we contribute to the race’s moral life” (MM 184). James scorns those who “imagine an abstract moral order in which the objective truth resides,” concluding that he would prefer “chaos forever than an order based on any closet-philosopher’s rule, even though he were the most enlightened possible member of his tribe” (MM 194, 204). James, moreover, deplors “the wholesale loss of opportunity under our *régime* of so-called equality and industrialism” despite “the anarchists, nihilists, and free-lovers; the free-silverites, socialists, and single-tax men” (MM 207). James, however, contends that “as our present laws and customs have fought and conquered other past ones, so they will in their turn be overthrown” (MM 206). James vindicates a philosopher who “as a militant, [is] fighting free-handed that the goods to which he *is* sensible may not be submerged and lost from out of life” (MM 204). Like Nietzsche, James upholds the philosopher’s will to create his own new values against the oppressive ethics of his times.

Both James and Nietzsche commend their revaluation of morality for making a radical break with the present. While calling for “*a revaluation of all values*” Nietzsche concludes that he is above all stating “*a grand declaration of war*” (TI 21-22).³⁴ His point is that “whoever wants to be a creator in good and evil, must first be an annihilator and break values. Thus the highest evil belongs to the greatest goodness: but this is – being creative” (EH 327).³⁵ According to Nietzsche, towards a higher morality “every

³⁴ Nietzsche’s planned to write a four volume *Revaluation of All Values* of which *The Antichrist* is written as the first, however, the plan was never realized. The question of morality and his own “revaluation” constitute nonetheless a predominant part of his writings.

³⁵ Hence Nietzsche commends his warlike nature as a strength opposed to the weakness of revenge: “I am warlike by nature. Attacking is one of my instincts. Being *able* to be an enemy, *being* an enemy – perhaps that presupposes a strong nature; in any case, it belongs to every strong nature” (EH 231). He concludes that “the *aggressive* pathos belongs just as necessarily to strength as vengefulness and rancor belong to weakness” (EH 232).

expedient ... is justified,” but “above all, *war*. War has always been the grand sagacity of every spirit” (TI 21). James likewise compliments his “alteration in ‘the seat of authority’” as resembling the Protestant reformation, finding that as “to papal minds, protestantism has often seemed a mere mess of anarchy and confusion, such, no doubt, will pragmatism often seem to ultra-rationalists minds in philosophy” (P 62). Further, he asserts that “the *highest* ethical life – however few may be called to bear its burdens – consists at all times in the breaking of rules which have grown too narrow for the actual case” (MM 209). It therefore requires a “strenuous mood” and “every sort of energy and endurance, of courage and capacity for handling life’s evils” (MM 211, 213). Finally, while upholding the creative strengths of the “militant” philosopher, James seconds Nietzsche’s praise for the means (if not the ends) of war, declaring that “the martial virtues, although originally gained by the race through war, are absolute and permanent human goods ... specifications of more universal and enduring competitive passion.” Hence he concludes that “the only thing needed hereforward is to inflame the civic temper as past history has inflamed the military temper.”³⁶ While underscoring the impact of power and courage, both James and Nietzsche legitimize war in terms of creating beyond the ethics of decadent nihilism.

“FREE WILL” AS CREATIVE POWER

Following their emphasis on the will and power to overthrow the old and create anew, James and Nietzsche dismiss the liberal idea of freedom or the idea of “free will” as an “essential faculty” in man. While discussing “*the free-will problem*” in his lectures on pragmatism, James rejects “the rationalistic fashion” of seeing the “free-will” as “a principle, a positive faculty or virtue added to man” (P 59). Rather, argues James, “free-will means novelty, the grafting on to the past of something not involved therein” (P 59). Likewise Nietzsche deems it a “great fateful error” of seeing the “will” as “a *faculty*” (TI 38). Upholding his “free spirit” he laments that “in all the countries of Europe and

³⁶ From James’ *Essays in Religion and Morality* quoted in West (58, 59). In his lectures on pragmatism James asserts that “pragmatism is fully armed and militant” (P 32).

likewise in America there exists at present something that misuses this name” (BGE 71). He deplores the “doctrines and ditties” of such “*libres-penseurs,*’ *liberei pensatori,*’ *Freidenker,*’ or whatever else all these worthy advocates of ‘modern ideas’ like to call themselves” (BGE 72-73). Nietzsche objects to “liberalism” as “in plain words, *reduction to the herd animal,*” because “freedom” is – contrary to the “moral principle” of “liberalism” – “the will to self-responsibility” (TI 92). It is, says Nietzsche, “something one *wants,* something one *conquers,*” hence it requires “will to power” (TI 92-93). “Free will” is thus equivalent to the will to power; to create in “danger.”

THE DRIVING FORCE OF PAIN AND SUFFERING

In their vindication of a strong will that fights against the present to reach beyond, James and Nietzsche assert pain and suffering as constitutive of a precondition for the creation of new values. Nietzsche, in fact, argues that “greatness and cunning” are created through “the discipline of great suffering” (BGE 155). James also affirms the “pains” and “evils” of existence as energizers of man’s will, underscoring “the exceeding prominence and importance of the part which pleasures and pains, both felt and represented, play in the motivation of our conduct” (“The Will” 67). In fact, says James, “cruelty to the lesser claims, so far from being a deterrent element, does but add to the stern joy with which it leaps to answer to the greater” (MM 213). Hence in “Is Life Worth Living,” he notes that “it is, indeed, a remarkable fact that sufferings and hardships do not, as a rule, abate the love of life; they seem, on the contrary, usually to give it a keener zest ... Need and struggle are what excite and inspire us” (47). However, whereas the value of suffering is for James that it inspires our will to counter it with “the greater,” Nietzsche asserts it as a “*desirable*” “discipline” in itself. Opposed to the socialist desire “*to abolish suffering,*” Nietzsche responds as the speaker of “free spirits” that “*we would rather increase it and make it worse than it has ever been!*” (BGE 155). While celebrating the “*creative powers*” of man, Nietzsche upholds the driving force of incessant suffering.

According to Nietzsche, “profound suffering ennobles” (BGE 209). It is he who has “suffered deeply” and become “initiated” as “the elect of knowledge,” “by virtue of his suffering,” who “*knows more*,” asserts Nietzsche (BGE 209). Interestingly enough, both James and Nietzsche suffered from weak health and insomnia. In this context Nietzsche – in line with his emphasis on suffering – explicitly asserts the significance of illness and pain in terms of “seeing.” In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche is “intoxicated” by his (apparent) “convalescence,” and upholds the value of illness because of the “self-questioning” it brings with it, concluding that “one acquires a subtler eye for all philosophizing to date” afterwards (GS 34). “Only great pain is the ultimate liberator of the spirit,” says Nietzsche (GS 36). Pain makes one more “profound” and encourages “the *will* henceforth to question further, more deeply, severely, harshly, evilly and quietly than one had questioned heretofore,” hence “life itself has become a *problem*” for the convalescent (GS 36). Thus suffering stimulates profounder insights into the “riddles and iridescent uncertainties” of nature.

James and Nietzsche’s different attitude to suffering opens an interesting view to how they differ with respect to their revaluation of morality and their prospects for the future. While underscoring the existence of pains and evils, James asserts that: “I am willing to take the universe to be really dangerous and adventurous, without therefore backing out and crying ‘no play’ ... I am willing,” says James further, “that there should be real losses and real losers, and no total preservation of all that is” (P 142). James, however, posits “the ideal as an ultimate” – albeit “as an extract” – and in which “evil” is “overcome.” The “escape from evil” is not by “preserving it in the whole,” but is achieved, says James, “by dropping it out altogether, throwing it overboard and getting beyond it, helping to make a universe that shall forget its very place and name” (P 142).

Nietzsche on the other hand, wants neither “relief” from pain nor to “overcome” suffering. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche describes Dionysian “understanding” as “the apprehension of truth and its terror” when “man is aware everywhere of the ghastly absurdity of existence” (51). According to Nietzsche, the Dionysian insight implies a looking into the tragic abyss of existence that one must bear as “the heaviest fate.”

Nietzsche upholds pre-Socratic Greece for enduring this heavy wisdom in their tragedies in which the chorus “solaced” the terror through its music and art while seeing life as “at bottom indestructibly joyful and powerful” (50). There is thus in a sense an “overcoming” of pain in those who – while asserting the will to life and power – dance in joy and create in response, but this by no means imply that evil is “dropped” out. Nietzsche upholds his prophet Zarathustra as a dancer who has the power of encountering the abyss of existence, while neither fighting it nor wishing it to go away; “Zarathustra is a dancer – how he that has the hardest, most terrible insight into reality, that has thought the ‘most abysmal idea,’ nevertheless does not consider it an objection to existence, not even to its eternal recurrence – but rather one reason more for being himself the eternal Yes to all things” (EH 306). “*This is the concept of Dionysus once again,*” asserts Nietzsche (EH 306). It implies the strength of having no objection to life’s pain and suffering, but that one excels instead in the art of saying Yes to life while having “weathered” the consciousness of “the hardest wars” without suffering from it.³⁷ Nietzsche upholds the incessant existence of pain which one must perpetually overcome in order not only to endure life, but affirm it.

