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Intelligence Inside Out: William James's Reappraisal of Religion

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to respond to the secularization of intelligence by paying a close attention to the radical reappraisal of religion, inaugurated by William James, the “Father of American psychology,” at the turn of the 20th century. Centering around his classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), the paper shows how James manages to sustain a trinity of intelligence, spirituality, and religion in the age of science. Three themes are identified from James's oeuvre and analyzed in the text: the first is James's scientific study of religion; the second his distillation of spirituality from religion; and the last his identification of religious patterns in world religions.

Keywords: William James, religion, intelligence, spirituality, science, world religions

Introduction

The term intelligence defies a generalized definition and is open to interpretations from a range of disciplines (Legg and Hutter). Intelligence, according to Howard Gardner in *Frames of Mind*, can be associated with the identification of problems, the ability of solving problems, and the aptness of exploiting opportunities of tackling problems to generate new knowledge (64-65). He further develops the theory of multiple intelligences that pigeonholed intelligence into different modalities, covering linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, and bodily-kinesthetic aspects (77-249). Despite being conscious of renewed scholarly interests in spiritual intelligence, he chooses not to add it to his classifications for he considers the choice of intelligences a matter of judgment (xxi).

Other scholars, Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall notably, propose spiritual intelligence independent of rational intelligence and emotional intelligence as the most fundamental level of human intelligence (SQ). For reasons of celebrating the values of cultural pluralism at the time of globalization their word choice *spiritual* bears no relations to religion, and they treat spiritual intelligence as moral intelligence that guides “goodness, truth, beauty, and compassion in our lives” (*Spiritual Capital* 3). However, spirituality owes a deep root to religion, and was used to refer to the Spirit of God that distinguishes human intelligence from the non-rational creation or even to the clerical state during the Middle Ages (Sheldrake 2-3). It is, as some argue, the subjective turn which reorients life from others' external expectation to the self's internal experience that renders spirituality secular (Woodhead and Heelas).

Researchers have noticed that students are increasingly in need of a spiritual dimension in their education experience. Some even call for integrating spirituality and religion into higher education so that their needs would be satisfied

(Chickering et al.). In fact, many American universities were established with religious backgrounds. In the past, religion was deemed important in shaping the American academic life. For example, Daniel Coit Gilman, the first president of Johns Hopkins University, regarded his work at the university as a Christian ministry and held that “The ultimate end of all educational and scientific effort, as well as of all legislation and statesmanship—is identical with that at which Christianity aims... ‘Peace on earth, good will to men’” (qdt in Marsden 157).

How did religion and spirituality gradually disappear in the American academic experience? Some mention the impact of the separation of church and state in the First Amendment to the US Constitution on education. Historically, the Catholics employed this jurisprudential principle to pressure the Supreme Court in order to ensure that Protestant indoctrination would be kept away from public education. On the other hand, the child benefit theory and the coercion test further permitted state financial support, which could reduce religious elements in teaching activities by providing secular textbooks, to private and parochial schools (Russell and Richardson). Others allude to the pressure of social change on educators with religious background. George Marsden believes that the growing diversity in America from 1870 to the 20th century encouraged liberal Protestant intellectuals to advance knowledge in the form of free inquiry, and as the academic society broadened its vision of scientific naturalism and cultural pluralism, higher education became more and more secular (*The Soul of the American University*). On a different note, Philip Gleason contends that the coming of modernity seriously challenged the so-called Catholic Renaissance of synthesizing knowledge and faith for the lofty cause of rejuvenating Western civilization and forced Catholic educators to embrace the scientific and instrumental components of modern society as advocated by the Second Vatican Council (*Contending with Modernity*).

These arguments anchor their explanatory power within the socio-institutional framework, yet only slightly make allowances for the intellectual reasoning of what religion is. This paper, therefore, will forage into the paradigm shift of understanding religion at the turn of the 20th century to formulate a response. The main focus of this paper is on how William James, the “Father of American psychology,” has revolutionarily repositioned religion in relation to intelligence to facilitate the secularization of acquiring knowledge at minimum cost of belief. Though James does not articulate a clear-cut definition of intelligence, he places it in the philosophical conundrum of comprehending the ultimate design of the universe to embroider its intricacy:

Is the Kosmos an expression of intelligence rational in its inward nature, or a brute external fact pure and simple? If we find ourselves, in contemplating it, unable to banish the impression that it is a realm of final purposes, that it exists for the sake of something, we place intelligence at the heart of it and have a religion. If, on the contrary, in surveying its irremediable flux, we can think of the present only as so much mere mechanical sprouting from the past, occurring with no reference to the future, we are atheists and materialists. (*The Principles of Psychology* 8)

Accordingly, intelligence is understood as a belief vested in the unfolding of universal rationality. To be intelligent is to have a penetrating consciousness of the ultimate purposes beyond the known material facts and to plan the future with these purposes in mind. "In all ages," James believes, "the man whose determinations are swayed by reference to the most distant ends has been held to possess the highest intelligence" (23). Religion, on the other hand, is a concomitant of intelligence. As long as intelligence remains a belief in ultimate ends, religion is the system of this belief. If the intentionality is not directed toward this belief, both intelligence and religion yield to materialism and atheism.

