Pragmatism and Religion
(First Lecture in Gerona)

1. Sin and Truth

The title of this series of lectures perhaps should have been "pragmatism as anti-authoritarianism." I shall be interpreting the pragmatists' objection to the view that truth is a matter of correspondence to the intrinsic nature of reality on the analogy of the Enlightenment's criticism of the view that morality is a matter of correspondence to the will of a Divine Being. I see the pragmatists' account of truth, and more generally their anti-representationalist account of belief, as a protest against the idea that human beings must humble themselves before something non-human, whether the Will of God or the Intrinsic Nature of Reality. So I shall begin by developing an analogy which I think was central to John Dewey's thought: the analogy between ceasing to believe in Sin and ceasing to believe that Reality has an intrinsic nature.

Dewey was convinced that the romance of democracy--that is, taking the point of human life to be free cooperation with our fellow humans in order to improve our situation--required a more thorough-going version secularism than either Enlightenment rationalism or nineteenth-century positivism had achieved. It requires us to set aside any authority save that of a consensus of our fellow humans. The paradigm of subjection to such authority is believing oneself to be in a state of Sin. When the sense of Sin goes, Dewey thought, so should the duty to seek for

correspondence to the way things are. In its place a democratic culture will put the duty to seek unforced agreement with other human beings about what beliefs will sustain and facilitate projects of social cooperation.

To have a sense of Sin, it is not enough for you to be appalled by the way human beings treat each other, and by your own capacity for malice. You have to believe that there is a Being before whom we ought to humble ourselves. This Being issues commands which, even if they seem arbitrary and unlikely to increase human happiness, must be obeyed. When trying to acquire a sense of Sin, it helps a lot if you can manage to think of a specific sexual or dietary practice as forbidden, even though it does not seem to be doing anybody any harm. It also helps to anguish about whether you are calling the divine Being by the name he or she prefers.

To take the traditional correspondentist notion of Truth with full seriousness, you must agree with Clough, that "It fortifies my soul to know/That, though I perish, Truth is so." You must feel uneasy when you read William James saying that "ideas...become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience." Those who resonate to Clough's lines think of Truth--or, more precisely, Reality as it is in itself, the object accurately represented by true sentences--as an authority we must respect.

To respect Truth and Reality in the relevant *proper way*, it is not enough to adjust one's behavior to changes in the environment: to

come in when it rains, or to shun bears. You must also think of Reality not just as an assortment of such things as rain and bears, but as something which, so to speak, looms behind such things--something august and remote. The best way to get into this way of thinking is become an epistemological sceptic--to start worrying about whether human language is capable of representing the way Reality is in itself, whether we are calling Reality by the right names. To worry in this way, you need to take seriously the question of whether our descriptions of Reality may not be all too human--whether Reality (and therefore Truth as well) may not stand aloof, beyond the reach of the sentences in which we formulate our beliefs. You must be prepared to distinguish, at least in principle, between the sort of belief which embodies Truth and beliefs which are merely tools, beliefs which merely increase your chances of happiness.

Dewey was quite willing to say of a vicious act that it was sinful, and of "2+2=5" or "Elizabeth the First's reign ended in 1623" that these sentences were absolutely, unconditionally, eternally, false. But he was unwilling to say that a power not ourselves had forbidden cruelty, or that these false sentences fail to accurately represent the way Reality is in itself. He thought it much clearer that we should not be cruel than that there was a God who had forbidden us to be cruel, and much clearer that 2+2=4 than that there is any way things are "in themselves". He viewed the theory that truth is correspondence to Reality, and the theory that moral goodness is correspondence to

the Divine Will, as equally dispensable.

For Dewey, both theories add nothing to our ordinary, workaday, fallible ways of telling the good from the bad and the true from the false. But their pointlessness is not the real problem. What Dewey most disliked about both traditional "realist" epistemology and about traditional religious beliefs is that they discourage us by telling us that somebody or something has authority over us. Both tell us that there is Something Inscrutable, something which claims precedence over our cooperative attempts to avoid pain and obtain pleasure.

Dewey, like James, was a utilitarian: he thought that in the end the only moral or epistemological criteria we have or need is whether performing an action, or holding a belief, will, in the long run, make for greater human happiness. He saw progress as produced by increasing willingness to experiment, to get our from under the past. So he hoped we should learn to view current scientific, religious, philosophical and moral beliefs with the scepticism with which Bentham viewed the laws of England: he hoped each new generation would try to cobble together some more useful beliefs--beliefs which would help them make human life richer, fuller and happier.

2. Classical Pragmatism

So much for an introductory statement of the theme which I shall be developing. Shortly I shall rehearse this theme in another key by bringing in Freud. But it may be useful if I first

say something about the similarities and differences, particularly in regard to their views about religion, between Dewey and the other two classical pragmatists: Charles Sanders Peirce and William James.

