Chapter (XIII)

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ABSTRACT:

Pragmatism is often thought to be incompatible with realism, the view that there are knowable mind-independent facts, objects, or properties. In this article, I show that there are, in fact, realist versions of pragmatism and argue that a realist pragmatism of the right sort can make important contributions to such fields as religious ethics and philosophy of religion. Using William James's pragmatism as my primary example, I show (1) that James defended realist and pluralist views in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and philosophy of religion, and (2) that these views not only cohere with his pragmatism but indeed are basic to it. After arguing that James's pragmatism provides a credible and useful approach to a number of basic philosophical and religious issues, I conclude by reflecting on some ways in which we can apply and potentially improve James's views in the study of religion.

1. Introduction

If there is a prevailing view of pragmatism in the fields of religious studies and theology today, it is that pragmatism is incompatible with realism. By realism, I mean the general philosophical view that "there are knowable mind-independent facts, objects, or properties" (Audi, 1999, 33). It is widely assumed that pragmatism entails a commitment to philosophical anti-realism - that is, a denial of the

truth of realism -and consequently that pragmatism must also reject such realist views as the correspondence theory of truth in epistemology and religious realism, the view that there are real, mind-independent objects of religious belief. It is my intention to show that pragmatism is compatible with realism - including even religious realism, which should be of special interest to scholars of religion and theologians – and consequently, that the prevailing view is mistaken. In the process, I want to explore the prospects of a realist version of pragmatism for the study of religion, in particular its prospects for such fields as religious ethics and the philosophy of religion. Although I cannot feasibly explore the many varieties of pragmatism in such limited space, it will be sufficient for my purposes if I can show that there is at least one version of pragmatism that defends metaphysical and religious realism, the idea of an objective, extra-human moral order, and the correspondence theory of truth, which is necessary if we are reliably to predicate the agreement of beliefs and statements with reality. The version of pragmatism that I propose to examine is that of William James.

While there have been other major pragmatists who held realist views on various philosophical issues - most notably Charles Sanders Peirce - using James has several added benefits. First, James is not usually understood as a metaphysical realist, much less as having advanced a version of the correspondence theory of truth, and it is often claimed that he rejected these views.1 In this regard, I hope to show that there is ample textual evidence to support a realist interpretation of James on basic metaphysical, epistemological, and religious issues. Second, and though it has seldom been appreciated,

James has special relevance for the field of religious ethics since he actually practiced religious ethics and developed an extensive and sophisticated account of the relationship between religion and morality. While James's views on this subject are not wholly unprecedented, they nonetheless display considerable novelty and provide a way of simultaneously acknowledging both the autonomy of morality and the necessity of religious commitment for realizing certain moral goods.

As we will see, there are versions of pragmatism for those whose philosophical intuitions or religious beliefs (or both) run in a realist direction. While not every line of James's thought is equally promising, the same could well be said of any significant thinker. There is much in James, though, that is philosophically interesting and defensible, and much that might variously strengthen or challenge our prevailing philosophical assumptions.

In section two, I examine the realist aspect of James's pragmatism, focusing specifically on how James's pragmatism combines a "humanist" account of truth with a commitment to metaphysical realism. In contrast to how he is usually understood - even by those who recognize his commitment to realism - I show that James in fact develops and defends a pragmatic version of the correspondence theory of truth.

Then, in section three, I discuss James's religious realism and religious ethics, and highlight some of the ways in which his religious and ethical views connect with his understanding of truth and reality. I show that James offers a nuanced account of the relationship between religion and morality, and that his overall

philosophical outlook is deeply informed by his religious and ethical views. I then conclude the essay with some brief reflections on how a realist and pluralist version of pragmatism might contribute to such fields as religious ethics and philosophy of religion today.

2. James's Metaphysical Realism and Pragmatic Account of Truth

In this section, I propose to examine the coherence of James's pragmatism: namely, whether James's explicit commitment to realism (James 1975, 270-73, 283-85) and the notion of truth as agreement with reality (1975, 96-97) might cohere with other claims that he makes about truth and verification. Examples of the comments include the claims that truth happens to an idea (1975, 97) and that truth is "only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as 'the right' is only the expedient in the way of our behaving" (1975, 106). What I want to demonstrate is not only that James's pragmatism presupposes metaphysical realism and the correspondence theory of truth, but also that these endorsements are in principle consistent with James's instrumentalism about truth and his claim that truth is an event that happens to an idea. Following James's own usage, I will refer to these claims respectively as James's realism and humanism about truth. While many other questions surrounding James's pragmatism remain, of course, focusing on this issue should help us to rule out one-sided ways of interpreting James's theory of truth. It will also enable us to see, in the next section, how James's pragmatism manages to preserve a "cordial relation with facts" without "turning positive religious constructions out of doors" (1975, 26). More pointedly, it will help

us to see how James could consistently be both a pragmatist and a religious realist.

