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William James: Pragmatism, Social Psychology and Emotions

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Abstract

At the core of pragmatism is the idea of an active projection of experience into the future. William James's contribution to pragmatism included an emphasis on emotions in the apprehension of possible futures and related processes. After presenting a summary of Jamesian pragmatism, and especially the significance of emotions in it, the article notes the reception of James's writings in Europe and their influence on European intellectual developments. Max Weber, for instance, studied James closely. He treated James's approach to religion as a negative example. While Emile Durkheim rejected the individualist approach of James, he nevertheless found much of value in James's conceptualization of religious experience, including its emotional underpinnings. Discussion below explores the neglected Jamesian quality of Durkheim's account of religion. It is noted in conclusion that the more recent sociological neglect of James and the failure to appreciate his particular approach in pragmatism, coincided with the rise of Freudian psychology in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Key words

■ Emile Durkheim ■ emotions ■ William James ■ pragmatism ■ religion

Pragmatism and William James

Pragmatism was designed as a method, through which the embroidery of metaphysical speculation would be unravelled. The achievement of this purpose was to be reached by inquiring about the consequences of practical actions that might be deduced from such speculation. The originators of pragmatism, each of whom agreed that it was a method and not a doctrine, were Charles Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910), and John Dewey (1859–1952). These were writers for whom their formative experiences in nineteenth-century America did not fully characterize their ideas and intentions. Each of them was thoroughly conversant with European intellectual culture and engaged with contemporary movements in European thought. Although it is always characterized as an American

movement, pragmatism's interaction with European thought has been a constant feature of its development.

Peirce first introduced the term pragmatism, in his papers 'The Fixation of Belief' (Peirce, 1877) and 'How to Make our Ideas Clear' (Peirce, 1878), as the name of a logical method for going beyond formalism and abstraction. James drew on Peirce's discussion – and refers to it – in a paper delivered in 1898 and published in the same year, 'Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results' (James, 1898). This paper, like Peirce's papers before it, failed to attract attention. But when James republished his paper six years later, minus the first three pages and concluding paragraph, as 'The Pragmatic Method' (James, 1904), it gave rise to considerable interest and effectively launched pragmatism as a philosophical movement.

With the publication of *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* in 1907, the pragmatic movement became fully identified with its author, William James. This development, understandingly, was not entirely satisfactory to Peirce, who wanted his approach to be understood as a purely logical method unlike the psychological approach he saw in James's work. In papers from 1905, Peirce renamed his approach pragmaticism – a name 'ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers' – to mark its distinctive features (Peirce, 1905a, 1905b). Although closer to James than Peirce, Dewey followed suit by describing his own approach as 'instrumentalist'. All of this has further encouraged a perception of James as the one and true pragmatist.

While classical pragmatism is now typically identified with James, his intellectual reach extended beyond the pragmatic method. There is a tendency, then, to separate out various aspects of James's thought, insisting that his pragmatism, for instance, is independent of his radical empiricism – a trend he encouraged – and that both be understood as separate from his psychology. Such compartmentalization, though, should not be accepted at the expense of an appreciation of fundamental continuities in James's thought. Dewey is correct to insist, therefore, that James's idea, typical of pragmatism in general, that 'validity is not a matter of origin nor of antecedents, but of consequents', is not only the main point of James's philosophy but of his psychology as well (Dewey, 1935: 20–1).

James's argument, that the significance of an idea is in the way it directs new observation and new experience, ties ideas to action more directly than is found in the work of most non-pragmatic thinkers. The pragmatic notion, that knowledge resides in concrete human acts, is a radical departure from idealist, rationalist and empiricist approaches. For James, ideas and knowledge are not the passive outcomes of past experience, but as Edward Moore has put it, 'the active projection of experience into the future' (1965: 79). Reference to the future is crucial for an understanding of James's thought, because the apprehension of the future and the basis of action that achieves or creates one possible future against others are necessarily emotional. This is a singularly Jamesian proposition, central to his pragmatism, not shared by his fellow founding pragmatists, and not understood or appreciated by most of his followers. It is what brings his psychology and his pragmatic method together.

The relationship between James's psychology and especially his theory of emotions, on the one hand, and his pragmatism, on the other, has been almost wholly neglected in the secondary literature. An account of emotions in James's psychology and its importance to the broader scope of his work will be indicated below. After a brief sketch of the reception of his ideas in Europe, there will be a discussion of James's impact on the classical sociology of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, giving attention to the place of emotions in these developments. Finally will be considered why James's approach to emotions had only limited purchase in the Europe of his day, and indeed in America. But first it will be necessary to present an overview of James himself.