Therefore, in the original framework of James's psychology, there is a reciprocal causation between intelligence and religion. Intelligence is the inward dimension of religion, while religion is the outward representation of intelligence. Later, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), James realizes that if religion is not analyzed in the scope of its institutional aspects but its working on human consciousness, or religious experience, religion could be seen as spirituality. Thence a certain trinity of intelligence, religion, and spirituality is established. However, this trinity is unstable. If religion can reflect how human consciousness registers objectivity, the growing human propensity to employ objectivity to generate knowledge will favor science as an alternative intelligence over religion. Moreover, the secularization of intelligence will in turn exclude spirituality. In this case, Gardner's intelligence without references to religion and spirituality will hold. If religion is only approached at the personal level, religion will be overtaken by spirituality. In this case, Zohar and Marshall's spiritual intelligence without taking religion into consideration will hold.

How does James save this trinity from its potential evolvment into a trilemma? I argue that James intentionally treats religion as an inevitable object of science. As science demands truth seeking and religion possesses a wealth of phenomena that await scientific explanations, the scientific study of religion mutually reinforces the research value of religion and positivism of science. This partially explains why American higher education system used to see science and religion in no essential conflicts with each other. Because James cherishes the individual experience of religion, he in his reconstruction of religion as spirituality achieves what Woodhead and Heelas call the subjective turn of religion. Due to the difficulty of accommodating the individual needs of spirituality, religion gradually exits from the groves of academe as an institution to govern spirituality. Since spirituality is personal and evades the precepts imposed by religious groups, to prevent spirituality go awry James further develops a criterion for measuring the soundness of spirituality. Hiring spirituality to uphold virtue and condemn evil in society embodies James's version of spiritual intelligence. Finally, James's psychological analysis of religion is grounded on the "varieties of religious experience," which elicit world religions and entail cultural relativism. World religions are at heart systems of redemption and people accept any specific religion based on their own understanding of religious experience and needs of searching for meaning in life. Once the academics in rigid scientific attitude recognize this pluralism in religion, the comparative study of religions emerges to promote

the necessary scientific naturalism and cultural pluralism for extending studies of religion, which is in accord with Marsden's argument. Thus, the connotation of intelligence in James's reappraisal of religion is at least extended to scientific intelligence, spiritual intelligence, and cultural intelligence. Scientific intelligence seeks to harmonize religion and science. Spiritual intelligence aims at appeasing the individuals without making them lose touch with the society. Cultural intelligence pleads for a cross-cultural and interreligious dialogue. On this account, the trinity of intelligence, spirituality, and religion sustains.

This paper is divided into five sections. The first and the last section corresponds to Introduction and Conclusion respectively. Section 2 will demonstrate how James manages to employ his philosophies of empiricism, pragmatism, and pluralism to bridge the gap between secular study of and scientific study of religion and how he sees the scientific study of religion can avoid the danger of scientism. Section 3 will explain James's way of transforming religion into spirituality and answer why spirituality and religion are still of importance in the age of science. Section 4 will focus on James's analyses of world religions and unveil how any specific religion can be interpreted in James's worldview.

The Scientific Understanding of Religion

For centuries, explaining religion had been the exclusive domain of the clergy. People were encouraged to follow religious sects' teaching of doctrines while warned against indulging themselves with creative religious interpretations. Studying religion for the sake of religion did not become less appealing until the advent of the Enlightenment that advanced the progress of natural sciences and curated skepticism toward religion. The uneasy relationship between religion and science accelerated in the 19th century and culminated in the Victorian crisis of faith.

The German-born British philologist and Orientalist Max Müller was not a skeptic of religion so much as one of the harbingers who innovatively employed secular and scientific methods to study religion. His lectures delivered at the Royal Institution were later compiled into the book *Introduction to the Science of Religion* in which he justified the free inquiry of religion: "True reverence is shown in treating every subject, however sacred, however dear to us, with perfect confidence; without fear and without favour; with tenderness and love by all means, but, before all, with an unfinishing and uncompromising loyalty to truth" (Müller 6). Müller's impartiality and truth-seeking spirit encouraged scientific neutrality of examining religion in the latter half of the 19th century free of the shackles of theology. His "science of religion" further brought him to present his works in the Gifford Lectures, which were founded by the will of Lord Adam Gifford with the purpose of promoting natural theology that attempts to bridge "secular and religious views of self and world" (Long), from 1888 to 1892 in Glasgow, Scotland. Apparently, a secular understanding of religion ceased attracting vehement critiques in Europe in the late 19th century and a new trend of studying religion "scientifically" was winning academic interests.

The other side of the Atlantic might take some time to catch up with European countries in terms of intellectual debates but was never absent in the absorbing of any innovative academic topics. In 1897 William James was invited by the Gifford Lectures to make a presentation in Edinburgh but he postponed it until 1899-1901 due to health problems. Besides, he needed additional time to realize his ambition of overtaking his father Henry James Sr. by synthesizing grand topics of mind and faith under public scrutiny (Hart 521). In front of the learned audience in Great Britain, he confesses that he has been influenced by European academia at University of Harvard and has studied the Scottish philosophy of natural religion (*Varieties* 1-2). However, as a psychologist unfamiliar with theology and the history of religions, he is only capable of providing a descriptive survey of subjective religious phenomena by drawing sources from documents written by self-conscious men who “were most accomplished in the religious life and best able to give an intelligible account of their ideas and motives” (2-3). It is worth noting that he refers to his selected documents as *documents humains* (3). James was clearly influenced by the school of naturalism in France since the French word *document*, as evidenced in Edmond de Goncourt’s *La faustin* and Émile Zola’s *Le Roman expérimental*, was conceived as necessary raw materials to “build,” in the metaphorical sense of architecture, rather than “invent” books (de La Tour). Later, this artistic usage of *document* for the sake of objectivism was applied scientifically for pathological purposes, and the word *document humain* was tantamount to “l’exact équivalent du *Fait*, du *Phénomène*, matériaux élémentaires de toute science concrète” (Segalen 17). James’s mention of his method of analyzing information from *documents* demonstrates his attitude of scientific objectivism toward religion and informs that he stays current with the progress in European scientific methods.