Whereas Nietzsche underscores the ceaseless presence of pain, James – in line with his posited hope for the development of truth – asserts the overcoming of pain and the elaboration of a moral universe: “The course of history is nothing but the story of men’s struggles from generation to generation to find the more and more inclusive order” (MM 205). James’ quest is for a common morality; i.e. that “which makes for the *best whole*, in the sense of awakening the least sum of dissatisfactions” (MM 205). He finds that the “pluralism” of individuals prevents a satisfaction of “all demands conjointly,” but he encourages us to act so as “to satisfy at all times *as many demands as we can*” (MM 205). Hence, it is the “unconditional commandment” of “the *highest ethical life*,” says James, “to vote and to act as to bring about the very largest total universe of good which we can see” (MM 209).

³⁷ *Ecce Homo* pp. 273, 274, 315, 327.

Moreover, James asserts the quest for the “highest” morality as a communal project. Though the philosopher “sees, indeed, somewhat better than most men” how to act in these matters, the moral question is significant for all to which the answer is, according to James, that one “must vote always for the richer universe, for the good which seems most organizable, most fit to enter into complex combinations, most apt to be a member of a more inclusive whole” (MM 210). One would thus act according to the “ideal of systematically unified moral truth,” says James (MM 214). James rejects the existence of ethical dogmas and asserts that “ethical treatises may be voluminous and luminous as well; but they can never be final” (MM 210). However, in his desire for an “organizable” and “systematically unified moral truth” he nonetheless suggests a commitment to a collective moral “system,” albeit as a potentially *created* – not eternally postulated – truth.

GOD AS AN APPEAL TO OUR MORAL ENERGY

While bidding man to “strenuously” act towards an inclusive “moral life,” James contends that “the capacity for the strenuous mood probably lies slumbering in every man” (MM 211). We therefore, concludes James, must assure “the wilder passions to arouse it,” in order to attain the “imperative ideals” of “living hard, and getting out of the game of existence its keenest possibilities of zest” (MM 211-13). It is James’ contention that “strong relief is a necessity of its vision,” hence he recommends a belief in God (MM 211). In fact, according to James, “in a merely human world without a God, the appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulating power,” while “every sort of energy and endurance, of courage and capacity for handling life’s evils, is set free in those who have religious faith” (MM 212-13). James objects to, for instance, Herbert Spencer’s ethics and his idea of a future “evolutionized perfection,” finding it impotent to truly affirm and act in a world of evils. According to James, “our attitude towards concrete evils is entirely different in a world where we believe there are none but finite demanders, from what it is in one where we joyously face tragedy for an infinite demander’s sake” (MM 213). Hence, contends James, in a world where God and

salvation are posited, we face pain in a more affirming manner in order to overcome it, whereas the Darwinian and Spencerian follower rest behind and await the “evolutionized perfection.”³⁸

In contrast to Nietzsche, James thus not only posits the development of truth and morality towards more “unity,” but upholds the belief in God as significant to intensify man’s will to act towards it. It is James’ point that “religion offers itself as a *momentous* option” for our will (WB 120). In his lecture on “The Will to Believe,” James argues that there is in fact at least “some believing tendency wherever there is willingness to act at all” (WB 101). Hence, when we direct our will to a belief in God, “we feel, too, as if the appeal of religion to us were made to our own active good-will,” says James (WB 121). James compares religious belief to “the gaming-table:” “If there were an infinity of chances, and only one for God in this wager, still you ought to stake your all on God,” argues James; “for though you surely risk a finite loss by this procedure, any finite loss is reasonable, even a certain one is reasonable, if there is but the possibility of infinite gain” (WB 103). Hence, though we may not be certain about God’s existence or the chances of salvation, it is James’ point that by offering at least a hope of “infinite gain,” religious belief proves fundamental for our will to act towards a better future.

Though James dismisses the belief in an Absolute God and underscores that there is no direct evidence to prove God’s existence, he defends a belief in God because of its impetus for man’s will while it opens out “the infinite perspective” (MM 212). In *Pragmatism* James asks his audience to consider the hypothesis of God “as a live one,” presenting it as follows: “Suppose that the world’s author put the case to you before creation, saying: ‘I am going to make a world not certain to be saved, a world the perfection of which shall be conditional merely, the condition being that each several agent does its own “level best”’” (P 139). Speaking as the mouthpiece of this God, James asks his readers if they will take “the chance of taking part in such a world,” a world of

³⁸ Robert J. Connell, in *William James on The Courage to Believe* (1984), discusses James’s “religious belief” in terms of an ethics to “face tragedy for an infinite demander’s sake,” as benefiting from the “bravery and patience” of belief (102).

“real adventure, with real danger” (P 139). At least “I deny the right of any pretended logic to veto my own faith,” asserts James; “I find myself willing to take the universe to be really dangerous and adventurous, without therefore backing out and crying ‘no play’” (P 142).³⁹ It is James’ contention that those who do not join him in this “play” are either “morbid minds” who “just give up,” or “simply afraid, afraid of more experience, afraid of life” (P 140).

James calls his attitude a “meliorism;” an attitude which does not deny the possibility of the world’s salvation, nor does it take it as guaranteed. James declares that he has “small respect indeed for the Absolute.” However, “if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true,” concludes James (P 143). As we’ve seen above, James argues that even “rationalistic hypotheses,” “if they have any use,” may be “true.” Hence “universal conceptions” such as God and the Absolute, are also “true” if they prove useful for men’s lives (P 131). James underscores the significance of religious belief as bolstering our acts, being the source of our will. To the extent that a belief triggers “*our act*” to “*create* the world’s salvation,” it is crucially “useful” for our lives while it serves as a driving force for our willingness and “wish” to act towards a better world (P 138). It is therefore also “true.” James posits “a social scheme of co-operative work” if we are willing to “join the procession” and “trust” ourselves and “the other agents enough to face the risk” (P 139). Religious belief has thus also a significant social “use” and relevance.

BELIEF IN GOD AS DENYING WILL TO POWER

Contrary to James’ defense of religious belief, Nietzsche rejects the belief in God as utterly life denying. Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity, religion, and transcendent beliefs constitutes a predominant part of his writings, amongst which the notorious

³⁹ “I firmly disbelieve, myself,” asserts James further, “that our human experience is the highest form of experience extant in the universe. I believe rather that we stand,” continues James, “in much the same relation to the whole of the universe as our canine and feline pets do to the whole of human life” (P 143). James depicts human beings as “tangents to the wider life of things” (P 144). He concludes that “we may believe, on the proofs that religious experience affords, that higher powers exist and are at work to save the world on ideal lines similar to our own” (P 144).

“madman’s” pronouncement of “the death of God” is just one example.⁴⁰ Nietzsche scorns the “concept of ‘God’” as an invented “counterconcept of life” which – as the concept of “the ‘beyond,’ the ‘true world’” – is “invented in order to devalue the only world there is,” i.e. “earthly reality” (EH 334). Whereas James upholds the values of religious belief for human actions in this world, Nietzsche deplores religious ideas as something that “oppose with a ghastly levity everything that deserves to be taken seriously in life, the questions of nourishment, abode, spiritual diet, treatment of the sick, cleanliness, and weather” (EH 334). Moreover, Nietzsche sees the religious man as “all that is weak, sick, failure, suffering of itself,” as opposed to “the proud and well-turned-out human being who says Yes” (EH 335). Nietzsche discards religion as a metaphysical “need” that the healthy and courageous “free spirit” – who breaths in “fresh air” – has no need for.⁴¹

James is not oblivious to the correlation between religious belief, “weakness,” and “need” which Nietzsche attacks. On the contrary, his emphasis on the value of “relief” in religious belief testifies James’ concern to mitigate human needs and insecurities. In his discussion on “Mysticism,” James argues that “mystical moments” not only “render the soul more energetic,” but tell as well “of the supremacy of the ideal, of vastness, of union, of safety, and of rest” (406, 419). Hence, when “mystical conditions” “appeal to the yes-function” in men, they do it while affording the “safety” and “rest” inherent in the belief in divine assistance (407). James thus underscores how an otherwise insecure and restless will can be bolstered by religious belief. Not everyone, however, may need the alleviation of religious belief. James assures his reader that if “radically tough, the hurly-burly of the sensible facts of nature will be enough for you, and you will need no religion at all” (P 144). Such a reader would have no problem to live with “crude naturalism.” On the other hand, “if radically tender,” continues James, “you will take up with the more

⁴⁰ In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche recounts the parable of the madman who on the marketplace declares that “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him” (n. 125, pp. 181-82).