A Presentation of William James

Pragmatism is a method of philosophy. 'The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable' (James, 1907: 45). But it is a method of philosophy based upon psychological principles of experience, rather than logical principles of entailment. James says that truth is 'essentially bound up with the way in which one moment in our experience may lead us towards other moments which it will be worth while to have been led to' (1907: 204–5). The relationship between philosophy and psychology in pragmatism raises questions concerning the relationship between philosophy and psychology in James's thought and career. James is possibly best known as a philosopher, but he is arguably best understood as a psychologist, indeed, a scientific psychologist. His approach to philosophy, it will be shown, must be treated in terms of the psychological principles that inform it, indeed, sustain it. It is necessary to put this case in order to show how the thrust of James's work is underpinned by a psychology of emotion.

James's greatest single achievement was the publication, in 1890, of the two-volume work, *The Principles of Psychology*. He spent twelve years writing this book, which is still in print. In this work he took psychology away from the metaphysical and speculative vein it occupied in the nineteenth century, and created modern scientific psychology based on biological principles. In the Preface the reader is told that this work arises from the 'view of natural science' (James, 1890a: v), a claim that is repeated and elaborated two years later in the 'Introductory' chapter of a single-volume condensation of the *Principles*, namely *Psychology: A Briefer Course* (James, 1892: 1–3).

The place of James's contribution to psychology in the chronology of his career is not straightforward. By the time that he had published what is arguably one of the most celebrated psychological texts ever written, he had ceased to practise psychological science and instead taken up philosophy. At least this is how his distinct careers are most frequently portrayed (Feinstein, 1984). It would be absurd to suggest that James did not become a philosopher. But such an absurdity is the mirror image of another, namely that he ceased to be committed to physiological psychology. The facts are easy to state. In 1880 James's

appointment at Harvard ceased to be Assistant Professor of Physiology, to which he was appointed in 1876, and he became instead Assistant Professor of Philosophy. In 1885 he was appointed full Professor of Philosophy. Between 1889 and 1897, however, his title was Professor of Psychology. These titular transitions reflect bureaucratic and political manoeuvres as much as they indicate intellectual affinities.

During the early establishment of psychology as an academic discipline, philosophy departments were often thought to be its appropriate setting. This was the view at Harvard also. James's graduate course, 'The Relations between Physiology and Psychology', was simply taken from the Department of Physiology and placed in the Philosophy Department, and he with it. This was without loss of the significant component of laboratory experimentation that the course required of its students. It can be mentioned parenthetically that James's was the first scientific psychological laboratory in the United States, and his course the first to offer laboratory instruction.

None of this is to deny James's philosophical contributions. In fact, his philosophical writings predate his appointment in that discipline by a decade. His interests in philosophy and science were in tandem from the beginning, and remained so. In an unsigned notice in the *Nation* of March 1876 James recommended that philosophy and science be pursued together, and that philosophers study physiological psychology. James's philosophical output is impressive in its volume and importance. At different times philosophical papers and lectures were brought together and published by James as *The Will to Believe* (1897), *Pragmatism* (1907), *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909a) and *The Meaning of Truth* (1909b). There is also a posthumous collection, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912).

It is not too far-fetched to say, however, that James's philosophical contribution was to bring certain insights of scientific psychology to that discipline, especially the regard for individual experience understood from the perspective of a biologically informed psychology. The suggestion is not that James's psychological theorizing absorbs all of his philosophy. Rather, the point is to acknowledge how profoundly his scientific psychology informed his philosophy.

Even as a philosopher James found it impossible to cease psychologizing. James's best-regarded work after the *Principles* is *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), originally given as the Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh in 1901–2. He had planned two courses, each of ten lectures, one dealing with psychological issues and the other with philosophical. But psychology occupied both series of lectures. He had to provide a 'Postscript' for the published version, in order to outline his philosophic conclusions. James could not help himself but write a psychological not a philosophical treatise. This is not an isolated case.