James then sets up his standard to gauge the nature and philosophic significance of religion. He deems that the existential judgment answers religion’s nature while the spiritual judgment, or *Werthurtheil* (*Werturteil* in obsolete German spelling), explains its value (*Varieties* 4). To demonstrate what an existential judgment can be, he takes the higher criticism of Biblical Studies that examines the historical facts and conditions of producing the Bible as an example. To explain the spiritual judgment, he points out that each soul has his own perception of the revelation value of the Bible. By emphasizing that the choice of judgments can lead to two fundamentally different evaluations of religion, James began his philosophical criticism of the Bible that corresponds to both the historical and textual schools of biblical criticism. Scholar David C. Lamberth believes that James was immersing himself in the philosophical discussion of religion in preparation for the Gifford Lectures, and therefore a philosophical reading of *Varieties* should be recommended (*William James and the Metaphysics of Experience* 106-07). It is obvious that James philosophizes religion to a certain extent, which confirms with Lamberth’s belief, but James apparently does so to make connections between biology and history (existential judgment), psychology and philosophy (spiritual judgment), as he states: “When I handle them biologically and psychologically as if they were mere curious facts of individual history” (*Varieties* 6). In other words, he only observes the nature and philosophy of religion through the lens of empiricism and psychology.

Next, James makes a bold iconoclastic move by calling religious leaders “pattern-setters” (6) and indicating the “nervous instability” (6) in their life experience. It is, as James believes, their pathological features such as “trances, heard voices, seen visions” (7) that help them become religiously influential and authoritative. As a result, a specific religion under the umbrella of religion mirrors a psychological pattern in the spectrum of psychological patterns. Implicitly, people choose their belief according to their psychological characteristics.

Further, James warns against the danger of oversimplifying the concept of religion: “the word ‘religion’ cannot stand for any single principle or essence,” he continues, “but is rather a collective name” (26). By doing so, he confirms the complexity and plurality inherent in religion and supports his empiricist method of dipping into religious experience as deep as possible to deal with the topic. Previously in his preface to *The Will to Believe* (1896), James defines his philosophic attitude as *radical empiricism*:

I say ‘empiricism,’ because it is contented to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience; and I say ‘radical,’ because it treats the doctrine of monism itself as an hypothesis, and, unlike so much of the half-way empiricism that is current under the name of positivism or agnosticism or scientific naturalism, it does not dogmatically affirm monism as something with which all experience has got to square. (vii-viii)

That said, James’s *radical empiricism* treats existing conclusions from all matters of fact as fallible hypotheses yet to be modified, and against the dogmatic nature of monism his philosophy evinces the inclination to pluralism. Strikingly similar to Karl Popper’s idea of falsification that invites scientific theories to be constantly tested for refutations (*The Logic of Scientific Discovery*), James’s fallibility-based empiricism critically questions the classical empiricist view that conclusions from observations are unailing. He is consistent with *radical empiricism* in writing *Varieties*, and on the premise that religion is fallible and/or one specific research on religion is equally fallible, he is able to conduct his idiosyncratic inquiry based on the discipline of psychology without taking institutional and theological aspects of religion into consideration.

James is also known for his philosophy of *pluralism*. “Pluralism,” according to him, “in exorcising the absolute, exorcises the great de-realer of the only life we are at home in, and thus redeems the nature of reality from essential foreignness” (*A Pluralistic Universe* 49-50). Connecting pluralism and empiricism, he highly values the multidimensionality in individual experience: “Every end, reason, motive, object of desire or aversion, ground of sorrow or joy that we feel is in the world of finite multifariousness, for only in that world does anything really happen, only there do events come to pass” (50). Correspondingly, he “arbitrarily” (*Varieties* 31) articulates his own definition of religion: “The feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (31). Situating religious experience at the individual level, James not only realizes the subjective turn of

religion by disregarding the community values of Christianity, exemplified in "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20), but also validates that the perception-based religion is pluralistic and deserves plural examinations.

It is likely that James's pluralism has influenced the scientific attitude of John Dewey, who happens to be the successor of James's philosophy of pragmatism. Dewey firmly believes that science is too complicated to be dealt with one-sidedly, and "in the house which science might build there are many mansions" ("Unity of Science as a Social Problem" 34). However, he, unlike James, is perhaps convinced by *e pluribus unum* and regards science as a "social unity" (32) to which there is a pressing need of uniting all fields of science. The reason for James not to favor unity over plurality may rest upon his criticism of monism and his contention that "absolute unity, in spite of brilliant dashes in its direction, still remains undiscovered, still remains a *Grenzbegriff*" (Will viii). Hence the search for a unified theory in science or for the omniscience in religion, in James's view, helps little for stimulating an understanding of the multifilament of world mysteries. Instead, a pluralist philosophy could endorse investigations of discoveries from multiple perspectives and different disciplinary approaches.

