

Field-Being and the Sick Soul

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I. Outline of the Project for a Pastoral Philosophy

The main characteristics of pastoral philosophy as opposed to traditional religions are that it (1) respects the autonomy of morals, (2) willingly submits to rational scrutiny, (3) is concerned with the motivation and justification for practices rather than the attempted proving of doctrines, (4) is willing to sacrifice logical consistency and precision rather than neglect any area or aspect of human experience, (5) is rooted in antecedent problems in living and (6) ends in confident decisions to act.

The ultimate motivation for pastoral philosophy lies in an analysis of the history of philosophy. Throughout the *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James proposes rather dramatic dichotomies, usually for the purpose of attending to one side and discarding the other, but almost always for some judgment of value. Thus James condemns institutionalized religion and philosophized theology in favor of personal religious experience. Likewise, while James does not dismiss the once-born, healthy-minded religion entirely, he devotes only two lectures to it compared with twelve lectures on the sick soul and the twice-born.

Those who do not agree with James' dichotomizing may still find his work useful for the development of the Field-Being philosophy. James' mistake, I believe, was that in proposing his dichotomies he assumed a substantialist point of view. He assumed that the intellect and the emotions were different "things." There is a much simpler way to interpret the conflicts that were James' main concern, and that is to say that the philosophical views that tend to be emotionally attractive are not usually the same as those that are intellectually attractive, and thus the search for a satisfying philosophy often leads to a divided self such as James describes in Lecture VIII. Pastoral philosophy is designed from the start to overcome the emotion-intellect division. Each of the six fundamentals of pastoral philosophy listed above is intended to make it unnecessary to disparage either the intellect or the passions. As Bishop Butler says in the very first sentence of Sermon XIII, "Everyone knows, you therefore need only just be put in mind, that there is such a thing, as having so great horror of one extreme, as to run insensibly and of course into the contrary."¹ This is exactly what James seems to have done on certain crucial issues in the *Varieties* and in his other writings, and this despite James' repeated insistence that he has no fear of extremes, that there are no rigid dichotomies, and that any proposal for healing the divided self must be judged by how well it works and not by what you or I or anyone thinks of it.

But solemnity, and gravity, and all such emotional attributes, admit of various shades; and, do what we will with our defining, the truth must at last be confronted that we are dealing with a field of experience where there is not a single conception that can be sharply drawn. The pretension, under such conditions, to be rigorously "scientific" or "exact" in our terms would only stamp us as lacking in understanding of our task. (Lecture II)²

James is unequivocal in setting aside institutional religion. At the start of Lecture XVI, he states that personal experience is "the exclusive subject of our study," and that "personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness." In Sermons XIII and XIV, Butler makes clear that he shares the high regard for mystical states, but in his, *Charge to the Clergy at Durham*, he explains why the mystic cannot just discard the institutional church.³ Field-Being philosophers will see this dispute from a different point of view. For Field-Being, the dichotomy between institutional and personal religion is, like all dichotomies, very superficial. While perhaps not entirely useless, it is far too shallow to allow for a deep analysis or to be invoked in deliberations about a major practical decision. Philosophical discussions of institutional vs. personal or of intellectual vs. passional are analogous to arguing about whether we should turn left or turn right in abstraction from any consideration of where we are now and where we want

to go. Once our present condition is analyzed sufficiently and once our goal has been sufficiently scrutinized, the decision of which way to turn should emerge without any need of further discussion of left vs. right.

Field-Being would seem to most people to be a version of the Healthy-Minded, in James's terms. But James very helpfully points out exactly what is wrong with Healthy-Mindedness as a philosophy. It is not that it does not work. It does work, but it cannot be counted on as fully sufficient since it relies on setting aside so much that is real. As long as we are vulnerable to becoming a divided self, we need to consider ways to overcome the division. Field-Being is not a simple-minded, dogmatic monism. It is rather a re-orientation in which the field becomes primary and the individual beings secondary. So in order to examine James' philosophy of religion from the Field-Being point of view, we need to ask whether the dichotomies he invokes in his effort to repair the divided self do more harm than good. That is, are they sufficiently benign that they may be helpful, or are they malignant and no real cure at all?

In what follows, I will first present a very brief history of pastoral philosophy, and then outline the *Varieties* in a way that brings out how relevant it is to Field-Being philosophy in certain crucial respects. Finally, I will address the twin questions of whether we should, on the whole, support what James is aiming to show and whether what James is aiming to show on the whole supports the Field-Being philosophy.

