

INTRODUCTION

Making Pragmatism Pragmatic

CLIFFORD S. STAGOLL AND MICHAEL P. LEVINE

In a letter to his younger brother Henry in 1907, William James (1842–1910) anticipated the triumph of pragmatism, the philosophical movement that he had so effectively helped to define, develop, and publicize, together with the success of his book of the same name. “I shouldn’t be surprised if ten years hence it should be rated as ‘epoch-making,’ for the definitive triumph of that general way of thinking I can entertain no doubt whatever—I believe it to be something quite like the protestant reformation” (James 1926, 2:239). James did not mean to presage pragmatism’s ascent just in the universities, public lecture halls, and journals, replacing idealism as the dominant philosophy of his time (although so proud a man as James would appreciate that triumph, too). Rather, he meant quite seriously his comparison with the rise of Protestantism, writing in his book that pragmatism had “generalized itself, become conscious of a universal mission, pretended to a conquering destiny.” “I believe in that destiny,” he continues, “and I hope I may end by inspiring you with my belief” (1975b, 30).

Not only is James’s prophecy extraordinary hubris, but it also evidences an attitude that seems fundamentally at odds with the core tenets of pragmatism itself. In any case, it has proven mistaken. Marian “Clover” Adams (1843–1885) famously said of Henry (1843–1916) (arguably the greatest novelist of his time), “It’s not that he ‘bites off more than he can chew’ but he chews more than he bites off.”¹ Leaving aside the merits of Adams’s claim (and sibling rivalry), it is clear that William had no trouble in biting

off a great deal, and at times not chewing enough. While the pragmatism of Charles Sanders Peirce, James, and John Dewey may no longer be as marginalized as it has been at times during the last century, it has hardly taken the philosophical or nonacademic world by storm, despite the interest generated by Richard Rorty. This of course does not mean that it has not had, or does not now have, its capable proponents, or that pragmatism in various guises has not made substantial advances.

James was convinced that pragmatism would succeed by way of its application: doing away with theoretical complications and confusions so as to leave the way open for human progress, and providing guidance for how people might best lead their lives. He characterized it as “the attitude of looking away from first things, principles, ‘categories,’ supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, consequences, facts” (1975b, 32). To this end, James’s ideal philosopher “turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins” in favor of “completeness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action, and towards power” (1975b, 31).

For James, pragmatism would help to realize a “‘melioristic’” approach to life. Located “midway” between a pessimistic attitude toward “salvation of the world” and an “optimism . . . that thinks the world’s salvation inevitable,” meliorism is the view that we can contribute to the betterment of the world generally, and our own lives particularly, through deliberate, effortful striving (1975b, 137). This is not to suggest that our lives are characterized by limitless possibilities (far from it), or that constraints can always be surmounted by the exertion of greater effort (far from it)—James was mindful of the unavoidable impacts on his community of the changing technologies, economies, and values of his day, for instance—but only that “some conditions of the world’s salvation are actually existent . . . and should the residual conditions come, salvation would become an accomplished reality” (ibid.). Such conditions, James goes on, “are first such a mixture of things as will in the fullness of time give us a chance, a gap that we can spring into, and, finally, *our act*,” though just what that act ought to be is as purposefully vague as it is nondescript (1975b, 137–38).

As James reminds his readers, the word *pragmatism* “is derived from the same Greek word, *pragma*, meaning action, from which our words ‘practice’ and ‘practical’ come” (1975b, 28). His whole oeuvre can be read productively as so many explorations and enunciations of ideas intended to guide such effort and action; as various perspectives on how we decide

the meaning and value of our experiences and proposals for how best to respond to them. In his critical mode, James reveals errors and oversights prevalent in previous philosophies and entrenched patterns of thinking and acting that have tended to disguise or obfuscate prospects for “salvation” (as well as what such a term might mean), and/or prevent their realization. As creatures whose lives are largely products of habitual thought and action, we often proceed mindlessly in one direction or another. In *The Principles of Psychology*, for instance, James alerts us to various aspects of self-conception that play themselves out in, for example, attention-seeking behavior and the attainment of physical possessions (1981, 279–82). In *Pragmatism*, he studies various preconceptions about religion, truth, and “common sense,” and proposes alternatives (1975b). For James, uncovering extant “habits of mind” is a crucial step toward conceiving of, and acting on, richer, more productive beliefs.