⁴¹ Nietzsche concludes this section which I have quoted from with Voltaire’s motto: “*Ecrasez l’infâme!*” (crush the infamy) (EH 335).

monistic form of religion” (P 144). James describes “monistic religion” as “transcendental absolutism” and is personally opposed to it, but contends it as an alternative for those who do not find “security enough” in his favored “meliorism,” i.e. “the pluralistic form, with its reliance on possibilities that are not necessities” (P 144). This latter form, says James, appeals to “you [who] are neither tough nor tender in an extreme and radical sense, but mixed as most of us are.” “It may seem to you,” continues James, “that the type of pluralistic and moralistic religion that I have offered is as good a religious synthesis as you are likely to find” (P 144). James thus asserts that there are different “needs” and that religions may fulfill these while offering “relief.” Rather than discarding religious needs as “sick” or “weak,” James lists various ways of fulfilling them in order to vitalize all of men’s actions as they move towards the future.⁴²

TEACHERS OF LIFE

In their reevaluation of truth and morality, both James and Nietzsche underscore philosophy’s significance for life. In this way they present themselves as articulators or teachers of a “life philosophy.”⁴³ Their teachings, however, differ in crucial aspects with respect to the realization of their ideas. We’ve seen that James postulates the positive development of both truth and ethics, while upholding the significance of religious belief in terms of man’s will to act for the future. Nietzsche, on the other hand, emphasizes the continuous “wrestle” and “struggling” required for both knowledge and higher moralities beyond good and evil. Moreover, Nietzsche underscores “the self-overcoming of morality, out of truthfulness” as the greatest task for the Yes-saying spirit (EH 328). Whereas James underscores his pragmatic ideas about truth and morality as inclusive of

⁴² To this concern with all of men’s lives and needs, George Cotkin comments that “James’s moral ideal was all-inclusive, designed to satisfy as many demands as possible ... For James, ethics began with recognition of the plurality of ideals and needs; he proceeded to praise those ethical ideals that least damaged the inner realities of each individual” (103).

⁴³ Ross Posnock explains how a “life philosophy” – or *Lebensphilosophie* – developed against the “sterility of modernity: the arid instrumentalism of contemporary social science, rationalism, and positivism” during the latter part of the 19th century, and he lists Nietzsche, Bergson, Husserl and William James as among the “strongest voices” of the “international chorus” against “scientism” (*Trial of Curiosity* 89).

the plurality of human kind, Nietzsche focuses on what his philosophy demands from the individual.

CHAPTER 7: SPEAKING AS TEACHERS

Keeping in mind his desire for “friends” and fellow “free spirits,” I contend we do Nietzsche wrong if we dismiss him for failing to consider a society of fellow human beings. In fact, when he speaks of “the future of man as his *will*,” he asserts that it will call for “great enterprises and collective experiments in discipline and breeding” (BGE 126). Moreover, he refers to himself as belonging to a “we” of genuine philosophers and addresses his call to “you free spirits.” Nonetheless, Richard Rorty criticizes Nietzsche for dismissing the concerns of human beings living together, while he commends James and his pragmatism for asserting the “worth of democracy” and “the ability of human beings to live together without oppressing one another” (Perspectives 9). It is true that Nietzsche scorned “*herd-animal morality*” of which he saw “the *democratic* movement” as an “evident expression” (BGE 125). What he was opposed to in this “movement,” however, was not a community of human beings *per se*, but its suppression of “*higher*” moralities and its “instinctive hostility towards every form of society other than that of the *autonomous* herd” (BGE 125). It is Nietzsche’s point that democracy thus prevents the realization of the higher potentialities in man.

Despite the various instances of sharp reactions and criticism raised against James’ pragmatism, James acted as a public intellectual with a large following.⁴⁴ Ross Posnock notes that “William inherited a role that until the mid-eighteenth century had been filled by a preacher ... From his pulpit at Harvard he provided moral guidance

⁴⁴ “The response from the world of professional philosophy was immediate and widespread,” comments George Cotkin on the reception of James’ *Pragmatism*. However, “except for John Dewey, Giovanni Papini, F.C.S. Schiller – that is, the initial coterie of James’s followers – many influential philosophers either ignored pragmatism or formed the opposition” (153). Hilary Putnam notes the “howls” James’ *Pragmatism* evoked from for instance Bertrand Russell (166). Hans Joas, who deals with the reception of American Pragmatism in Germany, comments that “even Peirce distanced himself from James and decided to describe his own thought henceforth as ‘pragmaticism,’ a name for his brainchild which he obviously believed was ugly enough to protect it from kidnappers. While James’s book was thus by no means uncontroversial in the United States, in Germany it unleashed a veritable storm of protest, against which the few supporters of James were hardly able to make themselves heard” (95-96).

founded on the practical value of self-trust, religious belief, and opposition to large institutions” (*Trial of Curiosity* 9). Both Nietzsche and James opposed the “bigness” and “masses” of modern democracy and its bureaucracies, while celebrating a heroic individualism and a healthier life. “I am against bigness and greatness in all their forms,” asserted James, listing “big organization as such, national ones first and foremost” as his enemies.⁴⁵ Nietzsche, moreover, scorned the leveling herd characteristics of socialism and liberalism as “the age of the masses” in which the “scribbling slaves of the democratic taste and its “modern ideas” act as the “levellers” (BGE 72). He aimed some of his most vehement strikes against Bismarck’s German *Reich* and the “mendacious racial self-admiration and racial indecency that parades in Germany today,” “advocat[ing] nationalism and race hatred.”⁴⁶ Both Nietzsche and James vindicated the individual response to the leveling of modern national politics; James celebrating the “heroic individual,” Nietzsche the heroic or noble “free spirit.” James, however, was also greatly concerned to guide his fellow Americans through the threats and disease of modernity, and his depiction of heroic individuals indicates a less radical break with both history and society compared to Nietzsche’s heroic “overmen.”

James wanted his contemporary Americans to become exceptional doers in a world of possibilities, and he sought to galvanize zestful fighters against the uncertainties and pains of life. Likewise Nietzsche underscored the overman’s “will to power” as the source of a far more courageous and active, powerful and creative way of living than the lives of his much despised contemporary Germans. However, Nietzsche, unlike James,

⁴⁵ James’ famous letter to Mrs. Henry Whitman, dated June 7, 1899 (qtd. in West 59). George Cotkin further discusses James’ opposition to “bigness” in terms of James’ hostility to “the modern technocratic hope and vision of vast, efficient bureaucracies,” seeing the threat of technology as promising “to chain the individual” (174). “James preferred to base his personal, public, and professional philosophy upon essentially anarchistic grounds,” asserts Cotkin, “for a world of pluralism and possibility, a world of individual moral responsibility under the sign of a personal God” (175).

⁴⁶ Quoted from “We who are homeless” in *The Gay Science* (338-40). In the chapter on “Peoples and Fatherlands” in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche deplores “the morbid estrangement which the lunacy of nationality has produced and continues to produce between the peoples of Europe, thanks likewise to the shortsighted and hasty-handed politicians” (188-89). Nietzsche opposed German pompous politics, as well as European nationalism.

did not want to be a teacher of followers. Whereas James spoke as a public and edifying philosopher, Nietzsche taught as a “disciple” of the Greek God Dionysos, or he spoke as the *Antichrist*, or through the mouth of Zarathustra.⁴⁷ Nietzsche commended himself for having “chosen the word *immoralist* as a symbol and badge of honor for myself” (EH 331). While posing questions with “a hammer,” Nietzsche was less concerned to please his audience and more concerned to have the yet unspoken speak.

Nietzsche, however, does at times depict himself as an “Educator,” though he dismisses followers and wants no “believers.”⁴⁸ “There is nothing in me of a founder of a religion,” asserts Nietzsche; “I *want* no ‘believers’” (EH 326). Yet, Nietzsche wants man to change, and he asserts that “it is part of my nature to be gentle and benevolent toward everybody” (EH 324). Nietzsche’s desire for man to change is, however, demanded as a self-overcoming that must be sought and realized independently. “Follow your own self faithfully,” bids Nietzsche; “take time – and thus you follow me” (GS 43). In fact, he comments that “the last thing *I* should promise would be to ‘improve’ mankind,” on the contrary says Nietzsche; “no new idols are erected by me ... *Overthrowing idols* (my word for ‘ideals’) – that comes closer to being part of my craft” (EH 217). Nietzsche scorns “improvement” as a “joke,” finding that “both the *taming* of the beast man and the *breeding* of a certain species of man has been called ‘improvement’” (TI 55). While calling for the overcoming of the human-all-too-human and a revaluation of all truths and values, Nietzsche does not want to have men adhere to ideals that conform to some sort of “improvement” of the present: “My humanity is a constant self-overcoming,” says Nietzsche (EH 233). Beyond the “old morality” is a “more manifold, more comprehensive life” and “the ‘individual’ stands there, reduced to his own law-giving, to his own arts and stratagems for self-preservation, self-enhancement, self-redemption” (BGE 201). Contrary to James’ attempt to convert his audience to a pragmatic living mobilized by a melioristic religion, Nietzsche underscores the significance of each

⁴⁷ *Ecce Homo* pp. 263, 333.

