THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF ETHICAL AND POLITICAL LIFE: A STUDY IN U.S.-
AMERICAN PRAGMATISM AND LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION PHILOSOPHY

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by
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation engages two philosophical traditions that seek to understand and reconstruct the religious dimensions of ethical and political life: 1) classical U.S.-American pragmatism as articulated by William James (1842-1910), Josiah Royce (1855-1916), and John Dewey (1859-1952) and 2) Latin American liberation philosophy as exemplified by Enrique Dussel (1934-present). The overarching aim is to show how the religious impulse, when held in check by certain critical principles, is among the most powerful resources humans possess (or perhaps more accurately, the most powerful force that possesses humans) for engaging in the ethical and political project of transforming ourselves and our world.

The first chapter outlines William James’ approach to religion as something that may contribute to a more unified psychological life and a more strenuous practical life. For James, the genius and vitality of religion stems from our capacity to experience ourselves as belonging more intimately to an “unseen” or “ideal” world than to the “seen” or “real” world, so that we are psychologically motivated to painstakingly realize the ideal.

Since James left the social dimensions of religion largely unexplored, the second chapter turns to Josiah Royce, who elucidates how profound transformations come about when an individual comes to identify with the memories and hopes of a larger community, especially when it is posited as part of the universal community of life. We can understand this transformation as religious (in the etymological sense of “to bind”) since it recognizes interdependence and cultivates our ethical bonds.

Chapter three uses John Dewey to go beyond Royce’s limited analysis of the concrete historical conditions that have produced “lost” individuals in need of the “saving power” of participation in community life. By re-working Royce’s religious community as democratic community, Dewey naturalizes and concretizes the conditions for human flourishing. Dewey also shows how the religious dimension of life shows up in everyone (though many very reasonably dispute calling this dimension religious), since our lives depend upon our desire and ability to incorporate and embody ideals (things which “are and are not”) in habit-based forms of practical life and public institutions.

As a power source that moves people through their convictions, the ties between religion and oppressive ideals must be differentiated from those between religion and liberating ideals. With this in mind, my final chapter works to avoid a dangerous (but typical) reduction of American philosophy to U.S. philosophy by putting pragmatism into an inter-American dialogue with Enrique Dussel’s philosophy of liberation. Like the pragmatists, Dussel develops intimately interconnected philosophies of religion, ethics, and politics, but he does so by beginning from the reality of so many peoples’ everyday experiences of being poor or otherwise oppressed. In the process, Dussel also achieves a critical transformation of pragmatism’s philosophy of religion by emphasizing the moments of our experience when our projects and identities are interrupted by those excluded or oppressed by the present order, so that we are called to open ourselves and our projects to criticism launched from beyond our limited sense of who “we” are. My final chapter enacts this at the philosophical level by interrogating the U.S.-American pragmatist account of the religious dimensions of ethical and political life by way of a transformational Latin American critique.
# Table of Contents

## Abbreviations

## Introduction

Religion in U.S.-American Pragmatism and Latin American Liberation Philosophy

Overview of Chapters

Situating the Project in Relation to Contemporary “American” Philosophy

Setting the Tone: The Emotive Force of “Religion”

### 1. The Pragmatic Value of Faith: William James’ Religious Genius

James’ Psychology: Contextualizing the (Religious) Self

A Pragmatically Unstable Dichotomy: Morality vs. Religion

The Fruits of Morality vs. the Fruits of Religion

Once-Born (Healthy-Minded) vs. Twice-Born (Sick-Souled) Religion

Ethical Saints and the Best Fruits Religion has to Show

Linking James’ Religious Psychology to his Pluralistic Ethical and Political Universe

### 2. The Religious Ties that Bind Us: Josiah Royce’s Philosophy of Community

Royce’s Philosophy of (American) Life in the Wake of William James

From James’ Individual Religious Experience to Royce’s Social Religious Insight

Interpreting Christianity as a Loyal Philosophy of Life

The Metaphysics of (Universal) Community and the Create/Discover Paradox

### 3. Faith at Work: John Dewey’s Greater Democratic Community

Dewey’s Political “Translation” of Royce’s Community: The Problem of the Public

The Great Community as a Function of Communication and Communion

Finding the Lost Individual: Dewey’s Naturalization of Royce’s Fall Narrative

Piety and Faith as Motors of Ethical and Political Reconstruction

Dewey’s Ethico-Religious Attempt to Liberate Liberalism

### 4. A Prophetic Critique: Enrique Dussel’s Liberation Philosophy

Interpreting Dussel’s Scattered Comments on Pragmatism

James and Dussel: The Ego Conquiro and its Religious Conversion

Royce and Dussel: The Corporeality of the Community of Life

Dewey and Dussel: The Prophetic Interruption of Pragmatism’s Piety

Conclusion

Works Cited
Abbreviations

References to William James’ work are to the critical edition:


Repeatedly cited volumes are abbreviated as follows:

- **ECR** *Essays, Comments, and Reviews*
- **ERM** *Essays in Religion and Morality*
- **P** *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*
- **PU** *A Pluralistic Universe*
- **TT** *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*
- **VRE** *The Varieties of Religious Experience*
- **WB** *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*

References to Josiah Royce’s work are to the editions collected in:


Repeatedly cited volumes are abbreviated as follows:


References to John Dewey’s work are to the critical edition:


Following the convention of many Dewey scholars, I use the following abbreviations, followed by volume and page numbers:


Repeated references to translations of Enrique Dussel’s books are abbreviated as follows:


Introduction

Religion in U.S.-American Pragmatism and Latin American Liberation Philosophy

One of the chief advantages of pragmatism in the minds of its founder (Charles Sanders Peirce) and chief popularizer (William James) was that it could take the role of religion in human life seriously. However, in comparison to many of the other prominent themes of pragmatic reflection—e.g., the social self, pluralism, meliorism, community, the nature of inquiry, fallibilism, semiotics, etc.—religion has received less attention. This is strange given the fact that religious issues are intimately interwoven with the classical pragmatist’s reflections on each of the aforementioned themes. What makes this comparative lack of attention even more peculiar is that many of the words used to describe the resurgence of interest in pragmatism in the last few decades—words such as “revival” and “renaissance”—have an obvious (though perhaps unintended and often disavowed) religious connotation.1 One cannot speak of bringing something dead back to life (“to revive,” from the Old French *revivre*) or of being born again (“renaissance,” from the Middle French *renaissance*) without at least inadvertently calling religion to mind.

In any case, when it comes to the philosophy of religion, pragmatism offers us a middle way between much of contemporary analytic philosophy after its “linguistic turn”2 as well as

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2 While there are conflicting accounts regarding the “linguistic turn”, I would identify two basic versions of it (the second weaker than the first): 1) the attempt to reduce every philosophical problem (especially psychological and epistemological ones) into a problem about language; 2) the insistence that every philosophical problem is a problem dependent upon problems about language. I take classical pragmatism to agree with the second, weaker version when it comes to the problems discussed in this dissertation, which all undoubtedly involve linguistic
much of contemporary continental philosophy after its “religious turn.”

We may attune ourselves to the meaningful dimensions of religious experience, practice, and commitment that most analytic philosophy leaves out by ignoring religion altogether, restricting itself to the analysis of “God-talk,” or by reducing religion’s significance to purely epistemological issues. At the same time, we may guard against the tendency of continental philosophy to develop a broader understanding of religion while simultaneously insulating it with intricate technical jargon. For just as pragmatism is committed to the critical refinement of common religious notions, it is also committed to the development of accounts of the religious dimensions of experience that will be comprehensible to most people.

Beyond the philosophical academy, pragmatism provides resources for navigating the waters between skepticism and dogmatism, or between (socio-)biological reductionism on the one hand (e.g., much of the “new atheism”) and an unreflective and dogmatic defense of a given religious tradition on the other hand (e.g., increasingly fundamentalist strains of religion in problems. As for the first version, pragmatism refuses to allow the problems of people to be reduced to mere problems of language.

This “religious turn” has been announced more than it has actually been performed. Even though a considerable amount of recent continental philosophy addresses religious themes, most philosophers still seem relatively allergic to religion and likely to turn away from it. Nonetheless, contemporary continental philosophers who proclaim the “religious turn” generally think that the work of Derrida and Levinas in particular, through a new style of philosophical engagement with religious and theological themes, allows us to think the relationship between philosophy and religion in a radically new way. See Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

today’s highly charged political environment). In fact, William James, Josiah Royce,5 and John Dewey go so far as to claim that when properly understood, there is a religious dimension to everyone’s life, not just those who identify with and participate in traditions and activities that most commonly go by the name “religion.”6 While I spend a great deal of time exploring the meaning of “religion” in the pragmatist tradition, suffice it to say for now that “religion” names the critical dimension of life in which we relate ourselves to and are transformed by ideals, i.e. things which “are and are not.”7 For example, the relations between and among: 1) my current self and my ideal future self; 2) my present graduate school community and our understanding of its past projected into the future; 3) the actual world and an imagined better world; and 4) myself, our graduate school community, the world, and God (however understood), all involve a religious dimension insofar as they are comprised of complex jumbles of actual and possible or real and ideal elements. James, Royce, and Dewey all agree upon the fundamental importance of

5 I include Royce as one of the classical pragmatists, even though Royce qualified his inclusion in this group by proclaiming himself an “Absolute Pragmatist.” Following the interpretation of Frank Oppenheim, I see the trajectory of Royce’s career in terms of a gradual shift in emphasis: from absolutism to pragmatism. Oppenheim’s most recent work re-imagines pragmatism itself by examining Royce’s critical interactions with the three philosophers most consistently recognized as pragmatists (Peirce, James, and Dewey). See Frank M. Oppenheim, Reverence for the Relations of Life: Re-Imagining Pragmatism via Josiah Royce’s Interactions with Peirce, James, and Dewey (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

6 This creates a kind of naming problem, since “religion” is stretched far beyond its standard meaning, which in many ways works against the pragmatic commitment to speak in ways that are clear and accessible. The word “spirituality” might be more apt, though it is prone to creating other distortions that I am seeking to avoid, e.g., the idea that one’s spirituality is not just personal but also radically private. These sorts of terminological problems are a persistent difficulty in the pragmatist tradition, since it is committed to both a kind of continuity with the traditions that gave birth to it and to a kind of break with these traditions in light of philosophical criticism. What often happens is that a word well-worn by the philosophical tradition (“experience” comes to mind most readily in this regard) is transformed into a kind of quasi-technical term in the hands of the pragmatists. The pragmatists never came up with a way of solving this persistent linguistic problem that accompanies their commitment to avoid unnecessary technical jargon.

7 The description of ideals as things that “are and are not” is taken from Victor Kestenbaum, The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal: John Dewey and the Transcendent (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 106. Kestenbaum borrows the phrase from John N. Findlay as a way of describing how Dewey wants to have it both ways, to “affirm that ideal meanings are ‘resident in the actualities discovered’ and deny that ideal meanings are ‘an antecedent possession of actuality.’” As we will see, James, Royce, and Dewey all center their interpretations of the religious dimension of experience around the relation between the actual and the possible or the real and the ideal, even while working to deconstruct these binaries.
this religious dimension of life, even though their understandings of it are quite different.\(^8\) Using their perspectives, this dissertation re-thinks the religious dimensions of our individual and communal experiences, practices, and commitments in order to show how religion, can, does, and should infuse ethical and political life.

Of course, the pragmatic reconstruction of ethical and political theory (understood as part of the larger attempt to reconstruct ethical and political life) has been going on for over a century, so that the territory is fairly well-charted with the exception of two areas upon which I have concentrated my efforts. I have already mentioned the first, namely, the way in which the ethical and political philosophy found in classical U.S.-American pragmatism is undergirded by the pragmatist philosophy of religion. My second aim is to begin reconstructing our understanding of pragmatism by considering the greater inter-American context of “American” pragmatism, i.e., the way in which the United States of America exists as only one country among the increasingly interdependent countries that comprise the Americas.\(^9\) In short, my project is an attempt to flesh out two important yet largely neglected aspects of the lifeworld out

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\(^8\) To give a simplistic sketch: James thinks that ideals (like God or the ideal \textit{Socius}) are real insofar as they produce real effects, Royce thinks that ideals (like God or the universal community) are somehow real though not yet actual, and Dewey thinks that ideals (like the ideal of democracy) are imaginative possibilities that convince us to struggle for their realization.

\(^9\) We are faced with another terminological problem, since in a U.S. context the word \textit{America} is almost always taken to mean the United States of America. In order to trouble this reduction, I will adopt the following nomenclature from this point forward in order to mark what I take to be the three different uses of the term: 1) “America” (in scare quotes) will be used to mark the common yet problematic usage whereby “America” is simply taken to refer to the United States of America; 2) \textit{América} (with an accent mark or \textit{con acento}) will be used to refer to what is more commonly (albeit still problematically) called “Latin America”; 3) \textit{the Americas} or \textit{America} (without scare quotes) will be used to refer to the entire American continent comprised of North, Central, and South America. Of these three usages, “America” (with scare quotes) seems to be the least problematic precisely because the scare quotes flag a problem with the usage. In contrast, my use of \textit{The United States} or \textit{U.S.} as shorthand for \textit{The United States of America} covers over the fact that Mexico is, strictly speaking, the United States of Mexico [\textit{Estados Unidos Mexicanos}]. In effect, both \textit{America} and \textit{the United States} are somewhat presumptuous shorthand forms that cover over the other Americas and the other United States. Of course, none of this linguistic parsing intended to reflect the plurality of the Americas addresses the problematic negation of America’s indigenous populations, since the word \textit{America} (even when pluralized or rendered with an accent mark) is of decidedly European and colonial origins. For a reflection on the potential for a decolonized way of thinking “America” see the postface to Walter Mignolo, \textit{The Idea of Latin America} (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 149-62.
of which “American” pragmatism arises and continues to function in an inter-American context. ¹⁰

My examination of the complex interplay between religion, ethics, and politics in the philosophical traditions of “American” pragmatism and Américan liberation philosophy aims at being both historical and timely. There has been a continuous battle between church and state since the beginning of modern philosophy, and this is particularly interesting as it plays out in an inter-American context. Indeed the “discovery” and present day shape of the Americas cannot be understood apart from the force of European Christian aspirations driven by what was seen as an ethical and political imperative to fashion particular kinds of communities in the “New World.” These aspirations are still central within “American” religious circles, though a deep disagreement continues to exist over whether God’s right or left hand should predominate. There is a profound difference between the more visible religious right and the increasingly vocal and organized religious left when it comes to interpreting the meaning of the U.S. Christian heritage. ¹¹ Contemporary democratic organizing and acting in the U.S. has a longstanding and complicated relationship with religion, which has been central to almost every major U.S. social movement whether for better (e.g., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference) or worse (e.g., the Ku Klux Klan). Likewise, religion in América has been consistently used in attempts to “fix” oppression in two dramatically different senses: 1) “to eliminate” (as used by liberation theologians), and 2) “to maintain” (as used by traditional elites).

¹⁰ When I wish to emphasize the diversity or radical pluralism of the American continent, I will refer to the Americas, whereas I will refer to America when trying to emphasize the often overlooked commonality and interdependence among the Americas. Admittedly, inter-American projects like this one conducted from my position in the United States threaten to obscure the substantial North-South power differential, a problem that is insightfully discussed by Sophia A. McClennen, “Inter-American Studies or Imperial American Studies?,” Comparative American Studies 3, no. 4 (2005).

Like these religious communities, the philosophical communities of the Americas have consistently faced the very practical question of what American communities should look like as they continue to grow, especially as both secularism and capitalism become increasingly powerful forces. On the whole, the contemporary discipline of philosophy tends to shy away from religion as a power source for progressive or radical social transformation. However, given both 1) the pragmatists’ methodological dedication to begin and end with common experiences, practices, and commitments (even while attempting to positively transform them in the process), and 2) the liberation philosophers’ parallel commitment to value the experiences, practices, and commitments of “the people” (especially “the wretched of the earth”), conducting a philosophical investigation into ethical and political life in the context of the Americas means taking religion seriously, since most Americans continue to think through these issues in (at least partially) religious terms. With the conviction that “American” pragmatism and Américan liberation philosophy can mutually illuminate each other and our present situation given their commitment to the lives of common people, my inquiry brings these two philosophical perspectives into dialogue on the advantages and disadvantages of religious experiences, practices, and commitments for individual and communal life.

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13 According to a survey report released by the Pew Global Attitudes Project in 2002, 59% of people in the U.S. considered religion to be very important personally, the highest percentage of any “developed” nation surveyed. The majority of people in every Latin American country (with the exception of Argentina) also considered religion to be very important personally, ranging from 80% of people surveyed in Guatemala to 57% in Mexico. See The Pew Research Center, "Among Wealthy Nations...U.S. Stands Alone in Its Embrace of Religion," http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=167. While admittedly speculative, I would suggest that the tendency for many contemporary philosophers to largely ignore or altogether avoid the issue of religion, which is clearly very important to most people, stems from a split between the “high culture” of the academy and the “low culture” that exists outside of it. Pragmatism and the philosophy of liberation both work to deconstruct this split.
Chapters one, two, and three—on William James, Josiah Royce, and John Dewey respectively—examine the religious as a vital dimension of experience, practice, and commitment that classical pragmatism seeks to understand and reconstruct in order to strive towards a more fruitful ethical and political life. But since the pragmatists (especially Dewey) understood philosophy as not just criticism but also the criticism of criticism, the fourth chapter on Enrique Dussel subjects the “American” pragmatist philosophy of religion to critique by beginning to explore a more radical Américan philosophy, the philosophy of liberation. Dussel’s liberation philosophy shares pragmatism’s recognition of religion’s potential for ethical and political transformation, but Dussel insists upon a more radical transformation of the Americas and the world by taking the experiences of those most oppressed by our global socio-economic and political systems as our philosophical point of departure. And as I will suggest, this move paradoxically represents both the fulfillment and the negation of pragmatism’s ethical and political project, as illuminated by and through its philosophy of religion.

Understanding how religion might be used to liberate individuals and foster political communities that are not predicated on the oppression of others is crucial for figuring out how we should continue to reconstruct both “America” and pragmatism half a century after Dewey’s death. Dewey proclaimed that the great pragmatic lesson was the use of intelligence to not just “liberalize” action but also to “liberate” people from oppression (MW 10:44; LW 3:97), but we have largely failed to liberate the majority of the world’s population from oppressive conditions, especially poverty. How is it that pragmatism’s philosophical vision of the good life has fallen so short when it comes to actually convincing people to live differently, effectively leaving the lives of so many in deplorable conditions? While any answer to this question is clearly speculative, I have undertaken this project with the conviction that part of the answer lies in the fact that
religion is still not taken seriously as a vital source for not just personal but also socio-political transformation, a point that pragmatism and liberation philosophy both insist upon, albeit in importantly different ways. I will say a bit more about the positive dimensions of religion at the close of this chapter, after providing an overview of the dissertation and then contextualizing it in terms of some recent secondary literature.

Overview of Chapters


Since the work of William James comes to mind most readily when one thinks of religion and pragmatism, my first chapter develops James’ penetrating analysis of how we might go about understanding and judging the significance and value of religion for life. James sought a middle way between skepticism and dogmatism by re-thinking the truth of religion in light of its fruits rather than its roots. For instance, James insists that even if it turns out that we could give a physiological account of how a person’s experience of God amounts to the firing of certain neurons or an alternative religious account of how that person truly experienced God (both interesting and questionable prospects), we would still need to give a philosophical account of the significance of that experience in light of the value of the transformations produced in the believer’s life. Using James, I begin to develop a philosophical approach to talking about religion as something that is not so much known or even believed as it is lived or used in the service of a more fruitful personal life, a more intimate social life, and a more strenuous ethical and political life. James also provides us with an initial working definition of religion, namely: “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.”

Throughout my first chapter, I relate James’ philosophy of religion to his meliorism, which is realized most dramatically when religious experiences and practices activate the “strenuous mood” to change the world. I also begin to show how religion is the most powerful resource humans possesses (or perhaps more accurately, the most powerful force that possesses humans) for engaging alongside God (understood as the embodiment rather than the source of goodness in the world) in the ethical and political project of re-creating the universe. James gets our study off on the right foot by helping us consider what religion does, or at least ideally aims to do: place us in an ethical relationship with all of the rest of life, which does not immediately seem to be a part of us. Religion is thus an essential organ of human life, a vital power source for transforming ourselves and our world. Religion’s vitality stems from the capacity to experience our “wider selves” as belonging more intimately to an “unseen” or “ideal” world than to the “seen” or “real” world. This sense of intimacy with an order that does not exist in any realistic or straightforward way and the personal transformations that this sense produces in us constitute the heart of religious life as understood by pragmatism.

2. The Religious Ties that Bind Us: Josiah Royce’s Philosophy of Community

As Josiah Royce recognized, the chief limitation of James’ philosophy of religion is that it focuses on the relationship between individual “religious geniuses” and the “higher powers” while leaving the inter-human aspects of religion comparatively unexplored. My second chapter explores Royce’s attempt to further develop James’ rather anemic sense of the nature of the

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wider, saving religious self that Royce understands as the universal community. In other words, I read Royce as actually developing the philosophy of community that is only a germ in James’ religious philosophy, since James’ solitary individuals are only religious by virtue of their wider, ideal selves. According to Royce, the wider, ideal self through which saving experiences that activate the strenuous mood come is the universal community that demands our loyalty. Royce thus understands James’ notion of the religious individual’s communion with the divine as loyal participation in the universal community of life. In short, there is no communion with the divine (however understood) without communion with the broader human community and even the community of life itself.

My engagement with Royce’s philosophy works to show: 1) the absolute necessity of community for human flourishing, and 2) the tremendous difficulty of bringing about healthy communities given the tendency of modern individuals to absolutize themselves and withdraw into a pretended world of self-sufficiency. Royce understood better than James what the religious individual needs saving from, since Royce’s philosophy of community addresses solipsism as a genuine problem of life (rather than an epistemological puzzle). This problem can be “solved” and individuals can be “saved” given their ability to ideally extend themselves by really identifying with and participating in the larger (and ideally universal) community of life through loyalty. Royce understands this personal transformation as religious (in the etymological sense of “to bind together”), insofar as it recognizes and further cultivates our ethical and political bonds to others, as we experience our communities as something “larger than ourselves.”
3. Faith at Work: John Dewey’s Greater Democratic Community

Like James’ and Royce’s, John Dewey’s philosophy was driven by a desire to revitalize the “American” community. Chapter 3 shows how Dewey effectively re-works Royce’s religious community as democratic community, thereby naturalizing and concretizing the operative conditions of (and obstacles to) actual communities. Given the tendency of Royce’s religious language to obscure the natural and economic conditions that produce the egoism that Royce diagnoses as “original sin,” I show how Dewey works towards the construction of greater community in terms of democracy as a way of life rather than religion as a way of life, even though he undoubtedly sees an irreducibly religious dimension to genuine democracy. For Dewey, the religious dimension of experience stems from the way in which our lives depend upon our imaginative capacity to bind ourselves to ideal future ends. In this sense, Dewey argues most convincingly that the religious dimension of life shows up in everyone (even if many would reasonably dispute calling this dimension “religious”), since ethical and political life depends upon our desire and ability to incorporate and embody ideals in a habit-based practical life. Dewey thus helps us to see how the pragmatists are all idealists in an ethical sense insofar as they believe that life is a struggle called into existence by the ideal, which requires us to stake our lives upon intangibles, oughts, shoulds, possibilities, and the like. In this sense, Dewey helps us see how our ethical and political lives inevitably involve a kind of religious faith.

In James, Royce, and Dewey, the overarching claim is that the life of most “American” individuals could be vastly improved through increased participation in community life, especially when this is understood as having a religious dimension. More specifically, they all agree that: 1) religion is where we encounter and are transformed by the ideal or the unseen and is thus a profoundly important dimension of human experience; 2) religion is necessary (though
not at all sufficient) for human flourishing insofar as it recognizes and cultivates our bonds to 
other members of the broader community of life; and 3) religion is a vital power source for 
activating the human desire to realize the ideal and may therefore release vital human energies 
for ethical and political struggle.

4. A Prophetic Critique: Enrique Dussel’s Liberation Philosophy

Of course, the historical links among religion, colonialism, imperialism, and nationalism 
in the U.S. should give us pause when (re-)constructing a pragmatic philosophy linking religion, 
ethics, and politics.¹⁵ It would be foolish to ignore the history of the Americas themselves as a 
kind of five-hundred year test case of the uses and abuses of religion for both the construction 
and destruction of communities, with plenty of examples of colonial terror, utopian vision, the 
maintenance of the status quo, and revolutionary reform.¹⁶ As a power source that moves people 
through their convictions, the ties between religion and oppressive ideals must be differentiated 
from those between religion and liberating ideals. My dissertation thus marks the need for 
religion in flourishing human communities, while also seeking to avoid confusing particular 
interests with universal principles. My final chapter therefore turns to the Américan philosophy 
of Enrique Dussel, as a way of beginning to place the philosophies of James, Royce, and Dewey

¹⁵ For an insightful study of the way in which religious myths have continuously informed U.S. national identity in 
problematic ways, see Richard T. Hughes, Myths America Lives By (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). 
While tracing five of these myths—the myths of the Chosen Nation, Nature's Nation, the Christian Nation, the 
Millennial Nation, and the Innocent Nation—through history, Hughes weaves together penetrating critiques offered 
by marginalized commentators (often Native Americans or African-Americans) who work to bring the dangerous 
effects of these subconscious myths to light. Whereas Hughes effectively offers an internal criticism from 
marginalized voices within the U.S. itself, the parallel critique developed in my final chapter will be from the 
perspective of Latin America as “America’s” marginalized Other.

¹⁶ On the one hand, oppressive “American” colonial ideals like Manifest Destiny drew much of their strength from 
religious convictions. On the other hand, so did movements like abolition, which rested upon the ideal of human 
equality and spoke an equally charged religious discourse.
in the larger context of a philosophy of the Americas in order to avoid a dangerous (but typical) reduction of American philosophy to U.S. philosophy.17

Like the pragmatists, Dussel develops intimately interconnected philosophies of religion, ethics, and politics, but he does so by beginning from the global reality of so many peoples’ everyday experiences of being poor or otherwise oppressed. Similarly, Dussel’s philosophy stems from a pragmatist-like faith in democracy as a way of individual and communal life, but he argues that philosophy and religion must focus upon those whom a given system excludes from full participation, effectively highlighting the importance of factors such as (neo-)colonialism, systems of exclusion based on race/gender/class, and international economics in the construction and destruction of communities in the Americas. Put simply, Dussel goes far beyond any of the pragmatists in providing a diagnosis of the concrete conditions that produce our present-day ethical, political, and religious failure to seriously address (in theory and practice) the intertwined issues of poverty and oppression.

In the process, Dussel also provides an ingenious transformation of pragmatism’s religious reflections upon “the unseen” and ideals as things which “are and are not.” The living conditions of the oppressed peoples of the world are anything but ideal, but they remain largely “unseen” and are effectively treated as things that “are and are not.” Whereas the pragmatist philosophy of religion understands the amelioration of ethical and political life in terms of the reconstruction of a “wider self” that incorporates that needs and desires of those who were

17 This reduction, which is almost never noticed (or at least almost never mentioned) by U.S. philosophers, takes place before the “triple reduction” of “American” philosophy that Vincent Colapietro has rightly noted: “There is often a double and even triple reduction—first of American philosophy to pragmatism, then of pragmatism to Dewey’s instrumentalism, and, finally, of Dewey’s pragmatism to its ‘strong misreading’ by Richard Rorty.” Vincent Colapietro, “The Question of Voice and the Limits of Pragmatism,” in The Range of Pragmatism and the Limits of Philosophy, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2004), 184. The second two reductions are certainly problematic, and my dissertation will work to avoid them, as do a number contemporary philosophers working out of the pragmatist tradition. In contrast, I suspect most (though certainly not all) of these philosophers are less attuned to the way in which it is not just pragmatism that is being reduced but also America.
previously beyond the self, Dussel’s philosophy of religion calls one to serve (or even become hostage to) the entire community of life, especially the wretched of the earth. Dussel thus creatively appropriates the Semitic, prophetic religious language of social justice in a way that is largely foreign to pragmatism, which generally prefers the Greco-Roman religious language of piety.  

Situating the Project in Relation to Contemporary “American” Philosophy

Having announced the central themes of my chapters, I would like to situate them in relation to a few prominent pieces of contemporary philosophical literature on the subjects I intend to address. This will also allow me to provide more of my scholarly rationale for including Royce in a dissertation on pragmatism and Dussel in a dissertation on American philosophy. As a collection of classical and contemporary essays treating the relationship between pragmatism and religion, Stuart Rosenbaum’s *Pragmatism and Religion: Classical Sources and Original Essays* serves neatly as a one-volume compendium of this subfield. A number of the contemporary essays are in line with my claim that James’ philosophy of religion, while of immense value, is ultimately too individualistic. While Protestant religion in the U.S. as far back as the Puritans undoubtedly emphasized the relationship between the individual and God, there was also a great deal of emphasis placed upon the relationship between the individual and

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18 This difference has also come into focus within the pragmatist tradition itself in recent discussions surrounding Cornel West’s prophetic pragmatism. See Mark David Wood, *Cornel West and the Politics of Prophetic Pragmatism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). A collection of charitable and critical responses to West can be found in George Yance, *Cornel West: A Critical Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001). Most commentators seem to agree that West adds the “prophetic” dimension by borrowing from the Christian tradition in ways that (at best) exceed or (at worst) undermine pragmatism. Structurally parallel arguments have been made about whether Dussel’s liberation theology exceeds or undermines his liberation philosophy. See Horacio Cerutti Guldberg, *Filosofía de la Liberación Latinoamericana* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006).

and the community. Unfortunately, the social and communal dimensions of religion are largely lacking in contemporary philosophy of religion. Even discussions of the relation between religion and ethics tend to follow James (inadvertently for the most part) by departing from a common assumption that the individual is the fundamental unit under discussion, with few attempts to explore how the individual is herself fundamentally constituted by her relations to others, relations which are always mediated by religious, political, and economic realities (to name just a few). Dewey’s exploration of community thus offers a valuable corrective to James’ comparatively individualistic philosophy of religion.

At the same time, many of the contributors to Rosenbaum’s volume are critical of Dewey in ways that naturally suggest a sustained engagement with Royce. For instance, Richard Bernstein charges Dewey with: 1) caricaturing “supernaturalism,” and 2) failing to do justice to the importance of religious communities for providing shared experiences that nurture a democratic faith. Royce is much stronger on both of these points, even though he is not once mentioned by the contemporary contributors to the volume. In contrast, the reprinted

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20 One only needs to consider early texts such as John Winthrop’s “A Model of Christian Charity” (reprinted in Rosenbaum, Pragmatism and Religion, 21-23) to see that even the most Protestant individual was only alone before God in a decidedly communal context. Of course, the fact that there was (Native) American religion long before America was “discovered” (by Europe) is generally covered over by being relegated to the “pre-history” of America. The idea of the individual alone before God was not only a marker of early Puritanism, but also conveniently fit the violent deployment of the Spanish Requerimiento. See Luis N. Rivera, A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

21 Scanning the most popular introductory philosophy of religion textbooks from Oxford, Prentice Hall, and Routledge yields a number of common themes: 1) faith and reason, 2) science and religion, 3) arguments for and against God’s existence, 4) analyses of God’s attributes, 5) the problem of evil, 6) religious language, 7) miracles and immortality, 8) religion and ethics, 9) religious diversity, and 10) religious experience. With the exception of discussions of: 1) religious language (which do incidentally mention the social nature of language), 2) religious pluralism (which must necessarily admit that religion has a social dimension) and, 3) religion and ethics (which must note that ethics is in part about the way we treat others), the books tend to treat religion as a fairly private matter. Yet surely, without a rich exploration of religion’s social dimension, we cannot make sense of any of the fundamental issues in the philosophy of religion.

22 To his credit, James does draw limited connections between personal religion and the broader community through his social psychology and more speculative metaphysics, both of which I will explore in the following chapter. Still, at the end of the day, James’s accounts of religion and ethics are overly individualistic.

“Philosophy” chapter from James’ *Varieties* mentions the “great importance” of Royce’s arguments. In fact, Royce was a major interlocutor of both James and Dewey, especially with respect to the themes of religion and community, though one could scarcely know this judging from the contemporary commentators in Rosenbaum’s volume.

Robert Westbrook also expresses his worries about the individualistic tendencies in much of the pragmatic religious heritage that he claims often appears indifferent to the communal aspects of religious experience. Following the general trend of the essays in the volume, Westbrook paints the story of pragmatism’s philosophy of religion as a conversation between James and Dewey, with Dewey’s position edging out James’ in terms of its value given Dewey’s emphasis on naturalism and the community over James’ emphasis on supernaturalism and the individual. Like Bernstein, Westbrook claims that pragmatism tends to neglect the value of shared or communal religious experience, putting his point quite memorably when he tells us that Dewey’s “common faith” (following in the footsteps of Emerson and James) is decidedly “un-common.” According to Westbrook, there is a profoundly individualistic and even anti-democratic strain at the heart of Emersonian, Jamesian, and Deweyan religion.

Albeit unintentionally, Bernstein, Westbrook, and others have made a strong argument for including Royce’s contribution to the pragmatist philosophy of religion, since Royce clearly

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25 On Royce’s relations with James and Dewey, see Oppenheim, *Reverence for the Relations of Life*.
27 Westbrook writes: “A Common Faith treats religious experience chiefly as individual religious experience, an affair of the self, and has little to say—and even less good to say—about the common life of religious communities. One might have expected more from a critic who believed that ‘shared experience is the greatest of human goods’ and who suggested that ‘the future of religions is connected with the possibility of developing a faith in the possibilities of human experience and human relationships that will create a vital sense of the solidarity of human interests and inspire action to make that sense a reality.’” Ibid., 201.
sees religious faith as not just an individual but also a communal affair with important ethical and political consequences. Westbrook notes that Dewey was, by and large, hostile to churches so that “he failed to consider that they might have something to teach about the ways and means of making any faith—including his own secular democratic faith—a common one.” Of course, Dewey is hardly alone among philosophers in failing to fully appreciate the positive contributions of religious community life (given the often dangerous and undemocratic features of some religious communities), but this has hardly convinced most people to leave religious communities. Royce understood (better than James or Dewey) how certain features of religious communities meet profound human needs and hold tremendously valuable resources for individual and communal transformation.

These links among the ethical, the political, and the religious also appear in a new light when we consider how much of the recent scholarly work that has been done on pragmatism in the last two decades has worked to reconstruct our understanding in light of the contributions of groups who were undoubtedly part of the pragmatist movement, even though their role has been largely forgotten (and erased) by subsequent history. Cornel West’s *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, Charlene Haddock Seigfried’s *Pragmatism and Feminism*, and Scott Pratt’s *Native Pragmatism* each works to deepen our understanding of the diversity of voices that contributed to the U.S. and its philosophy by pointing out the contributions and contestations of African-Americans, American women, and Native Americans in the shaping of the pragmatist philosophical tradition. The upshot is that it has become more common to read Jane Addams and

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29 Westbrook, “Pragmatism and Religion,” 201.
W.E.B. DuBois alongside William James and John Dewey, and much of the recent renewal of interest in the work of Josiah Royce has been tied to his philosophical treatment of race.33 All of this should come as no surprise if we accept Eduardo Mendieta’s hypothesis that the ongoing scholarly reconstruction of pragmatism as a philosophical tradition has been tied to the broader reconstruction of “American” identity, although this relationship has rarely been thematized.34 In other words, the attempts to philosophically enfranchise African-American, feminist, and Native American voices in the pragmatist tradition (by West, Seigfried, Pratt, and others) are intimately related to social and political attempts to empower these groups within and beyond the world of academic philosophy. Mendieta insightfully summarizes the thrust of his essay when he writes:

(H)ow American pragmatism is reconstructed and portrayed, which figures are foregrounded and given prominence, and what philosophical importance is attached to specific insights and arguments, seeks to develop and project a new national imaginary; that is, a new image of the nation. To use West’s language, we might say that what genealogy we trace determines which America we are able to visualize and project. Which pragmatism thus also means, which America?35

Mendieta’s observations are in keeping with a central theme of pragmatism itself (especially as conceived by Dewey)—namely, that philosophy should be used as a tool of socio-political reconstruction. Projects like those of West, Seigfried, and Pratt deserve to be more widely read and further developed, precisely because they seek to reconstruct “American” pragmatism (both


34 Mendieta writes: “What has not been analyzed and made explicit is that underlying the various projects of the refunctoning and renaissance of pragmatism, whether as simple neopragmatism or prophetic pragmatism, is the project of the reconstitution and reframing of national identity.” Eduardo Mendieta, "Which Pragmatism? Whose America?," in *Cornel West: A Critical Reader*, ed. George Yancy (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 83. This point is also reinforced in the introductory essay to Chad Kautzer and Eduardo Mendieta, *Pragmatism, Nation, and Race: Community in the Age of Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 1-16.

35 Mendieta, "Which Pragmatism? Whose America?," 84; italics added.
“America” and its pragmatism) by seeking out members of the “American” community whose insights and experiences have been historically marginalized.

My dissertation takes its inspiration from these projects by beginning to contextualize U.S. pragmatism as a philosophy of the Americas. Mendieta has made an important gesture towards such a philosophy by announcing his hope that a future generation of scholars and philosophers will begin “to develop, mature, and conceive a greater America that includes all of its subcontinents,” so that “we will begin to think of Latin American and North American philosophies as chapters in a larger geo-political and world-historical school of American philosophy from this hemisphere.”36 As of yet, there are only a few stirrings of this sort of perspective in the discipline of philosophy,37 but it is absolutely necessary for developing thick American philosophies. Otherwise, an insulated “American” pragmatist reconstruction of such fundamental philosophical categories as ethics, politics, and religion is likely to veil a “chauvinism of affluence,” to borrow the words of Jürgen Habermas.38

Rosenbaum’s Pragmatism and Religion volume is, at best, muted when it comes to discussing the ties among religion, pragmatism, and the (neo)-colonial, imperialist, and nationalist projects of the U.S. For instance, Sandra Rosenthal’s essay is a helpful reflection on the way in which the pragmatists thematize the growth of the self as “the ongoing integration and expansion of the self through a deepening attunement to, and incorporation of, ‘the other,’”

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37 Most notably, the First International Conference on Pragmatism and the Hispanic/Latino World, featuring presentations from over fifty scholars from the Americas and Spain, was held at Texas A&M University from February 18-20, 2010. This conference also coincided with the launch of a new journal, The Inter-American Philosophy Review, created to foster Inter-American philosophical dialogue.
38 Jürgen Habermas, "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State," in Multiculturalism, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 141. Habermas describes the way in which a substantial part of contemporary nationalism in Europe and “America” centers upon a refusal of “the immigration from the impoverished regions of the East and the South,” even though this poverty stems, in large part, precisely from European and “American” relations to the Third World. While Habermas does not extend his comments to the realm of intellectual production, the point holds just as well.
which ultimately includes the whole universe when carried out to its logical conclusion.\textsuperscript{39} According to Rosenthal, the pragmatists understand religion in relation to this expansion of the self, or the continuous reconstruction of a “wider self” through the incorporation of what was previously beyond the self. While I agree with Rosenthal’s account of the pragmatists, it worries me that she makes no mention of the remarkable resemblance between this “expansion of the self” and the (neo-)colonial project(s). This worry leads me to work toward the reconstruction of “American” pragmatism (both “America” and its pragmatism) in dialogue with Dussel, who exists beyond U.S. (and European) borders, working from a Latin American context that continues to suffer many of the negative effects of U.S. economic and political policy.

Turning to one last essay in Rosenbaum’s volume, Steven Rockefeller has made a compelling argument for pragmatism’s value as a tool for developing a global ethics when he points out how Dewey’s conception of a common moral faith might serve as a banner under which people’s economic goals could be united with a global quest for peace, justice, and ecological well being.\textsuperscript{40} I share Rockefeller’s (and Dewey’s) hope, but I fear that most people who work from within the pragmatist tradition miss the way in which our “we” is still a national (and even a nationalistic) “we.”\textsuperscript{41} Pragmatism was undoubtedly developed “as a method of critical thought for free men and women engaged in creative democratic living and social reconstruction in an evolving world,”\textsuperscript{42} but classical pragmatism was fairly limited when it came to thinking about how “our” (“American”) democracy at home might be predicated upon “their”

\textsuperscript{40} Steven C. Rockefeller, “Faith and Ethics in an Interdependent World,” Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} For a recent article that examines some of the dangerous ties between “American” nationalism and “American” pragmatism from William James to Richard Rorty, see Djelal Kadir, "Pragmatismo y Patriotismo: William James Cien Años Después," in Aproximaciones a la Obra de William James: La Formulación del Pragmatismo, ed. Jaime de Salas and Félix Martín, Razón y Sociedad (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2005).
(Américan) lack of democracy abroad. While James, Royce, and Dewey each undoubtedly had a sense of how “American” imperialism was a significant problem, Rockefeller probably goes too far in crediting James and Dewey with developing the critical method of pragmatism in “an effort to free and empower the individual and all groups, especially those who are oppressed or the victims of injustice.”

While the especially strikes me as an exaggeration, this popular reconstruction of the spirit of pragmatism is overwhelmingly close to the comparatively unknown philosophy of liberation, which seeks to understand the production of poverty and injustice in order to help liberate the oppressed. If pragmatism is, according to Mendieta (reading Cornel West), “the American name for a sense of moral outrage combined with a sense of hope and belief in the power of people to redeem and transform themselves,” then one might even be tempted to borrow James’ subtitle for Pragmatism and say that Dussel’s philosophy of liberation is a new Américan name for some old “American” pragmatist ways of thinking. We should not give in to this temptation, lest we unwittingly curtail the “sense of moral outrage.” Pragmatism and liberation philosophy share a “sense of hope and belief” in future possibilities for redemption and transformation, but we must underscore their critical edges. The philosophy of liberation is a direct challenge to pragmatism, just as pragmatism was a direct challenge to some old ways of thinking. Recognizing philosophical differences with a steady eye towards solidarity is the task I have undertaken in this dissertation. Much like James, I choose to provocatively describe Dussel’s liberation philosophy as a new name for some old pragmatist ways of thinking because I think that gaining a wider hearing for Dussel’s philosophy is important, not because I think liberation philosophy amounts to something like a Spanish translation of “American”

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43 Ibid., 307; italics added.  
44 Mendieta, "Which Pragmatism? Whose America?,” 100.  
45 The subtitle to James’ Pragmatism is A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking.
pragmatism. While the pragmatists developed critical principles to prevent ethical and political life from collapsing into an unthinking loyalty to the status quo, the limitations of their philosophies generally stem from their incomplete senses of who properly constitutes the “American” community. The pragmatists insightfully engage the question of religion’s role in ethical and political life, but they also call for the ongoing reconstruction of pragmatism through criticism, which must be conducted from a larger inter-American philosophical framework that includes philosophers such as Dussel.46

Writing from a Latin American perspective, Dussel argues that the so-called “American Way of Life” rests upon global economic structures of exploitation and oppression, so that the very way in which we are “American” must be forcefully interrupted before being reconstructed. Whereas the pragmatists understand the ethical and religious dimensions of experience as the dimensions in and through which we develop “wider” or “larger” selves by imaginatively extending our identities to include the welfare of other people and things, Dussel points out another important aspect of religion and ethics that pragmatism has largely missed. Dussel’s philosophy of liberation begins by prophetically affirming the reality of those who are outside or beyond the totality of the present socio-economic or political system, i.e. those who do not really “count” in our ethics or those with whom we do not religiously identify ourselves. For Dussel, the ethical and religious dimensions of experience are, in part, the dimensions in which our

46 There are undoubtedly other Latin American philosophers I might have chosen, but Dussel is ideal for at least two reasons: 1) He connects philosophical discourses of religion, community, ethics, and politics in ways that are strikingly parallel to the pragmatists, even while being highly skeptical of the pragmatist project given the history of the ways in which it has sometimes been used to further U.S. national interests and forestall radical social change. 2) He is probably the Latin American philosopher with the most international philosophical recognition at present, having engaged in dialogues with North American philosophers like Richard Rorty and Charles Taylor, French philosophers like Michel Foucault and Emmanuel Levinas, and German philosophers like Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel. These two attributes make Dussel particularly relevant to my project in particular as part of the larger need for inter-American and international philosophical dialogue called for by Dussel. See Enrique Dussel, "A New Age in the History of Philosophy: The World Dialogue between Philosophical Traditions," Philosophy & Social Criticism 35, no. 5 (2009).
individual and communal projects are interrupted by those excluded or subjugated by the present order. In this sense, ethics and religion do not simply hinge upon the expansion of the self. They also require an extreme contraction of the self, a kind of humility or contrition whereby we open ourselves and our projects to criticism launched from beyond our limited sense of who “we” are. Dussel helps us understand how our imaginative constructions of self and community often facilitate the actual destruction or subjugation of those who fall outside of the imaginative identification (or those who fall within it but on oppressive terms). As its name suggests, the philosophy of liberation judges any religious, philosophical, or political project based upon the justice (or injustice) it does to the oppressed. In short, Dussel can be understood as transforming the pragmatist project by persistently beginning with the fact that most of the world’s people are poor. Hence, any philosophy methodologically attuned to the problems of men and women must take not just their religion but also their poverty seriously, and Dussel’s philosophy helps us to consider how these two things might be related.

Setting the Tone: The Emotive Force of “Religion”

Famously (or infamously, depending on one’s philosophical disposition) James claimed that far more philosophy than most philosophers are willing to admit comes down to tone, to feel, to one’s temperament, or to prejudice (to use a more charged word).47 Indeed, if I were to

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47 James makes this claim repeatedly, perhaps most famously when he distinguishes between “tough-minded” and “tender-minded” philosophical temperaments in the first lecture of Pragmatism. However, he never makes the point so poignantly as in the following quotation that is repeatedly attributed to him, although I have been unable to verify its authenticity: “A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.” See Suzy Platt, Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations Requested from the Congressional Research Service (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1989). In any case, James most certainly writes: “Reason is only one out of a thousand possibilities in the thinking of each of us. Who can count all the silly fancies, the grotesque suppositions, the utterly irrelevant reflections he makes in the course of a day? Who can swear that his prejudices and irrational beliefs constitute a less bulky part of his mental furniture than his clarified opinions?” William James, The Principles of Psychology, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 1:521. Henceforth, PP.
set this very claim—that much of our philosophy falls out from personal, subjective factors—before a randomly selected panel of contemporary philosophers, they would immediately get to work disagreeing about it. While it would beg the question to claim that this thought experiment proves how philosophy is deeply rooted in our subjective preferences, James’ hypothesis does make sense of the striking historical and contemporary disagreements between philosophers.

Even if one is not willing to go all the way with James and admit that all philosophy is rooted so profoundly in the personal, the case of the philosophy of religion is perhaps clearer. Simply mentioning the word “religion” in a roomful of diverse people produces substantial disagreement quickly, almost immediately, with surprisingly little pause for reflective thought about why one is “for” or “against” religion and even less reflection upon what “religion” actually means.

Put simply, “religion” is an exceedingly charged word, whether one is a philosopher or not. But while prejudice and philosophical predisposition undoubtedly gets the first word, James rightly reminds us that they need not get the last if we are open to gradually re-forming our immediate subjective reactions over the course of our philosophical quest. Like Hume, James insists that the power of reason lies in its potential for ever so gradually improving not only the way we think but also the way we live, in spite of (but always subject to) the tremendous power of custom or habit.48 Practically speaking, we stand a much better shot at truth if we begin by admitting how much sway our prejudices hold, especially when it comes to judging something like religion, which is admittedly a historical collection of human prejudice and the downright

48 As evidence of this belief on James’ part, consider his “Remarks at the Peace Banquet” published in the Atlantic Monthly in 1904: “In ancient times philosophers defined man as the rational animal; and philosophers since then have always found much more to say about the rational than about the animal part of the definition […]. Reason is one of the very feeblest of Nature’s forces, if you take it at any one spot and moment. It is only in the very long run that its effects become perceptible. […] [W]eak as reason is, it has the unique advantage over its antagonists that its activity never lets up and that it presses always in one direction, while men's prejudices vary, their passions ebb and flow, and their excitements are intermittent.” William James, Essays in Religion and Morality, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 120-21. Henceforth, ERM.
stupidity or nastiness that often follows upon it. Nonetheless, James is also right to point out that the “highest flights of charity, devotion, trust, patience, bravery to which the wings of human nature have spread themselves have been flown for religious ideals” (VRE, 210), so that we may only dismiss religion at the peril of impoverishing our philosophy. Regardless of whether one chooses to place more emphasis on one side of the descriptive dichotomy or the other, there should be no question that both sides describe religion accurately. Religion figures as a tremendous source of energy throughout human history, and its power has been repeatedly used for both good and ill.

My project is primarily interested in figuring out how the religious dimension of life can affect life as a whole in positive ways, since I know that there is a great deal of religious energy in the world, and I remain convinced that this is not going to change anytime soon. I suspect that even the folks who react most negatively to the word “religion” can agree with me on this latter point. And if religion is here to stay (if not permanently, then at least for more time than its critics would like), a practical, strategic question emerges: “What positive things can we do with it?” Or, to personify religion as a force, “What positive things can it do with us?” Of course, in order to responsibly answer these questions we also need to ask, “What sorts of bad or dangerous things have people consistently done with religion?” or “What negative things will it tempt us to do?” And in order to begin seriously addressing these questions, we are going to need a definition of religion that I want to develop using the pragmatist tradition before subjecting it to a critique from the standpoint of liberation philosophy. Like the pragmatists, I am less interested in insisting that there is some essential, timeless way to define religion and more interested in using the word “religion” to pick out a set of phenomena that should capture our philosophical attention because they are an interesting and important part of human life. With James, I will also
admit that the word is terribly loaded, but we ask that our fellow inquirers attend closely to the phenomena we are interested in describing, even if it turns out in the end that we should pick a new word: “I am willing to accept almost any name for the personal religion of which I propose to treat. Call it conscience or morality, if you yourselves prefer, and not religion—under either name it will be equally worthy of our study” (VRE, 33). As we will see in Chapter 3, Dewey despaired of giving the collective noun “religion” any unified meaning at all, preferring to limit his discussion to the adjective “religious” insofar as it described certain dimensions of our experience. In turn, Dussel often uses the words “ethics,” “metaphysics,” and “religion” almost interchangeably. Yet he also makes a claim that I would heartily second:

> My understanding of philosophy does not demand from the beginning the assumption of a subjective empathy toward the religious dimension. This general assertion does not at all mean that I am denying that this association [between religion and philosophy] cannot take place. Quite the contrary. I am not even denying that this association may well take place in my own. […] But I want to distinguish them very clearly, because otherwise the coexistence most often disallows the philosophy of liberation in the philosophical world, and this, to me, would be disastrous.

Dussel’s aim is not to conflate ethics and religion (any more than it was James’ intention to relinquish philosophy to prejudice), but rather to attend carefully to their potential relations. In any case, I would like to suggest in what follows that both pragmatism and liberation philosophy are right to insist upon at least two things: 1) regardless of what we choose to call it, “religion” is of vital importance to the way human beings think and live; and 2) we can fruitfully investigate what religion is by way of an ethical and political consideration of what religion does.

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49 To clarify these first two terms, consider Dussel’s words in an interview: “What happens in my case is that my ethics is not a dogmatic metaphysics. Speaking about the human being is not necessarily always a metaphysics. In my case, it is an ethics that is postmetaphysical, or, as Levinas would say, a postmetaphysical metaphysics.” Fernando Gomez, "Ethics Is the Original Philosophy; or, The Barbarian Words Coming from the Third World: An Interview with Enrique Dussel," boundary 2 28, no. 1 (2001), 35.

50 Ibid., 31.

As the first sustained attempt to develop a pragmatic philosophy of religion, James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience* constitutes a natural point of departure for my project. In this work, James provides a penetrating analysis of how we might go about understanding and judging the significance and value of religion for life by re-thinking the truth of religion in light of its *fruits* rather than its *roots*. This is, so to speak, the bottom line of the pragmatic approach to religion adopted in my dissertation. But when it comes to James and pragmatism, the bottom line is far from all there is. Likewise, when it comes to interpreting James, we should recognize that there is more than the core, especially since this helps prevent the hasty yet widespread judgment that James’ pragmatism amounts to a “will to make believe” in supernatural powers that aren’t really there.

In short, this chapter builds an account of personal religion using James’ reflections on “the religious genius” that organically transitions into a discussion of religion’s role in community life, which we might in turn call “the genius of religion.” There is no question that James believed that the most interesting parts of life (whether religious or not) occur within the life of the individual. In fact, he was so profoundly attuned to the way in which the most

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51 James re-works Matthew 17:15-19 from the New Testament, which tells its readers to distinguish true from false prophets by judging the moral worth of their works or “fruits.” Matthew’s “You will know them by their fruits” becomes James’ “By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots” (VRE, 25). While this formulation is from 1907, James wrote “By their fruits ye shall know them” much earlier in his 1884 introduction to the literary remains of his father, examined in the second section below (ERM, 63).

52 James was routinely frustrated by what he perceived as a refusal on the part of his critics to engage his thinking using the principle of charitable interpretation, especially when it came to interpreting his admittedly hyperbolic, ironic, or otherwise rhetorical comments in their larger context. A passage from *Pragmatism* makes the point succinctly: “I once wrote an essay on our right to believe, which I unluckily called the *Will* to Believe. All the critics, neglecting the essay, pounced upon the title. Psychologically it was impossible, morally it was iniquitous. The ‘will to deceive,’ the ‘will to make-believe,’ were wittily proposed as substitutes for it.” William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, ed. Frederick Burkhart, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 124. Henceforth, P. The alternative titles mentioned by James were proposed by Dickenson Miller, “’The Will to Believe’ and The Duty to Doubt,” *International Journal of Ethics* 9, no. 2 (1899).
meaningful aspects of experience flow to and from the individual as their source that he missed a great deal of the way in which life flows from the individual qua member of a broader community of life. This shortcoming will eventually lead me to take what I can from James on religion and turn to Royce on community in my second chapter. However, I want to insist from the outset that this movement from the individual to the larger community of life emerges as a consistent undertone of James’ rather individualistic prose if one only listens for it.

James’ Psychology: Contextualizing the (Religious) Self

James’ philosophy of religion is unquestionably centered upon the self: “Religion, in short, is a monumental chapter in the history of human egotism” (VRE, 387). Nonetheless, as Eugene Fontinell has rightly pointed out, we must not “understand [James’] stress on the individual and personal dimension of religious experience in terms of an atomistic individualism or an isolating egotism.”53 In order to understand James on religion, we must examine James’ conception of the self and its wide-ranging relations, which requires a look at The Principles of Psychology. Whereas Varieties claims that the power of religion stems from the way in which an individual feels continuous with a wider self, Principles shows that James’ conception of the individual self is already quite wide to begin with.