Peirce kicked pragmatism off by starting from Alexander Bain's definition of belief as a rule or habit of action. Starting from this definition, Peirce argued that the function of inquiry is not to represent reality, but rather to enable us to act more effectively. This means getting rid of the "copy theory" of knowledge which had dominated philosophy since the time of Descartes—and especially of the idea of intuitive self-knowledge, knowledge unmediated by signs. As one of the first philosophers to say that the ability to use signs is essential to thought, Peirce was a prophet of what Gustav Bergman called "the linguistic turn in philosophy".

Like 19th-century idealists such as T.H. Green and Josiah Royce, Peirce was anti-foundationalist, coherentist, and holist in his view of the nature of inquiry. But he did not, as most of Hegel's anglophone followers did, think of God as an all-inclusive, atemporal experience which is identical with Reality. Rather, as a good Darwinian, Peirce thought of the universe as evolving. His God was a finite deity who is somehow identical with an evolutionary process which he called "the growth of Thirdness". This quaint term signifies the gradual linking of everything up with everything else through triadic relationships. Rather strangely, and without much in the way of argument, Peirce

took all triadic relationships to be sign-relations, and vice versa. His philosophy of language was intertwined with a quasi-idealistic metaphysics.

James and Dewey both admired Peirce, and shared his sense that philosophy must come to terms with Darwin. But they sensibly paid little attention to his metaphysics of Thirdness. Instead they focused on the profound anti-Cartesian implications of Peirce's development of Bain's initial anti-representationalist insight. They developed a non-representationalist theory of belief acquisition and testing which culminates in James' claim that "'The true'...is only the expedient in our way of thinking'. James and Dewey both wanted to reconcile philosophy with Darwin by making human beings' pursuit of the true and the good continuous with the activities of the lower animals—cultural evolution with biological evolution.

All three of the founding pragmatists combined a naturalistic, Darwinian view of human beings with a distrust of the problems which philosophy had inherited from Descartes, Hume and Kant. All three hoped also to save moral and religious ideals from empiricist or positivist scepticism. It is important, however, not to be blinded by these similarities, and by the fact that the three men are always treated as members of a single "movement", to the fact that they had very different philosophical concerns. It is probably only the chauvinistic need to have a distinctively American philosophy which has engendered the idea of a pragmatic movement. It is best, I think,

to view these three men simply as three interesting philosophers who happened to be American, and had a perceptible influence on each other's work--but as no more closely allied with one another than, say, Brentano, Husserl and Russell.

Although of the three knew and respected the other two, the motives that drove them to philosophy were very different. Peirce thought of himself as a disciple of Kant, improving on Kant's doctrine of categories and his conception of logic. A practicing mathematician and laboratory scientist, he was more interested in these areas of culture than were James or Dewey. James took neither Kant nor Hegel very seriously, but was far more interested in religion than either Peirce or Dewey. Dewey, deeply influenced by Hegel, was fiercely anti-Kantian. Education and politics, rather than science or religion, were at the center of his thought.

Peirce was a brilliant, cryptic, and prolific polymath, whose writings are very difficult to piece together into a coherent system. Peirce protested James' appopriation of his ideas, for complex reasons having to do with his obscure and idiosyncratic metaphysics, and in particular with his doctrine of "Scotistic realism"--the reality of universals, sometimes considered as triadic relations, sometimes as sign-relationships, sometimes as potentialities and sometimes as dispositions. Peirce was more sympathetic to idealism than James, and found James' version of pragmatism simplistic and reductionist. James himself, however, thought of pragmatism as a way of avoiding

reductionism of all kinds, and as a counsel of tolerance.

Although he viewed many metaphysical and theological disputes as, at best, exhibitions of the diversity of human temperament, James hoped to construct an alternative to the anti-religious, science-worshipping, positivism of his day. He approvingly cited Giovanni Papini's description of pragmatism as "like a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable chambers open out of it. In one you may find a man writing an atheistic volume; in the next someone on his knees praying for faith; in a third a chemist investigating a body's properties...they all own the corridor, and all must pass through it." His point was that attention to the implications of beliefs for practice offered the only way to communicate across divisions between temperaments, academic disciplines, and philosophical schools. In particular, such attention offered the only way to mediate between the claims of religion and those of science.

Dewey, in his early period, tried to bring Hegel together with evangelical Christianity. Although references to Christianity almost disappear from his writings around 1900, in a 1903 essay on Emerson he still looked forward to the development of "a philosophy which religion has no call to chide, and which knows its friendship with science and with art." The anti-positivist strain in classical pragmatism was at least as strong as its anti-metaphysical strain.