In the broadest sense, James sought not merely to humanize our understanding of truth - to see it, as Hilary Putnam has aptly written, "as a human instrument, and not as an idea that dropped from the sky" - but also to offer a concrete account of how true beliefs and statements relate to and agree with reality (see Putnam 1995, 21). As James writes toward the beginning of his discussion of truth in Pragmatism,

Truth, as any dictionary will tell you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their "agreement," as falsity means their disagreement, with "reality". Pragmatists and intellectualists both accept this definition as a matter of course. They begin to quarrel only after the question is raised as to what may precisely be meant by the term "agreement," and what by the term "reality," when reality is taken as something for our ideas to agree with [1975, 96).

The first point to be made here, and one that most interpreters have missed, is that James did not reject the idea that truth mean correspondence to, or agreement with, reality. Indeed, he referred to anti-realist interpretations of his account of truth as the "fourth misunderstanding" of pragmatism. What James rejected, rather, was the idea that "correspondence" names a mysterious and singular relation to absolute reality, of which our true beliefs and statements are merely passive copies or transcripts. For James, the fundamental problem with our inherited ways of talking about truth is not the idea of correspondence itself. It is rather that we have failed to specify in any concrete way what the "correspondence" or

"agreement" of our beliefs and statements with "reality" means. As a result, the concept of truth is left altogether mysterious to us; it is a term that we apply to beliefs and statements but do not really know how to explain. In his two major works on the subject, Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth, James develops and defends a new version of the correspondence theory of truth that aims to overcome just that problem. James's solution, as we shall see, was to clarify the distinction between truth and reality, and to humanize the former concept - that is, to see it as a human instrument serving various human purposes - while preserving the commitment to metaphysical realism inherent in the latter. In the remainder of this section I will try to explain, albeit briefly, exactly what this proposal means and what consequences it entails. This will be important not only for understanding James's pragmatic theory of truth, but also for understanding the sort of realism to which James subscribed.

Let us begin with the realist aspect of James's pragmatism. If we are to understand the realist aspect of James's account of truth, we will first need to distinguish what is sometimes pejoratively called "naïve realism" from the more general kind of metaphysical realism that James defended.6 James consistently rejected philosophical theories that naively presume that concepts and theories are passive mirrors of an absolute reality rather than approximations of reality for human purposes. To deny that concepts and theories are mirrors, however, is not necessarily to deny that they refer to a real, mind-independent world. Nor is it to deny the basic idea behind the correspondence theory of truth - namely, that truth involves a kind of agreement or "fit" between a belief or statement on the one hand and reality on the other. What James's pragmatic theory of

truth denies is not the claim that truth involves correspondence to reality, but rather (1) the common and mistaken conflation of truth with reality, and (2) the claim that correspondence is a mysterious, mind-independent property wholly uninfluenced by the actions and practices by means of which we arrive at truth.

Regarding the first denial, James traces much of our conceptual confusion about truth - as well as much misunderstanding of his pragmatism - to the failure to distinguish between truth and reality. "Realities are not true" James remarks, "they are; and beliefs are true Of them" (1975, 272). What James's pragmatism adds to this formula is that "if there is to be truth . . . both realities and beliefs about them must conspire to make it" (1975, 273). Realities exist quite independently of what we think or say about them. However, true beliefs and claims exist only insofar as there are minded, language-using beings that can have beliefs and make claims about those realities. In this sense, truth is not an eternal, mind-independent property, because it does not exist independently of the existence of claimants. Moreover - and this is crucial - truth is still dependent upon the existence of a real world for James, for without actual or potential reference to, and agreement with‹ some reality, no belief or statement can be true. James makes this point explicit in a number of passages, including the following:

My account of truth is realistic, and follows the epistemological dualism of common sense . . . this notion of a reality independent of either of us, taken from ordinary social experience, lies at the base of the pragmatist definition of truth. With some such reality any statement, in order to be counted true, must agree. Pragmatism

defines "agreeing" to mean certain ways of "working," be they actual or potential [1975, 283-84).

James's pragmatic account of truth thus presupposes metaphysical realism - here expressed as the view that there is a knowable, mind independent reality - while stressing that truths and the realities to which they refer must be distinguished; a true idea or statement is not identical to the reality to which it refers.

Regarding the second denial, and as Putnam has rightly observed, for James,

To say that truth is "correspondence to reality" is not false but empty, as long as nothing is said about what the "correspondence" is. If the "correspondence" is supposed to be utterly independent of the ways in which we confirm the assertions we make (so that it is conceived to be possible that what is true is utterly different from what we are warranted in taking to be true, not just in some cases but in all cases), then the "correspondence" is an occult one, and our supposed grasp of it is also occult [1995, 10].

On James's view, we cannot meaningfully separate truth from the means, the actions and practices, by which we come to know it. Truth and verification are inseparably bound up with one another; indeed, on James's view they are practically indistinguishable.11 It is here that James's realism connects with his humanism , for he frequently stresses that we cannot separate truth from what it is "known as" or the actions and practices by means of which we come to verify a given idea or statement as true.12 It is only by means of these concrete "workings" and "leadings," as James variously calls

them, and the "satisfactions" that they afford that we come into possession of truth.