⁴⁸ On “Nietzsche as Educator” see *Ecce Homo* (281).

individual's struggling overcoming and creating for himself. Hence, Nietzsche does not desire a readership of worshipers, but imagines instead an audience so independent it would appear monstrous: "When I imagine a perfect reader," reflects Nietzsche, "he always turns into a monster of courage and curiosity; moreover, supple, cunning, cautious; a born adventurer and discoverer" (EH 264). Nietzsche's favorite reader would adventurously and independently struggle for his own truths.⁴⁹

A NOBLER KIND OF EDUCATION

Despite his dismissal of the idea of "improvement," Nietzsche describes his favored "*actual philosophers*" as "extraordinary promoters of mankind" while being those who "know a *new* greatness of man" (BGE 142-43). Moreover, both Nietzsche and James uphold the need for a nobler kind of education. According to James, "the best claim we can make for the higher education is ... it should enable us to *know a good man when we see him*."⁵⁰ Hence he argues that "as a class, we college graduates should look to it that *ours* has spreading power" – having as "our motto" "*noblesse oblige*" – and thus assist a realization of a "higher, healthier tune" in society (ibid. 62).⁵¹ Nietzsche similarly

⁴⁹ Daniel W. Conway comments that since Nietzsche hopes to extend his influence into a future beyond modernity, he has to play a "dangerous game" while opposing an "available and willing" readership whose "weakness for discipleship betrays a fatal lack of cunning and guile" (3).

⁵⁰ Quoted from James' lecture "The Social Value of the College-Bred" delivered in 1907 (qtd. in Cotkin 61).

⁵¹ Cornel West discusses James' discussion of "our educated class" as brought up in his talk on "The Social Value of the College-Bred" (1908), arguing that James here "explicitly specifies its [pragmatism's] historical agent – the educated classes – and its ideological aim: to cultivate moral criticism for the preservation of highbrow culture, the election of refined political leaders, and the moderate extension of democracy" (62). West quotes James' praise of the educated classes: "We stand for ideal interests solely, for we have no corporate selfishness and wield no powers of corruption. We ought to have our own class-consciousness. 'Les intellectuels! ... As a class, we college graduates should look to it that *ours* has spreading power. It ought to have the highest spreading power" (qtd. in West 62). West concludes that "this passage is peculiar because we find James elevating elitism, tradition, collective consciousness, and social power – the very notions he deplores elsewhere" (62). According to West, "like Emerson, though unlike Peirce, James endeavors to articulate and elaborate a distinctive American ideology that weaves the themes of individuality, reconciliation, and heroic energies in order to facilitate his exercise of intellectual and moral leadership over a significant element of the middle class, that is, the professional and reformist elements of this class" (62).

criticizes “the entire system of higher education in Germany” with its “learned boors” and grammar schools, arguing that “there is a need for educators *who are themselves educated*; superior, noble spirits” (TI 63).⁵² These educators appear, however, more obscure than James’ fellow “college graduates.” When Nietzsche presents himself as the “Educator,” it is as a philosopher who – “as a terrible explosive, endangering everything” – is “worlds removed” from the concepts of professors and their “academic ‘ruminants’” (EH 281). Nietzsche’s teaching is not easily accessible, nor does it present itself as a practical solution on how to change education. In fact, he asserts that “we ‘free spirits’ are not precisely the most communicative of spirits” (BGE 72). Nietzsche speaks instead of his favored education as a dance: “For *dancing* in any form cannot be divorced from a *noble education*, being able to dance with the feet, with concepts, with words” (TI 66). He leaves it to his readers to figure it out themselves *how* to step in tune with his “dance.”

When Nietzsche speaks of “*actual philosophers*” as “*commanders and law-givers*” (their “‘knowing’ is *creating*, their creating is a law-giving”), his point is not to appeal to such philosophers to indoctrinate their collective society, but rather to underscore the significance of creating for oneself (BGE 142-43). In fact, the “actual philosopher” is doomed to be at odds with society – in “contradiction to his today” – while he philosophizes with a “hammer” to create a “path to his enlargement” (BGE 143). Such concern for one’s own “noble soul” is defined by Nietzsche – “at the risk of annoying innocent ears” – as an “egoism” (BGE 204). Nietzsche elaborates on this “egoism” as a “refinement and self-limitation in traffic” with others, both equals and those below (BGE 204). When Nietzsche speaks of the legislative work of true philosophers his point is once again to underscore how the individual must act and create out of his own will to power for his own enlargement.

⁵² Compare to Nietzsche’s critique of education and culture in *Beyond Good and Evil* in which Nietzsche scorns it as symptomatic of a “plebeian age” whose “essence” is “the art of deceiving” (203-04).

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF IMITATION

James described himself as a “an individualist and an anarchist,”⁵³ but in his ideas about truth, morality, religion, and education he always posits a common denominator with his fellow Americans and their ideas, while reassuring them about the conformity of his ideas with common sense and history. Contrary to this reforming attitude of James, it is Nietzsche – whose hammer’s “hardness” will “flash and cut and cut to pieces” – who appears truly “radical” (TI 112). The differences between James and Nietzsche regarding their attitude to society, common people, and social laws are significant. Nietzsche does not deny the social aspect of man (as we’ve seen Nietzsche is in fact crucially aware of the social – or herd – nature of man), however, he scorns the social laws of “needs” and resents the instinct of imitation in man: “I do not want to have people imitate my example; I wish that everybody would fashion his own example, as *I* do” (GS 216-17).⁵⁴ James, on the other hand, in his *Talks to Teachers*, asserts “the psychology of imitation” as a significant tool for setting an example to one’s students in order to fight the diseased will and the “vicious fashion” of the American “race which admires jerk and snap for their own sakes” (GR 32). While asserting that “we must change ourselves” to become “calm” and have “harmony, dignity, and ease” as our ideals, James therefore concludes that “there is only one way to improve ourselves, and that is by some of us setting an example which the others may pick up and imitate” (GR 32-33). According to James, such “imitation” occurs according to the “laws of social nature,” in which he sees great hope for the future (GR 34). Because, assures James, “if you should individually achieve calmness and harmony in your own person, you may depend upon it that a wave of imitation will spread from you” (GR 33). Finding that “some of us are in more favourable positions than others to set new fashions,” being in fact “more striking personally and

⁵³ William James in a letter to his friend William Dean Howells, dated November 16, 1900 (qtd. in Cotkin 174).

⁵⁴ Nietzsche has an interlocutor “B” assert this statement when questioned by “A:” “What? You want no imitators?” (GS 216). Walter Kaufmann comments in a footnote to the section, that how one should read this statement is “ambiguous,” however, Kaufmann concludes “it still seems probably” that “B speaks Nietzsche’s mind – and A mocks Nietzsche” (217).

imitable, so to speak,” it becomes a vital concern for James to appeal to and engage such “great men” as “examples” for the masses of society (GR 33).

JUSTIFICATION OF HERO-WORSHIP AND SAINTS

In stark contrast to Nietzsche, James even commends the saint for his role throughout history as an “ideal example.” Though James hardly refers to Nietzsche (and there are no references to James in Nietzsche’s works) James’ discussion of “saintliness” in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* is in fact one context in which he does mention the German philosopher, declaring that “the most inimical critic of the saintly impulses whom I know is Nietzsche” (362). “For Nietzsche the saint represents little but sneakingness and slavishness,” asserts James before he quotes a lengthy section from Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*; a section which in fact does not contain a single reference to saints (364). Hence, James’ discussion of Nietzsche is not interesting as a profound or accurate reading of Nietzsche (James admits that he has “abridged” and “transposed” the text a bit), but for James’ emphasis on the significance of saints in terms of their historical role as models. Taking Saint Paul as an example, James concludes that “from the biological point of view Saint Paul was a failure, because he was beheaded. Yet he was magnificently adapted to the larger environment of history; and so far as any saint’s example is a leaven of righteousness in the world, and draws it in the direction of more prevalent habits of saintliness, he is a success, no matter what his immediate bad fortune may be” (367). Hence, saints possess a “towering place in history,” and even “economically, the saintly group of qualities is indispensable to the world’s welfare,” concludes James (368).

Vindicating the impact of imitating great men and “the lasting justification of hero-worship,” James also underscores the positive progression of history.⁵⁵ While discussing in his lecture on “Great Men and their Environment” what causes “make communities change from generation to generation,” James contends that they are “due to

⁵⁵ On the justification of hero-worship, see “The Importance of Individuals” in *Will to Believe* (261).

the accumulated influences of individuals, of their examples, their initiatives, and their decisions” (166). However, the “power of individual initiative” is only realized by the “example of individuals whose genius was so adapted to the receptivities of the moment, or whose accidental position of authority was so critical that they became ferments, initiators of movement, setters of precedent or fashion,” explains James (174). Hence, he underscores that “social evolution is a resultant of the interaction of two wholly distinct factors – the individual ... and, second, the social environment, with its power of adopting or rejecting both him and his gifts” (178). James thus concludes that “not every ‘man’ fits every ‘hour,’” because geniuses may be incompatible with their times (176).