In more constructive moments, James provides clear and concrete guidance for various challenges of daily life. In his *Talks to Teachers on Psychology; and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*, for example, he discusses the psychological principles underpinning effective pedagogy, and specifies practical exercises for molding one's habits (1983, 47–53). In his epistemological work, James details the many ways in which we arrive at, deploy, and modify ideas that we take to be true, and how the psychology of these never-ending adjustments influences the ways that we attribute meaning to our experiences (1975a; 1975b). His philosophy of religion (in part) proposes ways of navigating a path between the mystical character of religious experience and scientific understanding of it (1985). Even in his more obtuse moments, as he struggles to enunciate a metaphysics capable of mediating the dynamism and richness of human experience with the facticity of nature's laws, he is at pains to emphasize prospects for altering one's perspectives and locating new ways of assessing and responding to one's circumstances in ways that are beneficial to oneself and others (1977).

But pragmatism's orientation toward action as James conceives of it is not limited to his academic and theoretical investigations. It is evident too in aspects of his biography. For example, as a young man James experienced lengthy periods when the prospect that reality was wholly determined drove him into helpless depression. But by committing to a doctrine of free will suggested by his reading of the French neo-Kantian Charles Renouvier (together with making changes to his personal and professional circumstances), James was able finally to locate a way forward, recording in his diary that he could “see no reason why [Renouvier's] definition of free

will—the sustaining of a thought *because I choose to* when I might have other thoughts—need be the definition of an illusion,” and that he meant to adhere to it in order to “voluntarily cultivate the feeling of moral freedom” (1926, 1:147). In this moment, we have an illustration of the continuity that James so frequently calls attention to between philosophical theorizing, planning, thinking, and acting.

Further examples of James’s commitment to the application of his philosophy are evident in his involvement in the public sphere. Following Ralph Waldo Emerson’s example, James took seriously an obligation to act on issues of public concern in language and locations accessible to a non-academic audience. From the mid-1890s until the end of his life, James participated in public debates about issues as diverse as American imperialism in the Philippines (he was vice-president of the Anti-Imperialist League), regulation of big business, care of the mentally ill, the awful problem of lynching, homogenization of university teaching qualifications, medical licensing, and the status accorded new and heterodox approaches in science and medicine (especially psychology). He also sometimes engaged with issues facing particular professional groups, as in *Talks to Teachers*, where he also touched upon the “duty, struggle, and success” of farmers in dealing with the challenges of their land (1983, 134). By involving himself in the social, economic, and political changes of his day, and applying insights from his several technical specialties to the realm of public affairs, James was helping, or thought he was helping, to return philosophy to a more practical engagement with the world.²

Of course, James was not alone in enunciating and championing links between pragmatist theory and human actions intended to improve our lot. Peirce (1839–1914) was credited by James as the first to introduce pragmatism to philosophy by virtue of his article “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” published in 1878. Peirce discussed the need (and as he proposes in many cases, the unavoidable human tendency) to continually test our conceptions of the world against their practical consequences, and formulated various versions of the “pragmatic maxim” intended to codify it: “Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object” (Peirce 1878, 293). More straightforwardly, in 1905, Peirce expressed pragmatism’s main tenet as follows: “that a *conception*, that is, the rational purport of a word or other expression, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing upon the conduct of life” (1905, 162–63). For Peirce, the “laboratory habit of mind” (to use

John Dewey's phrase), the human tendency to test and adjust one's beliefs on the basis of evident relations between events and their consequences, helps to improve the ways that we respond to our circumstances—albeit that what constitutes such “improvement” is not always specified and, even when it is, often remains unclear.