Dewey urged that we make no sharp distinction between moral deliberation and proposals for change in socio-political

institutions, or in education. He saw changes in individual attitudes, in public policies, and in strategies of acculturation as three interlinked aspects of the gradual development of freer and more democratic communities, and of the better sort of human being who would be developed within such communities. All of Dewey's books are permeated by the typically nineteenth-century conviction that human history is the story of expanding human freedom, and by the hope of substituting a less professionalized, more politically-oriented, conception of the philosopher's task for the Platonic conception of the philosoher as "spectator of time and eternity." He thought that Kant, especially in his moral philosophy, had preserved that Platonic conception.

In Reconstruction in Philosophy (1920) Dewey wrote that "under disguise of dealing with ultimate reality, philosophy has been occupied with the precious values embedded in social traditions...has sprung from a clash of social ends and from a conflict of inherited institutions with incompatible contemporary tendencies." For him, the task of future philosophy was not be to achieve new solutions to traditional problems, but to clarify "men's ideas as to the social and moral strifes of their own day." This historicist conception of philosophy, which developed out of Hegel's and resembled Marx's, has made Dewey less popular among analytic philosophers than Peirce or James. His intense concern with parochially American political and social issues has also served to limit interest in his work. Yet precisely because of his self-conscious historicism Dewey was, I shall be arguing

in these lectures, the classical pragmatist whose work may have the greatest utility in the long term.

Whether or not Dewey is the most useful of the three classical pragmatists, Peirce seems to me the least useful. Although he wrote more than either of the other two, and was perhaps the most "professional" of the three, his thought lacked focus and direction. Contemporary philosophers who call themselves pragmatists typically take over only one thing from Peirce: his substitution of talk of "signs" for talk of "experience". Instead of "signs", however, they speak of "language", which means excluding what Peirce called "icons" and "indices" from the realm of signs, and including only what Peirce called "symbols". It seems safe to say the if Peirce had never lived, that would have made no great difference to the history of philosophy. For Frege would have made the linguistic turn single-handedly.

Some contemporary philosophers, such as Hilary Putnam and Juergen Habermas, give Peirce an importance that I would not. That is because these two philosopher take over Peirce's definition of "truth" as that to which opinion is fated to converge at the end of inquiry, of of "reality" as what is believed to exist at that convergence point. I do not find this notion of convergence clear or helpful, for reasons that I shall be giving in later lectures.

My main reason for thinking Peirce relatively unimportant, however, is that he does not become engaged, in the way in which

James and Dewey did become engaged, with the problem which dominated Kant's thought and which was at the center of 19th century thought in every Western country: the problem of how to reconcile science and religion, how to be faithful both to
~~Newton and Darwin~~ the scientific enterprise and to the spirit of Christ. That problem is the paradigm of the sort of conflict between old ways of speaking and new cultural developments which Dewey it to be the philosopher's task to resolve.

The need to reconcile science and religion was all-important for Dewey during his first thirty years, and for James throughout his life. By contrast, Peirce's discussion of it consists of rather banal remarks--remarks which were the commonplaces of 19th-century thought. We find him saying, for example, that the apparent clash between these two areas of culture is the result of "the unphilosophical narrowness of those who guard the mysteries of worship." He rejects the suggestion that he is "to be prevented from joining in that common joy at the revelation of enlightened principles of religion which we celebrate at Christmas and Easter because I think that certain scientific, logical and metaphysical ideas which have been mixed up with these principles are unentable". (6.427) He says that the only distinctive thing about Christianity is the idea that love is the only law (6.440-1) and that Christianity's ideal "is that the whole world shall be united in the bond of a common love of God accomplished by each man's loving his neighbor". 6.443) This is a pretty standard 19th-century anglophone way of following up on

Kant's <u>Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone</u>. It amounts to
saying that you can Christian ethics without Christian theology,
and therefore without interfering with Newtonian cosmology or
Darwinian accounts of human origins.

This easy compromise struck James and Dewey, as it struck
Nietzsche, as <u>too</u> easy. This is because these men took religion a
lot more seriously than Peirce ever did. Peirce was raised an
Episcopalian, claimed that that was the only religion for a
gentleman, and experienced, as far as we now, no great spiritual
crises which expressed themselves in religious terms.

James was raised by his eccentric father on a kind of
idiosyncratic blend of Swedenborg and Emerson. Though he and his
siblings had the good sense not to take their father's
idiosyncratic theological <u>ideas</u> with any great seriousness,
William took his father's religious <u>experiences</u> very seriously
indeed. He suffered the same sort of spiritual crises as had
afflicted Henry James, Sr., and was never sure whether to
describe them in psychological or religious language.