If James's account of truth is to avoid explaining the obscure by way of the more obscure, however, it will need to clarify what these terms mean. Luckily James does this, particularly in The Meaning of Truth, a book that he hoped would dispel certain misunderstandings of his pragmatism.

What it means for ideas or statements to "correspond to" or "agree with" reality on James's view is that they actually or potentially (1) point or lead us to some reality and (2) yield satisfaction as a result (1975, 270). An idea or statement "works" if it does both of these things, because it puts us into actually experienced or potentially experience able relations with reality. For example, on James's view, we confirm the truth or falsity of statements such as "It's raining" by performing actions such as looking out the window, walking outside, asking a friend to perform one of these actions for us, and so forth. When we perceive the rain - or any other real feature of the world - we thereby verify the statement, at least for all practical purposes. This is the pragmatic meaning of truth on James's view, in particular what it means for a belief or statement to "correspond" to reality. In such cases, what we have done is to grasp the experiential relations that obtain between our beliefs and statements and the world. There is nothing mysterious about this, so long as we recognize that there is (at least under normal conditions) no gap in the structure of experience, or between our minds and our experience of the world. In the case of analytic truths, including true mathematical and logical statements, what we perceive are the purely conceptual

relations that obtain between various symbols and statements (see, for example, James 1975, 100-2).

Of course, much of what we believe to be true depends on confirmations performed by others (because we cannot directly confirm or disconfirm the truth of every statement for ourselves) and on our shared linguistic and social practices. As James is careful to point out, we are warranted in believing that there are tigers in India even if we have not been there ourselves and seen them with our own eyes. The fact that our perceptions of, and propositions about, tigers point or refer to the tigers is, as James puts it, "a perfectly commonplace intra-experiential relation, if you once grant a connecting world to be there" (1975, 200). The correspondence or agreement of our beliefs and statements with reality is "no special inner mystery," he insists, "but only an outer chain of physical or mental intermediaries connecting thought and thing. To know an object here is to lead it through a context which the world supplies" (1975, 200-1). The correspondence of thoughts and objects (whether physical or ideal) is a real feature of our experience in everyday life, even if it is not infallible or incorrigible.

For James, truth is an event; it happens to an idea or statement because it is partly brought about through our actions and social practices, but it does not reduce to our actions and social practices. As he insists, "there can be no truth if there is nothing to be true about"(1975, 272). Likewise, when James describes true beliefs and statements as ones that "work," he does not mean that they are true simply because they are useful or that truth can be reduced to utility.

That "ideas should be true in advance of and apart from their utility," James insists, "that, in other words, their objects should really be there, is the very condition of their having that kind of utility" (1975, 278). While James understands truth - like all concepts and theories - as a human instrument, he also thinks that what ultimately makes our beliefs and statements about reality successful is their agreement with reality. (Without some notion of agreement with reality, we might add, the success of certain ways of describing and explaining reality and the failure of others is left inexplicable.) Concepts and theories are thus useful instruments for coping with reality only insofar as they put us in touch with reality and help us to describe and explain it. While our purposes with reality vary, James thinks, this realistic feature of truth does not.

This last point is essential for understanding James's humanism and realism about truth. As James writes in The Meaning of Truth:

The pragmatist calls satisfactions indispensable for truth-building, but I have everywhere called them insufficient unless reality be also incidentally led to. If the reality assumed were cancelled from the pragmatist's universe of discourse, he would straightway give the name of falsehoods to the beliefs remaining, in spite of all their satisfactoriness. For him, as for his critic, there can be no truth if there is nothing to be true about. Ideas are so much flat psychological surface unless some mirrored matter gives them cognitive lustre. This is why as a pragmatist I have so carefully posited "reality" ab initio, and why, throughout my whole discussion, I remain an epistemological realist [1975, 272).

What we see here is that James's humanism or instrumentalism about truth is not incompatible with realism.15 Indeed, insofar as James's account is instrumentalist, it actually presupposes realism, for without a real world our concepts and theories have no purchase and cannot sensibly "work." Under the terms of an instrumentalist account of truth, truth cannot be separated from the means by which it is known.

Truth is not something outside the structure of human experience; rather, it is part of that structure, just as our minds and the world are part of it. James's view is that "the truth-relation . . . has a definite content, and . . . everything in it is experienceable" (1975, 173). As James explains this last point, The links of experience sequent upon an idea, which mediate between it and a reality, form and for the pragmatist indeed are, the concrete relation of truth that may obtain between the idea and that reality. They, he says, are all that we mean when we speak of the idea "pointing" to the reality, "fitting" it, "corresponding" with it, or "agreeing" with it - they or other similar mediating trains of verification. Such mediating events

make the idea "true" [1975, 275).