Peirce's investigations were crucial for James's version of pragmatism. By interpreting Peirce's maxim in terms of a psychology of action, setting aside the experimentally regulative processes of science on which he relied heavily, and referring pragmatism's general tenet to particular consequences and actions for a particular person, James makes of pragmatism a general theory of first-person meaning—specifically, the view that the meaning of one's experiential circumstances is intimately interconnected with their impact upon the way that one thinks and lives. On this wider account, pragmatism becomes less concerned with what is meant by calling a diamond “hard” or a table “flat” (the kinds of examples to which Peirce calls special attention) and more concerned with resolving issues in ethics, the down-to-earth decisions of daily life, religion, and metaphysics. More specifically, it focuses on how one's thinking influences and is influenced by human practices. James writes that “if there were any part of a thought that made no difference in the thought's practical consequences, then that part would be no proper element of the thought's significance” (1975b, 259). Pragmatism becomes, then, a theory of the meaning of *personal experience* in terms of the actions to which it leads.

John Dewey developed and applied aspects of James's work, but deviated from it in several crucial respects. First, he countered James's preoccupation with the lives of individuals by conducting pragmatist investigations of fields as diverse as social theory, democracy in its various forms (politics, education, journalism, and institutions), and social influences on aesthetic judgment. Like James—but to a far greater extent—Dewey pursued the implications of his philosophical analyses as a progressive advocate and activist, particularly on matters of education, women's suffrage, international relations, and preservation of liberal democracy. Second, Dewey championed the advantages of experimental science much more strongly than James—despite James's training in science and medicine, and his significant contributions to the development of modern psychology.

Third, whereas Dewey agrees with James that “it lies in the nature of pragmatism that it should be applied as widely as possible; and to things as diverse as controversies, beliefs, truths, ideas, and objects,” he is more careful to delineate “the *distinct* type of consequence and hence of meaning of

practical appropriate to each” (Dewey 1908, 87–88). For Dewey, application of pragmatism to real-world problems (or, at least, those with a significant social dimension) demands more deliberate articulation of the context than James thought appropriate. For James, the point is not so much to predefine a problem using philosophical concepts so as to enable a more focused analysis of it, but rather to analyze and propose new ways in which those experiencing the problem might conceive of and respond to it.

All three of these giants of so-called “Golden Age” pragmatism share the view, then, that the meaning and value of ideas, concepts, propositions, and theories ought to be decided by the consequences of their being adopted, and specifically, by how well they help us to adjust to events by guiding our thinking and action. But James is the most approachable and suggestive of them, the one who most encourages bold exploration of ways in which pragmatism might help to realize melioristic intent. This is due in large part to his insight and his willingness to locate and question even those conceptions that seem most basic. (“To believe in the one or the many, that is the classification with the maximum number of consequences,” he writes [1975b, 64]). But it is a product, too, of his engaging writing: evocative, rich with literary imagery, suggestive of new paths to pursue, and often bearing the hallmarks of live performance derived from their original incarnation as public lectures. Although there might be merit in claims that James’s work is sometimes inconsistent and even downright careless, his desire to tackle so many philosophical and psychological challenges, his employment of myriad theoretical approaches and conceptual resources, and his refusal to systematize links between his projects all contribute to an open-endedness that invites fresh engagements.³

This book means to survey and sample some of the ways in which such engagements might extend beyond exegesis and explanation to practical application. In the current climate, in which study of the humanities (indeed, the humanities generally) are increasingly marginalized by a profit-driven tertiary education sector, political misunderstanding, and the preeminence of job-focused training, such an ambition might be interpreted as a proposal for widening the market for Jamesianism. Such a development might be no bad thing, showing to an audience, however small, that, appropriately interpreted and translated, pragmatism has a thing or two of value to say about issues that matter to individuals and their communities. We might even hope that a few more people might come to the realization that John J. Stuhr said was “essential for the public trust and public support of the humanities[:] . . . [that] education in the humanities is essential for the

realization of basic professional, personal, and social values” (Stuhr 1997, 10).