The year before he died James began work on a new book, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1911). It is only the second of his publications, after the *Principles*, which is not a collection of lectures or articles. Unfinished at the time of his death, the book is a systematic treatise on metaphysics. This is interesting in itself because in *Pragmatism* and other works he cautions against metaphysical philosophizing. If anything, then, *Some Problems* is a statement of James's firm

commitment to philosophy. But this philosophy is precisely an extension of his scientific psychology. His argument is essentially that experience is a fundamental reality and the basis of reliable knowledge, and that percepts are ontologically and epistemologically prior to concepts. These propositions have clear philosophic relevance and are given philosophic elaboration. But their source is in James's scientific psychology of perception, thought, and the self, originally published in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890a, 1890b).

In summary: William James was immersed in Victorian scientific culture and thoroughly trained in the natural sciences. He was committed to a scientific outlook until the end, and was an exponent of scientific psychology throughout his career.

The Theory of Emotions in James

James's biographer, Ralph Barton Perry, said that James's 'object is man the organism, saving himself and asserting his interests within the natural environment' (quoted in McDermott, 1967: xxiv). Indeed, James's implicit Darwinism leads him to write of the human organism as adapting to the environment through essentially biological functions and processes. For James, the human organism is interested and active, creating its own circumstances out of adaptive necessity. James is concerned with the evolution of human action, not with the evolution of emergent 'things' such as neural systems or cortex.

Such a view of mind, as actively – one could say pragmatically – projecting from present experience into the future, is typically Jamesian. From this perspective, mind is not a passive imprint of past experience, but a selective and interested agent in the creation of its own future. 'Only those items which I *notice* shape my mind', says James, 'without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos' (1890a: 402; emphasis in original). The source of interest, according to James, is in the 'passional' nature of the human organism.

This latter quality, most frequently neglected in comparable thinkers, is central for James. Where other writers separate reason, volition and emotion, James brings them into contact with each other. Even more radical, emotion is given a leading role. He says:

the conceiving or theorizing faculty . . . functions exclusively for the sake of ends that do not exist at all in the world of impressions we receive by way of our senses, but are set by our emotional and practical subjectivity altogether. (1897: 117)

Without 'emotional pertinency', says James, 'there is little to care or act for' (1897: 83). Not only does emotion direct and energize action, it is the source of originality (1897: 247). Thus, emotion is central to James's understanding of human will in a natural world. He wrote on emotion extensively. But his theory of emotion is the least understood part of James's scientific psychology.

In his account of 'The Emotions', outlined in Chapter 25 of the *Principles*, James argues that 'bodily changes follow directly from the perception of an

exciting fact, and that our feelings of [these] changes as they occur *is* the emotion' (1890b: 449). James is saying here that in those emotions in which bodily sensation is implicated – what he calls 'coarse' emotions – bodily sensation is prior to emotional feeling and not the other way round. This claim is counter-intuitive: it is conventionally held that we feel scared, and then we have a creeping sensation over our skin.

The discussion of James's theory of emotion in the relevant literature has been wholly occupied with the question of whether physical sensation necessarily precedes emotional feeling or not. But for James, this was never the issue. His intention in grounding emotional feeling in bodily sensation was to insist that emotions are embodied, that they emanate from the physical self and not from some 'spiritual' source outside a person's experience of self. Thus, James, in effect, opposes culturalist or social constructionist accounts of emotion. These latter disregard the physical being of the emoting self and suppose that external cultural rules and conventions animate an emotional subject.

James's critics have assumed that his somatic theory turns emotion into an epiphenomenon, into 'froth': it is a consequence of sensation, not a cause of behaviour (Oatley, 1992: 133). But this too is a misunderstanding of James's position. James did not hold that emotion was only a result of biological processes. The biological processes themselves are adaptive to the environment, and the role of emotion is crucial in this process. In 'What is an Emotion?', published in 1884 in *Mind*, James says that the 'most important part of my environment' which elicits emotion 'is my fellow-man' (1884: 257). This point was elaborated into a chapter of its own in the *Principles*, 'The Consciousness of Self', in which particular emotions and their behavioural consequences are discussed. This and other accounts spelled out by James indicate the role he acknowledges emotion to have in social adaptation (see Barbalet, 1999).

A theory of the function of emotion in the social world is founded on James's natural scientific theory of emotions. The natural scientific theory provides the basis of a social scientific theory of human intention and practice. Thus James treats the human organism and its social proclivities scientifically as an attribute of the natural world. James was aware that a quality of human emotion is not merely its natural evolutionary function, but its uniquely human quality of purpose. This latter he understands entirely in terms of his natural scientific approach. But it becomes particularly interesting when James's scientific theory of emotion demonstrates that the naturally purposive intentionality of the 'passional' actor undercuts the determinism of dogmatic scientism.