The view that James describes in such passages clearly does not entail a rejection of the correspondence theory of truth. Rather, it is a pragmatic version of the correspondence theory of truth, one in which any "gap" between our minds and the world is denied and in which truth is determined by means of actual or possible experiential relations. To claim, as many interpreters have, that James rejected the correspondence theory of truth outright is a misreading of serious proportions.

Well and good, one might object, but does James not characterize his commitment to realism in The Meaning of Truth as "epistemological realism" rather than metaphysical realism? Does this not count against an interpretation of James as a metaphysical realist, even if it is the only place that James uses the phrase "epistemological realism" in Pragmatism or The Meaning of Truth! The first point to be made in response to this objection is that while the term "epistemological realism" was not uncommon in James's day, it is no longer commonly used by contemporary philosophers; turning to a standard resource such as The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, one finds no entry for the term. The reason for this, I think, is connected to the second and more substantive point, namely that it is exceedingly hard to see how epistemological realism does not presuppose metaphysical realism. If one understands epistemology to mean the theory of knowledge (including such concepts as truth and epistemic justification) - and this is the traditional and commonly accepted sense of the term, and was certainly how James understood it - then epistemological realism surely means the view that knowledge (as well as truth and epistemic justification) involves reference to a real, mind-independent world.

Indeed, in James's day, it implied not merely reference but also correspondence to reality, a sense that James is careful to preserve. In affirming that he is an "epistemological realist," James is saying that his theory takes truth to be an epistemic concept, and that it is epistemic precisely on account of its relation to reality. Ideas or statements can only be true if they "fit," "lead up to," or "correspond to"reality; it is this relationship with reality, or the

experiential mediating events between our minds and the world, that makes our ideas or statements true (1975, 275). Although James does not draw this inference, it seems clear that his claims about truth and reality logically presuppose a dependence relationship: namely, that while there can be reality without truth, there cannot be truth without reality. This strikes me as obviously true. In making this dependence relationship explicit, I think we see how James's account of truth takes the existence of a mind-independent reality as a sine qua non for the possibility of truth. As James insists, "there can be no truth if there is nothing to be true about" (1975, 272). The terminological objection that we have been considering would seem to be misguided, then, not only because it presumes that James was an epistemological but not a metaphysical realist, but also because it presumes that epistemological realism does not presuppose metaphysical realism.

In sum, a failure to understand both the humanist and the realist aspects of James's account of truth has led to serious misunderstandings of his pragmatism. Not only critics such as G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, but also admirers like F. C. S. Schiller and Richard Rorty have variously failed to appreciate that James was both a humanist and a realist in his epistemology, and that his pragmatism combines both - or at least attempts to do so. If I am right, even astute and sympathetic interpreters of James such as Putnam have failed to see that James endorsed a version of metaphysical realism and the notion of truth as correspondence that is its epistemological correlate.

While James was not always successful in balancing the realist and humanist aspects of his pragmatism - at times he suggests that

reality is somehow altered or reconstructed through our cognitive interactions with it, which has the effect of undercutting his commitment to realism - that he sought to combine these philosophical views in his pragmatism cannot credibly be denied.

What I hope to have shown in this section is that humanism and realism about truth go hand-in-hand under the terms of James's pragmatic account. Humanism about truth without realism deprives our beliefs and claims about reality of any "answerability to the world", to borrow John McDowell's apt phrase (1994). On such a view, there is nothing for a truth-claim "to be true about." And realism about truth without humanism fails to recognize that we do not have an absolute or "God's eye" view of reality, a view from nowhere that either is or can be free of all particular human interests, practices, and epistemic limits. Such a view fails to grasp not only the instrumental nature of our concepts and theories, but also the fact that concepts and theories are at best fallible models or approximations of reality for human purposes, and not infallible and identical copies of reality. Understanding the humanist and realist aspects of James's account of truth not only helps us to clarify our understanding of his pragmatism, but also our understanding of pragmatism more generally.

We now need to consider how James's metaphysical realism and endorsement of a type of correspondence theory of truth connects with other aspects of his thought. As we will see in the next section, James's realism also took a religious form that, in conjunction with his metaphysical and epistemological views, influenced his understanding of the nature of morality and moral properties. I will argue that while James denied that moral facts and properties could

exist independently of the existence of empathic beings capable of making value judgments (and in this respect they cannot be called mind independent), his views on morality nonetheless take on an objective form in conjunction with his naturalistic moral theory and religious realism. In the latter regard, James argues that if there are minds or forms of consciousness higher than our own, and if those minds or forms of consciousness manifest moral properties (indeed, manifest them in a greater or even a perfect way), then the sphere of morality includes forms of consciousness that are higher and morally greater than our own. James included these entities in his pluralistic and "piecemeal supernaturalist" account of the universe and argued in a number of works that belief in and experience of them is of the utmost importance for what he called "the moral life." However, on James's view, different human needs and interests, concepts and contexts, come together to shape particular forms of religious belief, experience, and practice. Accordingly, we shall find that James's pragmatic philosophy of religion and religious ethics display not only his commitment to realism, but also his commitment to humanism.