But beyond this grand ambition is the desire to do justice to James’s own emphases on the action-orientation, consequences, and use-value of philosophy. Despite pragmatism’s numerous conceptual links to practices, there is a relative paucity of literature that attempts to apply his philosophy to real-world issues. There are exceptions, of course. John J. McDermott, for instance, apart from being one of the most insightful and provocative commentators on James’s philosophy, has drawn deeply and consistently on it for resources to investigate everything from general characteristics of American culture to the phenomenology of private experiences (e.g., McDermott 1986; 2007). Several philosophers (most notably Charlene Haddock Seigfried [1991; 1996] and contributors to a recent collection [Tarver and Sullivan 2015]) have drawn on resources in James to address issues related to feminism, sometimes using them to explain gender-related issues and propose new ways of resolving or dealing with them, and at others using feminism as the basis for fresh perspectives on James and his work. Others have utilized his ideas in discussions of animal welfare (e.g., McKenna 2013) and conceptions of the human body (e.g., Shusterman 2012), and we have seen a resurgence of interest in James’s ethics in relation to self-transformation (e.g., Franzese 2008; Marchetti 2015).

But relative to the enormous biographical and interpretative literature on James, such examples are sparse. Further, even in those cases where the relevance of James’s work to some field of study or challenging issue is proposed, scholars have tended to describe (usually in technical philosophical language) the *potential* theoretical riches to be had rather than emphasizing how those riches might be *realized*. Their point is usually to show how James might lead us out of some philosophical dispute that bears on the case, rather than to identify means for and consequences of applying pragmatist resources to it. The precise steps to take in order to move from identifying a potentially useful resource to acting upon it are left unspecified, or vague. Such an approach has tended to constrain pragmatism’s audience to other philosophers and theorists working in closely related fields—those most capable of interpreting the language and context, and most comfortable with pursuing matters of theoretical import—rather than expanding it to those who might deploy pragmatist ideas in practice, whether professional practitioners or a wider public.

This volume means to encourage an alternative enterprise, emphasizing various ways in which James’s theories can be used to conceive of and cope with challenges in contemporary life. The point is not just to locate the

inherent usefulness of James's ideas for such matters, but rather, by drawing out some of the ways in which pragmatism might be made "pragmatic" (in the common sense of that word), to promote James's own concern with actions and consequences. On the one hand, this has led the editors to select several chapters that address particular questions directly, such that some idea or theory of James's is shown to be useful in understanding or coping with an issue with which we are confronted. These align more closely with James in a constructive mood. On the other hand, some chapters take a more oblique approach, opening the way for new ways of thinking about our problems and challenges by critiquing assumptions that have tended to constrain our conception of them and make some cases seem intractable. These chapters more closely approximate James's critical moments. Our purpose in what follows is not to produce an abstract of the essays or summary of their arguments, but to give an account of their significance.

Part 1 of the volume includes five chapters that apply James's theory to particular problems or issues. The volume opens with a bang, and what is likely the most contentious and some will say problematic chapter in the volume: James M. Albrecht's "Listening to 'the Cries of the Wounded': Jamesian Reflections on the Impasse of Gun Control." It addresses the issues of gun violence and gun control, and the Jamesian resources, ethics in particular, for understanding and possibly even adjudicating the seemingly implacable impasse. It is an impasse that is one of the most emblematic of the deep and bitter divisions in American society today. Along with Albrecht's specific arguments, the chapter (stirring a hornet's nest) presents an opportunity for appraising fundamentals of James's pragmatic ethics, alongside Albrecht's interpretation of them. Some readers will endorse Albrecht's application of James's views; others may find it misguided or even offensive. In any case, the chapter reveals just how provocative the application of James's ideas can be.

Moving to somewhat safer though no less controversial ground, and taking on issues of great concern to James (as well as the editors), Lauren Goldman in "Revisiting the Social Value of College Breeding" examines James's view that higher education is essential to democracy, and raises broader questions about the purpose and value of higher education and education generally. These issues are especially relevant in this era of the managerialization and corporatization of higher education, now virtually a *fait accompli*. As Goldman says, "all is not well in higher education." With James, he provides a means to reflect on what has happened to universities and how the changes affect our lives in important practical ways, and an opportunity for querying (another word for challenging) a second enormous

and at times bitter division in society (not just in the United States) between the so-called educated elite and so-called working class. The place and value of higher education in society have become particularly pressing matters in what is becoming known as the post-truth (i.e., Trump) world and milieu that we currently live with—a world that would be an anathema to James, Dewey, and Rorty alike. Like the preceding chapter, Goldman's provides ample opportunity for considering first-order interpretive issues related to James. Is it really, as James sees it, intellectuals who are needed to maintain the tried and true ideals of truth and justice?