II. Outline of the History of Pastoral Philosophy

Pascal introduced probabilities into apologetics, and Bishop Butler devoted the entire introduction of his *Analogy* to probable evidence, being careful to discuss it first in general and only later in relation to religion. Both Pascal and Butler recognized that it may be rational to act on a lesser probability, and they defended this view with ordinary examples. James read Butler carefully and used him in courses at Harvard. James also cites Pascal as a source for his, "The Will to Believe."⁴ Butler was a bishop in the Church of England, and for a time his works were widely regarded as standards of orthodoxy, but, as his religious critics recognized, Butler's way of defending religion required some serious concessions. In particular, Butler affirmed the autonomy of conscience and the right of reason to judge any alleged revelation. For Butler these "concessions" made perfect sense since he thought that physical nature, human nature and scripture were equally from God. Thus God could not give one command through conscience and a contradictory command through scripture, nor could scripture tell us anything that was contrary to reason. Apparent conflicts need to be resolved by further study. Butler was an empiricist, and most of his observations concerned morals and the moral aspects of religion, but in his sermons "On the Love of God" he does have a long and sympathetic discussion of the sort of religious experience that interested James. By the time James gave his Gifford Lectures, Butler's work had been out of favor for a generation or two, and even by the time Dewey was obliged to take the traditional Butler course in the 1870's at the University of Vermont, it was clear that the future was headed elsewhere. Only with hindsight can we see that Pascal and Butler were as much laying the foundations of pragmatism as they were defending Christianity. Their methods were relative to the intellectual conditions of the time, so as the times changed the implications of their methods changed. James and Dewey thought that what I have called the pastoral function of philosophy could be carried out all the better if we did away with religious institutions, and Dewey wanted to abandon all talk of the supernatural. They assumed no educated modern person would be able to take traditional organized religion seriously, a point that might still be disputed. The principle that links all these writers, and that runs through empiricist theology, pragmatism, and on to the religion of the future is the importance of intellectual integrity.

Obviously there are those who will never be satisfied with arguments, however clear and cogent, that only support a practical choice in a forced choice situation and keep failing (or do not even try) to prove their conclusions taken as speculative propositions. This prejudice arises from a failure to understand the initial motivation for producing the arguments. In Lecture VIII, James quotes Emerson's "Spiritual Laws." The entire paragraph, which James quotes only in part, reads:

The intellectual life may be kept clean and healthful, if man will live the life of nature, and not import

into his mind difficulties which are none of his. No man need be perplexed in his speculations. Let him do and say what strictly belongs to him, and, though very ignorant of books, his nature shall not yield him any intellectual obstructions and doubts. Our young people are diseased with the theological problems of original sin, origin of evil, predestination, and the like. These never presented a practical difficulty to any man,—never darkened across any man's road, who did not go out of his way to seek them. These are the soul's mumps, and measles, and whooping-coughs, and those who have not caught them cannot describe their health or prescribe the cure. A simple mind will not know these enemies. It is quite another thing that he should be able to give account of his faith, and expound to another the theory of his self-union and freedom. This requires rare gifts. Yet, without this self-knowledge, there may be a sylvan strength and integrity in that which he is. "A few strong instincts and a few plain rules" suffice us.⁵

This paragraph contains the axioms of all pastoral philosophy. Concentrate on your own practical problems and avoid the diseases that come with importing artificial notions. In some cases, of course, a purely intellectual problem may also be a pressing personal problem, as was the case with the young Bertrand Russell. But even Russell is the exception that proves the rule, since as soon as Russell experienced the frenzy in England over what would come to be called the First World War, he gave up his intellectual work to devote himself entirely to anti-war work. But secondly, as Emerson points out, one may solve a problem in living without necessarily being able to articulate and defend the solution in intellectual terms. That takes a special talent. John Dewey ends his Terry Lectures published as *A Common Faith* with the injunction to readers to make the common faith explicit and militant.⁶ He ends *Reconstruction in Philosophy* with a similar injunction. What is not at all obvious, but what is shown in the tradition that runs from Pascal to Butler and on to the James of, "The Will to Believe," is that when we review the evidence from the point of view of deliberation regarding a practical problem, the standards of rationality change drastically. If the objective evidence is indecisive, then the rational person will suspend judgment until sufficient evidence is available, but in practical situations, the choice may be forced before sufficient evidence is available. The point that is made by this tradition is that even in conditions of having to decide under conditions of ignorance, we still have, if not evidence, at least rationally relevant considerations. We can, for example, always raise the question of who has the burden of proof, and the premises that rationally support the burden of proof include a much wider range of considerations that those that can be brought in as evidence for the truth or falsity of the substantive conclusion.