The incompatibility between great men and their times is also addressed by Nietzsche who describes himself as “an untimely man,” only to be “born posthumously,” finding that his contemporary readers lack an “ear” for his teaching.⁵⁶ When James, however, talks about the “incompatibilities” between “great men” and “their environments” he argues that it “is usually the fact that some previous genius of a different strain has warped the community away from the sphere of his possible effectiveness,” hence “after Voltaire, no Peter the Hermit” (ibid. 176-77). Thus James’ point is that “untimeliness” exists only in so far as it contradicts the natural progression of history, because “a living being must always contain within itself the history, not merely of its own existence, but of all its ancestors” (177). Contrary to Nietzsche’s contention that it is his contemporary Germans who are not ready for him, James posits the positive interaction between geniuses and common men as a progressive historical interaction.

⁵⁶ See for instance the preface to *The Antichrist* in which Nietzsche asserts that “some are born posthumously” (568). Further in *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche writes his “Expeditions of an Untimely Man” (67+), and he asserts that “Posthumous men – like me, for instance – are not so well understood as timely men, but they are *listened to* better. More precisely: we are never understood – and *hence* our authority...” (24). In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche includes himself amongst “we posthumous people” asserting that “it is only after death that we shall enter *our* life and become alive, oh, very much alive” (321).

GENUINE PHILOSOPHERS AS GREAT MEN OF TOMORROW

In contrast to James' emphasis on the historical development of great men and the practical significance of teachers, Nietzsche appears quite obscure in his talk of genuine philosophers. In fact, according to Nietzsche, "what a philosopher is, is hard to learn, because it cannot be taught: one has to 'know' it from experience" (BGE 144). Though he asserts that the genuine philosopher would live while continuously striving "to know better," he by no means presents a manual on how to live in such a way (HAHA 42). Moreover, whereas he underscores the significance of hermeneutics and "the art of reading well," he also indicates the requirement of a non-cognitive reading, stating that "as regards my *Zarathustra*, I think no one should claim to know it who has not been, by turns, deeply wounded and deeply delighted by what it says" (GM 157). According to Nietzsche, to understand *Zarathustra* means to "participate" in "all its sunniness, sweep, and assurance" (GM 157). Sarah Kofman comments that Nietzsche's writing imply that its "reading transforms the reader" (116). We can, however, "discover in a text only what we ourselves are but were unaware of," explains Kofman (116). Hence, Nietzsche's "aphorism becomes a precaution against feeble minds, against the *profanum vulgus*; it allows one to express revolutionary ideas in the knowledge that one will be understood only by those who possess the third ear" (116). Nietzsche wanted, as noted above, to be heard by his "friends" and he did not dismiss "companions" or fellow "free spirits." It is the "blind herd" of followers that Nietzsche scorns, while he upholds the struggling quest for knowledge as a challenge for the individual. Only he who has an "ear" for his teaching has the courage to accept this challenge.

Nietzsche indicates that rightful readers of his texts will only be born after his death. He wonders, moreover, if perhaps the genuine philosopher must "*necessarily* [be] a man of tomorrow" (BGE 143). The genuine philosopher is a man of "greatness," but, asks Nietzsche, "is greatness – *possible* today?" (BGE 144). Nietzsche laments that in modern Europe the "herd animal alone obtains and bestows honours," hence the "rare" and the "higher man" is suppressed by the common (BGE 144). Nietzsche concludes that

“tremendous counter-forces have to be called upon to cross this ... continuing development of mankind into the similar, ordinary, average, herdlike – the common” in order to realize “the more select” (BGE 206). However, whereas James proceeds to mobilize his fellow college graduates to set examples for men to realize a “higher ethical life,” Nietzsche is still looking for noble educators and genuine philosophers.

JAMES’ PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

James’ educational program is rich in practical guidance and offers lists of tools available to men so that they may become his favored “doers.” For instance, to attain the right emotion; i.e. “to feel brave,” “cheerful,” and “healthy,” it is James’ point that one merely needs to *act* accordingly. In his essay on “The Gospel of Relaxation,” printed in *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: and to Students on some of Life’s Ideals*, James declares that he wishes to show the “practical applications to mental hygiene” of certain “psychological doctrines” (22). To feel and become as James desires – “brave,” “cheerful,” and “healthy” – one merely has to *act* in such away, assures James. For instance, “to sit up cheerfully, to look round cheerfully, and to act and speak as if cheerfulness were already there” will make you feel cheerful (23). In fact, “if such conduct does not make you soon feel cheerful, nothing else on that occasion can” (23). Hence, “to feel brave,” we should “act as if we *were* brave” (23). It is James’ point that “from our acts and from our attitudes ceaseless inpouring currents of sensation come, which help to determine from moment to moment what our inner states shall be” (24). James asserts this as a “fundamental law of psychology,” and it is from this concluded connection between our acts and emotions that he vindicates a certain kind of behavior as a cure to the tedium of his contemporary Americans.

“It is no small thing to inoculate seventy millions of people with new standards,” admits James, “yet, if there is to be any relief, that will have to be done” (GR 32). Lamenting the American disease of “breathlessness and tension ... that lack of inner harmony and ease,” James underscores the significance not only of a more cheerful and

brave conduct, but of physical exercises (GR 31). Taking the Norwegian women of his time and their “use of *ski*” as an example, James underscores the value of “the well-trained and vigorous body” in order to support a “well-trained mind” (GR 25). “In Norway the life of the woman has lately been entirely revolutionized by the new order of muscular feelings,” commends James; not only are they “saying good-bye to the traditional feminine pallor and delicacy of constitution, but actually taking the lead in every educational and social reform” (GR 25). Hence, concludes James, “I cannot but think that the tennis and tramping and skating habits and the bicycle craze which are so rapidly extending among our dear sisters and daughters in this country are going also to lead to a sounder and heartier moral tone, which will send its tonic breath through all our American life” (GR 25). To exercise one’s “muscular vigor” is thus of the utmost importance in James’ estimation, as it may significantly change one’s moral attitude to life.

THE WILL VERSUS SKEPTICISM

According to James, we should dismiss “worry” and “anxiety” about the outcome of our acts and “*unclamp*” our “intellectual and practical machinery” (GR 35). James bids both his fellow teachers, when they enter their classrooms, and his students, when they are about to have an examination, to “fling away all further care;” “trust your spontaneity ... we are only too careful as it is” (GR 36). While demanding a higher “attention to what we do and express, and not to care too much for what we feel,” James asserts that we may get rid of “*bad habits*” through “the habit of freeing” ourselves from a reflection that inhibits our action (GR 23, 30, 35). Moreover, he upholds the “*will* not to be a sceptic,” finding that “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” (MM 184). For James, what matters is that we do not “give up,” but rather “*unclamp*” our energies and act.

Like James, Nietzsche is also critical of the hampering constraints of skepticism. As discussed above, he deplores the philosophic nihilism of “the arrogant disdain for philosophy” and the growing “fear” against “the frontiers of knowledge” (BGE 130). While scorning the “sedative and soporific ... gentle, gracious, lulling poppy scepticism” – harrying a “nihiline” and diseased Europe suffering from “sickness of will” – he thus underscores that his favored philosopher is “not a sceptic” (BGE 136). It is Nietzsche’s point that beyond such sick skepticism and nihilism is the powerful will which sets its own “objectives.” Hence, he “welcome[s] an *objective* spirit,” for he feels “sick to death of everything subjective and its accursed ipsissimosity” (BGE 133). Nietzsche upholds “the objective man” as “the man who no longer scolds or curses as the pessimist does,” while he deplores “the exaggerated way in which the depersonalization of the spirit is today celebrated,” especially “within the pessimist school” (BGE 134). “The objective man,” explains Nietzsche, is a “measuring instrument,” not “an end” in himself, who goes “out to welcome everything and every experience” (BGE 135). “The objective man” – whose “thoughts are roaming” – sustains the quest for “knowledge” (BGE 134).

On the other hand, as we’ve seen above, Nietzsche also favors skepticism as a “freedom” against “convictions,” and he favors “any *skepsis*” to which he can reply: “Let us try it!”⁵⁷ Nietzsche explains that “the sceptic” he objects to is “that delicate creature” who “is schooled to wince at every No, indeed at a hard decisive Yes” (BGE 136). Opposed to the sick “fascinations of scepticism” within “Western Culture” (and according to Nietzsche “the will is sickest” in France for there “culture has been longest”), he upholds the “Russian nihiline” as “a pessimism *bonae voluntatis* which does not merely say No, will No, but – dreadful thought! *does* No” (BGE 136-37). Being, as we’ve seen, both a “Yes-sayer” and an “annihilator” of values, Nietzsche prefers the Russian nihilism which, beyond the “nervous debility and sickliness” of European “paralysis of will,” dares to act on its “No.”

⁵⁷ *The Antichrist* (638) and *The Gay Science* (115).