Moving from universities to fields, farmyards, and slaughtering houses, Erin McKenna in "What Makes the Lives of Livestock Significant?" calls attention to an ambivalence, and possibly a contradiction, in James's writing regarding animal experience and the value of animals. On the one hand, James suggests that just as other humans may experience the world differently than we do and yet deserve respect and tolerance, so too do animals. Their lives are not meaningless or insignificant because they experience things differently from ourselves or other animals. Yet McKenna claims that at other times James seems to see animals as significant only in virtue of their use by humans.

Which is it? Focusing on animals as food, McKenna discusses claims for animal rights and animal welfare in terms of James's central ethical notion of meliorism. To stand the test of time and retain utility, an ethical theory must be applicable and adaptable to new cases, settings, and situations. McKenna's chapter can be also usefully viewed as testing the durability or plasticity of central features of Jamesian ethics to this important and much-debated issue of contemporary ethical concern.

Next, in chapter 4, Nate Jackson turns pragmatism toward "disability" and experiences of the "disabled" in "Significant Lives and Certain Blindness: William James and the Disability Paradox." In particular, Jackson is concerned with examining James's thought as a possible resource for conceiving of disablement in conjunction or as compatible with human flourishing. Jackson claims that scholars have not focused enough on the relation between disability and well-being, and that mistaken intuitions persist regarding disabilities as *necessarily* limiting quality of life.

By way of justifying James's thought as a useful philosophical resource for studying facets of disability, Jackson calls attention to James's own uses of examples of disability (deafness, blindness, and neurodiversity) as well as his own (at times disabling) illnesses. One of the most significant aspects of James (and pragmatism generally) with respect to disability is the view

that the testimony of the disabled regarding their experience ought not be dismissed or undermined. An adequate notion of well-being should be indicative of the fact that disabilities (of at least many kinds) are neither contrary to nor incompatible with it. James is a source for an ethics of tolerance and for recognition of limitations to judgments of values. He promotes and recommends a type of “epistemic humility” that counters any tendency to dismiss the testimony of others regarding the value, meaning, and quality of their lives.

Meliorism, as the belief that things can be made better, is an essential part of Jamesian ethics and epistemology. In “Pragmatism and Progress,” the last chapter in part 1, Damian Cox and Michael Levine ask what it means to make things better, or in slightly different terms, what it means to say that progress or improvement has been made? They do so by addressing and answering one specific question: “has there been progress in race relations in the United States since legally sanctioned segregation allegedly ended in the 1960s?”

Along with its central role in pragmatism, what constitutes progress is an interesting question in its own right. Apart from some sort of metric, what does it even mean to say that progress has or has not been made (in whatever area)? Indeed, just what is meant by meliorism in James’s pragmatism is unclear. This chapter is an attempt to make a first-order contribution to a core doctrine of pragmatism by explaining “progress.” It does so in a way that is consistent with and advances an understanding of Jamesian meliorism.

The chapters in part 2 are more concerned with interrogating philosophical notions that influence how we conceive of and respond to real-world issues, and how philosophers have at times encouraged relatively narrow conceptions of relevant terms, including “applied philosophy” and “experience.”

In chapter 6, “Applying Jamesian Pragmatism to Moral Life: Against ‘Applied Ethics,’” Sami Pihlström argues that although James’s pragmatism encourages something like applied ethics (“bringing moral philosophy down to earth from abstract theorization”), the true applications of Jamesian pragmatism to moral life are opposed to the basic idea of applied ethics. Unlike applied ethics, though some applied ethicists might argue against Pihlström’s characterization, Jamesian pragmatism rejects any sharp distinction between moral theories and their practical application.