Given James’ desire to avoid or at least postpone metaphysical disputes in Principles, he focuses his inquiry on the empirical self in order to avoid questions concerning dubious entities such as “the soul” or “the transcendental ego.” Surveying the contents of the empirical Self, 54


54 Following James, from this point forward I use Self (with a capital S) to designate the empirical Self in its unity (though its unity is admittedly always a matter of degree), while using self (with a lowercase s) to refer to the constituent parts (material, social, and spiritual) of the single empirical Self. Of course, to a certain extent, the choice of emphasis (unitary Self or plural selves) is inevitably misleading since the perfect unity of the Self is always more ideal than real and never obliterates the Self’s internal diversity (or plurality of component selves). This becomes
James writes: “In its widest possible sense, however, a man’s Self is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account” (PP 1:279). James goes on to tell us that what makes all of these things part of a man's Self is that they give him the same emotions. The persons, places, things, and thoughts with which I identify are quite literally a part of me, insofar as what happens to them is experienced as something happening to me. To provide conceptual order, James divides the constituents of the empirical Self into: 1) the material self, 2) the social self, and 3) the spiritual self. The material self is concretely comprised of a body, but it also extends into the world through material things as diverse as clothes, property, and other family members. The social self is even more dramatically extended and divided, as James indicates when he writes: “Properly speaking, a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind. To wound any one of these images is to wound him” (281-82).

However, it is the spiritual self—“a man’s inner or subjective being, his psychic faculties or dispositions, taken concretely” (283)—that is highest in the Self’s internal hierarchy, for it must adjudicate the rivalry and conflicts between the different parts of our material and social selves. Whether we choose our personal center willfully, or simply allow our Selves to drift where they may, it is the extent to which we identify with (i.e., find “warmth and intimacy” in)

clearer in Varieties during James’ lengthy discussion of the “divided Self,” i.e. the fragmented collection of selves that nonetheless forms a Self.

55 James’ sense of the potential extendibility of the Self increases throughout his career, culminating in A Pluralistic Universe where he claims that we can ultimately come to have an intimate relationship with the universe itself, such that we comprise a minute but nonetheless critical part. William James, A Pluralistic Universe, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977). Henceforth, PU. As we will see, this is remarkably similar to Royce’s understanding of how the Self may (ideally) extend itself in order to identify itself as a member of a larger community, even to the point of identifying with the universal community. Likewise, it is hard to imagine Dewey’s public or Dussel’s pueblo without recognizing our psychological capacity to identify ourselves with things that lie beyond our immediate perception, reach, and experience. Whether or not we choose to call this extension religious as such, this ability to extend the Self is clearly fundamental to religious experience.
particular aspects of our Self that decides what concretely constitutes our *spiritual* self. The spiritual self thus functions as an empirical analogue to traditional religious notions such as “the soul” and more modern philosophical notions such as “the transcendental ego” insofar as James invokes the spiritual self to explain how an individual has the capacity to organize or unify the many parts of the Self into a (more or less) coherent whole. Given our human finitude, or inability to be all things at all times to all people, “the seeker of his truest, strongest deepest self must review the list carefully, and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation” (295-96; italics added).

While we cannot be sure that James had a particularly religious sense of salvation in mind here, his psychological description of the Self undoubtedly plays into his later account of religious salvation in *Varieties*. Perhaps most salient is James’ distinction, within each aspect of Self (material, social, and spiritual), between “the immediate and actual, and the remote and potential” (PP 1:300). James is particularly fascinated by the *potential* social self because of its connection with our moral and religious lives, which are dominated by the customary behaviors we adopt from the various groups around us. When a person decides to make a moral decision that cuts against the customs of her family, friends, or larger society, she risks a kind of self-destruction, since her material life and self-esteem are highly dependent upon the recognition she receives from other people. Thus, James claims that when a person decides to go against the customs of a particular group, that person is strengthened “by the thought of other and better

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56 As with all unifications in James’ philosophy, the perfect unity of the Self is subject to an “ever not quite”: “The word ‘and’ trails along after every sentence. Something always escapes. ‘Ever not quite’ has to be said of the best attempts made anywhere in the universe at attaining all-inclusiveness” (PU, 145). Hunter Brown has gone so far as to (wisely) suggest that the phrase *ever not quite* “represents more succinctly than most the character of James’ philosophical outlook.” Hunter Brown, *William James on Radical Empiricism and Religion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 3.

possible social judges” (300). As a concrete historical example, a person participating in the Montgomery bus boycott might have engaged in civil disobedience towards the actual U.S. government as a way of appealing to and even bringing about a potential U.S. government that would recognize the right of blacks to sit anywhere they would like. James’ insight is that such an action is undertaken with an eye towards being seen by a presently ideal but potentially real society (in our historical example, a non-racist society).

If James is right to say that “the innermost of the empirical selves [i.e., the spiritual self] of a man is a Self of the social sort,” then he is no doubt right to say that there are situations where the empirical Self “can find its only adequate Socius in an ideal world” (301). James’ psychological explanation of the individual’s need for God thus emerges from his claim that the most private aspects of the individual are nonetheless dialogically constituted. So while it is undoubtedly true to say that James’ concept of the spiritual self represents the deeply personal nature of each individual’s center, it would be misleading to say that the spiritual self is private, unless private is understood in the way that James’ understands it, i.e., as radically conditioned by (and in turn conditioning) the public. In short, the need for God arises when the actual social

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58 There a number of excellent studies on the role of religion in the civil rights movement, but I will only mention the two most directly relevant to my project—the first because of its emphasis upon “The Beloved Community” (an ideal explored by Royce), and the second because of its claim that “Dewey became possessed by a sense that religion had what liberalism lacked […] that liberals could appropriate the inspiration they needed from religion, if only they changed their way of thinking about religion.” See Charles Marsh, The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today (New York: Basic Books, 2005) and David L. Chappell, A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 14.

59 Here, James focuses on the single ideal Socius, rather than the ideal society of recognition, but clearly what I hope for when I act against the grain of the current society is that the future society will judge itself in the eyes of the same ideal Socius from which I now seek recognition. That is, I hope that the other members of society will be convicted by the very ideals I currently act upon, even if my faith ultimately rests in the single ideal Socius.


61 It is therefore crucial to nuance any claim about James’ individualism by noting that he consistently assumes the dramatically social nature of each individual, as outlined in the tenth chapter of Principles that we are considering. George Cotkin aptly summarizes James’ relation to the social by commenting upon a letter that James wrote to Schiller in 1909: “Although James admitted that he often ignored a historical context for thought and action, he did
conditions that an individual finds herself in cannot provide the recognition or intimate social relations that her spiritual self deems necessary.

Regardless of the nature of its particular constituents, the empirical Self is constituted by the parts of the universe to which it feels intimately or at least emotionally related. On James’ account, these feelings naturally prompt actions of bodily, social, and spiritual “self-seeking and self-preservation” (293). In fact, James explains the majority of human behavior as self-seeking, but he does so while dramatically widening the possible inclusivity of the self, so that things such as altruism, heroic patriotism, or even martyrdom appear in the guise of self-seeking. While the laws of self-seeking and self-preservation appear to be laws of nature, there seem to be remarkably few limits upon what can be felt as a part of one’s Self. A dichotomy thus emerges based on whether the Self operates primarily in a sympathetic mood of expansion or in an aloof mood of contraction:

All narrow people intrench their Me, they retract it,—from the region of what they cannot securely possess. [...] Thus may a certain absoluteness and definiteness in the outline of my Me console me for the smallness of its content. Sympathetic people, on the contrary, proceed by the entirely opposite way of expansion and inclusion. *Nil humani a me alienum* [Nothing human is alien to me]. Let them despise this little person of mine, and treat me like a dog, I shall not negate them so long as I have a soul in my body. They are realities as much as I am. What positive good in them shall be mine too, etc., etc. (298).

According to James, the Self’s capacity to include other people and things within its own intimate sphere is the psychological motor of both morality and religion. The difference between the moral and the religious seems to depend upon how far reality needs to be stretched, upon whether the ideal Socius or society psychologically required for moral action can be conceivably constituted by future humans or instead goes so far as to require God. Indeed, James makes precisely this point in “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life”: “The capacity for the strenuous mood lies so deep down among our natural human possibilities that even if there were

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so only hesitantly, noting that ‘men do think in social situations...I simply assume the social situation.’” George Cotkin, *William James, Public Philosopher* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 18.

62 My unpacking of James’ psychological account here makes use of his later elaborations on intimacy in PU, 19ff.
no metaphysical or traditional grounds for believing in a God, men would postulate one simply as a pretext for living hard.”63 In other words, God comes into our lives as a “hypothesis”—literally, something we place under [ὑποτίθημι] ourselves—when we have a lived, subjective experience of the necessity of God for our most strenuous undertakings. On this model, there would be no sense in telling a religious person that her prayerful communion with God was not the platform from which she launched her struggle for social justice. But by the same token, it would be futile to try to convince a different person to believe in God using intellectual arguments if she failed to experience the need for such a power infinitely higher or wider than herself in order to achieve distant goals. Such a person might fight just as hard in the moral struggle to achieve social justice while personally finding the psychological need for God superfluous given her faith in herself, her community, or even future generations.64

In either case, there are two key points: 1) our personal struggles to transform ourselves and our world always require a vision (however vague or cloudy) of an ideal, of something that does not yet exist in any straightforward way but that we nonetheless feel should exist and 2) there are at least some cases of people who feel that the ideal could not possibly become real without God’s help. As James writes: “All progress in the social Self is the substitution of higher tribunals for lower; this ideal tribunal is the highest; and most men, either continually or occasionally, carry a reference to it in their breast. […] Those who have the most of it are possibly the most religious men” (PP 1:301). This description seems perfectly plausible when it comes to either the consciousness of the mystic who feels at one with God and the universe or to

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64 The question of whether or not we should consider this moral faith religious will be raised more explicitly in Chapter 3 on Dewey.
the life of the moral saint who works toward the oneness of life on earth, but James wants to push the point further by claiming that there is at least a hint of religiousness in us all:

But I am sure that even those who say they are altogether without it [i.e. a reference within their breast to the highest ideal tribunal] deceive themselves, and really have it in some degree. Only a non-gregarious animal could be completely without it. Probably no one can make sacrifices for ‘right,’ without to some degree personifying the principle of right for which the sacrifice is made, and expecting things from it. Complete social unselfishness, in other words, can hardly exist; complete social suicide can hardly occur to a man’s mind (300-01).

In James’ philosophy, religion seems to be nothing but morality carried to the next level, i.e., the becoming real or incarnation of the ideal. However, James himself warns against such “nothing but” statements, which do mark the essence of a thing but do not exhaust it.65 To further clarify the difference between morality and religion, I will eventually turn to James’ extended discussion of the matter in Varieties, but first, I would like to take a brief look at a couple of texts that precede Principles in order to provide a broader context for James’ (and pragmatism’s) struggle to differentiate morality and religion while attempting their reconciliation, since this is a central theme of my project.

A Pragmatically Unstable Dichotomy: Morality vs. Religion

Four years before James began working on Principles in 1878, he wrote a brief article that describes the “mood of faith” as taking the vividly possible as if it were true when there is insufficient evidence to decide the case either way upon purely logical grounds.66 While James

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65 James suggests that the basic shortcoming of positivism is that it reduces the richness of phenomena, especially ideals, to cases of “nothing but”: “Ideals appear as inert by-products of physiology; what is higher is explained by what is lower and treated forever as a case of ‘nothing but’—nothing but something else of a quite inferior sort” (P, 15). James would be among the last to deny that for a human being to have ideals, a great deal must happen physiologically, but this is merely the beginning of the philosophical story, especially given James’ pragmatic commitment to attend not just to roots but also to fruits.

66 The passage from which I garner this definition follows: “But now that an age of synthesis seems approaching, scientific men obey the current, cut loose from the old traditions of taking things piecemeal and contentedly ignoring much, and commit themselves to vast theories which, whether true or false, stand at least as much unverified today, in the strict scientific sense of the word verification, as any of the theosophies of the past. Your correspondent ‘Scientist’ says they have a perfect right to do so. As men, of course they have! Heaven forbid that they should not
does not explicitly say that this mood is equally crucial for our moral life, it is easily inferred.

For example, in order to offer a stranded motorist roadside assistance I must believe, i.e., “have faith,” or conceive it as vividly possible that he or she will not attempt to kill me.\(^{67}\) Of course, a “faith” like this need not be particularly religious. In fact, the early James plainly wants to draw a line between morality and religion, as can be seen in his 1885 introduction to the literary remains of his father, whom he quotes as follows: “Morality expresses the sentiment I have of my own absoluteness, the feeling I have of a selfhood strictly independent of that of any other man….

[...] Self-assertion is thus so clearly the fundamental law, the vital breath, of our moral life, that it is no wonder we cling to that life as the true end of our being” (qtd. in ERM, 22-23). James’ father goes on to write that, in contrast, he means by religion “such a conscience on man’s part of a forfeiture of the Divine favor, as perpetually urges him to make sacrifices of his ease, his convenience, his wealth, and if need be his life, in order to restore himself, if so it be possible, to that favor” (24-25). According to Henry James Sr., the religious task is to identify oneself with all others, since divinity consists in having no selfhood apart from one’s existence through others (39). Conceived in this way, religious existence would hinge upon acknowledging one’s utter dependence upon the broader community of life, as created and sustained by the divine.

When William comments on his father’s works at the end of his introductory essay, we find that he is essentially in agreement, although he makes a point of the fact that most people sometimes outstrip the proof, and, no longer sickled o’er with scruples about crucial experiments and adequate evidence, yield to the pleasure of taking for true what they happen vividly to conceive as possible. Only when this exhilarated, but by no means unhealthy, mood is upon them, let it be distinctly recognized for what it is the mood of Faith, not Science.” William James, Essays, Comments, and Reviews, ed. Frederick Burkhardt and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 115; italics added. Henceforth, ECR.

\(^{67}\) This is admittedly a belief that is not particularly hard to come by for most people, but it is nonetheless an example of the kind of social situation requiring the sort of “precursive faith” (or social trust) that James’ discusses in “The Will to Believe”: “A social organism of any sort whatever, large or small, is what it is because each member proceeds to his own duty with a trust that the other members will simultaneously do theirs. Wherever a desired result is achieved by the co-operation of many independent persons, its existence as a fact is a pure consequence of the precursive faith in one another of those immediately concerned” (WB, 29).
find the moral life sufficient most of the time insofar as they find their own powers sufficient for the exercise of their moral energy (61-62). For William, this is all well and good provided that we are able to keep up this mood of “healthy-mindedness,” but the “morbid view” is never far from any one of us, since there are no guarantees that we won’t soon find ourselves “‘all sicklied o'er’ with the sense of weakness, of helpless failure, and of fear” (62). He therefore concludes:

Whenever we feel this, such a sense of the vanity of our voluntary career comes over us, that all our morality appears but as a plaster hiding a sore it can never cure, and all our well-doing as the hollowest substitute for that well-being that our lives ought to be grounded in, but, alas! are not. This well-being is the object of the religious demand,—a demand so penetrating and unassuageable that no consciousness of such occasional and outward well-doing as befalls the human lot can ever give it satisfaction (62).

For both the younger and the elder James, then, there is an absolute divergence between morality and religion. William approaches the matter more practically and less theologically than his father, but the point is basically the same: morality works just fine until one fails miserably or feels helpless to do the very sorts of things or be the sort of person that morality calls for. In turn, religion’s ardent desire to be carried along securely in the eternal hands of God mocks morality’s insistence upon strenuous individual effort as entirely self-sufficient. But the interesting thing to note is that even this early in his career, William refused to give up on either the strenuous individual effort required by morality or the revitalizing help from beyond the self offered by religion. So rather than resolve the dilemma that he and his father had (in admittedly different ways) come upon, he concludes the essay with a question and a method for resolving the difficulty:

Is the religious tendency or the moralistic tendency on the whole the most serviceable to man's life, taking the latter in the largest way? By their fruits ye shall know them. Solvitur ambulando; for the decision we must perhaps await the day of judgment. Meanwhile, the battle is about us, and we are its combatants, steadfast or vacillating, as the case may be. It will be a hot fight indeed if the friends of philosophic moralism should bring to the service of their ideal, so different from that of my father, a spirit even remotely resembling the life-long devotion of his faithful heart (63).

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68 James puts the antagonism as follows: “[O]f religion and moralism, the morbid and the healthy view, it may be said that what is meat to the one is the other’s poison” (ERM, 62).
This passage foreshadows William James’ career-long devotion to philosophical pluralism (or melioristic “moralism”). However, in spite of what he suggest here about the great divide between morality and religion, it seems that he developed pragmatism as a way of mediating between the two in order to devise a moral religion or a religious morality. And while the younger James was undoubtedly more individualistic (and thus in his father’s sense, more “moralistic”) than the elder, there is no doubt that William wanted his conception of God to be like his father’s, i.e., “monistic enough to satisfy the philosopher, and yet warm and living and dramatic enough to speak to the heart of the common pluralistic man” (60-61).69 For our purposes, the points to take away are: 1) from the beginning, there is a troubled yet intimate relationship between morality and religion in James’ thought, and 2) this relationship is illuminated when placed in the context of James’ father’s thought.70 The initial categories that James inherited from his father for the dichotomy between morality and religion emphasize morality as the expression of individualism and religion as the full expression of human sociality. The fact that this runs counter to the common scholarly opinion that sees James’ religious view as individualistic and his moral and political views as pluralistic leads me to believe that an interpretive reconciliation is in order.

In order to move from a description of the source of this tension in James’ thought towards a description of the philosophical problem itself, it will help to name the problem in the

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69 James’ first solid attempt to express such a conception of God can be found in his discussion of his own personal overbeliefs at the end of Varieties, but they do not receive their fullest expression until A Pluralistic Universe.

70 William James’ sense of religious salvation, or becoming a strenuously, morally active member of a pluralistic religious universe, is not as individualistic as people often think, and the influence of his father goes a long way in explaining this fact. Unfortunately, it seems the psychological studies of the relationship have dramatically outnumbered the philosophical ones. The best treatment of which I am aware concerning the philosophical relation between father and son is Henry Samuel Levinson, The Religious Investigations of William James (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), esp. 10-14. Robert Richardson’s recent biography, which is usually very careful, expresses the more typical view when he writes that William’s views were “almost diametrically opposed to those of Henry Senior.” Robert D. Richardson, William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 84.
older, theological terms more familiar to Henry James Sr. In negative terms, this is the problem of “sin,” which occurs when a Self that ought to have done something good actually does something evil. Asking this very same Self to do good rather than evil next time would seem to require a change in the Self, and yet if this Self is “in sin” to begin with, it is not clear how the change is going to come from within the Self. In positive terms, this is the problem of “grace,” i.e., the problem of accounting for the Self’s dependence upon outside help from God without thereby providing the self with an excuse to “sin more that grace may increase.”

By psychologically and philosophically translating both problems, William James is effectively asking us: What are we to make of the fact that some of our most strenuous moral efforts seem to paradoxically come upon the heels of our letting go of merely personal responsibility by placing our faith in powers beyond ourselves? James’ pragmatic answer—presented at the climax of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in his discussion of saintliness—is that we should figure out how to harness this paradox to both our moral and religious advantage.

**The Fruits of Morality vs. the Fruits of Religion**

James’ first task in *Varieties* is to explain what he means by religion. He believes that religious phenomena will appear most clearly and distinctly against a backdrop of neighboring (mostly moral) phenomena through the study of “religious geniuses,” i.e., “individuals for whom religion exists not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever rather” (VRE, 15). The project of *Varieties* is to study these religious geniuses in order to make a judgment regarding the value of their experiences: “In the end it had to come to our empiricist criterion: By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots. […] The roots of a man’s virtue are inaccessible to us. No appearances whatever are infallible proofs of grace. Our practice is the only sure evidence, even

71 The biblical phrase is from Paul’s Letter to the Romans, 6:1.
to ourselves” (25). Here, James has returned to the question he posed at the end of his commentary on his father’s literary remains: What are the fruits of morality as distinct from the fruits of religion, and which is “on the whole the most serviceable to man's life, taking the latter in the largest way?” (ERM, 63). To the critics of religion, James is ready to concede that the “religious genius” is “psychopathic,” that there is something “morbid” about the origins of his genius. Nonetheless, James insists that this does not determine the value of the religious genius’ life but only its strength: “Such men do not remain mere critics and understanders with their intellect. Their ideas possess them, they inflict them, for better or worse, upon their companions or their age” (VRE, 28).

Here we have a barebones yet important description of religion as a kind of energy or power source, something that pushes the ordinary aspects of human experience beyond their normal scope, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse. The twofold task of the pragmatist philosopher of religion thus becomes: 1) to see how religion manages to push ordinary experience beyond its normal limits and 2) to judge the results. Of course, this also creates the difficulty of pinning down precisely what pragmatism means by religious (as opposed to aesthetic or moral) experience, since at first glance it seems that calling an experience “religious” is simply to announce that it is particularly intense, deep, or wide.72 James is therefore forced to circumscribe his usage of the term while admitting that since “the word ‘religion’ cannot stand for any single principle or essence, but is rather a collective name,” “we may very likely find no one essence, but many characters which may alternately be equally

72 John McDermott has tirelessly shown how experience in its broadest sense serves as both the starting point and the ending point (the “leading metaphor”) for much of American thought, especially classical “American” Pragmatism. See John J. McDermott, "The American Angle of Vision: II – Philosophical Dimensions," Cross Currents 15, no. 4 (Fall 1965) and John J. McDermott, "The American Angle of Vision: I – Historical Dimensions," Cross Currents 15, no. 1 (Winter 1965). My project is essentially an attempt to see what falls out ethically and politically if we begin with the religious aspect or dimension of experience.
important in religion” (30). From this multitude, James selects his “own narrow view of what
religion shall consist in for the purpose of these lectures,” namely, “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” (34). While James tells us that his decision
is “arbitrary,” this seems to be a rhetorical flourish, since he defends it upon the grounds that
there is “one great partition which divides the religious field. On the one side of it lies
institutional, on the other personal religion” (32). James deems personal religion more
fundamental and important, since institutional religion is historically predicated upon it.74

At least two things seem problematic with this decision on James’ part, even when
evaluated on Jamesian terms. First, there is no such thing as the personal-religion-pure-and-
simple that James attempts to describe. While James may be right to mark a fundamental
difference between “first-hand” and “second-hand” religion, he is undoubtedly wrong to ignore
the relations between the two. In fact, he seems to be committing the very intellectualist fallacy
he so often warns against by pretending that two sets of distinguishable phenomena (namely,
personal and institutional religion) are therefore unrelated.75 Even the great “religious geniuses”
of Christianity or Buddhism founded new religions in the context of the old (Judaism and
Hinduism, respectively). Moreover, James seems to contradict his own anti-Spencerian principle
of focusing on the most developed rather than the most primordial instances of a given

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73 It is crucial to note that James both: 1) admits up front that this is a relatively narrow view of religion and 2)
frequently allows a broader view of religion to trouble the relative narrowness of his lectures.
74 James writes: “Churches, when once established, live at second hand upon tradition; but the founders of every
church owed their power originally to the fact of their direct personal communion with the divine […] so personal
religion should still seem the primordial thing, even to those who continue to esteem it incomplete” (VRE, 33).
75 James defines “vicious intellectualism” as “the treating of a name as excluding from the fact named what the
name’s definition fails positively to include” (PU, 32). In the Varieties, it seems that James is excluding institutional
religion from personal religion.
phenomena in order to gain the best understanding of its essence. On the one hand, James freely admits that the personal, religious, and moral devoutness that most interests him came after magic and fetishism historically. On the other hand, James wants to claim that the institutional form of religion is inevitably a degeneration of the unique relation individuals may develop with the divine. To be consistent, James should admit that the sort of religion that most interests him is a fairly late development, but that it remains the essential, driving force of the more formal theological and ecclesiastical accretions.

Of course, in James’ defense, there is nothing wrong in principle with treating first-hand religion as the primary phenomenon to be studied, since selective attention is mandatory when studying such a broad field. Moreover, James does address the broader societal and institutional effects of religious geniuses even if he does not look toward their social and institutional causes. In this sense, he does not construct an artificial gulf between the two. And to interpret him as charitably as possible, turning almost exclusively towards personal religion allows him to simplify his task of pragmatically judging the fruits of religion, concentrating on religion in action rather than religion in conception. In other words, he is able to look at religious ideas in light of the practical consequences they produce in individual lives rather than the official creeds.

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76 In “Remarks on Spencer’s Definition of Mind as Correspondence,” James criticizes Spencer’s reasoning which is said to run as follows: “[S]ince every process grows more and more complicated as it develops, more swarmed over by incidental and derivative conditions which disguise and adulterate its original simplicity, the only way to discover its true and essential form is to trace it back to its earliest beginning. There it will appear in its genuine character pure and undefiled.” William James, *Essays in Philosophy*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Ignas K. Skrupskelis, and Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 9.

77 Moreover, if we take a historical view (as Royce does), we must note that social or communal religion comes long before the personal, almost solitary religion that James takes as basic, since the “birth of the individual” is itself a relatively modern phenomenon. See Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 2 vols. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), vol. 1, 145ff. Henceforth, PC. Alternatively, if we take a historical view (as Dussel does), we must note that magic and fetishism continue to thrive in “capitalism as daily religion.” See Enrique Dussel, “The Concept of Fetishism in Marx's Thought (Elements for a General Marxist Theory of Religion),” *Radical Philosophy Review* 6, no. 1, 2 (2003), 123.

78 My turn to Royce in the next chapter is designed to correct both of these shortcomings of James’ philosophy of religion. Royce claims that the “genius” of the “religious genius” lies in a novel, imaginative interpretation of reality that nonetheless rests upon and further contributes to tradition, such that the old is reinvigorated and the community of life grows in such a way that the fruits extend even to those who are not “geniuses.”
they produce in institutions. Finally, James’ focus helps him sidestep the sticky question of what “properly” constitutes the divine, enabling him to posit the possibility that a person can be “religious” without God or any sort of concrete deity, provided that the person is behaving religiously. 79 This, however, throws us back into the misty regions of the morality and religion dichotomy, so James proposes once again to “arbitrarily” limit the discussion to the more common usage of “the divine” as referring to a deity or deities. So while “at bottom the whole concern of both morality and religion is with the manner of our acceptance of the universe,” only religious persons experience a state of mind 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” (46). In contrast, for merely moral persons “life is a war, and the service of the highest is a sort of cosmic patriotism which also calls for volunteers” (45).

James concludes that a fully religious life includes what the merely moral life has to offer (namely, the need for strenuous effort) but then goes on to supersede it: “Religious feeling is thus an absolute addition to the Subject’s range of life. It gives him a new sphere of power. When the outward battle is lost, and the outer world disowns him, it redeems and vivifies an interior world which otherwise would be an empty waste” (46). If religion proves to be the only thing that can accomplish this paradoxical increase of the Subject’s power through submission or obedience to

79 This is just one of the many instances of how James consistently troubles the very conceptual dichotomies that he employs, as if to remind us that any conceptual dichotomy is constructed for its theoretical usefulness, which quickly comes to an end if the concept is allowed to obscure the reality it is designed to describe. Effectively, James is reminding his reader that even though “religion” means one thing for the purposes of his lectures, this technical usage must not ultimately obscure the fact that the phenomena that may be termed religious in a broad sense outstrip the technical usage. For example, James writes: “The sort of appeal that Emersonian optimism, on the one hand, and Buddhistic pessimism, on the other, make to the individual and the sort of response which he makes to them in his life are in fact indistinguishable from, and in many respects identical with, the best Christian appeal and response. We must therefore, from the experiential point of view, call these godless or quasi-godless creeds ‘religions’; and accordingly when in our definition of religion we speak of the individual’s relation to ‘what he considers the divine,’ we must interpret the term ‘divine’ very broadly, as denoting any object that is godlike, whether it be a concrete deity or not’ (VRE, 36). This category of “godless or quasi-godless creeds,” which seems to include many moral worldviews, is tremendously important though difficult to classify. For an excellent, though to my mind flawed, discussion of some concrete instances of this category see John E. Smith, Quasi-Religions: Humanism, Marxism and Nationalism (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994).
a higher power, then James argues that "its vital importance as a human faculty stands vindicated beyond dispute" (49). At the outset of Varieties, then, James continues to be in essential agreement with his father concerning the inevitable human need for religion, even if William wants to give more positive content to morality alone. Nonetheless, religion remains the only thing that can save us from our finitude, dependence, and impotence precisely by reconciling us to them when we experience help from divine power(s) beyond the Self.

Having distinguished morality alone from religion, James goes on to describe the operation of this religious reconciliation to our finitude that may paradoxically open up a new sphere of moral power:

[Religion] consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto. This belief and this adjustment are the religious attitude in the soul. [...] 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. Such objects may be present to our senses, or they may be present only to our thought. In either case they elicit from us a reaction; and the reaction due to things of thought is notoriously in many cases as strong as that due to sensible presents. It may be even stronger (51).

In this quotation, we can see the three elements (psychological, practical/moral, and metaphysical) that are always interrelated in James’ philosophy, even when he chooses to deal with them separately: 1) the psychological question of how belief in the unseen functions; 2) the

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80 James speaks of this religious addition to human life in evolutionary terms: religion is "an essential organ of our life, performing a function which no other portion of our nature can so successfully fulfill" (VRE, 49).

81 In fact, James uses some of the very same phrases in Varieties that he used much earlier in the introduction to his father’s literary remains. In Varieties, he writes: “To suggest personal will and effort to one all sicklied o’er with the sense of irremediable impotence is to suggest the most impossible of things. What he craves is to be consoled in his very powerlessness, to feel that the spirit of the universe recognizes and secures him, all decaying and failing as he is. Well, we are all such helpless failures in the last resort. The sanest and best of us are of one clay with lunatics and prison inmates, and death finally runs the robustest of us down” (VRE, 46). Compare to the earlier version: “To suggest personal will and effort to one ‘all sicklied o’er’ with the sense of weakness, of helpless failure, and of fear, is to suggest the most horrible of things to him. What he craves is to be consoled in his very impotence, to feel that the Powers of the Universe recognize and secure him, all passive and failing as he is. Well, we are all potentially such sick men. The sanest and best of us are of one clay with lunatics and prison inmates. And whenever we feel this, such a sense of the vanity of our voluntary career comes over us, that all our morality appears but as a plaster hiding a sore it can never cure, and all our well-doing as the hollowest substitute for that well-being that our lives ought to be grounded in, but, alas! are not. This well-being is the object of the religious demand,—a demand so penetrating and unassuageable that no consciousness of such occasional and outward well-doing as befalls the human lot can ever give it satisfaction” (ERM, 62).

82 William James puts this point memorably as follows: “Religion thus makes easy and felicitous what in any case is necessary” (VRE, 49).
practical question of what behaviors belief in the unseen produces alongside the moral question of whether these behaviors are good or bad; and 3) the metaphysical question of precisely how the unseen order can be said to exist or at least produce effects. What is perhaps most brilliant about James’ typical progression is his choice to begin with the psychological fact that “our whole higher prudential and moral life is based on the fact that material sensations actually present may have a weaker influence on our action than ideas of remoter facts” (51).

Put simply, James is calling our attention to the power of ideas: “This absolute determinability of our mind by abstractions is one of the cardinal facts in our human constitution. Polarizing and magnetizing us as they do, we turn towards them and from them, we seek them, hold them, hate them, bless them, just as if they were so many concrete beings” (54; italics added). For instance, our belief in highly abstract ideas such as “right” and “wrong” may guide our conduct in directions different from those of our bodily instincts or material interests. James suggests that religion performs a kind of miraculous practical function by bringing what would otherwise be remote intellectual ideas into the most intimate sphere of personal life. For example, the abstract moral ideas of “good” and “evil” may be religiously experienced at a more visceral level when the individual feels herself to stand before God as judge. Even if the religious believer never directly or immediately experiences the deity, her entire life can be concretely bound to how the deity would have her live. Thus, religion can be considered the ultimate case of the practical effects of the unseen when the unseen is felt to be the ultimate reality: “Many persons (how many we cannot tell) possess the objects of their belief, not in the form of mere

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83 Robert Richardson articulates the interrelatedness of James’ interests particularly well when he writes: “James was always interested in psychology, religion, and philosophy, and […] what we are sometimes tempted to regard as a progression is simply the continual turning this way and that of a grand central concern that had all three facets for James.” Richardson, *William James*, 364.

84 James tells us that in such a case, the deity can hardly be said to be present to the mind of the believer at all in terms of definite description, and yet “the sentiment of reality can indeed attach itself so strongly to our object of belief that our whole life is polarized through and through, so to speak, by its sense of the existence of the thing believed in” (VRE, 57).
conceptions which their intellect accepts as true, but rather in the form of quasi-sensible realities directly apprehended” (59).

In sum, when it comes to religion (as well as ethics and politics, as we will see in the sections below) “articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of the same conclusion” (67). Of course, this is not necessarily a good thing, but James thinks that if we are honest with ourselves, we will not deny it as a fact from which we must set out. Our impulsive belief “sets up the original body of truth,” and our philosophy “is but its showy verbalized translation” (67). Once verbalized, it becomes subject to critique and reconstruction, but this will be most effective if we frankly recognize that we do not live immediately or primarily on the level of intellectual creeds, but rather upon the level of intuition or what “feels right” to us. And given the fact that the wants, susceptibilities, and capacities of individuals vary tremendously, James tells us that it should be no surprise that we find religious experiences, practices, and commitments in a great number of varieties.

Once-Born (Healthy-Minded) vs. Twice-Born (Sick-Souled) Religion

After limiting his usage of the term religion by distinguishing it from morality, James draws a further distinction between two religious types: the once-born vs. the twice-born, or the healthy-minded vs. the sick-souled.85 The former type has “the tendency which looks on all things and sees that they are good” (78). Such deliberate optimism is undoubtedly useful, and

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85 I follow James in using once-born interchangeably with healthy-minded and twice-born interchangeably with sick-souled. However, as pointed out by Michael Slater, “James should not identify being healthy-minded with being once-born, as he does on p. 139 of VRE, because not all healthy-minded persons are once-born types (some are twice-born), and not all once-born types are healthy-minded (it is possible that some might be sick-souled).” Michael R. Slater, "Metaphysical Intimacy and the Moral Life: The Ethical Project of The Varieties of Religious Experience," Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society 43, no. 1 (2007), 152 n.32. In other words, healthy-minded and sick-souled describe modes of being, whereas once-born and twice-born describe types of conversion, so that James should not conflate them. Nonetheless, since the two typologies generally line up with one another and their differentiation is not crucial for my purposes, I simply follow James in treating them as interchangeable.
James claims that everyone indulges in such an attitude to some extent insofar as we ignore a great deal of the suffering in the world. Quoting from what he takes to be a typical religious expression of such optimism, James writes:

In just the degree in that you realize your oneness with the Infinite Spirit, you will exchange dis-ease for ease, inharmony for harmony, suffering and pain for abounding health and strength. To recognize our own divinity, and our intimate relation to the Universal, is to attach the belts of our machinery to the powerhouse of the Universe. One need remain in hell no longer than one chooses to; we can rise to any heaven we ourselves choose; and when we choose so to rise, all the higher powers of the Universe combine to help us heavenward (qtd. on 88-89).

James makes two points about such optimistic views: 1) they answer a fundamental human need for many people, often producing staggering practical results regardless of what we may ultimately conclude about their metaphysical basis, and 2) they nonetheless fail to meet the needs of others who, for one reason or another, are unable to maintain such optimism. Healthy-minded or once-born religion essentially works by the power of suggestion that James defines quite simply as “another name for the power of ideas, so far as they prove efficacious over belief and conduct” when they “come to the individual with the force of a revelation” (97-98). This last phrase is crucial, since the very same ideas may function in one context or for one individual as ethical ideals, whereas in a different context and for another individual they may function as religious revelations. In either case, there is a sense of reality attached to the unseen, but only in the religious case does such contact seem to come from a (more or less) personal force beyond ourselves. However, for both the ethically optimistic person and the sick-souled religious person, the claim of the once-born religious person (that all is right with ourselves and the world if we would but realize it and learn to cast out fear and negative thinking) falls on deaf ears. For the person content with ethics alone, there is no revelation here, only some sort of new-age

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86 James writes: “We divert our attention from disease and death as much as we can; and the slaughter-houses and indecencies without end on which our life is founded are huddled out of sight and never mentioned, so that the world we recognize officially in literature and in society is a poetic fiction far handsomer and cleaner and better than the world that really is” (VRE, 80-81).
therapeutics that fails to have any personal appeal. Whereas for the sick-souled person, the claim of the once-born not only fails to grip but also appears as patently false and woefully inadequate to a felt need for supernatural intervention.

Combining James’ two schematic dichotomies (morality vs. religion and healthy-minded vs. sick-souled), we end up with three basic types: 1) the ethical individual, who relates to ideals without ascribing them much personality or revelatory force; 2) the healthy-minded religious individual, who finds both revelatory and efficacious the claim that all is right with self and world if she would only realize it; and 3) the sick-souled religious individual who is only saved “by what seems to him a second birth, a deeper kind of conscious being than he could enjoy before” (154). According to James, one’s type is often determined based upon one’s personal “pain-threshold” or “misery-threshold,” i.e., the point at which one passes from pleasure to pain or from joy to misery. In other words, those who are less psychologically prone to experiencing pain or misery often find themselves at the ethical end of the scale, whereas those who are more sensitive to experiencing pain or misery often find themselves at the twice-born end of the scale, with the once-born falling somewhere in between.87

Although James claims that all three psychological types are reasonable responses to one’s experience, he still seeks to judge which is the most reasonable based upon the facts:

Even if we suppose a man so packed with healthy-mindedness as never to have experienced in his own person any of these sobering intervals, still, if he is a reflecting being, he must generalize and class his own lot with that of others; and, doing so, he must see that his escape is just a lucky chance and no essential difference” (116; italics added).

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87 James’ psychological observation is compatible with the claim that which side of the pain or misery threshold a given individual spends the most time on is largely influenced by “objective” rather than “subjective” factors such as one’s social, economic, or political power. However, James generally fails to make this point. In the following passage, James is undoubtedly making a psychological point, but the same passage holds equally if not more true of, e.g., differing economic conditions: “The sanguine and healthy-minded live habitually on the sunny side of their misery-line, the depressed and melancholy live beyond it, in darkness and apprehension. There are men who seem to have started in life with a bottle or two of champagne inscribed to their credit, whilst others seem to have been born close to the pain-threshold, which the slightest irritants fatally send them over” (VRE, 115).
Once one recognizes the amount of suffering and the corresponding need for help in the world, refined optimism and other intellectual and moral consolations seem irreverently remote:

Here is the real core of the religious problem: Help! help! No prophet can claim to bring a final message unless he says things that will have a sound of reality in the ears of victims such as these. But the deliverance must come in as strong a form as the complaint, if it is to take effect; and that seems a reason why the coarser religions, revivalistic, orgiastic, with blood and miracles and supernatural operations, may possibly never be displaced. Some constitutions need them too much (135-36).

In short, twice-born religion is deeply rooted in the needs of a sizable class of individuals, so that even those individuals who find themselves on the other side of the pain or misery threshold may, upon reflection, come to realize that “healthy-mindedness is inadequate as a philosophical doctrine, because the evil facts which it refuses positively to account for are a genuine portion of reality; and they may after all be the best key to life’s significance, and possibly the only openers of our eyes to the deepest levels of truth” (136). The ethical individual has little to offer in the face of sorrow, pain, and death apart from a paradoxical blend of courage and resignation that simply does not meet the needs of certain types of people. Likewise, the once-born individual more or less chooses to ignore the sorrow, pain, and death that mark the lives of others, since at bottom all would be well with them if they simply stop participating in the illusion. Ultimately, it is the twice-born religious type that surveys the largest possible domain of experience. To ignore this fact completely is to fail to address what we may call (borrowing James’ language from another essay) “a certain blindness in human beings” to the suffering of others. Only twice-born religions respond to the dramatic need some people have for deliverance or salvation from the realities of sorrow, pain, and death. In sum, what differentiates James’ three basic types or

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88 In Varieties, James only briefly deals concretely with the sorrow, suffering, pain, and death that mark the conditions for the possibility of twice-born religion. He gives much starker expression to the concrete grounds for hopelessness in “What Makes a Life Significant.” William James, Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 150-67. Henceforth, TT.
varieties of religion—moral [religion], once-born “religion,” and twice-born religion—is where each one falls on the scale between pure naturalism and pure Salvationism.\footnote{The brackets in the phrase “moral [religion]” designate James’ reluctance to call this a religion, even though in the broadest usage of the term, James thinks it may be called a religion “by courtesy” (VRE, 40). Stoicism, as a well-articulated and broad-based doctrine of life complete with a metaphysics, seems to be the most profound example in James’ mind (122). Similarly, the scare quotes in “once-born ‘religion’” reflect the fact that James finds twice-born religion to be more religious, since the individual experiences not only a re-birth or expansion of the Self but also a “spiritual death” or deep contraction of the Self that makes way for powerful help from the divine. In short, James is perfectly willing to grant the status of religion to well-formed ethical ways of life provided that we are using religion in its broadest possible sense, in much the same way we may call an individual’s worldview and way of life a philosophy, even if he or she has never read Plato or Kant. Nonetheless, James prefers to use the word religion in his lectures to describe the individual’s “letting go” in order to be swept up into the larger life of the divine, and he thinks that the twice-born perform this “letting go” in a more complete way. James thus believes that religion, in the narrow technical sense he is developing, should be reserved for the “religions of salvation” like Christianity. Of course, James is also quick to point out that “here as in most other current classifications, the radical extremes are somewhat ideal abstractions, and the concrete human beings whom we oftenest meet are intermediate varieties and mixtures” (139-40).}

Psychologically speaking, the twice-born religious type has its roots in “an incompletely unified moral and intellectual constitution” (140). The individual appears as a “divided-self” or “a battle-ground for what he feels to be two deadly hostile selves, one actual, the other ideal” (143). James echoes his position in Principles by pointing out that all of us are somewhat divided Selves insofar as our material, social, and even spiritual selves are many and exist without being fully harmonized. For each of us, “the normal evolution of character chiefly consist in the straightening out and unifying of the inner self” (142). This may come about either gradually or rapidly in many different ways, e.g., through altered feelings, altered powers of action, intellectual insight, or mystical experience. In fact, James tells us that “to find religion is only one out of many ways of reaching unity; and the process of remedying inner incompleteness and reducing inner discord is a general psychological process, which may take place with any sort of mental material, and need not necessarily assume the religious form” (146). Still, James insists that religion “often transforms the most intolerable misery into the profoundest and most
enduring happiness” and that the experience of unification provides the most extreme feeling of relief “when it is cast into the religious mould” (146).90

In fact, we can describe a spectrum ranging from moral [religion] through once-born “religion” to twice-born religion based upon how quickly the unification of the divided self occurs. Moral [religion] is a lifelong struggle to unify the self by strenuously shaping one’s real self in terms of one’s ideal self. Once-born “religion” is a perpetual realization of the claim that one is already part of the divine life, and one’s real self becomes increasingly unified as one manifests the ideal, divine self that is already at one’s core. Finally, twice-born religion centers upon an experience of conversion in which the old, real self dies and the ideal self becomes real through the saving power of the divine. Throughout the spectrum, spiritual growth is an ongoing process, but as one shifts from the moral end of the spectrum to the twice-born end, the emphasis is placed upon the transformation being dramatic, abrupt, and radical.91 Likewise, the interpretation becomes more religious as the changes in the individual are viewed as coming from further beyond or outside of the Self. In any case, regardless of how conversion occurs, it denotes “the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy” in consequence of the Self’s increasing belief in the unseen ideal as a reality that is increasingly classified as divine or supernatural as one moves along the spectrum (157).

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90 James sums up his point by employing an ancient distinction from physical medicine: “The older medicine used to speak of two ways, lysis and crisis, one gradual, the other abrupt, in which one might recover from a bodily disease. In the spiritual realm there are also two ways, one gradual, the other sudden, in which inner unification may occur” (VRE, 152-53).

91 For a brilliant, detailed, and sympathetic study of the lifelong, gradual conversion that marked the lives of ancient philosophers such as the Stoics and Epicureans, see Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005). Whereas James is most interested in the abrupt cases of conversion following the Christian, Protestant model, Foucault is most interested in the lifelong cases of ethical “conversion to self” that marked the lives of many ancient philosophers.
It is crucial to note that James treats religion as, in certain fundamental respects, a radical solution to the psychologically ordinary problem of the divided Self. Whether particularly religious or not, unification comes as a set of ideals become the Self’s “center of energy.” James makes the same point in *Principles* when speaking of the “spiritual self” as the locus of the individual’s capacity to organize or unify the many parts of the Self into a more or less coherent whole. As we saw above in the second section, James even uses the language of “salvation” when describing the importance of having a spiritual self that, under the sway of ideals, unifies the various and often conflicting material and social selves. In *Varieties*, James examines this salvation in its fully religious form:

> It makes a great difference to a man whether one set of his ideas, or another, be the centre of his energy; and it makes a great difference, as regards any set of ideas which he may possess, whether they become central or remain peripheral in him. To say that a man is “converted” means, in these terms, that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy (162).

While such conversions are unmistakably religious, they nevertheless follow the pattern of ordinary “conversion” or unification of the divided Self that forms a natural part of healthy psychological growth, especially from the phase of adolescence to that of adulthood. In fact, we could go so far as to say that conversion, in all its forms, is a process of *socialization*, though there are considerable differences between religious “conversion” and ordinary “socialization” based upon one’s interpretation of the *society* or *socius*. The socially converted individual is unified rather haphazardly by whatever unity happens to arise in the context of the company she keeps; the morally converted individual is unified by a set of more or less articulate moral ideals; the once-born religious individual is unified by a fairly vague sense of “the divine force” in the

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92 James writes: “In his recent work on the Psychology of Religion, Professor Starbuck of California has shown by a statistical inquiry how closely parallel in its manifestations the ordinary 'conversion' which occurs in young people brought up in evangelical circles is to that growth into a larger spiritual life which is a normal phase of adolescence in every class of human beings. […] The symptoms are the same,—sense of incompleteness and imperfection; brooding, depression, morbid introspection, and sense of sin; anxiety about the hereafter; distress over doubts, and the like. And the result is the same,—a happy relief and objectivity, as the confidence in self gets greater through the adjustment of the faculties to the wider outlook” (VRE, 164).
universe; and the twice-born religious individual is unified by a force that she experiences as personal and divine. In other words, James is articulating a spectrum of conversion based upon an increasingly wide (and metaphysical) sense of social reality. Indeed, James’ claim that “conversion is in its essence a normal adolescent phenomenon, incidental to the passage from the child’s small universe to the wider intellectual and spiritual life of maturity” (165) allows him to eventually conclude that moral and religious saints are more “grown up” than the rest of humanity.

Following Professor Starbuck, James sees two basic ways in which conversion can be accomplished, “a conscious and voluntary way and an involuntary and unconscious way” (169-70). James believes that the world is full of conversion by volition, that this method can be highly effective, and even that there are persons who seem incapable of conversion in any other way. Nonetheless, in even the most conscious and voluntary moral “conversions,” James believes that there are “passages of partial self-surrender interposed” and that “the very last step must be left to other forces and performed without the help of [the will’s] activity” (171):

[T]here are two things in the mind of the candidate for conversion. First, the present incompleteness or wrongness, the ‘sin’ which he is eager to escape from; and, second, the positive ideal which he longs to compass. Now with most of us the sense of our present wrongness is a far more distinct piece of our consciousness than is the imagination of any positive ideal we can aim at. In a majority of cases, indeed, the ‘sin’ almost exclusively engrosses the attention, so that conversion is “a process of struggling away from sin rather than of striving towards righteousness.” A man’s conscious wit and will, so far as they strain towards the ideal, are aiming at something only dimly and inaccurately imagined (172; quoting Prof. Starbuck).

In short, the psychological description of conversion, whether of a moral or religious type, consists of “the throwing of our conscious selves upon the mercy of powers which, whatever they may be, are more ideal than we are actually” (173). In other words, there is an irreducible element of “faith” in the goodness and power of the ideal. Of course, the reverse holds true as

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93 Unfortunately, this understanding of religion as fundamentally social is an often-overlooked facet of James’ philosophy of religion. This may largely stem from the fact that James’ most articulate expression of religion as a kind of enhanced sociality occurs in A Pluralistic Universe, which is not as widely read as Pragmatism or Varieties.
94 See the next section below for a discussion of James’ saint as a religious version of Nietzsche’s übermensch.
well: there is an irreducible element of will or self-determination involved in the case of placing oneself in the hands of the divine.\textsuperscript{95} But at the most basic level, the more that self-surrender to the ideal is emphasized, the more religious the conversion is on James’ model.

James sees a perfect harmony between psychology and religion up to this point, insofar as “both admit that there are forces seemingly outside of the conscious individual that bring redemption to his life” (174). Of course, psychology sees these forces as subconscious and religion sees them as transcendent and divine (though perhaps operating through the subconscious on James’ hypothesis).\textsuperscript{96} In short, the \textit{psychological mechanism} is basically the same in both cases; the debate is over how to interpret the accompanying \textit{metaphysical reality}.

While James does briefly outline his personal overbeliefs at the end of \textit{Varieties}, the metaphysical and/or psychological \textit{roots} of conversions are not nearly as important as the practical \textit{fruits}, and we must decide the significance and value of religious experience upon “empirical grounds exclusively” (193). Non-religious persons may turn out to be less ethical, as ethical, or more ethical than religious persons. There is no indubitable mark by which we may distinguish goodness caused by supernatural sources from goodness caused by natural sources. We may, however, safely claim that where the behavior does not meet our natural or empirical ethical criteria, it is not worth venerating \textit{even if it is supernatural}, in which case it would be

\textsuperscript{95} With respect to the irreducibility of both elements (willfulness and self-surrender), James writes: “Describing the whole phenomenon as a change of equilibrium, we might say that the movement of new psychic energies towards the personal centre and the recession of old ones towards the margin (or the rising of some objects above, and the sinking of others below the conscious threshold) were only two ways of describing an indivisible event. Doubtless this is often absolutely true, and Starbuck is right when he says that ‘self-surrender’ and ‘new determination,’ though seeming at first sight to be such different experiences, are ‘really the same thing. Self-surrender sees the change in terms of the old self; determination sees it in terms of the new’” (VRE, 199 n.20).

\textsuperscript{96} Within the realm of pure psychology, James offers this hypothesis: “[W]hat makes the difference between a sudden and a gradual convert is not necessarily the presence of divine miracle in the care of one and of something less divine in that of the other, but rather a simple psychological peculiarity, the fact, namely, that in the recipient of the more instantaneous grace we have one of those Subjects who are in possession of a large region in which mental work can go on subliminally, and from which invasive experiences, abruptly upsetting the equilibrium of the primary consciousness, may come” (VRE, 193).
better called *diabolical*. 97 James’ overall point is thus very clear: the metaphysical *why* of religious conversion and the psychological process or *how* of religious conversion are both subordinate to the practical *what* when it comes to ethically judging the effects of conversion according to empirical criteria. 98

**Ethical Saints and the Best Fruits Religion has to Show**

The central question of James’ inquiry is: *What is achieved through religious experience?*, and the basic answer is that “what is attained is often an altogether new level of spiritual vitality, a relatively heroic level, in which impossible things have become possible, and new energies and endurances are shown” (196). This is why no student of moral psychology or philosophy can afford to ignore religion: it is tremendously *powerful*. And while religious conversion usually both stems from and gives birth to theology and dogma (and occasionally mystical experience), these are not as significant as the change in the individual’s way of life:

> What may the practical fruits for life have been, of such movingly happy conversions as those we heard of? *With this question the really important part of our task opens*, for you remember that we began all this empirical inquiry not merely to open a curious chapter in the natural history of human consciousness, but rather to attain a spiritual judgment as to the total value and positive meaning of all the religious trouble and happiness which we have seen (239; italics added).

> Given that the description of the fruits of the religious life and the subsequent judgment of these fruits is “the really important part” of James’ task, it is unfortunate that the secondary philosophical literature has been so myopically devoted to James’ chapter on mysticism and the
question of what knowledge of God it might bring. To my mind, nothing could be clearer than the fact that James thought his chapters on saintliness far more important, for it is in the public life of the saint rather than in the private consciousness of the mystic that the true value of religion lies. To reiterate, James’ empirical task is to describe the fruits of the religious life, and his philosophical task is to judge their value. James concludes that “the best fruits of religious experience are the best things that history has to show,” although I would also add that the worst fruits of religious experience are among the worst things that history has to show. In any case, religion’s staggering capacity to undergird both everyday ethical life and ethical heroism does indeed appear miraculous “even from the purely human point of view.” Or, to point the point negatively: “These devotees have often laid their course so differently from other men that, judging them by worldly law, we might be tempted to call them monstrous aberrations from the path of nature” (211). The heights of religious devotion seem to yield both ethical heroes and diabolical monsters. James is therefore careful to note that there is occasionally something genuinely, morally sick in certain sick-souled individuals, just as there is something morally beautiful in the lives of other sick-souled saints.

To explain this divergence, I have likened religion to a tremendous “power source,” but James, coming historically upon the heels of Darwin, generally prefers evolutionary metaphors. Of course, James was neither a Spencerian optimist believing in the inevitability of humanity’s

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99 James spends five full lectures (one-fourth of the entire book) on saintliness and only two lectures on mysticism. Moreover, James’ impetus for taking up the question of mysticism seems to be his desire to see whether or not it can vouch for the metaphysical claims underlying the lives of saints. In fact, if we count the reality of the unseen as underpinning saintliness, the distinction between the once- and twice-born as setting up the discussion of conversion, and the process of conversion itself as part and parcel of the saintly life, we end up with well over three-fourths of the book devoted directly or indirectly to saintliness! In the final section below, I also argue that James’ political interests at the time of Varieties support saintliness as an interpretive center.

100 James quotes Sainte Beuve as follows: “Even from the purely human point of view, the phenomenon of grace must still appear sufficiently extraordinary, eminent, and rare, both in its nature and in its effects, to deserve a closer study. For the soul arrives thereby at a certain fixed and invincible state, a state which is genuinely heroic, and from out of which the greatest deeds which it ever performs are executed” (VRE, qtd. on 211; italics added).
spiritual evolution nor a social Darwinist believing that the complexities of change in human society could be viewed quite simply as a survival of the fittest in a way that borders on might makes right. Instead, James follows Darwin’s theory carefully while extending its scope to make hypotheses about religious phenomenon, classifying religious saints as aberrations (“judging them by [present] worldly law”) that may be likened to the “spontaneous variations” of evolutionary theory (211). These variations that cut against the grain of socially acceptable morality may turn out to be either monstrous or saintly. What James argues is not that all religion moves us towards social utopia, but rather that religion has a tremendous capacity to change the lives of its most ardent believers in a way that generally changes society.