Moreover, Nietzsche favors a “spirituality” which “will allow the strange, the *novel* of every kind to approach one first” before one reacts (TI 65). While deploring the diseased “sceptic” of modern times, he also scorns the “vulgarity” of he who – “due to the incapacity to resist a stimulus” – “*has* to react.” What Nietzsche upholds as “a practical application of having learned to see,” is that “one will have become slow, mistrustful, resistant as a *learner* in general.” In contrast to James, Nietzsche deplores those who “stand with all doors open” while “ever itching to mingle with, *plunge into* other people and other things” (TI 65). Whereas James vindicates an attitude of “spontaneity” and to “fling care away,” Nietzsche bids us “*not* to react immediately to a stimulus, but to have the restraining, stock-taking instincts in one’s control ... in an attitude of hostile calm” (TI 65). “Learning to *see*, as I understand it,” explains Nietzsche,” “is precisely *not* to ‘will,’ the *ability* to defer decision ... habituating the eye to repose, to patience, to letting things come to it; learning to defer judgment, to investigate and comprehend the individual case in all its aspects” (TI 65). James and Nietzsche both lament the moral tensions and the lack of a powerful will which they see as inherent in the disease ravaging modern men. But whereas James encourages us to plunge ahead with his practical cures, Nietzsche cautions against haste and underscores the individual’s meticulous efforts to overcome this sickness.

A peculiar example of this different emphasis in James and Nietzsche’s teachings, is James’ pragmatic appropriation of Nietzsche’s central “formula” “*amor fati*.” In his essay on “A Pluralistic Mystic” James commends the writings of the “pluralistic mystic” (in James’ estimation) Benjamin Paul Blood who declared: “Simply, *we do not know*. But when we say we do not know, we are not to say it weakly, and meekly, but with confidence and content” (1312). Sympathetic to Blood’s embrace of mysticism and his relegating of reason and knowledge to the “secondary,” James acclaims Blood’s declaration, for it “seems to resemble that of Nietzsche’s *amor fati*” (1312). James praises Blood’s “mysticism” for courageously affirming the limits of conceptual knowledge and logic while upholding the “integrally new” which “life” gives. James, however, continues his commentary on Blood to assert that what “remains” as the “inexplicable” must

therefore “be met and dealt with by faculties more akin to our activities and heroisms and willingnesses, than to our logical powers” (1313). Hence, despite his acclaim for mysticism’s assertion of the “inexplicable,” James assures his readers that answers will be reached in the future, and though there is “no advice to be given,” it is James’ conclusion that our “activities” will practically solve the “inexplicable.”

THE CURATIVE POWERS OF FORGETTING

James and Nietzsche’s assertion of the health of forgetting follows their critique of skepticism and pessimism, while it gives another interesting example of how they in the end appear to hold different positions on a matter they at first seem to agree. “If we could only *forget* our scruples, our doubts, our fears, what exultant energy we should for a while display!” contends James in his essay on “The Will” (68). It requires, continues James, the “*achievement of the will ... to ATTEND to a difficult object and hold it fast before the mind*” (69). Likewise Nietzsche asserts the healthy strength of forgetting and upholds “the power of oblivion” as a “plastic curative power” – “an active screening device” – which may “introduce a little quiet into our consciousness so as to make room for the nobler functions and functionaries of our organism which do the governing and planning” (GM 173, 189). Hence they both uphold the active power of forgetting, governed by the will.

However, Nietzsche also contends that it is only through “forgetfulness” that man has become a slave to “truth” and “language,” oblivious to their historical contingencies as man’s own creations.⁵⁸ Further, he contends that he who has the powerful “faculty of oblivion” also creates for himself “an opposite power, that of remembering, by whose aid, in certain cases, oblivion may be suspended” (GM 189-90). It means “a continuing to will what has once been willed, a veritable ‘memory of the will,’” explains Nietzsche (GM 190). Though it would be imprudent to accuse James – a highly learned man of letters – of ignoring the significance of memory, James’ central concern, as regarding the

⁵⁸ See chapters 3 and 5 above. Ref. *Human, All Too Human* (21) and *On Truth and Lie* (45).

question of “skepticism,” is to uphold the *act* against any deferment of either skepticism or reflection. Nietzsche, on the other hand, who is also concerned to caution *against* rash actions, ends on a more ambivalent note than James in questions where he sets it as his vital goal to encourage people – immobilized by doubt – to act.

James’ practical concerns for his students and fellow Americans have barely, if any resonance, in Nietzsche’s teaching who tends to appear more esoteric and ambiguous. Though he – like James – deplores the “nostalgic fatigue” of his time and scorns the “unwholesome” way of life which is “turned away from actions and swing between brooding and emotional explosions,” his posited ways of overcoming such unwholesomeness are different from James’ despite their similar first impression (GM 151, 165). Confronting modernity’s “nostalgic fatigue,” Nietzsche vindicates “power, fullness of being, energy, courage in the face of life, and confidence in the future” (GM 151). Moreover, he upholds “brief habits” as significant for such powerful living. “I love brief habits and consider them an inestimable means for getting to know *many* things and states, down to the bottom of their sweetness and bitterness” says Nietzsche (GS 236). But “*enduring* habits I hate. I feel as if a tyrant had come near me” (GS 237). Nietzsche, as we’ve seen, vindicates creative perspectives, multiple “eyes,” and now style: “*One thing is needful*. – To ‘give style’ to one’s character – a great and rare art!” exclaims Nietzsche (GS 232). However, despite his vindication of such creative responses – similar in appearance to the new habits of spontaneity, courage, and cheerfulness upheld by James – they are – contrary to James’ alternatives – not easily achieved. “Lightheartedness” or “gay science” is in fact “the reward of long, courageous, painstaking, inwards seriousness,” asserts Nietzsche, “which to be sure is not within every man’s compass” (GM 156). When Nietzsche upholds “brief habits” and the “cheerful lightness” of “style,” he is also concerned to underscore that they go together with the “painstaking” wrestling of serious and severe efforts, struggling “to know *many* things and states.”

The crucial difference between James and Nietzsche thus appears in how they posit the realization of change. Whereas Nietzsche underscores the hard task of the

individual's self-overcoming, James upholds practical tools, good teachers, noble examples, and the power of religious belief. As Cotkin points out, "at the time that Nietzsche, in his ploy to energize the individual, proclaimed God's demise, James posited God's presence for the same ends," arguing that "in a Godless universe, 'the appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulating power'" (103). Both James and Nietzsche contend their unique reevaluation of truth and morality as vital for the individual and to overcome the cultural disease of their times. However, their prospects for modern man's ability to actualize their teachings are significantly different.

CHAPTER 8: UPHOLDERS OF PROFOUNDER INSIGHTS

In their call for a new culture in which men create a “higher” living for themselves, both James and Nietzsche underscore the significance of a healthier and stronger will. In this assertion inheres their common task, but also their different appeal. Whereas Nietzsche emphasizes the tremendous strength it demands from the individual to overcome himself and his diseased society, James posits not only easier and more practical ways to come about it, but also the value of a “vision of relief” as energizing the will. Hence, we can see James and Nietzsche’s different views towards the future in terms of what “insights” they posit as essential for man in order to realize a stronger will.

James’ “insight” is his “vision of relief;” the belief in God and salvation. According to James, “where God is, tragedy is only provisional and partial, and shipwreck and dissolution are not the absolutely final things” (VRE 507).⁵⁹ At some moments James posits a “tramp and vagrant world, adrift in space ... a set of stars hurled into heaven without even a centre of gravity to pull against” (P 125). However, he also contends that “the universe, unfinished, [is] growing in all sorts of places, especially in the places where thinking beings are at work” (P 124). His central contention is that “the universe, at those parts of it which our personal being constitutes, takes a turn genuinely for the worse or for the better in proportion as each one of us fulfills or evades God’s demands” (VRE 507). Maintaining that belief in God assures a movement toward “unity” and “salvation,” he concludes that “God’s existence is the guarantee of an ideal order that

⁵⁹ According to Cotkin, “in his depressive years, during which James lacked the confidence to face the phenomenal world with its vagaries of the moment, the thought of a world indeterminate and open, quite as much as the vision of a world determinate and closed to free will, inspired fear and trembling” (56). Referring to James’ comments on the “abyss of horrors,” “panic fears,” and “melancholy,” Cotkin contends that it was the “certainty” of the abyss which led James to call out for God for “solace and assurance” (104). It was the God James turned to after his encounter with the “abyss of terrors” that he would later recommend “to those without belief, to those intellectuals caught up in a Hamletian pose,” concludes Cotkin, finding that “the individual who did not believe in a God who supported energetic striving for ideal ends would continue ‘lumbering’” (103-04).

shall be permanently preserved” (VRE 507). Beyond the contingencies of human life, James upholds the “relief” of a permanent ideal.

We’ve seen that Cotkin sees James’ choice of “doing,” opposed to “doubting,” as his response to the “abyss” which drove Hamlet mad. The case of Hamlet is an interesting point of comparison between James and Nietzsche, for the latter refers to him at several points. In *Ecce Homo*, for instance, Nietzsche asks “is Hamlet *understood*?” and continues: “Not doubt, *certainty* is what drives one insane” (EH 246). Nietzsche acknowledges Hamlet’s insight into the abyss, but deplors that it made him “insane.” Nietzsche vindicates a Dionysian affirmation of the abyss, but, he warns; “one must be profound, an abyss, a philosopher to feel that way. – We are all *afraid* of truth” (EH 246). Opposed to the common fear of truth and Hamlet’s insanity, Nietzsche upholds the Dionysian encounter with the tragic abyss as strong enough not only to endure it, but affirm it. The Dionysian intoxication implies a cheerful and creative Yes to life that transcends the madness and cynicism of Hamlet.⁶⁰

Nietzsche dismisses religious beliefs, yet he vindicates a certain “insight” in his ideas about Dionysian intoxication and affirmation of life, albeit different from James’ recommended “vision.” Nietzsche upholds a tragic “insight” into the abyss of existence. “I am a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus,” says Nietzsche; “I should prefer to be even a satyr to being a saint” (EH 217). Nietzsche has been called a “poetic mystic” and an “esoteric” thinker, commentaries worthy of our consideration if we attempt to understand Nietzsche’s distinct attitude to life.⁶¹ Nietzsche praises “the Dionysian mysteries” as

⁶⁰ In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche refers to Hamlet as representing a “cynicism” characteristic of those “who would like to conceal and deny that they are broken, proud, incurable hearts” (209).