3. James's Religious Realism and Religious Ethics

In addition to being a metaphysical realist, James was also a religious realist. That is, he believed in the reality of an unseen religious order and disbelieved that "our human experience is the highest form of experience extant in the universe" (1975, 143; see

also (1985, 408). Under the terms of James's realistic account of religion there exists, in the most general terms, a "more" of consciousness or "wider self" with which our minds are in contact in cases of genuine religious experience (see 1985, 400-8). As he wrote in the concluding lecture of The Varieties of Religious Experience,

The further limits of our being plunge, it seems to me, into an altogether other dimension of existence from the sensible and merely "understandable" world. Name it the mystical region, or the supernatural region, whichever you choose. So far as our ideal impulses originate in this region (and most of them do originate in it, for we find them possessing us in a way for which we cannot articulately account), we belong to it in a more intimate sense than that in which we belong to the visible world؛ for we belong in the most intimate sense wherever our ideals belong. Yet the unseen region in question is not merely ideal, for it produces effects in this world. When we commune with it, work is actually done upon our finite personality, for we are turned into new men, and consequences in the way of conduct follow in the natural world upon our regenerative change. But that which produces effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself, so I feel as if we had no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal [1985, 406).

To this "more" religious individuals and communities add their various "overbeliefs," or articles of faith. For James this took the form of belief in a finite God - one limited only with respect to power - who is "but one helper, primus inter pares, in the midst of all the shapers of the great world's fate" (1975, 143). Nonetheless, he allowed that different individuals and communities will hold

different overbeliefs, both as a matter of predisposition and of personal choice, and that this pluralistic situation is not to be regretted. James writes:

Religious fermentation is always a symptom of the intellectual vigor of a society; and it is only when they forget that they are hypotheses and put on rationalistic and authoritative pretensions, that our faiths do harm. The most interesting and valuable things about a man are his ideals and over-beliefs. The same is true of nations and historic epochs; and the excesses of which the particular individuals and epochs are guilty are compensated in the total, and become profitable to mankind in the long run [1979, 9).

As this passage makes clear, James was not only a religious realist, but also a religious pluralist. It also shows that he recognized a close connection between religion and ethics or religious belief and moral values. While James rejected the notion that values exist altogether independently of minds, he nonetheless believed in the reality of higher, extra-human forms of consciousness, and held that these forms of consciousness were the source and guarantor of many of our highest moral values. Thus, James's religious realism has both moral content and logical consequences for his account of morality.

In order to see this, it will be helpful to consider James's essay "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" (1979), which presents one of the clearest statements of his views on the nature of morality and its connection to religion. Although James's views on the nature of religion would undergo significant change in later years, moving from a relatively narrow defense of theism to a robust defense of

religious pluralism, the basic structure of his moral theory would remain the same.

James's main purpose in the essay was to show that "there is no such thing possible as an ethical philosophy dogmatically made up in advance" (1979, 141). Here, James develops a naturalistic and consequentialist moral theory that evinces the same sort of humanism about moral concepts and theories as he would later develop about truth.

James writes, Neither moral relations nor the moral law can swing in vacuo. Their only habitat can be a mind which feels them; and no world composed of merely physical facts can possibly be a world to which ethical propositions apply [1979, 145.)

Similarly, while James does not rule out either the existence of God or an ideal moral order, he denies that belief in such entities is necessary in order to provide a basis for morality:

The only force of appeal to us, which either a living God or an abstract ideal order can wield, is found in the "everlasting ruby vaults" of our human hearts, as they happen to beat responsive and not irresponsive to the claim. So far as they do feel it when made by a living consciousness, it is life answering to life [1979, 149).

What is minimally necessary for the existence of morality, James argues, is not the existence of God, an eternal moral law, or an inherent "moral fabric" of the universe, but rather the existence of empathic beings that have interests and make claims on one another.

More specifically, moral obligation and the moral point of view come into existence when beings that have both cognitive and affective capacities begin the intersubjective and social practice of making claims on one another (1979, 145-47).

What James offers in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life", then, is a naturalistic and social account of the basis of morality. The basis of morality is one thing, and the final ends of morality are another. James tips his hand to this distinction at the end of section two of the essay, where he writes, We, on this terrestrial globe, so far as the visible facts go, are just like the inhabitants of such a rock. Whether a God exist, or whether no God exist, in you blue heaven above us bent, we form at any rate an ethical republic here below. And the first reflection which this leads to is that ethics have as genuine and real a foothold in a universe where the highest consciousness is human, as in a universe where there is a God as well. "The religion of humanity" affords a basis for ethics as well as theism does. Whether the purely human system can gratify the philosopher's demands as well as the other is a different question, which we ourselves must answer ere we close [1979, 150; my emphasis).