We gain very little by merely knowing the conventional rules for assigning the burden of proof. In practice we must make a determination in each case. Consider just one example. It is obvious from inspection that Field-Being is and aims to be a global philosophy. Being global does not make it right, of course, but it could be argued that there is a presumption in favor of any position that aggressively considers all the available evidence and that the burden of proof rests on those more parochial philosophies that do not have a trans-cultural perspective. There is, we might say, an initial prejudice in favor of the broader view, but this is just that, a prejudice. It can be overcome by superior arguments, but since it is a rationally grounded prejudice, it will carry the day unless and until such superior arguments are presented and pass muster. The general mood in philosophy today is that this is unlikely to happen.

For these reasons, I see no merit in the objections raised by those who do not like pragmatism because it deals with actions and practices rather than with abstract propositions. To deal seriously with actions and practices is to make use of one's full intellectual abilities.

Another objection that is very frequently raised against this whole group of writers in regard to religion is that what they have defended is a "watered down" version of the ancient faith. This is really the other side of the coin. Whereas the prior objection failed to understand the need, as part of the original problem, for evidential rigor, this objection fails to understand the demands of the passions. What matters in philosophy or in religion is not how strong or diluted the "concoction" is but rather how well it satisfies and resolves the problem that brought us to it in the first place. It may well be, as Emerson quotes Wordsworth, that a few plain rules will suffice. As we can see from the brief history of pastoral

philosophy above, there is no institutional carrier for this philosophy. I would describe what each of the successive writers does as a “shucking” of philosophy. Each seeks to remove what is inessential (or useless, depending on how pragmatic they are), and gets down to the meat that is inside. This is not merely a metaphor. In pastoral philosophy the test of the strength of a philosophy is how much weight it can bear in practice. There is no room to fudge here, since in the pastoral philosophy, there is always a practical problem that motivated the philosophical work in the first place. The sufficiency of an argument or theory is always judged by whether that original problem has been cleared. And for that original problem to be cleared the solution must be satisfactory both from an intellectual and an emotional point of view. James recognizes this very clearly, and thus the two philosophies he concentrates on are the healthy-minded, which is entirely satisfactory emotionally but may run into intellectual problems, and the sick soul, which is intellectually honest but can be emotionally debilitating.

When we look over the brief history of pastoral philosophy, we also notice that the particular contribution of Field-Being, besides globalizing pastoral philosophy by bringing in Asian sources, is that it serves to dismantle the great chain of being that has been pre-supposed by all previous (substantialist) western philosophies.

III. Outline of the Varieties of Religious Experience

Although James makes various comments about traditional presentations of the philosophy of religion, he does not explain exactly how he saw his lectures in relation to a standard treatise. There is the same sort of peculiarity of form in Butler’s *Analogy*. In both cases the author seems to have been guided entirely by what he anticipates the reader reaction will be. In particular, the author has an end in view, and his intention is not to write about how to get there but rather actually to guide the reader to the destination. In accord with the pastoral philosophy the reader ends not by agreeing with the author or with anyone but by acting, or at least by seeing the world in a certain way.

The goal-state that James has in mind seems clearly enough stated in Lecture II:

Morality pure and simple accepts the law of the whole which it finds reigning, so far as to acknowledge and obey it, but it may obey it with the heaviest and coldest heart, and never cease to feel it as a yoke. But for religion, in its strong and fully developed manifestations, the service of the highest never is felt as a yoke. Dull submission is left far behind, and a mood of welcome, which may fill any place on the scale between cheerful serenity and enthusiastic gladness, has taken its place.⁷

And then a little later in the same lecture:

And here religion comes to our rescue and takes our fate into her hands. There is a state of mind, known to religious men, but to no others, in which the will to assert ourselves and hold our own has been displaced by a willingness to close our mouths and be as nothing in the floods and waterspouts of God. In this state of mind, what we most dreaded has become the habitation of our safety, and the hour of our moral death has turned into our spiritual birthday. The time for tension in our soul is over, and that of happy relaxation, of calm deep breathing, of an eternal present, with no discordant future to be anxious about, has arrived. Fear is not held in abeyance as it is by mere morality, it is positively expunged and washed away.⁸