If, as James famously said, “habit is the enormous fly-wheel of society,” then we might say that the religious saint is one of the factors that may introduce a wobble into the flywheel and change society’s course. Admittedly, the religious life is also a life of habit, but it is often an “otherworldly” life in the sense of cutting against the social norms of the world (though it may also be “otherworldly” in the more straightforward sense of being disconnected from the world in favor of the heavenly beyond). James paints each individual as a mixture of impulses and inhibitions, and he notes that in most of us, there are powerful inhibitions that prevent us from realizing our ideals. And even though the distance between our actual lives and our ideal lives exists by definition, this distance is dramatically shorter in heroic types:

To a Fox, a Garibaldi, a General Booth, a John Brown, a Louise Michel, a Bradlaugh, the obstacles omnipotent over those around them are as if non-existent. Could the rest of us so disregard them, there might be many such heroes, for many have the wish to live for similar ideals, and only the adequate degree of inhibition-quenching fury is lacking. […] Given a certain amount of love, indignation, generosity, magnanimity, admiration, loyalty, or enthusiasm of self-surrender, the result is always the same. That whole raft of cowardly obstructions, which in tame persons and dull moods are sovereign impediments to action, sinks away at once. Our conventionality, our shyness, laziness, and stinginess, our demands for precedent and permission, for guarantee and surety, our small suspicions, timidities, despairs, where are

101 I say “one of the factors” because James clearly believes that there are other great individuals who are, for instance, primarily artistic or political that may also radically change society’s course. James explores these themes in “Great Men and Their Environment” (WB, 163-189) and “The Importance of Individuals” (WB, 190-195).
Traditionally, the moral hero is a great warrior, who violently inflicts his ideals upon his age.\textsuperscript{102}

In contrast, the picture James paints of “universal saintliness” offers an equally powerful but less violent alternative for dramatically changing society and even the world.\textsuperscript{103}

According to James, universal saintliness—universal because it is \textit{practically} “the same in all religions” \textsuperscript{104}—has the following psychological traits:

1. A feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world’s selfish little interests; and a conviction, not merely intellectual, but as it were sensible, of the existence of an Ideal Power.
2. A sense of the friendly continuity of the ideal power with our own life, and a willing self-surrender to its control.
3. An immense elation and freedom, as the outlines of the confining selfhood melt down.
4. A shifting of the emotional centre towards loving and harmonious affections, towards ‘yes, yes,’ and away from ‘no,’ where the claims of the non-ego are concerned (219-220).

In sum, the saint has a tremendous sense of the “reality of the unseen” that infuses her life with power, giving her a sense of freedom as her “confining selfhood” melts down and gives way to wider claims beyond the narrow ego. But more important for James are the fruits of these four psychological traits:

\textsuperscript{102} In the final section below we will see how President Roosevelt had given new life to this ideal in James’ own time in order to fuel a new era of U.S. imperialism.

\textsuperscript{103} James eventually packaged “universal saintliness” in secular terms at the end of his career in his famous 1910 essay “The Moral Equivalent of War” (ERM, 162-174). Generally speaking, secondary literature that analyzes or employs this essay fails to note that James’ original inspiration for the idea was clearly religious, since he first uses the phrase when describing the religious saint in \textit{Varieties}.

\textsuperscript{104} It is interesting to note that for James, in a certain abstract sense, the nature of the religious object or ideal does not seem to matter, as long as its emotional effects and spiritual fruits are the same. Whether Stoicism, Christianity, or the “enthusiasm of humanity,” the same spiritual fruits of universal saintliness supposedly obtain. However, it seems to me that unless we supply a hidden premise, James’ claim that saintliness is universal will not hold water. If all it takes is religious devotion to an ideal, someone like David Koresh (the cult leader of the Branch Davidians whose actions led to the “Waco Seige” or “Waco Massacre” in 1993), would qualify as a saint. James seems to take for granted that \textit{eventually}, society will recognize the moral goodness of the religious saint, even though \textit{initially} the religious saint may appear as a moral aberration. An obvious example of this would be the striking difference between the way in which Martin Luther King Jr. was largely denounced and hated in his own time but has since come to be almost universally revered, such that attending a church service in King’s church has practically become a political necessity for anyone running for president in the U.S. In sum, James seems to depend upon a largely unstated theory of social evolution that holds that once a religion achieves global status and respect, we can safely assume that some of its ideals are morally noble.
a. *Asceticism.*—The self-surrender may become so passionate as to turn into self-immolation. It may then overrule the ordinary inhibitions of the flesh that the saint finds positive pleasure in sacrifice and asceticism, measuring and expressing as they do the degree of his loyalty to the higher power.
b. *Strength of Soul.*—The sense of enlargement of life may be so uplifting that personal motives and inhibitions, commonly omnipotent, become too insignificant for notice, and new reaches of patience and fortitude open out. Fears and anxieties go, and blissful equanimity takes their place.
c. *Purity.*—The shifting of the emotional centre brings with it, first, increase of purity. The sensitiveness to spiritual discords is enhanced, and the cleansing of existence from brutal and sensual elements becomes imperative. Occasions of contact with such elements are avoided: the saintly life must deepen its spiritual consistency and keep unspotted from the world.
d. *Charity.*—The shifting of the emotional centre brings, secondly, increase of charity, tenderness for fellow-creatures. The ordinary motives to antipathy, which usually set such close bounds to tenderness among human beings, are inhibited. The saint loves his enemies, and treats loathsome beggars as his brothers.

From these two lists, we can construct a dramatic sketch of saintliness, charting the *contraction* and *expansion* of the Self. When the Self feels itself to be part of a far wider, ideal life that makes its own narrow egoistic interests pale in comparison, there a is feeling of self-*contraction.* When this attitude is deliberately cultivated through various ego-denying behaviors, *asceticism* results. James believes that there is value in this ascetic contraction of Self, but only insofar as it naturally leads the Self to *expand* once again as it surrenders control in order to participate more fully in the broader, ideal life of the divine. This is the second element of James’ description of universal saintliness, the feeling of self-*expansion* in keeping with the universe’s wider life. Such a feeling leads to *strength of soul* insofar as the previous egoistic impulses and inhibitions fade away as the Self expands to serve the wider, ideal life to which it was previously opposed or blind. This, in turn, requires another form of *contraction* that James calls *purity of life,* or the desire to root out contradictions or inconsistencies that may still remain between the old narrow ego and the wider spiritual self, especially gaps between one’s verbal professions and one’s practices.¹⁰⁵ However, “When the craving for moral consistency and purity is developed to this degree, the subject may well find the outer world too full of shocks to dwell in, and can unify his

¹⁰⁵ James acknowledges that this is at the heart of Puritanism in all its forms. For a thoughtful study discussing the effects of “the Puritan imaginary” on James’ pragmatism, see M. Gail Hamner, *American Pragmatism: A Religious Genealogy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
life and keep his soul unspotted only by withdrawing from it” (238). Just as in the case of the contraction of Self that leads to asceticism, James seems to think that purity of life is beneficial and may be judged to have a positive practical significance provided that it serves to spur on a expansion of the Self’s emotional center. James consistently claims that the “no, no” or contraction of the actual Self ought to be a means to the end of being able to better say and do “yes, yes” as the Self widens to incorporate the needs of the broader community of life into its own life through acts of charity.106

Essentially, James treats charity as the final practical end of universal saintliness. His comments are especially fascinating given the way in which he employs a social evolution metaphor to demarcate the saint as an almost superhuman being. In what reads like an inversion of Nietzsche’s übermensch, James writes:

‘Love your enemies!’ [...] Can there in general be a level of emotion so unifying, so obliterative of differences between man and man, that even enmity may come to be an irrelevant circumstance and fail to inhibit the friendlier interests aroused? If positive well-wishing could attain so supreme a degree of excitement, those who were swayed by it might well seem superhuman beings (228; italics added).

According to James there is nothing contradictory in principle about loving others (even one’s enemies) as oneself, and although history provides few non-apocryphal examples of such degrees of saintly charity, it does seem that the appearance of such saintly types “might conceivably transform the world” (229). Were we to follow the example of the saints,

it would involve such a breach with our instinctive springs of action as a whole, and with the present world's arrangements, that a critical point would practically be passed, and we should be born into another kingdom of being. Religious emotion makes us feel that other kingdom to be close at hand, within our reach (229).

Here, we have James’ psychological and philosophical interpretation of the New Testament claim that the kingdom of God is at hand. James argues that religion is critically instrumental for

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106 James’ does not use the phrase “community of life,” which (as discussed in the chapters that follow) is a gloss on Royce provided by Dewey. Nonetheless, James certainly becomes fascinated late in his career by the vitalism of Fechner. At the time of Varieties, the clearest hint of viewing all living things as having something in common comes in his discussion of charity, which “may efface all human barriers” (VRE, 226). In a footnote, James even goes on to say that charity often effaces “the barrier between men and animals also” (226 n.24).
dramatic social change insofar as it makes certain social relations that now seem impossible feel as though they were possible.

Given both religion’s unmatched power to create this feeling and the necessity of this feeling as a precursor to creating the reality, we can see why James believes religion is such a valuable possession of humankind, not just for personal psychological reasons but for social and political reasons as well. Nonetheless, James’ focus remains on individual believers, and he even ascribes most of religion’s negative aspects to “the spirit of corporate dominion” and “the spirit of dogmatic dominion,” which combine to form “the ecclesiastical spirit”:

I beseech you never to confound the phenomena of mere tribal or corporate psychology which it presents with those manifestations of the purely interior life which are the exclusive object of our study. The baiting of Jews, the hunting of Albigenses and Waldenses, the stoning of Quakers and ducking of Methodists, the murdering of Mormons and the massacring of Armenians, express much rather that aboriginal human neophobia, that pugnacity of which we all share the vestiges, and that unborn hatred of the alien and of eccentric and non-conforming men as aliens, than they express the positive piety of the various perpetrators. Piety is the mask, the inner force is tribal instinct (271).

With this distinction, James believes that he is able to largely acquit religion from most of the negative charges against it, since he has already made “personal religion” stand in for “religion” in his lectures. Of course, this will not work once we begin to fix James’ mistake of severing personal religion from institutional religion.\(^{107}\) While James does admit that even personal religion is liable to “over-zealousness or fanaticism,” he believes that this can be kept in check if we use our common sense:

Is it necessary, some of you have asked, as one example after another came before us, to be quite so fantastically good as that? We who have no vocation for the extremer ranges of sanctity will surely be let off at the last day if our humility, asceticism, and devoutness prove of a less convulsive sort. This practically amounts to saying that much that it is legitimate to admire in this field need nevertheless not be imitated, and that religious phenomena, like all other human phenomena, are subject to the law of the golden mean. […] The conduct we blame ourselves for not following lies nearer to the middle line of human effort (272).

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\(^{107}\) The rather strict dichotomy James sets up between personal and institutional religion is bizarre in light of James’ general opposition to all forms of strict division or dualism between neighboring phenomena, but it does make sense in light of his Emersonian roots. For a fine exposition and comparison of Emerson’s and James’ religious individualisms, see Ramón del Castillo, "The Glass Prison: Emerson, James, and the Religion of the Individual," in Fringes of Religious Experience: Cross-Perspectives on William James's The Varieties of Religious Experience, ed. Sergio Franzese and Felicitas Kraemer (Frankfurt: Ontos, 2007).
James has come upon what is known in contemporary ethics as the problem of the moral saint. In her famous article on the subject, Susan Wolf argues that the character that of a moral saint, i.e., a person single-mindedly focused on “improving the welfare of others or of society as a whole,” is not one that seems particularly attractive as a personal ideal. Without any merely self-regarding behaviors (e.g., no reading novels or collecting stamps) the moral saint would supposedly have little to no personal character and would thus not even be admirable as a person. In James’ words, “Spiritual excitement takes pathological forms whenever other interests are too few and the intellect too narrow” (273). For James, the problem is not that such an individual is too devoted to God, but rather that such a God is not worthy of devotion.

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. Smitten as we are with the vision of social righteousness, a God indifferent to everything but adulation, and full of partiality for his individual favorites, lacks an essential element of largeness; and even the best professional sainthood of former centuries, pent in as it is to such a conception, seems to us curiously shallow and unedifying (277).

In short, James argues that the saint worthy of the name in our age must have a broader notion of God that includes social righteousness, such that the religious life of the saint worth imitating does not consist of “an endless amatory flirtation […] between the devotee and the deity” but instead a life of service to society (278), or what nowadays is generally called a commitment to “social justice.”

James judges the virtue of purity in a similar manner, distinguishing between two fundamentally different methods of achieving purity: “But whereas your aggressive pietist reaches his unity objectively, by forcibly stamping disorder and divergence out, your retiring

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109 James himself coins a term for a mind too narrowly interested in a conception of God that is itself too narrow: “When the love of God takes possession of such a mind, it expels all human loves and human uses. There is no English name for such a sweet excess of devotion, so I will refer to it as a theopathic condition” (VRE, 275).
110 Likewise, we could alter Wolf’s position a bit and say that the problem is not excessive saintly devotion to morality, but rather an unduly anemic and narrow notion of morality to begin with.
pietist reaches his subjectively, leaving disorder in the world at large, but making a smaller world in which he dwells himself and from which he eliminates it altogether” (279). James applauds the former but is deeply suspicious of the latter, since the former provides a service to society at large while the latter maintains purity only be withdrawing from society at large. James’ bottom line is that in “our age of democracy,” a religion that does not require service beyond direct service to the deity is not worth our time or energy (283).

With so much emphasis upon social justice and charity, James brings in Nietzsche to launch the charge of “preserving the unfit, and breeding parasites and beggars” (283). James is exceptionally honest when, rather than pronouncing a clear judgment from the mouth of common sense, he chooses to write: “No simple answer is possible. Here, if anywhere, one feels the complexity of the moral life, and the mysteriousness of the way in which facts and ideals are interwoven” (283). The whole problem of the religious saint boils down to the fact that the saint conducts herself as though the kingdom of God were already at hand. That is, the saint acts as if an ideal society were already real. But this may have two drastically different effects: 1) such conduct may actually allow the non-ideal aspects of the world to triumph or 2) such conduct may help realize or actualize the ideal. James puts the first possibility as follows: “[I]n the world that actually is, the virtues of sympathy, charity, and non-resistance may be, and often have been, manifested in excess. The powers of darkness have systematically taken advantage of them” (284). On the other hand, James also notes that without the saint’s willingness to help first and ask questions later, to be continuously duped rather than be permanently suspicious, and to treat others graciously without consulting the rules of prudence, “the world would be an infinitely worse place than it is now to live in” (284).
This is James’ *Will to Believe* in social action, and James is undoubtedly right to point out that the behavior of saints is at least sometimes prophetic, helping to realize what previously existed only as an ideal: “Even when on the whole we have to confess [the saint] ill adapted, he makes some converts, and the environment gets better for his ministry. He is an effective ferment of goodness, a slow transmuter of the earthly into a more heavenly order” (287). James also offers a more “worldly” analogy, noting that the socialist and anarchist dreams of utopian schemes of social justice are “in spite of their impracticability and non-adaptation to present environmental conditions, analogous to the saint’s belief in an existent kingdom of heaven. They help to break the edge of the general reign of hardness, and are slow leavens of a better order” (287). In sum, there is no escaping the attitude of faith if the world is to be improved. James’ interpretation of moral saints is fascinating insofar as they are understood to be using a kind of pragmatic, experimental method by trying radically charitable social behavior that others will not dare. Simply put, in order for the social order to be improved, there must be at least some people willing to believe in the reality of the unseen, or at least some people who have enough faith to act as if the ideal were concretely possible enough to be realized, all without having any guarantee of success.

Once James has gotten into the thick of his account of saintliness, his reasons for ascribing greater insight to the twice-born become increasingly clear:

*For in its spiritual meaning asceticism stands for nothing less than for the essence of the twice-born philosophy. It symbolizes, lamely enough no doubt, but sincerely, the belief that there is an element of real wrongness in this world, which is neither to be ignored nor evaded, but which must be squarely met and overcome by an appeal to the soul’s heroic resources, and neutralized and cleansed away by suffering* (289).
In its ideal form asceticism (or the willful contraction of the Self) enables the Self to more fully acknowledge the real wrongness in the world in order to battle it under the influence of ideal forces.\(^{111}\) In contrast, the ultra-optimistic form of the once-born philosophy thinks we may treat evil by the method of ignoring. […] It accepts, in lieu of a real deliverance, what is a lucky personal accident merely, a cranny to escape by. It leaves the general world unhelped and still in the clutch of Satan. The real deliverance, the twice-born folk insist, must be of universal application (289).

In other words, the once-born are able to maintain their religious stance only by choosing to ignore the real suffering that goes on in the life of the broader world.

So rather than decry the ascetic impulse or ignore it like most of his contemporaries, James insists that it must be channeled in some “objectively useful” way (290). Whereas the older monastic asceticism “terminated in the mere egotism of the individual, increasing his own perfection,”\(^{112}\) James envisions the new moral saint and his re-channeled ascetics as a hopeful replacement for the most ancient and venerable type of hero, the war hero:

What we now need to discover in the social realm is the moral equivalent of war: something heroic that will speak to men as universally as war does, and yet will be as compatible with their spiritual selves as war has proved itself to be incompatible. I have often thought that in the old monkish poverty-worship, in spite of the pedantry which infested it, there might be something like that moral equivalent of war which we are seeking. May not voluntarily accepted poverty be “the strenuous life,” without the need of crushing weaker peoples? (292).

James notes that most contemporary people in “the English-speaking world” are terrified of poverty. They are so terrified that the desire to gain wealth and the fear of losing it are more powerful than, for instance, the desire to build a just society or the fear of selling out. James suggests that personal indifference to poverty would allow us to better struggle for unpopular, reformatory, or revolutionary causes: “We need no longer hold our tongues or fear to vote the

\(^{111}\) Of course, James admits that the “unenlightened intellect of former times” often led asceticism into expressions that were anything but helpful to the broader social world (VRE, 290). Nevertheless some form of asceticism is a pre-requisite of twice-born religion, which requires the death of the old narrow ego in order for the wider spiritual self to be born.

\(^{112}\) Again, we see here James’ insistence that in order to be moral according to current empirical standards, self-contraction must ultimately serve the end of incorporating wider social relations into the life of the Self. For James, the old, actual egoistic self contracts in order to better realize the new, ideal social self.
revolutionary or reformatory ticket. Our stocks might fall, our hopes of promotion vanish, our salaries stop, our club doors close in our faces; yet, while we lived, we would imperturbably bear witness to the spirit, and our example would help to set free our generation” (293). Of course, James is careful to contextualize his idealization of poverty. For the poor, “wealth gives time for ideal ends and exercise to ideal energies,” but more often not, the wealth of the rich breeds cowardice and propagates corruption (293). James only claims that poverty can be a powerful means to certain ideal ends, especially for the “educated class,” which generally has either an irrational fear of poverty or an unthinking, compulsive desire to earn and spend money in ways that do not serve ideal ends and energies.

To sum up, James believes that the saintly life is capable of delivering many people from their unthinking acceptance of the status quo, which involves the sheer egoism of looking out for number one at worst and the tribal egotism of looking out for me and mine at best. In contrast, the saint devotes herself to constructing wider, healthier, flourishing human communities as part of constructing a wider, healthier, flourishing Self. In the life of the saint, self-help joins help of others under the sway of help from the power of the divine. Undoubtedly, exemplary moral lives often achieve similar fruits, but James believes that exemplary religious lives are able to reach higher, superhuman heights given that their actions seem to flow not just from their commitment to others, but also from their belief in the reality and personality of the divine:

Whoever possesses strongly this sense [of the divine] comes naturally to think that the smallest details of this world derive infinite significance from their relation to an unseen divine order. The thought of this order yields him a superior denomination of happiness, and a steadfastness of soul with which no other can compare. In social relations his serviceability is exemplary; he abounds in impulses to help. His help is inward as well as outward, for his sympathy reaches souls as well as bodies, and kindles unsuspected faculties therein. Instead of placing happiness where common men place it, in comfort, he places it in a higher kind of inner excitement, which converts discomforts into sources of cheer and annuls unhappiness. So he turns his back upon no duty, however thankless; and when we are in need of assistance, we can count upon the saint lending his hand with more certainty than we can count upon any other person. Finally, his humble-mindedness and his ascetic tendencies save him from the petty personal pretensions which so obstruct our ordinary social intercourse, and his purity gives us in him a clean man for a companion (294).
Having outlined these fruits of universal saintliness as exemplary of religion, James’ question of whether religion on the whole stands justified answers itself. But this is not to say that religion, or its exemplar the saint, cannot still be terribly dangerous. Since the office of religion is to inspire unyielding, personal fidelity to the unseen world of ideals, and the saint is the character that carries out the practical tasks of this fidelity come what may, everything hinges upon the ethical quality of the ideal. If the ideals of the saint are narrow and the unseen world believed in unworthy, “a saint can be even more objectionable and damnable than a superficial carnal man would be in the same situation” (294-95). In short, the bare fact that an attitude is religious does not necessarily make the attitude good, though it does make the attitude powerful. Given this fact, we are thrown back upon the spiritual judgment that forms the center of James inquiry: is religion (ethically) justified on the whole?

To prepare his final answer, James once again turns to Nietzsche as religion’s articulate antagonist, championing the ancient, heroic virtues of the strong warrior whom we admire for his inner strength and outward power. In turn, James champions the comparatively new, heroic virtues of the charitable saint who charms us with the beauty of his gentleness. James openly admits that both ideals are attractive, but he masterfully distills the issue down to these two questions: “Shall the seen world or the unseen world be our chief sphere of adaptation? and must our means of adaptation in this seen world be aggressiveness or non-resistance?” (297). According to James there is no simple answer insofar as we must take both worlds into account (since both are genuine influences on human life) and insofar as the seen world clearly requires both aggressiveness and non-resistance (depending on the context). Thus, the debate between religion’s apologists and its despisers boils down to “a question of emphasis, of more or less. Is
the saint’s type or the strong-man’s type the more ideal?” (297). James continues to refuse to choose one ideal human type over another given the complexities of the actual environment:

It is supposed by most persons, that there can be one intrinsically ideal type of human character. A certain kind of man, it is imagined, must be the best man absolutely and apart from the utility of his function, apart from economical considerations. […] According to the empirical philosophy, however, all ideals are matters of relation. It would be absurd, for example, to ask for a definition of “the ideal horse,” so long as dragging drays and running races, bearing children, and jogging about with tradesmen's packages all remain as indispensable differentiations of equine function. […] We must not forget this now when, in discussing saintliness, we ask if it be an ideal type of manhood. We must test it by its economical relations (297-98).

James consistently returns to his radically empiricist criteria, refusing to judge the value of saintliness in a philosophical manner that is able to pronounce judgment without inquiring into the concrete context. We cannot speak of “ideal behavior” without specifying a context in which the behavior appears as ideal. Of course, we can abstractly speak of “ideal behavior” in the “ideal society,” in which case, the saint emerges as the highest ideal. A society composed exclusively by aggressive members would destroy itself by inner friction, whereas a society composed exclusively by sympathetic, fair, and non-resistant members “would be the millennium, for every good thing might be realized there with no expense of friction” (298). In other words, abstractly considered, the saint is a higher type than Nietzsche’s übermensch “because [the saint] is adapted to the highest society conceivable, whether that society ever be concretely possible or not” (298). What is so strange about the saint is that she places her faith in the reality of the unseen or ideal society and is willing to stake her life upon the chance that it will come to pass with her help, even if this makes her ill-adapted in specifiable ways to the present society.113

James thus avoids falling prey to a mistake made by most thinkers who apply evolutionary theory to contexts beyond biology. While it is easy to say the words “survival of the

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113 James summarizes his contextualism as follows: “[Success] cannot be measured absolutely; the verdict will vary according to the point of view adopted. From the biological point of view Saint Paul was a failure, because he was beheaded. Yet he was magnificently adapted to the larger environment of history; and so far as any saint’s example is a leaven of righteousness in the world, and draws it in the direction of more prevalent habits of saintliness, he is a success, no matter what his immediate bad fortune may be” (VRE, 299).
fittest,” it is exceedingly difficult to lay out the criterion by which we ought to judge the fittest in the case of human beings, since they inhabit different and even opposed spheres of being (biological, cultural, political, religious, etc.). Human beings are undoubtedly biological beings, but they are also historical and social beings. James thus insists that “our testing of religion by practical common sense and the empirical method, leave it in possession of its towering place in history. Economically, the saintly group of qualities is indispensable to the world’s welfare” (299). Many of the greatest saints even manage to change their environments quickly and are thus worldly successes, having played a critical role in actualizing the ideals in which they believe. The less immediately successful saints are admittedly more tragic, but they at least succeed in being “heralds and harbingers” of a better worldly order, and thus contribute to social evolution. James therefore implores his audience:

Let us be saints, then, if we can, whether or not we succeed visibly and temporally. But […] each of us must discover for himself the kind of religion and the amount of saintship which best comports with what he believes to be his powers and feels to be his truest mission and vocation. There are no successes to be guaranteed and no set orders to be given to individuals, so long as we follow the methods of empirical philosophy (299).

With this audience-wide prescription, James lays bare his own faith in the relevance of saintliness to life, especially when we interpret his prescription in its historical context as an alternative to an ethics of domination and imperialism that was gaining (and has continued to gain) popular support. Providing such an interpretation is the task of my final section. In spite of the fact that James’ language of saintliness may be rather off-putting for contemporary readers, his exploration of sanctification remains invaluable. For he is describing the process by which a person becomes ready and able to respond to the demands of the “wider self,” whose full context is no less than the world at large or even the universe itself.
Linking James’ Religious Psychology to his Pluralistic Ethical and Political Universe

While this “wider self” may sound too abstract to be saving, James developed it to meet a pressing need felt by both himself and many of the people around him. As George Cotkin has pointed out in an excellent contextualist reading of James’ life and work, many people after the U.S. Civil War were plagued by feelings of (in the words of the time) “moral sea-sickness” and “religious weightlessness.” James wrote his groundbreaking *Principles* in a late nineteenth century context when freedom of the will, individual possibility, and autonomy were all being called into question by the rise of scientism in an increasingly corporate, technocratic, and bureaucratic social order. Cotkin claims that people from James’ social class in particular felt “hemmed into a world of increasing bureaucracy and ease; they confronted what James would designate as the *tedium vitae* [weariness of life].” *Principles* met this context squarely by insisting that we could continue to speak of human agency even in an increasingly industrial environment. Reductionistic, mechanical explanation only *almost* worked to explain human beings. It did not explain the way in which the stream of consciousness was owned and interested, selecting some things from the environment and ignoring others in order to create personal identity and sustain personal projects. No matter how muddled, the self was a felt center of interests, and contingent as the self might be, it felt its own power in shaping the reality it experienced. James’ individual had the power of positing an ideal organization of self and world and undertaking their realization through strenuous, heroic, and even war-like effort to escape from the *tedium vitae*.116

115 Ibid., 10.
116 As Bennett Ramsey notes, “Mental functions became ‘weapons of the mind.’ Ideas were judged for their capacity to ‘draw blood.’ Self-power became the hero’s ability to stand his ground in a world of strenuous struggle and effort.” Ramsey, *Submitting to Freedom*, 48-49.
James took this heroic self and began to give it a more explicitly religious mission in the essays that form *The Will to Believe*. *Principles* had already given those suffering from the *tedium vitae* the chance to be heroes again, but *The Will to Believe* endowed this task with a clear religious significance: the heroic self had to willfully bind itself to its ideal self and its ideal world in order to realize them.\(^{117}\) So not only did James restore the possibility for individual and social change, he placed them under the sign of God by arguing that there were good reasons for believing in the *possibility* that God needed our help, our “idealities and faithfulnesses,” in order to accomplish His own tasks and redeem the world (WB, 55). In fact, James even went on to speculate that God might “draw vital strength and increase of very being from our fidelity” (WB, 55). Essentially, the heroic religious task that James offered to his academic audience in *The Will to Believe* was to join God in saving oneself and the world at the same time through strenuous effort, thereby showing religious belief to be justified insofar as it proved uniquely capable of unleashing this effort and instilling life with meaning. While God’s existence was only a possibility and God’s metaphysical nature ultimately remained a mystery, the important thing was that religion or the will to believe set free “every sort of energy and endurance, of courage and capacity” (WB, 161). James even went so far as to say that if there were no traditional or logical grounds for believing in God, “men would postulate one simply as *a pretext for living hard*, and getting out of the game of existence its keenest possibilities of zest” (WB, 161; italics added).

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\(^{117}\) It is the emphasis upon *binding* that leads me to follow Bennett Ramsey in designating this activity as *religious* in the etymological sense of “to bind together.” In Cotkin’s words, *The Will to Believe* attempted to “expose the pretense of science, celebrate the ennobling powers of religious and moral belief, and combat both determinism and moral sea-sickness through an emphasis on voluntarism and heroic individualism as parts of historical and moral change.” Cotkin, *William James*, 79.
Whether it had much to do with James or not, near the turn of the century the United States adopted God as just such a “pretext for living hard.” Shortly after the publication of The Will to Believe, the aggressive imperial self stood wholly resurrected in the United States under the leadership of Theodore Roosevelt, who became governor of New York, then vice-president, and finally president of the U.S. after establishing himself as a war-hero in the Spanish-American War of 1898. The line had blurred between imperialist logic claiming the superiority of Anglo-Saxondom and religious logic claiming the superiority of Christianity, and the United States began to confuse its ways with God’s ways as missionaries readied themselves to Christianize the globe in conjunction with its Americanization. Given that James’ psychological diagnosis of his (academic) culture had rested, above all, on a perceived lack of passion, he was initially hesitant to unequivocally denounce the way in which such expansion aroused the zeal of U.S. crowds. While he did make a clear stand against “war fever” and jingoism as early as the Venezuela Boundary Dispute of 1895-96, he initially saw the war to come against the Spanish in Cuba as something that would initiate the U.S. into the brotherhood of truly powerful and important nations while giving the U.S. a chance to show the world its goodness. While James would eventually become famous for his anti-imperialism through his opposition to the U.S. government’s policies during and after the Spanish-American War, he initially chose to see only honorable intentions in the U.S. military crusade against the Spanish in Cuba, writing his

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118 To be fair to James, The Will to Believe was written for academic audiences plagued by “[t]oo much questioning and too little active responsibility” (WB, 39). James admitted that if he “were addressing the Salvation Army or miscellaneous popular crowd it would be a misuse of opportunity to preach the liberty of believing as I have in these pages preached” because “what mankind at large most lacks is criticism and caution, not faith” (7).

119 For more on James’ biography as it relates to the formation of his anti-imperialist stance, see the chapter entitled “The Imperial Imperative” in Cotkin, William James.

120 For more on James’ anti-imperialism—the political issue on which James spent the most time, thought, and practical effort—see the section “James as Reformer” in Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James: As Revealed in Unpublished Correspondence and Notes, Together with His Published Writings, 2 vols. (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1935).
brother Henry, “Not a soul thinks of conquest or wishes it.”\textsuperscript{121} Although James was hard on “yellow journalism” from the beginning and consistently wary of the crowd and its mob mentality, he had a soft spot for the way in which individuals were effectively escaping the \textit{tedium vitae} through an active devotion to \textit{some} cause.\textsuperscript{122}

The task for James thus became to figure out how all of this passionate energy could be turned towards \textit{good, peaceful} causes rather than \textit{destructive, belligerent} ones. Indeed, this eventually became the subject of his famous 1910 essay entitled “The Moral Equivalent of War,” but as we have seen above, the original idea appears eight years earlier in the \textit{Varieties of Religious Experience} during James’ discussion of the religious saint.\textsuperscript{123} James’ discourse on saintliness, the climax of \textit{Varieties}, was a direct attempt to maintain his own discourse of heroism and the importance of the individual, while precluding its imperial appropriation by religiously binding the self to the wider community of life to which we are generally blind.\textsuperscript{124}

In effect, James reworked his psychological portrait of the self in the \textit{Principles} by binding this self to “a wider self from which saving experiences come” (VRE, 405), thereby religiously endowing the new self with bonds of sympathy and responsibility that the old self lacked. When historically contextualized, his portrait of saintliness can be read as an attempt to

\textsuperscript{121} Cotkin, \textit{William James}, qtd. on 133.
\textsuperscript{122} James worried more explicitly about the vagueness of causes a few years later in \textit{A Pluralistic Universe}. Specifically, James found Royce’s suggested principle of “loyalty to loyalty” inadequate to the task of providing a basis for ethical judgment: “Abstractness \textit{per se} seems to have a touch of ideality. Royce’s ‘loyalty to loyalty’ is an excellent example. ‘Causes,’ as anti-slavery, democracy, liberty, etc., dwindle when raised in their sordid particular” (PU, 123 n. 1).
\textsuperscript{123} Exceedingly little secondary literature on \textit{Varieties} considers the fact that James composed it while firing off regular rejoinders to Roosevelt’s successful imperialistic appropriation of the discourse of heroism. James was particularly infuriated by the way in which Roosevelt’s 1899 speech entitled “The Strenuous Life” appropriated James’ discourse while dramatically changing the ends to which strenuousness should be directed.
\textsuperscript{124} This blindness is, of course, the subject of James’ “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings” (WB, 132-149), published in 1899 shortly after he became a full-blooded anti-imperialist. We should also recall that the famous 1898 lecture that launched pragmatism, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results” (P, 257-270), was delivered at Berkeley only a month after the ceasing of hostilities in the Spanish-American war. All of which is to say that James’ pragmatism is bound up with his anti-imperialism, which in turn informs his philosophy of religion and pluralistic metaphysics.
replace Roosevelt’s belligerently nationalistic vision of the war-hero with the radically charitable vision of the saint, who provides a powerful yet peaceful method of heroically ameliorating self and society. While James had considered faith almost exclusively as an expansive mood in the *Principles* and *The Will to Believe*, subsequent events revealed the need to pay considerably more attention to the ways in which faith involves a mood of contraction, and twice-born religion is the category that results. Rather than overlooking, downplaying, or simply denying the reality of evil in both the self and the world (as once-born religions do), twice-born religions promise deliverance from evil. But this deliverance in the form of re-birth or conversion first requires the recognition that things such as sorrow, pain, and death are genuine parts of reality. Nonetheless, in the saintly form of twice-born religion that most interests James, this recognition yields not complacency but rather an active struggle against sorrow, pain, and death.

Unlike the imperial self, which expands by simply attempting to control the foreign forces that would otherwise bind it, James’ revamped religious self expands by freely submitting itself to a multitude of forces beyond itself, relinquishing rather than relishing control, losing its narrow ego to gain its wider self.\(^{125}\) In fact, it seems that another reason James considers the “twice-born” religious self to be the highest type is because it has undergone a process of conversion in which it shifts from an autonomous, egoistic willfulness to a more relational and responsibly bound mode of being, allowing ideal and unseen forces outside of itself to guide its conduct. Religion thus performs a kind of miraculous practical function by bringing what would otherwise be remote intellectual ideas into the most intimate sphere of personal life as the “unseen” realm is *felt* to be a part (even the *ultimate* part) of reality. This “sentiment of reality” may in turn lead the faithful to “attain an altogether new level of spiritual vitality, *a relatively heroic level*, in which impossible things have become possible, and new energies and endurances

\(^{125}\) I am borrowing this notion of religious submission from Ramsey, *Submitting to Freedom*. 
are shown” (VRE, 196). Religious experiences, practices, and commitments can make radical social and political arrangements that would otherwise seem impossible feel as if they were possible.

James further develops this theme in *A Pluralistic Universe*, arguing that “[t]he vaster vistas which scientific evolutionism has opened, and the rising tide of social democratic ideals, have changed the type of our imagination,” leading people to believe that the divine must hold a “more organic and intimate” place in the universe (PU, 18). In the course of his discussion, James uses the word “intimacy” (or one of its derivatives) over fifty times, contrasting it with “foreignness” in his attempt to convince his audience to precursively trust rather than be wary of “the great universe whose children we are,” so that the world as a whole may slowly grow more intimate through our faith and effort (PU, 19). James thus argues for the importance of complementing our sweeping, abstract, and conceptual knowledge of the universe with a more intimate knowledge—i.e., a particular, concrete, and intuitive appreciation of its parts—in order to overcome what James had earlier referred to as “human blindness.” James writes, “The only way in which to apprehend reality’s thickness is either to experience it directly by being a part of reality one’s self, or to evoke it in imagination by sympathetically divining some one else’s inner life” (PU, 112). Carrying out this sympathetic method will help put us in touch with the “wider self from which saving experiences come” of the Varieties: “What we conceptually identify ourselves with and say we are thinking of at any time is the centre; but our full self is the whole field, with all those indefinitely radiating subconscious possibilities of increase that we can only feel without conceiving, and can hardly begin to analyze” (PU, 130). Although James does not explicitly make the connection, he seems to be grasping towards what the mystic experiences and what the saint practices: the ultimate oneness of the community of life.
But this is a very particular kind of intimate oneness: a oneness-in-manyness. James’ great hope is that his philosophy will help convince people that only with their help “does foreignness get banished from our world, and *far more so when we take the system of it pluralistically than when we take it monistically*” (PU, 143; italics added). He explains:

> Our ‘multiverse’ still makes a ‘universe’; for every part, tho it may not be in actual or immediate connexion, is nevertheless in some possible or mediated connexion, with every other part however remote, through the fact that each part hangs together with its very next neighbors in inextricable interfusion. The type of union, it is true, is different here from the monistic type of alleinheit. It is not a universal co-implication, or integration of all things *durcheinander*. It is what I call the strung-along type, the type of continuity, contiguity, or concatenation (PU, 146-47).

Basically, James is saying that intimacy requires *both* genuine unity and genuine plurality, both oneness and manyness. Or to put it another way, intimacy is a particular form of plurality. In a certain sense, James is simply stating the intellectually obvious: every single thing is *in some way* (however remote) connected to or related with every other thing. But his statement quickly turns radical the moment that we begin to attempt to *actively and sympathetically experience and practice these connections*, as is demonstrated by the lives of the most charitable saints (think of Gandhi or Mother Theresa).

Clearly, James’ viewpoint *could* underpin a radical political philosophy, but the worrisome thing is that his language may still lend itself to imperialistic appropriation. On James’ humanistic model, there is no escaping the fact that we are largely (if not solely) responsible for “banishing” foreignness from the world. Of course, any *careful* reader of James’ texts would never mistake the way in which James suggests we “banish foreignness” (through radically charitable acts that effectively open our eyes to our deep and wide relations with other forms and ways of life) from the way in which a more imperialistic discourse would suggest we “banish foreignness” (through sheer military force, assimilation, and the like). Nonetheless, there

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is no question that James’ language is easily appropriated by imperialism, since the fastest way to achieve unity (though not genuine Jamesian intimacy) is to simply destroy or assimilate plurality. James’ vision is thus as beautiful as it is dangerous, as should become apparent the moment one thinks about what has usually happened historically when a given religion has decided that foreignness is the enemy to be rooted out. For it is far easier to abolish foreignness by destroying the foreigner than it is to abolish foreignness by undertaking the difficult project of building social intimacy. The task, then, in the chapters that follow is twofold: 1) to continue developing James’ religious vision of an intimate yet pluralistic universe as it is taken up by both Royce and Dewey, and 2) to articulate the limitations and potential pitfalls of the pragmatist approach in light of Dussel.
2. The Religious Ties that Bind Us: Josiah Royce’s Philosophy of Community

The present chapter is an attempt to demonstrate how Royce further contextualizes James’ religious individual by showing how she may practically participate in the larger community of life through loyalty. While the bulk of philosophical commentary has followed in the footsteps of Ralph Barton Perry by interpreting Josiah Royce primarily as William James’ enemy in the epic “Battle of the Absolute,” this chapter will present Royce in light of the fact that he thought of himself as James’s disciple. That is, I interpret Royce and James as being quite substantially in agreement, especially given the fact that at the end of their respective careers, James was moving towards idealism and monism even as Royce was moving towards pragmatism and pluralism, a fact that has lead Bruce Kuklick to speak of a philosophical reconciliation that he describes as “Jamesian idealism and Roycean pragmatism.” Of course, this is not to say that the “Battle of the Absolute” never happened; it is only to insist upon the context of both the battle and its subsequent retellings. For my purposes here, what is important is that there is a loose scholarly agreement regarding the dates of the battle. The

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127 The phrase was coined in Perry, _The Thought and Character of William James_, vol. 1, 208.
128 The word disciple is Royce’s own: “William James was my friend from my youth to the end of his beneficent life. I was once for a brief time his pupil. I long loved to think of myself as his disciple; although perhaps I was always a very bad disciple.” Josiah Royce, _William James and Other Essays on the Philosophy of Life_ (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911), 30. Henceforth, WJ.
130 Perry, who was openly hostile to Royce’s idealism and anxious to appear as the successor to a neo-realist James, undoubtedly wanted to maximize the philosophical distance between Royce and James. Bruce Kuklick elaborates what he calls Perry’s “sleight of hand,” which “effectively portrayed Royce as outmoded and sentimental, ill equipped to serve American thought in the new century” while portraying James “as more contemporary, forward-looking, and typically American.” Bruce Kuklick, _A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000_ (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 176.
131 While Perry gives the dates of the war as 1882-1899, he still refers to James’ “lifelong argument” with Royce, the always formidable advocate of an Absolute that unifies the world by an all-at-once knowing of it.” Perry, _The Thought and Character of William James_, vol. 2, 386; italics added. I do not believe this is a fair portrait of the mature Royce’s position, though it does describe Royce’s middle period. In any case, the essential point for my purposes is that the “battle” was over, having become an “argument” even for Perry.
climax of the “war” comes before the twentieth century, i.e., before either James or Royce reached their mature philosophical positions. Beginning with this simple chronological point enables us to change the root metaphor guiding our interpretation of James and Royce, reading them as friends or at least colleagues rather than enemies at war.132

Royce’s Philosophy of (American) Life in the Wake of William James

In the preface to William James and Other Essays on the Philosophy of Life, Royce tells us that each one of the collected essays offers an “interpretation of some problem that is, in my opinion, of vital interest for anyone who wants to form sound ideals for the conduct of life” (v).133 Royce shared this broad interest in the “philosophy of life” with James, who seems to have been describing the same thing when he wrote: “The philosophy which is so important in each of us is not a technical matter; it is our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means” (P, 9). While only the first of Royce’s essays is an explicit tribute to James, the attention paid to life’s meaning shows that Royce owed to James “as teacher, and as dear friend, an unfailing inspiration, far greater than he ever knew, or than I can well put into words” (WJ,

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132 This more friendly aspect of their relationship is highlighted by both Clendenning and Kuklick, authors of the two chief intellectual biographies of Royce. While Clendenning follows Perry by using “The Battle for the Absolute” as a chapter title, he dramatically softens the nature of the dispute by saying that it was “really a lover’s quarrel.” John Clendenning, The Life and Thought of Josiah Royce: Revised and Expanded Edition (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), 209. Likewise, Kuklick tries to correct the unfortunate tendency to portray James as Royce as opponents at Harvard. Bruce Kuklick, Josiah Royce: An Intellectual Biography (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), 5. In contrast, James’ intellectual biographers (who are more numerous and have generally exerted more influence), tend to follow Perry in playing up the differences between James and Royce. For instance, Robert Richardson claims that “James's own views were a world apart from Royce’s […] over the course of their long, drawn-out ‘battle of the Absolute.’” Richardson, William James, 386. Of course, there is always some acknowledgement of common ground, as in this quote from Gerald Myers: “Though James said ‘Damn the Absolute!’ to Royce, he was close in spirit to Royce […], closer to [his] metaphysical reconceptualization of the world than to the laissez-faire conclusions of some positivistic or scientific thinking.” Gerald E. Myers, William James: His Life and Thought (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 293.

133 In keeping with the increasing emphasis on pragmatism in Royce’s mature philosophy after the success of James’ Pragmatism, the introduction to The Philosophy of Loyalty similarly states: “The present book […] is simply an appeal to any reader who may be fond of ideals, and who may also be willing to review his own ideals in a somewhat new light and in a philosophical spirit” (PL, 2).
To Royce’s mind, this was a debt he shared with other Americans, insofar as James was the most recent in the line of representative American philosophers that included Jonathan Edwards and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Predating the fully professionalized academic discipline of philosophy in the United States, James (like Royce) was a philosopher of life who expressed “an interpretation of the life of man and a view of the universe, which is at once personal, and [...] national in its significance” (6). Royce thus interprets James as expressing “ideas which are characteristic of some stage and of some aspect of the spiritual life of his own people” (4).

In the course of estimating William James as well as the American ideas and ideals he represented, Royce effectively provides us with a glimpse into his own mind, since he liked to think of himself as following in James’ philosophical footsteps. According to Royce, James began his career (during the 1870s, only a few years before Royce began his own) in the context of “two notable movements of world-wide significance,” the elaboration of the doctrine of evolution and the rise of the new psychology (11). But alongside these worldwide movements, James belonged to “the age in which our nation, rapidly transformed by the occupation of new territory, by economic growth, by immigration, and by education, has been attempting to find itself anew, to redefine its ideals, to retain its moral integrity, and yet to become a world power”

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134 While I am not emphasizing the biographical component of Royce’s choice to dedicate this collection of essays to James’ memory, I find it fascinating to speculate that Royce was so intellectually (and emotionally) connected to James that he kept James alive after his death as a kind of ideal conversation partner. Oppenheim makes this point, though without adding much in the way of further psycho-biographical speculation: “It seems no exaggeration to say that William James was even more present to Royce’s reflections after James’s death.” Oppenheim, *Reverence for the Relations of Life*, 86.

135 James draws heavily upon both these thinkers in his philosophy, most clearly in the *Varieties* where he prioritizes Emerson’s “first-hand” religious experience and says that Edwards’ *Treatise on Religious Affections* is an elaborate working out of his own thesis that we should attend to the fruits rather than to the roots of religious experience (VRE, 25). James’ philosophical relations with Emerson are perhaps better known than his relations with Edwards, which are documented by Wayne Proudfoot, "From Theology to a Science of Religions: Jonathan Edwards and William James on Religious Affections," *The Harvard Theological Review* 82, no. 2 (1989).

136 For an excellent narrative on the professionalization of American philosophy that centers upon the careers of James and Royce and Harvard, see Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy*. 
Hence, Royce positions James (and himself by extension) as a philosophical interpreter of “the relations between the practical problems of our civilization and those two world-wide movements of thought” (18).

However, Royce claims that James did not realize “that he was indeed an especially representative American philosopher” because he lacked a robust understanding of the social, which Royce would soon come to call the community, the centerpiece of his mature philosophy:

[James] so loved what he called the concrete, the particular, the individual, that he naturally made little attempt to define his office in terms of any social organism, or of any such object as our national life, viewed as an entity. And he especially disliked to talk of causes in the abstract, or of social movements as I am here characterizing them. His world seemed to him to be made up of individuals—men, events, experiences, and deeds (19).

With subtle criticisms such as this one, Royce begins to implicitly place himself in the role of self-consciously taking the role James played without realizing it, especially when treating problems of ethics and religion. Royce interprets James’ *Varieties* as an expression of “our own national variety of the spirit of religious unrest” whose effect was a new insight into the evolution of religion and a renewed psychological tolerance for its study (20). And while Royce frets about the way that James “seems to leave religion in the comparatively trivial position of a play with whimsical powers,” Royce also insists that there is something very American in James’ faith that “the unconventional and the individual in religious experience are the means whereby the truth of a superhuman world may become most manifest” (22). Royce refers to this as the “spirit of the frontiersman, of the gold seeker, or the home builder, transferred to the metaphysical and to the religious realm” (22). This spirit refuses to let experience itself be overshadowed by “abstract scientific theory” or, for that matter, any form of tradition:

In James's eyes, the forms, the external organizations of the religious world simply wither; it is the individual that is more and more. And James, with a democratic contempt for social appearances, seeks his

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137 The question of whether or not a nation may “retain its moral integrity” while yet becoming “a world power” is precisely what James was addressing in his reflections on imperialism. As we will see, this is a theme in Royce, Dewey, and Dussel as well.
religious geniuses everywhere. World-renowned saints of the historic church receive his hearty sympathy; but they stand upon an equal footing, in his esteem, with many an obscure and ignorant revivalist, with faith healers, with poets, with sages, with heretics, with men that wander about in all sorts of sheepskins and goatskins, with chance correspondents of his own, with whomsoever you will of whom the world was not and is not worthy, but who, by inner experience, have obtained the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (24-25).

Royce does not think that James’ philosophy of religion was adequate, since it was far too chaotic, but Royce is equally convinced that James’ view could “only be amended by taking it up into a larger view, and not by rejecting it” (25). James had beautifully expressed “the whole spirit of hopeful unrest, of eagerness to be just to the modern view of life, of longing for new experience, which characterizes the recent American religious movement” (44), but it was (implicitly) up to Royce, James’ disciple, to carry things towards a wider and less chaotic view.

Royce also makes a parallel point with respect to James’ ethical philosophy. After all, the nation needed not just religious but also moral guidance, so Royce asks: “What are the principles that can show us the course to follow in the often pathless wilderness of the new democracy?” (26). Like James, Royce was skeptical of the vague ethical “maxims that combine attractive vagueness with an equally winning pungency,” since such an “athletic” moral law usually leads to self-confidence at the price of a disposition to attribute moral failings to our opponents rather than ourselves (27). And yet neither James nor Royce were willing to dismiss the real significance of many of “America’s” vaguer ideals since they “give us counsel that is in any case

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138 For a fascinating account of how Royce hoped to see this sort of chaotic frontier mentality progress towards social order (what James called social intimacy), see Josiah Royce, *California: A Study of American Character: From the Conquest in 1846 to the Second Vigilance Committee in San Francisco* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2002).

139 This notion of taking something up “into a larger view” is what Royce will come to define precisely as *insight* in Josiah Royce, *The Sources of Religious Insight* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912). Henceforth SRI.

140 Ironically, James seems to have accused Royce of formulating just this sort of vague moral law with his principle of loyalty: “Abstractness *per se* seems to have a touch of ideality. ROYCE’S ‘loyalty to loyalty’ is an excellent example. ‘Causes,’ as anti-slavery, democracy, liberty, etc., dwindle when realized in their sordid particulars. The veritable ‘cash-value’ of the idea seems to cleave to it only in the abstract status” (PU, 123). Royce addresses the dangers of the vagueness of America’s idealism in the essay “On Certain Limitations of the Thoughtful Public in America” in Josiah Royce, *Race Questions, Provincialism, and Other American Problems* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908). Henceforth, RQP.
opposed to sloth,” “discourage the spirit that reflectively divides the inner self,” and “emphasize courage” (29). In other words, Royce was just as attracted to the strenuous life as James, and he was equally concerned with combating the *tedium vitae*. Both philosophers sought a *moral* equivalent of war, since they were both aware of how tragically the strenuous mood often ended, especially when the results are viewed through the eyes of our enemies.

James had captured the national spirit. He was restlessly active by temperament, loathed abstractions, counseled strenuousness, and insisted that the moral philosopher must be in close touch with concrete life. Indeed, James’ pragmatism had become known by foreign critics as characteristically American in its “tendency to judge all ideals by their practical efficiency, by their visible results, by their so-called ‘cash value’” (34-35). But as Royce notes, James protested these cruder interpretations of pragmatism as a worship of efficiency, for although James was an empiricist committed to experience, *Varieties* showed that this also included “religious experience—experience of the unseen and of the superhuman” (34). Loving as he did “those who are weak in the eyes of this present world—the religious geniuses, the unpopular inquirers, the noble outcasts,” James saw this sort of *unworldliness* as a marker of spiritual importance “if only such unworldliness seemed to him to be joined with interests that, using his favorite words, he could call ‘concrete’ and ‘important’” (35).

As we saw in the previous chapter, James’ ethical saint can be interpreted as the most genuine “pragmatist” in a sense that is very far from the word’s current popular usage that seems to center upon a willingness to compromise in keeping with a certain realism. In contrast, the classical pragmatist does not respond so “realistically” to the world of experience:

Herein James differs from all traditional positivists. Experience is never yours merely as it comes to you. Facts are never mere data. They are data to which you respond. Your experience is constantly transformed by your deeds. […] The simplest perception, the most elaborate scientific theory, illustrate how man never merely finds, but also always cooperates in creating his world. […]What makes life worth living is not
what you find in it, but what you are ready to put into it by your ideal interpretation of the meaning that, as you insist, it shall possess for you (37-38).

Here, Royce rightly interprets James as an *ethical idealist*, though James would no doubt prefer the term *radical empiricist* as a matter of temperament.\(^\text{141}\) In fact, Royce claims that he learned much of his own idealism from James’ “The Will to Believe,” which showed that James was “in spirit an ethical idealist to the core” (43). Royce and James thus agree upon the following basic point: “Your deeper ideals always depend upon viewing life in the light of larger unities than now appear, upon viewing yourself as a coworker with the universe for the attainment of what no present human game of action can now reveal” (38). In other words, Royce and James both see the need for *religion*, understood as a *faith in ideals* that helps us *realize* them, or “a resolute interpretation of human life as an opportunity to cooperate with the superhuman and the divine” (40).

As for the claim that their ethico-religious idealism makes Royce and James representative “American” philosophers, this is an exceedingly difficult claim to substantiate, so I will settle for making clear what Royce meant by it. Royce asks his readers “to remember [James] then, not only as the great psychologist, the radical empiricist, the pragmatist, but as the interpreter of the ethical spirit of his time and of his people […] a prophet of the nation that is to be” (45, italics added).\(^\text{142}\) The italicized phrase makes it clear that for Royce, to be a representative philosopher is *not* merely to passively re-present the various ideals and sentiments


\(^{142}\) This language is quite close to that of Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). Surprisingly, however, Rorty makes no mention of Royce and only passing reference to James, choosing to concentrate on Dewey as the representative of pragmatism. This strikes me as part of Rorty’s larger plan to purge pragmatism of its religiously idealistic elements, though as I will argue in Chapter 3, these are present in Dewey’s own philosophy.
of one’s time and place. It is to understand, even to share these ideals and sentiments, but then to transcend their trivial and capricious aspect in the direction of what Royce calls “the larger realm of universal life.” What makes a philosopher representative, then, is the ability to interpret the community’s spirit to itself, which is to say that the representative philosopher paradoxically both discovers and creates a shared set of ideals.