Dewey was the only one of the three classical pragmatists to
have had a really strenuous religious upbringing--the only one
to have encountered religion, so to speak, in its full fury. He
was also the only one ever swallowed it full strength. His mother
continually asked him "Are you right with Jesus?" and his
biographers agree that belated resentment at his mother's
meddling piety was central to the formation of Dewey's mature
thought.

Despite the fact that James never had to cast off an orthodoxy imposed in his youth, the need to bring his father into the same intellectual universe as that inhabited by his scientifically-oriented friends (such as Peirce and Chauncey Wright), was very important in shaping his thought. I suspect that we owe the pragmatist theory of truth of truth to this need. For the underlying motive of that theory is to give us a way to reconcile science and religion by viewing them not as two competing ways of representing reality, but rather two non-competing ways of producing happiness. I take the anti-representationalist view of thought and language to have been motivated, in James' case, by the realization that the need for choice between competing representations can be replaced by tolerance for a plurality of non-competing descriptions, descriptions which serve different purposes and which are to be evaluated by reference to their utility in fulfilling these purposes rather than by their "fit" with the objects being described.

If James' watchword was tolerance, then Dewey's was, as I have said, anti-authoritarianism. His revulsion from the sense of sinfulness which his religious upbringing had produced led Dewey to campaign, throughout his life, against the view that human beings needed to measure themselves against something non-human. As I shall be saying in more detail later, Dewey used the term "democracy" to mean something like what Habermas means by the term "communicative reason": for him, this word sums up the idea

that human beings should regulate their actions and beliefs by the need to join with other human beings in cooperative projects, rather than by the need to stand in the correct relation to something non-human. This is why he grabbed hold of James' pragmatic theory of truth.

Although James will always be the most sympathetic and most readable of the three classical pragmatists, Dewey was, I think, the most imaginative. This is because he was the most historically-minded: the one who learned from Hegel how to tell great sweeping stories about the relation of the human present to the human past. Dewey's stories are always stories of the progress from the need of human communities to rely on a non-human power to their realization that all they need is faith in themselves; they are stories about the substition of fraternity for authority. His stories about history as the story of increasing freedom are stories about how we lost our sense of sin, and also our hope of another world, and gradually acquired the ability to find the same spiritual significance in cooperation between finite mortals that our ancestors had found in their relation to an immortal being. His way of clarifying "men's ideas as to the social and moral strifes of their own day" was to ask his contemporaries to consider the possibility that weekday cooperation in building democratic communities could provide everything "higher"--everything which had once been reserved for weekends.

3. Pragmatism as Liberation from the Primal Father

Before saying more about the pragmatists' way of reconciling of religion and science, I want to make an excursus into Freud. Freud's account of the origin of conscience, of the superego, seems to me another version of the anti-authoritarian strain which motivated Dewey. The dialectical standoff in contemporary analytic philosophy between pragmatists and their "realist" opponents is best understood as the reciprocal unintelligibilty to one another of two types of people. The first are those whose highest hopes are for union with something beyond the human-- something which is the source of one's superego, and which has the authority to free one of guilt and shame. The second are those whose highest hopes are for a better human future, to be attained by more fraternal cooperation between human beings. These two types of people are conveniently describable in Freudian terms: they are the people who are still subject to the need to ally themselves with an authority-figure and those who are untroubled by this need.

Hans Blumenberg has argued that the Renaissance was a period in which people turned from eternity to futurity. This turn is the one which, in my view, is fully accomplished, in the area of philosophy, only by pragmatism. The de-eternalization of human hope had to wait four hundred years to become philosophically explicit. The representationalist tradition in philosophy which was dominant in those four hundred years hoped that inquiry would put us in touch, if not with the eternal, at least with something which, in Bernard Williams' phrase, "is there anyway"--something

non-perspectival, something which is what it is apart from human needs and interests. Pragmatists do not think inquiry can put us more in touch with non-human reality than we have always been, so in their view the only question is: will human life be better in the future if we adopt this belief, this practise, this institution?

Freud, in his last and wackiest book, <u>Moses and Monotheism</u>, offers us an account of human progress which complements Blumenberg's. There he tells the story of how social cooperation emerges from parricide, from the murder of the primal father by the primal band of brothers:

> It must be supposed that after the parricide a considerable time elapsed during which the brothers disputed with one another for their father's heritage, which each of them wanted for himself alone. A realization of the dangers and uselessness of these struggles, a recollection of the act of liberation which they had accomplished together, and the emotional ties with one another which had arisen during the period of their explusion, led at last to an agreement among them, a sort of social contract.
>
> [But] recollection of their father persisted at this period of the 'fraternal alliance'. A powerful animal-- at first, perhaps, always one that was feared as well-- was chosen as a subsitute for the father...On the one hand the totem was regareed as the clan's blood

ancestor and protective spirit, who must be worshipped

and protected, and on the other hand a festival was

appointed at which the same fate was prepared for him

the the primal father had met with. He was killed and

devoured by all the tribesmen in common... (S.E., v.