James is attentive to the human mental capacity of making abstractions from the concrete. Echoing Ralph Waldo Emerson, Kant, and Plato, he suggests that the ability to perceive the abstract permits the understanding of the nature of things, and it is abstract ideas that make concrete objects meaningful: "As time, space, and the ether soak through all things, so (we feel) do abstract and essential goodness, beauty, strength, significance, justice, soak through all things good, strong, significant and just" (*Varieties* 56). Reversely, it is also possible to create the concrete from the abstract. Once people sense the abstract law and order of nature, there is an anthropomorphic tendency of attributing human qualities to natural entities for evidence of their perceptions which explains the birth of Greek gods (58). To draw an inference from James's findings, the human beings' capacity of feeling the presence of the objective and their propensity for employing subjective senses to creatively describe the invisible inaugurate the basis of religion and usher in the endless search for truth.

On the relationship between religion and science, evidently, James was influenced by Charles Darwin who inspired his evolutionary theory of consciousness (Taylor). Religion, according to James, mixes the transcendentalist perception of abstract values from the physical world and the sensationalist metaphoric description of divine wonders. Religion agrees with science in basing discourses on abstractions, yet the strictly objective attitude of science in the interests of explaining truth free of interferences from artistic expressions and religious personification separates science from religion. The development of epistemic objectivity in human consciousness catalyzes the birth of religion while its further development induces science. Science, from the evolutionary perspective, can thus be seen as an epistemological descendant of religion. In James's time religion was yielding to science: "'Science' in many minds is genuinely taking the place of a religion. Where this is so, the scientist treats the 'Law of Nature' as objective facts to be revered" (*Varieties* 57).

If the evolution of consciousness along the asymptote of approaching objectivity is directly conducive to the birth of science as a reliable source for intelligence, why is there a need for a retrospective survey of religion for inspiration? James later in his celebrated *Pragmatism* (1907) concludes that the philosophy of *pragmatism* was the core of his studies of religion. Contrary to sentimentalists' preference of emotions over abstract values as truth or rationalists' insistence on unconditional "principles" as truth (*Pragmatism* 227-231), James's pragmatism positions truth conditionally in the process of being verified in relation to an idea: "Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its veri-*fication*. Its validity is the process of its valid-*ation*" (201, the italics are the author's). Consequently, the process of verifying religious experience interlocks the philosophy of pragmatism.

Taking *Varieties* and *Pragmatism* together, it is plain to see James's logic: 1) Anything religious can be identified as an object of consciousness: "All our attitudes, moral, practical, or emotional, as well as religious, are due to the 'objects' of our consciousness, the things which we believe to exist, whether really or ideally, along with ourselves" (*Varieties* 53); 2) An object perceived is an observable source for the verification process: "To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare" (*Pragmatism* 46-47); 3) The varieties of religious experience inevitably lead to a diversity of verification processes which further enrich the toolkits of pragmatism for truth seeking and motivate the philosophy to refine itself constantly: "You see that pragmatism can be called religious, if you allow that religion can be pluralistic or merely melioristic in type.... The various over-beliefs of men, their several faith-ventures, are in fact what are needed to bring the evidence in. You will probably make your own ventures severally" (300-01). Thus, studying religion in the age of science constitutes a pragmatist's acknowledgment of the fallibility of science in truth verification.

As a lifetime opponent of dogmatism and supporter of pluralism, James detested the monopolization of truth and foresaw the danger of scientism. His attempt to study religion scientifically from the perspective of psychology serves his philosophy of pragmatism teleologically. His hope was to encourage researchers to exploit their liberty of making choices for a sound judgment in verifying truth. He raised the awareness of the intellectual entanglement of science and religion and left the question for the academia in the future to find out a solution. "If radically tough," says James, "the hurly-burly of the sensible facts of nature will be enough for you, and you will need no religion at all" (301).

Religion as Spirituality

In a world where the correlation between science and intelligence is becoming positive, is religion still related to intelligence? It is necessary to recall that the subtitle of *Varieties* is "A Study in Human Nature." In nature, there are universally

applicable laws that work independently of human activities. Science is the formal logic to measure and describe as precise as possible these laws. However, human nature is kaleidoscopic and there can never be a consensus on what it is or how it should be. Religion, as the carrier of inexhaustible human experience, provides a fruitful account of human feelings, dispositions, actions and confers meanings to life. Moreover, the topic of religion covers the areas of human consciousness neglected by the emerging discipline of psychology, as James states frankly: "It is as if there were in the human consciousness a *sense of reality*, a *feeling of objective presence*, a *perception* of what we may call 'something there,' more deep and more general than any of the special and particular 'senses' by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed" (*Varieties* 58, the italics are the author's). Religion is hence the ineluctable source for unearthing the hidden reality of the way human is. It is for these reasons that James resorts to religion for his inquisition into human nature.

However, as James deliberately dismisses the institutional aspects of religion and sticks to the psychological viewpoint, religion in *Varieties* is not religious so much as it is spiritual. Correspondingly, human nature is spirituality in essence. James sees the Emersonian sense of religion as one of the earliest attempts to separate spirituality from gods or anything material: "Not a deity *in concreto*, not a superhuman person, but the immanent divinity in things, the essentially spiritual structure of the universe, is the object of the transcendentalist cult" (31-32). Like Ralph Waldo Emerson, James believes in the autonomy of spirituality. Disagreeing with the then physiological theory and materialist scientists' "medical materialism" (13) which holds that everything in mind is organically founded, he argues that spirituality is unattached to the physical makeup because spiritual values can shift, and this shifting is not determined by the fixed physiological structure and will not lead to any physiological changes (14). Therefore, spirituality, in James's analysis, has nothing to do with neurology and cannot be evaluated by natural sciences. Rather, James poses three criteria to judge spirituality: immediate luminousness, philosophical reasonableness, and moral helpfulness (18). The first criterion refers to human immediate inner feelings and instincts. The second is about making opinions logically coherent with the system of philosophy. With the last one, aligning feelings, opinions and ideas, along with moral obligations, is involved. Therefore, by James's standards, spiritual intelligence is intuitive, reflective, and moral.