Of course, at this point, Royce has not developed the technical language to say this. As we will see in the sections below, *The Sources of Religious Insight* develops the category of insight in 1912 and *The Problem of Christianity* develops the categories of community and interpretation in 1913. Still, Royce is already using these terms loosely in this 1911 collection. In the second essay, “Loyalty and Insight,” Royce seeks to further the ideal of “insight,—the ideal of learning to see life as it is, to know the world as we men need to know it, and to guide our purposes as we ought to guide them” (49). Notice already the triadic, interpretative structure of insight, which mediates between is and ought. Insight takes the world both for what it is and for what we need it to be. In short, insight creatively discovers purpose and lives this purpose out, creating a kind of positive feedback loop as loyally living in light of previous insight serves as a “source of a very deep insight into the meaning of life, and, as I personally believe, into the nature of the whole universe” (52). Clearly, then, we have the basic elements of James’ pragmatism as a form of ethical idealism, mediating between a passive scientific discovery of an inflexibly objective world and the artistic co-creation of the universe in keeping with a lived, subjective need for meaning.

Having gestured towards the meaning of insight, Royce returns to his 1908 definition of loyalty as “the thoroughgoing, the voluntary, and the practical devotion of a self to a cause” (55).

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143 James makes a similar point in “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” regarding the direction of what we might call ethical progress, which requires us to attempt to relieve the “pinch between the ideal and the actual” by working towards “the very largest total universe of good which we can see” (WTB, 153-158).
By insisting that a cause must be *social* in character (*The Problem of Christianity* will substitute *community* for *cause*), Royce can be read as extending James’ late attempts to interpret the universe after a social analogy, since loyalty “respects individuals, but aims to bring them together into one common life” (56). In fact, Royce’s “but” is misleading, for it is precisely his respect for individuals that leads him to say: “[W]hen apart, individuals fail; but […] when they try to unite their lives into one common higher selfhood, to live as if they were the expressions, the instruments, the organs of one ideally beautiful social group, they win the only possible fulfillment of the meaning of human existence” (56).

In sum, Royce is carrying on James’ project of fathoming and fashioning a socially intimate universe in order to heal a world of divided selves, since

> the great problem of the philosophy of life today may be defined as the effort to see whether, and how, you can cling to a genuinely ideal and spiritual interpretation of your own nature and of your duty, while abandoning superstition, and while keeping in close touch with the results of modern knowledge about man and nature (60).

Along with James, Royce aims to reinterpret and reanimate the philosophical question of the supernatural because the modern naturalistic and mechanical views of reality, while true within their own proper sphere, “are inadequate to tell us the whole truth” (72). The question for Royce is: “If causes [later, communities] are realities, then in what sort of a real world do you live?” (72). Ironically perhaps, Royce is not content with James’ own work that “frankly interprets the universe after a social analogy” because it is too *abstract*.144 Royce believes that if the people who loyally participate in the lives of their communities are right, then these higher forms of social life are “as real as we separate creatures are real” (76). The loyal *have faith* in the reality

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of their communities, which are “are at once personal (if by person you mean the ordinary human individual in his natural character) and super-personal” (78). In other words, religious faith “relates to that which is above us, but it must arise from that which is within us” (94). But Royce’s loyalists, just like James’ religious geniuses, cannot simply rest upon this insight into the spiritual realm; insight (whether mystical or not) must be judged by its fruits (94). In other words, genuine religious insight will give rise to ethical life:

If I am right, all of the loyal are grasping in their own ways, and according to their lights, some form and degree of religious truth. They have won religious insight; for they view something, at least, of the genuine spiritual world in its real unity, and they devote themselves to that unity, to its enlargement and enrichment. And therefore they approach more and more to the comprehension of that true spiritual life whereof, as I suppose, the real world essentially consists (95).

Royce wants to claim that loyalty is essentially religious as a mode of interacting with “superhuman” forms of life (which James would more modestly call “larger than ourselves”). But to make this claim, Royce needed to further develop the theoretical categories of insight and interpretation, their practical partner loyalty, and their metaphysical partner community. These three concepts are explored in the following three sections of this chapter.

**From James’ Individual Religious Experience to Royce’s Social Religious Insight**

Like James’ Varieties, Royce’s The Sources of Religious Insight was not an attempt to develop a comprehensive philosophy of religion, much less a set of religious doctrines. As public lecturers, they aimed to perform a practical, reconciling function.145 From the varieties of religious experience, Royce (no less than James) hoped to move his audience “toward unity of spirit, toward co-operation in the midst of all our varieties of faith, and toward insight itself and

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145 Royce puts the point this way: “I am to make some comments upon the ways in which religious truths can become accessible to men. What truths thus become accessible you must in large measure discover by your own appeal to the sources of which I shall try to tell you. […] I am not here to set people right as to matters of doctrine, but rather to point out the way that, if patiently followed, may tend to lead us all toward light and unity of doctrine” (SRI, 4).
the fruits of insight” (SRI, 9). To begin, Royce assumes James’ main conclusion from *Varieties*.

In spite of the profound discrepancies between the various religious creeds: “The central and essential postulate of whatever religion we, in these lectures, are to consider, is the postulate that *man needs to be saved*. And religious insight shall for us mean insight into the way of salvation and into those objects whereof the knowledge conduces to salvation” (8-9). In other words, Royce offers the category of *insight* as at least one of the means by which we (in James’ words) make the “proper connection with the higher powers” (VRE, 400). With respect to where to begin the religious inquiry, Royce is thus in complete agreement with James: we should *begin* with the experience of the individual “alone with the divine.”

But this immediately leads to what we might call the religious incarnation of the Meno Paradox: “The paradox is that a being who is […] so weak as to need saving, should still hope, in his fallible experience, to get into touch with anything divine. The question is, how is this possible? What light can my individual experience throw upon vast problems such as this?” (25).

In essence, Royce’s series of lectures is dedicated to shedding light upon this religious paradox by outlining seven sources of religious insight: 1) individual experience, 2) social experience, 3) reason, 4) will, 5) loyalty, 6) sorrow, and 7) the invisible church. According to Royce, the religious individual experiences three things:

First, his Ideal, that is, the standard in terms of which he estimates the sense and the value of his own personal life; secondly, his Need of salvation, that is, the degree to which he falls short of attaining his ideal and is sundered from it by evil fortune, or by his own paralysis of will, or by his inward baseness; thirdly, the presence or the coming or the longing for, or the communion with something which he comes to view as the power that may save him from his need, or […] in a word, as his Deliverer (28-29).

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146 Royce writes: “Now James's whole view of religious experience differs in many ways from mine. But just at the present point in our inquiry, where it is a question of what I should call the most elementary and intimate, but also the crudest and most capricious source of religious insight, namely, the experience of the individual ‘alone with the divine,’ I feel my own account to be most dependent upon that of James and my own position to be most nearly in agreement with his” (SRI, 27-28).

147 While Royce refers frequently to Plato, he does not explicitly mention Plato’s *Meno*, though he does say that the religious paradox might be called “just as correctly, the paradox of common-sense, the paradox of reason, the paradox of knowledge, yes, the paradox of being thought-fully alive in any sense whatever” (SRI, 21).
As noted in the previous chapter, this pragmatic analysis of religion is, in a sense, deceptively simple: 1) our struggles to transform ourselves (and our world) require a kind of an ideal vision or ability to envision states of affairs that as of yet do not exist; 2) however, there are many people who feel that they are not capable of realizing these ideals solely under their own power, so that; 3) help is required from sources beyond the self. In Royce’s terms, we experience a need to properly order our lives:

We need to give life sense, to know and to control our own selves, to end the natural chaos, to bring order and light into our deeds, to make the warfare of natural passion subordinate to the peace and the power of the spirit. This is our need. To live thus is our ideal. And because this need is pressing and this ideal is far off from the natural man, we need salvation (31).

This sense of salvation is shared throughout many wisdom traditions—Royce lists Plato, Marcus Aurelius, the Buddha, and Jesus—but as seen before, the question of how religious the solution is depends largely upon just how “far off from the natural man” this ideal unity of life lies.

Royce’s essential point is that in order to move towards our own ideal, in order to replace our caprices with spiritual control, “we must be able somehow to transcend the boundaries of any merely individual experience. Our individual experience must become some sort of intercourse with Another” (32). Ironically, we find Royce using the pluralistic language of “intercourse with Another” in contrast to James’ monistic language of the “larger self”! Indeed, throughout his career, Royce’s aim is to contextualize the individual in a larger social life: “In passing to our social experience, however, we shall not leave our individual experience behind. On the contrary, through thus passing to our social experience as a source of religious insight, we shall for the first time begin to see what our individual experience means” (34). This is a beautifully succinct statement of the way in which Royce is an individualist; he is forever attempting to give the life of the individual a larger meaning by placing it in a larger universe of life.
According to Royce, most individuals experience themselves as naturally being “creatures of wavering and conflicting motives, passions, desires” (44). Likewise, most individuals at least occasionally experience a desire “to give unity to our desires, to organize our activities, to win […] the strength of spirit which is above the narrowness of each one of our separate passions” (44-45). For Royce, this is the supreme aim of life, but one need not necessarily go this far in order to agree that many (perhaps all) individuals are in danger of failing to give their lives sufficient aim, meaning, or purpose.\(^{148}\) If one is willing to go at least this far, then “the quest for the salvation of man interests you, and is defined for you in genuinely empirical terms” (38). Of course, one may ultimately judge that the religious language is too loaded, that to speak of “the quest for the salvation of man” takes us too far from the empirical phenomena of life. But as with James, Royce’s hope is that his audience will attend to the phenomena he is describing, even if they ultimately decide that describing it in religious terms is unnecessary. Again, this strikes me as among the chief virtues of the pragmatic approach to religion, for it “connects religion not merely with doubtful dogmas and recondite speculations, but rather with personal and practical interests and with the spirit of all serious endeavor” (39). In other words, pragmatism moves us away from claims that stake religion’s value upon supernatural revelation or special knowledge towards claims that hinge upon religion’s value for practical life.

In fact, Royce goes even further than James in humanizing and democratizing religion:

\begin{quote}
Men who never heard of Christianity, and men who have never felt conscious of any external revelation from above, as well as men who have had no such sudden uprushes from their own subconscious natures as James’s “religious geniuses” have reported, are able to win a genuine religious interest, to be aware of an intense need for salvation, and to set before themselves, in however inarticulate a fashion, the very ideal of life which I have been trying in my own way to formulate (47-48).
\end{quote}

\(^{148}\) Citing what is undoubtedly the most severe case, Royce reports being deeply impressed when James said: “It has long been to me a fact that the principal business of philosophy is to give a man a good reason why he shouldn't commit suicide.” See Josiah Royce, *Metaphysics*, ed. William Ernest Hocking, Richard Hocking, and Frank M. Oppenheim (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 274.
That is to say that Royce is less interested in James’ “religious genius” and more concerned with the everyday efficacy of religion, or what I have called the “genius of religion.” The category that Royce uses to move towards this view of religion is *insight*, which leads from “narrowness of view” towards a “wider vision” of ourselves and our place in the universe. Like James, Royce uses the language of the “divided self,” saying that “we are prone to living many lives, seldom noting how ill harmonized they are” (48). What we need saving from is therefore, at the most basic level, *ourselves*. But over and against this discord and disharmony of the narrow activities of our various selves, there are moments of *insight*, “moments when we get a wider vision of ourselves, when we review life, or foresee it with a broad outlook” (49).

As good as such moments sound, however, they are often quite tragic when they come:

> They show us at a glance how with the left hand we have undone the right hand's work, how we have loved and forgotten, how we have sworn fealty to many masters, and have cheated one while we served another, how absorption in business has made us unworthy of home, or how we have wantonly sacrificed a friend in order to win a game, or gained our bit of the world through what, upon review, we have to call the loss of our souls (49-50).

Such tragic moments of clarity show “the need to possess what by mere nature we never come to possess, namely, the power to ‘see life steadily and see it whole,’ and then to live triumphantly in the light of this vision” (50). According to Royce, these sorts of insightful moments and their accompanying desire to live more resolutely and coherently are common to all, no matter how infrequently they come. While these experiences give rise to more complex and articulate philosophies and religions, Royce believes that “the plain man […] will seize upon whatever expressions the creed or the language of his tribe may suggest to him” (51).

Like James, Royce is attempting to outline the basic structure of our experiences of insight that then give rise to all sorts of overbeliefs about the generally unseen world that we
have “seen” into.\textsuperscript{149} So even apart from references to God, the crucial point for Royce, as for James,\textsuperscript{150} is that life’s ideal goal, meaning, or purpose is represented as somehow \textit{both} within \textit{and} beyond one’s grasp.\textsuperscript{151} And while one’s representation of life’s purpose may not involve “God,” this symbol conveniently represents the fact that we are, indeed, helpless either to hold before us this our personal vision of the triumphant life and of the unity of the spirit, or to turn the vision into a practical reality, unless we come into touch and keep in touch with an order of spiritual existence which is in a perfectly genuine sense superhuman, and in the same sense supernatural, and which certainly is not our natural selves (51-52).

The outlines of James’ saving \textit{more} should be obvious, and Royce draws himself still closer to James when he writes that \textit{even if there were no such higher order of spiritual existence}, “\textit{none the less we need it, and so need salvation}” (53). The point is simply that—while the religious “solution” to life may seem mysterious, strange, or even ridiculous—it stems from a perfectly normal set of experiences and desires. Upon reflection, perhaps in the face of some tragedy, we find our concrete lives to be narrow, capricious, self-defeating, or just plain defeated. Occasionally, however, we catch a glimpse of or imagine a wider, steadier, more harmonious and successful life. And when the contrast between our actual lives and our ideal lives strikes us as profound enough, we believe that getting from one life to the other would be our salvation.

Like James, Royce admits that much of this movement is simply part of growing up, of socialization, which “may bring us into intercourse with what is in general much better than a man’s subliminal self, namely, his public, his humane, his greater social self, wherein he finds his soul and its interests writ large” (55). In fact, Royce notes that many psychologists and

\textsuperscript{149} A very common overbelief is the standard monotheistic one, which Royce puts into the mouth of the “plain man” as follows: “This is the ideal that God sets before me. This is the divine will regarding my life” (SRI, 51).

\textsuperscript{150} As James puts it, “Meanwhile the practical needs and experiences of religion seem to me sufficiently met by the belief that beyond each man and in a fashion continuous with him there exists a larger power which is friendly to him and to his ideals. All that the facts require is that the power should be both other and larger than our conscious selves. Anything larger will do, if only it be large enough to trust for the next step” (VRE, 413).

\textsuperscript{151} Royce discusses this concept of something being simultaneously within and beyond in his discussion of Kant’s notion of the moral autonomy of the will (WI 2:32-29).
philosophers of religion, in keeping with the present beliefs in socialism or democracy as the cure for the ills of the present age, are “disposed to conceive that the whole essence of the religion of all times, the entire meaning of religious beliefs and practices, can be exhaustively and accurately described in the purely human and social terms which these practical counsels attempt to embody” (57). Such views focus upon our social experience as the principal source of religious insight, an insight that when carried out would culminate in something like what James refers to in “The Will to Believe” as the “religion of humanity” (WTB, 150).

However, this more modern view, whether operating under the watchword of socialism or democracy or both, is at odds with the traditions of the great world religions that do not interpret the old faiths in this way, just because these religious traditions all agree in regarding the human social order as something which exists for the sake of an essentially superhuman order. As these various faiths assert, man can never be saved by purely human means, whether you call these means preventive medicine, or socialism, or universal brotherhood, or even love, so long as love means simply human love (59).

Royce runs up against the same problem that James did when examining the social self. There is nothing preventing society itself from being wayward and capricious; simply switching levels from individual caprice to societal caprice can hardly amount to salvation. Since Royce is not willing to say that our social experience is all there is to religion, he insists upon the following two points: 1) “Man is, indeed, a being who cannot be saved alone, however much solitude may help him, at times, toward insight. For he is bound to his brethren by spiritual links that cannot be broken” and 2) “So long as man views his fellow-man merely as fellow-man, he only complicates his problem, for both he and his fellow equally need salvation. Their plight is

152 In fact, Royce recognizes that James is even more insistent upon this point: “James, in his ‘Varieties of Religious Experience,’ shows the utmost liberality toward differences of faith, and insists in the opening chapters of his book that religious experience is a field where one must beware of defining sharp boundary lines or of showing a false exclusiveness. Yet one boundary line he himself defines with the greatest sharpness; and in respect of one matter he is rigidly exclusive. Religious experience, he insists, is, as you will remember from our first lecture, the experience of an individual who feels himself to be ‘alone with the divine.’ And the social types of religious experience James rigidly excludes from the ‘varieties’ whereof he takes account” (SRI, 62).
common; their very need of salvation chains them together in the prison of human sorrow” (65).

The first lesson is simply that the individual self is bound to and dependent upon others, and the second lesson is that mere sociality is no more saving on its own than mere individuality.

Royce’s bottom line is that both the individual and the social must be transformed.

Individual experience and social experience are both sources of religious insight, but they are still only on the way to salvation:

But when our social experience shows us any such way upward it does so, if it truly does so, because human social life is the hint, the likeness, or the incarnation of a life that lies beyond and above our present human existence. For human society as it now is, in this world of care, is a chaos of needs; and the whole social order groans and travails together in pain until now, longing for salvation (75).

Just as the self points beyond itself in longing for an ideal version of itself, the same can and must be said of the social order that James hoped would progress hand-over-hand towards an increasingly intimate universe, a process Royce explores as the building of the universal community through the active devotion to particular communities that he calls loyalty.

Apart from their very real temperamental differences, James would agree with Royce that “the formation of abstract ideas is but a means to an end,” that “this end is the enlargement of the range of our view of the connections of our experience,” and that “what I have said will mean little to you unless you come to see how it can be translated into an adequate expression in our active life” (116; italics added). When all is said, there is a pragmatic agreement between James and Royce about what is to be done. Despite their tendency to occasionally move in opposite directions when it comes to their overbeliefs, they are in absolute accord when it comes to what metaphysics is for. As an attempt to formulate an articulate insight into the nature of things, metaphysics must relate to practical life. Applying this point to religious insight, Royce writes:

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Nothing forbids us to entertain the belief that there are superhuman and supernatural realities, forms of being, living and spiritual personalities, or superpersonalities, as various and lofty as you please, provided only that they be such as to make whatever evidence of their being is accessible to us capable of definition in a human and empirical way. The truth, namely, of our belief about such beings, has to be tested by us in terms of our own concrete religious experience. Such beliefs, like others, must “work” in order to be true. That is, these beliefs, however they arise, must lead to conduct; and the results of this conduct must tend to our religious comfort, to our unity of feeling, to our peace, or power, or saintliness, or other form of spiritual perfection. The fruits of the spirit are the empirical tests of a religious doctrine […] No truth is a saving truth—yes, no truth is a truth at all unless it guides and directs life. Therein I heartily agree with current pragmatism and with James himself” (143).

For both James and Royce, believing in God amounts to laying down “some sort of rule for such forms of action as involve a fitting acknowledgement of God’s being and significance” (146). But Royce wants to go one step further than James by more consistently pointing out how individual human life depends upon a constant attempt to adjust oneself to something beyond one’s individual life, whether that something else is “common sense,” “scientific experience,” “God’s law,” or any number of other things. For Royce, the logical outcome of noting this leads to a form of absolute idealism, but the more crucial point of agreement to take away is simply that religious life amounts to an attempt to adjust our lives to forms of life that extend not just above and beyond but also through our own. The name Royce gives for this concrete attempt to reverently live out, in, and through life’s relations is loyalty. Loyalty is the form that our wills take when we attempt to reasonably yoke, to ethically harmonize, to religiously bind individual and social reality.

In short, loyalty is Royce’s solution to the problem of morality vs. religion that we defined at the beginning of the first chapter in terms borrowed from Henry James Sr. Royce joins William James in trying to establish some sort of harmony, since both morality and religion “have to do with our ideals, with our needs, with the conforming of our lives to our ideals, and with the attainment of some sort of good” (168). Still, morality and religion function differently: “[T]he moral interest seeks to define right deeds and to insist that they shall be done. It estimates the Rightness of deeds with reference to some ideal of life. But however it conceives
this ideal, it makes its main appeal to the active individual. It says: ‘Do this’” (170). The religious interest, in contrast, “centres about the sense of need, or, if it is successful in finding this need satisfied, it centres about the knowledge of that which has delivered the needy from their danger” (170). Like James, Royce outlines something like a division of labor between religion and morality, or at least a difference in emphasis, but the larger pragmatic point that they want us to take away is simply that morality and religion share a common goal: both seek the good life, even if ethics tends to do so in terms of doing and religion tends to do so in terms of being.\(^{154}\) The trouble is that “each side may regard the other with a deep sense of sacred aversion” (174).\(^{155}\) To simplify things at the most basic level of metaphor, the moralist lays stress upon pushing oneself to realize the ideal, whereas the religionist insists that one is pulled towards the ideal by divine forces. Nonetheless, morality and religion should be able to agree that how we reach the ideal self/society/community matters less than the fact that we live our lives progressively moving in that direction. Admittedly, the “mere moralist” and the “religious fanatic” often disagree on the nature of the ideal self/society/community to begin with, but James and Royce insist that more agreement might come if the moralists, the once-born optimists, and the twice-born sick souls could recognize a common desire to have a meaningful existence by living in relation to ideals.\(^{156}\)

\(^{154}\) While neither James nor Royce emphasize the point, both these modes (doing and being) are fundamentally different from the mode of having. James puts the point very clearly in the midst of his brief discussion of socialism: “Lives based on having are less free than lives based either on doing or on being” (VRE, 256).

\(^{155}\) Royce characterizes the dispute as follows: “Certain of the lovers of religion have, upon occasion, condemned moralists, sometimes as legalists who do not know that there is any highest good, sometimes as vain optimists who ignore the danger of perdition, sometimes as despisers of divine grace, sometimes as the barbarous troublers of spiritual peace. Certain moralists, in their turn, and according as they ignore or accept the postulates upon which the religious interest is based, have condemned the devout, sometimes as the slanderers of our healthy human nature, sometimes as seekers in the void for a light that does not shine, sometimes as slavish souls who hope to get from grace gifts that they have not the courage to earn for themselves, some-times as idlers too fond of ‘moral holidays’” (SRI, 179).

\(^{156}\) As seen in Chapter 3, the attempt to articulate this common ground is the project of Dewey’s *A Common Faith*. 
While both James and Royce attempt this reconciliation of morality and religion, Royce does so more explicitly by developing the category of *loyalty* as a “mode of living that is just *both* to the moral and to the religious motives” because it reconciles “our need of a grace that shall save with the call of the moral life that we shall be strenuous” (181). In other words, Royce attempts to develop “a type of morality that, in and for itself, is already essentially religious” (181). For Royce, it is both the metaphysical nature of causes and the relation that the loyal have to them that makes loyalty religious. A cause (or community) is not a mere abstraction, but rather a “live something,” i.e., “some conceived, and yet also real, spiritual unity which links many lives in one” (199). A cause must be “based upon human needs, inclusive of human efforts, and alive with all the warmth of human consciousness and of human love and desire and effort” (200). But while being so clearly human, a cause is also “*superhuman in the scope, the wealth, the unity, and the reasonableness of its purposes and its accomplishments*” (200). A cause is thus a *religious* object, for it binds the conflicting selves that constitute the single individual into a more unified self while simultaneously binding these loyal selves to one another. In other words, a cause calls for loyalty, and this loyalty *saves* both the individual and the social group from caprice. Of course, if caprice were as harmless as it sounds, the religious case that we need saving would undoubtedly be less sound. But Royce points out that human caprice is no small thing. Given the fact that “it is part of man’s mission to destroy evil”—a fact that Royce thinks the moralist, the saint, and militarist all agree upon—a great deal rests upon how capracious our judgements are concerning what constitutes evil (219). Like James, Royce is surprisingly willing to look at our primitive destructive instincts. Both accept that “destruction” or “war” is part of being human, though this need not control what we decide to destroy or wage war against.
Normally, the tragic aspects of human life are given as among the chief hindrances to religious views of the world (the problem of evil is the philosophical form of the argument). But Royce argues that sorrow, the tragic aspect of human life, is actually a source of religious insight. One expects insight to come from experience, from reason, from activity, even from loyalty, but from sorrow? Like James, Royce believes that twice-born religious folks are actually on to something, that they see further and more truthfully than many people suspect precisely because they have a more profound sense of sorrow. Their sorrow leads them to religious insight because it helps them recognize their need for salvation, the need for something “beyond our own active resoluteness” (223). As a matter of fact religion “presupposes not only the presence, but the usual prevalence of very great evils in human life” (224). Indeed, one’s recognition of tragedy and illness in the human world becomes both deepened and more varied as one gains religious insight, for “religion […] teaches us to know, better and better, the tragedy of life.”

As with James, what counts as religious rather than simply moral depends upon how far reality must be stretched in order to be transformed into the ideal, upon how sufficient our own efforts seem to turn tragedy into triumph. Recourse to the moral will alone seems sufficient for many people, and for them, the various ills, misfortunes, and tragedy of human life are not sources of religious insight but rather sources of moral enthusiasm and strenuousness. Clearly, one does not necessarily need religion to fight the good fight: “The war with pain and disease and oppression, the effort to bind up wounds and to snatch souls from destruction—all these things constitute some of man's greatest opportunities for loyalty” (234). And yet, Royce contends that simple destruction is not the proper response to some of the ills we encounter, for we find these ills “inseparably bound up with the good” (235). These ills can only be removed by

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157 Chapter 4 explores how Royce’s philosophy of sorrow links up with Dussel’s liberation philosophy, which also views things like poverty, oppression, and sorrow as deep sources of religious and philosophical insight.
being assimilated, idealized, or given meaning within a larger whole, and this necessarily involves suffering. Such suffering is not simply a means to being able to more vigorously destroy but is, at bottom, redemptive, for it yields religious insight through sorrow:

By sorrow, then, I here mean an experience of ill which is not wholly an experience of that which as you then and there believe ought to be simply driven out of existence. The insight of which sorrow is the source, is an insight that tends to awaken within you a new view of what the spiritual realm is (240).

Royce is not primarily making a point about how to resolve the problem of evil either mentally through theory or even practically through action. Instead, he is suggesting that grief is an insightful lens through which we may catch a glimpse of “the depth of the significance of our relations as individuals to one another, to our social order, and to the whole of life” (252). This is not to suggest that sorrow justifies moral passivity or political sloth but rather to suggest resolute action, courage, and loyalty actually depend upon the experience of tragedy and sorrow. In other words, religion has a leg up on morality when it comes to giving both tragedy and sorrow meaning, since morality (and once-born religion) view tragedy and sorrow quite simply as things to be rooted out, whereas religion insists upon the value of their having been undergone because they strengthen the ties that bind us to one another “in the prison of human sorrow” (65).

Combining the previously discussed sources of insight, Royce ends with a lecture entitled “The Unity of the Spirit and the Invisible Church,” which foreshadows The Problem of Christianity by making community the pivot upon which religion turns: “The principle means of grace, I say, which is open to any man lies in such communion with the faithful and with the unity of the spirit which they express in their lives” (291). Royce terms such communion “the crowning source of religious insight,” for just as loyalty brings together the sources of individual experience, social experience, reason, will, and sorrow, communion brings together the loyal themselves. The “rule” of gaining insight through this communion is:
So be prepared to interpret, and sympathetically to comprehend, the causes and the service of other men, that whoever serves the cause of causes, the unity of all the loyal, may even thereby tend to help you in your personal service of your own special cause. To cultivate the comprehension and the reverence for loyalty, however, and wherever loyalty may be found, is to prepare yourself for a fitting communion with the invisible church (292).

By focusing upon communion among the faithful themselves (rather than simply between the individual “alone with the divine”), Royce more concretely apprehends the varieties of religious experience. And in doing so, he moves beyond James’ attempt at religious reconciliation by suggesting a principle of charitable interpretation that goes beyond mere tolerance. For Royce wishes to change the fact that religious history has so far amounted to “an endless war of factions” who have “been able to remember God only by narrowly misreading the hearts of their brethren” (294). This is clearly a failed strategy, so Royce suggests that rather than attempting to reduce the many to the one, we recognize that “the varieties of religious experience in James’s sense of that term are endless” (294). And while Royce, like James, uses the language of “tolerance,” Royce seems to mean something more like “charity”:

Tolerance is what charity becomes when we have to deal with those whose special cause we just now cannot understand. Loyalty is tolerant, not as if truth were indifferent, or as if there were no contrast between worldliness and spirituality, but is tolerant precisely in so far as the best service of loyalty and of religion and of the unity of the spirit consists in helping our brethren not to our own, but to their own. Such loyalty implies genuine faith in the abiding and supreme unity of the spirit (297).

The principle at work here is quite remarkable. Tolerance amounts to the least that I can do when I run up against a form of religious life that I do not recognize as kindred, biding my time until I can actually further the cause of their loyalty. Tolerance, then, becomes not the goal but a kind of stop-gap measure on the way to a more genuine understanding, support, and communion. Undoubtedly, it is easier to waive off such points as the headiest “idealism” and saddle “pragmatism” with its more contemporary connotations of “being realistic” about the conflicts that inevitably divide humankind. But I find both courageous and insightful Royce’s attempt to imaginatively construct a vision of what community could look like if it were based not upon
principles of exclusion and intolerance, nor even upon tolerance, but upon an unlikely communion that grows out of our attempts to help others seek their own. Undoubtedly, such visions may prove utopic in the derogatory sense, but both Royce and James rightly remind us that genuine progress does not come from merely tolerating our given conditions and limitations but from ethically and religiously binding ourselves to the project of realizing ideals that have no home in experience as of yet.158

Interpreting Christianity as a Loyal Philosophy of Life

If Royce’s choice of the word “loyalty” has struck some commentators as particularly unfortunate given the dramatic shift in cultural contexts between his more Victorian time and our own,159 then Royce’s frequent talk of “unity of the spirit,” “communion,” and other adapted Christian metaphors has undoubtedly fared even worse. While the entirety of Royce’s corpus is shot through with biblical quotations and allusions, The Problem of Christianity is his only explicit attempt to develop an interpretation of Christianity as such. What complicates things quite dramatically, however, is that this same work provides his most robust philosophies of loyalty and community—at both the everyday level of a philosophy of life and the more specialized level of metaphysics. And while neither one of these levels is isolated from Royce’s innovative interpretation of Christianity, he aims to lay things out in such a way that his readers might accept his philosophies of loyalty and community apart from his interpretation of

158 For a fascinating study that uses the classical pragmatists and feminist philosophy to construct a positive account of utopia, see Erin McKenna, The Task of Utopia (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).
159 This historical shift is well-captured by Clendenning, who writes: “For many twentieth-century readers, a barrier to acceptance of Royce’s theory has been a merely semantic difficulty. Loyalty has acquired a bad reputation: it conveys the stale odor of the Victorian era; we associate it with imperial governments, political oppression, militarism; we suspect that it is only a mask for the slave’s devotion to his master. This kind of loyalty dehumanizes; it requires blind obedience, violation of conscience, denial of individuality.” Clendenning, The Life and Thought of Josiah Royce, 299. Clendenning goes on to rightly insist that nothing could be further from Royce’s intended meaning, which might be better conveyed using commitment given contemporary linguistic undertones: “As he used the term, loyalty is intensely personal; it is, indeed, the only way that personality can be ethically expressed” (299).
Christianity. In other words, the *pragmatization* of Royce’s project reaches a climax,\textsuperscript{160} so that we are left with three distinguishable projects that paradoxically aim to be both independent from and dependent upon one another: 1) an interpretation of Christianity in keeping with a “modern,” scientific understanding of the world; 2) a general philosophy of life that hinges upon a life of loyalty to community; and 3) an accompanying metaphysics of universal community.

Since the paradox of the interdependent dependence of Royce’s three projects is no less daunting to untangle than the mysterious Christian doctrine of the trinity that it seems to repeat philosophically,\textsuperscript{161} my interpretation will focus upon Royce’s claims for the *independence* of the three strands of his project. This is all the more appropriate since the scholarly tendency is to dismiss Royce’s philosophy (just like James’) wherever it seems to be “contaminated” by his religious vision.\textsuperscript{162} Although I will argue that we can take Royce’s philosophy very seriously without a commitment to Christianity, we should note that Royce’s philosophy generally hinges upon developing the *relations* among things that are generally (and wrongly) taken to be

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\textsuperscript{160}I borrow the term *pragmatization* from Claudio Marcelo Viale, "Extending West's Analogy: Royce, Mead, and American Philosophy," *Ideas y Valores* 57, no. 137 (2008). Whereas Kuklick focuses upon the scholarly reception of Royce through Perry, Viale concentrates on Royce’s reception through Mead: “Mead has always designated Royce’s philosophy as a Hegelian, Idealist or Romantic one without real or authentic connection with attitudes and habits of the American mind.” This statement, where he clearly converges with Deweyan philosophy, partly helps to configure the canonical image of Royce, an image that is still being shaped by current literature” (29). Like Viale, I emphasize “the firm intent of *pragmatization* in Royce’s intermediate and mature periods—with his distinction between practical philosophy and metaphysics” that emphasizes the viability of the former even apart from the acceptance of the latter (30). I would also add that James’ mature works (which no one disputes as genuinely pragmatic and also idealistic) display the same attempt to separate practical philosophy and metaphysics, so that one may be, for instance, a pragmatist without thereby being a radical empiricist (or an absolute idealist). Finally, the term *pragmatization* gestures towards Royce’s late philosophical attempts to “establish a connection between natural and ideal community in a Peircean way” (37). In a similar vein, Oppenheim has referred to the “late ‘Peirceanized’ Royce,” since Royce’s writings from 1912-1916 reflect his rediscovery of Peirce. See the introduction to the second volume of Josiah Royce, *Josiah Royce's Late Writings: A Collection of Unpublished and Scattered Works*, ed. Frank M. Oppenheim, 2 vols. (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2002). Henceforth, JRLW.

\textsuperscript{161}While unpacking this claim would take us rather far afield into another philosophical tradition, I find it helpful to think of Royce’s philosophy as a kind of “religion without Religion,” a concept borrowed from John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). This concept is more succinctly explained and defended as an attempt to “waylay the usual distinction between the religious and the secular” in John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 11.

\textsuperscript{162}As seen in Chapter 4, similar attacks are launched against Dussel’s liberation philosophy for being “contaminated” by liberation theology.
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completely independent from one another. This is no doubt related to Hegel’s influence upon Royce’s thought, but it is not simply a love of system that drives Royce to consistently develop what he called “reverence for the relations of life.” As John Kaag has recently argued by interpreting Royce’s philosophy through the marginalia written in his copy of Hegel’s *Phenomenologie*, Royce “observes that consciousness often finds its ill-suited home in a world of ‘foreign’ objects or in a realm where ‘other forms of subjectivity’ appear as foreign objects.” From his early witnessing of racial prejudice and discrimination rampant in California in the 1870s, to his later sense of not fitting in at Harvard, Royce must have had a very personal idea of alienation even while maintaining its universal relevance. In fact, if we follow John McDermott’s interpretation of James’ understanding of alienation as “the inability to make relations” (an understanding that certainly fits with James’ radical empiricism and his later attempts to develop a socially intimate universe), then we may say that both James and Royce were responding to the problem of alienation, though we may second Royce’s statement that James was comparatively “guiltless […] of Hegel’s categories” (WJ, 43). At any rate, it is alienation that Royce’s philosophy of loyalty aims to address, and it is with this background in mind that I would like to interpret Royce’s understanding of Christianity.

Royce’s preface to *The Problem of Christianity* tells us quite clearly that the volume constitutes a continuation of: 1) *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, which ends with a chapter entitled “Loyalty and Religion”; 2) *William James and Other Essays on the Philosophy of Life*, which continues to argue that loyalty can provide a way of life that is at once ethical and religious; and

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163 The phrase is from Royce, *California*, 394. Frank Oppenheim has used the phrase as the basis for an excellent study of Royce in relation to the other “big three” pragmatists (Peirce, James, and Dewey). See Oppenheim, *Reverence for the Relations of Life*.
3) *The Sources of Religious Insight*, which contains a promise to examine Christianity more specifically as an ethical religion of loyalty at a later date. Royce puts the point in this way:

> In brief, since 1908, my ‘philosophy of loyalty’ has been growing. Its successive expressions, as I believe, form a consistent body of ethical as well as of religious opinion and teaching, verifiable, in its main outlines, in terms of human experience, and capable of furnishing a foundation for a defensible form of metaphysical idealism (PC 1:viii-ix).

While still espousing a form of metaphysical idealism, Royce has ramped up the *pragmatization* of his project in order to refute anyone who would lump him together with the other idealists who have formed a system of “abstract conceptions,” whose interest, if they have any interest, is purely technical, and whose relations to the concrete religious concerns of mankind is wholly external and formal; and [...] then tried to steal popular favor by misusing traditional religious phraseology, and by identifying these [...] barren technicalities, with the religious beliefs and experiences of mankind, through taking a vicious advantage of ambiguous words (xii-xiii).

To avoid this charge, Royce reverses the order of *The World and The Individual*, which began with metaphysical theory and ended with moral and religious application. Royce asks his reader to first consider Volume I, which contains an interpretation of Christianity “verifiable, in its main outlines, in terms of human experience” before judging the more technical metaphysics contained in Volume II. While grounding his religious metaphysics in human experience, Royce mentions his broad agreement with James and the inspiration gained from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

However, Royce goes on to foreshadow his book’s preoccupation with community by pointing out his edifying aims even more explicitly than James did:

> For, after all, it is more important that we should together recognize in religion our own common personal needs and life-interests than that we should agree about our formulas. So I have indeed tried, in this book, to speak as one wanderer speaks to another who is his friend, when the way is long and obscure (xiv-xv).

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166 Unfortunately, secondary literature on *The World and the Individual* virtually ignores the second volume, “Nature, Man and the Moral Order,” effectively treating Royce’s presentation of his metaphysics in the first volume as the *whole* of his philosophy, when from the beginning to the end of his career, Royce’s metaphysics is always in the service of his broader ethical philosophy.
On the one hand, Royce is even more interested than James in trying to practically *unify the varieties* of religious experience without recourse to dogmatism and with a sense of fallibility. On the other hand, Royce simultaneously seeks to *amplify the plurality* of religious experiences by focusing on our *social* religious experience of and in community as a remedy to the scant attention James paid it:

James supposed that the religious experience of a church must needs be “conventional,” and consequently must be lacking in depth and in sincerity. This, to my mind, was a profound and a momentous error in the whole religious philosophy of our greatest American master in the study of the psychology of religious experience (xv-xvi).

As I have argued in the previous chapter, this puts James’ supposed lack of interest in the social elements of religious experience far too flatly. Nevertheless, it is Royce who seeks to make community the cornerstone of his ethical and religious philosophy. And while he carries this project out concretely via an interpretation of the religion of Christianity, he interprets Christianity as nothing more (and nothing less) than the “most highly developed religion of loyalty” (xviii). In fact, just as James remarked that “even if there were no metaphysical or traditional grounds for believing in a God, men would postulate one simply as a pretext for living hard” (WB, 161), Royce now claims:

> [T]hese doctrines, and the ideas in terms of which they are expressed, are verifiable results of the higher social religious experience of mankind. Were there no Christianity, were there no Christians in the world, all these ideas would be needed to express the meaning of true loyalty, the saving value of the right relation of any human individual to the community of which he is a member, and the true sense of life. These doctrines, then, need no dogmas of any historical church to define them, and no theology, and no technical metaphysical theory, to furnish a foundation for them (xx).

This strikes me as a clear instance of the pragmatist strategy in philosophy of religion, which attempts to call our attention to the religious dimensions of experience, not to the word “religion,” nor even to the word “experience.”

167 Oddly enough, Royce’s attempt to tackle the “problem” of Christianity is thus, in a certain sense, indifferent to “Christianity” while simultaneously claiming it as the most advanced form of religion so far! Again, this is a paradox that I will not attempt to sort out here. I wish only to highlight the paradox so that I may more gracefully (or
To begin to see how this works, consider Royce’s own statement of his book’s thesis:

[T]he essence of Christianity, as the Apostle Paul stated that essence, depends upon regarding the being which the early Christian Church believed itself to represent, and the being which I call, in this book, the “Beloved Community,” as the true source, through loyalty, of the salvation of man. This doctrine I hold to be both empirically verifiable within the limits of our experience, and metaphysically defensible as an expression of the life and the spiritual significance of the whole universe (xxvi).

By referring to “Christianity,” “the Apostle Paul,” and the “early Christian Church” in the first sentence just quoted, Royce leaves little doubt that he is out to interpret Christianity—something that William James never tried to do. And yet, as the second sentence indicates, Royce wants his interpretation to be judged (along the lines laid out by James) as a philosophy of religion “empirically verifiable within the limits of our experience” [Volume I], which will nonetheless lead us to launch quite naturally into the realm of metaphysical overbeliefs [Volume II].

In other words, we can read the two parts of Royce’s Problem of Christianity as running parallel to the work that James did in The Varieties of Religious Experience and A Pluralistic Universe respectively, with the proviso that Royce is setting out from a consideration of Christianity rather than religion more generally. So while Volume I: The Christian Doctrine of Life lays out the three essential ideas of Christianity (Community, the Lost Individual, and Atonement), Royce agrees that these ideas should be estimated in empirical terms (in terms of their “economic fruits” to borrow James’ language). But just as James’s exploration of the varieties of religious experience led him to the realm of overbeliefs, Royce’s exploration of Christianity leads him to metaphysics because it hinges upon the idea of community. Even though plenty of people have lived Christianity without much metaphysical reflection, Volume II: The Real World and the Christian Ideas “consider[s] the neglected philosophical problem of the sense in which the community and its Spirit are realities” (xxxix).
Given Royce’s claim to be James’ disciple alongside Royce’s interpretation of James as an “ethical idealist to the core,” “The Christian Doctrine of Life” might have been more accurately called “The Christian Philosophy of Life” or even “The Christian Way of Life.” For once religion is “cashed out” in terms of its “economic effects” in the lives of believers, religious doctrines become markers of the “central,” “intensely interesting,” “life problem[s] of humanity” (12-13). Whether the topic is religion more generally (as in James’ Varieties) or a particular religion (as in Royce’s Problem), the approach called for by the pragmatist philosophy of religion is neither a dogmatic religious apologetics nor an equally dogmatic philosophical hostility (or indifference), but rather a dynamically productive mixture of charitable and critical principles of interpretation.168 In short, Royce’s attempt, to define the essential features of Christianity in order to estimate its value for life, can be understood as thoroughly pragmatist.

Looking back at the history of Christianity, Royce notices two dominant yet contrasting characteristics. On the one hand, Christianity always appears “as an art of living, as a counsel for the attainment of the ends of human existence” that is somehow modeled upon the life of Christ himself (23). On the other hand, “Christianity has never appeared simply as the religion taught by the Master,” but has always involved the way in which the meaning of Christ’s life has been interpreted by the subsequent Christian community (25). Royce’s basic move is to shift the discussion’s center of gravity from the significance of the individual named Jesus (which tends to bring out dogmatism in any number of directions) towards the life of the subsequent Christian

168 To broadly situate this via media in terms of more recent philosophical literature, I would place the pragmatic approach somewhere between the handful of neo-Thomist and Evangelical philosophers (e.g., John F. X. Knasas and William Lane Craig, respectively) who are fairly comfortable mixing Christian apologetics and philosophy and the handful of “new atheists” (e.g., Daniel Dennett) who approach religion with hostility. In contrast, philosophers working on (or should we say after?) the “religious turn” in continental philosophy (e.g., John Caputo), while obviously holding different views from the classical pragmatists, exhibit something like their spirit in their attempt to approach religious issues as tremendously important for philosophy. Of course, the majority of philosophers still seem content to approach religion with a critical indifference.
community, or Church. Royce’s first major task, then, is to make believing in communities seem as natural or as reasonable as believing in individuals.

Long before the advent of Christianity, Plato and Aristotle attended to the ways in which communities “have a sort of organic life of their own, so that we can compare a highly developed community, such as a state, either to the soul of a man or to a living animal” (62). Indeed, Royce took William Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie* to be studying this very same phenomenon empirically in his own time. Leaning upon Wundt, Royce attempts to establish that we should treat human communities as minded organisms for the very same reasons that we treat individual human beings as minded organisms. These reasons, which form the basis of the discipline of psychology and the subdiscipline of social psychology, are not mystical but rather empirical and pragmatic: “A community behaves like an entity with a mind of its own. Therefore it is a fair ‘working hypothesis’ for the psychologist to declare that it is such an entity, and that a community has, or is, a mind” (65). Moreover, not only do communities behave like minded organisms, but individuals also behave towards them as minded organisms insofar as individuals treat communities with love, devotion, or loyalty (as well as hate, defiance, and disloyalty). Finally, since communities can also interact more or less mindfully with one another, we have every reason to say that communities themselves can form communities.

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171 Royce’s interpretation of the human individual as a (more or less) united community and his interpretation of communities as (more or less) united individuals can create a great deal of terminological confusion. In what follows, I will reserve the word “individual” for a human individual (in the customary sense) and the word “community” for a human community (in the customary sense), but this unfortunately obscures Royce’s claim that individuals are themselves communities and that communities are themselves individuals. Strictly speaking, a community of communities is thus itself an individual comprised of a plurality of communities, which are themselves comprised of individuals, who are themselves communities!
What Royce gives us then, is something like James’ late panpsychism in terms of its emphasis upon social intimacy. But ironically, at least given common caricatures of James as the empiricist and Royce as the idealist, it is Royce who insists upon the empirical status of real communities by appealing to Wundt and everyday life (rather than Fechner and analogical reason). And while Royce goes on to consider the metaphysics of community in Volume II, he is content in Volume I to simply point out that we have practical (e.g., aesthetic, ethical, and religious) reasons for treating communities as organic individuals. The basic “data,” which Royce sets out to interpret, is the simple fact that across time and space, human beings have related to their communities with the kind of active devotion that Royce calls “loyalty.” And in many cases, individual human beings have lived and even died in ways that reveal a belief that the lives of their communities are more valuable than their own. At the most basic level, Royce’s inquiry is simply an attempt to come to grips with this astounding fact.

Of course, Royce also seeks to further the cause of harmony among the loyal, especially when they belong to different communities. Therefore, he is a champion of not just loyalty but loyalty to loyalty.\textsuperscript{172} Whereas loyalty describes the individual’s willing, practical, and thoroughgoing devotion to a community, loyalty to loyalty describes a devotion to the highest possible community of communities, i.e., the universal community. While this is a regulative ideal, it is rooted in a realization that is natural enough—namely, that we (whoever we are) may view others as having something in common with us in terms of the structure of their loyal attitude or devotion even when they do not share the same objects of loyalty. Royce marks the advent of Christianity as an important part of the development of the ideal of the universal community, while acknowledging that it has more ancient roots as well:

\textsuperscript{172} See Lecture III, “Loyalty to Loyalty,” in The Philosophy of Loyalty.
In brief, loyalty is, from the first, a practical faith that communities, viewed as units, have a value which is superior to all the values and interests of detached individuals. And the sort of loyalty which reaches the level of true chivalry and which loves the honor and the loyalty of the stranger or even of the foe, tends, either in company with or apart from any further religious motive, to lead men towards a conception of the brotherhood of all the loyal, and towards an estimation of all the values of life in terms of their relation to the service of one ideally universal community. To this community in ideal all men belong; and to act as if one were a member of such a community is to win in the highest measure the goal of individual life. It is to win what religion calls salvation (72-73).

Essentially, Royce is pointing to a historical tendency to conceive of and become devoted to an increasingly universal community. Indeed, it would be possible to approach this ideal using something like Roman Stoicism. But Royce is concerned with Christianity, especially with the way in which Christianity links the idea of loyalty to the idea of salvation.

Generally speaking, the best-known and most important aspect of Jesus’ life and teaching as related in the Gospels concern the notion of love—most famously, Jesus’ summation of the many commandments in terms of love of God and love of neighbor (Matthew 22:38-40). However, Royce claims that Paul transformed Jesus’ own teaching by introducing “not only a new experience, but a new sort of being,” namely, the Christian community itself as an object of love. In other words, Paul made Jesus’ teachings concerning love more concrete and less mysterious by transforming love into loyalty:

This, the first of our three essential ideas of Christianity, is the idea of a spiritual life in which universal love for all individuals shall be completely blended, practically harmonized, with an absolute loyalty for a real and universal community (105).

Concretely, Paul was counseling small church communities about how to realize the Kingdom of Heaven on earth by making the material, emotional, and spiritual needs of each other the common concern and experience of not just the local congregation (the community) but of the Church as a whole (the community of communities). Practically speaking, the emphasis upon life in community answered both the question of “How should I love God?” and “Who is my neighbor?” And although we might expect a story of historical progress, Royce believes that there is a move away from the social intimacy of the early Christian communities as the
institutional Church develops, so that spiritual community increasingly becomes a matter of dogma rather than experience.

This takes on a new level of importance once Royce moves on to discuss the second leading Christian idea, namely, the moral burden of the individual. Royce begins his lecture with the following quote from Spinoza: “All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare,” a point that the vast majority of the world’s wisdom traditions seem to agree upon. While many contemporary people would likely agree with this statement, it seems that there is decidedly less emphasis upon the need for excellence in order to achieve the moral life. And if fewer people see a necessary connection between excellence and ethical life, then the following statement rings even truer now than it did when Royce wrote it: “This idea defines the moral burden, to which the individual who seeks salvation is subject, in so grave a fashion that […] many modern minds have been led to declare that so much of Christian doctrine […] is an unreasonable and untrue feature of the faith” (110). In other words, the religious insistence upon the need for salvation makes little sense if there is no corresponding sense of the weight of the moral burden. However, by making the pursuit of excellence tantamount to the moral life, moralists from the Stoics to Spinoza have placed a very heavy burden on the individual. Christianity adds that the individual cannot bear this burden alone, that the strength to bear one’s moral burden must lie in a source

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173 Royce’s work is hardly unusual in positing a purer or at least less fragmented past in the hopes of moving towards a better future, but unlike many stories concerning the comparative unity or simplicity of the past, there is a scholarly consensus that the early house church communities of the apostolic era were markedly different and more intimate than the subsequent communities of the institutionalized Church. See, for instance, Robert J. Banks, Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994) and Wayne A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003) and Rodney Stark, The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal, Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force (HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).

174 This is a perfect instance of what Dewey notes as a common tendency to stabilize ideals in the world of the mind because given them stability in the actual world by working to embody them would be far more difficult: “Then when philosophers have hit in reflection upon a thing which is stably good in quality and hence worthy of persistent and continued choice, they hesitate, and withdraw from the effort and struggle that choice demands:—namely, from the effort to give it some such stability in observed existence as it possesses in quality when thought of. Thus it becomes a refuge, and asylum for contemplation, or a theme for dialectical elaboration, instead of an ideal to inspire and guide conduct” (LW 1:286).
above or beyond the individual. This dovetails with the Christian idea of community, which constitutes an inversion of the moralists’ emphasis upon self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, the most basic outlines of this claim against utter self-sufficiency have been lost in a web of theological controversy concerning concepts such as *original sin*. In spite of these historical accidents, Royce believes that the Christian notion of the moral burden is actually “the one which can be most easily interpreted to the enlightened common sense of modern man” (119).

According to Royce, self-consciousness comes about through a comparison of one’s personal conduct with that of others. As human civilization increases in complexity and humans become increasingly conscious as individuals, the moral burden of the individual steadily increases. In fact, one could take the advent of Christianity as a marker in the development of the moral consciousness of the individual. Pauline Christianity gives voice to a new degree of tension operating at the level of individual consciousness by explicitly announcing a universally sinful human nature coupled with an omniscient God who is uniquely conscious of this nature. But just as James does, Royce asks us to take a step back from the theological notion of God to notice that all of our self-estimations ultimately rest upon our comparing our conduct with that of real friends, foes, rivals, critics, etc. However, this is only where our self-estimations begin, for our comparisons are inevitably repeated “in a companionship with ideal fellow-beings of all grades of significance” (133). Like James, Royce holds that our mature conscience is “the product of endless efforts to clear up, to simplify, to reduce to some sort of unity and harmony, the equally endless contrasts between the self, the fellow-man, and the social will in general” (134-35), so that crucial aspects of our lives are enmeshed in ideal worlds. And given that there are all sorts of social tension and conflict in the modern world, it is no surprise that the task of unifying what James called “the divided self” can constitute a surprisingly heavy burden.
Royce’s psychological advance over James lies in noticing how modern societies increasingly rely upon a process of inculcating morality “by first teaching us to be more considerate, more self-observant, more formally conscientious than we were before” (140-41). This is a way of telling the story of the birth of modern individualism, wherein the individual still submits to social conventions but simultaneously develops an increasingly deep opposition to merely external authority. And lest we think that all of this is “the mere construction of a theorist,” Royce points to the modern landscape of corporations, labor strikes, and other industrial conflicts that reveal the fact that “individualism and collectivism are tendencies, each of which, as our social order grows, intensifies the other” (152).175 So long as we remain mired in the dualistic categories of individual versus society, no amount of moral effort on the part of the individual will resolve the tension, since the increasingly complex, interdependent, and tense social world makes more and more demands upon the individual, who cannot refuse these demands without asserting a self-will that is itself the product of these demands.

We can tell this story even more dramatically in terms borrowed from Emerson and James. In fact, doing so should clarify how Royce is positioning himself rhetorically as their successor:

Train me to morality by the ordinary modes of discipline and you do two things: First, and especially under modern conditions, you teach me so-called independence, self-reliance. You teach me to know and to prize from the depths of my soul, my own individual will. […] But this teaching of independence is also a teaching of distraction and inner despair. For, if I indeed am intelligent, I also learn that, in a highly cultivated civilization, the social will is mighty, and daily grows mightier, and must, ordinarily and outwardly, prevail unless chaos is to come. […] I have my own law in my own members, which, however I seem to obey, is at war with the social will. I am the divided self. The more I struggle to escape through my moral cultivation, the more I discern my divided state. Oh, wretched man that I am! (149-51; italics added).

175 As we will see in the next chapter, Dewey further naturalizes Royce’s analysis of this conflict, which often falls back upon theological metaphors like “original sin” that are not unpacked sufficiently. As I will suggest in the final chapter on Dussel, the theological metaphors are not a problem in and of themselves, provided that their “cash value” is made sufficiently apparent. Indeed, it is fascinating to consider the way in which James’ and Royce’s analysis of the birth of the modern “divided self” maps on to more Marxian material histories that treat the birth of the modern corporation. See for instance, Jeffrey Sklansky, The Soul’s Economy: Market Society and Selfhood in American Thought, 1820-1920 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 137-170.
Here is the problem: Emerson’s *self-reliant individual* is cast into the world of social forces that James’ describes as producing *the divided self*. And Royce, effectively positioning himself as their philosophical successor, offers *loyalty* as the simultaneously ethical and religious attitude that has the power to bind the self-reliant individual to the larger community of life in such a way that the wounds of the divided self are healed.