23, 82-3)

Freud goes on to argue that totemism was "the first form

in which religion was manifested in history", and to claim that

"the first step away from totemism was the humanizing of the

being who was worshipped". This humanization produced first a

mother-goddess, and then polytheism of mixed genders. Polytheism

was succeded by the great patriarchal monotheisms, through a

processen polytheism, through a process which phallogocentrists

call "purification" and which Freud regarded as a recapturing of

psycho-historical truth. In these religions, the murdered father

was restored to his rightful role as one who demanded

unconditional obedience, although he was now banished from the

earth to the sky.

Platonism, one can imagine Freud saying, was a

depersonalized version of this sort of monotheism--a further

attempt at so-called purification. In this depersonalized form,

proper respect for a de-humanized father-figure is shown not by

obedience to him but by an attempt to become identical with him.

We do this by surrendering everything in us which seperates us

from him (such as space, time, and the body). We good sons aim

at becoming identical, so to speak, with good, kind, loving,

generous aspects of father, while ignoring the violent and willful aspects. Platonism gives us a way of imitating, so to speak, all that was great and good and admirable in our fathers without having to imitate their unpleasant idiosyncrasies. We wish, by purifying ourselves, to become identical with what father would have been like if he had ever managed to behave decently. ~~The Idea of the~~ God is Father stripped of parts and passions.

In the broad sense of the word "metaphysics" which Heidegger employs when he says that metaphysics is Platonism and Platonism metaphysics, metaphysics looks to pragmatists like an attempt to snuggle up to something so pure and good as to be not really human, while still being enough like a loving parent so that it can be loved with all one's heart and soul and strength. Plato's infatuation with mathematics--the paradigm of something neither willful nor arbitrary nor violent, something which embodied anagke with no trace of bia--gave him the model for this being: the outline of the father-figure, so to speak, without any distracting detail.

Freud's interest in Plato was in fact restricted almost entirely to the discussions of Eros and of androgyny in the Symposium, but suppose that he had turned his eyes on the Theory of Ideas. Had he done so, I think that he would seen worship of the bare Idea of Father as the origin of the conviction that it is knowledge, rather than love, which is the most distinctively human achievement. For Plato arranged things so that we could

please Father best by doing mathematics, or, at a second best, mathematical physics.

This conviction of the importance of knowledge runs through the history of what Derrida calls "the metaphysics of presence"-- the history of the Western search for a still point in the turning world, something one can always rely on, always come home to, something, as Derrida says, "beyond the reach of play". The quest for such a reassuring presence is, for all those who resonate to Aristotle's claim that "all men by nature desire to know", the proper way of life for the good son. To devote oneself to getting knowledge as opposed to opinion--to grasping unchanging structure as opposed to awareness of mutable and colorful content--one has to belive that one will be cleansed, purified of guilt and shame, by getting closer to something like Truth or Reality. When opponents of pragmatism say that pragmatists do not belive in truth, they are saying that they pragmatists do not grasp the need for such closeness, and therefore do not see the need for purification. They are, their metaphysically-inclined opponents suggest, _shameless_ in their wilingness to revel in the mutable and impermanent. Like women and children, they seem to have no superego, no consience, no spirit of seriousness.

As Blumenberg sees it, the repersonalization of God which occurred when Christianity took over eventually turned itself inside out. It did so when Occam drew the voluntaristic consequences of Divine Otherness, and thereby helped reduce

monothesism, if not to absurdity, at least to unusability by the intellectuals. Occamism made the will of our Father in Heaven so inscrutable that all connection snapped between his will and our desires, between us and Him. He became less like somebody to get close to than somebody who could tolerate no relation save sheer obedience. He ceased to be a possible object of contemplation and rapport. So the rediscovery of Plato by the Renaissance humanists repeated the move toward depersonalization, and the turn from theology to metaphysics, which had been made when the Idea of the Good offered a purified form of worship to pagan intellectuals.

Dewey never read any Freud to speak of, but if he had I think that he would have accepted Freud's account of the maturation of humanity, and he could have used it to strenghen and supplement his own story of how the West overcame Greek dualisms in the course of inventing modern technology and modern liberal societies--two inventions which he took to be part of the same anti-authoritarian movement. He would have seen the successive de-centerings performed by Copernicus, Darwin and Freud himself as helpful in forcing us to stop looking outside the human community for salvation, and making us instead explore the possibilities offered by social cooperation. In particular, I think that he might have seen modern democratic societies as founded on, as it were, fraternity alone--that is to say, fraternity freed from memory of paternal authority. Only pragmatism reaps the full advantages of parricide.