James further separates the spiritual state from religious phenomena, as he writes: "Religious melancholy, whatever peculiarities it may have *quâ* religious, is at any rate melancholy" (24). The relation between religion and spirituality is hence delicate. Religion can summon up spirituality. Once spirituality comes into existence, be it a sub-phenomenon derived from religion, it is nevertheless self-standing. If this causality link is to be suspended for the purpose of ontology, then spiritual experience is religious experience *per se* and *vice versa*. In *Varieties* the boundaries between religion and spirituality are intentionally blurred and these two terms are often used interchangeably to corroborate James's ultimate secularization of religion: "Religion, whatever it is, is a man's total reaction upon life" (35). To be religious, radically speaking, is to be concurrently spiritual and worldly.

James acknowledges the existence of the so-called “unseen,” i.e., what is beyond the sensory perception of naked eyes. He takes a pragmatic stance and harks back to the Kantian idea of *praktischer Hinsicht* to postulate that people’s faith in the existence of unintelligible objects can “have a definite meaning for our practice” (*Varieties* 55). Consequently, what matters is not whether God can be verifiable but the phenomenon that the inner consciousness of believing in the unseen order even without commanding one’s faculties to prove its existence can change life positively. It is the interaction between everyday behaviors against the unseen’s giant shadow and the manifest faith in the eternally mystical unseen that forms a distinctive *reality* in human experience. As a philosopher of pragmatism who adheres to the scientific rigor of his time, this is the best that James can do to prove the invisible order without involving mysticism. Beyond this, he could only speculate that humanity is enclosed in the divine plan: “in the metaphysical and religious sphere, articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of the same conclusion” (74). That being so, spirituality, by engaging in the human consciousness of the unseen absolute order, is the revelation of divine reasons.

The spiritual response to what is unseen can shepherd believers into an elevated life. Practically, to boost personal and social morale, it is even worth investing faith in “the unseen.” Congruent with James’s third criterion which is the moral helpfulness in judging spirituality, the belief that “there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto” (53) tells how the completeness of the cosmic order could inspire people to pursue a higher goal of moral perfection. Religious life could be no more spiritual than steeling oneself in human completion as if he/she is the agent of the unseen.

Besides the unseen moral goods, there are unseen abstract values that can be perceived from encountering objects to make life more fulfilled. James referred to Plato for his theory of ideas and Emerson for his discovery of “abstract divineness of things” to demonstrate that the human intellect is fully aware of values that are “worthy of worship” (57) from the earthly. Plato’s *Symposium* particularly arrests James’s attention:

The true order of going is to use the beauties of earth as steps along which one mounts upwards for the sake of that other Beauty, going from one to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair actions, and from fair actions to fair notions until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute Beauty, and at last knows what the essence of Beauty is. (qtd. in *Varieties* 57)

This quotation from *Symposium* is indicative of the human understanding of abstraction yet also aims at reaching an accord of Plato’s emphasis on “fair actions” with James’s practicality of belief in the unseen.

The meaning of “fair actions” is at least twofold in the context of *Varieties*. First, putting knowledge into practice is a necessary step to approach truth in the philosophy of pragmatism. Only by the process of starting from the material to the conceptual then to the action and finally to the notion can a person have a

thorough grasp of what roles of “the seen” and “the unseen” play in the constitution of the reality. Second, reality does not exist inertly but is incessantly being shaped by the interplay of action and notion. James is suggesting that spirituality, as cognitive intelligence, can discern both the good and the bad. To realize the best of all possible worlds, human beings should exploit their spiritual potential to draw inspirations from the sublime and do good things for the betterment of life. This suggestion also appears in his essay “The Moral Equivalent of War” (1910) where James admits that human nature contains “inferiors” which can lead to militarism but the same energy and passion behind bellicosity, if guided rightly by morals, can be transfigured in preparation for utopia (James).

The rise of science marks a crisis for religion and is endowed with the potential to disturb spirituality. In “Is Life Worth Living?” (1895), James names two life attitudes, optimism and pessimism, as “definitions of the world” (*Will* 60). He is more concerned with pessimism for he observes that science has explained what religion fails to explain, and consequently a great disenchantment with religion appears in the modern society, which could frustrate believers’ piousness and hence lead to their mental instability. Instead of remaining neutral to these two dissimilar life philosophies, he treats pessimism as “a religious disease” (39) and suggests that true faith is the courage to believe unshakably in the possibilities of life, which can produce optimism: “But the craving, when the mind is pent in to the ‘hard facts,’ especially as science now reveals them, can breed pessimism, quite as easily as it breeds optimism when it inspires religious trust and fancy to wing their way to another and a better world” (40).