The treatment of determinism in James's scientific psychology is heavily nuanced. He admits that for 'scientific purposes' psychology must claim determinism. But he immediately adds that the 'deterministic assumption of psychology is merely provisional and methodological' (1892: 461). This is because 'Science is a system of fixed relations. Wherever there are independent variables, there science stops' (1892: 457). According to James, then, science 'abstracts from free-will, without necessarily denying its existence'. In practical terms, however, 'such abstraction is not distinguished from rejection' (1892: 457).

Determinism, though, is untenable for James. This is because it 'denies the ambiguity of future volitions, because it affirms that nothing future can be ambiguous' (1897: 158). James does not for a moment believe that the future is open-ended. But he does insist that unlike the past, the future affords different possibilities, and actors therefore must choose between them. James says in *A Pluralistic Universe*, for instance, that what 'really exists is not things made but things in the making' (1909a: 263). There are alternative futures, and in choosing one course of action, the other possibilities are thereby closed (1897: 151, 269).

Thus, James accords great significance to futurity. Indeed, for an understanding of rationality, James says, 'one particular relation is of greater practical importance than all the rest, [that is] the relation of a thing to its consequences' (1897: 77). The difficulty is that the consequences of a thing cannot be known until they occur, and this is always in the future relative to the event whose consequences are of concern to the actor involved. According to James, the question of rationality, and the attendant issue of the unknowability of the future, are matters about which the concept of emotion provides answers.

The ambiguity of the future, an ambiguity which he says is unavoidable, is a source of philosophical and practical distress, according to James (1897: 79–81). The unease which accompanies a sense of futurity is settled by a feeling of expectancy (1897: 77–8). In this affective or emotional displacement of uncertainty concerning the future James locates rationality, or at least the 'sentiment of rationality'. The 'emotional effect of expectation' is to enable actors to proceed in their practical affairs (1897: 78–9). Thus, James characterizes rationality in terms of the particular emotional configuration that enables actors to engage unknowable futures.

The 'feeling of sufficiency in the present moment', which permits persons to 'think with fluency' and to act with purpose, is associated with the feeling of expectation concerning the future. In these ways James characterizes rationality as a property of mind or a quality of action explicable in terms of its emotional qualities. James's conceptualization of rationality in terms of emotional orientations to the future, and his insistence on emotional salience for rationality, is especially evident in his treatment of the role of emotion in decision-making.

In his essay, 'The Will to Believe', James (1897: 23–4) notes that in most social situations action is taken in the absence of evidence as to what might be its most appropriate course. The general form of such a circumstance he calls a 'forced option', a situation in which there is no possibility of not choosing (1897: 3). A paradigm case is whether to trust another. In order to cooperate one must. But whether trust is warranted can only be known after it is given. The decision to trust, therefore, cannot be based on relevant evidence. Under these circumstances the absence of evidence regarding a correct course of action means that calculation to aid decision-making is impossible, and an emotional rather than a logical choice or commitment is necessary if action is to occur at all.

In 'The Sentiment of Rationality' James (1897: 96–7) develops the point, that emotion constructs circumstances, through the case of the 'Alpine climber' in which an actor's particular emotional commitment leads to a singular material

outcome. To escape serious difficulty the Alpine climber must execute a dangerous leap that she has not performed before. If she is engaged by the emotions of confidence and hope, she is likely to perform a feat that would be otherwise impossible. Fear and mistrust, on the other hand, are likely to lead to hesitation, and this will increase the probability that the climber will miss her foothold and fall to her death. Whichever emotion is engaged will be commensurate with a particular outcome, but with contrastingly different consequences.

The role of emotion in practical conduct or human agency, then, is to permit action that would be inhibited if it were to rely on logic or calculation alone. The evidence on which calculation relies is simply not available for most social actions. The emotional contribution to agency is to overcome the uncertainty of the future by providing an emotional orientation to one possible future in the realization of a present action. Otherwise action simply could not occur, and the actor would not be able to proceed.