From the perspective of a Jamesian pragmatist, “applied ethics” makes little sense. Pragmatists will or should regard ethical theory as, in Pihlström’s words, “practical all the way down,” with “no fundamental distinctions

between metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics.” He argues further that “in this sense, Jamesian moral philosophy is comparable to . . . Wittgensteinian moral philosophy.” Ethical theorists may well scratch their heads not so much at the claim that Jamesian moral theory might have significant similarities to Wittgensteinian ethics (though that too might be contested), but rather at the claim that Jamesian pragmatist ethics can do away with the distinctions between metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. What does pragmatist ethics look like from Pihlstrom’s perspective, then, and how does it operate, practically speaking?

In chapter 7, “Understanding Experience with William James,” John Ryder argues that far from being “superfluous,” an account of experience is “central to a clear handle on thought, cognition, emotions, aesthetics, politics, and human action generally.” And by central, he means not just to pragmatism, but to any philosophy that deals with these issues. Ryder claims that an adequate conception of experience is to be found “ensconced in the pragmatic naturalist tradition.”

In cognitive science, for example, we find “empirical and conceptual support for the idea that mind is embodied, indeed extended into an individual’s body and environmental location.” These ideas, Ryder argues, “rest to a considerable degree on features of experience and cognition that William James was the first to notice and develop.” Ryder points to James’s theories regarding the bodily basis of the emotions (emotions as feeling), the qualitative aspect of thought and by implication the bodily basis of reason and logic, and the importance of relations in experience.

Sami Pihlström argues in chapter 6 that Jamesian pragmatism rejects any sharp distinction between moral theories and their practical applications. In a sense, Ryder is doing something similar in trying to show that any application of pragmatism to issues both theoretical and practical regarding cognition, emotions, aesthetics, politics, and other areas should be well grounded in James’s account of experience because they are—or should be—intrinsically related to that account.

In chapter 8, “James and the Minimal Self,” Yumiko Inukai argues that James, drawing his conclusions from experience, anticipated much of what has developed in contemporary philosophical models of self. This includes, for example, the contemporary focusing on the relationship between phenomenal consciousness and subjectivity—an approach that has yielded “the minimal self” (“the sense of being someone, of a self being present”). The contemporary alternative to the minimal self is the idea of the self as a narrative construction, which includes personalities, beliefs, values, memories,

and so on. Inukai sees these characteristics as present in James's account of the stream of consciousness.

Inukai claims that although these two approaches or theories are often seen as conflicting, they are in fact complementary. Both are needed to capture the complexity of self. (Think perhaps of wave and particle theory in quantum physics.) Further, Inukai sees James as offering just such a complementary and necessarily encompassing account.

There is little doubt that Inukai's claim regarding complementarity would be contested by both sides on the basis that the two positions are either incompatible or else delineate two different issues with regard to the self—one metaphysical and the other largely descriptive. In any case it would be useful to see how the competing theorists would respond to the integrative challenge, and to see whether pragmatists take Inukai's approach as distinctively Jamesian.

Part 3 gets personal, and we would like to think not only that parts 1 and 2 point in this direction, but so do James and his pragmatism. Part 3 contains three chapters on how James's ideas might be adopted to help guide one's own philosophical and professional practice.

In 1911, James's former colleague at Harvard, George Santayana, addressing an audience in California, pondered whether, "if the philosophers had lived among your mountains, their systems would have been different from what they are." He concluded that they would indeed be

very different from what those systems are which the European genteel tradition has handed down since Socrates; for these systems are egotistical; directly or indirectly they are anthropocentric, and inspired by the conceited notion that man, or human reason, or the human distinction between good and evil, is the centre and pivot of the universe. That is what the mountains and the woods should make you at last ashamed to assert. From what, indeed, does the society of nature liberate you, that you find it so sweet? (Santayana 2009, 19)

In chapter 9, "William James and the Woods," Douglas R. Anderson considers the significance for James's work and personality of his time in the country, liberated from "the city and cosmopolitan philosophy," and finds it to have been crucial. Not only did James's excursions to Chocorua and beyond provide "some space for self and world exploration—for contemplative and meditative thought," but they were essential for his maintaining

a “life at the borders” between a hectic city existence of professional and social demands and a need for escape from that life to pursue health and simplification. More than that, though, these periods seem to have renewed James’s powers of receptivity and perceptual awareness, encouraging his insights into “the poetic and the religious dimensions of human experience.”