Only in a democratic society which describes itself in

pragmatist terms, one can imagine Dewey saying, is the refusal to countenance any authority save that of consensus reached by free inquiry complete. Only then can the fraternity which was first glimpsed when the primal father was killed by the band of brothers be achieved. This achievement had been deferred by the many attempts, made over many millenia, to come to terms with the spectre of the murdered father: the attempts which make up the history of monotheism and of metaphysics. It will no longer be deferred, Dewey thought, once we come to treat our collective superego, our collective sense of what counts as a moral abomination, as having no authority seperate from that of tradition, and when we treat tradition itself as endlessly malleable and revisable by its inheritors.

I hope that it is clear by now why I chose the title "Anti-Authoritarianism in Epistemology and Ethics" for this series of lectures. By anti-authoritarianism in ethics I mean the development of the attitude I just described--the attitude that make our sense of what counts as a moral abomination not an insight produced by a part of ourselves that is linked to something non-human and good, but simply a revisable cultural inheritance. By anti-authoritarianism in epistemology I mean the substitution of intersubjectivity, in the form of free consensus among the members of those curious enough to inquire, for objectivity, where objectivity is understood as a privileged relation to a non-human being, such as God or Reality or Truth.

4. James' Way of Reconciling Religion and Science

I turn now, in this final section of my lecture, to one of the least popular and most criticized portions of William James' work: this essay "The Will to Believe." This essay argues that we do not need to reconcile science and religion, since we can, so to speak, keep them in seperate compartments by viewing them as tools to satisfy non-competing needs. I shall try to put this argument in the context of James' over-all anti-representationalism.

In thinking about James, it helps to remember that James not only dedicated Pragmatism to John Stuart Mill, but reiterated some of Mill's most controversial claims. In "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life", James says that " The only possible reason there can be why any phenomenon ought to exist is that such a phenomenon actually is desired." (WB, 149) This echo of the most ridiculed sentence in Mill's Utilitarianism is, I suspect, deliberate. One of James' most heartfelt convictions was that to know whether a claim should be met, we need only ask which other claims--"claims actually made by some concrete person"--it runs athwart. We need not also ask whether it is a "valid" claim. He deplored the fact that philosophers still followed Kant rather than Mill, still thought of validity as raining down upon a claim "from some sublime dimension of being, which the moral law inhabits, much as upon the steel of the compass-needle the influence of the Pole rains down from out of the starry heavens." (WB, 148)

The view that there is no source of obligation save the

claims of individual sentient beings entails that we have no
responsibility to anything other than such beings. Most of the
relevant sentient individuals are our fellow humans. So talk
about our responsibility to Truth, or to Reason, must be replaced
by talk about our responsibility to our fellow human beings.
James' account of truth and knowledge is a utilitarian ethics of
belief, designed to facilitate such replacement. Its point of
departure is, once again, Peirce's treatment of a belief as a
habit of action, rather than as a representation. A utilitarian
philosophy of religion need not ask whether religoius belief gets
something right. It need only ask how the actions of religious
believers interfere with the lives of other human beings, and
how the needs filled by religious belief might be filled without
creating such interference.

Our responsibility to Truth is not, for James, a
responsibility to get things right. Rather, our obligation to be
rational is exhausted by our obligation to take account of other
people's doubts and objections to our beliefs. This view of
rationality makes it natural to say, as James does, that the true
is "what would be better for us to believe". (P, 42)

But of course what is good for one person or group to
believe will not be good for another person or group. James never
was sure how to avoid the counter-intuitive consequence that what
is true for one person or group may not be true for another. He
fluctuated between Peirce's identification of truth with what
will be believed under ideal conditions, and Dewey's strategy of

avoiding the topic of truth and talking instead about justification. But for my present purpose—which is to evaluate the view of religious belief which James offered in his essay "The Will to Believe"—it is not necessary to decide between these strategies. So I can postpone for later lectures what pragmatists should say about truth. I need consider only the question of whether the religious believer has a right to her faith—whether this faith conflicts with her intellectual responsibilities.

It is a consequence of James' utilitarian view of the nature of obligation that <u>the obligation to justify one's beliefs arises only when one's habits of action interfere with the fulfillment of others' needs</u>. Insofar as one is engaged in a private project, that obligation lapses. The underlying strategy of James' utilitarian/pragmatist philosophy of religion is to <u>privatize</u> religion. This privatization allows him to construe the supposed tension between Science and Religion as the illusion of opposition between cooperative endeavours and private projects.