James's account of particular emotions as continuous with practical rationality derives from a conception of persons as interested, purposive, and active agents in their relations with others, generative of the social reality they experience. And, more to the point, the evolutionary function of emotion is evident in human purposiveness and is realized through humankind's 'passional' nature. The significance James gives to emotions cannot be underestimated, and the extent to which this is a remarkably radical grasp of both philosophical and psychological principles cannot be ignored. As one commentator has noted:

Ever since Plato most philosophers had been suspicious of *feelings* or *emotions*, and regarded them as hindrances to obtaining pure truth; thus a serious thinker must guard against the influence of his emotions or subjective states of mind. But now James not only restored feeling to respectability but argued that it was essential to cognition. In fact, it is only by feeling that one really *knows* an object; if the object is only present in the mind or consciousness and not experienced through the sense and emotions then one only *knows about it*. (Allen, 1967: 266–7; emphasis in original)

James in Europe

By the time he died in 1910 at the age of 68 years, William James was undoubtedly the most influential American thinker of his period, indeed, of any period. His European reputation was possibly even higher than his standing in America. James not only represented to European thinkers the American advances in psychology and philosophy, for which he was largely responsible, but he entered into the formation of contemporary European thought as much as he did American. Indeed, his European reputation came as a 'return wave', as George Santayana described it, that further enhanced James's American reputation (Santayana, 1920: 94).

Although it is true to say that today sociology is largely blind to William James, it must be remembered that his influence on the formation of classical sociology was central. It is well known, for instance, that James was an instrumental source

in the development of American sociological social psychology, and especially the theories of Cooley and Mead (Parsons, 1968; Jandy, 1942; Joas, 1985). But it is too limited to see James's influence confined to what became the symbolic interactionist approach in sociology. The breadth of James's influence can be measured by acknowledging that he was not only an intellectual source of symbolic interactionism, but also of the institutionalist economics and radical sociology of Thorstein Veblen (1914), for instance.

James's significance as a source for sociological development cannot be confined to America. Although the details of the relationship await systematic examination, it is now appreciated that James exerted an influence on the thought of both Max Weber and Emile Durkheim (see, for example, Hennis, 1998; Allcock, 1983), which will be taken up below. Less frequently noted is the influence of James on the sociology of knowledge, as developed by Max Scheler, for instance (Stikkers, 1980: 24–6), and other aspects of social thought (see Hughes, 1961, *passim*). But the extent of James's influence on European thought went much deeper than the intellectual impact he had on the development of sociology.

James's European reputation began at the time he started writing major articles, from 1878. In that year he published two important papers in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* and a brief communication in the French journal *Critique Philosophique*. In the following year he published two important papers in the British journal *Mind*. The editors of *Mind* and *Critique Philosophique* were respectively George Croom Robertson and Charles Renouvier, with whom James established correspondence and a friendship that continued for their lifetimes. James was ideally suited to exploit and develop the European interest in his work. Since boyhood he had spent time in Europe, and he had an excellent command of French and German. In 1882 James had a year's leave from Harvard and spent several months in Europe, from August 1882 to March 1883, during which time he met many people. These included the experimental psychologist Carl Stumpf in Prague in October 1882, the philosopher Ernst Mach, with whom he remained in sympathetic contact, and many others (see Perry, 1935a: 586–627).

Mach's intellectual temperament was similar to James's insofar as he 'was not deterred by academic barriers from importing philosophy into science and science into philosophy' (Perry, 1935a: 587). Like James, Mach was interested in the basis of knowledge in experience (Perry, 1935a: 588), but unlike James, had no interest in the affective side of the equation (Mach, 1897). This is mentioned here because it sets a frequently repeated pattern: some common points of contact bring James close to a particular European thinker, but there remains a failure on the part of his associate to grasp, accept, or otherwise appreciate James's understanding of emotion and its significance, with a consequent intellectual, although not necessarily personal, breach between them.

James in Weber and Durkheim

Two writers central to the development of modern sociology who did understand the importance of the emotions to James, but who evaluated it differently, were Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. It is a measure of James's influence on European thought that the founders of sociology in Germany and France respectively could not avoid a discussion of James's relevant ideas. While Weber and Durkheim offered contrastingly different accounts of religion, they each gave religion a central place in key foundational monographs in characteristic statements of their sociologies, Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) and Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) was discussed by both of them.