⁶¹ Joan Stambaugh alludes to Nietzsche as a “poetic mystic” while referring, for instance, to his ideas about the encounter with “the abyss of light” as leading to a response of “utter stillness” (*The Other Nietzsche* 135-51). Laurence Lampert also notes the esoteric characteristics of Nietzsche’s teaching (*Nietzsche’s Teaching* 246-67). Daniel Conway argues that “the esoteric wisdom hidden behind Nietzsche’s crumbling masks is expressed in the gnomic teachings of eternal recurrence, *amor fati*, and the innocence of Becoming” (157-58). John Wilcox discusses Nietzsche’s “esoterism” in terms of Nietzsche as a “noncognitivist” (36-43). Ted Sadler, further, discusses Nietzsche’s “Dionysian truth” as “the positivity of mystery.” In *Truth and Redemption* (1995) Sadler finds that “the Dionysian aspect of the eternal return, the fulfilling ‘moment’ (Augenblick) of affirmation, has all the characteristics of a mystical experience” (150). According to Sadler, “Dionysian truth” implies a redemptive experience of eternity.

expressing the will to the eternal recurrence of life (TI 109). According to Nietzsche, it is “in the Dionysian mysteries, in the psychology of the Dionysian condition, that the *fundamental fact* of the Hellenic instinct expresses itself – its ‘will to life’” (TI 109). What is affirmed, explains Nietzsche further, is “*eternal* life, the eternal recurrence of life; the future promised and consecrated in the past; the triumphant Yes to life beyond death and change; *true* life as collective continuation of life through procreation, through the mysteries of sexuality” (TI 109). In Nietzsche’s estimation there is “no more exalted symbolism than this *Greek* symbolism” which he sees as “the profoundest instinct of life, the instinct for the future of life, for the eternity of life” (TI 110).⁶²

“Dionysian redemption involves a return to the ‘centre’ of life,” concludes Sadler, which “is achieved through the affirmation of life” (136-37).

⁶² It is in *The Gay Science* that Nietzsche for the first time posits the question of eternal recurrence. What if, asks Nietzsche, “some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you wish it, speck of dust!’” (273). “How well disposed would you have to become to yourself,” reflects Nietzsche further, “and to live *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?” (274). Nietzsche thus posits the tremendous strength of the Yes-sayer faced with an existence of eternal recurrence. Nietzsche discusses the idea of “eternal recurrence” further in *Zarathustra*, and he indicates in *Ecce Homo* that the idea was already present in his first work *The Birth of Tragedy* as spoken through the words of Heraclitus (274). In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche explains that “the idea of the eternal recurrence, this highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable, belongs in August 1881... that day I was walking through the woods along the lake of Silvaplana ... it was then that this idea came to me” (295). Nietzsche’s ideas about the eternal recurrence have been hotly debated by his commentators. Martin Heidegger’s metaphysical interpretation of the eternal recurrence is rejected today by for instance Jacques Derrida, Joan Stambaugh, Laurence Lampert, and Bernd Magnus, the latter reading the idea of the eternal recurrence as an “existential imperative,” arguing that “if eternal recurrence expresses a ‘natural’ law, how can it become an object of choice?” (112). Conway explains the different takes on Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence – and its “distortions” – by for instance Simmel, Bäumler, Löwith, Vaihinger, Heidegger, Jaspers, Arendt, E. Heller, Deleuze, Danto, Klossowoski, Kaufmann, Bataille, Nehamas, Strong, Stambaugh, Lingis, Kundera, Vattimo, Warren, Magnus, Irigary, Clark, Shapiro, and Lampert, as an aspect of Nietzsche’s “Dangerous Game.” While wanting to be “born posthumously,” Nietzsche did not communicate on a common level, nor did he explicate “the eternal recurrence.” This is, however, also “the enduring attraction” of this idea, contends Conway, because “Nietzsche whets his readers’ appetite for a redemptive teaching, hinting salaciously at the epiphanies that await his rightful audience” (160). Though “the ensuing distortions of the eternal recurrence may eventually disfigure Nietzsche’s teaching beyond recognition, but this is the risk he must accept in order to project his influence into the next millennium,” concludes Conway (164). Rather than to assert a (distorting) position in the debate on the “eternal recurrence” which Conway so perceptively summarizes, I am

Contrary to James' vision of a progressive history that concludes in salvation, the Dionysian insight affirms the "eternal recurrence" of life and its profoundest pains. "In the teachings of the mysteries, *pain* is sanctified," says Nietzsche (TI 110). Its "overflowing feeling of life and energy within which even pain acts as a stimulus provided me," continues Nietzsche, "with the key to the concept of the *tragic* feeling" (TI 110). Such tragedy is far from "pessimism," explains Nietzsche further, and is actually the "decisive repudiation" of it and its "*counter-verdict*." It is "affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility ... *not* so as to get rid of pity and terror," but "beyond pity and terror, *to realize in oneself* the eternal joy of becoming – that joy which also encompasses *joy in destruction*" (TI 110). It is following this affirmation of life's "inexhaustibility" that he objects to Christianity which – "with *ressentiment against* life" and its denial of sexuality – "threw *filth* on the beginning, on the prerequisite of our life" (TI 110). Nietzsche rejects Christianity because it excludes the eternal recurrence of life and "the innocence of becoming," while making the beginning – and thus every new "Yes" – "impure."

According to Nietzsche, "the highest state a philosopher can attain" is "to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence – my formula for this is *amor fati*" (WP 536).⁶³ Sixteen years after he wrote *The Birth of Tragedy* in which he first describes the "Dionysian," he explains it as follows:

discussing Nietzsche's hypothesis of the "eternal recurrence" as his "insight" opposed to James' "vision." The "insight" of the eternal recurrence underscores Nietzsche's emphasis on profound pain as continuously returning, contrary to James' supposition of a history that progresses in a linear manner towards salvation. The "eternal recurrence" thus highlights Nietzsche's demands on the individual as opposed to James' "hope" for collective salvation.

⁶³ Ted Sadler explains Nietzsche's postulate of the "highest state which a philosopher can attain" in terms of "redemption;" "a state of intoxication, rapture, forgetfulness of self, ecstasy, enchantment and cheerfulness, of surging power and strength which transports man out of himself," while "at the same time it is a state of great seriousness, reverence and gratitude" (137).

The word ‘Dionysian’ means: an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the everyday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness: a passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states; an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life as that which remains the same, just as powerful, just as blissful, through all change; the great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow that sanctifies and calls good even the most terrible and questionable qualities of life; the eternal will to procreation, to fruitfulness, to recurrence; the feeling of the necessary unity of creation and destruction. (WP 539)

Though the “Dionysian” thus implies an “urge to unity,” “bliss” and “joy,” it also affirms eternal “sorrow,” pain and “destruction.”

Nietzsche posits the idea of the eternal recurrence as the “highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable,” hence he connects it to his formula of “amor fati” (EH 295).⁶⁴ It is, continues Nietzsche, “the decisive feature of a Dionysian philosophy” to say “Yes to opposition and war; *becoming*” (EH 273). Nietzsche upholds his “Yes” to such a life as “the first *tragic philosopher*” (EH 273). It implies above all the strength to continuously affirm the pains of existence that inhere in the splendor of becoming.

The strong “will to power” which Nietzsche vindicates, requires a tragic insight into the abyss of existence quite different from James’ “vision of relief.” Hence, James and Nietzsche posit different demands to the individual in terms of his or her existential reorientation. Joan Stambaugh discusses in her book on *The Other Nietzsche* (1994) what role Dionysian insight plays for Nietzsche regarding man’s life. “Nietzsche rejects transcendence in its traditional sense as being a powerless wishing for the Other in every form,” asserts Stambaugh, “whether for a God ... or for a being otherwise of life itself”

⁶⁴ In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche asserts that : “My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it – all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary – but *love* it” (258). Nietzsche introduced this concept for the first time in *The Gay Science* (first ed. 1882), exclaiming “*Amor Fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse ... some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer” (GS 223).