On a pragmatist account, scientific inquiry is best viewed as the attempt to find a single, unified, coherent, description of the world—the description which makes it easiest to predict the consequences of events and actions, and thus easiest to gratify certain human desires. When pragmatists say that "creationist science" is <u>bad</u> science their point is that it subordinates these desires to other, less widespread, desires. But since religion has aims other than gratification of our need

to predict and control, it is not clear that there need be a quarrel between religion and orthodox, atoms-and-void, science, any more than between literature and science. Further, if a private relation to God is not accompanied with the claim to knowledge of the Divine Will, there may be no conflict between religion and utilitarian ethics. A suitably privatized form of religious belief might dictate neither one's scientific beliefs nor anybody's moral choices save one's own. That form of belief would be able to gratify a need without threatening to thwart any needs of any others, and would thus meet the utilitarian test.

W.K. Clifford, James' chosen opponent in "The Will to Believe" thinks that we have a duty to seek the truth, distinct from our duty to seek happiness. His way of describing this duty is not as a duty to get reality right, but rather as a duty not to believe without evidence. James quotes him as saying "if a belief has been accepted on insufficient evidence, the pleasure is a stolen one...It is sinful, because it is stolen in defiance of our duty to mankind...It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." (WB, 18)

Clifford asks us to be responsive to "evidence", as well as to human needs. So the question between James and Clifford comes down to: is evidence something which floats free of human projects, or is the demand for evidence simply a demand from other human beings for cooperation on such projects?

The view that evidential relations have a kind of existence independent of human projects takes various forms, of which the

most prominent are realism and foundationalism. Realist
philosophers say that the only true source of evidence is the
world as it is in itself. The pragmatist objections to realism
start from the claim that "...it is impossible to strip the human
element from even our most abstract theorizing. All our mental
categories without exception have been evolved because of their
fruitfulness for life, and owe their being to historic
circumstances, just as much as do the nouns and verbs and
adjectives in which our languages clothe them." (ECR, 552 Compare
Nietzsche, The Will to Power, sec. 514.) If pragmatists are right
about this, the only question at issue between them and realists
is whether the notion of "the world as it is in itself" can be
made fruitful for life. James' criticism of correspondence
theories of truth boil down to the argument that a belief's
purported "fit" with the intrinsic nature of reality adds nothing
which makes any practical difference to the fact that it is
universally agreed to lead to successful action.

Foundationalism is an epistemological view which can be
adopted by those who suspend judgment on the realist's claim that
reality has an intrinsic nature. A foundationalist need only
claim that every belief occupies a place in a natural,
transcultural, transhistorical order of reasons--an order which
eventually lead the inquirer back, eventually, to one or another
"ultimate source of evidence.".[1]   Different foundationalists

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[1]See Michael Williams, Unnatural Doubts (Oxford: Blackwell,
1993), p. 116: "...we can characterize foundationalism as the

offer different candidates for such sources: for example,
Scripture, tradition, clear and distinct ideas, sense-experience,
and common sense. Pragmatists object to foundationalism for the
same reasons as they object to realism. They think that the
question of whether my inquiries trace a natural order of reasons
or merely respond to the demands for justification prevalent in
my culture is, like the question whether the physical world is
found or made, one to which the answer can make no practical
difference.

Clifford's demand for evidence can, however, be put in a
minimalist form--one which avoids both realism and
foundationalism, and which concedes to James that intellectual
responsibility is no more and no less than responsibility to
people with whom one is joined in a shared endeavour. In its
minimalist form, this demand presupposes only that the meaning of
a statement consists in the inferential relations which it bears
to other statements. To use the language in which the sentence is
phrased commits one, on this view, to believing that a statement
S is true if and only if one also believes that certain other
statements which permit an inference to S, and still others which
can be inferred from S, are true. The wrongness of believing
without evidence is, therefore, the wrongness of pretending to
participate in a common project while refusing to play by the

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view that our beliefs, simply in virtue of certain elements in
their contents, stand in natural epistemological relations and
thus fall into natural epistemological kinds."

rules.

This view of language was encapsulated in the positivist slogan that the meaning of a statement is its method of verification. The positivists argued that the sentences used to express religious belief are typically not hooked up to the rest of the language in the right inferential way, and hence can express only pseudo-beliefs. The positivists, being empiricist foundationalists, equated "the right inferential way" with eventual appeal to sense experience. But a non-foundationalist neo-positivist might still put forward the following dilemma: If there are inferential conections, then there is a duty to argue; if there are not, then we are not dealing with a belief at all.

So even if we drop the foundationalist notion of "evidence", Clifford's point can still be restated in terms of the responsibility to argue. A minimal Clifford-like view can be summed up in the claim that, although your emotions are your own business, your beliefs are everybody's business. There is no way in which the religious person can claim a right to believe as part of an over-all right to privacy. For believing is inherently a public project: all us language-users are in it together. We all have a responsibility to each other not to believe anything which cannot be justified to the rest of us. To be rational is to submit one's beliefs--all one's beliefs--to the judgment of one's peers.