It is of passing interest that during his visit to America in 1904, to attend the World Congress of Arts and Science in St Louis, Weber met James, probably in Harvard. It is necessary to indicate a probable location of their meeting because while Weber alludes to the simple fact that a meeting did take place (1906: 308), he provides no further details. In her discussion of Weber's American visit, Marianne Weber neglects to even mention James or Weber's meeting with him (1926: 279–304). Marianne does, though, mention that Weber visited Boston and especially Harvard, where they 'felt that they were on familiar soil' (1926: 301). She also mentions meeting Hugo Münsterberg. Münsterberg was a German experimental psychologist and philosopher who had studied at the University of Heidelberg and later taught at the University of Freiburg, where he knew Weber. He was appointed to a position at Harvard through James's endeavours, with whom he worked (see Simon, 1999: 226–7, 325–7). It is likely that it was Münsterberg who introduced Weber and James. Curiously, there is nothing in James's writing, including his correspondence that has been located by the present writer, which refers to his meeting with Weber.

Weber famously argued in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination has an elective affinity with the spirit of capitalism, with a particular commitment to calculative maximizing market behaviour. This is because the typical coping strategies of the psychological consequences of Calvinist doctrine are involvement in practical worldly activity (1905: 111–12). Weber goes on to draw out the implications for social practices of the relevant religious principles. The Calvinist's commitment to practical worldly activity, according to Weber, derives from the inclination to perform 'good works', not as a means of attaining salvation, but as a means of 'getting rid of the fear of damnation' (1905: 115). The hallmark of the Calvinist ethic, according to Weber, is a 'life of good works combined into a unified system' (1905: 117). One aspect of such a system is the need to eliminate what would otherwise distract from the continuous and steady application of effort to constant purpose, namely the source of spontaneous and impulsive enjoyment, the emotions (1905: 119).

Given Weber's treatment of Calvinism in terms of its characteristic doctrines, and his broad rejection of the significance of emotions, as both object and

method (see Barbalet, 2000), it was inevitable that antipathy would be the form of his intellectual relationship with James. Indeed, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber has only one reference to James, not in the text but in a dismissive footnote. In it he writes that the ‘content of ideas of a religion is, as Calvinism shows, far more important than William James (*Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902: 444ff.) is inclined to admit’ (Weber, 1905: 232).

James does not in fact deny that philosophy or ideas have a place in religion, but that place is secondary to the affective basis of faith. James writes that beliefs, including religious beliefs are fixed by passions not reason, and the latter only ‘dignifies it and lends it words and plausibility’ (1902: 333). For Weber, meaning, value and purpose require the suppression of emotion (1903–6: 179–82), whereas for James, whatever value, interest, or meaning there is in the world arises through our emotional experiences of it (1902: 128). Thus, Weber was on a collision course with James, a fact simply ignored in a detailed statement of the extent to which James was known to Weber and his circle (Hennis, 1998).

Emile Durkheim also read James, and other pragmatic writers, extensively. This is especially demonstrated in his lectures on pragmatism, delivered in Paris in 1913 and 1914 (Durkheim, 1983). In the slightly earlier *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), Durkheim makes one explicit reference to James’s *Varieties*, as Weber had done in the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The context is Durkheim’s discussion, in the Conclusion of *Elementary Forms*, of the orientation of religious believers: ‘they sense that the true function of religion is not to make us think [or] enrich our knowledge . . . [but] to make us act and to help us live’ (1912: 419). While Durkheim accepts this understanding of religion, he does not accept that the capacities to achieve this force or power are endogenous to the religious beliefs themselves.

Durkheim holds that in order for beliefs to be real in their consequences, they must be encapsulated in action. This is not one action or even a number of disconnected actions, but structured repetitions of actions, what he describes as ‘regularly repeated actions’ (1912: 420). Durkheim goes on to say that:

anyone who has truly practiced a religion knows very well that it is the cult that stimulates the feeling of joy, inner peace, serenity, and enthusiasm that, for the faithful, stand as experimental proof of their beliefs. The cult is not merely a system of signs by which the faith is outwardly expressed; it is the sum total of means by which that faith is created and recreated periodically. Whether the cult consists of physical operations or mental ones, it is always the cult that is efficacious. (1912: 420)

For James, on the other hand, individual experience is enough. But Durkheim does not disagree with James’s emphasis on experience. According to Durkheim, ‘This entire study rests on the postulate that the unanimous feeling of believers down the ages cannot be mere illusion’ (1912: 420). He immediately acknowledges that he accepts, with James, ‘that religious belief rests on a definite experience, whose demonstrative value is, in a sense, not inferior to that of scientific experiments, though it is different’ (1912: 420). Durkheim and James disagree, though, about the level of experience generative of religion, as suggested above.