James’s time in the woods shows that, for him, to live productively “at the borders” involved doing away with neat demarcations between private rest and public philosophy, immersion in the natural environment and analyses of the mystical and religious, physical rest (and exercise) and contemplative effort, and rich philosophical themes and the simplest aspects of everyday life. James’s experiences in the woods are realizations of the kinds of relationality that are central to his philosophy. Such interactions have been largely ignored or set aside by recent, technically oriented philosophy, Anderson argues, much to its loss and ours, and we would do well to re-engage with natural settings in order to encourage philosophy’s re-engagement with diverse human experience.

As Clifford Stagoll writes in chapter 10, “Taking James to Work: Pragmatism for Managers,” “the very name ‘pragmatism’ suggests it as appropriate for use in philosophy of management.” But how do we realize this suggestion without pragmatist philosophy being misappropriated in the cause of crass instrumentalism, wholly inconsistent with pragmatism’s conception of the world?

Stagoll proposes that the answer lies in using resources from James to engage “directly with the demands of management practice and with practitioners,” by which he means using them to improve how managers decipher and draw lessons from their professional experiences. Unlike much traditional management theory, where abstraction is the price paid for general applicability, pragmatism can provide individual managers with tools for coping with disorderly, complicated, and fast-paced work environments. A Jamesian philosophy of management would emphasize and explain the need for managers to draw information from diverse sources, for instance, to take account of qualitative factors in determining the meaning of quantitative measures, and to develop flexible plans for coping with unexpected events.

Stagoll goes on to propose ways to implement a Jamesian philosophy of management, perhaps the most demanding “pragmatic” challenge of all. James provides a range of practical tools capable of helping managers to cope with the personal and professional challenges of their work. Examples include his proposals for adjusting habits, making moral decisions in complicated

circumstances (such as those that test the bounds of policy and procedure manuals), and coping with stress. The “pragmatic” nature of James’s pragmatism is likely to appeal to managers, Stagoll contends, in ways that some trite, cliché-addled management theories will not.

The significance of habit in a world of change (the world that we all live in and always have lived in), the importance of relying on habit, and the impossibility of not doing so—these are major themes in James’s pragmatism. Habit is a force for the status quo, but by orienting and structuring our lives, it sustains us by both holding us back and enabling us to move forward when we find it necessary to do so. Habit is a necessary, albeit somewhat hidden, condition for meliorism in ethics, epistemology, and daily life generally (socially, politically, and personally). It may sound odd, but without habit there could be no progress.

In the book’s final chapter, “Habits in a World of Change,” James Campbell “explores the centrality of habit to James’s psychology and philosophy, and considers how his largely descriptive emphases can be applied to our current situations.” As Campbell says, “habits are means of stabilizing experience, they make us less adaptive to novelty,” and yet novelty relies on it. What moves us away from habit to novelty? When and why should we seek difficult paths away from our habitual ways of understanding, interpreting, and relating to the world and others? Questions naturally arise as well as to reasons for, or causes of, resistance to change. How are these to be explained, and to what extent can they be, and when should they be, overcome? Campbell is right in emphasizing the significance of understanding habit for James’s pragmatism.

The idea for this volume was motivated by what we took to be the relative dearth of literature applying James’s pragmatism to issues of current and practical significance, coupled with our considered view that resources in James’s pragmatism can be profitably applied to such issues. We thought this neglect of the practical surprising given that, from its inception, pragmatism’s focus has been “applied” in the sense that it was concerned with practices—with outcomes, consequences, and actions in relation to the differences they make in everyday life. We asked for essays that we thought might best address our concern and motivation, essays that considered issues along the lines of “how might James have explained . . . ?” or “how might James’s theories guide us in dealing with . . . ?” We requested that authors cover such issues as politics and society, ethics, philosophy (particularly the rise of philosophical professionalism and “the PhD octopus”), religion, and alienation. Insofar as the present chapters reflect our initial motivation and

what we perceived as the odd lack of engagement with practical issues, we believe the book achieves our goals.