James resists this view. In "The Will to Believe" he argues that there are live, momentous and forced options which cannot be

decided by evidence--cannot, as James put it, "be decided on intellectual grounds". But people who side with Clifford typically rejoin that, where evidence and argument are unavailable, intellectual responsibility requires that options <u>cease</u> to be either live or forced. The responsible inquirer, they say, does not <u>let</u> herself be confronted by options of the sort James describes. When evidence and argument are unavailable, so, they think, is belief, or at least <u>responsible</u> belief. Desire, hope, and other non-cognitive states can legitimately be had without evidence--can legitimately be turned over to what James calls "our passional nature"--but <u>belief</u> cannot. In the realm of belief, which options are live and forced is not a private matter. The same options face us all; the same truth-candidates are proposed to everyone. It is intellectually irresponsible either to disregard these options, or to decide between these truth-candidates except by argument from the sort of evidence which the very meanings of our words tell us is required for their support.

This nice sharp distinction between the cognitive and the non-cognitive, between belief and desire, is, however just the sort of dualism which James needs to blur. On the traditional account, desire should play no role in the fixation of belief. On a pragmatist account, the only point of having beliefs in the first place is to gratify desires. James' claim that thinking is "only there for behavior's sake" (WB, 92) is his version of Hume's claim that "reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the

passions".

If one accepts either claim, one will have reason to be as dubious as James was of the purportedly necessary antagonism between science and religion. For, as I said earlier, these two areas of culture seem to fulfill two different sets of desires. Science enables us to predict and control, whereas religion offers us a larger hope, and thereby something to live for. To ask "which of their two accounts of the universe is true?" may be as pointless as asking "is the carpenter's or the particle physicist's account of tables the true one?" For neither question needs to be answered if we can figure out a strategy for keeping the two accounts from getting in each other's way.

Consider James' characterization of the "religious hypothesis" as that (1) "the best things are the more eternal things..." and (2) "that we are better even now if we believe [1]". (WB, 29-30) For the moment I shall disregard the question of whether this suffices to characterize what most religious people believe. I want merely to remark that if you had asked James to specify the difference between accepting this hypothesis (a "cognitive" state) and simply trusting the larger hope (a "non-cognitive" state)--or the difference between believing that the best things are the eternal things and relishing the thought that they are--he might well have replied that such differences do not make much difference.[2] What does it matter, one can

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[2]Pragmatists can, of course, make a distinction between hope and knowledge in cases where knowledge of causal mechanisms is

imagine him asking, whether you call it a belief, a desire, or a hope, a mood, or some complex of these, so long as it has the same cash value in directing action? We know what religious faith is, we know what it does for people. People have a right to have such faith, just as they have a right to fall in love, to marry in haste, and to persist in love despite endless sorrow and disappointment. In all such cases, what James called "our passional nature", and what I should call "our right to privacy", asserts its rights.

I suggest that we reinterpret James' intellect-passion distinction so as to make it coincide with a distinction between the public and the private, between what needs justification to other human beings and what does not. A business proposal, for example, needs such justification, but a marriage proposal (in our romantic and democratic culture) does not. Such an ethics will defend religious belief by saying, with Mill, that our right to happiness is limited only by others' rights not to have their own pursuits of happiness interfered with. This right to happiness includes the rights to faith, hope, and love-- intentional states which typically should not have to be justified to our peers. Our intellectual responsibilities are

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available. The quack hopes, but the medical scientist knows, that the pills will cure. But in other cases, such as marriage, the distinction often cannot usefully be drawn. Does the groom know, or merely hope, that he is marrying the right person? Either description will explain his actions equally well.

responsibilities to cooperate with others on common projects designed to promote the general welfare (projects such as constructing a unified science, or a uniform commercial code), and not to interfere with their private projects. For the latter--projects such as getting married or getting religion--the question of intellectual responsibility does not arise.

James' critics will hear this riposte as an admission that religion is not a cognitive matter, and that his "right to believe" is a misnomer for "the right to yearn" or "the right to hope" or "the right to take comfort in the thought that...". But James is not making, and should not make, such an admission. He is, rather, insisting that the impulse to draw a sharp line between the cognitive and the non-cognitive, and between beliefs and desires, even when this explanation is relevant neither to the explanation or the justification of behavior, is a residue of the false (because useless) belief that we should engage in two distinct quests--one for truth and the other for happiness. Only that belief could persuade us to say amici socii, sed magis amica veritas. To be thoroughly anti-authoritarian in one's view of knowledge and inquiry is never to be tempted to say anything like that. The most one can say is something like: amici socii, sed forse magis amici socii futuri.