In summary, Durkheim does not accept James's supposition that the experience at the root of religion is individual but holds such experiences to be collective: 'Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rites are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain, or recreate certain mental states of those groups' (1912: 9). But it is too simplistic to argue that Durkheim was opposed to James, because of this and associated matters, as Lukes, for instance, suggests (Lukes, 1975: 460; see also pp. 485–96). Durkheim also drew upon other aspects of James's thought and in his own way applied James's central ideas concerning emotions.

At the beginning of the opening chapter of *Elementary Forms* Durkheim insists that in order to understand religion and advance its scientific study, it is essential to avoid the pitfalls of earlier practitioners. He refers explicitly to a leading contemporary practitioner of the comparative scientific study of religions, Sir James Frazer, who, like his predecessors and colleagues, 'failed to recognize the profoundly religious character of the beliefs and rites that will be studied below' (1912: 21). It is too easy to slide over the significance of this remark, and it is necessary to be aware that the revolution in the scientific study of religion that Durkheim implicitly refers to here, and that he draws on and benefits from, is the publication of James's *Varieties*.

Through the publication of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), James set the study of religion on a course that had hitherto been absent, namely one that insisted upon the authenticity and validity of religious belief premised on religious experience. Without this perspective being established by James, Durkheim simply would not have been able to proceed, and would not have been able to declare:

It is unthinkable that systems of ideas like religions, which have held such a large place in history – the well to which peoples in all ages have come to draw the energy they had to have in order to live – could be mere fabrics of illusion. (1912: 66)

Sociologists rather than the believers themselves, Durkheim says, must, however, answer the question, concerning which 'realm of nature these realities belong'. He continues, 'But to make the posing of that question even possible, we must first allow that real things are conceived of in that way' (1912: 66).

What facilitated Durkheim's sociological study of religion, then, was James's conception of religion in terms of experience, and belief predicated on experience. Additionally, Durkheim takes up the emotional dimension of religious experience, central to James's account. Durkheim is no stranger to the importance of emotion in social life, although commentators have seen this as a weakness (Lukes, 1975: 448–9). In Durkheim's earliest important work, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), for instance, a key concept, 'collective conscience', is largely defined in terms of the socially pervasive emotions or sentiments that connect the actions and inclinations of otherwise separate individuals in a society (1893: 79–85). The importance of emotion in Durkheim's sociology is continued in *Elementary Forms*.

The importance of experience of reality as foundation to religion, which Durkheim in general terms accepts, was associated at the time with the work of Max Müller. But Müller's meaning is not Durkheim's. According to Müller, in Durkheim's words, 'the varied spectacles that nature offers to man seem to meet all the necessary conditions for arousing the religious idea in the mind directly' (1912: 71). In Müller's account, then, experiences generating or supporting religious ideas are cognitive or intellectual. But many of the cognitive representations derived from religious ideas are misleading if not false, as Durkheim notes:

If the point of religion was to give us a representation of the world that would guide us in our dealings with it, then religion was in no position to carry out its function, and humanity would not have been slow to notice that fact. (1912: 77)

The experiential reality on which religion draws has a source other than the one Müller points to.

Durkheim's review of Müller's argument points to the need to identify an experiential reality that can coexist with the factual errors that are so frequently encountered in religion. He finds it in the emotional basis of commitment and action. Indeed, Durkheim's formulation parallels James's in referring to what is pragmatically or practically true. A factual error that 'does indeed perpetuate itself in history', Durkheim says, can do so only when

it proves to be *practically true* – that is to say, if, while not giving us a correct theoretical idea of the things to which it is related, it expresses correctly enough the manner in which those things affect us, for better or for worse. (1912: 77; emphasis in original)

By identifying the force of an idea or experience in 'the manner in which . . . [it] affects us', Durkheim refers to affective or emotional reality that James had earlier described as underlying religion. He goes on to say, 'Under those conditions, behaviour decided upon for the wrong reasons has every chance of being the right behaviour, at least overall; and so why the error could have survived the test of experience becomes understandable' (1912: 77). By picking up the emotional dimension of experience as the basis of action, Durkheim is able to demonstrate the relative insignificance of the factual content of religious ideas. While Müller had sought to ground religion in cognitive experience, Durkheim turned to the source of religion in feelings and emotions that sustained actions and, in doing so, particular beliefs, including religious beliefs.