In *Varieties*, optimism and pessimism evolve into “healthy-mindedness” and the “sick soul” respectively. Healthy-mindedness refers to “the tendency which looks on all things and sees that they are good” (*Varieties* 87), yet the sick soul is the judgment that “the evil aspects of our life are of its very essence” (131). James here no longer grants value preferences to these two spiritual tendencies and argues that both complement each other for a full picture of human experience since life is replete with good and bad moments. However, the sick souls can “be twice-born in order to be happy” (166). As James in Lecture VIII, IX and X implies, spirituality unifies contrasting mental states and divided souls. And the conversion in Christianity is in fact a healing action that reconciles the evil elements in life with the Holy Spirit and promises deliverance from the otherwise unbearable weight of original sin and *Weltschmerz*.

Accordingly, it is safe to conclude that regardless of the expansion of modern science, religion and its double at the personal level spirituality will continue to provide emotional support to people who are overcoming difficulties in life. James’s separation of religion and spirituality offers two manners for salvation. Either you stay with the religious communities for a collective salvation or turn to the self for a personal transformation. As varieties of individualism are burgeoning in the US schooling experience (Kusserow), spirituality for its weightiness of subjective experience gradually replaces religion which traditionally played a role in soul healing, though.

Varieties of Religion

James's analysis of world religions enlarges the scope of *Varieties*. Despite his appreciation for the "healthy-minded joyousness" found in the Greek belief system of polytheism, James contends that "They [Greeks] knew no joys comparable in quality of preciousness to those which we shall ere long see that Brahmans, Buddhists, Christians, Mohammedans, twice-born people whose religion is non-naturalistic, get from their several creeds of mysticism and renunciation" (143). His mention of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam is by no means coincidental. Socio-historically speaking, the postbellum Transcendentalists inherited the antebellum Transcendentalism's assimilation of cultural elements from Asian religious traditions to their romantic reverie of the Orient. Yet influenced by the new Orientalist scholarly movement in Europe, they also sought to actively popularize Oriental themes in American publications and academe and compared world religions in the light of Darwinian evolutionism (Versluis). Considering this, it is not surprising to see that James investigates these world religions conceptually as "twice-born" religions that move beyond the stage of natural religions and possess a coherent system of philosophy, morals, and spirituality ready for new interpretations. On account of personal academic interests and the national sprawling fever for Orientalism, James later in *A Pluralistic Universe* concludes his experiment of using a variety of religious traditions as sources for psychological analysis: "it is high time for the basis of discussion in these questions to be broadened and thickened up" (*Pluralistic* 330).

Hinduism along with Stoicism and Buddhism, according to James, can best explain "both the humility as to one's self and the charity towards others which characterize spiritual excitement" (*Varieties* 279). At the personal level, it concentrates the "consciousness upon the moment at hand" (290) and secures inner equilibrium and inward tranquility. Situating Hinduism in his Lectures XI, XII, and XIII on *Saintliness*, James finds that this religion is capable of arousing "spiritual emotions" (271) for general causes of humanities to overcome the personal "instinctive repugnance" (284) toward others which could handicap the self-other relationship, and consequently contributes to the saintly character. For this reason, Hinduism integrates the personal into the social.

In a larger sense, Hinduism is the medium between the Self and the Cosmos. By quoting the *Upanishads*, James recognizes in the Vedanta school the unity of the Self and Brahman for ultimate truth seeking: "That art Thou! Not a part, not a mode of That, but identically That, that absolute Spirit of the World" (qtd. in *Varieties* 419). Moreover, he sees the union of the individual and the Absolute as the "great mystic achievement" (419) for understanding the unseen reality. Religious mysticism in Hinduism "is dualistic in Sankhya, and monistic in Vedanta philosophy" (425), but whatever its nature, it belongs to Hinduism, one of the accumulated traditions that form "one half of mysticism" (426).

In James's opinion, Hinduism is purely a spiritual religion. He rejects claims of any scientific proof of the Hindu mystic cosmic experience, as he subsequently in *Pragmatism* criticizes Hindu philosopher Vivekananda's notion of the *Atman* or

the Universal Self: "it is indeed not a scientific use, for we can make no particular deductions from it. It is emotional and spiritual together" (274). Following this logic, the contemporary idea of "Hindu Science" may be considered by him as a pseudoscience.

To say the least, James's understanding of the Hindu religion differs little from the imagination of antebellum Transcendentalists that Hinduism is the "soul of an essentially spiritual and mystical India that provided a needed balance to Western materialism and Protestant practicality" (Altman 102). However, his emphasizing Hinduism's feature in uniting personal experience and religious mysticism provides a fresh perspective in the working of human intelligence for connecting the individual with the social, the spiritual, and the universal.

James considers Buddhism as one of the "systems of thought which the world usually calls religious, and yet which do not positively assume a God" (*Varieties* 31) and a religion "in which the pessimistic elements are best developed after (165). Buddhism, then, is interpreted by him as an atheistic religion that targets at spiritual suffering. For the sick souls, the Buddha is a perfect sympathizer. James notices that Leo Tolstoy quotes from the Buddha when the literary giant is trying to find answers for deep questions of life such as "Why?" "Wherefore?" "What for?" (153-55). Though Tolstoy concludes these questions with a disillusionment in life, James believes his intellectual debate on life and religion somehow "led to Tolstoy's recovery" (156).

James appreciates the Buddha's teaching of the "middle way," which cautions disciples against two extremes, that of mortification and that of desire and pleasure (361). The healthy-minded risk hedonism while the sick souls take a chance with asceticism. James's highlighting the "middle way" seems to remind the healthy-minded people that there are many others experiencing a time of tribulation; and the Buddhist teaching intimates that both happiness and sadness could evolve into extremes that disrupt the peace of mind for a balanced life. True inner wisdom would take both extremes into consideration and make "one thing as indifferent to us as another, and thus leads to rest, to peace, and to Nirvana" (361-62).