(8). Instead, continues Stambaugh, “Nietzsche thinks the possibility of transcendence as man’s activity of self-overcoming” (8). It is thus through tragic affirmation of life that man may become “truly human,” concludes Stambaugh (9). According to Stambaugh, what Nietzsche is pointing to is “a type of human being who *experiences* differently from most of us. The artist is the man *able* to experience and shape a higher dimension of reality” (10). It is Stambaugh’s point that in his creative response to the abyss of existence, man as an artist of himself – as the “overman” – may transform his life into a “higher dimension” and thus overcome himself and his terror. Hence, the overcoming of the disease of decadent modernity requires that the individual creates his own “immanent transcendence” through creative self-overcoming that affirms the Dionysian abyss.

Though James too bids man to overcome his diseased will, he does it while positing a higher God who – with his “infinite demands” – pulls forth the energies of man who will thus act towards a better future according to a “higher” ethics. Whereas in Nietzsche’s discussion the will to power inheres in man prior to the insight into the abyss of existence as required to endure it and affirm it, James posits the vision of God as the impetus for man’s will, hence the vision affords the will. Moreover, the Dionysian insight serves as a “stimulus” to create and to “realize” the joy of becoming in oneself, hence it perpetuates the “will to power” in the eternal becoming of life, whereas James’ “will” strives towards the “ideal” of “salvation.”

James, finally, does not assert the fundamental “depth” of the individual experience of the abyss as Nietzsche does. Though he requires the individual to perform an existential change, he discusses this as possible at different – and practical – levels. Religious belief may be desired by some, but not by all. Some may need it, some may not. Some may face the abyss of existence, but not all have the strength to do so. James emphasizes the impact of “great men” to change societies. They change as “examples” and “ideals,” whose actions the masses will follow. For James, an existential reorientation can thus come about in a more external and practical manner than what Nietzsche requires. However, James ends his essay on “The Moral Philosopher and Moral Life” with what he states as his “final conclusion, - that the stable and systematic

moral universe for which the ethical philosopher asks is fully possible only in a world where there is a divine thinker with all-enveloping demands” (MM 213-14). Hence, “we “must postulate a divine thinker, and pray for the victory of the religious cause,” asserts James, for he finds religious belief indispensable “to let loose in us the strenuous mood” (MM 214). Despite his all-inclusiveness and practical alternatives for men’s lives, James does not fall short from vindicating his preferred alternative. He concludes his discussion on the moral life with an appeal which accentuates his insight and “vision” of God as vital for the realization of a healthier and higher kind of living.

CHAPTER 9: SOMETHING FOR THE FUTURE

The purpose of my discussion of Nietzsche and James' "insights" has been to show how they – beyond their vindication of the "will" to create healthier and better truths and lives – underscore that the "will" is significantly energized by either the "will to power," the "eternal return," and the "abyss" of existence, or the "vision" of a universe of pains and evils striving towards "unity" and "salvation;" what I have defined as their unique "insights." Though we may choose to disapprove of both these "insights," and dismiss James as too optimistic in his ploy to guide his audience towards the future, or Nietzsche as too enmeshed in the disease of decadent Europe to see the potentialities of common man, I contend that it is crucial to see how they posit their insights for truth and life. James and Nietzsche are not merely desiring a creative multiplication of perspectives and styles, but assert an impetus – a power – behind what they uphold as higher creations of both truth and morality.

I argued in the introduction against the postmodern and deconstructionist readings of James and Nietzsche as a "leveling" of their insights, manifested in an enthusiasm for contingency and style. Such readings fails to consider James and Nietzsche's attention to that which is beyond the surface of pluralism and contingencies. I brought up Richard Rorty's discussion of James' ideas about truth, hence I shall return to him now to conclude the circle. In his article on James' religious belief, "Faith, responsibility, and romance," Rorty – in his typical neo-pragmatic fashion – first underscores the difference between on the one hand the "responsibility to ourselves to make our beliefs cohere with one another, and to our fellow humans to make them cohere with theirs," and on the other hand the "private" realm in which we can do as we like as long as it does not interfere with what is "good for another person or group" (85). Rorty commends James' writings on religious belief for containing religion to the private sphere: "James's utilitarian/pragmatist philosophy of religion is to *privatize* religion" (85). According to

Rorty, “insofar as such states as hope, love, and faith promote only such private projects, you need not worry about whether you have a right to have them” (91). Hence, “a suitably privatized form of religious belief might dictate neither one’s scientific beliefs nor anybody’s moral choices save one’s own. That form of belief would be able to gratify a need without threatening to thwart any needs of any others and would thus meet the utilitarian test” (86). Rorty compliments James’ religious belief for allowing man to make decisions for his private life as he needs it, though not interfering with his concerns for other people’s well-being.

Though James allows for different kinds of religion as men would need it, admitting that some may not need it at all, he nonetheless vindicates *his* preference and belief in God, and not only because of his need to it, or its promise of salvation, but because of the possibilities it opens up for mankind and their *will to act* towards a better world while faced with the pains and evils of existence. Hence when Rorty (who confesses that he was “raised atheist” and finds it “merely confusing to talk about God”) describes James’ religious belief as a private “fuzzy overlap of faith, hope, and love ‘romance;’” he ignores how James underscores the tremendous significance of religious belief for a scheme of social cooperation (96).⁶⁵

David Owen takes issue with Rorty’s distinction between the public and the private spheres as a distinction that serves to “privatise (or depoliticise) the pursuit of conceptions of the good and refuse to intervene in such non-political issues” (168). Owen criticizes Rorty’s “political liberalism,” arguing that it “renders all other virtues non-political” than those “of cultivating tolerance and fair-mindedness” (169). Nietzsche’s “agonistic politics,” on the other hand, is “more conducive to human flourishing,” argues Owen, because it “can facilitate the cultivation of a wide range of human powers” rendered “non-political” by Rorty’s “liberalism” (169). Opposed to Rorty’s liberalism “conceptualised in terms of the *opportunity* (i.e., absence of external constraints),” Owen underscores the “stress on freedom as self-overcoming and on the importance of struggle

in Nietzsche's thinking in which the relationship between freedom and agonism marks the site" (165). Whereas Nietzsche upholds "freedom" as "self-overcoming" and "will to self-responsibility," Rorty's "liberalism" ignores the significance of overcoming oneself (165).⁶⁶

Opposed to Rorty, Owen underscores "the relation between our perspectives and our affective constitution," arguing that "the account which Nietzsche offers is the thesis of *will to power* in which the affective interest in experiencing ourselves as autonomous agents is presented as the architectonic interest of our affective constitution" (147). Hence, when Rorty ejects Nietzsche's "will to power" and replaces it with "an alternative social constructionist account of the self," he dismisses that in which Nietzsche's perspectives are "rooted," i.e. "the extra-linguistic affective economies of embodied individuals" (147-48). Rorty thus ignores that which is the impetus for our self-overcoming and the "order of rank" for our freedom. In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* Rorty argues that "in a Nietzschean view ... to change how we talk is to change what, for our own purposes, we are" (20). Rorty's appropriation of Nietzsche thus discards that which Nietzsche posits as energizing and directing of our perspectives and "how we talk," namely the will to power and the continuous need to overcome ourselves in a world of eternal becoming. In the "liberal community" of "ironic liberals" which Rorty defends, there is no power left to galvanize our will or to choose between our different acts, nor are there any criteria for our own estimation of ourselves as "free" individuals.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Rorty places himself amongst "those who, like me, were raised atheist and now find it merely confusing to talk about God" (98).

⁶⁶ According to Owen, "liberal politics (as expressed in its institutions) undermines either the possibility of self-overcoming by leaving it without direction or the significance of self-overcoming by depoliticising it" (168).

⁶⁷ The "contingent shallowness" which I would object to in Rorty's discussion is similarly addressed by Ted Sadler who takes issue with the postmodern readings of Nietzsche. According to Sadler, we may let those who see Nietzsche's Dionysian truth as "impractical" to their own perspectives; "let them call for renewed efforts in the creation of perspectives" (207). However, continues Sadler, Nietzsche does "not consider that any more perspectives are necessary" (207). Rather, "what is needed is simplicity: no easy nostalgia, no innocent return to the past, but the difficult and rigorous simplicity which lets go of so

It appears to me that what James and Nietzsche can teach us today, is that beyond the stalemate of irony there might be a time in which we dare to take the risk of positing our own “insight” for our lives. Cornel West describes the appeal of pragmatism in “our postmodern moment” in terms of its “unashamedly moral emphasis and its unequivocally ameliorative impulse” (4). “In this world-weary period of pervasive cynicisms, nihilisms, terrorisms, and possible extermination, there is,” continues West, “a longing for norms and values that can make a difference, a yearning for principled resistance and struggle that can change our desperate plight” (4). We can see the neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty – in his desire for a liberal community of solidarity – as symptomatic of West’s cultural diagnosis. What is missing, however, is a more powerful incentive for our efforts to change who we are so that we may live and create more profoundly.

much which has filled up and puffed up human beings for many centuries” (207). Against the postmodern celebration of Nietzsche’s “styles” and “perspectives,” Sadler contends that what Nietzsche wants us “to realize is that, before speaking of the ‘way forward,’ we must stop dead and abide for a very long while in the problems of who and what we are, on what it means for human beings ‘to be’” (207-08).

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