What the individual needs, according to Royce, is a new form of self-consciousness that harmonizes the demands of self and society, a form of self-consciousness that can be achieved through *loyalty*, or “the love of a community conceived as a person on a level superior to that of any human individual” (159). In keeping with his claim that we should interpret a community as a higher grade or type of individual, Royce defines loyalty as the form that love for this higher individuality takes. Further complicating things is the fact that Paul and the early Christians insisted that the Church—unlike any family, clan, people, or political community—was miraculous in its origin, and could therefore only be entered by the appropriately supernatural workings of God’s grace. This emphasis upon grace leads Royce to speak of “The Beloved Community” as the Christian way of naming “The Universal Community.” And while there is admittedly an irreducibly Christian aspect to Royce’s interpretation of grace, much of what he does falls in line with the left-Hegelian, or at Feuerbach’s, project of pointing out just how “miraculous” and “supernatural” the mundane and natural world is when we stop to think about it. In this case, Royce is simply pointing out how a community can embody values and sustain a way of life across time in ways that no human individual ever could. Therefore, loving a

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176 While a fuller consideration of Royce’s project would require much more discussion of how dependent upon Christianity Royce ultimately remains, I am following Royce’s insistence that his interest in these matters is “an interest, first in the foundation which the Christian ideas possess in human nature, and secondly in the ethical and religious values which are here in question” (175). While sidestepping the theological tangles involved may not be satisfactory, it is necessary in order that my project proceed to Dewey and Dussel, who further naturalize Royce’s theological doctrines in any case.
community—i.e., being loyal—involves a transformation of the human individual that differs from that involved in simply loving another human individual.

As with James, there is a sense in which religious salvation appears as a radical form of socialization that involves binding the individual to a community that is somehow both real and ideal. A full treatment of this process as salvific would require a detailed examination of Royce’s discussion of the Christian ideas of grace, guilt, and atonement. But since I am interested in Royce’s philosophy of religion more generally, as well as his philosophy of community more specifically, I would like to pass over Royce’s lectures on these subjects and proceed directly to the lecture that attempts to synthesize these three leading Christian ideas: “The Christian Doctrine of Life”:

Through these lectures, both the contrast and the close connection between ethical and religious ideas have been illustrated. Ethical ideas define the nature of righteous conduct. Religious ideas have to do with bringing us into union with some supremely valuable form or level of life. Morality gives us counsel as to our duty. Religion, pointing out to us the natural poverty and failure which beset our ordinary existence, undertakes to show us some way of salvation. Ethical teachings direct us to a better mode of living. Religion undertakes to lead us to a homeland where we may witness, and, if we are successful, may share some supreme fulfillment of the purpose for which we live (327).

As something that brings together both ethical and religious elements, a “doctrine of life” is an ethical way of life lived in light of our most important overbeliefs concerning the nature of the universe and our place in it. And for Royce, the most important feature of Christianity is the fact that it points us towards the ideal of participating in the realization of the universal community through loyalty.

Royce holds off on speaking of how we might conceive the universal community as real in order to first emphasize its importance as an ideal:

Just now, just in this year or on this day, there exists no human community that is adequately conscious of its own unity, adequately creative of what it ought to create, adequately representative, on its own level, of the real and human communion of the spirit (357).
The universal community is nowhere to be discovered; it must therefore be created. Royce therefore translates the Christian credo into more philosophical terms as follows: “I believe in the beloved community and in the spirit which makes it beloved, and in the communion of all who are, in will and in deed, its members. I see no such community as yet; but none the less my rule of life is ‘Act so as to hasten its coming’” (360). In Jamesian terms, this is the endless quest for social intimacy in the universe. It is the life lived by the ethical saint who does not have a present experience of a world brimming over with social intimacy so much as a present longing for such a world. In essence, Volume I of The Problem of Christianity is akin to what James might have said had he developed a more thorough sense of a universe interpreted after a social analogy.

Royce emphasizes this desire or longing for communion because he believes that religion is a product of human needs. Religion comes about not so much to accurately describe the facts of the natural world but rather to articulate a coherent world of values. This is particularly important to understand in the modern era as science and industry have increasingly transformed our understanding of and relation to nature while displacing religion from its central role in public life. At bottom, religion is a social doctrine, a call for a certain way of life together, and so Royce articulates even more clearly than James the inadequacy of mystical experience alone:

Hence, while one may be thoroughly loyal, and therefore thoroughly religious, without having the gift or the grace of mystical illumination, no mystic can become truly religious unless, like all the really greatest of the mystics, beyond all his illuminations, and besides all his mere experiences of fulfillment, or of the immediate presence of the Divine, he attains to a strenuous, active loyalty which can overcome the world only by living in the community (401-02; italics added).

Here, we can clearly see Royce’s version of James’ ethical saint, living strenuously under the sign of God. And while James had already articulated “real religion” in terms of “real prayer” (VRE, 365), i.e., communion with the divine, Royce makes religious experience itself explicitly communal, effectively exploding James’ attempt to define religion as “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” (VRE, 34). For Royce, religious psychology is, at bottom, social psychology. This is the way in which Royce goes beyond James, by more consistently exploring the upshots of the claims that: 1) the religious self is a fundamentally social self, even when in solitude, and 2) the divine is, in turn, communal in structure.

More broadly speaking, Royce’s insight is that the way to the good life lies in embracing the communal dimensions of our existence, which while in no way incompatible with mystical experience, are most clearly experienced through loyalty:

It is this experience [of loyalty] which, while always essentially human in the facts that it brings to our notice, opens up its endless vistas, suggests to us countless interpretations in terms of our relations to a supernatural world, and justly seems to be a revelation of something not ourselves which is worthy to be our guide and salvation. This experience of grace and of loyalty it is which awakens an inexhaustible metaphysical interest (407-08).

Just as James holds that we cannot help but have overbeliefs, especially when it comes to interpreting our religious experience, Royce believes that loyalty, which binds us to communities—i.e., forms of organized life that are larger than ourselves—inevitably moves us towards metaphysics. While this turn may not always be taken reflectively, the very loyalty of the loyal practically depends upon their belief in the reality of the communities to which they belong.

The Metaphysics of (Universal) Community and the Create/Discover Paradox

Given that the loyal attitude is both dependent upon and constitutive of the reality of the community to which one is loyal, and that the community is in turn both producer and product of this belief, Royce begins Volume II of The Problem of Christianity by reminding us of the importance of the religious aspects of will, conscience, and purpose, lest we come away thinking that religious experience is something that just happens to human beings rather than something
that also *issues forth* from them. Indeed, emphasis upon *experience* often misleads us into thinking only of the *passive* or *receptive* aspects of human life, rather than its *active* or *creative* aspects. Of course, when the pragmatists use *experience*, they are almost always speaking about both aspects. (Hence, I have often substituted, *experiences, practices, and commitments.*) Royce and James may have drawn different metaphysical conclusions at various stages in their respective careers, but they never differed when it came to insisting that philosophy must not just respect but actually support human agency. So when Royce turns to what I call the “create/discover paradox” in Volume II, he is wrestling with the same problem that James announced thirty-five years earlier at the end of “Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind as Correspondence,” long before the term “pragmatism” was even circulating.

While Royce is following in James’ footsteps by relating religion to the problem of agency, he goes beyond James insofar as he not only situates the (ethical and religious) agent in a broader community of life but also suggests that we need a philosophy that considers communities themselves as agents. Strikingly, most philosophical reflections upon ethics and religion generally fail to explicitly lay out any theory of community whatsoever, since they proceed from the level of the individual to the level of some more or less abstract idea, e.g., virtue, duty, happiness, or God. But since both ethics and religion can only appear concretely in a *social* world, a philosophy of community is indispensible. We cannot make sense of human experience, particularly when it comes to ethical and religious life as made manifest by the loyal, without being drawn into a discussion of the metaphysical status of community, including the

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177 EP, 7-22.
178 This is, of course, a major theme of *The Will to Believe*, which Royce frequently praises.
universal community. This, more than anything else, is Royce’s unique contribution to the philosophy of religion and philosophical theology:\textsuperscript{179}

For us, then, theology, if we are to define any theology at all, must depend upon the metaphysical interpretation and foundation of the community. If that ideal of one beloved and united community of all mankind whose religious value we have defended, has a basis, not merely in the transient interests of us mortals, but also in whatever is largest and most lasting in the universe, then indeed the doctrine of the community will prove to be a doctrine about the being and nature and manifestation of God (PC 2:11).

Royce’s metaphysical turn is clearly recognizable from his previous works, where he turns from mortal transience to “whatever is largest and most lasting in the universe.” But in place of The Absolute, Royce’s doctrine of God is now stated in terms of the universal community. As his lectures proceed, it also becomes increasingly clear that he has introduced a crucial word into the passage quoted above that speaks of a metaphysical interpretation of community. While Christianity has provided the occasion for Royce’s reflections and his comments undoubtedly bear upon the sorely neglected theological topic of the Holy Spirit, Royce’s philosophical aim is to ask the question: in what sense may we interpret the idea of the universal community as something more than a valuable regulative ideal?

Royce is also convinced that the pay off of such a task extends far beyond the philosophy of religion. Most importantly, beginning a metaphysical inquiry with the idea of community dissolves the “problem” of the One and the Many, since “a community immediately presents itself to our minds both as one and as many; and unless it is both one and many, it is no community at all” (17). Of course, Royce is not so foolish as to think that simply stating this fact solves the problem by itself, but it does give it relevance and ground what threatens to become a detached, irrelevant metaphysical discussion in the world of human needs and values. It also points us back to the value of Royce’s philosophy of loyalty, which while hardly providing the last word on ethics, points us very clearly towards the defining tension of ethical life—the

\textsuperscript{179} Royce seems to have realized this as reflected in his comment that to make the community the central focus of a philosophy of religion is “to undertake a task as momentous as it is neglected” (PC 2:16).
tension between the one and the many, between myself and everyone else—while offering loyalty as a means of resolving or at least productively living this tension. But the larger point is simply that any strict metaphysical dichotomy between the one and the many, just like any ethical dichotomy between egoism and altruism, fails to address the texture of human life, which is always lived in community.180

And yet the modern individual is convinced, long before metaphysical questions can even arise, that the world is full of “a variety of individually distinct minds or selves, and that some, for us decisively authoritative, principle of individuation, keeps these selves apart, and forbids us to regard their various lives merely as incidents, or as undivided phases of a common life” (18). It seems that there is something intuitive and even inevitable about our belief in individuals. We may find ourselves hard pressed to precisely define the boundaries of the individual given that our common sense also speaks of interdependence and tells us that “no man is an island,” but we remain unshaken in our commonsense belief that the individual is the basic unit of human reality.181

Nonetheless, a world of Leibnizian monads does not do justice to our experience in its entirety, which forces the problem of community on us. For one, things such as languages and religions undoubtedly exist and yet cannot be reasonably said to have been created by isolated individuals. Such things are created by peoples, not people. Moreover, human history up to the present is full of instances when “the close shut-in streams of consciousness now appear as if

180 While I am now emphasizing this point using Royce, it is worth remembering that James shared this belief and even articulated it forcefully from time to time, even when emphasizing individual agency, as in this quote from “Great Men and their Environment”: “The community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community” (WB, 174).

181 Royce points out at least three reasons for this commonsense belief: 1) our bodies are separated from one another so that I cannot immediately feel another person’s pain physiologically; 2) we cannot immediately experience or intuit the thoughts of other people, and 3) we believe that moral categories like rights, responsibilities, and ideals ultimately reside within the individual.
they had lost their banks altogether,” instances such as raves, riots, or festivals (28). Finally, under more ordinary and controlled circumstances, we sometimes believe that an entire community can somehow speak or act through one of its members, or that individuals think the thoughts of their broader culture as much as (or perhaps even more than) their own idiosyncratic thoughts.

We need a metaphysics that can intelligently account for these features of human life and experience, something like James provides in *A Pluralistic Universe*. James was unwilling to accept that we are absolutely cut off from each other’s consciousnesses, arguing that a larger self might be possible as a form of compounded consciousness. However (and this is quite ironic given the standard philosophical accounts of both James and Royce), Royce was not satisfied with James’ late metaphysical speculations precisely because the compounding of consciousness seemed to suggest a merging or blending of selves, so that Royce felt the need to emphasize how individuality is maintained in community. In fact, not only does Royce argue that a genuine community does *not* de-personalize its members; he actually argues that personality and individuality themselves emerge from community.184 James’ model was especially worrisome to Royce given that it seemed to provide a better description of a mob (where there seems to be a kind of merging of aims and desires) than of a community. Noting how a crowd or a mob is a temporary phenomenon that cannot persist through time, Royce suggests that we approach both selves and communities as time processes.

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182 Royce’s point here strikes me as very Jamesian in the sense that it is an attempt to recover the *fuzziness or vagueness* of our ostensibly individual experience, which far from being clearly and distinctly private, bleeds outward towards a *more* that is exceedingly difficult to pin down or define.

183 Royce also mentions that this attempt brought James “into new relations with the idealistic tradition in philosophy” (PC 2:34). While Royce does not further specify how, his comment further demonstrates how he is positioning himself as James’ successor.

184 The clearest consideration of this point, apart from Royce’s own, is found in Jacquelyn Ann Kegley, *Genuine Individuals and Genuine Communities: A Roycean Public Philosophy* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997). Chapter 4 on how individuals grows up in the communal context of the family is particularly interesting, given that philosophers have rarely thematized family relations.
According to Royce, a human individual described functionally in temporal terms involves at least three figures: a present self interprets a past self to a future self. Royce’s tactic is to get us to first reflect upon the generally neglected fact that a self, when yanked from the time process and taken as a mere flash of consciousness, is hardly a self at all: “Our idea of the individual self is no mere present datum, or collection of data, but is based upon an interpretation of the sense, of the tendency, of the coherence, and of the value of a life to which belongs the memory of its own past” (43). A self’s existence has a narrative structure wherein continuity is furnished by both memories and long-term projects, and Royce thinks that if we carefully attend to the way in which our ideas concerning the self depend upon interpretation, we will be in a better position to understand the community, which rests upon an interpretation of a plurality of selves functioning organically as a “higher” type of individual. Neither individuals nor communities are given in our experience as data; they are complex interpretations. Thus, just as we think of an elderly person whose life is full of significant accomplishments and experiences as a “thicker” self, Royce suggests that

the wealthier the memory of a community is, and the vaster the historical processes which it regards as belonging to its life, the richer—other things being equal—is its consciousness that it is a community, that its members are somehow made one in and through and with its own life (38-39).

Far from a simple recording of the past, a memory is an interpretation of past events that is inevitably bound up with a more general interpretation of one’s own life and its meaning. Anticipating the central paradox of Royce’s metaphysics, the essential point is simply that memory is not simply discovered nor is it simply created. Memory of the past is constructed both

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185 Royce (in a way that suggests interesting parallels with various existentialists) claims that the self is a project, insofar as “I am one more or less coherent plan expressed in a life” (41-42). Likewise, Royce claims that the personality is “an essentially ethical category” insofar as it individuates people in light of the unique roles they come to play in the universe. See Josiah Royce, The World and the Individual, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1899), vol. 2, 229.

186 Royce’s crucial turn towards interpretation is not explained in any detail until his third lecture, but we find him using the word at crucial junctures well before he thematizes it.
passively and actively in relation to the present and the future. This active dimension of memory (which is not necessarily conscious), plays a crucial role in constructing both individual selves and the larger communities in which they live. Thus, an individual may come to identify herself not only with her own deeds but also the deeds of her ancestors. In other words, she may come to view her own life and identity as continuous with and thus a part of the lives and identities of her ancestors, thus becoming a part of a community of memory. Royce emphasizes that this process need not involve any sort of mystical attitude or compounding of consciousness. It is scarcely mystical “whenever we consider the history of our country, or of mankind, or of whatever else seems to us to possess a history that is significantly linked with our personal history” (49).

Likewise, hope and the future help constitute individuals and communities in conjunction with memory and the past. For instance, I may reasonably come to identify the future victory (or defeat) of my basketball team (or even my brother’s basketball team) as my own future victory (or defeat), thus helping to constitute a community of expectation.

Given the ways in which communities, just like individuals, depend upon present interpretations of both past and future involving both memory and expectations, Royce offers the following as his first definition of community:

Now when many contemporary and distinct individual selves so interpret, each his own personal life, that each says of an individual past or of a determinate future event or deed: "That belongs to my life;" "That occurred, or will occur, to me," then these many selves may be defined as hereby constituting, in a perfectly definite and objective, but also in a highly significant, sense, a community (50).

James explored this process of ideally extending oneself in Principles, and Royce is extending his work into the realm of social or communal psychology. We all creatively and

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187 Indeed, when Royce writes that “one’s treasures and one's home, one's tools, and the things that one's hands have made, frequently come to be interpreted as part of the self” (PC 2:63), it seems that he at least subconsciously has James’ Principles in mind: “In its widest possible sense, however, a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account” (PP, 279). James’ trouble was that he could never figure out how to unite these various selves apart from descriptions of the spiritual self or
conventionally extend our lives into the past and into the future. Royce’s point is that these pasts and futures may be shared, i.e., interpreted as being somehow held in common and thus forming a community, all without in any way calling into question real individuality or genuine pluralism. In fact, as James also took great pains to show in his discussion of social intimacy, the most valuable, meaningful, and significant communities depend upon a rich plurality of individuals.

Philosophically, the hinge of Royce’s position is that we use the same basic psychological mechanisms to enlarge both our own individual lives and the lives of our communities. The process of interpreting ourselves and our place in a larger world of communities depends heavily upon our ability to interact with and be transformed by our ideals. Speaking practically in terms of our finite and embodied lives, there are limits to how far we can extend the boundaries of our selves and communities, but Royce thinks the fact that we do so is beyond question and without logical limit. Undoubtedly, various saints and sages have claimed to identify with all of the world’s doings and suffering, attainments and tragedies. Precisely how this happens is up for grabs, and we may give any number of personal, social, moral, philosophical, political, or religious explanations. But recognizing the bare fact that it happens is the first step in considering the universal community that Royce is talking about.

Once we begin to recognize that communities and not just individuals are real, we may also speak from the point of view of the community as “a being that attempts to accomplish something in time and through the deeds of its members” (64). Still concerned to distance himself from charges of an out-of-touch idealism, Royce emphasizes that this is a “practical” conception of community that concerns “deeds done, and ends sought or attained” (65). For a community to seek these ends, to accomplish or at least strive towards its ideal purposes through

“self of selves” that tended to sound more like a substantial will or Stoic inner citadel than befitted a psychology without a soul. Royce’s notion of loyalty is a way describing how the demands of a given individual’s various social selves might be unified, effectively giving a more concrete context to James’ spiritual self.
the real deeds of its members, we must also acknowledge a multiplicity of distinct individual selves capable of communication.¹⁸⁸ Finally, in the course of this communication, a plurality of selves must establish at least some past and future events that are identical across or shared among their own various, ideally extended past and future selves.

These are the prerequisites for community, but the most important question for Royce is the extent to which “this consciousness of unity can find expression in an effectively united common life which not only contains common events, but also possesses common deeds and can arouse a common love—a love which passes the love wherewith individuals can love one another” (79). A flourishing community can scarcely be built solely upon distant memories, vague hopes, and the occasional present crisis that draws people together. What is needed is a way of living together in the present while self-consciously cooperating to extend the lives of both the community and its individual members. The increasingly complex worlds of commerce and industry have required ever more cooperation among individuals to make the systems of the world run, but as Royce notes, it is exceedingly difficult for an individual to survey this complex world of cooperative activity and say: “In my own ideally extended past and future that activity, its history, its future, its significance as an event or sequence of events, all have their ideally significant part. That activity, as the cooperation of many in one work, is also my life” (84).

Once again, Royce has noted an inverse proportion between the social complexity of a society (defined perhaps in terms of the division of labor) and the likelihood that a given individual will come to view that complexity as part of his or her ideally extended life. Reiterating his earlier

¹⁸⁸ As we will see in the next chapter, Dewey picks up Royce’s story of community by focusing upon the nature of this communication and how it might be used to constitute various communities, various publics.
point, Royce writes: “In fact, it is the original sin of any highly developed civilization that it breeds cooperation at the expense of a loss of interest in the community” (85).\(^{189}\)

In broad (more Deweyan) strokes, Royce is interested in trying to figure out how we might move from the great society, to the great community.\(^{190}\) A sociologist or social psychologist could certainly talk about how modern corporations and nations behave “as if they were units,” i.e., as societies. But even machines function as units, as Royce notes when he tells us that the work of most modern individuals requires them to “cooperate as the cogs cooperate in the wheels of a mechanism” (88). For us to speak of genuine community, modern individuals would have to come to recognize their own interdependence, creatively direct their own cooperative activities, and come to view the products of their labor as somehow shared.\(^{191}\) While Royce provides little analysis of the modern conditions that produce this predicament, his emphasis upon (which is not to say is analysis of) alienation under modern social and economic conditions is often surprisingly similar to that of the early Marx.\(^{192}\) Royce’s solution, however, is different:

> When love of the community, nourished by common memories, and common hope, both exists and expresses itself in devoted individual lives, it can constantly tend, despite the complexity of the present social order, to keep the consciousness of the community alive. And when this takes place, the identification of the loyal individual self with the life of the community will tend, both in ideal and in feeling, to identify each self not only with the distant past and future of the community, but with the present activities of the whole social body (92).

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\(^{189}\) While Royce can hardly be interpreted as announcing a theological doctrine in earnest when he refers to “original sin” in this passage, the next chapter shows how Dewey further naturalizes Royce’s explanation of this tension in The Public and its Problems (LW 2:235-372).

\(^{190}\) Royce seems to differentiate between society and community in the third lecture of his 1915-16 extension course in ethics when discussing one of the course texts, Graham Wallas’ The Great Society (JRLW 2:93-105). Dewey draws the distinction more precisely in The Public and its Problems.

\(^{191}\) As we will see in the next chapter, this is essentially a very thin version of Dewey’s much thicker reflections upon democracy as a way of life.

\(^{192}\) Royce seems to become even more interested in exploring the social conditions that produce this alienation, or what Royce sometimes calls estrangement, in his 1915-16 extension course in ethics (JRLW 2:75-171). Unfortunately, Royce does not seem to have written out his lectures for the second half of this course, which appears to have treated the problem of alienation as a social, public problem in contrast to the first half of the course, which treated it more as a problem between individuals. My next chapter interprets Dewey as carrying out this work.
In effect, Royce offers us a well-worn (which is not to say overused) religious exhortation, suggesting that we must learn to love one another. His innovative twist is twofold: 1) this love is not simply a love of individuals (although it is also that) but a love of community, i.e. loyalty or what Paul called charity; and 2) this love is not simply an emotion but rather an emotionally colored interpretation of life and its ideal conditions.

Unfortunately, Royce has very little to say about the conditions under which this loyalty, this love of community, would become more prevalent. In fact, it is one of the few moments in his discourse when he hides behind the religious language of mystery:

There remains the fate which Paul so emphasized, and which has determined the whole history of the Christian consciousness: Knowledge of the community is not love of the community. Love, when it comes, comes as from above. Especially is this true of the love of the ideal community of all mankind. I can be genuinely in love with the community only in case I have somehow fallen in love with the universe. The problem of love is human. The solution of the problem, if it comes at all, will be, in its meaning, superhuman, and divine, if there be anything divine (102).

Royce has moved James’ discussion in the philosophy of religion beyond an overly simplistic discussion of the individual alone with God that seems to ultimately leave the individual “alone with his intuitions, his lurid experiences of sudden conversion, or his ineffable mysteries of saintly peace” (104). And while Royce’s claim that the problem of love (understood now as loyalty to the ideal community of humankind) is human even though its solution is divine may be appear like the return of a mystical form of faith, I would argue that he is actually challenging the human vs. divine dichotomy by offering an interpretation of the universal community as itself divine. Royce suggests that his basic method

first, encourages a man to interpret his own individual self in terms of the largest ideal extension of that self in time which his reasonable will can acknowledge as worthy of the aims of his life. Secondly, this method bids a man consider what right he has to interpret the life from which he springs, in the midst of which he now lives, as a life that in any universal sense cooperates with his own and ideally expresses its own meaning so as to meet with his own, and to have a history identical with his own. Thirdly, this method directs us to inquire how far, in the social order to which we unquestionably belong, there are features such
Note how Royce’s metaphysical method is no longer a question of knowledge, which was undoubtedly the focus of his earlier preoccupation with the Absolute. Now, Royce’s entire method hinges upon questions of interpretation. Royce is not asking how I know who I am and what my relations are to the rest of life. He is asking how I ought to interpret who I am, interpret my relations to the broader world of life, and inquire into my grounds for hoping that the social order itself might be transformed into an increasingly self-conscious and intentional community. For the mature Royce, the most important philosophical, religious, and metaphysical problems are not simple questions of fact but rather problems that call for interpretations that are both creative and intelligent. In fact, without interpretations, “there would be neither selves nor communities” (112). Thus, Royce turns explicitly to the question of interpretation by attempting to put into his own words “some still neglected opinions” laid out forty years earlier by Peirce in his “On a New List of Categories” and the essays in the Journal of Speculative Philosophy now referred to as the Cognition Series.

In short, everything of value in human life depends upon the process of interpretation: “Man is an animal that interprets; and therefore man lives in communities, and depends upon them for insight and for salvation” (168). Interpretation thus becomes “the main business of philosophy” (168). Returning to Peirce’s Cognition Series, Royce begins to illustrate the basic psychology of interpretation by examining the case of conscious comparison, one of the simplest forms of interpretation.

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193 If only distantly, Royce’s tripartite method follows the broad outlines of the three questions that Kant poses to human reason: “What can I know?” “What ought I do?” and “What may I hope?”

194 The essays in question are reprinted in Peirce, The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, vol. 1, 1-108. As Royce notes, James also recognized the importance of Peirce’s work, but James was never drawn like Royce was to the issues surrounding interpretation. In other words, James never came to a clear sense that what his philosophy was doing was interpreting the universe, even though we have seen James’ brief mention that A Pluralistic Universe “interprets the universe after a social analogy.”
The problem, whether you call it a theoretical or a practical problem, is not that of linking percepts to their fitting concepts, nor that of paying the bank bills of conception in the gold of the corresponding perceptions. On the contrary, it is the problem either of arbitrating the conflicts; or of bringing to mutual understanding the estrangements; or of uniting in some community the separated lives of these two distinct ideas, of ideas which, when left to themselves, decline to coalesce or to cooperate, or to enter into one life (183).

While Royce is ostensibly talking only about simple cases of comparison, his language of arbitrating conflict, bringing mutual understanding, and uniting in community makes it clear that much larger issues are at stake. Nonetheless, the basic point is that comparison is triadic in structure, so that the act of comparison always involves “the invention or discovery of some third idea, distinct from both the ideas which are to be compared. This third idea, when once found, interprets one of the ideas which are the objects of the comparison, and interprets it to the other, or in the light of the other” (183-84; italics added). Now it would seem that the question of whether this third idea is invented or discovered matters a great deal, but Royce refuses to choose, insisting that interpretation involves both: “The new, the third, the interpreting idea, in these elementary cases of comparison, shows us, as far as it goes, ourselves, and also creates in us a new grade of clearness regarding what we are and what we mean” (187). To borrow Royce’s language from The Sources of Religious Insight, our most important interpretations are a form of insight: “The really creative insight has come from those who first compared and then mediated, who could first see two great ideas at once, and then find the new third idea which mediated between them, and illumined” (192). Here, the mediating idea is found, but it is only found by the creative mediator, people such as prophets, poets, and philosophers.\(^{195}\)

\(^{195}\) As far as Royce is concerned, James never understood interpretation as a third mode of cognition. But if we look at James’ Pragmatism, particular the introductory lecture, it is obvious that what James is in fact doing is engaging in a process of interpreting the “tough-minded” and the “tender-minded” to one another. Indeed, he offers “pragmatism” itself as “a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demand. It can remain religious like the rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts” (P, 23). Of course, pragmatism is not offered as a mere compromise, as a simple balancing of the demands of rationalism and empiricism with each making equal and opposite concessions. Instead, pragmatism is offered as a “third,” as a mediating idea, as an interpretation of philosophy (itself understood as interpretation). As a mediator, James will not be satisfied unless both sides are satisfied that pragmatism is, in some sense, the fulfillment of their own side.
When Royce claims that philosophers have actually devoted themselves “neither to perceiving the world, nor to spinning webs of conceptual theory, but to interpreting the meaning of the civilizations which they have represented” (255), he is in broad agreement with both James (more implicitly) and Dewey (more explicitly) in that all three practiced philosophy broadly as the philosophy of culture, making them more or less public intellectuals. Another way of saying this is that all three aimed at philosophically reconstructing experience. Here, I am most concerned with how they sought to show that religion, understood broadly as our relation to the “unseen” world of ideals, which is also to say the interpreted, or spiritual world, has a permanent home in present, past, and future human experience.

Drawing upon his analysis of comparison, Royce defines the problem of reality in terms of a comparison between two essential ideas, “the idea of present experience and the idea of the goal of experience” (265). These two ideas take different forms across different domains of discourse. For example, ethics contrasts the real and the ideal; metaphysics contrasts appearance and reality; St. Paul contrasts the flesh and the spirit; the Stoic contrasts the life of the fool and the life of the wise; the theorist contrasts the intellectual problem and its solution; etc. Any attempt to interpret the world in a given domain of discourse must take account of both of these antithetical ideas and bring them into some plausible relation: “The question about what the real world is, is simply the question as to what this contrast is and means” (268). Realists and idealists, monists and pluralists, theists and materialists, empiricists and rationalists each have their own way of interpreting the antithesis in a way that strikes them as the best refinement of

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196 James’ role as a public intellectual has already been discussed in the previous chapter and Dewey’s is taken for granted. So far as I am aware, there is very little on Royce as a public intellectual apart from a brief discussion in Kuklick, The Rise of American Philosophy (306-14) and a similar version in Kuklick, A History of Philosophy in America (163-171). Kuklick makes a sharp distinction between James and Royce at Harvard and the more publicly engaged “Chicago School” of John Dewey, Jane Addams, and Herbert Mead. Undoubtedly, there is a difference of degree in terms of public engagement, though I am doubtful that it constitutes such a clear difference in kind.
what James called our “our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means” (P, 9). Royce’s (Peircean) insight is that any interpretation of reality has an irreducibly triadic, which is to say communal, structure. Whether we are speaking about an individual presently interpreting her past to her future self or one scientist interpreting data for the larger scientific community, the “real world,” whatever else it entails, will involve all sorts of communities of interpretation. Royce writes:

In the concrete, then, the universe is a community of interpretation whose life comprises and unifies all the social varieties and all the social communities which, for any reason, we know to be real in the empirical world which our social and our historic sciences study. The history of the universe, the whole order of time, is the history and the order and the expression of this Universal Community” (273).  

Essentially, though without explicitly saying so, Royce is following up on James’ attempt to interpret the universe after a social analogy. The universe itself—which James called “the common socius of us all” (PU, 19)—is just like every other form of individual life insofar as it can be interpreted in terms of its real elements, its ideal elements, and their relation. James’ radical empiricism sought to reclaim the connecting tissues, the internal relations of experience, and Royce pushes James even further to stop implicitly restricting experience to individual experience. Or perhaps better put, in considering the ways in which communities themselves can be interpreted as “higher” individuals, Royce is attempting to recover our experience of our relations to others, what religion often describes in terms of the ways in which the self is bound to others. With such an understanding of human life, religion and ethics no longer appear as subsequent attempts to bind a given and otherwise isolated individual to a religious community or moral code, but as natural expressions of the fact that our lives naturally emerge from relations that commonsense metaphysical individualism covers over or obscures. Royce has effectively taken James’ individual—who is a divided self on at least two fronts: ethically

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197 While Royce makes the connection in a different manner than Peirce, they both make the basic point that reality and community cannot be understood apart from one another. In other words, unlike Cartesianism, pragmatism makes knowledge impossible for an absolutely solitary ego.
between what she does and what she ought to do, and religiously between what she is and ought to be—and given us a divided universe that can be progressively transformed into a universal community through loyalty. Of course, in and through this very process, James’ individual is given both ethical and religious purpose: she will be saved from an aimless life of fleeting and idiosyncratic aims by loyally participating in the universal community of life.
3. Faith at Work: John Dewey’s Greater Democratic Community

This chapter will further explore the interwoven themes of religion and community raised in chapter one and expanded upon in chapter two. By reworking Royce’s religious community as democratic community, Dewey further naturalizes, historicizes, and concretizes Royce’s project of creating/discovering greater community through the development of a new individualism and a thoroughly reconstructed liberalism. Nevertheless, there is still an irreducibly religious dimension to the ethical and political philosophy developed in Dewey’s later works.\(^{198}\) In terms of the scholarly debate that surrounds the role of religion in Dewey’s philosophy, I will be arguing (usually indirectly) with scholars like Michael Eldridge, who suggest that Dewey’s religious project “can be translated back into secular discourse without remainder.”\(^ {199}\) To his credit, Eldridge offers a very careful reading of both Dewey generally and his philosophy of religion specifically, but I will aim to show that he is nonetheless wrong to claim that “[s]ecularity is the condition and enhanced secularity the consequence of [Dewey’s] commitment to intelligent action.”\(^ {200}\) Like Steven Rockefeller, Victor Kestenbaum, and (most recently) Melvin Rogers, I insist that Dewey’s philosophy of religion remains a crucial aspect of his ethical and political philosophy more generally.\(^ {201}\)

\(^{198}\) While it would be appropriate to consider Dewey’s entire corpus, I will focus on his later works (as defined by the periodization employed by the Center for Dewey Studies in the publication of Dewey’s Collected Works) to keep the discussion manageable.

\(^{199}\) Michael Eldridge, *Transforming Experience: John Dewey's Cultural Instrumentalism* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), 10. Given that Eldridge consistently rails against the tendency “to read Dewey in a reductonistic, dichotomous, uncontextual way,” I find it particularly ironic that he wants us to completely substitute the aesthetic dimension of experience for the religious dimension of experience in Dewey’s philosophy. Of course, Eldridge does recognize that he is reading Dewey against himself.

\(^{200}\) Ibid., 12. Eldridge is undoubtedly correct to note that “too many have mistakenly thought that what Dewey was taking about when he used the terms faith, piety, and God was—more or less—what other people are talking about when they use these terms” (11). However, he is wrong to think that this talk should be completely eliminated in favor of secular terms.

Moreover, these links among ethics, politics, and the philosophy of religion are inevitable, even when moving beyond interpretive claims concerning classical pragmatism. Put simply, if we are going to ask the ethical question of how we should live or the political question of how we should govern ourselves, we must ask the question of who “we” are, which is a question of all of our relationships as well as a question of what Dewey calls “shared experience” or, more religiously, “communion.” Attempts to answer such a question (no matter how tentatively) also involve the use of imagination, which enables us to interpret ourselves as parts of larger unseen wholes that outstrip our immediate experience of them (i.e., what Royce explored in terms of religious insight). Such attempts necessarily involve what James called “the mood of faith,”202 which produces overbeliefs that, when worked out systemically, provide the material for a metaphysics. So while Dewey’s philosophical attempt to substitute the quest for meaning in place of the quest for certainty does eschew dogmatism, it depends nonetheless upon the religious dimensions of experience.

Dewey’s Political “Translation” of Royce’s Community: The Problem of the Public

It is well-known that William James served as one of John Dewey’s chief philosophical inspirations, since Dewey’s autobiographical essay—“From Absolutism to Experimentalism”—mentions James’ Principles as “the great exception to what was said about no very fundamental vital influence issuing from books” (LW 5:157). While it would be misleading to posit Josiah Royce as such a “vital influence,” there is no doubt that community, the centerpiece of Royce’s

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202 The phrase is from James’ 1874 letter to the editor, “The Mood of Science and the Mood of Faith” ECR, 115-117.
philosophy, is also central to Dewey’s work. Admittedly, this connection is thematic rather than causal, but another reason that it has only infrequently been explored by scholars is the fact that Dewey’s earlier published reviews of Royce’s philosophy tended to be rather critical.

However, in a manuscript from 1930 that remained unpublished until 2001, Dewey offers a clear (though qualified) endorsement of Royce’s philosophy, precisely insofar as it valorizes community:

I cannot accept [Royce’s] theory that the natural world is nothing in itself except the outer show of personal centers of experience. But that fact does not impair the moral and religious lesson that, as it seems to me, is to be drawn from his teaching. The obdurate and opaque physical world is at least to be treated by us as a means of the realization of a genuine community of living, as a servant to be used in the “task of organizing here on earth a worthy social life” (SV 1:50; italics added).

As we have seen in previous chapters, the pragmatism of both James and Royce constitutes a form of ethical idealism that treats the raw material of nature as something to be shaped by human hands in keeping with a creative and imaginative vision. As far back into pragmatism’s prehistory as Emerson and Henry James Sr., this ethical and political task has been understood in religious terms, and as we will see, Dewey is no exception to this tradition. However, because Dewey believed that Royce’s metaphysical idealism prevented the full development of this “moral and religious lesson” that the real world exists to be treated “as a means of the realization of a genuine community of living,” Dewey portrays his own career as

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203 In a 1915 address that laid out his own intellectual autobiography, Royce claimed: “When I review this whole process [of my intellectual development], I strongly feel that my deepest motives and problems have centred about the Idea of the Community, although this idea has only come gradually to my clear consciousness.” Josiah Royce, The Hope of the Great Community (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 129.

204 For a brief overview of Dewey’s comments on Royce’s philosophy, see Frank M. Oppenheim, "Dewey on Royce: A Recently Discovered MS, and a Response," Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society 37, no. 2 (2001).


206 The phrase from Royce that Dewey quotes is from Royce, The Spirit of Modern Philosophy, 6.

207 Dewey writes: “I have had to come to the conclusion that the idealistic tradition from which Royce started continued to hamper him and prevented a full development of [his] own intrinsic genius” (SV 1: 50).
moving from Absolutism to Experimentalism.\textsuperscript{208} In contrast to Royce who holds “that this
desirable life is already and eternally realized,” Dewey argues that

the promotion of such a life measures the value of our knowing and our doing, and that our final human
responsibility is to so use the natural world, and its obstacles as well as its resources, in furthering the
development of a freer and fuller, a more transparent and intimate, community of life here on earth” (SV
1:50).

In short, Dewey claims that we should “read value where Royce writes reality” (SV 1:50), just as
James suggested that God might be treated as an ideal “last” rather than as an ontological
“first.”\textsuperscript{209} Of course, it is certainly possible to interpret Royce’s later work in precisely this way,
as his old conception of Absolute seems to give way to the new ideal of the Universal
Community.\textsuperscript{210} In any case, Dewey is certainly wrong to claim that Royce (at least the later
Royce) believed “that the real world is already nothing but a unified community of personal
minds and experiences” (SV 1:50; italics added).\textsuperscript{211} Nonetheless, Dewey agrees completely
when it comes to the fundamental importance of “organizing here on earth a worthy social life.”
He therefore writes:

To understand Royce is to restore the connection between the particular problem he is treating at a given
time and the […] the world of individual spirits communicating without obstruction or barrier in a
community of mutual understanding, of free loyalty and complete sympathy (SV 1:47).

In Dewey’s own work, the theme of “furthering the development of a freer and fuller, a
more transparent and intimate, community of life here on earth” is most clearly foregrounded in

\textsuperscript{208} Kestenbaum notes that far too many scholars of Dewey work uncritically assume the “from-to structure”
represented in Dewey’s “From Absolutism to Experimentalism” as an overarching interpretive framework,
effectively obscuring many of the nuanced continuities across the span of Dewey’s career. Kestenbaum also
highlights the fact that in this very same essay, Dewey himself admits: “The philosopher […] that I became as I
moved away from German idealism, is too much the self that I still am and is still too much in the process of change

\textsuperscript{209} See James’ lecture “Pragmatism and Humanism” in \textit{Pragmatism}.

\textsuperscript{210} The precise nature of the shift in Royce’s late metaphysics is debatable, and Dewey himself does not claim to
have fully understood the writings of the later Royce. See Oppenheim, "Dewey on Royce,” 208; 217-18.

\textsuperscript{211} In \textit{Pragmatism}, James suggests that the basic shortcoming of positivism is that: “Ideals appear as inert by-
products of physiology; what is higher is explained by what is lower and treated forever as a case of 'nothing but'—
nothing but something else of a quite inferior sort” (P, 15). Dewey seems to think that Royce’s metaphysical
idealism simply makes the equal and opposite mistake of reducing the richness of “lower” phenomena like
individual minds and experiences to “nothing but” expressions of the Absolute.
The Public and its Problems, published in 1927, only a few years before the comments on Royce just considered. Having applied Dewey’s interpretive advice in the previous chapter, we have seen how Royce’s vision of this ideal community was conditioned by his context, and how he consistently attempted to apply his idealism to historical problems surrounding the creation of flourishing communities, from his essay on provincialism to his later essay on international insurance. Nonetheless, whether we view it as accurate or not, Royce’s idealism has generally been understood as being “out of touch.” And while scholars are scarcely unanimous in evaluating Dewey’s The Public and its Problems as a success, they are undoubtedly inclined to consider it as a genuine work of political philosophy, a genre that James and Royce left almost completely unexplored.212

However, if we take the block quote above and “read value where Royce writes reality” (SV 1:50), The Public and Its Problems appears as a work that is committed to constructing a “world of individual spirits communicating without obstruction or barrier in a community of mutual understanding, of free loyalty and complete sympathy” (SV 1:47). James, Royce, and Dewey are united in holding that such a community is an invaluable ideal, however much they may disagree when it comes to understanding its metaphysical status. But whereas Royce’s The Problem of Christianity gives a great deal of consideration to the metaphysical status of the universal community and very little consideration to how we might actually go about bringing it about, Dewey’s The Public and Its Problems is determined not to fall into what Royce saw as the typically “American” trap of “suppos[ing] great reforms to be possible merely through good

212 Recall the charge by Bruce Kuklick that Royce and James failed to provide a meaningful and sustained philosophical reflection on the important political issues of their day. Kuklick claims that both James and Royce failed to sufficiently analyze the economic and political roots of America’s actual social problems, leading Kuklick to conclude that they were “ultimately self-satisfied and uncritical of the social order.” Kuklick, A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000, 313.
resolutions.” So rather than begin with the ideal of community and proceed to offer a moral exhortation with the hope of gaining some political traction, Dewey begins with a fairly technical political philosophy. Of course, Dewey ends by examining the ethico-religious dimensions of “community” and “democracy” (thus continuing in the spirit of Royce’s project), but he is determined to avoid the way in which Royce was “hampered” by the starting point of his idealistic metaphysics.

In this respect, we might say that Dewey reverses the direction of what is often referred to as “The American Experiment.” As suggested in my introduction, James, Royce, and Dewey were all driven by a desire to revitalize the “American” community that cannot be historically understood apart from the force of religious aspirations to fashion particular kinds of communities in the “New World.” But whereas the traditional approach was to establish a preconceived notion of the proper form of community based upon a supernaturally revealed plan, Dewey’s mature philosophy works in the opposite direction. He begins by examining the organic and cultural conditions for the possibility of genuine community under distinctively modern circumstances, and only then does he turn to consider the religious principles suitable to producing such conditions. This creates the illusion that religion is nothing more than an afterthought for Dewey, but this is true only in the most narrowly literal sense. After writing deeply religious things in his early works, religion does seem to disappear in his middle

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214 Dewey claims that, given Royce’s problematic starting point, “the problems were wrongly stated and the solutions therefore unacceptable” (SV 1: 50).
215 The phrase is very common, but I have been unable to establish its original source, so I will settle for citing a standard high school history textbook that features the phrase as its title: Steven M. Gillon and Cathy D. Matson, The American Experiment: A History of the United States, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2009).
216 The importance of religion in Dewey’s early works is undisputed, so will offer but a single passage from “My Pedagogic Creed”: “I believe that every teacher should realize the dignity of his calling; that he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social order and the securing of the right social growth. I believe that in this way the teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God” (EW 5:95).
works, but it undoubtedly returns after he begins to develop his mature social philosophy in his later works. Why? I would suggest that it is because Dewey came to realize that religion was no less powerful and necessary a motor for social change than it was for James or Royce. As Dewey worked to develop a new individualism and a reconstructed liberalism, he recognized that “the lack of secure objects of allegiance, without which individuals are lost, is especially striking in the case of the liberal” (LW 11:70). Describing the present “crisis in liberalism,” Dewey writes:

[A]fter early liberalism had done its work, society faced a new problem, that of social organization. Its work was to liberate a group of individuals, representing the new science and the new forces of productivity, from customs, ways of thinking, institutions, that were oppressive of the new modes of social action, however useful they may have been in their day. The instruments of analysis, of criticism, of dissolution, that were employed were effective for the work of release. But when it came to the problem of organizing the new forces and the individuals whose modes of life they radically altered into a coherent social organization, possessed of intellectual and moral directive power, liberalism was well-nigh impotent (LW 11:39; italics added).

In other words, after naturalizing Royce’s ideal religious community as democratic community, Dewey was left without a force capable of realizing the ideal. To borrow words from historian David Chappell, “[Dewey] came to believe that liberals could appropriate the inspiration they needed from religion, if only they changed their way of thinking about religion.” Dewey begins developing this alternative way of thinking in his reflections upon piety near the end of *The Quest for Certainty* in 1929, but they do not come to fruition until *A Common Faith* in 1934, just before the 1935 publication of *Liberalism and Social Action* (the source of quotations mentioned earlier in this paragraph).

But all of this is to get ahead of ourselves, or at least the story developed in this chapter, which proceeds more or less chronologically. Suffice it to say for now that Dewey did not seem to see the need for religion until he realized just how difficult it would be to actually accomplish the social transformations that his philosophy was calling for. However, he remained methodologically convinced that before he could address the potential power that religious ideals

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might contribute to Royce’s “task of organizing here on earth a worthy social life” (qtd. in SV 1:50), he had to provide an analysis of the real problems and obstacles presently working against such an organization.

Returning, then, to The Public and its Problems, Dewey begins with the pressing political problem of the public recently set forth by Walter Lippmann. In Public Opinion and The Phantom Public, Lippmann argued that the media and the social science of the day were inadequate to the task of forming a sufficiently intelligent public opinion for political democracy. In a 1925 review, Dewey relates what he takes to be Lippmann’s position to be as follows: “The positive function of the public is [...] to intervene occasionally upon the work of the [political] insiders, by taking the part of some of the insiders against others [...] to learn to throw its weight to this or the other inside group” (LW 2:216). Then and now, this is a fairly accurate description of how the public functions. Much of what passes for public debate amounts to throwing one’s weight to one side or the other (conservative or liberal, Republican or Democrat, etc.). But can and indeed ought the public be more than this?

At the heart of Dewey’s inquiry, there is a basic distinction between “facts” and the meaning of facts. In all spheres, philosophy is for Dewey a quest for meaning, not merely truth. Put more bluntly, Dewey is still an idealist (ethically rather than metaphysically speaking). Lippmann has his facts straight—the public actually is a phantom—but the

219 While admitting that “making such a statement is dangerous,” Dewey writes: “Meaning is wider in scope as well as more precious in value than is truth, and philosophy is occupied with meaning rather than with truth” (LW 3:4).
220 As Kestenbaum notes, the standard view of Dewey’s idealism “holds that having passed through his ‘ideal period’ from 1882 to 1903, Dewey gradually but decisively turns away from idealism.” Kestenbaum, The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal, 1. Like Kestenbaum, I believe that Dewey recast rather than rejected idealism. In his 1925 essay, “The Development of American Pragmatism,” Dewey portrays his own instrumentalism as a critical continuation of James’ “meliorism” and “moral idealism,” which were destructive of “monistic rationalism and for absolutism in all its forms” (LW 2:14). Even late in his career, as in the following statement from 1940, Dewey
significance of this fact demands interrogation and interpretation. The interpretation should *not* be the kind that Dewey took Royce to be offering, in which the messy disagreement and discord of political life is somehow swept up in the reality of the Absolute. Nonetheless, Dewey is “profoundly grateful to [Royce] for the thoroughgoing way in which he has asserted the communicative and participating nature of experience and mind, and has held up its continuous expansion as the ideal goal of both knowledge and action” (SV 1:50). Thus, Dewey argues that publics and their instrumentalities, including the apparatus of government, must be continuously rediscovered and democratically reconstructed (LW 2:255-56). The cynicism of Lippmann is effectively replaced by Dewey’s pragmatist faith in the possibilities of human self-transformation.

Such a faith is the topic of this chapter, but Dewey (even more so than Royce) understood the fact that one must intelligently create or discover adequate means if one is to sincerely will the ends of radical political transformation. *The Public and its Problems* thus repeatedly stresses the importance of using *communication* as a means of identifying and forging common, public aims. For Dewey, there is no sense in making a historical claim that isolated, asocial human individuals eventually decided to come together and form a social contract, but there is a great deal of sense in asking how human individuals actually form the communities that they do through observation and communication. At the most basic level, human beings are able to focus their attention upon the consequences of associated action. All actions have consequences, but

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continued to advocate the ethical importance of idealism: “Idealism in its moral sense is a component of naturalistic humanism” (SV 1:108).

221 Dewey makes this point most clearly in “The Ethics of Democracy,” one of his earliest works from 1888: “The essence of the ‘Social Contract’ theory is not the idea of the formulation of a contract; it is the idea that men are mere individuals, without any social relations until they form a contract. The method by which they get out of their individualistic condition is not the important matter; rather this is the fact, that they are in an individualistic condition out of which they have to be got” (EW: 1:231). According to Dewey, this theory of men as “isolated non-social atoms” has been replaced by the theory of man as an intrinsically “social organism” (231), so that even the private sphere is to be understood as a thoroughly *social* sphere.
not all consequences impinge upon parties other than the agents directly involved. Thus, Dewey draws a functional distinction between two different kinds of consequences: those affecting the persons immediately involved—i.e., the private sphere—and those affecting others as well—i.e., the public sphere. Whether we are cognizant of them or not, we already have shared interests, concerns, and crises. We are in countless respects suffering and otherwise being affected by the consequences of actions undertaken by others. Dewey’s name for such a community of interest is “The Public,” and the legitimacy of any government depends upon how truly its representatives act in behalf of (and not just on behalf of) the public (257).

The trouble is that the public has grown exponentially in size as the modern world has become increasingly interconnected and interdependent at the purely functional level. To provide a sense of this dramatic change, Dewey quotes Woodrow Wilson:

To-day the every-day relationships of men are largely with great impersonal concerns, with organisations, not with other individual men. Now this is nothing short of a new social age, a new era of human relationships, a new stage-setting for the drama of life (qtd. on 295). 222

Interpreting this quote from Wilson, Dewey writes: “[T]he new forms of combined action due to the modern economic régime control present politics […] ‘The new age of human relationships’ has no political agencies worthy of it. The democratic public is still largely inchoate and unorganized” (302-03). This is the pressing problem of community that Dewey thought Royce addressed only obliquely. 223 Dewey aims to address it by way of a response to Lippmann’s radical doubt regarding the very possibility of there ever being a real public again in modern society, since most people do not feel like their vote makes any difference, and political

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223 Indeed, it is interesting that both Royce and Dewey take their point of departure for a historical understanding of the twentieth century problem of community from Wallas’ The Great Society. While there are no extant lecture notes, we do know that Royce treated alienation as a social, historical, and public problem while using Wallas as a textbook in the second half of the extension course in ethics that he offered in the final two years of his life. In comparison, Dewey had a great deal of time to work out the problem of community in a socio-historical way.
machinery often conceals the fact that “big business rules the governmental roost in any case” (309).

But rather than follow Lipmann’s interpretation of these disconcerting facts, Dewey seeks to ground his radical faith in the capacity of persons across countless forms of human boundaries to constitute themselves into effective coalitions. Dewey appears naïve only to those who fail to perceive that he reinterprets the public itself (the fact of its insubstantial, largely illusory character) as, first and foremost, a problem:

What, after all, is the public under present conditions? What are the reasons for its eclipse? What hinders it from finding and identifying itself? […] What has happened to the Public in the century and a half since the theory of political democracy was urged with such assurance and hope? (313).

Wherever there are extensive, indirect, and serious consequences following upon large-scale forms of associated action, there are the necessary (though by no means sufficient) grounds for a public because there is a common interest in controlling these consequences. The trouble is that this is not generally apparent because the overwhelming complexity of the modern world has made it difficult to identify our common interests. Individuals do not understand, much less control, the bulk of the forces governing their lives (which is not a slight against their individual intelligence, so much as a testament to just how complicated and interconnected the world is, as well as an indictment of the present state of more socialized forms of intelligence, including the educational system).224

Dewey has effectively “translated” Royce’s two-worlds approach to metaphysics and reinstated the create/discover paradox on the practical level. In terms of what Royce called “The World of Description,” we already have a great multitude of common interests, and as Dewey suggests, these form a solid theoretical foundation for speaking of the public. However, we do

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224 As Dewey writes: “The indictments that are drawn against the intelligence of individuals are in truth indictments of a social order that does not permit the average individual to have access to the rich store of the accumulated wealth of mankind in knowledge, ideas and purposes. There does not now exist the kind of social organization that even permits the average human being to share the potentially available social intelligence” (LW 11:38).
not sufficiently understand, realize, or appreciate our common needs, desires, and sufferings. That is, our interests do not actually enter into a shared “World of Appreciation.” Dewey’s emphasis on communication is intended to bridge this gap, precisely by concretizing and historicizing Royce’s problem of community, but as we will see, the religious language of communion does not drop out.

**The Great Community as a Function of Communication and Communion**

According to Dewey, the pressing political need is for “non-political forces [to] organize themselves to transform existing political structures” (LW 2:315). Individuals and local face-to-face communities such as schools and churches must intelligently reconstruct the political structure in order to gain democratic control over the economic forces that dominate present-day political culture. Dewey acknowledges that this task is exceptionally difficult given the fact that most people’s lives are so wrapped up in work (with the remaining time going to compensatory amusements) that political participation has little draw. But instead of supposing, as Lippmann did, the impossible ideal of an omnicompetent citizen, Dewey is advocating the ideal of a citizenry sufficiently alert and informed to know what is being done in their name and also what is being done to them (though mostly behind their backs) by corporations and other parties. Of course, Dewey realizes that even this would be a remarkable feat: “Who is sufficient unto these things? Men feel that they are caught in the sweep of forces too vast to understand or master. Thought is brought to a standstill and action paralyzed” (319).