We acknowledge that important topics are missing from the volume. Ideally, we would have included chapters on James's pragmatism and gender, the built environment, and politically motivated manipulation of "truth." We would have liked to explore the relationship between James's pragmatism and poetry (e.g., Emerson, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens—to mention only a few—perhaps even Philip Levine and Billy Collins), noting that certain kinds of poetry resonate with life experience to an extent that much philosophy proper does not. Sometimes it takes a book to see what's missing from it.

Edited books tend to assume a final shape that at best approximates their original conception. This is not (necessarily) a bad thing and can in fact be a good thing. Even with relatively detailed abstracts in place, by the time chapters are done and revisions made, an editor's grip on the final product will have loosened. What we think most important about the volume is not so much, or merely, the content, but rather (we hope) the direction it gives to what we have termed "pragmatism applied." The general question that *Pragmatism Applied* raises is whether or not, and to what extent, pragmatism can be a philosophy for our time.

NOTES

1. en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Talk:Literature
2. For a comprehensive account of James's activism and contemporary interpretations of it, see Coon (70–99).
3. The biographical details of William James and his immediate family are well chronicled, but for those unfamiliar with them it's worth investigating for hints at the ways that James's unusual upbringing influenced his philosophy. See Richardson, *William James in the Maelstrom of American Modernism*; Simon, *Genuine Reality: A Life of William James*.

REFERENCES

- Coon, Deborah J. "‘One Moment in the World's Salvation’: Anarchism and the Radicalisation of William James," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 1 (1996): 70–99.
- Dewey, John. "What Does Pragmatism Mean by Practical?" *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 5, no. 4 (1908): 85–99.

- Franzese, Sergio. *The Ethics of Energy: William James's Moral Philosophy in Focus*. Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2008.
- James, William. *The Letters of William James*. 2 vols, edited by Henry James. London: Longmans, Green, 1926.
- . *The Meaning of Truth*. Vol. 2 of *The Works of William James*, edited by Fredson Bowers and Ignas K. Skrupskelis. Introduction by H. S. Thayer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1909] 1975a.
- . *Pragmatism*. Vol. 1 of *The Works of William James*, edited by Fredson Bowers and Ignas K. Skrupskelis. Introduction by H. S. Thayer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1907] 1975b.
- . *A Pluralistic Universe*. Vol. 4 of *The Works of William James*, edited by Fredson Bowers and Ignas K. Skrupskelis. Introduction by Richard J. Bernstein. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1909] 1977.
- . *The Principles of Psychology*. Vols. 8–10 of *The Works of William James*, edited by Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis. Introductions by Rand B. Evans and Gerald E. Myers. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1890] 1981.
- . *Talks to Teachers on Psychology; and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*. Vol. 12 of *The Works of William James*, edited by Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis. Introduction by Gerald E. Myers. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1899] 1983.
- . *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Vol. 15 of *The Works of William James*, edited by Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis. Introduction by John E. Smith. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1902] 1985.
- Marchetti, Sarin. *Ethics and Philosophical Critique in William James*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- McDermott, John J. *Streams of Experience*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986.
- . *The Drama of Possibility: Experience as Philosophy of Culture*, edited by Douglas R. Anderson. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.
- McKenna, Erin. *Pets, People, and Pragmatism*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.
- Peirce, Charles S. "How to Make our Ideas Clear." *Popular Science Monthly* 12 (1878): 286–302.
- . "What Pragmatism Is." *Monist* 15, no. 2 (1905): 162–63.
- Richardson, Robert J., *William James in the Maelstrom of American Modernism*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.
- Santayana, George. *The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy and Character and Opinion in the United States*, edited by James Seaton. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.

- Seigfried, Charlene Haddock. "The Missing Perspective: Feminist Pragmatism." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 27, no. 4 (1991): 405–16.
- . *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Shusterman, Richard. *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Simon, Linda. *Genuine Reality: A Life of William James*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998.
- Stuhr, John J. *Genealogical Pragmatism: Philosophy, Experience, and Community*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.
- Tarver, Erin C., and Sharon Sullivan, eds. *Feminist Interpretations of William James*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015.