In terms of the cosmic experience of uniting Man and God for internal concentration, Buddhism is compared by James to Hinduism. The Buddhists not only share the practice of *samādhi* (the highest stage of meditation for completing the unity) with the Hindus but also have their own *dhyāna* for "higher states of contemplation" (401) where everything, including indifference, memory, and self-consciousness, lapses into voidness. Buddhism lets the satisfied sense of unity in Hinduism go. Therefore, James believes that Buddhism is more developed than Hinduism regarding meditation and contemplation for personal enlightenment. *Dhyāna* is "not yet Nirvana," James continues, "but as close an approach to it as this life affords" (402).

David Scott observes that James's discourse on the fluidity of consciousness bears a philosophical resemblance to Buddhism's "stream of consciousness," and his luminousness, philosophical reasonableness, and moral helpfulness for evaluation of spirituality run parallel with Buddhist teachings about *samādhi*, *prajñā* (wisdom), and *śīla* (ethics) ("William James and Buddhism: American Pragmatism and the

Orient"). It is likely that James was directly influenced by the Buddhist philosophy when he was about to write about consciousness and religion. This should not come as a surprise since American Victorianism was known for its active engagement in critically examining the philosophy of Buddhism (Tweed), while the "agnostic views of ultimate reality and nonsubstantialist views of selfhood" (154) in the late-Victorian America permitted atheistic discussions on a wide range of topics, consciousness included.

Apropos of the Abrahamic religions, Christianity is the most familiar to James. Christianity in totality, as James proposes, is transcendental and anti-empirical: "The whole force of the Christian religion...so far as belief in the divine personages determines the prevalent attitude of the believer, is in general exerted by the instrumentality of pure ideas, of which nothing in the individual's past experience directly serves as a model" (54). Thus, it is the craving for what is beyond individual consciousness that constitutes the faith of God. Various Christian denominations are covered in *Varieties* but the proportion of medieval Christian mysticism, Quietism, Pietism, and the Quakers is comparatively sizeable since these religious bodies tend to emphasize a personal relationship with God and can therefore provide abundant *documents humains* for James's analysis of spirituality. These Christian sources for mystic experience complement the sources James collects for Hinduism and Buddhism to make an interreligious dialogue on mysticism possible.

How come the Spirit of Jesus Christ could bypass the intermediary of religious community to reach the individual? James postulates that it was the "crisis of self-surrender" that stimulated Christianity to develop inwardly. Left in his forlornness, the individual has a pressing demand for an "immediate spiritual help," and this very demand incentives the shift of popularity from Catholicism to Lutheranism, Lutheranism to Calvinism, Calvinism to Wesleyanism, and eventually Wesleyanism to transcendental idealism, in order of the individual's attachment to God's grace (*Varieties* 211). James quotes Martin Luther's message of personal experience to surmise that "Nothing in Catholic theology...has ever spoken to sick souls" (245-46). Duly, the rise of Protestantism can be attributable to its sincere care for the individual's mental and emotional needs of which Catholic bureaucratic red tape fails to take notice.

But once the individual realizes what he hankers after in his loneliness is nothing more than a divine intervention in his favor and that Christ's partiality does not contribute to his intelligence, he will feel a sense of shame in accepting the amazing love anymore and instead embrace the scientific objectivity, abstract beauty of ideas, and impartiality in social righteousness as the new religion: "What with science, idealism, and democracy, our own imagination has grown to need a God of an entirely different temperament from that Being interested exclusively in dealing out personal favors, with whom our ancestors were so contented" (346). Intimacy with God in the end begets the free will.

Islam is mentioned in *Varieties* with far less length and only with favoritism with the Sufi sect. James argues that influences from ancient Persian pantheism and Hinduism make the Sufis experience religious life differently from the "rigid

monotheism of the Arab mind" (402). He uses a piece of the autobiography of Al-Ghazali, an 11th century Persian philosopher and theologian, to prove that "Mystical truth exists for the individual who has the transport, but for no one else" (405). Accordingly, mystical experiences, unlike conceptual thoughts, are individual feelings which are not transferable to others for establishing the common ground of knowledge. But how can untransferable intuitions proselytize those who do not have the identical mystical experiences for a conversion? James turns to Islam again and finds that "Mohammed's revelations all came from the subconscious sphere" (481).

Like Sigmund Freud, James registers the importance of unconsciousness (in James's word: subconsciousness) and sees subconsciousness as the linchpin of psychology and religion: "Psychology and religion are thus in perfect harmony up to this point, since both admit that there are forces seemingly outside of the conscious individual that bring redemption to his life" (211). As far as James understands, subconsciousness is in charge of afflatus and supernatural communication: "Our intuitions, hypotheses, fancies, superstitions, persuasions, convictions, and in general all our non-rational operations, come from it" (483). Therefore, religious leaders' inspiration and revelation derived from sacred experiences could ultimately be attributable to the mysterious working of subconsciousness. Though the ordinary mortals do not share the experience of receiving inspiration and revelation with religious leaders, their subconsciousness equips them with the faculty to conduct a non-rational reasoning of the leaders' words and actions. Subconsciousness is hence the medium for communication of implicit information, or what Michael Polanyi calls the "tacit knowledge." The accumulation of this implicit knowledge perceived by the subconscious sphere in the end allows epiphany to excel and facilitate the conversion marked by the "sudden perception or conviction of new truth, or of impulse to action so obsessive that it must be worked off" (483).