Still, Dewey believes that he can at least name the conversion that must take place: the Great Society must become a Great Community. There is little doubt that the religious language

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225 Dewey writes: “There can be no public without full publicity in respect to all consequences which concern it” (339).
of conversion is being deliberately deployed by Dewey. Having restricted himself in the opening chapters of *The Public and Its Problems* to the strictly political meaning of “democracy,” Dewey turns towards the wider ethico-religious significance of this word in the fifth chapter, “Search for the Great Community.”

The idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea than can be exemplified in the state even at its best. To be realized it must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion. [...] Governmental institutions are but a mechanism for securing to an idea channels of effective operation (325).

While criticisms (such as Lippmann’s) of the political machinery are deeply relevant, “the believers” in democracy or those to whom Dewey also refers as “the faithful” rightly insist that the idea of democracy must not be reduced to its external organs and structures (326). These people may not exactly be James’ “believers” or “Royce’s “faithful,” but they do share a common belief in the reality of the unseen, i.e., a belief in the saving power of democracy as “a wider and fuller idea” than its political manifestations suggest.

Dewey therefore suggests that we interrogate the very idea of democracy in order to critically reconstruct its political instrumentalities and agencies (325). The Socratic character of Deweyan democracy is rarely noted, but it is central to his task. He is trying to help us realize that we do not know the practical meaning of the most basic terms in our philosophical lexicon. Hence, in an effort to illuminate the ideal of democracy, Dewey writes:

> From the standpoint of the individual, [democracy] consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs [...] From the standpoint

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226 Dewey initially deemed the wider meanings of the term democracy to be “of such a broad social and moral import as to be irrelevant to our immediate theme” (286).


228 This parallels Royce’s insistence that we not mistake the “visible church” for the “invisible church” or the ideal of Universal Community. Or, to borrow language from William James, the widest sense of “democracy” lies in the direction of “the unseen,” “the more,” or even “the vague.”
of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the
interests and goods which are common (328). 229

Communities are individuals in association with one another, though in more constitutive and
fundamental respects than is ordinarily appreciated. In turn, individuals are always already
participants in the complexly entangled associations of their everyday lives. Regarded as an idea,
then, democracy is “the idea of community life itself, […] so that] clear consciousness of a
communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the ideal of democracy” (328).

Of course, we must not use the vagueness of our most valuable ideals, including
democracy, to avoid the difficult task of finding the mechanisms for realizing them. Dewey is, at
one and the same time: 1) stressing the way in which our most worthwhile ideals outrun our own
capacity to understand how they might be embodied and 2) insisting that any worthwhile
attention to ideal ends must not distract our attention from the need to develop means for their
realization. And since our discussion of Royce’s philosophy of community in the previous
chapter has already highlighted the first of these two dimensions, this section will focus upon
Dewey’s consideration of the second. More specifically, we will examine how Dewey
understands the problem of community as a problem of communication, though the ethico-
religious language of “communion” as a way of glossing “shared experience” never drops out:
“Communication can alone create a great community. Our Babel is not one of tongues but of the
signs and symbols without which shared experience is impossible” (324-25).

A return to the British social psychologist Graham Wallas, from whom Dewey takes the
term “Great Society” will help us understand the transformation Dewey has in mind. In 1914,
Wallas coined “The Great Society” as a sociological parallel to the “The Great Industry,” which
was being used by economists to represent the accelerating industrialization of the world over the

229 In the final section as well as the final chapter, I will explore the fact that Dewey explicitly links democracy and liberation.
last century. For Wallas, the difficulties that accompany the new forms of social association (e.g., the modern corporation) are a fact, as are the distant and largely unintended consequences of these forms of association, including the submergence of the individual. For Dewey, what remains is the task of making meaning out of this dramatic change in social scale by intelligently converting the Great Society into the Great Community, which is inextricably related to converting the old individualism into a new individualism. Genuine individuality is not an innate possession, nor a matter of mere self-sufficiency, nor a simple matter of uniqueness. Individuality is a matter of becoming an individual through associated activities, shared meanings, and common values. A given person can’t help but be social; human beings are social animals. But the possibility of becoming a genuine individual (in Dewey’s technical sense) depends upon being a member of a genuine community (in Dewey’s technical sense). With his lifelong interest in education understood as continuing growth (which we might also put in terms of courageous and imaginative self-overcoming), Dewey insists that each individual must learn to “develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community […] who contributes to a further conversion of organic powers into human resources and values” (332; italics added). Of course, community (like individuality) always remains an ongoing task:

The work of conversion of the physical and organic phase of associated behavior into a community of action saturated and regulated by mutual interest in shared meanings […] does not occur all at once nor completely. At any given time, it sets a problem rather than marks a settled achievement (331; italics added).

While such passages may not sound much like James’ or Royce’s reflection upon religion, Dewey’s notion of “conversion” is still related to what James understood in terms of the saving power of a wider self (cf., Dewey’s new individualism as discussed further in the following

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section) and what Royce understood as the saving power of loyal participation in the larger life of communities (cf., Dewey’s new liberalism as elaborated in the final section).

In other words, community (like individuality) is an *ideal*, and its realization thus presents not just an *economic* and *political* but also an *ethical* and *religious* problem for Dewey. The *ethico-religious* sense of conversion being employed by Dewey is unmistakable in the first sentence of the following passage:

> The old Adam, the unregenerate element in human nature, persists. It shows itself wherever the method obtains of attaining results by use of force instead of by the method of communication and enlightenment. It manifests itself more subtly, pervasively and effectually when knowledge and the instrumentalities of skill which are the product of communal life are employed in the service of wants and impulses which have not themselves been modified by reference to a shared interest (332).

While no *explicit* reference is made to the theological notion of “original sin,” the mention of “the Old Adam” leaves little doubt that Dewey is still thinking conversion in at least partially religious terms. In fact, the continuation of the passage just quoted is reminiscent of Royce’s claim that “it is the original sin of any highly developed civilization that it breeds cooperation at the expense of a loss of interest in the community” (PC 2:85):

> To the doctrine of ‘natural’ economy which held that commercial exchange would bring about such an interdependence that harmony would automatically result, Rousseau gave an adequate answer in advance. He pointed out that interdependence provides just the situation which makes it possible and worth while for the stronger and able to exploit others for their own ends, to keep others in a state of subjection where they can be utilized as animated tools (332).

Dewey perceptively noticed that the rapid development of increasingly sophisticated technological tools of communication has *not* led to an increase in community, since “no amount of aggregated collective action of itself constitutes a community” (330). Well before

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231 Dewey defines “an ideal in the only intelligible sense of an ideal” as “the tendency and movement of some thing which exists carried to its final limit, viewed as completed, perfected” (LW 2:328).

232 Actually, as Dewey’s later work *Freedom and Culture* clarifies, the problem of realizing ideals is as wide as the problem of reconstructing culture itself, with ethical, political, legal, religious, artistic, scientific, economic, and educational dimensions (to name only some of the most prominent). See LW 13:65-188, esp. 118.

233 I will not be exploring the philosophy of technology that accompanies Dewey’s ethical and political philosophy, so I simply refer the reader to the following substantial treatment: Larry A. Hickman, *John Dewey's Pragmatic Technology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Chapter 7, “Publics as Products” is particularly relevant to the subject of community.
Marshall McLuhan argued that individualistic print culture would inevitably be brought to an end by a new “electronic interdependence” leading to the creation of the “global village,”

Dewey pointed out the crucial flaw of parallel doctrines claiming that increasing economic interdependence would certainly bring about social harmony. The mere possession of more sophisticated tools of communication or the sheer rise of global forms of industry do not make it any less likely that some humans will use many other forms of life (including other humans) as “animated tools.” In other words, new forms of technology and industry do not magically render ethico-religious “conversion” unnecessary. Nevertheless (and this marks Dewey’s advance over Royce), we cannot simply forgo the analysis of the influence of material conditions that continue to operate even when “we refuse to note them, or […] smear them over with sentimental idealizations” (333). Instead, we must attend to fruits as well as roots, and this means that we must examine the change brought about by the human capacity to perceive and direct the course of events through communication. Admittedly, communication itself does not accomplish anything miraculous; vast oppressions require sophisticated communication. The problem of constructing “The Great Community” out of the raw materials of “The Great Society” is therefore a question of ensuring that the experience, perception, communication, and direction of the consequences of organic interdependence are widely and equitably shared.

The classical theory of the democratic state relied on two notions that have proven misguided in light of the course of historical events: “that each individual is of himself equipped with the intelligence needed, under the operation of self-interest, to engage in political affairs; and that general, suffrage, frequent elections of officials and majority rule are sufficient to ensure the responsibility of elected rulers to the desires and interests of the public” (334). At bottom,

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both of these notions rested upon what Lippmann called the idea of the “omnicompetent” individual, which flies in the face of the fact that “man acts from crudely intelligized emotion and from habit rather than from rational consideration” (334). Rational knowledge is not the natural possession of each individual but rather “depends upon tools and methods socially transmitted, developed and sanctioned” (334). This means that “a thing is fully known only when it is published, shared, socially accessible” (345). The “problem of knowledge” is not the problem of how an isolated, individual consciousness can successfully grasp the objective world, but rather the problem of how the methods and fruits of inquiry can be most fully and widely shared, which takes us to Dewey’s re-working of Royce’s religious notion of communion:

We have but touched lightly and in passing upon the conditions which must be fulfilled if the Great Society is to become a Great Community; a society in which the ever-expanding and intricately ramifying consequences of associated activities shall be known in the full sense of that word, so that an organized, articulate Public comes into being. The highest and most difficult kind of inquiry and a subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive art of communication must take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe life into it. When the machine age has thus perfected its machinery it will be a means of life and not its despotic master. Democracy will come into its own, for democracy is a name for a life of free and enriching communion (350; italics added).

Some of the most famous contemporary philosophers inspired by Dewey (and other pragmatists such as Peirce and Mead) have explored the fundamental ethical and political importance of communication as part of their discourse ethics.235 Likewise, contemporary scholar-activists such as Robert McChesney have applied Dewey’s reflections to the ongoing problem of corporate control of mass media in the contexts of formally democratic states.236 In other words, many scholars have effectively endorsed Dewey’s statement in Experience and Nature that “of all things, communication is the most wonderful,” but far fewer have gone on to explore what Dewey means when he goes on to say “that the fruit of communication should be

participation, sharing, is a wonder by the side of which transubstantiation pales” (LW 1:132). Or, returning to the last line from the block quote above, there has been considerably less reflection on democracy as “a name for a life of free and enriching communion.”237

Herein lies one of the chief values of interpreting Dewey’s project alongside Royce’s, for this allows us to see that Dewey is not interested in social inquiry and communication simply for their own sake. Rather, inquiry and communication are part of the larger task of developing shared experience—“the greatest of human goods” (LW 1:157)—which Dewey often describes by using religious terms such as “communion” or even “transubstantiation,” though his usage of such terms is anything but traditional. Admittedly, this strand of Dewey’s thought is not fully developed in *A Public and Its Problems*, which is more focused on the instrumental (rather than final) aspects of communication. But as Dewey reminds us in *Experience and Nature*, “the great evil lies in separating instrumental and final functions,” and communication functions both ways.

Communication is uniquely instrumental and uniquely final. It is instrumental as liberating us from the otherwise overwhelming pressure of events and enabling us to live in a world of things that have meaning. It is final as a sharing in the objects and arts precious to a community, a sharing whereby meanings are enhanced, deepened and solidified in the sense of communion (LW 1:159).

Dewey’s reflections on community hinge upon both communication and communion. And when they are combined to form genuinely shared experience “there exists an intelligence which is the method and reward of the common life, and a society worthy to command affection, admiration, and loyalty” (LW 1:161). The references to “common life” and especially to “loyalty” make the religious resonance with Royce’s work clear. The difference is that when it comes to Royce’s Absolute or Universal Community, Dewey has “read value where Royce writes reality” (SV 1:50).

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237 Any consideration of why there has been less reflection on this aspect of Dewey’s philosophy will be speculative, but we would do well to consider Dewey’s own words: “Skepticism becomes the mark and even the pose of the educated mind. It is the more influential because it is no longer directed against this and that article of the older creeds but is rather a bias against any kind of far-reaching ideas, and a denial of systematic participation on the part of such ideas in the intelligent direction of affairs” (LW 5:276).
Finding the Lost Individual: Dewey’s Naturalization of Royce’s Fall Narrative

Even at the level of local face-to-face communities, there has been an increase in society accompanied by a decrease in community. Modern economic conditions make for increasingly dense yet mobile urban populations that mandate an accompanying increase in planning and organization. But none of this necessarily translates into community, for this requires communication and communion, as articulated in the section above. Since Dewey locates the most robust forms of human happiness in stable and enduring ties with others, he wonders how much of our present discontent and need for relatively mindless amusement stems from “the void caused by the loosening of the bonds which hold persons together in immediate community of experience” (LW 2:369).

Published in 1930, Individualism Old and New constitutes an exploration of this loosening that has produced what Dewey calls “The Lost Individual.” In previous chapters, we examined much of the pre-history of Dewey’s lost individual through: 1) James’ discussion of “the divided self” to be saved by a particular kind of socialization in Varieties and 2) Royce’s portrayal of “the detached individual” to be saved by the Universal Community in The Problem of Christianity. Dewey’s philosophy further naturalizes the historical and economic production of the divided, detached, and lost individual in order to develop new resources for personal unification through social reconstruction. Dewey begins with an analysis of how our “money culture” has grown to be the unofficial religion of the United States. While we practice a relentless economic materialism, we preach “the loudest and most frequently professed [idealism] the world has ever heard” (LW 5:47).238 Churches offer little resistance to this

238 This divorce between practice and preaching is directly parallel to the analysis Royce developed in 1899, thirty years earlier: “On Certain Limitations of the Thoughtful Public in America” (RQP, 109-165).
unofficial religion, generally giving it their seal of approval by endorsing financial success as a marker of God’s grace and adopting the methods and models of advertising and the business world. The overall result is a deep-seated division and contradiction between what we say and what we do, so that “the more we depart from [our older creeds] in fact, the more loudly we proclaim them” (48).

While this division is particularly noticeable at present if one is willing to take an honest look, Dewey recognizes the fact that this split is an outgrowth of the duality of our tradition itself. Dewey recognizes the fact that “the genuinely spiritual element of our tradition”—i.e., “the ideal of equality of opportunity and of freedom for all, without regard to birth and status”—has only gained reality through “a novel combination of the machine and money” (49). Increasingly, this ideal of a rich interplay between individuality and community is “obscured and crowded out” by a pecuniary material culture that justifies inequality, oppression, and the destruction of genuine individuality (49).

This problem is particularly pressing given that “Americanism” is now conquering the world through quantification, mechanization, and standardization (52). But just as with the crisis of the public, Dewey is unwilling to grant finality to the present state of affairs. The question is how we might pass through and transcend the internal and external divisions that increasingly mark our lives. So just as The Public and Its Problems sought to outline how we might convert “The Great Society” to “The Great Community,” Individualism Old and New announces: “The problem of constructing a new individuality consonant with the objective conditions under which we live is the deepest problem of our times” (56). These two problems are, of course,

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239 As we will see in the next chapter, there is even more duplicity in this duality than Dewey is willing to admit. This becomes easier to recognize if—substituting “America” for “The West” in the words of the Martinican social critic Édouard Glissant—we recognize that “[America] is a project, not a place.” Édouard Glissant, Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 2.
inextricable, and the first step in solving them is to better define them through a realization of how they came about. Only then will we clearly see how “the business mind” not only dominates life in its economic aspects, but also “finds its way into every cranny of life, personal, intellectual, emotional, affecting leisure as well as work, morals as well as economics” (64). The simple fact is that we are living in an overwhelmingly interdependent, corporate age that manufactures everything from individual desires to political consent. But given that the older ideal of individualism is still loudly proclaimed, we live in “a situation which defines an individual divided within himself” (66).

This divided self (religiously diagnosed by James) is also a lost individual (religiously diagnosed by Royce): “[T]he loyalties which once held individuals, which gave them support, direction and unity of outlook on life, have well-nigh disappeared. In consequence, individuals are confused and bewildered” (66). Life in the U.S. is predominately market-driven and is thus marked by unrest, impatience, and insecurity. The increased opportunity for the self-expression of the rich has been purchased at the cost of the diminution of the actual freedom of the poor, but even the captains of industry are not exempt from inner division, since “the results of industry as the determining force in life are corporate and collective while its animating motives and compensations are so unmitigatedly private” (69). The bottom line is that “individuals do not find support and contentment in the fact that they are sustaining and sustained members of a social whole” (68). We even lack definite and worthwhile creeds and programs that might serve as productive outlets for our “pathetic instinct toward the adventure of living and struggling

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240 Both James and Royce tended to jump over this first step. James called for an heroic individuality that would rail quite miraculously against present historical tendencies, while Royce largely neglected the actual history of how the U.S. moved from pioneering individualism to corporate impersonalism. Of course, we must mention Royce’s California as an important exception.
together” (71).\textsuperscript{241} Dewey speculates that “our excited and rapacious nationalism” stems largely from the fact that increasing corporateness has detached individuals from their local ties (70). Yearning for “genuine cooperativeness and reciprocal solidarity in daily life”—or what Dewey elsewhere calls “democracy as a way of life” (LW 11:217)—is harnessed by propaganda to drive wars that actually serve “to protect commerce, to make secure the control of raw materials, and to command markets […] for the purpose of securing economic gain for a few” (LW 5:71).

In James’ terms, there is a profound lack of “social intimacy.” In Royce’s terms, we lack worthwhile communities to serve as the objects of our enlightened loyalty. And while Dewey can be difficult to pin down when it comes to the future of religion, he is sure of the following statement about its past:

[Religion] was the symbol of the existence of conditions and forces that gave unity and a centre to men's views of life. It at least gathered together in weighty and shared symbols a sense of the objects to which men were so attached as to have support and stay in their outlook on life (71).

In the final section, we will examine the implications of Dewey’s claim that religion “is not so much a root of unity as it is its flower or fruit” (71), but for now it is sufficient to note that Dewey is more skeptical than either James or Royce when it comes to the power of deliberately cultivating a religious attitude.\textsuperscript{242} Of course, this is only part of Dewey’s larger complaint against individualistic, reactionary attempts to alter society by a strange combination of criticism and evasion. Indeed, he levels a very similar criticism against “literary persons and academic thinkers,” who are primarily \textit{effects} of new forms of industry and commerce, even though they

\textsuperscript{241} For a time, “liberalism” served as such “a theory of politics sufficiently definite and coherent to be easily translated into a program of policies to be pursued,” but now liberalism has become little more than a vague temper of mind (LW 5:70). Dewey explores this point more fully while outlining the possibility of a renaissance liberalism in \textit{Liberalism and Social Action} (LW 11: 2-65), explored in the final section below.

\textsuperscript{242} In comparison to James, Dewey appears less convinced that religion can so profoundly change individuals that society would be transformed in the process. However, Royce would likely retort that this is because Dewey seems to follow James in assuming (perhaps uncritically) that the essence of religion lies in the relation between “individual men in their solitude” and “whatever they may consider the divine ” (VRE, 34).
like to think of themselves as *causes* (74). Heroic individuals, whether saints or academics, are quite simply overmatched.

At the same time, ordinary or average individuals have become *monstrous*:

Individuals who are not bound together in associations, whether domestic, economic, religious, political, artistic or educational, are monstrosities. It is absurd to suppose that the ties which hold them together are merely external and do not react into mentality and character, producing the framework of personal disposition (80-81).

What the monstrous “lost individual” needs is a “harmonious and coherent reflection of the import of these connections into the imaginative and emotional outlook on life” (81). But instead, the average “American” struggles to “be social,” i.e., “to find substitutes for that normal consciousness of connection and union that proceeds from being a sustained and sustaining member of a social whole” (83). Clearly, Dewey’s account of the historical loss of “the ties that bind” is deeply relevant to not just the attempt to create the Great Community but also the corresponding attempt to “find” a world of genuine connections for the presently “lost” individual. To the extent that these genuine connections cannot *simply* be found, since they must also be created, the project of developing a new individualism also involves a faith in ideals. But as necessary as ideals are, they are also inherently dangerous insofar as they tempt us “to think that in dwelling upon ideal goals we have somehow transcended existing evils” (112). A healthy religious faith recognizes that “save as [ideals] are related to actualities, they are pictures in a dream” (112).

The need is thus for a new form of individualism harmonized with the new forms and dimensions of associated living, an individualism freed from its present identification with the quest for private economic gain. There are thus two interrelated tasks: 1) individuals must come to understand and acknowledge the staggering degree of global interdependence that sustains their lives and 2) the older doctrine of individualism must be revised to provide real equality of
opportunity by modifying the present economic system. Both of these tasks have an irreducibly religious dimension. The first concerns what we might broadly call a problem of piety, in that it is geared towards a recognition of our responsibilities to other people, as well as our place in the universe. Unlike traditional supernaturalism and militant atheism, which both tend to isolate human beings from nature and one another, Dewey calls for a new form of individualism piously attuned to our natural, cultural, and economic interdependence. The second task involves putting what Dewey call’s “a common faith” to work under the banner of a new individualism and a thoroughly revised liberalism. In the section that follows, I will show how Dewey amplifies the religious concerns that appear in *Experience and Nature* (1925), *The Quest for Certainty* (1929), and “What I Believe” (1930), in order to develop *A Common Faith* (1934). The final section will then show how Dewey’s account of “the religious” in turn provides a motor (not to be confused with the motor) for the personal conversions and political transformations that he elaborates in *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), *Individualism Old and New* (1930), and *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935). In sum, I will argue that Dewey’s ethical and political project is not practically viable unless it draws vital strength from “the religious,” which Dewey explores in terms of piety and faith.

**Piety and Faith as Motors of Ethical and Political Reconstruction**

To associate Dewey’s philosophical proposal with the ancient, backwards-looking, and thus seemingly conservative virtue of piety may seem rather strange given that Dewey is generally associated with the new, futurism, and progressivism. Likewise, Dewey’s consistent criticism of supernaturalism might seem to exclude a substantial role for faith. Indeed, Dewey’s
concern with religion seems to drop out after his early period, but these appearances are deceiving, as Dewey’s words in “Religion and Our Schools” (1908) suggest:

Possibly if we measured [the increasing difficulty of believing in the supernatural] from the standpoint of the natural piety it is fostering, the sense of the permanent and inevitable implication of nature and man in a common career and destiny, it would appear as the growth of religion. We take note of the decay of cohesion and influence among the religiously organized bodies of the familiar historic type, and again we conventionally judge religion to be on the decrease. But it may be that their decadence is the fruit of a broader and more catholic principle of human intercourse and association which is too religious to tolerate these pretensions to monopolize truth and to make private possessions of spiritual insight and aspiration (MW 4:176).

Clearly, our understanding of whether religion is on the increase or the decrease (both in Dewey’s writing and in the world more generally) hinges upon what we take “religion” or “religious” to mean. Dewey’s mature attempt to clearly define these words does not come about until A Common Faith, but there are a number of important precursors.

With respect to piety, we might appropriately begin with an initial definition that Dewey borrows from George Santayana:

Piety is attachment to whatever in the sources of man’s being also serves as the natural and historic fount of the values which make this being worth having. It is a cherishing consciousness that the human spirit is derived and responsible, having its roots in nature and in the past endeavor of society (MW: 4:237).

The words are Dewey’s own, but they are offered as part of a 1907 review of Santayana’s The Life of Reason. In fact, a full treatment of Dewey’s understanding of piety would necessitate an extensive look at not just Santayana, but also Emerson, the two sources to whom Dewey was most intellectually pious on this front. However, for our purposes, it is sufficient to understand...

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243 As Steven Rockefeller puts it: “The second period begins [in 1894] with Dewey’s move to the University of Chicago, which roughly speaking marks the time in his career when having abandoned the neo-Hegelian system, he began constructing his own new philosophy of pragmatism and humanistic naturalism.” Rockefeller, John Dewey, 19. Roughly speaking, we can divide commentators into two camps based on their understanding of what happens to Dewey’s religious thought after his early period: 1) those like Michael Eldridge who acknowledge that Dewey wrote about religion after his early period but who also argue that he should not have, in order to be a philosophically consistent naturalist, and 2) those like Rockefeller who argue that “[Dewey’s] later thought is a reconstruction of his early philosophy. This is especially true of his religious thought” (19).
244 Santayana’s reflections on piety, which Dewey discusses in his review, can be found in George Santayana, The Life of Reason, or The Phases of Human Progress, 5 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1905-06), vol. 4, ch. 10, 178-192. For an extensive treatment of Santayana’s relation to pragmatism with respect to the philosophy of religion, see Henry Samuel Levinson, Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina
Dewey takes up the notion of piety—namely, to revive the religious impulse outside of the supernatural metaphysical framework in which it traditionally functioned in order to harness it to his naturalized vision of ethical and political reconstruction. To this end, Dewey draws more heavily upon pre-Christian understandings of piety, including those of the Chinese, Greeks, and Romans.  

There is sound sense in the old pagan notion that gratitude is the root of all virtue. Loyalty to whatever in the established environment makes a life of excellence possible is the beginning of all progress. The best we can accomplish for posterity is to transmit unimpaired and with some increment of meaning the environment that makes it possible to maintain the habits of decent and refined life (MW 9:19).

Dewey’s reference to “loyalty” is reminiscent of Royce’s desire to develop a philosophical “reverence for the relations of life.” Moreover, the temporal structure of piety parallels Royce’s understanding of interpretation. While piety is primarily retrospective, it is “for the sake of a present so secure and enriched that it will create a yet better future” (MW 9:19). Insofar as piety involves a dramatic increase in perspective, which manifests in an amplified capacity to see relationships of dependence such that the life of the individual is contextualized in the larger community of life across space and time, it might also be described as a form of what Royce termed insight. Likewise, we can see that Deweyan piety is involved in James’ melioristic call for an increase in “social intimacy”: “Intellectual piety toward experience is a precondition of the direction of life and of tolerant and generous cooperation among men” (LW 1:392).

While Deweyan piety is directed towards antecedent conditions, these conditions are understood as the natural and cultural conditions that make a life of meaning and value possible, as opposed to anything supernatural. For Dewey, the things of experience and nature are
sufficient unto themselves as objects of piety. While this idea is not fully developed until *A Common Faith*, its germ appears clearly in *The Quest for Certainty*:

Religious faith which attaches itself to the possibilities of nature and associated living would, with its devotion to the ideal, manifest piety toward the actual. […] Respect and esteem would be given to that which is the means of realization of possibilities, and to that in which the ideal is embodied if it ever finds embodiment. […] Nature and society include within themselves projection of ideal possibilities and contain the operations by which they are actualized. […] Nature, including humanity, with all its defects and imperfections, may evoke heartfelt piety as the source of ideals, of possibilities, of aspiration in their behalf, and as the eventual abode of all attained goods and excellencies (LW 4:244).

*Faith* in the ideal involves critical *piety* towards the actual. This is Dewey’s religious proposition in a nutshell. There is no need to go beyond nature to seek out some higher, independent realm of being as the true object of religious devotion. Such attempts simply hypostasize reality’s best possibilities by placing them in a separate realm for safe-keeping, but this effectively turns religion into “a refuge, not a resource” (244). Like the other pragmatists, Dewey aims to put religious devotion to work in *this* world.

Unlike Royce, however, Dewey sees no inescapable psychological need for The Infinite or The Absolute. To borrow James’ words, “Anything larger will do, if only it be large enough to trust for the next step” (VRE, 413). While Dewey has “no intention of entering into the field of the psychology of religion,” he does believe that “the sense of dependence […] comes close to the heart of the matter” (LW 4:244). The natural universe itself—which James called “the common *socius* of us all”—seems sufficient in this respect. Throw in our dependence upon the entire history of human civilization, and our sense of dependence should only swell. The trouble is that religion has so often purchased its sense of dependence upon the supernatural at the price of its denial of human interdependence, especially when it comes to those understood to be *outside* of the particular religious tradition in question. In contrast, Dewey wants to develop a universal sense of common dependence:

The sense of dependence that is bred by recognition that the intent and effort of man are never final but are subject to the uncertainties of an indeterminate future, would render dependence universal and shared by
all. It would terminate the most corroding form of spiritual pride and isolation, that which divides man from
man at the foundation of life's activities. A sense of common participation in the inevitable uncertainties of
existence would be coeval with a sense of common effort and shared destiny (LW 4:246).

Dewey thus proposes a religious disposition rooted in our common dependence upon nature (part
of which involves culture) rather than our common descent from One God (who inevitably seems
to end up playing favorites in the mind of his children). Of course, nothing necessarily prevents
humans from deciding that nature itself plays favorites (preferring one race to all others, for
example). This is why Dewey seeks to develop a “sense of common participation in the
inevitable uncertainties of existence.” We must abandon the quest for certainty, which is
inevitably accompanied by the search for immutable reality and absolute value, and set out
instead upon the “search for values to be secured and shared by all, because buttressed in the
foundations of social life” (248).

This is the task of developing “a common faith,” which Dewey sketches in “What I
Believe” (1930) before publishing A Common Faith in 1934. Citing James, Dewey understands
faith as “tendency toward action” rather than “acceptance of a definite body of intellectual
propositions” (LW 5:267). This understanding of faith makes it possible to understand
experience itself as “the sole ultimate authority,” rather than the institutional authority of any
church or the literal authority of any supposedly revealed text (267). Like Royce, who
recognized that many of the traditional creeds of Christianity had become impossible to believe
for the “modern man,” Dewey saw that science and technology had undermined faith in the
supernatural, ideas of the soul and its destiny, the notion of fixed revelation, etc. However, the
“renunciation of the extra-empirical” does not compel us to abandon all religion, but instead
opens “the possibility of developing a faith in the possibilities of human experience and human
relationships that will create a vital sense of the solidarity of human interests and inspire action
to make that sense a reality” (273). Intellectuals have gone too far in making skepticism “the
mark and even the pose of the educated mind,” which cultivates “a bias against any kind of far-reaching ideas” and cynically denies their role in “the intelligent direction of affairs” (278). So rather than understand the breakdown of faith in traditional ideals as an indictment of both faith and ideals themselves, Dewey sees a great opportunity for developing a new faith in ideals sustained by, within, and for experience itself.

The development of this new faith is Dewey’s task in *A Common Faith*, which we are now in a better position to understand in light of Dewey’s reflections upon piety. For it is far too common for scholars to understand Dewey’s religious proposal in overly presentist or futurist terms. The words of Milton Konvitz, who wrote the introduction to *The Collected Works* edition, are representative in this regard:

Since religions are culturally and historically conditioned, says Dewey, we should throw out all their dated cultural baggage and start with a clean slate. This, I think, overlooks the fact that one's connections with the past can be a sustaining tie rather than a constraining chain. To be disengaged from the past, to have no sense of history, to lack a sense of piety for one's origins, inheritance, and traditions, may leave a person rootless and alienated (LW 9:xxxi; italics added).

Ironically, Dewey would almost certainly agree with the statement that Konvitz offers as an ostensible rebuttal.248 Not only is such an attempt to start with a *tabula rasa* fatal for a sense of connection to the world and its history, it is also bound to cripple our ability to give meaning to the present and future. Dewey knows that there is no way to begin an inquiry apart from tradition: “All knowing and effort to know starts from some belief, some received and asserted

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248 To be fair, *A Common Faith* does use language that no doubt led Konvitz to his interpretation. Dewey claims that the tremendous historical variability of religious understandings of “unseen powers and our relations to them […] demands that in imagination we wipe the slate clean and start afresh by asking what would be the idea of the unseen, of the manner of its control over us and the ways in which reverence and obedience would be manifested, if whatever is basically religious in experience had the opportunity to express itself free from all historic encumbrances” (6; italics added). Konvitz (and others) seem to have missed the mood of Dewey’s sentence, where the slate is wiped clean in imagination, in order to better see what *might* happen if the religious dimension of experience were to express itself without the constraints of history. Besides, Dewey makes it clear elsewhere that “the transfer of idealizing imagination, thought and emotion to natural human relations would not signify the destruction of the churches that now exist” (LW 9:54-55).
meaning which is a deposit of prior experience, personal and communal” (LW 1:320). Indeed, his religious reflections upon piety constitute his attempt to be faithful to this fact.

Dewey reconsiders our religious lives given an understanding of faith that proceeds from the realm of doing and suffering rather than an institutionalized intellectual creed. In this respect, Dewey’s project is continuous with James’ *Varieties*, which moves us away from the metaphysical questions concerning God’s existence that dominate the history of theology and towards the ethical questions that arise in human experience. Dewey is, however, willing to go a step further than James by ruling the supernatural out of his account completely:

Separating the matter of religious experience from the question of the existence of God, […] I have found […] that all of the things which traditional religionists prize and which they connect exclusively with their own conception of God can be had equally well in the ordinary course of human experience in our relations to the natural world and to one another as human beings related in the family, friendship, industry, art, science, and citizenship. Either then the concept of God can be dropped out as far as genuinely religious experience is concerned, or it must be framed wholly in terms of natural and human relationship involved in our straightaway human experience (LW 9:224; italics in original).

*A Common Faith* is Dewey’s attempt to develop a sense of piety for and faith in life that does not require a supernatural source to be intelligible. We can call this a “religious naturalism” provided that we do not place undue emphasis on the “ism.” Dewey’s intent is not to develop a reductionism thinly veiled by the word “naturalism”; he does not want to bring God “down to earth” so much as he seeks to bring the natural up to the level of the sublime.249

It is worth remembering that Dewey’s philosophical enemies are not only the “traditional supernaturalists” but the “militant atheists” as well. Both groups are extremists, one insisting that preserving the supernatural is the only way to preserve religion and the other claiming that once the supernatural has been debunked there is nothing left for religion to do. In contrast, Dewey seeks to separate the religious dimension of experience from belief in the supernatural, precisely

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249 Like Victor Kestenbaum, I believe that we must neither 1) place a glass ceiling over Dewey’s pragmatism by denying all forms of transcendence nor 2) chain Dewey’s pragmatism from below by interpreting all references to transcendence in terms of instrumentalism. See Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 11-16.
in order to liberate “what is genuinely religious” (LW 9:4).\textsuperscript{250} Famously, Dewey seeks to distinguish between the adjective \textit{religious} and the noun \textit{religion}. The trouble with “religion” as a singular substantive noun is that it refers to an overwhelming plurality of historical phenomena. Unpacking the \textit{Oxford Dictionary} definition—“Recognition on the part of man of some unseen higher power as having control of his destiny and as being entitled to obedience, reverence and worship”—Dewey notes that: 1) the “unseen powers” have been understood in vastly incompatible manners, 2) “obedience, reverence and worship” have been expressed in myriad ways, and 3) the moral motivations for these behaviors exhibit no unity. Historically speaking, all peoples seem to have had \textit{a} religion, but “the differences among them are so great and so shocking that any common element that can be extracted is meaningless” (7).

In the modern era, the most historically remarkable thing about religions is that they are increasingly subject to individual choice.\textsuperscript{251} Making this choice \textit{intelligently} would mean asking “what conception of unseen powers and our relations to them would be consonant with the best achievements and aspirations of the present” (6). While Dewey makes no mention of James’ ethical saints, he is effectively taking up James’ treatment of religion as pertaining to the realm of the unseen, while working to further increase the ethical and ideal content of the religious elements of experience without referring to the supernatural. Echoing James’ attention to fruits rather than roots, Dewey writes: “The actual religious quality in the experience described is the effect produced, the better adjustment in life and its conditions, not the manner and cause of its production” (11). Indeed, this “better, deeper and enduring adjustment in life” may come about through loyalty to a cause (as with Royce), through a passage of poetry (as with Santayana), or

\textsuperscript{250} In fact, the second chapter of \textit{A Common Faith}, “Faith and Its Object,” originally appeared as an article entitled “The Liberation of Modern Religion.” See the textual commentary to \textit{A Common Faith} (LW 9:448-457).

\textsuperscript{251} Dewey writes that “the greatest change that has occurred in religion in all history” is that religious organization are “more and more a matter of the voluntary choice of individuals, who may tend to accept responsibilities imposed by the church but who accept them of their own volition” (LW 9:41).
even through philosophical reflection (as with Spinoza). Dewey aims to free the religious function from the constraint historically placed upon it by supernatural religions, so that the idea of invisible powers might refer to “all the conditions of nature and human association that support and deepen [our] sense of values” (11)—the objects of Deweyan piety discussed above.

“Adjustment” must not be understood simplistically as a one-way adaptation of organism to environment, but rather as an active reaction to environmental conditions that works to shape them in keeping with our actual aims and ideal ends. As we saw in the first chapter, James’ ethical saints are “well-adjusted” to their intelligent understanding of an ideal society, and their lives often do “adjust” actual societies in profoundly productive ways. For Dewey, a given adjustment is religious to the extent that it involves deep-seated, enduring “changes in ourselves in relation to the world” that “pertain to our being in its entirety” (12). While a religious adjustment includes “a note of submission,” it is “a change of will conceived as the organic plenitude of our being, rather than any special change in will” (13). Although Dewey makes no mention of it, this is precisely the way in which James describes conversion and Royce describes loyalty, i.e., as involving a peculiar combination of self-assertion and self-surrender. In other words, Dewey is taking up the classical pragmatist project of developing a moral religion or, more accurately, a religious morality: “It is the claim of religions that they effect this generic and enduring change in attitude. I should like to turn the statement around and say that whenever this change takes place there is a definitely religious attitude” (13).

Dewey’s greatest addition to James and Royce’s religious account pertains to the role of the imagination in unifying or harmonizing the divided self and world. Dewey insightfully

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252 Dewey mentions these three ways of an enduring adjustment coming about on page 11, though he does not mention the names of Royce or Spinoza.

253 Like his account of piety, Dewey’s account of religious imagination is heavily indebted to Santayana, who “connected the religious quality of experience with the imaginative” (LW 9:13).
claims: “The idea of a whole, whether of the whole personal being or of the world, is an imaginative, not a literal, idea” (14). Neither the self nor the universe can be observed, thought, or acted upon apart from the unifying activity of the imagination: “[T]he idea of a thoroughgoing and deep-seated harmonizing of the self with the Universe (as a name for the totality of conditions with which the self is connected) operates only through imagination” (14). Thus, any imaginative understanding of one’s self or one’s universe involves what Dewey now introduces as “moral faith.” Faith has traditionally been “regarded as a substitute for knowledge,” so that a body of creedal propositions is taken as “true on credit of its supernatural author” (15). But this understanding of faith ignores its moral and practical meaning as “a conviction that some end should be supreme over conduct” rather than a “belief that some object or being exists as a truth for the intellect” (15). In fact, the practical acknowledgement that an ideal end has a rightful claim over us “goes beyond evidence that can be presented to any possible observer” (16). Such faith rests upon “being conquered, vanquished, in our active nature by an ideal end” (15). The end that we are convinced should exist is, by definition, not just unseen but also non-existent!

In contrast, supernatural interpretations of religious experience have inevitably claimed that the object of faith “is not ideal and that its claim upon us is not primarily moral or practical, since the ideal in question is already embedded in the existent frame of things” (15). As seen in the first section above, this is precisely parallel to Dewey’s complaints about Royce’s metaphysical idealism:

Faith that something should be in existence as far as lies in our power is changed into the intellectual belief that it is already in existence. When physical existence does not bear out the assertion, the physical is subtly changed into the metaphysical. In this way, moral faith has been inextricably tied up with intellectual beliefs about the supernatural (16).

Dewey’s criticism aims to highlight the ways in which faith has historically been opposed to actual ethical (and political) progress insofar as it allows people to assume that somehow,
somewhere, or somewhen, the very changes that ought to come about in the world are somehow already embodied in the ultimate metaphysical structure of reality, so that we are effectively “freed from the responsibility for intervening” (16). The actually divided self, and the presently broken world are thus left unchanged.

In contrast, on Dewey’s understanding of “faith”:

An unseen power controlling our destiny becomes the power of an ideal. All possibilities, as possibilities, are ideal in character. The artist, scientist, citizen, parent, as far as they are actuated by the spirit of their callings, are controlled by the unseen. For all endeavor for the better is moved by faith in what is possible, not by adherence to the actual (17).

Dewey wants to derail the shift from this ethical and practical idealism to a form of metaphysical and intellectual idealism. Rather than psychologically depending upon the intellectual belief that what we must work for here and now already exists in another metaphysical realm or will inevitably come to exist because of a supernatural guarantor, Dewey suggests that we further attune ourselves to and cultivate “those relations to the [physical and cultural] environment that support our undertakings and aspirations” (18). In fact, the historical tendency to attribute the source of all good to God and the source of all evil to humans or nature is a deeply impious attitude:

Natural piety is not of necessity either a fatalistic acquiescence in natural happenings or a romantic idealization of the world. It may rest upon a just sense of nature as the whole of which we are parts, while it also recognizes that we are parts that are marked by intelligence and purpose, having the capacity to strive by their aid to bring conditions into greater consonance with what is humanly desirable (18).

Just as Dewey’s revised understanding of piety looks backward to the sources of goods, his revised understanding of faith looks forward to their multiplication and equitable distribution. This process demands the best of human intelligence and moral imagination, which would serve as better objects of piety and faith than the supernatural objects of traditional religions. While Dewey admits that lives “consciously inspired by loyalty to such ideals as have been mentioned are still comparatively infrequent to the extent of that comprehensiveness and intensity which
arouse an ardor religious in function,” he asks us to consider “how much of the existing situation is due to the fact that the religious factors of experience have been drafted into supernatural channels” (19).

Returning to Royce, who is never mentioned in *A Common Faith*, Dewey might ask (in the Jamesian mood of “Why not?): Why not posit the community of life, comprised as it is by the rich intersections of nature and culture, as the “community of memory” with which we might *piously* identify? In turn, why not consider this selfsame community of life as “The Great Community of Hope” to be *faithfully* served by passionate intelligence? After all, moral faith sounds remarkably like Royce’s loyalty when Dewey writes: “I should describe this faith as the unification of the self through allegiance to inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us and to which the human will responds as worthy of controlling our desires and choices” (23). Since Royce and others have clearly admitted that “the objects of religion are ideal in contrast with our present state,” why not go on to admit that “they have authoritative claim upon conduct just because they are ideal” (29)?

While Dewey does not explicitly discuss Royce, he does develop his own interpretation of the word “God” as “the ideal ends that at a given time and place one acknowledges as having authority over his volition and emotion, the values to which one is supremely devoted, as far as these ends, through imagination, take on unity” (29). Again, without making any explicit mention of James, Dewey seems to second his claim in the *Varieties* that “God is real since he produces real effects” (VRE, 407). Of course, Dewey clarifies James’ first usage of “real” by writing: “the reality of ideal ends as ideals is vouched for by their undeniable power in action” (LW 9:29). Clearly, we are in tremendously messy metaphysical territory, and the different nuances of the respective accounts of James, Royce, and Dewey are certainly relevant.
Nonetheless, James and Royce would *practically* agree with Dewey that “all possibilities reach us through the imagination […] whereby] things unrealized in fact come home to us and have power to stir us” (30). And this is scarcely mere fancy, since the “unification of practical and emotional attitudes” or “the unity of loyalty and effort” produced is very real (30). Speaking as ethical idealists, all three pragmatists would happily agree: “The reality of ideal ends and values in their authority over us is an undoubted fact” (30).

Moreover, these ideals are not merely “subjective” features of the world that only exist “in our minds,” for they are embodied in personal character and historically operative in social action: “What one person and one group accomplish becomes the standing ground and starting point of those who succeed them” (34). If we imaginatively project these ideal forces into a unity, we might very well use the word “God” to describe it, but only if we ensure that it remains intimately “connected with all the natural forces and conditions—including man and human association—that promote the growth of the ideal and that further its realization” (35). Whether or not we make the decision to use “God” to describe this “active relation between ideal and actual” (35), Dewey is convinced that

the need for such an idea is urgent. It can unify interests and energies now dispersed; it can direct action and generate the heat of emotion and the light of intelligence. Whether one gives the name “God” to this union, operative in thought and action, is a matter for individual decision. But […] a clear idea of that function seems to me urgently needed at the present time (35).

Dewey’s use of “God” here has proven very puzzling to subsequent scholars, but it need not remain so opaque if we recognize that: 1) Dewey was always better at casting “the light of intelligence” than he was at generating “the heat of emotion” and 2) Dewey wanted to unlock the human potential for radical conversions just as desperately as James did. In a 1906 address before the American Philosophical Association entitled “The Energies of Men,” James said:

> Few scientific men can pray, I imagine. Few can carry on any living commerce with ‘God.’ Yet many of us are well aware how much freer in many directions and abler our lives would be, were such important forms
of energizing not sealed up. There are in everyone potential forms of activity that actually are shunted out from us (ERM, 132).

While James was not willing to rule out the role of a supernatural God, he and Dewey were equally willing to use “God” in untraditional ways precisely because they recognized the power of religion and its role in generating the emotional and imaginative energy necessary for profound personal and political transformations. Dewey thought that freeing religion from its exclusive association with supernaturalism would allow it to function “in every aspect of human experience that is concerned with estimate of possibilities, with emotional stir by possibilities as yet unrealized, and with all action in behalf of their realization” (39). In other words, everything significant in human experience potentially has a religious aspect! In contrast, Dewey notes how militant atheism (like traditional supernaturalism) separates human beings from the natural world and thus lacks a sense of piety, whereas a healthy religious attitude “needs the sense of a connection of man, in the way of both dependence and support, with the enveloping world that the imagination feels is a universe” (36).

However, when we return to “religion in its social connections” under distinctively modern conditions, we notice that religions permeate smaller portions of the population. Even more tellingly, most of the daily life of even those persons who most actively participate in traditional religions is determined by the economic, technological, educational, and political changes of the last few centuries. Religion is no longer “the social centre of gravity.” That religion is increasingly understood as a matter of doctrine rather than as a way of life simply reflects this fact, which constitutes “the greatest change that has occurred in religion in all history” (41). In a sense, the loud intellectual dispute between scientific naturalism and theological supernaturalism has diverted our attention from these more dramatic historical changes in the social fabric. More than any of the changes in scientific beliefs or religious creeds,
these changes in the patterns of associated living—referred in the first section above as “a new stage-setting for the drama of life”—have produced the “lost,” “detached,” or “divided” individuals that figure so heavily in the philosophy of James, Royce, and Dewey. Even when such individuals actively resolve to become Jamesian saints or Roycean loyalists, they must carry their religious attitudes into a world of affairs that is seen as fundamentally secular.

Dewey’s hypothesis is that if we were to uproot the strict dualism between the religious and the secular, the sacred and the profane—which has historically rested upon the distinction between the supernatural and the natural—we might productively unleash what James called “the energies of men”:

What would be the consequences upon the values of human association if intrinsic and immanent satisfactions and opportunities were clearly held to and cultivated with the ardor and the devotion that have at times marked historic religions? The contention of an increasing number of persons is that depreciation of natural social values has resulted, both in principle and in actual fact, from reference of their origin and significance to supernatural sources (47-48).

In contrast, Dewey suggests that “the values prized in those religions that have ideal elements are idealizations of things characteristic of natural association, which have then been projected into a supernatural realm for safe-keeping and sanction” (48).254 The trouble with this projection is that it forces people to in turn rely on supernatural agencies for the “salvation” of the world, whose existing social relations are all too easy to indict:

It is enough to point to the war, jealousy, and fear that dominate the relations of national states to one another; to the growing demoralization of the older ties of domestic life; to the staggering evidence of corruption and futility in politics, and to the egoism, brutality, and oppression that characterize economic activities (49).

254 Passages like this make Steven Rockefeller’s reference to Dewey as the “American Feuerbach” stand out as particularly perceptive: “Like the author of The Essence of Christianity [Dewey] left the church in the name of human community, abandoned the idea of special revelation in the name of truth and morality, and eventually rejected the God of the church theologians in order to overcome humanity’s alienation from its own essential goodness and in order to realize the spiritual meaning inherent in ordinary human relations.” See Rockefeller, John Dewey, 216. Apart from the reference to humanity’s “essential goodness,” this characterization of Dewey strikes me as spot on.
But rather than join traditional theologians by concluding that “social relations are so debased that the only recourse is to supernatural aid,” Dewey insists that we ought to begin by marking these social relations as a problem for social inquiry (49-50). We must not paralyze the development of our understanding of such problems by referring to either supernatural agencies or general moral forces such as “sinfulness” or “selfishness.”

Instead, Dewey wants us to experiment with “devotion, so intense as to be religious, to intelligence as a force in social action” (53). While the present state of the world is easy to impeach, there remains the fact that “affection and passionate desire for justice and security” continue to exist alongside “the emotions that arise from living in conditions of inequity, oppression, and insecurity” (53). And the liberation of the religious from the restraints of supernaturalism might help produce “the marriage of emotion with intelligence” (53).

All modes of human association are “affected with a public interest,” and full realization of this interest is equivalent to a sense of a significance that is religious in its function. The objection to supernaturalism is that it stands in the way of an effective realization of the sweep and depth of the implications of natural human relations. It stands in the way of using the means that are in our power to make radical changes in these relations” (54).

This takes us right back to the quote from The Public and Its Problems that was mentioned in the second section above: “Who is sufficient unto these things? Men feel that they are caught in the sweep of forces too vast to understand or master. Thought is brought to a standstill and action paralyzed (LW 2:319). Dissociating the religious from the supernatural would free thought from the search for generic moral explanations for complicated modern social problems and invigorate social action through the “transfer of idealizing imagination, thought and emotion to natural human relations” (54). Natural piety might be shown to “the community of causes and consequences in which we, together with those not born, are enmeshed,” “the widest and deepest symbol of the mysterious totality of being the imagination calls the universe” (56).
Dewey has, in effect, directed Santayana’s natural piety towards James’ faith in a pluralistic universe as the “common socius of us all” (PU, 19). Dewey has also translated Royce’s Universal Community into the fully naturalistic (though nonetheless ethically idealistic) terms of “the continuing life of this comprehensive community of beings,” which “includes all the significant achievement of men in science and art and all the kindly offices of intercourse and communication” (56). Likewise, Dewey’s pious moral faith is designed to undergird the new individualism called for in Individualism Old and New by highlighting “our relations to one another and the values contained in these relations” described at the end of A Common Faith:

We who now live are parts of a humanity that extends into the remote past, a humanity that has interacted with nature. The things in civilization we most prize are not of ourselves. They exist by grace of the doings and sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link. Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it. Here are all the elements for a religious faith that shall not be confined to sect, class, or race (58-59).

**Dewey’s Ethico-Religious Attempt to Liberate Liberalism**

Of course, Dewey realized the ethico-religious attempt to secure, solidify, expand, and distribute “the heritage of values we have received” is intimately bound up with the radical transformation of modern-day economic and political institutions. In fact, Dewey’s faith presents a danger to all institutions, religious or not, to the extent that they have become “largely a sanction of what socially exists” (LW 5:274). Dewey wants the liberation of the religious function to be more like Primitive Christianity, insofar as it was “devastating in its claims” and “demanded a change of heart that entailed a revolutionary change in human relationships” (LW 5:273). The trouble now is that the revolutionary change in human relationships at the hands of modern industry and technology has already occurred, far more rapidly than anyone could have ever imagined. And while Dewey firmly rejects the notion that a mere change in heart will be
sufficient to fix the problems of the public, the lostness of the individual, or the backwardness of present-day liberalism, *A Common Faith* makes it equally clear that these problems cannot be adequately addressed *without* a change in heart. In this final section, I will therefore examine Dewey’s attempt to liberate liberalism from its present attachment to the *status quo* in *Liberalism and Social Action*, a task that will help us move towards a discussion of Dussel’s philosophy of liberation in the final chapter.

As early as *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey began developing a discussion of what a public is and what government does in order to make possible a historical and empirical treatment of changes in political arrangements that might form the basis for the intelligent reconstruction of political life further elaborated in *Liberalism and Social Action*. The two historical periods that most interest Dewey are the eighteenth century revolutionary period that saw the birth of modern democracy and the contemporary twentieth century period marked by a host of problems stemming from the fact that much of the political ideology and technology developed during the eighteenth century under the banner of “individualism” or “liberalism” has actually become oppressive in light of the changing character of modern life, particularly in its economic aspects.255 Born in revolt against the established government of Great Britain, the original democracy of the United States was afraid of government and sought to structurally limit it. Thus, “Freedom presented itself as an end in itself, though it signified in fact *liberation from oppression*” (LW 2:289; italics added).256 Dewey continues:

> Since it was necessary, upon the intellectual side, to find justification for the movements of revolt, and since established authority was upon the side of institutional life, the natural recourse was appeal to some inalienable sacred authority resident in the protesting individuals. Thus “individualism” was born, a theory which endowed singular persons in isolation from any associations […] with native or natural rights. (289).

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255 This point first appears in *The Public and Its Problems*, but Dewey makes it more clearly in *Liberalism and Social Action*, particularly the second chapter “The Crises in Liberalism” (LW 11: 23-40).

256 Note the fact that freedom is understood here precisely as “liberation from oppression,” which will become very important when we turn to the philosophy of liberation in the final chapter.
One the one hand, we get a political doctrine resting upon the individual’s natural rights. On the other hand, the older metaphysical conception of Natural Law is reinterpreted as Economic Law (291). The great irony of all of this for Dewey is that the doctrine of individualism came about amidst the rise of powerful industrial and economic forces that were decidedly impersonal. Likewise, the emphasis upon economic law as natural was decidedly artificial in the sense that many of the economic processes and laws that govern individual behavior are historically variable (294, 299). These contradictory intellectual moves—which exalted the individual in economic and political theory as the individual was increasingly submerged in economic and political practice—lie at the heart of Dewey’s criticism of traditional individualism and political liberalism in its classical sense.

In *Liberalism and Social Action*, Dewey begins his expanded history of individualism and liberalism with Locke, who claims “that governments are instituted to protect the rights that belong to individuals prior to political organization of social relations” (LW 11:7). In the earlier part of the eighteenth century, liberalism’s concern for liberty and the individual began to subordinate political to economic activity, effectively connecting natural laws to economic laws of free production and exchange. This period of liberalism is most famously associated with the name of Adam Smith. Dewey, however, expresses greater admiration for the transformation of liberalism at the hand of Jeremy Bentham. Recall the outlines of Dewey’s religious proposal discussed in the section above: faith in the ideal involves critical piety towards the actual. While wielding the simple ideal standard of “the greatest possible happiness for the greatest number,” Bentham not only exposed and attacked the abuses of the existing legal system, he actually proposed concrete remedies, seeking to (in his own words) “extend the experimental method of reasoning from the physical branch to the moral” (qtd. on 13). With clear approval, Dewey notes
that Bentham’s reforms demonstrated “that liberalism can be a power in bringing about radical social changes:—provided it combine capacity for bold and comprehensive social invention with detailed study of particulars and with courage in action” (14). In contrast, Dewey complains about the “American principle of ‘Let George do it,’” whereby “liberals in this country are given to supposing and hoping that some Administration when in power will take the lead in formulating and executing liberal policies” (14). In contrast, Bentham represents a liberalism that is painstakingly attuned to the actual, even while encouraging the active struggle to transform it in keeping with clear and vivid ethical and political ideals.