While James's moral theory does not require the existence of God or an ideal moral order, his broader account of ethics recognizes a need to supplement morality with a practical form of religious faith. In the final section of the present essay (section five), we find James defending the view that a purely naturalistic and social account of morality ultimately fails to satisfy certain of our moral needs, and that if these needs are to be met, one must hold certain additional metaphysical and theological beliefs (1979, 159).23 In a move similar

to Kant's in the Critique of Practical Reason, James argues that while the basis of morality is autonomous from religion, our desire to lead "morally strenuous" lives and to offer an account of moral objectivity cannot plausibly be satisfied unless we postulate God's existence. James's view, in brief, is that we cannot fully awaken our moral capacities and sustain them at their highest level without believing that our moral obligations are ultimately grounded in a moral standard that transcends any merely human standard. James writes:

In a merely human world without a God, the appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulating power. Life, to be sure, is even in such a world a genuinely ethical symphony; but it is played in the compass of a couple of poor octaves, and the infinite scale of values fails to open up [1979, 160]. 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. Every sort of energy and endurance, of courage and capacity for handling life's evils, is set free in those who have religious faith. For this reason the strenuous type of character will on the battle-field of human history always outwear the easy-going type, and religion will drive irreligion to the wall [1979, 161).

Strictly speaking, the moral point of view does not require God's existence, much less God's assistance in the moral life. But when we believe that "a God is there, and that he is one of the claimants," James writes, "the infinite perspective opens out. . . . the more imperative ideals now begin to speak with an altogether new objectivity and significance" (1979, 160). Through religious belief not

only do our moral obligations acquire new force, it also becomes rational to believe that one can attain certain goods that would otherwise be impossible (or at least implausible) under the terms of a strictly naturalistic moral theory.

Although James does not discuss these goods in much detail in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," in later works he would deal with such goods as personal salvation or liberation from suffering, as well as collective goods such as the possible redemption or liberation of the world. Indeed, he would modify his account of religion in the process of coming to believe that a plurality of religious faiths, and not merely theism, are capable of enabling human beings to lead morally strenuous and flourishing lives, while maintaining his view that morality alone is insufficient for realizing such goods (see 1985, 44-50, 382-414). When we take a broad view of James's writings, including not only "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" but also later works such as The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), Pragmatism (1907), and A Pluralistic Universe (1909), we find that his basic claim regarding the relationship between religion and morality is that there are moral goods that can only be gained (if at all) by supplementing our worldview with metaphysical and religious beliefs. While James thinks that one is within one's epistemic rights to abjure such beliefs and thereby give up the hope of attaining these goods, he also thinks that we have an epistemic right to become religious believers under certain conditions. Beginning roughly with Varieties, James would expand upon this view, arguing that to supplement one's view of the world in this way is not merely to hold metaphysical and religious beliefs, but also to postulate the existence of the objects of

one's beliefs. Religion, he now insists, is "not a mere illumination of facts already elsewhere given ... it is something more, namely, a postulator of new facts as well" (1985, 407-8). He explains:

The world interpreted religiously is not the materialistic world over again, with an altered expression; it must have, over and above the altered expression, a natural constitution different at some point from that which a materialistic world would have. It must be such that different events can be expected in it, different conduct must be required (1985, 408).

James refers to this realistic view as "the pragmatic way of taking religion," which involves conceiving the world as having both a natural and a supernatural constitution (1985, 408).

However, while James's account of religion is realistic, it is not thereby dogmatic. Although James consistently stresses that religious beliefs should be held as fallible and revisable hypotheses, it is important to grasp that for James religious hypotheses presuppose a commitment to the reality of the objects to which they refer, just as scientific hypotheses presuppose a commitment to the reality of the physical phenomena to which they refer. The basic difference between a dogmatic religious believer and a Jamesian religious believer, then, is not that the former has realistic religious beliefs and the latter does not, but rather that the former thinks that the truth of his beliefs is certain, whereas the latter thinks that the truth of his beliefs is provisional and subject to revision in light of future experience. "Experience, as we know, has ways of boiling over," James writes, "and making us correct our present formulas" (1975, 106).

While not every religious person could ascribe to every aspect of James's philosophy of religion and account of morality, it should be clear that James was anything but an enemy of religious belief. Unlike his fellow pragmatist John Dewey, who rejected religious realism in favor of a purely humanistic and non-cognitive account of the "religious function in experience," James did not think that traditional forms of religious belief and practice were either inherently incredible or inherently incompatible with a democratic culture (see Dewey 1934). Furthermore, unlike certain neo-pragmatists such as Richard Rorty, who largely shared Dewey's view of religion and saw traditional forms of religious belief as a "conversation-stopper" in liberal democratic societies, James believed that the free exchange of religious ideas and reasons in the public sphere was a vital social good. These aspects of James's pragmatic philosophy of religion should commend themselves to religiously committed ethicists and philosophers of religion, as well as those who seek to include a place for religion in the public sphere but who are not personally religious. Even if these scholars happen to disagree with James on certain points, which almost certainly they will, they should nonetheless recognize the existence of common ground between them.