James's scarce mention of Hebrew prophets (479-81) only adds evidence to his ascertaining the relationship between divine inspiration and subconsciousness. Meager space left for Judaism is a symptom of his awareness of the rise of Jewish Studies, but he was obviously out of synchronization with the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement in 19th century Germany. After all, James was a psychologist and it was his focus on the religious inwardness that brought world religions all together: "Judaism, Islam and Buddhism get along without ritual sacrifice; so does Christianity" (462). Certainly, at the subconscious bottom of the religion's iceberg, all religions are equally effective in animating the mind to overcome the limited consciousness of the self and reach out to the unconsciousness of the other: "Mental facts do function both singly and together, at once, and we finite minds may simultaneously be co-conscious with one another in a superhuman intelligence" (*Pluralistic* 292).

Despite lack of references to Confucius in his works, Confucianism may be seen as the hidden source for James's philosophy. Both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau read translations of Confucian texts, and there is evidence that they built their philosophy with inspirations drawn from the Confucian tradition (Foust, *Confucianism and American Philosophy* 14). James's quotations

from Emerson and Thoreau in *Varieties* are clear signs of the Transcendentalists' influence on his works and may conceal a Confucian clue.

Thematically, James's reference to the Emersonian religion that treats the universe as a divine order without deities is in accord with Confucius' attitude toward the *Heaven (tian)*, which is manifest in *Analects* 7.21 that the Master "had nothing to say about strange happenings, the use of force, disorder, or the spirits"; and 17.19 that the Master regards the *Heaven* as an abstract cosmic order : "Does *tian* speak? And yet the four seasons turn and the myriad things are born and grow within it. Does *tian* speak?" James's excerpt from Thoreau's *Walden* that calls for the consciousness of spirituality in Nature (*Varieties* 275) is hardly different from Confucius' ideal life that celebrates the artistic lifestyle in bliss of Nature and Heaven in *Analects* 11.26: "At the end of spring, with the spring clothes having already been finished, I would like, in the company of five or six young men and six or seven children, to cleanse ourselves in the Yi River, to revel in the cool breezes at the Altar for Rain, and then return home singing." Seemingly, James, Emerson, and Thoreau share many in common with the Master.

Additionally, modern scholars also find that there are philosophical overlaps between Confucianism and American pragmatism (Shusterman; Foust, "Confucianism and American Pragmatism") which indicate possible, however indirect, transcultural exchanges. Hence, the spread of Confucian texts to America in the early 19th century could in some way be regarded as a faint foreshadowing of James, Emerson and Thoreau's Transcendentalist understanding of religion and the American philosophy of pragmatism.

Conclusion

William James's reappraisal of religion is as copious as his contemplation of the universe is recondite. Though James moors his analysis of religion to the discipline of psychology, he in many ways contributes to the scientific study of religion, studies of spirituality, and comparative religion. James's recalibration of religion within the scope of science is unique to the extent that he locates it in his coordinate system of radical empiricism, pragmatism, and pluralism. Radical empiricism implies the fallibility of any scientific approach. Pragmatism treats the process of verifying religion or any other subject as a partial yet technically functional procedure to corroborate the completeness of idea. Pluralism recognizes the multitudinous elements that constitute a subject and warrants a well-rounded investigation. By this way, James's scientific study of religion augments the philosophy of science and gives fair warning to monoideism of either science or religion.

On the other hand, as the scientific reasoning is inadequate in respect of solacing people and subsuming religious experience under science, religion distinguishes itself in connecting the souls with the unseen cosmic order. If religion trivializes its organized form for purposes of doling out personalized care, it becomes spirituality in essence. A spirituality in fine fettle, according to James, could guide the soul to differentiate the good from the bad, to appreciate the moral

goods in society and the abstract beauty in nature, and to align itself with the universe for self-improvement.

James's analyses of world religions come off as a study of the patterns of religious experience. Hinduism essentializes spirituality to invite the joy of uniting with the universe. Buddhism, alternatively, brings meditation and contemplation to the next level of acosmism, while its soteriology offsets optimism against pessimism for the attainment of inner peace. Christian mysticism embraces the soul's intimacy with God, and true intimacy eventually brings about the free will. Lastly, subconsciousness discovered in Islam and Judaism by James oils the wheel of perennialism in explaining the conversion process in all religions and suggesting the existence of non-rational thinking in human intelligence. Unmistakably, James conducted his survey of world faiths since time immemorial against the background of transcendentalism, itself a product of America's cultural contact with the Eastern philosophy. Encompassing world religions fulfils the promise of "varieties of religious experience" and testifies to James's philosophy of pluralism in overcoming cultural parochialism.

Ultimately, the profuseness in James's writings complies with his quest for intelligence: "Our intelligence cannot wall itself up alive, like a pupa in its chrysalis. It must at any cost keep on speaking terms with the universe that engendered it" (*Pluralistic* 207). James himself did not privilege any form of intelligence, while left the question of ideal intelligence open-ended and individualized. To a certain degree, intelligence, as the title of James's book *The Will to Believe* hints, is the exercise of the will to believe in the unseen possibilities. What you believe shapes your own type of intelligence and you use it to live a life to die for. In the final analysis, it would be no exaggeration to say that James's reassessment of religion marks the culmination of the fin-de-siècle transatlantic intellectual venture into the entangled relationship of religion and intelligence and heralds the coming of the 20th century as an American century in which the values of science, spirituality, and multiculturalism are celebrated.

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