Dewey also discusses how a similar attunement in the second half of the nineteenth century gave rise to the idea “that government might and should be an instrument for securing and extending the liberties of individuals” (8). Historically speaking, this humanitarian idea—which led to modern labor laws—was spread in Britain not by the utilitarians but by religious reformers: “No account of the rise of humanitarian sentiment as a force in creation of the new regulations of industry would be adequate that did not include the names of religious leaders drawn from both dissenters and the Established Church” (18). Here we have an important example of religion serving as a crucial root of an economically and politically progressive social movement. In fact, this is precisely what Dewey seeks to imagine and cultivate in *A Common Faith*, revealing that his claim there—that religion “is not so much a root of unity as it is its flower or fruit” (LW 9:71)—is not meant in any sort of timeless or ahistorical sense. Dewey puts the point even more strongly in a later essay published the following year in 1936:

Another influence that finally joined in to form the humanitarian current was the religious. […] Ardent, aggressive missionary zeal for saving the souls of men, especially those of the humble and poor, ran over into efforts to improve their condition by abolishing harsh and cruel inequalities. The movement, instigated by religion, was active in attack upon slavery, upon the abuses of prison life, upon brutal and mechanical methods of administering charity, and, through the factory laws, upon the inhuman conditions of labor of women and children in mines and factories. In every one of these movements evangelical zeal was the motive force (LW 11:283).
Dewey cites many other historical sources of liberalism and the changes it has undergone, but the last one I will mention given its connection with religion is the “organic idealism” that originated in Germany as a response to the philosophy of individualistic empiricism. Asserting that “relations constitute the reality of nature, of mind, and of society,” people such as Thomas Hill Green argued that “Only by participating in the common intelligence and sharing in the common purpose as it works for the common good can individual human beings realize their true individualities and become truly free” (LW 11:20). Much like Royce, these philosophical liberals depended upon an untenable form of metaphysical idealism, but they nonetheless served the invaluable function of “point[ing] out the restriction, economic and political, which prevent many […] individuals from the voluntary intelligent action by which they may become what they are capable of becoming” (21).

We could cite more of Dewey’s examples beyond Bentham, humanitarian religious leaders, and Green, but these three are sufficient for pointing out Dewey’s overarching concern that liberalism continue to develop in such a way that the actual and the ideal are continuously and intimately linked. Maintaining this link is particularly difficult given the present crisis in liberalism, which Dewey explores in his second chapter. Roughly speaking, the “split” in liberalism stems from the fact that it never fully managed to unite “earlier ideas of [individual] freedom with an insistent demand for social organization” (24). The older form of liberalism has no room for democracy as a “form of social organization, extending to all the areas and ways of living” (25). While classical liberalism stood for the “enduring values” of liberty, the free development of individual capacity, and the central role of free inquiry and expression, the earlier liberals “had no idea of historic relativity, either in general or in its application to themselves” (26). This proved disastrous when, by the middle of the nineteenth century, “The
economic and political changes for which they strove were so largely accomplished that they had
become in turn the vested interest, and their doctrines, especially in the form of *laissez faire*
liberalism, now provided the intellectual justification of the *status quo*” (26).

In this ironic turn of events, the classical philosophy of liberalism—which was genuinely
liberating when originally developed—has become one of the chief means of supporting
presently oppressive social and economic conditions that prevent the widespread attainment of
the very ends which classical liberalism professes. Classical liberals “saw the need of new
political conditions as a means to political liberty” while failing to see that, under present day
economic conditions, the “social control of economic forces is equally necessary if anything
approaching economic equality and liberty is to be realized” (28). Thus classical liberalism—
referred to as “neoliberalism” when espoused in our time—“became an instrument of vested
interests in opposition to further social change, a ritual of lip-service” (35). Unlike today’s
neoliberals, Dewey’s seeks to adjust the ideals “of liberty, of individuality, and of freed
intelligence” to the present situation in which “power rests finally in the hands of finance
capitalism, no matter what claims are made for government of, by and for all the people” (LW
11:296).

Dewey’s “conception of historical relativity” means that “liberty in the concrete signifies
release from the impact of *particular* oppressive forces” (LW 11:35). Neoliberals fighting “big
government” are, in effect, still working to “liberate” us from *nineteenth century* legal customs
preventing the development of forces of production! The liberalism that Dewey calls for, in
contrast, is anything but *laissez faire* in seeking “liberation from material insecurity and from the
coercions and repressions that prevent multitudes from participation in the vast cultural resources
that are at hand” (36). In place of the “régime of despotism” controlled by the dominant economic class, Dewey proposes a form of economic and political organization in which “the new forces of productivity are cooperatively controlled and used in the interest of the effective liberty and the cultural development of the individuals that constitute society” (40). This end-in-view that aims to liberate individuals from the actual forms of oppression, simply cannot come about by the means of classical liberalism, which believed in the “unplanned and external convergence of the actions of separate individuals, each of whom is bent on private advantage” (40). In fact, the ends of liberalism “can now be achieved only by reversal of the means to which early liberalism was committed” (40). Just as Dewey seeks to liberate individuals from the old individualism and to liberate the religious from traditional supernatural religion, he seeks the liberation of liberalism via this reversal.

In contrast to neoliberalism, which is the attempt to move backwards, “liberalism must now become radical, meaning by ‘radical’ perception of the necessity of thoroughgoing changes in the set-up of institutions and corresponding activity to bring the changes to pass” (45). While our institutions are “democratic in form,” they substantially favor “a privileged plutocracy” (45). And although recent policies have added new and valuable social services to the more traditional functions of government, liberalism must “go further and socialize the forces of production, now at hand, so that the liberty of individuals will be supported by the very structure of economic organization” (61-62). From our present-day historical perspective, we might repeat Dewey’s observation that “political liberalism has never attempted to change the fundamental conditions of the economic system” (285). Liberals are thus still faced with the dramatic choice Dewey articulated seventy-five years ago: either stop professing belief in liberty as an ideal value or

257 In the next chapter, we will see that although Dussel never uses the word “liberalism” to describe it, he is just as interested in the “liberation” that Dewey is discussing.
start taking concrete steps to “institute the socialized economy of material security and plenty that will release human energy for pursuit of higher values” (63). The fact that liberals continue to choose neither one of these two options is puzzling, to say the least. Or, to make the more indicting claim, perhaps this gap between what we preach and what we practice lies at the sick heart of liberal ideology. Clearly, Dewey does not think that this gap is necessarily constitutive of liberalism, but as I have argued above, he recognized an irreducibly religious dimension to the project of releasing the human energy required to bridge this gap.
4. A Prophetic Critique: Enrique Dussel’s Liberation Philosophy

James’ vocal opposition to the imperial policies of the U.S. during and after the Spanish-American war was undoubtedly linked to his pluralistic metaphysics and his religious quest for “social intimacy.” Royce was devastated by the fact that the outbreak of World War I came directly upon the heels of his attempt develop a religiously attuned philosophy of community based upon loyalty to the entire community of life.\(^{258}\) In 1946, Dewey looked back upon the way in which World War II had demonstrated that U.S. isolationism was no longer a viable political option because “relations between nations are taking on the properties that constitute a public, and hence call for some measure of political organization” (LW 2:375). In short, from classical pragmatism’s second founding in 1898 to its eclipse following Dewey’s death,\(^{259}\) pragmatism sought to be an international movement of socially and politically engaged philosophers seeking to further democratic communities that would neither be constrained by national borders nor have these same borders prove permeable to imperialism. Of the pragmatists considered, Dewey most clearly saw the increasing sway of global economic forces that effectively denied the democratic claim that “common experience is capable of developing from within itself methods which will secure direction for itself” (LW 1:41). In contrast, Dewey faithfully sought “no other result than creating and promoting a respect for concrete human experience and its potentialities” (41), which he understood to be the most basic foundation for genuine democracy at every level of social scale:

\(^{258}\) Convinced that a new type of modern nationalism was the central motive for the war, Royce outlined a practical scheme for regulating international conflict and reaffirmed his commitment to the cosmopolitan community of hope that he called “The Great Community.” Royce, *The Hope of the Great Community*, 50. For more on Royce’s reaction to World War I, see Chapter 10 of Kuklick, *Josiah Royce*.  
\(^{259}\) 1898 is, of course, the year of William James’ address, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results.” For the story of pragmatism’s twofoundings, see Max H. Fisch, "American Pragmatism before and after 1898," in *Peirce, Semeiotic, and Pragmatism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
Respect for experience is respect for its possibilities in thought and knowledge as well as an enforced attention to its joys and sorrows. Intellectual piety toward experience is a precondition of the direction of life and of tolerant and generous cooperation among men. Respect for the things of experience alone brings with it such a respect for others, the centres of experience, as is free from patronage, domination and the will to impose (LW 1:391).

In this chapter, I show how Enrique Dussel’s philosophy of liberation can be fruitfully interpreted as critically engaging this Deweyan “piety toward experience,” radically dramatizing the pragmatist’s “respect for others,” and persistently demanding “an enforced attention to [the] joys and sorrows” revealed in the experience of poor, oppressed, excluded, or otherwise de-centered “centres of experience.” In fact, these two American philosophical traditions—pragmatism and the philosophy of liberation—share a metaphilosophy insofar as they take experience or life as both the fundamental point of departure and the necessary point of arrival for every philosophy worth its salt. In turn, both traditions have democratic political commitments, since it is all of human experience or life in general (rather than the experience or life of philosophers and other social or economic elite), which must be taken seriously theoretically in order to improve things practically. While Dussel’s philosophy is deserving of in-depth study on its own terms, I take it up in this chapter in order to critically develop the pragmatist claim that religion might provide a wide-reaching, positive force for transforming our ethical and political lives. By more forcefully asking, “Whose experience? Whose concrete life has been, is, and will be taken seriously?” Dussel’s philosophy of liberation constitutes a critique of pragmatism’s own professed commitments, or perhaps more accurately, a prophetic criticism of those who cry “Experience! Experience!” and then proceed to do philosophy without taking


261 Admittedly, I have spent more time laying out the pragmatist philosophies of James, Royce, and Dewey, but my hope is that the use of Dussel to critique and develop classical pragmatism performs a sufficient interruption of the imperialistic flow of power in which it is generally Latin America that needs to be challenged to develop along the lines of the United States.
the experience of the “third world” seriously. This is particularly tragic since, as Dussel rightly reminds us, it might more accurately be called the “two-thirds world” as home to two-thirds of the world’s human experience:

The Philosophy of Liberation that I practice, not only in Latin America, but also regarding all types of oppression on the planet (of women, the discriminated races, the exploited classes, the marginalized poor, the impoverished countries, the old and homeless exiled and buried in shelters and asylums, the local religions, the homeless and orphaned children (a lost generation) of inhospitable cities, the systems destroyed by capital and the market…in short, the immense majority of humanity), begins a dialogue with the hegemonic European-North American philosophical community […] concerning] eurocentrism and the invisibility of “economics” that in turn prevent the development out of poverty of the greater part of humanity as a fundamental philosophical and ethical theme.262

This quotation foreshadows the themes found in the sections below that treat: 1) the need for a dialogue between Latin American liberation philosophy and “American” pragmatism as part of an inter-American democratic struggle against oppression; 2) the “invisibility” of the oppressed as it relates to James’ religious realm of the “unseen,” 3) the meaning of economics for Royce’s universal community of life, and 4) Dussel’s prophetic understanding of religion in relation to Dewey’s piety towards experience and nature.

**Interpreting Dussel’s Scattered Comments on Pragmatism**

The present chapter is an attempt to continue developing the dialogue between “American” pragmatism and Latin American liberation philosophy that Dussel himself has gestured toward, though in passing. His remarks on pragmatism can be roughly divided into two periods, early and late. His early references to pragmatism occur in the 1970s and early 1980s in his writings on liberation pedagogy that cast Dewey and pragmatism in a negative light.263 In broad strokes, he paints “Dewey’s followers” as the last in a long line of “pedagogical fetishism”

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that “worships” and replicates oppressive social institutions as though they were divinely instituted. But shortly after pragmatism’s resurgence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Dussel began to reevaluate his position, particularly in light of the North-South dialogues that he had with Karl-Otto Apel and Richard Rorty. Apel led Dussel to a reconsideration (and partial endorsement) of Peirce’s pragmatism, while Rorty led him to a reconsideration (and partial endorsement) of Dewey’s pragmatism.

Since I have not discussed Peirce’s pragmatism (apart from its intersection with Royce’s), I will focus on Dussel’s response to Deweyan pragmatism. But before treating the substance of Dussel’s reconsidered view, we should note the fascinating way in which he positions Latin American liberation philosophy in the geopolitics of knowledge by way of an analogy with “American” pragmatism. During an interview entitled “The Barbarian Words Coming from the Third World” Dussel says:

I would say that there is a philosophical practice in Latin America that originates from the Latin American horizon. It is, of course, the philosophy of liberation. I like repeating the following anecdote about William James visiting Edinburgh around 1907, lecturing the English about the philosophy of religion. We may imagine him planning ahead in the following manner: “I [James] will do this in the manner which is proper to what we call pragmatism.” I [Dussel] wish I had seen the faces of the English sitting down on the schoolroom benches getting the “inappropriate” lesson coming to them from barbarous (North) America, quite barbarous, of course, from the cultural and philosophical viewpoint of these imaginary turn-of-the-century English scholars and students. […] I doubt very much that James was successful in the eyes of those [imaginary] English students. But in a sense, he did become successful, only much later. Today, everyone talks about pragmatism as a given. I think this anecdote applies also to Latin American philosophy.

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266 On p. 28 of The Underside of Modernity, Dussel refers to the following work on Peirce by Apel as “magnificent”: Karl-Otto Apel, Charles S. Peirce: From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981). In contrast, Dussel chastises Rorty for largely forsaking Dewey’s pragmatism.
Dussel’s basic point is that, at least initially, pragmatists discovered that they were seen as philosophical barbarians “excluded from the hegemonic European philosophical community.”

He is also trading upon the (admittedly problematic) commonplace that pragmatism is “America’s only indigenous philosophy.” While scholars have found it difficult to say precisely what is so “American” about pragmatism, there has been a fair degree of consensus that there is something “American” about pragmatism. Dussel’s suggestion that Latin American philosophy finds itself in a similar situation strikes me as perceptive, since (at least historically speaking) there is something dominating about Europe as the epistemic location for philosophy. In a similar vein, Nelson Maldonado-Torres has suggested that “U.S.-American philosophers in the late 1980s turned to pragmatism as a way to articulate a U.S.-American philosophy” just as “a group of young Latin American philosophers [including Dussel] met in Argentina during the 1970s to discuss the relevance of space for philosophy and the possibility of grounding philosophical reflection in Latin America, not Europe.”

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270 The claim that pragmatism is the “indigenous” or “native” philosophy to emerge from the U.S. shows up in a number of books and articles. I have in mind John E. Smith’s claim that “pragmatism clearly represents an indigenous and original philosophical outlook.” John E. Smith, *America’s Philosophical Vision* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1992), 2. This claim is problematic given that pragmatism’s “Americanism” does not seem to reflect the culture or thought of Native Americans, although a couple of books make the case for a meaningful connection: Pratt, *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy* and Bruce Wilshire, *The Primal Roots of American Philosophy: Pragmatism, Phenomenology, and Native American Thought* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).


In sum, U.S.-American and Latin American philosophy generally, as well as pragmatism and liberation philosophy more specifically, have had to prove their status as philosophies that are different enough from European philosophy to have something “original” to contribute while still being similar enough to European philosophy to merit inclusion in the category “philosophy” to begin with. Thus, Eduardo Mendieta urges philosophers “to look at the resurgence of pragmatism and the development of an autochthonous black liberation theology, for instance, after the late sixties, as a parallel process to the emergence of Liberation Theology and Liberation Philosophy in the southern cone of the continent” (UM, xxi). In this respect, Dussel has a kind of vested interest in pragmatism’s revival, since pragmatism and liberation philosophy are at least partially linked by both being American philosophies. However, since the time of pragmatism’s founding, the U.S. has become a global economic power, thus assuming Europe’s previous position of imperial dominance. In terms of philosophical dominance, the U.S. has become the new Europe, and Latin America now stands in the place of “American” pragmatism a century earlier, leading Dussel to say that he has personally had the same experience as James when giving talks in the U.S. or Europe. Modifying James’ introduction to *Varieties* by way of a few interpolations, Dussel writes:

> It is with no small amount of trepidation that I take my place behind this desk, and face this learned audience. To us Americans [read: Latin Americans today], the experience of receiving instruction from the living voice, as well as from the books, of European [read: and North American] scholars, is very familiar […] It seems the natural thing for us to listen whilst the Europeans [and North Americans] talk. The contrary habit, of talking whilst the Europeans [and North Americans] listen, we have not yet acquired; and in him who first makes the adventure it begets a certain sense of apology being do for so presumptuous an act (VRE, 11; Dussel’s modifications in brackets). 274

In light of this shared sense of being excluded for being perceived as a philosophical barbarian, Dussel encourages “the return to the great philosophical theses of Pragmatism,” but he adds that

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“this will not be possible if the Pragmatism of the North does not open itself to a necessary dialogue with the impoverished, exploited, and excluded South.”

Dussel’s substantial agreement with classical pragmatism is made quite explicit during his philosophical confrontation with Rorty in Mexico City, a meeting which led Dussel to understand “the opinion of some North American friends when they indicated the apparent similarity between Liberation Philosophy and North American pragmatism” (UM, 113). On the one hand, Dussel applauds Rorty as a critic of analytic philosophy and as a democrat who assumes the “profoundly ethical attitude” of solidarity with those who suffer (UM, 104). As the basis for their conversation, Dussel takes the following passage from Rorty: “Are you suffering? In my jargon, this is the ability to distinguish the question of whether you and I share the same final vocabulary from the question of whether you are in pain” (qtd. in UM, 103). On the other hand, Dussel criticizes Rorty’s neopragmatism for: 1) failing to notice that liberalism and democracy are contradictory logics, 2) rejecting all philosophical claims to reason, universal validity, or reality and 3) falling into a “liberal Northamericanism of Eurocentric character” (105).

In contrast, Dussel holds that (Deweyan) pragmatism is guilty of only the last of these three charges. As discussed at the end of the previous chapter, Dewey criticizes liberalism insofar as it has become an ideological justification for the status quo rather than a radically democratic attempt to liberate individuals from present-day forms of oppression, most of which are economic. With respect to the second charge, classical pragmatism never rejects the

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275 Ibid., 36; translation mine.
277 Insofar as Dewey holds on to the language of liberalism, Dussel is unlikely to completely concede this point. However, Dussel does acknowledge the fact that Dewey’s pragmatism follows the slogan of Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach by insisting that “it is necessary to change the social structures in order to end the pain of those who
language of “reason” or “reality” in the way that Rorty’s neopragmatism does. Dussel relates that, at the beginning of Rorty’s address in Mexico City, “Rorty advised us Latin Americans to abandon Marxist great narratives, at least when we present our thinking to North Americans. This discourse, he suggested, has lost all of its validity” (126). In response, Dussel asked:

Pragmatically (in Dewey’s sense) speaking, if someone is in misery, in absolute poverty [...] which language will be more “pragmatically useful”: your banalization or Marx’s language, which tries to rationally explain the causes of their pain, and which pronounced the “law of accumulation” thus: the accumulation of wealth is the counterpart of the accumulation of misery? Rorty could not but answer that Marx’s language would be more useful. With this the entire question of Liberation Philosophy becomes clear, at least from the point of view of Dewey’s “pragmatism”! (127; translation modified).

According to Dussel, Dewey’s pragmatism is vastly preferable to Rorty’s neopragmatism because, while both may take up the question of suffering as a philosophical theme, Rorty’s liberal ironism undercuts the rationality necessary to seriously address the further questions: 1) “What are the causes of this suffering” (105) and 2) “Pragmatically speaking, how might we abolish it?” or “How can I help?” (117-18). In other words, Rorty’s neopragmatism “takes away philosophical reason as a weapon of our liberation” (110; translation modified). In contrast, Dussel’s liberation philosophy and (Deweyan) pragmatism insist that “the negation of a certain illegitimate exercise of reason (essentialist, “metaphysical”) and a dominating language does not negate the necessity of an affirmation of a new liberating language” (115).

The task of developing “a new liberating language and reason” in response to suffering in the world establishes a common ground for pragmatism and liberation philosophy as American philosophies of social reconstruction and political transformation. In keeping with the preceding chapters, I will focus upon the religious dimensions of this ethical and political demand to “be in suffer, or at least mitigate it. In contrast, the greatest cruelty a liberal may commit consists precisely in proclaiming rights while negating them in fact” (UM, 128; translation modified).

278 I am not necessarily endorsing Dussel’s interpretation of Rorty, though it does strike me as astute. I am simply using Dussel’s comments on Rorty’s neopragmatism to draw out Dussel’s understanding of Dewey’s pragmatism. Elsewhere, Dussel writes: “Certainly, an Ethics of Liberation could be closer to a ‘Deweyan pragmatist’ than the ‘estheticism’ of a Rorty.” Dussel, "Algunas Reflexiones Sobre el Pragmatismo de Charles S. Peirce," 50; translation mine.
solidarity [with the exploited] and attempt to ‘clarify’ the cause of their suffering,” which Dussel also recognizes as “the objective of a pragmatic philosophy, at least in the sense of Dewey’s or Cornel West’s vision” (UM, xi). Dussel’s mention of Cornel West here is especially interesting given that the one of the chief differences between West’s “prophetic pragmatism” and Rorty’s neopragmatism is that only the former allows a socially and politically constructive role for religion. As we will see in the sections below, Dussel makes the same point about the need for a liberating religion as he makes about the need for a liberating reason: the negation of a certain illegitimate exercise of reason or religion does not negate all reason or all religion. In any case, Dussel agrees with the classical pragmatists (especially Dewey) when he writes: “The Philosophy of Liberation affirms decisively and unequivocally the communicative, strategic, and liberating importance of ‘reason’ [...] and commits itself to the reconstruction of a critical philosophical discourse” (UM, ix; italics added).

However, Dussel’s third charge against Rorty’s neopragmatism mentioned above—that it falls into a “liberal Northamericanism of Eurocentric character” (105)—can also be leveled against classical pragmatism. Dussel is critical of pragmatism insofar as he perceives it to depend (at least partially) upon the calculative, bureaucratic, and oppressive reason of modernity that he as we will see in the sections below, Dussel makes the same point about the need for a liberating religion as he makes about the need for a liberating reason: the negation of a certain illegitimate exercise of reason or religion does not negate all reason or all religion. In any case, Dussel agrees with the classical pragmatists (especially Dewey) when he writes: “The Philosophy of Liberation affirms decisively and unequivocally the communicative, strategic, and liberating importance of ‘reason’ [...] and commits itself to the reconstruction of a critical philosophical discourse” (UM, ix; italics added).

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281 While this chapter emphasizes “the prophetic” as a dimension that is present yet anemic in classical pragmatism, I do not develop an interpretation of West’s “prophetic pragmatism” in relation to Rorty’s neopragmatism or Dewey’s pragmatism given both the constraints of space and the fact that much of what needs to be said can be found in Shannon Sullivan, “Prophetic Vision and Trash Talkin’: Pragmatism, Feminism, and Racial Privilege,” in *Pragmatism, Nation, and Race: Community in the Age of Empire*, ed. Chad Kautzer and Eduardo Mendieta (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 186-205. Nonetheless, I take it that much of what I have attempted to recover from the classical pragmatist tradition with respect to religion should make West’s prophetic pragmatism look less like the aberration that it seems upon Rorty’s telling and more like what Dussel sees as a faithful attempt to rethink pragmatism by taking its point of departure “from the periphery, from the dominated, from the excluded, from the poor, from the discriminated races.” Dussel, “Algunas Reflexiones Sobre el Pragmatismo de Charles S. Peirce,” 50; translation mine.
describes in terms of “Eurocentrism.” We might say that while classical pragmatism eventually arrives at the suffering of the oppressed and calls for the reconstruction of the economic and political systems that produce such suffering, Dussel’s liberation philosophy “commits itself to the reconstruction of a critical philosophical discourse that departs from the category of ‘Exteriority’ (with Marx and Levinas, for example) and assumes a practico-political ‘responsibility’ in the ‘clarification’ of the liberating praxis of the oppressed” (x; italics added).

In other words, pragmatism begins with what it thinks is general experience, when in fact it is setting out from a historical experience that is located in the privileged center of a global system whose development began with the traumatic colonization (not discovery) of the Americas. In contrast, liberation philosophy begins with the experience of the oppressed, i.e., those who are excluded from or external to the world’s dominant institutions and systems:

To ‘localize’ (in Homi Bhabha’s sense) its discourse has always been the intent of the philosophy of liberation. It has sought to situate itself on the periphery of the world-system from the perspective of dominated races, from the point of view of women in a patriarchal system, from the standpoint of disadvantaged children living in misery.

Pragmatism’s radical empiricism and its democratic commitments may lead it to the same liberating project of social and political reconstruction, but the starting point of liberation philosophy is still a difference that makes a difference. Parsing out this difference while

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282 Dussel writes: “Pragmatism still could not discover the phenomenon of Eurocentrism, because it self-interpreted the United States as the full Western realization of Europe—in the long journey of cultural history from East to West, just as Hegel had conceived it.” Dussel, "Algunas Reflexiones Sobre el Pragmatismo de Charles S. Peirce," 50; translation mine. For more on Dussel’s notion of Eurocentrism, see “The ‘World System’: Europe as ‘Center’ and Its ‘Periphery’ beyond Eurocentrism” in Enrique Dussel, Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 53-81.

283 To be sure, pragmatism never intentionally makes this mistake, since it recognizes that “a standpoint which is nowhere in particular and from which things are not seen at a special angle is an absurdity” (LW 6:15). Nonetheless, the pragmatists often have trouble recognizing their own particularly privileged vantage points.


285 In an attempt to describe the difference in starting point more fully, Dussel writes: “If Pragmatism thinks preferentially from the experience of the scientific community, from the natural sciences (from Darwinism, for example), and from North American common sense, the Ethics of Liberation prefers to think preferentially and primarily from the experience of the practico-political community, from the critical social sciences (from the global
calling attention to the possibility for a common project is the task of the remainder of this chapter.

**James and Dussel: The Ego Conquiro and its Religious Conversion**

In his lectures delivered on the quincentennial anniversary of Columbus’s “discovery” of what would come to be called America, Dussel provides an alternative account of the birth of modern philosophy in terms that make colonialism and imperialism part and parcel of the modern project rather than merely an unfortunate side effect. Inverting the norm, Dussel works to center his philosophy upon the experience and reality of the world’s poor and oppressed located in the world’s periphery, “the immense majority of humanity, the seventy-five percent of the world situated in the southern hemisphere” whose oppression began five hundred years ago with Europe’s colonial expansion into the “New World.” Dussel thus attempts to think modernity without Eurocentrism by carefully attending to the way in which the positive project of European modernity is always related to its largely negative consequences for non-Europe: “I wish to present a new, world-encompassing paradigm that conceives modernity as the culture incorporating Amerindia and managing a world-system, which does not exist as an independent, self-producing, or self-referential entity, but as a part, as the center, of that system” (11). Dussel believes that such a radical reinterpretation of modernity will enable us to separate the “myth of modernity,”—which justifies violence and oppression against (post-)colonial subjects—from “modernity’s rational, emancipative concept,” a project that he terms *transmodernity*:

Unlike the postmoderns, I will not criticize reason as such; but I do accept their critique of reason as dominating, victimizing, and violent. I will not deny universalist rationalism in its rational nucleus, but I do oppose the irrational element of its sacrificial myth. I do not then deny reason, only the irrationality of the

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violence of the modern myth. I affirm the reason of the Other as a step toward a transmodern worldhood (26).

In order to affirm this transmodern project, however, we must first tarry with the negative and squarely face the fact that the philosophically solipsistic ego cogito (“I think”) of René Descartes cannot be so conveniently separated from the ethically solipsistic ego conquiro (“I conquer”) of Hernán Cortés: “For the modern ego, the inhabitants of the land never appeared as Other, but as the possessions of the Same to be conquered, colonized, modernized, civilized, as if they were the modern ego’s material” (IA, 35). Quoting extensively from Kant and Hegel, Dussel demonstrates how the concept of the development out of immaturity of non-Europe effectively operates as Europe’s main justification for its domination of the (non-)world peripheral to world history. While such critiques of Kant and Hegel abound today, Dussel traces an important link between the historical use of the ontological concept of development and its ongoing socio-economic use to justify the poverty of the “third world.” Just as, for Hegel, modern Christian Europe had nothing to learn from other worlds or cultures, the U.S. (which Dussel calls the contemporary “Europe of the North”) sees itself as having little to learn from the rest of globe in the midst of globalization and economic imperialism: “For the modern ego, the inhabitants of the land never appeared as Other, but as the possessions of the Same to be conquered, colonized, modernized, civilized, as if they were the modern ego’s material” (35).

While The Invention of the Americas concentrates upon the original conquest of the American continent and its Amerindian populations, Dussel always has an eye towards how the same dominating logic operates in the present age of globalization and U.S. imperialism (in 1992, Dussel was thinking of the irrational myth of the United States’ fundamental right to spread “freedom” across the globe under the first Bush administration). Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 1, the United States was coming into its own as a global imperial power just as James
was launching pragmatism. Having successfully conquered and sequestered its own Native
American population and having fulfilled its “manifest destiny” to annex most of the
Southwestern United States from Mexico, the United States turned to conquering the peoples residing in Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippines. Dussel notes the paradoxical nature of the myth of modernity that underlies such actions:

> While the conquest depicted itself as upholding the universal rights of modernity against barbarism, the indigenous peoples suffered the denial of their rights, civilization, culture, and gods. In brief, the Indians were victimized in the name of an innocent victim [Jesus Christ] and for the sake of universal rights. Modernity elaborated a myth of its own goodness, rationalized its violence as civilizing, and finally declared itself innocent of the assassination of the Other (UM, 50).

James sarcastically rails against the very same “civilizing” logic in “The Philippine Tangle,” published in 1899:

> We are to be missionaries of civilization, and to bear the white man's burden, painful as it often is. We must sow our ideals, plant our order, impose our God. The individual lives are nothing. Our duty and our destiny call, and civilization must go on. Could there be a more damning indictment of that whole bloated idol termed ‘modern civilization’ than this amounts to? (ECR, 157).

Unlike James (or the other pragmatists), however, Dussel develops the pathological psychology behind such horrific imperial actions in his phenomenology of the *ego conquiro* (“I conquer”), a psychological subject that James’ *Principles* and *Varieties* do not address. In Dussel’s narrative, the imperial attitude is preeminently embodied in the person of Hernán Cortés, who explicitly saw himself as Christendom’s new Constantine, conquering the new world under the sign of the cross. Rather than experiencing itself as bound to God, as being reduced in relation to the divine, the *ego conquiro* undertakes a movement of unlimited expansion, practically experiencing itself as God, as larger than all of the lesser forms of life beneath it, which it attempts to reduce to mere instruments of its own will. An analogous logic also applies at the level of the national(istic) ego that sees the history of other nations as merely contributing to the unfolding of its own divine destiny, precisely the same mixture of imperialism and religion that James criticizes:
But it is obvious that for our rulers at Washington the Filipinos have not existed as psychological quantities at all [...]. We have treated them as if they were a painted picture, an amount of mere matter in our way. They are too remote from us ever to be realized as they exist in their inwardness” (ECR, 160).

In striking contrast, critical religious consciousness is reached on Dussel’s model through humility in the face of the Other and openness to the words of the Other. Such consciousness is religious insofar as it requires the faith that this is not just my world, i.e., the belief that truly understanding the world requires my faithful acceptance of the Other and the Other’s world (even if this in turn opens the possibility for critical dialogue). More explicitly than the pragmatists, Dussel contrasts the imperial religion of the conqueror that is ultimately a fetishistic belief in one’s own self-sufficient superiority, with the genuinely ethical faith that responds to the fact that the lives of others revolve around their own centers of freedom that must be respected. (Recall that Deweyan piety “brings with it such a respect for others, the centres of experience, as is free from patronage, domination and the will to impose.” As a rebuttal to Hernán Cortés’ imperial ego, Dussel introduces Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Spanish Dominican priest famous for his religious defense of the rights of the indigenous peoples of America:

Las Casas attained the maximal critical consciousness by siding with the oppressed Other and by examining critically the premises of modern civilization violence. In his view, a more developed Christian Europe would have displayed its pretended superiority over Others differently. It would have taken account of the Other's culture, respected the Other's alterity, and engaged the Other's free, creative collaboration.

In short, Las Casas was so bold as to claim that neither European religion nor European civilization could be spread by the sword and that Europe’s violence against the indigenous peoples was utterly unjustified and unprovoked (the very same points that James makes about the

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287 The most extended pragmatist reflection upon this shortcoming is perhaps James’ “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” which treats “the blindness with which we all are afflicted in regard to the feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves” (TT, 132). In a sense, Dussel is questioning the universality or at least the inevitability of this blindness by providing something like a genealogy of it.

288 A longer citation of this same passage (LW 1:391) is given at the beginning of this chapter.
United States’ violence against the Filipinos. Las Casas thus “appropriated modernity’s emancipatory meaning without partaking of its irrational myth” because his “concern focused on how the Other should enter the community and begin to participate in it” (IA, 69). I take it that the pragmatist tradition shares this same goal, but Dussel’s fundamental point is that critical consciousness is not reducible to self-criticism. The achievement of a critical philosophical consciousness in Europe or the U.S. is utterly dependent upon the willingness to listen to the voices of non-Europeans, Latin Americans, Native Americans, and other Others. Apart from such willingness, the projects of European and U.S. philosophy risk the likelihood of being philosophies of domination or justificatory ideologies.

Returning to the issue of religion in particular, the crucial thing to note is that both Cortés and Las Casas were heroically religious, even though the objects of their religious faiths could not have been any more different from one another. To put things in Jamesian terms, religion is uniquely powerful insofar as it is capable of inspiring the strenuous mood and unleashing “the energies of men,” but it is not necessarily good. Like James, Dussel ethically judges religion by its earthly fruits, but Dussel goes on to clearly distinguish between two fundamentally different modes of religious existence: fetishistic vs. libratory (a distinction that I will discuss further in the sections that follow. For example, the fetishistic faith of Cortés (just like the fetishistic faith of Theodore Roosevelt) rests upon a will to power that deafens its ears to the

289 In “The Philippine Tangle,” James writes: “The issue is perfectly plain at last. We are cold-bloodedly, wantonly and abominably destroying the soul of a people who never did us an atom of harm in their lives” (ECR, 157).

290 Recall that James openly admits that religion can be used for evil purposes: “By the very intensity of his fidelity to the paltry ideals with which an inferior intellect may inspire him, a saint can be even more objectionable and damnable than a superficial carnal man would be in the same situation” (VRE, 294-295). For James, the problem is not that zealous individuals like Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders are too devoted or obedient to God, but rather that such a God, “full of partiality for his individual favorites” (277), is not ethically worthy of devotion or obedience.

291 James implicitly draws something like this distinction in Varieties, but he simplistically attributes almost all of “the basenesses so commonly charged to religion’s account” as stemming not from religion per se, but rather from “religion’s wicked practical partner, the spirit of corporate dominion” and “religion’s wicked intellectual partner, the spirit of dogmatic dominion” (VRE, 271). However, as Royce rightly notes, one can be ethically faithful in a communal context just as easily as one can be dangerously dogmatic in an individualistic context.
forms of life outside of its vision. Such a faith does not imbue *life per se* with meaning and purpose, but instead reserves these for only *its own life* (and the lives that it chooses to recognize as worthy or valuable). While such a faith undoubtedly provides its own life with a meaning and purpose, it is fundamentally self-divinizing and destructive of other forms of life (as James suggests in “What Makes a Life Significant?”).²⁹² In contrast, the *libratory* faith of Las Casas (like the faith of James’ ethical saints) rests upon a faith in the reality and value of the unseen inner lives of others. Such a faith has faith in its own finitude, its own fallibility, and is therefore marked by not just self-expansion but also self-contraction in the face of the Other and other ways of life.

Thus far, I have emphasized the common ground between the philosophy of religion found in both James’ pragmatism and Dussel’s liberation philosophy. However, I am also worried by the fact that James’s account of the religious saint seems to fit Dussel’s description of the *ego conquiro* as “an ego that just keeps on growing,”²⁹³ especially since James’s account was developed during the very period in which the U.S. was beginning to take center stage as a global imperial power. To be sure, there is a crucial difference between James’s ethical saint and Dussel’s imperial conqueror. The narrow ego of James’ twice-born ethical saint *dies* to allow the wider, religious self to commune with and participate in the entire community of life. In contrast, the narrow ego of Dussel’s imperialist grows by *subjugating* the wider world. So while both the

²⁹² The general thrust of James’ essay is that we ought to sensitize ourselves to the significance of the inner lives of others and that such sensitization marks “an increase of religious insight into life,” which in turn augments the “religion of democracy” (TT, 156).

²⁹³ I translate this phrase from Dussel’s description of the *yo conquisto* (“I conquer”) as “un ego que continúa creciendo” in a lecture entitled “Filosofía Moderna y Filosofía Colonial” given at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México on February 13, 2008. The ambiguity of the Spanish contains the tension I am trying elaborate insofar as the verb *crecer* can be rendered as “to grow” in a number of distinct senses: from “grow in size,” to “grow up,” to “develop,” to “evolve.” While Dussel clearly meant his description to have a negative connotation, I am fascinated by James’ attempt to develop an account of the growth of the ego in decidedly *positive* terms, much like Dewey’s attempt to describe the significance of human development in terms of *growth* in *Democracy and Education*, especially in the chapter “Education as Growth” (MW 9:46-58). Everything would seem to depend upon *what kind of self* is growing.
saintly self and the imperialist self grow, they are vastly different selves because they grow in vastly different ways. On James’s model, good growth is inseparable from painstakingly attempting to overcome the “certain blindness in human beings” by imaginatively and sympathetically putting oneself in the place of others, which requires faith in the reality and value of their inner lives. Nonetheless, while the self of James’s twice-born saint is transformed and dramatically widened, it is never de-centered.

We are thus left with a version of the basic yet perplexing philosophical question: “Is ethics ultimately rooted in self-interest (of a dramatically enlightened and widened self perhaps)? Or is ethics rooted in the cessation (even if only momentary) of self-interest?” James clearly leans towards the former position, asking us to consider the religious and philosophical hypothesis that our “wider self” includes the entire universe and to join his ethical saints in attempting to let every other Other’s needs into our intimate sphere. In contrast, Dussel clearly opts for the latter, claiming that exteriority—“the ambit whence other persons, as free and not conditioned by one's own system and not as part of one's own world, reveal themselves”—is “the most important category for philosophy of liberation” (PL, 40,33).

Of course, the pragmatic principle offers us a method for tackling this dispute. What practical difference does it make to say that (metaphysically speaking) ethical life is rooted in a supremely enlightened and expansive being-for-self that includes the being-of-others as a part of its own life versus saying that (metaphysically speaking) ethical life is rooted in a supreme willingness to put being-for-self on hold in order to responsibly be-for-others? I suspect that

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294 Dussel also suggests that we undertake this sort of faithful, imaginative, and sympathetic movement, especially in Chapter 6 of The Invention of the Americas, which invites us “to change skins and to see through new eyes” in order to sympathetically imagine the European “discovery” of America as experienced by its indigenous peoples (74). 295 Dussel’s criticism of the following “Eurocentric” passage from Rorty thus recurs: “That is the ethnocentrism of a we (we liberals) which is dedicated to enlarging itself, to creating an ever larger and more variegated ethnos” (qtd. in UM, 112. The original passage is from Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, 198.)
these two positions may ultimately boil down to a (nonetheless important) difference in
emphasis, since James never allows an ultimate identification of the self and the Other and
Dussel never allows so much difference between self and Other for indifference to be a sensible
option. But in order to try and get a better handle on this crucial difference in emphasis, let us
consider a concrete case, that of hunger, for as Dussel reminds us, “All of this acquires practical
reality when someone says, ‘I'm hungry!’” (PL, 40).

If we were to pose Ralph Waldo Emerson’s question—“Are they my poor?”296—to
James’s ethical saint, the answer would be a resounding “Yes!” whereas it seems that Dussel’s
response would be something like “No, the poor do not belong to me, but their poverty reveals
my responsibility to them.” Roughly speaking, James thinks that the ethical and political way
forward is the Emersonian way, the way of identifying ourselves with the lives and needs of the
other parts of the cosmos that in some (more or less) mystical way are parts of ourselves,297
whereas Dussel thinks that the ethical and political way forward is the Levinasian way, the way
of recognizing that the hungry, for instance, are not parts of our selves or our systems, but that
nonetheless (if the language of “belonging to” is even appropriate), we belong to them.298 This is
what it means concretely to set out from Dussel’s philosophical category of “exteriority.”

Undoubtedly, either theory could be psychologically or metaphysically descriptive of
what happens when an individual responds ethically or politically to the existence of unjust
poverty in the world. However, James’ option is far easier for politicians such as Roosevelt to

296 Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” in The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Brooks
Atkinson and Mary Oliver (New York: Modern Library, 2000).
297 For a more detailed study of this expansive movement and an incisive analysis of its potential pitfalls, see
298 To make this point, Dussel prefers Levinas’ term hostage to any language that might be construed as that of
ownership: “The hostage is an innocent, just person who ‘witnesses’ the victim (the other). The victim suffers a
traumatic action. The hostage suffers ‘for’ the other. [. . .] Out of his or her own satisfaction (i.e., the absence of
need), the hostage responds to the victim.” Enrique Dussel, “‘Sensibility’ and 'Otherness' in Emmanuel Levinas,”
Philosophy Today 43, no. 2 (1999), 126-27.
appropriate in paternalistic or imperialistic ways, and may even at bottom be an expression of the “ontological expansion” endemic to James’ race, gender, and class.\textsuperscript{299} On the other hand, Dussel’s option simply may not be psychologically motivating, especially for the exceedingly narrow selves of U.S. consumer culture, the “culture of narcissism.”\textsuperscript{300} Of course, this may simply be all the more reason to tell the average U.S. consumer that he or she ought to become a “hostage” to the poor and the needy in hopes of interrupting an unthinking devotion to consumerism. James’ vision of “the moral equivalent of war” was, after all, an attempt to harness the “old monkish poverty-worship” to a strenuous life that would serve rather than crush poorer and weaker peoples (VRE, 293).\textsuperscript{301} Dussel’s position can thus be understood as a radicalization of James’, coming to similar conclusions, but setting out from the experience of the poor rather than that of the wealthy. In the end, where we place (and where we should place) the emphasis is inseparable from the context in which and the position from which we are asking the question. Both James and Dussel, insofar as they both reject any sort of “view from nowhere,” might be able to agree on this point. In order to better understand the difference made by focusing upon the interruption and de-centering of the ethical subject that Dussel has in mind as the basis of a genuinely liberating faith, we would need to undertake a detailed investigation into the work of Emmanuel Levinas, whose philosophical language of “the Other” is present throughout Dussel’s

\textsuperscript{299} The term “ontological expansion” is borrowed from Shannon Sullivan, \textit{Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). William James may have artfully described “A Certain Blindness in Human Beings” (TT, 132-149), but this did not magically cure him of his own blindness to the suffering of the poor, a point that was first and most famously expressed by Max C. Otto, "On a Certain Blindness in William James," \textit{Ethics} 53, no. 3 (1943), 184-191.


\textsuperscript{301} James is fairly careful to contextualize his idealization of poverty. For the poor, “wealth gives time for ideal ends and exercise to ideal energies,” but more often not, the wealth of the rich breeds cowardice and propagates corruption (VRE, 293). James only claims that poverty can be a powerful means to certain ideal ends, especially for the “educated class,” which generally has either an irrational fear of poverty or an unthinking, compulsive desire to earn and spend money in ways that do not serve ideal ends and energies.
corpus, including The Invention of the Americas.\textsuperscript{302} While I cannot undertake such a treatment here, I will briefly focus upon the way in which Levinas’ philosophy is creatively and critically transformed in Dussel’s Latin American context in order to then suggest the difference this might make for James’ pragmatist philosophy of religion.

Dussel began transforming Levinasian themes as early as 1973,\textsuperscript{303} when he introduced the face of the Other as a fundamental point of departure for ethics as first philosophy and gives credit to Levinas for radically influencing his own philosophy of liberation. Levinas’ Totality and Infinity gave Dussel a framework for his own ethical critique of modernity from the perspective of the concrete others of Latin America.\textsuperscript{304} Quoting the Hebrew epigraph to Otherwise than Being,\textsuperscript{305} Dussel reads Levinas’ entire ethical project as being dedicated “To the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists, and of the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations…victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-Semitism.”\textsuperscript{306} In 1972 in Louvain, Dussel asked Levinas: “What about the fifteen million Indians slaughtered during the conquest of Latin America, and the thirteen million African who were made slaves, aren’t they the other you’re speaking about?” Dussel reports that Levinas only stared at him at said: “That’s something for you to think about.”\textsuperscript{307} I have been reading The Invention of the Americas as Dussel’s extended reflection on precisely this theme.\textsuperscript{308} From Levinas, Dussel learned that criticism (and hence ethics and

\textsuperscript{302} For more on Dussel’s philosophical relationship to Levinas, see the chapter “Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation: Discovery and Integration of Levinas’ Thought” in Michael Barber, Ethical Hermeneutics: Rationalism in Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 18-49.


\textsuperscript{305} Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise Than Being: Or Beyond Essence (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

\textsuperscript{306} Qtd. in Dussel, "'Sensibility' and 'Otherness' in Emmanuel Levinas," 126.

\textsuperscript{307} Dussel, “‘Sensibility’ and ‘Otherness’ in Emmanuel Levinas”, 126.

\textsuperscript{308} While I do not examine it here, the second half of The Invention of the Americas undertakes this task by beginning to re-construct the history of the European invasion from the point of view of “the Indian, the African
politics) is impossible without the Other calling my spontaneity into question, since only the Other who is excluded from reigning systems of rationality can open the way for more comprehensive notions of rationality. This is at the heart of the transmodern reason that Dussel works to develop when he shows, for instance, how the rationality of Las Casas was superior he was open to being interrupted and instructed by the Indian Other.

This movement requires a kind of Levinasian faith in the reality of the Other’s world of experience, a faith that involves what Dussel terms the analectical method:

The analectical refers to the real human fact by which every person, every group or people, is always situated ‘beyond’ (ano-) the horizon of totality. Negative dialectic is no longer enough. The analectical moment is the support of new unfoldings. The analectical moment opens us to the sphere (which is not the ontic one of the factual sciences or the ontological one of negative dialectic), referring us to the other. Its proper category is exteriority. The point of departure for its methodical disclosure (a method that is more scientific than dialectic) is the exteriority of the other (PL, 158-59).

The discourse of liberation philosophy begins by affirming the reality of those who are outside or beyond the totality of the present socioeconomic system. Another way that Dussel puts this is to say that liberation philosophy is an affirmation of internal transcendentality, an affirmation of what is within the totality but is seen as non-Being by the totality. Dussel writes:

Hence, utopia is not the fruit of a mere ‘creating imagination’ which sets out from out of the Totality (from Marcuse to Bloch), but instead and above all, is the affirmation of “that-which-has-no-place” (ouk-tópos): The poor, the “castrated” women, the alienated Oedipus, the exploited people, the capitalist peripheral nations. “Ouk-topias” (which have no place in the dominating totality) are the non-beings, who nevertheless have reality (UM, 7).

With this critical analectical vocabulary, Dussel politically mobilizes the central role of the exteriority of the Other for constructing his transmodern project. His thinking is not so much utopic as it is ouktopic because it sets out to affirm that which is real but is not given its rightful place in the sun, that which is real but is unjustly negated by the system. His method is analogical because it sets out from beyond (ano-) the dominant logos of the totality. The

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slave, the humiliated mestizo, the impoverished peasant, the exploited worker, and the marginalized person packed among the wretched millions inhabiting contemporary Latin American cities” (74).

Levinas writes: “The essence of reason consists not in securing for man a foundation and powers, but in calling him in question and in inviting him to justice.” Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 88.
affirmation of the reality of exteriority, which is *unseen* from the point of the view of the totality, is the critical starting point for the philosophy of liberation.

With this point of departure firmly in mind, Dussel’s liberation philosophy might prove an invaluable resource for challenging and developing James’s philosophy of religion by providing it with more concrete content. For instance, we can take James’s pragmatist discourse about “the unseen,” pair it with his talk of “human blindness,” and realize that a lot of what religion deals with in terms of “the unseen” is an undeniable economic and political *reality*. For Dussel, when it comes right down to it, there are surprisingly material aspects of “the unseen” that classical pragmatism generally failed to analyze, e.g., the way in which the oppressed are “unseen” by the eyes of the dominant political system or the way in which most people in the U.S. fail to see how our economic prosperity is related to poverty in other parts of the world. This is why *exteriority* is so important to Dussel as “the ambit whence other persons, as free and not conditioned by one’s own system and not as part of one's own world, reveal themselves” (PL, 40). In this way, Dussel faithfully affirms the reality of those persons who exist within a given socio-economic totality but remain “unseen” by that totality.

Such language recalls James’ discussion of an all-too-common “healthy-mindedness”:

> We divert our attention from disease and death as much as we can; and the slaughter-houses and indecencies without end on which our life is founded are huddled out of sight and never mentioned, so that the world we recognize officially in literature and in society is a poetic fiction far handsomer and cleaner and better than the world that really is (VRE, 80-81).

The astonishing capacity of many privileged people in the United States to ignore the suffering of others is tremendously significant for liberation philosophy, which urges a rigorous look at the suffering in the world. While James had a very different sense of “the unseen” in mind, we can imagine the conversion or transformation that might come about if the poverty and suffering hidden from the sight of the comparatively privileged and prosperous were to move from the dim
realm of lifeless statistics in such a way that the \textit{reality} of their sorrow became an object of belief
“not in the form of mere conceptions which [the] intellect accepts as true, but rather in the form
of quasi-sensible realities directly apprehended” (VRE, 59). The “once-born” claim—that this
suffering would somehow up and vanish if people would simply establish a right relation with
the spiritual world (or perhaps pull themselves up by their bootstraps in some other way)—is
untenable because it can be maintained only by more or less willfully choosing to ignore the real
suffering that goes on in the life of the broader “unseen” world. In turn, James’ words regarding
the superiority of “twice-born” religion take on new significance:

Even if we suppose a man so packed with healthy-mindedness as never to have experienced in his own
person any of these sobering intervals, still, \textit{if he is a reflecting being, he must generalize and class his own
lot with that of others}; and, doing so, he must see that his escape is just a lucky chance and no essential
difference.[…] healthy-mindedness is inadequate as a philosophical doctrine, because \textit{the evil facts which it
refuses positively to account for are a genuine portion of reality}; and they may after all be the best key to
life’s significance, and possibly the only openers of our eyes to the deepest levels of truth” (VRE, 116, 136;
italics added).

In short, Dussel can help us connect the dots James left between human blindness and the
religious realm of the unseen. Whereas the once-born person “accepts, in lieu of a real
deliverance, what is a lucky personal accident merely, a cranny to escape by […]leaving] the
general world unhelped and still in the clutch of Satan,” the twice-born person insists that
deliverance from evil (unnecessary poverty and oppression on Dussel’s model) “must be of
universal application” (VRE, 289). While James’ (or Royce’s or Dewey’s) interpretations of the
realm of the unseen as “the ideal” are insightful, we should not let them obscure the
overwhelming \textit{reality} of the pain, poverty, and misery of the oppressed and excluded. The fact
that the poor or oppressed \textit{do not appear} (except perhaps instrumentally) on many ethical and
political maps leads Dussel to speak of the “appearance” of such persons (in such a way that the
naturalness of the present system is challenged) as “epiphany” or even “revelation” (PL, 41):
“What reason can never embrace, the mystery of the other as other, only faith can penetrate. In
proximity, face to face, someone can hear the voice of the other and welcome it with holy respect” (46). This language is thickly religious, transcendental, and metaphysical, but Dussel is talking about something remarkably mundane, immanent, and practical: “Metaphysics, in the meaning I give it in this present discourse on philosophy of liberation, is knowing how to ponder the world from the exteriority of the other” (48).

Likewise, Dussel’s careful attention to the differences between fetishistic and liberatory religion (which I explore further below) could help us vigilantly maintain the difference between the way in which neoliberalism in the U.S. and elsewhere often walks hand in hand with imperial and nationalistic theocracy and the way in which other forms of religious faith (the religious underpinnings of the civil rights movement are often taken as a paradigmatic case) make genuine contributions to social justice. As Dussel tells us, “To have an ethical conscious, one must be atheistic vis-à-vis the fetishistic system and one must have respect for the other as other” (PL, 59). Remarkably, Dussel’s ongoing process of liberation is directly parallel to James’s ongoing process of sanctification.\footnote{Dussel has never made this point, though he has noted the parallelism between his concept of liberation and James’ concept of verification: “In North American pragmatism, one does not speak of truth but rather of verification. So now we do not refer to liberty but instead to liber-ation as a process.” Enrique Dussel, Twenty Theses on Politics, trans. George Ciccariello-Maher (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 137. Henceforth, TTP.} Liberation is the process by which selves are freed from their bondage to oppressive forces just as sanctification is the process by which selves are ethically bound to other centers of freedom. Both processes may sound otherworldly, but for Dussel and James they are the earthly, “economic” processes by which self and society are progressively transformed. At bottom, the pragmatic point is that religion is tremendously powerful, potentially transformative, and that people will undoubtedly continue to use it. Dussel helps us to faithfully continue and confront James by asking: what will they use it for? As a way of maintaining their
own blindness to suffering? Or as a way of being able to say with integrity, “I once was blind, but now I see”?

Royce and Dussel: The Corporeality of the Community of Life

As discussed in Chapter 2, Royce’s reflections on community constitute his most valuable contribution to the pragmatist philosophy of religion. His philosophy of loyalty constitutes an attempt to make the role of James’ ethical saints and religious geniuses more generally available as an ethical religion open to all individuals. In his lecture entitled “Some American Problems in Their Relation to Loyalty,” Royce therefore writes:

If there is any truth in the foregoing, then our concept especially helps us in trying to define what it is that we most need in the social life of a democracy, and what means we have of doing something to satisfy the moral needs of our American community, while leaving the liberties of the people intact. Liberty without loyalty—of what worth, if the foregoing principles are sound, could such liberty be to any people? (PL, 99-100).