4. Conclusions

For James, pragmatism was not an alternative to realism in metaphysics, epistemology, or the philosophy of religion. It was rather a way of accounting for his realist intuitions about the nature of reality, knowledge, and the objects of religious belief and experience in a concrete and experientially grounded way. The overarching purpose of James's pragmatism was to provide us with a

"mediating way of thinking" (1975, 26) about reality - one which mediates between the extremes of a positivistic, "tough-minded" physicalism on the one hand, and "tender minded" philosophical and religious theories that lack any empirical grounding on the other. According to James,

You want a system that will combine both things, the scientific loyalty to facts and willingness to take account of them, the spirit of adaptation and accommodation, in short, but also the old confidence in human values and the resultant spontaneity, whether of the religious or of the romantic type. And this is then your dilemma: you find the two parts of your quaesitum hopelessly separated. You find empiricism with inhumanism and irreligion; or else you find a rationalistic philosophy that indeed may call itself religious, but that keeps out of all definite touch with concrete facts and joys and sorrows [1975, 17).

It is intellectually responsible to want a scientific and empirically grounded view of the world, James insists, but if this is all we have, then our moral, aesthetic, and religious values will suffer. Likewise, if our worldview accounts for the latter values but disconnects them from the world of empirical facts, then our interest in scientific knowledge and intellectual integrity will suffer. What James's pragmatism aims to provide is "a philosophy that can satisfy both types of demand. It can remain religious like the rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts" (1975, 23).

James's pragmatism, in a very basic sense, sees these various theoretical and practical interests as goods to be accounted for and

balanced. If accounting for and balancing these many goods requires us to modify our worldview, then so be it; indeed, the desire for a fixed and uniform worldview shared by many "tough-minded" and "tenderminded" thinkers is itself part of the problem, James thinks, because such a Weltanschauung allows us to realize only a narrow range of goods and purposes at the expense of many others. In this respect, we see how James's pragmatism entails a commitment to pluralism at both the theoretical and practical levels.

To claim that we should recognize a plurality of legitimate and irreducible goods and purposes, however, is not necessarily to endorse an "anything goes" relativism. Not every perspective is equally valuable or truthful, and some cannot reasonably be said to be valuable or truthful at all. As James insists, "one man's vision may be much more valuable than another's" (1977, 10), and some views - such as religious fanaticism and imperialism - are vicious and should be rejected. If there is a weakness in James's defense of pluralism, though, it is that he sometimes stressed the value of tolerance at the expense of other intellectual and moral values. In particular, we need to identify points of similarity or even overlapping consensus between different ethical and religious traditions, and to provide an account of ethical and religious objectivity in the midst of ethical and religious pluralism.

While James made great strides in the latter respect in works like The Varieties of Religious Experience, he left the ethical aspect of his pluralism largely undeveloped. Any ethically adequate version of pluralism must address this problem and work to overcome it – and this, I believe, is an area in which we can improve upon James's account. One highly promising solution to this problem has been

sketched by Philip J. Ivanhoe, who argues that we should move beyond relativistic versions of ethical pluralism to what he calls "ethical promiscuity," a view that combines ethical pluralism with a commitment to ethical realism. Ivanhoe writes:

Ethical promiscuity does not entail moral relativity, nor does it imply that one can blithely move from one form of the good life to another in quick succession. It is meant to emphasize that there is a remarkably wide variety of possible good human lives and good human communities. These good lives will share a kind of family resemblance and the people who live them will both be able to appreciate each other's lives and agree in ruling out absolutely certain kinds of practices [1996, 213 n. 25).

If we extend Ivanhoe's insights to metaphysical and other theoretical issues, we would seem to have an approach that captures James's general philosophical commitment to realism and pluralism while ruling out the relativistic claim that any sort of life or view of the world is as good as any other.31 Under the terms of an ethically and religiously promiscuous version of pluralism, for instance, there are many good ways of life and religious views of the world, and the loss of such diversity would be a truly bad thing. But these good ways of life and views of the world are not radically different from one another. At the metaphysical level they are grounded in a common, real world that at once enables and constrains their various interpretations of it, and at the ethical level, they converge in judging certain kinds of beliefs and practices as unacceptable. Buddhists and Christians, for example, can both agree about the wrongness of infanticide and torture, and can likewise agree that such practices are violations of an objective moral order,

even if they offer different theories of human nature and the nature of the moral order.

If an ethically and religiously "promiscuous" approach is to be pragmatic, though, it must account not only for the reality and plurality of ethical values and religious beliefs, but also the human contribution to ethics and religion. Values are an inherent part of our experience of a meaningful world. To quote James, they "form the background for all our facts, the fountain-head of all the possibilities we conceive of (1985, 53). In this sense, the Jamesian pragmatist understands values as real and constitutive features of human experience, and not as mere projections onto the furniture of the universe. As James writes in this context,

This absolute determinability of our mind by abstractions is of one of the cardinal facts in our human constitution. Polarizing and magnetizing us as they do, we turn towards them and from them, we seek them, hold them, hate them, bless them, just as if they were so many concrete beings. And beings they are, beings as real in the realm which they inhabit as the changing things of sense are in the realm of space [1985, 54).