Durkheim's arguments do not merely draw on James's in the manner indicated above. In his discussion of mourning ritual, for instance, is a fuller mobilization of James's approach to emotion. An important aspect of James's theory of emotions is what might be called the somatic proposition (see Papanicolaou, 1989). As we saw above, James argued against the common-sense idea that perception of some fact leads to mental affection or emotion and this, in turn, produces the physical arousal that is typically held to come as a consequence of the affective state. James's approach, on the other hand, holds that the bodily changes precede the feeling, and that in the absence of these changes the perception that gives emotion its object 'would be purely cognitive in form, pale,

colourless, destitute of emotional warmth' (James, 1884: 248). Whereas James is concerned with the emotional experience of individuals, as we have seen, Durkheim outlines the evidence for a somatic account of emotions in his treatment of ritual mourning.

Durkheim presented data and argument demonstrating that the coordination of physical or bodily actions and gestures in ritual are productive of collateral emotions. In his discussion of piacular rites, for instance, Durkheim shows that it is not thoughts of the deceased on the parts of the mourners, but their self-laceration and other physical activities that generate the appropriate emotions (1912: 392–417). The importance of Durkheim's argument, which has gone more or less unnoticed, is that it alerts us to the emotional consequences of the engagement of bodily dispositions in rites, and social institutions in general (see Barbalet, 1994). The significance of this aspect of Durkheim's treatment of Aboriginal religious rites in the present context is that they project onto the collective dimension an analogue of James's somatic theory of emotions.

Conclusion: James and Freud

At the core of James thought is a social psychology of emotions that has been regularly and frequently ignored in the secondary literature on both pragmatism and its impact on sociology. Its influence on the development of sociology, when it has been acknowledged, has been depreciated and misunderstood. Why this is so cannot be grasped by reference to singular causes or simple explanations to do with the merit or otherwise of James's emotional pragmatism. But it is not simplistic to say that the rise of Freudian psychology in Europe tended to displace alternative approaches to mind and emotion at just the time that James's account of emotions was having an impact on classical European sociology. The Freudian invasion of the United States has served, ironically, to prevent an adequate airing of James's social psychology on his home ground.

It is sometimes understood that James accepted Freudian psychology. Stuart Hughes, for instance, in referring to Freud's American tour and his address at Clark University in Massachusetts wrote that:

James, although fatally ill himself, came to hear [Freud]. At the close of the lecture series, he told the visitor from Vienna: 'The future of psychology belongs to your work.' There is no more dramatic moment in the intellectual history of our time. (Hughes, 1961: 113)

That James appreciated the historical significance of psychoanalysis was not, however, an endorsement of Freud's psychology. In a letter reporting his encounter with Freud, James wrote that:

I hope that Freud and his pupils will push their ideas to their utmost limits, so that we may learn what they are. They can't fail to throw light on human nature; but I confess that he made on me personally the impression of a man obsessed with fixed ideas. I can make nothing in my own case with his dream theories, and obviously 'symbolism' is a most dangerous method. (quoted in Perry, 1935b: 122)

James appreciated not the intellectual value of Freud's thought but the way in which it emotionally corresponded with cultural currents of the day.

It is not appropriate here to spell out the differences between the approach to emotion in James and Freud. Nevertheless, in order to understand the neglect of James's account of emotions and the appeal of Freud's from the period of the First World War, only two things need be mentioned. James's account of human emotions is essentially optimistic: it operates in terms of prospective futures that social agents have a role in forming. Emotions, for James, are a creative and decisive force in human affairs, appropriately guiding social agents through situations to what would otherwise be inconclusive outcomes. According to Freud, on the other hand, emotions are necessarily irrational forces that, if not properly discharged, lead to neurotic symptoms. Freud's account resonated perfectly with a political, social and economic world that was experiencing not only the irrationality and violence of total war, but also economic depression and dislocation.

Additionally, the appeal of a theory of emotions that legitimated and sanctioned the removal of inhibitions on public discussion of sexual matters was enormous. James had nothing to offer in this domain that could match the appeal of Freud's theory of emotions to populations in Europe and America who were increasingly free of the restraints of conventional morality sponsored by the traditional authorities of religion and class.

With the recent resurgence of interest in pragmatism within the humanities and social sciences, James also enjoys the benefit of a new readership. The important but neglected contribution James made to the development of classical sociology provides opportunities for reconsideration not only of the nature and direction of sociological theory, but also the significance of emotions in social processes.

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