To get us to that point, James begins by trying to dispose of three objections. In Lecture I he asks for a ban on all appeal to origins, either for or against religion. In Lecture II, he proposes his own definition of religion, and in Lecture III he argues that even though we are talking about the unseen, we are not assuming the existence of something skeptics would want to doubt. With those preliminaries out of the way, James begins his main exposition, but it is a very uneven one. The religion of healthy-mindedness is the topic of Lectures IV, V and the beginning of VI. From VI, “The Sick Soul,” through XV is a continuous exposition in the form of an evangelical sermon. First we are told how terrible things are (the soul is

sick), then a diagnosis is made (the self is divided) and a remedy is proposed (conversion), a remedy that we can know will restore us to better and more lasting health than we have ever known (saintliness). Having referred throughout this admittedly long sermon to the testimony of the mystics, and having repeatedly disparaged philosophy as a method in religion, James next takes up these deferred topics, again seeming to anticipate questions the reader might have at this point. The bland title of Lecture XIX, "Other Characteristics," refers primarily to James' treatment of organized religion.

IV. The Sick Soul and Field-Being

Early in the *Varieties* Lecture II, we encounter an excellent description, quoted above, of the end point, the fully cured soul that is at least suggestive of Field-Being. The next most important connection with Field-Being is in Lecture III, "The Reality of the Unseen," which I prefer to call, "The Nature of the Ontological Imagination in Relation to Reason." In this chapter, James brilliantly breaks down the dichotomy between the seen and the unseen, showing that such a distinction does far more harm than good from a practical point of view. As always, we need to keep in mind that what matters is not what James says about concepts but what he does with them. Essentially what James does is to show the reader that the question is not so much whether one should believe in the unseen, but rather how we are to understand the reality of the unseen.

Another major dichotomy of the *Varieties* is that of the conscious and the subconscious. Here, certainly, James' purpose is to get the reader not only to consider experience more broadly but to enhance the unity of experience. In Lecture VII, the invocation of the objective/subjective distinction is perhaps not as happy, but still has the same aim of dividing for the sake of overcoming the division. In Lecture IX, James distinguishes between the volitional type of conversion and the type by self-surrender. Here, as with many others, the point seems to be one of expository convenience without any ontological implications. There are other strong connections between James in the *Varieties* and the Field-Being philosophy. For example, the whole discussion of the "field of consciousness" in the Lecture on "Conversion," might serve as a foundational text for Field-Being.

What pragmatism is about, and what James preeminently represents is a turn away from the traditional philosophies whether rationalist or empiricist. These differ on the type of grounds one ought to have for accepting a proposition. Likewise, James is a step removed from all philosophies that differ primarily in what propositions they urge be accepted or rejected. For James the issue is not what one accepts passively but rather what one acts on. Those who take James' side, so to speak, will need to open themselves to the widest possible experience before making any judgment, and when judging will similarly open themselves to the widest range of considerations, not just the intellectual. James' pragmatism is more like an invitation to be accepted or declined rather than affirmed or denied.

A few years after giving the Gifford Lectures, James was introduced to the young Italian pragmatist Giovanni Papini. Papini supplied James with the perfect metaphor for making clear what pragmatism is about. The corridor analogy of Papini is to pragmatism what the myth of the cave is to Platonism. The theme of pragmatism is the same as the theme of what I have called the pastoral philosophy. If one is to engage any philosophy, rather than merely study and come to an opinion, then one must live the philosophy, come to it pragmatically. We should support James in seeking to experience first-hand or through authentic testimony the widest range of religious experience. Doing so, we should expect to pass through the stages outlined in what I have called James' "sermon" in the central sections of the *Varieties*. That this is in accord with Field-Being should already be evident from the parallels already cited.

James has been repeatedly criticized for the scant attention he gives to Asian sources in his survey of religious experience. Field-Being obviously serves as a remedy to that. We can also, I think, go a step further. If the Papini corridor is the key to understanding James' point of view in the *Varieties*, then may we not also see Field-Being as a room on the corridor? Certainly Field-Being does not deny Jamesian pluralism in favor of a bland, homogenized reality. Rather what is essential for Field-Being in its

rejection of substantialism is the connectedness of things. But, of course, since there are no things, it cannot be things that are connected, only activities.

Notes

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1. Butler, Joseph. *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*. London: Knapton, 1726.
 2. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Longmans, 1902.
 3. Butler, Joseph. *A Charge deliver'd to the Clergy, at the primary visitation of the Diocese of Durham, in the year, MDCCLI*. Durham: Lane, 1751.
 4. James, William. "The Will to Believe: An Address to the Philosophical Clubs of Yale and Brown Universities." *The New World*, June, 1896.
 5. Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Essays: First Series in The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979, pp. 77-78.
 6. Dewey, John. *A Common Faith*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934.
 7. James, 1902.
 8. James, 1902.