However, while values are real and constitutive features of our experience, for a Jamesian pragmatist, it is implausible to think of them as having an altogether mind-independent existence. Values are not like rocks and stars, which have a mind-independent ontology; they, in contrast, are tied to the existence of minded beings and would go out of existence if such beings ever ceased to exist. This is simply to say that values should be understood in humanistic as well as realistic terms. Indeed, seeing values as

inextricably connected with the judgments made by minded beings - and recognizing the different judgments that such beings make - can help us to account for the pluralistic nature of values in addition to their realistic nature. Balancing humanism with realism about moral facts and properties is a strategy that few religious ethicists have pursued, and I believe that it is one that could have significant payoffs in such fields as comparative religious ethics and in the attempt to identify or construct a common morality. Progress here demands that religious ethicists make use of the same scientific resources as their counterparts in moral philosophy, who have been generally quicker to recognize the importance of recent scientific discoveries in such areas as evolutionary biology, cognitive science, and child development, and more ready to embrace the idea that human beings have a common biological nature that at once underlies morality and places limits on moral relativity.

The major strength of a religiously realist and pluralist version of pragmatism, I believe, is that it enables us to account for the potential reality of some of the objects of religious belief, experience, and devotion - and thus, the potential truth- value of some religious beliefs and informational quality of some religious experiences - while rejecting the narrow exclusivism characteristic of many realist approaches to religion. Such an approach will appeal to those who not only have religious interests that they hope to pursue and satisfy through the study of religion, but who also think that there is or may be truth and value in many religious views and practices, and not simply in one's own. How might one warrant such a theory? One potential way of warranting belief in the truth of religious claims is to turn to religious experience, an approach that

was pioneered by James and has subsequently been pursued by a number of philosophers of religion, including William Alston and Alvin Plantinga. While there is much that separates James's account from Alston's and Plantinga's respective accounts - most notably the religiously pluralist focus of James's account and the specifically Christian focus of theirs - what they share in common is the basic presupposition that religious experience can provide a direct and independent warrant for religious belief. This is a promising approach, I believe, and as Alston, Plantinga, and others have shown, it has strong epistemological legs. However, a contemporary pragmatic and realist approach to religious experience needs to address certain problems, particularly those raised by James's account.

Consider the following. Whereas Alston and Plantinga maintain that beliefs derived from religious experiences can be rational and warranted without reference to other beliefs - or at least rational and warranted within the context of a given community of belief and its epistemic criteria - James usually maintains that the direct insights afforded by religious experiences also need to satisfy certain community-independent criteria (including both epistemic and moral criteria) in order to be warranted.34 At other times, however, James claims that religious beliefs can be directly warranted by mystical experiences without any need of further rational support, in much the same way that perceptual beliefs are directly warranted by perceptual experiences (1985, 335-39). Since James also claims that "personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness" (1985, 301), we would seem to have two rival Jamesian accounts on this issue. Either account is

potentially defensible, but one must choose: either the epistemic justification of religious beliefs derived from religious experiences requires coherence with other beliefs, or it does not. While both accounts presume the realism inherent in James's pragmatism, only the first coheres with its humanist and holist aspects. I think that in some ways, this is the more attractive of the two accounts by virtue of its demand for reflective equilibrium, but it faces the additional challenge of showing how religious beliefs about reality cohere with scientific ones.

The second account, on the other hand, can be grounded simply in terms of a direct realist view of perception, which is arguably one part of James's pragmatism and radical empiricism. It is theoretically tidier than the first account, but it comes at the potential cost of dissociating religious belief from other of our beliefs, including scientific and ethical beliefs.

These are difficult matters, and I will not presume to resolve them here. While we have much to learn, I believe, from studying a thinker like James, I am not recommending that we all become Jamesian pragmatists. We can take James in piecemeal fashion rather than taking him wholesale, just as we often do with philosophers such as Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel. There is nothing to prevent one, for example, from endorsing the realism and humanism that are basic to James's pragmatism without buying into his religious views or all the details of his account of truth. Indeed, I have suggested that we need to build upon James's account in several places, and doing this may sometimes require us to modify or even depart from his views. It almost certainly will require us to take account of a wider body of religious data than James did, given

the advances in our knowledge of religious traditions that have occurred between James's time and ours. Nevertheless, I have tried to show that the realism, humanism, and pluralism inherent in James's pragmatism provide us with a means of satisfying and reconciling a number of philosophical interests that sometimes are thought to be incommensurable. Among these, and of central importance for the study of religion, is James's ability to combine religious realism and religious pluralism with a humanistic understanding of the nature of religion. Perhaps most remarkably of all, what James allows us to see is the possibility of viewing that ultimately transcends both.

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