Like Dewey (and certainly Dussel), Royce is dissatisfied with an understanding of liberty as freedom from responsibility. So while Royce focuses on the ethical and political needs of the “American” community, he situates them as but one part of a worldwide need for an “enlightened loyalty” that would work to build a cosmopolitan world community: “To this community in ideal all men belong; and to act as if one were a member of such a community is to win in the highest measure the goal of individual life. It is to win what religion calls salvation” (PC, 72-73). Even more so than James, Royce is convinced that “Americans” must “grow up” by recognizing our relations to others that ethics describes in terms of responsibilities and religion describes in terms of the ways in which the self is bound to others.

311 In this sense, Royce can be understood as creatively interpreting James’ call in the Varieties: “Let us be saints, then, if we can, whether or not we succeed visibly and temporally. But […] each of us must discover for himself the kind of religion and the amount of saintship which best comports with what he believes to be his powers and feels to be his truest mission and vocation” (299).
As with James’ reflections on “the unseen,” Dussel offers a new sense of reality to Royce’s ideal of the universal “community of life,” which Royce takes such pains to demonstrate as a “community of interpretation” that constitutes the metaphysical essence of the real world in the second part of *The Problem of Christianity*. \(^{312}\) Dussel’s philosophical insight is as obvious in hindsight as it is profound: there can be no “community of interpretation” without a “community of life,” which is always *materially* or *economically* conditioned. Before there can be Roycean interpretation (or Deweyan communication), there must be life, in these sense that people must have at the very least secured the conditions for their own physical survival. If these conditions are *not* met, then the counterfactual idealization of the universal community of interpretation (or communication) is empty at best, or a way of actively obscuring the factual conditions necessary for the realization of such an ideal at worst. Dussel refers to this as the “material principle” of his ethics because it “concerns in the last instance the reproduction and growth of human life”:

> Whoever acts (seriously or ethically) has already recognized *in actu* the requirements of the possible survival of humanity in a concrete *good human life* (happiness, values, cultural understandings of being), which is shared with all those who form part of a real, historical *community of life* which has a universality claim and co-solidarity with humanity as such. \(^{313}\)

Royce’s philosophical innovation was to join the forces of morality and religion to establish loyalty as the basis for “the good life,” but he is devastatingly silent when it comes to discussing the economic and material basis for the production and reproduction of such a life. This is why Marx remains so crucial for Dussel’s critical project:

> The suffering corporeality of the dominated (as worker, as Amerindian, as African slave, […] as female, as non-white race, as future generations that will suffer in their corporeality the ecological destruction that the

\(^{312}\) Strictly speaking, Royce never uses the exact phrase “community of life,” although I believe that Dewey is right to describe Royce’s philosophy in this way: “Although I cannot go the whole distance with [Royce] in holding that this perfect social life is already and eternally realized, I am glad to go at least as far as holding that the promotion of such a life measures the value of our knowing and our doing; and that our final human responsibility is so to use the natural world, and its obstacles as well as its resources, in furthering the development of a freer and fuller, a more transparent and intimate, *community of life* here on earth” (SV 1:50; italics added).

present system inflicts on the planet) […] refuses validity to the system and refuses to project a “good life” that produces the poverty or the unhappiness of the dominated or excluded […] whether in the form of norm, acts, institutions, or arguments, as in the case of capital. No one has demonstrated this fact in the last century as Marx has, because it touches a fundamental dimension of the ethical materiality: the exploitation of the ethical subject, who is a member of the community of life, and who is affected in her corporeality through daily work that is concretized in the non-fulfilled basic needs, that is, unhappiness (impossibility of living). The ethical subject who is poor finds herself materially oppressed and formally excluded.314

In a global economic system that produces such tremendous poverty (particularly in the global South), Roycean loyalty would have to become more critical in the twofold sense of 1) criticizing the present socio-economic systems that negate life and 2) recognizing that the basic conditions for the possibility of loyalty are material. Abstractly, Royce’s notion of “loyalty to loyalty” is perfectly amenable to Dussel’s positive point that we must act creatively from a position of solidarity in order to transform the world in the direction of the sur-vival [sobre-vivencia] of the community of life as a whole,315 but Royce has very little to say about how we must negate a system that cuts people off from life long before they have a chance to develop their “higher capacities” for things such as loyalty.

Since the practical negation of such a socio-economic system as a way of affirming life cannot be understood apart from economics, Dussel writes: “If Liberation Philosophy departs from the reality of misery, poverty, exploitation, then the relation person-to-person (practical) is always already a priori institutionalized and reproduced historically from a given economic structure” (UM, 12). And yet, while Dussel is far more concerned than the pragmatists with the “material principles” of ethical and political life, he is no less concerned with avoiding a crass economism. Beginning in 1970 and continuing through 1990, Dussel conducted extensive studies of Marx’s manuscripts, which resulted in three books that work to overturn the

314 Ibid., 16.
315 I write sur-vival, since Dussel uses sobre-vivencia in a technical sense to suggest that, while “higher things” like Royce’s loyalty are necessary for meaningful human life, they are ultimately based upon the “lower” level of biological life: “The ‘sur [sobre]’ of survival indicates, first, life from the perspective of the higher functions of the ‘mind’ (such as conceptual categorization, conscience, linguistic competence, self-consciousness, autonomy, etc.,) and, second, enhancement, development, new processes of innovation or cultural invention, and the creation of new conditions for human life.” Ibid., 24.

Dussel’s retrieval of Marx, then, involves giving expression to the viewpoint of an Other excluded for a long time from his own personal philosophical totality and at present excluded from the totality of the philosophical enterprise itself. Dussel recovers a philosophical Other who in turn dedicated his entire to life to the recovery of the Other of capitalism—the living laborer as the origin of the production of wealth.\footnote{319}{Barber, \textit{Ethical Hermeneutics}, 91.}

It is misleading to speak of capitalism or capitalists producing wealth, since this obscures the worker exterior to capital, the Other of capital, whose labor is the ultimate source of all economic value. Marx’s insight, according to Dussel, was that surplus value does \textit{not} derive from the sale of goods above their value on the market, but rather from the \textit{worker’s} creative capacity in the sphere of production. Classical political economy mistakenly locates the source of value in circulation, “covering over” the production of value by the worker who becomes \textit{invisible}.

Marx’s insight for Dussel is that profit in capitalism originates in the value created by exploited and unjustly compensated labor, so that capitalism can be criticized from the “exteriority” whose reality it covers over. Returning to Barber’s commentary:

If “totality” is the fundamental category for the analysis of capital as already given, only from the category of exteriority, from the reality of living labor beyond capital, can one expect to understand the origin of...
capital and to criticize it. The point of view of living labor—for whom Marx felt himself ethically responsible—has become here the hermeneutic perspective from which to approach the totality of the capitalist system. Marx’s economics is none other than an ethical hermeneutics of the economy itself.320

Just as Dussel’s ethical hermeneutics allows him to re-examine history and modernity from the perspective of the Other exterior to yet constitutive of history and modernity, Dussel’s ethico-critical economics allows him to re-examine the dominant world-system of capitalism from the perspective of the vast majority of humanity that is “exterior” to it yet produces its fruits. Latin America (along with most of the rest of the world outside of Europe and the U.S.) constitutes the “periphery” from which the global capitalist “center” steals surplus wealth.

Dussel links his two critiques (the irrational myth of modernity explored in the previous section and of the irrational myth of capitalism creating value ex nihilo) in the figure of conquest conducted for wealth, the worship of which becomes a new religion:

> And thus in the name of the “new god” (gold, silver, money, pounds sterling, or the dollar) there have been immolated to the god of nascent mercantilism, the god of economic imperialism, and the contemporary imperialism of the multinational corporations, millions more human beings of the periphery than those the Aztecs immolated to their god Huitzilopochtli—to the horror of civilized, religious-minded Europeans! (PL, 9).

We thus return to Dussel’s distinction between libratory and fetishistic religion, now recast at the level of economy. The irrational myths of capitalism are just as deadly as the irrational myths of modernity when it comes to the destruction and oppression of human life. The philosophy of liberation aims to combat these myths, setting out as a “barbarian philosophy” from what under the sway of these myths amounts to “non-Being, nothingness, otherness, exteriority, the mystery of no-sense” (PL, 14). In short, Dussel works to develop a historical consciousness from the “underside” of economic history, from the point of view of those “exterior” to Western prosperity.

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320 Ibid., 96-97.
From this very same perspective, one of Royce’s sources of religious insight—that of sorrow—takes on a new relevance. Royce believes that James’ twice-born see further and more truthfully than many people suspect precisely because they have a more profound sense of sorrow. One’s recognition of tragedy and illness in the human world becomes both deepened and more varied as one gains religious insight, for “religion thus teaches us to know, better and better, the tragedy of life” (SRI, 226). Indeed, the following words from Royce might have just as easily been written by Dussel: “The war with pain and disease and oppression, the effort to bind up wounds and to snatch souls from destruction—all these things constitute some of man’s greatest opportunities for loyalty” (234). Or in Dussel’s own terms: “The person summoned to responsibility by the other is plucked out of his or her tranquility, peace, and security and is hurled into a risky adventure, beyond the quest for personal happiness.”321 The difference once again lies in Dussel’s insistence upon the materiality of the spiritual. So when Royce writes, “The insight of which sorry is the source, is an insight that tends to awaken within you a new view of what the spiritual realm is” (SRI, 240), Dussel might simply go on to quote the Jewish proverb: “The other’s material needs are my spiritual needs.”322 Unless firmly rooted in the everyday material/economic world, the highest flights of ethical idealism—which characterize Dussel’s liberation philosophy as much as classical pragmatism—remain disembodied and “otherworldly” in the worst sense: “Without an economics, hermeneutics (or pragmatics) remains without carnal (material) content” (UM, 88).

321 Dussel, “ ‘Sensibility’ and ‘Otherness’ in Emmanuel Levinas,” 128.
322 This proverb, originally the formula of a nineteenth-century Lithuanian Talmudist named Rabbi Israel Salanter, has been made famous by Emmanuel Levinas’ repeated references to it. See, for example, Levinas’ interview with Richard Kearney in Richard A. Cohen, Face to Face with Lévinas (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 24. For more on the original source of the quotation, see Cohen’s Richard A. Cohen, Ethics, Exegesis, and Philosophy: Interpretation after Levinas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 155, 200.
Nevertheless, there is an irreducibly religious dimension to the community of life.

Whether by sorrow or other means, Royce rightly recognized that religion has the potential to help us catch a glimpse of “the depth of the significance of our relations as individuals to one another, to our social order, and to the whole of life” (SRI, 252). According to Dussel, even Marx held that “the objective and true essence of religion has to do with the circulation of life (symbolized by the prophets of Israel in the ‘blood’), in the relationship of the sacrificial offering with respect to divinity.”

Religious suffering is the expression of real suffering and at the same time the protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as people’s illusory happiness is the demand for the real happiness. The demand to abandon illusions about their condition is a demand to abandon a condition which requires illusions.

Dussel takes this passage (and other passages with religious themes from the entire span of Marx’s career) and works to develop a distinction between fetishistic and libratory religion. On Dussel’s interpretation, Marx consistently negates the fetishistic religion of capitalism; he is an atheist with respect to the worship of Mammon (appearing in various incarnations as commodities, money, and capital) as the “worldly religion” of the present. Moreover, if the worship of money constitutes the religion of this world, then the “otherworldly” things of religion take on a whole new meaning. Throughout Marx’s corpus, Dussel finds room for (and thin suggestions of) a libratory religion wherein human beings would assume an ethical relationship to one another and the absolute, the community of life itself. Dussel thus reads Marx as rooted firmly in the Semitic tradition of the Hebrew prophets such as Isaiah: “What to me is

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the multitude of your sacrifices? I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs, or of he-goats […] learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow (Isaiah 1:11, 17). Dussel posits that in order to criticize the worldly religion of capitalism, Marx must have had a positive yet undeveloped conception of religion that shows up implicitly in his critique of fetishism.

According to Dussel, Marx’s understanding of religion rests upon an understanding of the relationship between people and whatever is held to be absolute: “Relation-among is an essential moment of religion, thereby the classics thought that religio meant ‘binding-with.’” In turn, fetishism is defined as “the absolutization of the relative, from the absolutization, separation, autonomy, mystification of one of the terms of a relationship. By denying, annihilating, and subsuming the other term, the term which is summed up is concluded, is fetishized.” In other words, fetishistic religion negates or denies the very relations through which it is produced. Or in Dussel’s Levinasian language, the “part” rises to dominate as the “totality”: “Fetishist self-affirmation of the totality supposes the negation, the annihilation of the exteriority, of what is other or comes from the other than capital.” In this way, capital is severed from the material conditions of its production, from living labor or the community of life. Eventually, when capitalism becomes so developed that money seems to be able to reproduce itself in the form of interest, “Capital appears as a mysterious and self-creating source…the source of its own increase.”

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325 Quoted in Dussel, "The Concept of Fetishism in Marx's Thought," 98.
326 Ibid., 124.
327 Ibid., 101-02.
328 Ibid., 102.
329 Ibid., 105.
thus presents itself as a *self-creating* and *self-sustaining whole* complete with “worshipers, cult
and sufferings, enlivening circulation of the fetish thanks to human blood”:

> [C]apital claims the ownership of all wealth which can ever be produced, and everything is has received so
> far is but an installment for its all-engrossing appetite. By its innate laws, all surplus labour which the
> human race can ever perform belongs to it. Moloch [i.e., the idol to which the blood of human victims is
> offered in the Hebrew Bible].

Such a god is the work of human hands, yet it reins absolute over the world in such a way that it
“obscures,” “mystifies,” “disguises,” “erases” its dependence upon living labor, which is
increasingly pushed into the realm of the *unseen*, thus creating an ever more pressing need for
libratory religion:

> Transparency and visibility on the superficial horizon of circulation is typical of all the old systems. The
> work of the slave is *visible* as such; the tribute of the servant of feudalism is *visible* as such. […] On the
> contrary, capital (value) hides, withdraws from looks, launches the production process, turns *invisible* in the
> space of work, of labour […] It divides production (invisible deep level) from circulation (visible
> superficial level). The invisibility of the origin of the reality and explanation of invisible phenomena
> permits the fetishization of value (of capital).

Combining the thrust of the previous section and this one, we might say that “The Religious
Mission of Sorrow” (Royce) is to reveal the sensible, corporal, fleshly world of suffering that
produces value, establishing a libratory religion on the firm foundation of “The Reality of the
Unseen” (James).

**Dewey and Dussel: The Prophetic Interruption of Pragmatism’s Piety**

Both Dewey and Dussel are trying to naturalize religion, while retaining the *force* of the
way in which its vision transcends the actually existing world or the *status quo*. Returning to the
passage from Marx in the section above, “Religious suffering is the *expression* of real suffering

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330 Qtd. in Ibid., 107.
331 Ibid., 119.
332 “The Religious Mission of Sorrow” is Chapter 6 of Royce’s *The Sources of Religious Insight*, and “The Reality
of the Unseen” is Chapter 3 of James’ *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. 
and at the same time the protest against real suffering.”

Or, as Dewey wrote in *Experience and Nature* “A particular ideal may be an illusion, but having ideals is no illusion. It embodies features of existence. Although imagination is often fantastic, it is also an organ of nature; for it is the appropriate phase of indeterminate events moving toward eventualities that are now but possibilities” (LW 1:291). While leary of certain kinds of transcendence, both Dewey and Dussel emphasize a particular kind of atheism rather than an all-purpose “aggressive atheism,” which is, according to Dewey, excessively preoccupied with “man in isolation” and thus suffers from “lack of natural piety” (LW 1:36). A religious attitude, in contrast, seeks a “sense of connection” (36). In brief, “aggressive atheism” (or what has more recently been termed “the new atheism”) is militant against the wrong God! Returning to Dussel’s Marxian language: “To the false consciousness, interest would seem to be the fruit of money: value created from nothing by the power of capital. God on earth, fetish, Moloch—inasmuch as, in reality, the life of such a fetish is the blood of workers offered in the holocaust of the accumulation of value.”

The fetishized god (Capital) hides its origin, its material base of living labor, so that worshipping it manifests a fundamental impiety. In contrast, Dussel presents Marx as “a genius of relations,” whose economic theory demonstrates how the present capitalistic system fails to demonstrate what Royce called “reverence for the relations of life.”

Whereas pragmatism urges a piety that would recover a sense of our interdependence with one another and with nature, liberation philosophy launches a full-blown prophetic critique of the piety exhibited towards the idols of capitalism. Admittedly, William James makes an offhanded remark about a similar kind of fetishistic religion when he refers to “the exclusive worship of the bitch-Goddess SUCCESS […] and the squalid cash interpretation put on the word

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334 Dussel, "The Concept of Fetishism in Marx's Thought," 121.
success” as our “national disease.” Likewise, James’ “The Philippine Tangle” is a “damning indictment of that whole bloated idol termed ‘modern civilization’” (ECR, 157; italics added).

There are also the beginnings of a more sustained critique in Dewey, though the idols targeted are more ideological or political than material or economic:

The words “sacred” and “sanctity” come readily to our lips when such things [the Constitution, the Supreme Court, private property, free contract and so on] come under discussion. They testify to the religious aureole which protects the institutions. If “holy” means that which is not to be approached or touched, save with ceremonial precautions and by specifically anointed officials, then such things are holy in contemporary political life. As supernatural matters have progressively been left high and dry upon a secluded beach, the actuality of religious taboos has more and more gathered about secular institutions, especially those connected with the nationalistic state (LW 2:341).

Dewey’s focus here is upon the “social pathology which works powerfully against effective inquiry into social institutions and conductions” (341). His criticism of philosophy’s obsession with epistemology notwithstanding, the root of the problem is understood in terms of “the backwardness of social knowledge” and taboos against inquiry (342). In contrast, Dussel understands the fundamental problem as the active, fetishistic worship of money that constitutes “capitalism as daily religion.” Dussel therefore proclaims the value of Marx’s atheism with respect to Capital “as an anti-fetishist position and anti-idolatrous in a total convergence with the atheism of idols on the part of the prophets of Israel and the founders of Christianity.”

At the same time, Dussel argues for the value of a religion of liberation and insists that “Marx certainly did not oppose a God of liberation who demanded for his acquaintance a praxis of justice.” Since religion pertains to the realm of relations between people and what is taken to be of absolute value or worth, it is not enough to simply negate the “secular religion” of capitalism. A certain atheism provides the necessary but not sufficient conditions for liberation,

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336 Dussel, "The Concept of Fetishism in Marx's Thought," 123.

337 Ibid., 122.

338 Ibid., 123.
which requires its own religion, its own affirmation of the value of living labor or the community of life over capital: “In the fetishist religion, human life is offered to the fetish, the idol, and the life of the god is the death of the human being.”\textsuperscript{339} In contrast, “A God of liberation requires the religious subject to consider the poor as a mediation of worship of the Absolute. Justice for the poor, the widow, the fatherless is the agreeable worship of a God who shares life with man and who does not accumulate the life of men.”\textsuperscript{340} While Dussel’s references are primarily to Jewish and Christian texts, these traditions do not have a monopoly on libratory religion. Not only can Jewish and Christian texts be employed in the service of a fetishistic religion, but the texts themselves can become the object of fetishistic worship. As in James’ pragmatism, we must look to the fruits; a religion is what it does. And in the case of libratory religion, “the religious subject broadens his community and includes the poor and the oppressed in the communication of goods, production, and work, this being the Absolute, the place of communion in participation.”\textsuperscript{341}

Note that the ends-in-view—community, communication, communion—are identical to those goods described by Dewey, but Dussel has gone further in calling attention to the economic mediations of these goods. In this respect, we might say that Dussel is to Dewey as Dewey is Royce: Dussel economizes Dewey’s democratic community (without falling into a reductionistic economism) just as Dewey naturalizes Royce’s religious community (without falling into a reductionistic naturalism). Libratory religion contributes to the flow of the material conditions for life by assuming a position of solidarity with the poor and oppressed peoples whose invisibility is produced by the fetishistic religion. Dussel therefore insists: “An indiscriminate atheism and an intuitive materialism like that of Feuerbach or a cosmological atheism like that of Stalin are not only opposed to Marx’s positions but also block the liberation

\textsuperscript{339} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{340} Ibid., 124.
\textsuperscript{341} Ibid., 124; italics added.
of these peoples.” Dussel repeatedly calls attention to the way in which liberatory religions have played crucial historical roles in calling fetishistic religions into question:

We should take our point of departure from liberating praxis in Latin American in order to see how Tupac Amarú put the fetish-god of colonial Spanish Christianity into question through his Indian rebellion; or how the priest Hidalgo and his army of Indians stopped rendering worship, practically declaring himself an atheist with respect to the “god” of the Mexican oligarchy.

Dussel repeatedly calls attention to the way in which liberatory religions have played crucial historical roles in calling fetishistic religions into question:

Note that the liberatory religion in this example is indigenous whereas Christianity plays the role of the fetishistic religion of colonial oppression. In contrast, Feuerbach’s atheism is held up as a moment in which is the solipsistic ego cogito of modern philosophy is rejected as a fetish in favor of opening towards the Other, so that “the new philosophy is the complete, absolute, non-contradictory conversion of [Hegelian] theology in anthropology.” Following in Feuerbach’s footsteps, Marx’s atheism opens the possibility of liberatory religion because it works to stop humanity from sacrificing the substance of its own life to a fetish and to start reclaiming the value of the human community. Dussel concludes that we should certainly be atheists “if one understands atheism as the negation of the negation of humanity—like Feuerbach and Marx taught—because this atheism is anti-fetishism, a negation of the justificatory ideology of the dominant class as oppressor.” Feuerbach and Marx are both atheists with respect to certain gods, not all-purpose atheists. The question is always “Which ‘god’ does one negate and why?” Even the prophets of ancient Israel were atheists with respect to what they understood to be false gods.

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342 Ibid., 123.
344 Qtd. in Ibid., 49.
345 Enrique Dussel, Praxis Latinoamericana y Filosofía de la Liberación (Bogotá: Nueva América, 1983), 241; translation mine.
346 Enrique Dussel, Método Para Una Filosofía de la Liberación (Salamanca: Sigueme, 1974), 245; translation mine.
347 See the section “El ateísmo de los profetas y de Marx” in Dussel, Filosofía Ética Latinoamericana V, 127-33.
Of course, one can be an atheist with respect to all gods, but this is to forsake the power of religions of liberation that should be “respected by the revolutionary because […] they serve to resist oppression, to hope for liberation, and to ‘protest against real misery.’”348 I take Dussel to be making a point that is deeply pragmatic: to the extent that the practical fruits of a given religion are liberating, this should at least give “militant atheists” pause when negating all religion. Speaking in terms of the concrete context of Latin America, Dussel notes that standard Marxism has been “a movement of intellectual elites who could neither link up with nor serve the creative power of the people insofar as it referred to myth and religious symbolism. In other words, the symbolic creativity of a people has been depreciated by the European rationalization of ‘orthodox’ Marxists.”349 In the “American” context, Cornel West has taken a very similar position: “The major contribution religious revivals can make to left strategy is to demand that Marxist thinkers and activists take seriously the culture of the oppressed. This fundamental shift in the sensibilities and attitudes of Marxists requires a kind of desecularizing and de-Europeanizing of Marxist praxis.”350

The essential point is that “the culture of the wretched of the earth is deeply religious,”351 which links up perfectly with an economic variation on James’ psychological point that those born on the unfortunate side of the “misery-line” are more likely to embrace twice-born religion.352 Thus, a militant atheism (with its historical roots in the European Enlightenment)

348 Dussel, Praxis Latinoamericana y Filosofía de la Liberación, 242; translation mine. The cited phrase is from the famous “opiate of the masses” or “opium of the people” passage in Marx’s “Toward a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right” that has been quoted twice above.
349 Dussel, Filosofía Ética Latinoamericana V, 134.
350 “Religion and the Left” in West, The Cornel West Reader, 378. In this same essay, West recognizes Dussel as one of the few intellectuals who “have begun to come to terms with the complex relation of religious practices to political struggle” (375).
352 James writes: “The sanguine and healthyminded live habitually on the sunny side of their misery-line, the depressed and melancholy live beyond it, in darkness and apprehension. There are men who seem to have started in life with a bottle or two of champagne inscribed to their credit; whilst others seem to have been born close to the
effectively operates as a new form of imperialism. To put things a bit too simply for the sake of clarity: 1) Europe imposes a fetishistic version of Christianity upon the Americas as part of its colonial project, and then, 2) once the colonized take up a libratory version of Christianity (whose intellectual articulation constitutes liberation theology), Europe promptly responds by proclaiming secularism in the political sphere and the death of God in the religious sphere. In contrast, Dussel stresses “the political importance of the theology of liberation as a narrative that provides a basis for the praxis of the people in Latin America” (TTP, 49). This is not to say that the only way forward politically is to convert to Christianity or any other religion, it is only to insist upon the intellectual importance of taking religion seriously, especially when it is functions in a libratory fashion at the level of popular social and political culture. It is also, in a certain sense, to breathe new life into Dewey’s attempt to “liberate” religion from its oppressive forms, including the form of dogmatic atheism. When religion underpins libratory social movements, it gives further meaning to James’ statement: “Religious feeling is thus an absolute addition to the Subject’s range of life. It gives him a new sphere of power. When the outward battle is lost, and the outer world disowns him, it redeems and vivifies an interior world which otherwise would be an empty waste” (VRE, 46).

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354 Dussel offers a fascinating interpretation of Nietzsche’s famous proclamation that “God is dead”: “It would not be impossible that the poetic genius of Nietzsche (beyond even his reasoning capacity) had envisioned the end of Europe, its death, the death of its self-divinization, of its fetishization: European nihilism. I think that the Nietzschean formula—which has a sense other than the Hegelian one—is ambivalent, but that in one sense it can be accepted by the Latin American philosophy of liberation: The divinity of Europe is dead!” Dussel, Filosofía Ética Latinoamericana V, 51; translation mine.
Dussel’s anti-fetishist philosophy of religion is rooted in the prophetic tradition with a Marxian twist, whereas his libratory philosophy of religion is rooted in the prophetic tradition with a Levinasian twist. The *negative moment* of the philosophy of liberation is the “negation of the negation,” i.e., becoming an atheist with respect to claims of the present totality that produces oppression while demanding worship. The *positive moment* is the replacement of the fetishistic religion with a libratory religion attuned to not just the spiritual needs but the material relations that sustain the community of life. Militant atheism succeeds with respect to the negative moment, but not the positive one. A more narrowly aimed progressive atheism could still negate what it rightly takes to be negation of human life—“the Hegelian ‘god’, that was nothing more than the sacralization of the European ‘ego’ (imperial and recently capitalist)”—but go on to affirm “the poor, the European worker, the American Indian, the African slave,” i.e., the Other.355 Dussel therefore writes:

In Latin America this is the pressing current situation, given the deeply rooted presence of an a popular *ethos* of profound religiosity. Hidalgo the priest rose up behind a Guadalupan image with his army of Indians and *mestizos*. Latin American socialism has before itself, then, the work of relaunching the atheist dialectic of Marx […] towards an affirmation of alterity where the religious recuperates its liberating, critical-prophetic, subversive sense insofar as it knows how to risk everything, even life itself, for an order of justice that anticipates the eschatological kingdom, the aim of a hope without limit.356

In this positive moment, Dussel’s philosophy of religion appears to be in general agreement with Dewey’s religious naturalism that calls attention to the need for the *embodiment* of even the most ideal and seemingly impossible things. As seen in Chapter 3, Dewey’s emphasis on piety is geared towards recognition of our responsibilities to other people, as well as our place in the natural universe. Likewise, as we have seen in Dewey’s discussion of democracy, Dewey is no stranger to the orienting value of ethico-religious ideals, provided that they actually spur us on to realize them. It thus seems that Dussel’s libratory faith fits with

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356 Dussel, *Filosofía Ética Latinoamericana V*, 139-40; translation mine.
Dewey’s claim that “Religious faith which attaches itself to the possibilities of nature and associated living would, with its devotion to the ideal, manifest piety toward the actual” (LW 4:244).

However, Dewey immediately goes on to say that this religious faith “would not be querulous with respect to the defects and hardships of the [actual].” Admittedly, Dewey does not mean that we should piously worship the status quo.357 He agrees with Dussel when it comes to showing respect to “the means of realization of possibilities, and to that in which the ideal is embodied if it ever finds embodiment” (LW 4:244). Nevertheless, might there still be something positive to be said for the importance of being fiercely querulous when it comes to the actual state of the world? From Dussel’s perspective, Dewey is perfectly reasonable to worry about certain kinds of transcendence that debase the earth in order to lay up treasures in heaven. But in the end, Dussel is more worried about oppressive, self-divinizing totalities than he is worried about misplaced transcendence.

There are two dimensions that are at least consistently underplayed (if not missing) in pragmatism: 1) the prophetic interruption of the voice of the oppressed Other that is related to 2) the importance of atheism with respect to negating the mindless worship of the prevailing totality. As interruptions of the tendency to experience oneself (or “the same”) as divine, both of these dimensions are related.358 Dewey does note the tendency of institutions to obey something like a law of entropy, erosion, and fetishization, turning them towards what Dussel calls “the survival of a self-referential bureaucracy” (TTP, 23). Dewey even briefly complains that religion

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357 As Melvin Rogers has shown, Deweyan piety has a critical edge because he infuses it “with the reflective and critical power of inquiry. Rogers, The Undiscovered Dewey, 131. The way that Rogers uses Bernstein to support his point is also particularly relevant to our discussion: “To put the issue in theological terms, a faith that excludes critical examination is a form of idolatry” (qtd. on 277).
358 Of course, this is still to view the whole problematic through the eyes of those (like myself) who are not particularly oppressed or excluded. I can only speculate as to what things might look like from their perspective, which might advocate the growth of the self/ego in relation to the oppressive system.
has become “largely a sanction of what socially exists,” bemoaning the fact that “a religion that began as a demand for a revolutionary change has become a sanction to established economic, political, and international institutions” (LW 5:273). Still, Dewey does not place nearly as much emphasis as Dussel on the way that, through this fetishizing process, “the mediation invented for advancement of life and democracy turn instead down the path towards death, repression and domination” (TTP, 23).

In turn, Dewey’s philosophy of religion is decidedly less prophetic in tone than that of Dussel when he emphasizes “the moment of atheism toward the prevailing totality, as Marx correctly described it in accordance with the prophets of Israel, who rejected the divinity of fetishes” (TTP, 84). Dewey undoubtedly understood philosophy as criticism but his voice never reaches the pitch of Dussel when he writes: “the demand or obligation that the political vocation imposes—in starting from a position of solidarity with the humiliated other, which surpasses the mere fraternity of the ‘we’ of the hegemonic community in power—is to refuse and negate the truth, the legitimacy, and the efficacy of that system” (84; italics added). Likewise, Dussel’s understanding of politics as vocation (a response to the call of the community of life), as the exercise of obediential power that involves “knowing how to listen to the other,” is not altogether different from Dewey’s reflections upon the responsibility that government bears to the public. Still, Dewey never goes so far as to clearly say: “Politics, in its noblest obediential form, is this responsibility for life, with a special attention to the lives of the poorest, and this fundamental normative demand constitutes the creative moment of politics as liberation” (85).

Regardless of what one ultimately thinks of the “ethical Marx” developed by Dussel, his tireless emphasis upon the staggering lack of material and economic conditions necessary for human flourishing—particularly in the Global South—remains a valuable addition to, or perhaps

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359 Dussel’s “ethical Marx” is outlined by Mendieta in the introduction to Dussel, Beyond Philosophy, 9.
correction of, (Deweyan) pragmatism. Like the difference in philosophical starting point (the experience of the oppressed in liberation philosophy vs. experience more generally in pragmatism), this insistence upon tarrying with the negative before launching a positive project strikes me as a difference that makes a difference. In the conclusion that follows, I turn once again to trying to articulate this difference while still leaving room for a common philosophical project between pragmatism and liberation philosophy.
Conclusion

"American" pragmatism is an emancipatory philosophical movement operating under the ambiguous advantage of having a place in the machinery of a formally democratic government that has slowly come to lie at the center of the global economy. But pragmatism is, in aspiration, a liberatory philosophy of much broader scope and deeper significance. To borrow words from Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*, it is dedicated to continuously “breaking down the barriers of class, race, and national territory” (MW 9:93). The genealogy of this broader movement—which we might tie to what Randolph Bourne prophetically called “Trans-National America”—has yet to be written, or even sufficiently imagined. If W.E.B. Du Bois, C. Wright Mills, and Sidney Hook are, on Cornel West’s telling, integral to the U.S.-American evasion of epistemology-centered philosophy, then Gloria Anzaldúa, Roberto Unger, and Enrique Dussel (to select but three names in order to match the number of pragmatists in this dissertation), are pivotal in the inter-American engagement with the struggles of marginalized groups, countries, and cultures.

In fact, any pragmatism prefaced by the word *American* is ultimately defensible only as a philosophy of the many nations that constitute the Americas, re-imagined in a global context.

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362 I have focused upon Dussel, who has had very diverse experiences as a person situated on the border of many linguistic, cultural, disciplinary, and even national worlds. See the Introduction to Alcoff and Mendieta, *Thinking from the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation*, 1-26. Nevertheless, Dussel can scarcely represent Latin American philosophy singlehandedly. I mention Roberto Unger, both because he is from Brazil (a country that is often effectively excluded from Latin America because its population is not Spanish-speaking) and because of his book that attempts to develop a radical pragmatism: Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Self Awakened: Pragmatism Unbound* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). Gloria Anzaldúa is also particularly apt as a Chicana feminist and queer theorist who spent her life in South Texas on the border between the two Americas while developing rich reflections upon mestizaje, marginalization, and resistance. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).
363 There are a number of studies that propose pragmatism as a potential framework for a global philosophy. My Introduction has already mentioned Rockefeller, "Faith and Ethics in an Interdependent World."
Otherwise, American philosophy will continue to be just what Dewey feared and Dussel criticized. In an address given to the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy in 1926 (the first to be held in the U.S.), Dewey said: “If American civilization does not eventuate in an imaginative formulation of itself, if it merely re-arranges the figures already named and placed, in playing an inherited European game, that fact [will be] the measure of the culture which we have achieved” (LW 3:9). To a far greater extent than Dewey himself ever imagined, this imaginative reformulation of American culture must reflect nothing less than the cultures of the Americas, in their mutually sustaining, conflicting, and (far too often) tragically destructive entanglements. Looking back at what Dewey referred to as the “measure of the culture which we have achieved,” Dussel told those gathered in Seoul, Korea at the Twenty-Second World Congress of Philosophy in 2008 that the philosophical task of the twenty-first century is the “recognition and acceptance of the meaning, value, and history of all regional philosophical traditions on the planet,” beginning with “a dialogue between North and South, because we will be reminded of the continuing presence of colonialism and its legacies.”

My dissertation has been an admittedly limited attempt to further this dialogue with a focus upon the relationships among ethics, politics, and religion. I have attempted to show that, even though pragmatism largely shares a positive ethical and political vision with the philosophy of liberation, pragmatism does not exercise (at least not to the same degree) the prophetic religious tendency to call attention to the negative and the need to abolish idols. While not the intention of pragmatism, it might still be charged with effectively allowing comparatively well-reaching vein, see Giles Gunn, Beyond Solidarity: Pragmatism and Difference in a Globalized World (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2001).

364 As mentioned in my Introduction, I am using the phrase “American philosophy” to refer exclusively to inter-American philosophy or philosophy in the Americas. This is part of my attempt to avoid (in Dussel’s words) “cornering Latin Americans into becoming nothing” (UM, 109).

off “Americans” to remain “once-born,” to say that if the oppressed would just work hard enough or wait long enough, they too would come to share the benefits of the “American way of life.” This charge takes us right back to: 1) James and the question of what properly constitutes the re-birth involved in “twice-born” religion; 2) Royce and the question of how the universal community is to come about without obliterating differences; and 3) Dewey and the question of how to find room for revolutionary transcendence in this world while still maintaining “piety toward the actual” (LW 4:244). All three of these questions are related to Dussel’s charge that pragmatism is guilty of Eurocentrism. Further inquiry into this accusation would necessarily involve a more detailed examination of Levinas, who inspires much of Dussel’s metaphysical language to describe ethics in terms of the interruption of being-for-self. We would also need to examine Dussel’s creative appropriation of Marx for thinking this interruption economically, especially as it relates to world systems theory. Religiously speaking, we would need to parse out the complicated relationship between Dussel’s philosophy of liberation and his liberation theology, especially when it comes to his prophetic critique of fetishism or idolatry. And insofar as all of these questions are intimately bound up with their own historical, geographic, and cultural issues, we would need to further explore the contextual differences between “American” pragmatism and Américan liberation philosophy.

All of these topics are relevant, but their examination would (at least temporarily) take us rather far afield from the realm of classical pragmatism. Of course, this may be precisely what should happen. While there is a great deal of value in pragmatism, its commitment to pluralism means that it lays no claim to having a monopoly on truth. Insofar as “American” pragmatism recognizes that “a standpoint which is nowhere in particular and from which things are not seen at a special angle is an absurdity” (LW 6:15), it must also recognize its own inadequacy, since
the perspectives in the world are irreducibly plural. In order to avoid the absurdity of a view from nowhere, I have worked from an “American” pragmatist perspective throughout this dissertation, but it would be foolish to pretend that the borders of pragmatism constitute philosophy’s finis terrae. Just as the classical pragmatists often had trouble recognizing their own particularly privileged vantage points, I have no doubt that I am equally subject to what James pointed out as “a certain blindness” in himself. Similarly, if we take nothing else away from Dussel’s reflections on faith, we should recognize that critical consciousness is not reducible to self-consciousness. Achieving critical philosophical consciousness from an “American” pragmatist perspective is thus utterly dependent upon the willingness to have faith in not just the reality but also the value of the other geographic, historical, cultural, and economic locations teeming with experience. Of course, Dussel’s own liberation philosophy does not have any special status as the exhaustive representation and analysis of human experience. Insofar as Dussel sees the philosophy of liberation as meta-discourse that attempts to weave together various strands of liberatory thought and praxis, he must remain open in principle to any and all perspectives that claims to shed light upon oppression and the possibilities for liberation.

Instead of offering a neatly wrapped up conclusion, then, I can think of no better way to briefly review what has been accomplished in this dissertation than by seconding James’ famous appropriation of the words of the pluralistic mystic Benjamin Paul Blood: “ever not quite.” Or, perhaps even more appropriately: “There is no conclusion. What has concluded, that we might

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366 James, “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings” (TT, 132, 149).
367 With respect to the claim that philosophy of liberation constitutes a meta-discourse, Dussel writes that the philosophy of liberation affirms “transcendence and synthesis of a liberating historical reason, critique of the pretension to universality of particular reason, and affirmation of the rational novelty of future totalities constructed by the erotic, pedagogic, political, and even religious praxis of the oppressed […] In this sense, yes, the Philosophy of Liberation is a particular language and a meta-language (a ‘language game’) of the ‘languages of liberations.’ The philosophy of feminist liberation, the philosophy of political-economic liberation of the poor (as persons, groups, classes, popular masses, and peripheral nations), the philosophy of cultural liberation of youth and peoples (from the educational systems and hegemonic media), and even the philosophy of religious and anti-fetishist, or anti-racist, liberation are all concrete levels of the Philosophy of Liberation” (UM, x).
conclude in regard to it?”  

But whereas Blood penned these lines in a thoroughly mystical vein, James quoted them at the end of his own lifelong attempt to pragmatically examine the practical fruits of the religious dimensions of life, whether mysticism is involved or not. From James’ pen, this lack of a conclusion is not a call for mystical withdrawal so much as it is an admission of fallibility, which only increases our worldly responsibility. It is also, ironically, a reflection upon the inadequacy of mere reflection, whether done in a philosophical or religious vein. James sought to use reflection to develop a moral equivalent of war, a way of harnessing religious fervor to making the world as a whole more humane, substituting what he called “the religion of democracy” for an imperialistic nationalism (TT, 156). Because of religion’s capacity to achieve dramatic individual and social change by making arrangements that now seem impossible feel as though they were possible (thereby helping to realize what previously existed only as ideals), James encouraged his listeners: “Let us be saints, then, if we can, whether or not we succeed visibly and temporally. But […] each of us must discover for himself the kind of religion and the amount of saintship which best comports with what he believes to be his powers and feels to be his truest mission and vocation” (VRE, 299).

In this respect, James’ reflections on religion are remarkably close in spirit to the words of a priest who I once heard make a fascinating alteration to the final words of the Catholic mass, currently rendered in English as “The mass is ended; go in peace.” Instead, this priest said:

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368 This quotation from Blood is found in “A Pluralistic Mystic” in James, Essays in Philosophy, 190. For a discussion of the relationship between James and Blood, see Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, vol. 2, 553-560.

369 Much has been made of the fact that “A Pluralistic Mystic,” essentially a collage of Blood’s writings accompanied by James’ commentary, was the last essay that James ever published. Perhaps the first to dramatically relate James’ death to the writing of this essay was Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy : the Lives and Opinions of the Greater Philosophers (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926), 389.

370 The formula from the traditional Latin Mass contained in the typical editions of the Roman Missal published between 1570 and 1962 is: Ite, missa est. A great deal of disagreement has surrounded its interpretation and translation since the Middle Ages, but the English rendering is very standard.
“The mass is not ended; it is meant to be lived. Go in peace to love and serve one another.”

While it is heretical for a priest to alter the liturgy promulgated by the Church, his words may ironically do a better job of conveying the spirit of the message of the Second Vatican Council, which, in the words of Catholic author Scott Hahn, suggested that the laity “live the transformation, the miracle, the communion, in every action of [their] day.” Likewise, this priest’s unorthodox formulation recovers the etymological sense of mission present in the Latin missa: the laity is being dismissed, i.e., sent back into the world in order to live the mass by loving and serving one another. For as James writes (enthusiastically quoting Prof. Leuba): “Not God but life, more life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life, is in the last analysis the end of religion” (qtd. in VRE, 399).

Royce’s innovation was to analyze this “larger, richer, more satisfying life” in terms of the religious dimensions of community life, which involves loving and serving one another, as the unorthodox priest indicated. However, Royce interprets this earthly communion as the essence of not just Christianity, but of a philosophy of loyalty more generally. Carrying on James’ attempt to link ethics and religion in order to increase social intimacy, Royce defines loyalty in terms of “reverence for the relations of life.” Again, the effect is to shift the religious emphasis from the relationship between the individual and God towards an emphasis on nurturing the relationships among the individuals who together constitute a community. While Royce’s idealistic metaphysics can get rather heady, his practical aim is to provide a

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371 I have been unable to find any printed evidence of this form of dismissal from mass. However, the sentiment it expresses is not uncommon, as indicated by the popular Catholic writer Mark Shea’s suggestion that Ite, missa est should be translated as “Go! You are sent!” since “for the vast majority of us, the work of the gospel is to be done in the world, not in the sanctuary.” See the post from February 25, 210 on Mark Shea’s blog, as hosted by the National Catholic Register at http://www.ncregister.com/blog/mark-shea/. Similarly, the Catechism of the Catholic Church reads: “Holy Mass (Missa), the liturgy in which the mystery of salvation is accomplished, concludes with the sending forth (missio) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives” (No. 1332). Catechism of the Catholic Church: With Modifications from the Editio Typica, (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 370.

philosophical account of the relations that make communities (all the way up to the universal community) just as real as individuals. Working to correct for the individualistic myopia that pervades modern culture, Royce’s category of religious insight works to move us from “narrowness of view” towards a “wider vision” of ourselves and our place in the universe as a whole (SRI, 48). In this sense, his philosophy of religion constitutes an attempt to overcome the alienation that individuals feel with respect to one another and to nature. While Royce does use the language of the “superhuman” or “supernatural,” his intention is to point us towards the reality of the world above and beyond the individual self.

By reading “value where Royce writes reality” (SV 1:50), Dewey understood the motivations that drove Royce’s project. But Dewey also recognized that Royce had not said much about the economic and political mediations necessary for actually creating the universal community that seems to be more of a far-off ideal than a present reality. Nor had Royce provided much by way of a historical analysis of the production of the “detached individual.” Dewey’s philosophy of democracy works to correct these shortcomings by politicizing, naturalizing, and historicizing Royce’s philosophy of community. Yet in keeping with James and Royce before him, Dewey recognized the positive role of the religious in fueling the revolutionary conversions necessary to reconstruct societies as communities in keeping with a new individualism that would work for rather than against the liberation of others.

This is, in brief, the reconstruction of pragmatism that I have developed in this dissertation by using James, Royce, and Dewey to mutually interpret one another when it comes to the religious dimensions of ethical and political life. While I have noted important disagreements, my overarching narrative has suggested that each of these three pragmatists comes to develop an aspect of religion that is but a germ in the previous pragmatist. In a sense,
this meta-narrative continues when the discussion shifts to Dussel’s philosophy of liberation, since I have interpreted Dussel as critically developing Dewey’s call for a pious “respect for others [as] the centres of experience”, precisely by developing an “enforced attention to [the] joys and sorrows” revealed in the experience of poor, oppressed, excluded, or otherwise de-centered “centres of experience” (LW 1:391). But as my Introduction suggested, it also makes sense to view the philosophy of liberation as a negation (not just the fulfillment) of pragmatism’s ethical and political project as informed by its philosophy of religion. Insofar as Dussel’s liberation philosophy launches a critique of classical pragmatism’s Eurocentrism, effectively locating “America” and its pragmatism as lying at the center of a historical movement that supplants Europe as the center of an unjust global system, the growth of pragmatism is prophetically interrupted.

In other words, it seems that Dussel’s critique paradoxically operates both within and beyond the confines of pragmatism’s ethical, political, and religious commitments. Viewed from within the pragmatist tradition, we can say that pragmatism has always advocated a radical empiricism mandating that we leave no stone unturned when it comes to our examination of experience. Focusing upon the experience of the oppressed or excluded then appears as the fulfillment of pragmatism’s own revolutionary potential. Viewed from beyond the pragmatist tradition, we can say that pragmatism’s failure to sufficiently analyze or criticize the injustice present in the majority of the world’s experience—which takes place in the “Third World” or what has more recently been called the “Majority World”373—reveals the Eurocentric myth

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373 The term “Majority World” has not gained wide acceptance as a replacement for “Third World,” but it does have the advantage of defining this segment of the world’s population in terms of what it has (the majority of the world’s population) rather than what it lacks as the “Developing World.” Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam coined the phrase “Majority World” as part of his campaign to combat the injustice involved in the fact that photographers of the majority world were effectively excluded from their self representation by the international economics of mass media. See Shahidul Alam, "The Majority World Looks Back,” New Internationalist, no. 403 (August 2007).
operating at pragmatism’s core. In this case, pragmatism would paradoxically need to be negated before its own professed mission could be fulfilled. In religious language, pragmatism would need to be born again, which is also to say that it would need to die first. And while pragmatism has a great deal to say about the growth or expansion involved in healthy religious, political, and ethical life (whether in James’ dramatic narrative of the saint, Royce’s movement towards universal community, or Dewey’s conceptualization of education as continuing growth), it seems to have less to say about the contraction or negation involved in the religious conversion involved in radical ethical and political transformations. The point is not to decide whether it is pragmatism or liberation philosophy that gets to constitute the totality that would wholly absorb the other philosophical tradition. The point is that “philosophy as criticism” is not reducible to self-criticism. On a thoroughly dialogical model of philosophy, the way to continue towards the right, the true, or the good will always involve some degree of being proven wrong, false, and bad by some other. Therefore, instead of settling this philosophical dispute once and for all, I would like to table these topics as the subject for future inter-American conversations and end this dissertation by revisiting the grounds for a common project calling for further debate between both of these American philosophical traditions.

Of course, the need for philosophical conversations should not obscure the fact that the actual task before us—the task that Dewey named “creative democracy” on his eightieth birthday—is always “a problem of readjusting social relationships, or, from the distributive side, [...] that of securing a more equable liberation of the powers of all individual members of all groupings” (LW 2:355; italics added). This is based upon Dewey’s understanding of political freedom as “liberation from oppression” (LW2:289), which lies at the heart of Dussel’s philosophical project. The methodological lesson to be learned is clear: the individuals and

groups who are effectively excluded from meaningful moral, economic, or political decisions are those most crucial to the further realization of democracy. As Dewey puts it using a homely metaphor, “The man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches” (LW 2:364). Or in Dussel’s words, “For the most part, it is the minorities or the opposition who grasp these negative effects since they are the ones who suffer from them, and it is in the resolution of these negative effects that we find the future, the transformation, and the qualitative progress of life” (TTP, 66). Nonetheless, Dewey is oddly reticent when it comes to specifying who the shoe is pinching. While he urges an empirical look at the present state of society and advocates an experimental approach to its democratic reconstruction, I find it disconcerting that he does not more flatly state the empirical fact that the shoe was (and still is) disproportionately pinching, for example, women or African-Americans. This once again raises the question of pragmatism’s “Eurocentrism.”

To be fair, Dewey does occasionally say that we must not allow the shoe to pinch anyone based upon such factors as “race, color, sex, birth and family, [or] material or cultural wealth” (LW 14:226). Dewey’s pragmatism is methodologically rooted in the concrete and theoretically sensitive to the need to undertake a radical reconstruction of liberalism in order to continue the ongoing struggle for liberation from present-day forms of oppression, particularly economic oppression. Indeed, he claims that “liberalism must now become radical” and take practical steps to “institute the socialized economy of material security and plenty that will release human energy for pursuit of higher values” (LW 11:45, 63). But the fact remains that he rarely assumes

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375 Similarly, Dewey claims that “all valuable as well as new ideas begin with minorities, perhaps a minority of one” (LW 2:365)
376 Consider the provocative statement by Cornel West with regard to this shortcoming in Dewey’s philosophy: “If a Martian were to come down to America and look at the American pragmatist tradition, they would never know that there was slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, discrimination, segregation in the history of America. This is a major indictment.” Cornel West, “Afterword” in Bill Lawson and Donald Koch, Pragmatism and the Problem of Race (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 275.
the prophetic tone of righteous indignation that Dussel does by calling for a response to the victimization of particular peoples.

In contrast, Dussel’s philosophy begins by affirming the reality and demanding the liberation of those who are outside of or beyond the totality of our present socio-economic or political systems, i.e., those who do not really “count” when we are making decisions: “We must criticize, or reject as unsustainable, all political systems, actions, and institutions whose negative effects are suffered by oppressed or excluded victims!” (TTP, 85). Far more than Dewey, Dussel is disposed to name the particular groups who are being oppressed or excluded. But like Dewey, who also understood philosophy as criticism,377 Dussel believes that this negative or critical moment must ultimately serve as a means to a positive, transformative moment that works towards greater community: “We must produce and reproduce the lives of the oppressed and excluded, […] discovering the causes of their negation and adequately transforming institutions to suit them, which will as a result improve the life of the community as a whole” (TTP, 86; translation modified).

Both liberation philosophy and pragmatism thus seek to contribute to the critical transformation of the world. Likewise, both philosophies share a tendency to charge the horns of false dilemmas, to mediate between clashing opponent pairs such as individualism and collectivism or classical liberalism and classical Marxism. Each philosopher also unequivocally roots the basis and legitimacy of all political power in what Dewey calls the public and Dussel calls el pueblo or the people.378 This shared view of the people as the ultimate political authority is intimately tied to their radical re-thinking of democracy as an ideal, not an accomplished reality. As Dussel claims, “[T]he perfect empirical institutionalization [of democracy] is

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impossible” (89). Nonetheless, democracy remains a powerful regulative ideal for guiding our attempts to transform present-day political institutions. Both philosophers believe that our political progress can be empirically measured by the yardstick of how well present systems manage to satisfy the actual social demands of all individuals and groups. Dewey and Dussel thus view democracy as something fundamentally experimental, or in the words of Dussel “a system to be perennially reinvented,” since any given attempt to institutionalize democracy must be viewed in the end as fallible (89). So too do they agree that the greatest present impediment to the healthy function of democratic institutions is the overpowering sway of economic forces, which are the single largest (though by no means exclusive) cause of oppression. In short, Dewey and Dussel both effectively work to subsume the bourgeois revolution’s ideal of liberty under the ideal of liberation.

These are all substantial similarities, but they are not identities. There are vast differences in the two philosophers’ historical and cultural contexts. Dewey’s U.S.-American pragmatism wants us to begin with our own (admittedly attenuated) experiences of community as a good and build from there. While he can certainly see that the world must be radically transformed, he believes that once we begin to reconstruct our local forms of life along increasingly democratic lines, we will become increasingly capable of transforming larger political structures to reflect democratic (rather than narrowly economic) values. Dussel cannot wait for this process to take place. Writing from a Latin American perspective, Dussel argues that present forms of local life in the United States rest upon a fundamentally unjust global economy. So whereas Dewey sees democracy beginning at home and spreading to the far corners of the earth, Dussel has witnessed the kind of so-called “democracy” actually exported by the U.S. since Dewey’s death. Dussel thus believes that we must begin by recognizing the fact that the so-called “American way of
life” rests upon global structures of exploitation and oppression. Even our local practices must therefore be forcefully interrupted before being reconstructed. While this may sound very close to reviving the old reform versus revolution debate, we should be wary of casting Dewey as the stodgy white reformist and Dussel as the fiery Latin revolutionary. Such portrayals tell us more about our own stereotypes than anything else. After all, Dewey’s commitment to democracy as a way of life is no less radical that Dussel’s. In turn, Dussel’s insistence that we strive for continuity between democratic means and democratic ends is no less pragmatic than Dewey’s. As I have suggested, the task should not be understood in terms of which philosophy “wins,” but rather on the light that these two traditions might shed upon one another.

Even more broadly speaking, I believe that developing a dialogue between U.S.-American pragmatism and Latin American liberation philosophy would contribute to not just a philosophical but also a political recognition of Hispanic and Latino voices in the present day U.S., a task that seems particularly pressing given that Hispanics and Latinos now comprise an estimated 16% of the U.S. population. While 16% is still a numerical minority, the demographic changes this figure represents are significant and are among the very things that Dewey was thinking about. From a position of relative power and privilege, he wrote:

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379 Dussel writes: “There is a certain solidarity with the ‘American way of life’ which is deathly, unjust, and tyrannical for a ‘Latin American way of life’” (UM, 123).
380 Robert Westbrook argues that Dewey is “a more radical voice than has generally been assumed,” “a deviant among American liberals, a liberal steadily radicalized by his distinctive faith in thoroughgoing democracy.” Robert Westbrook, John Dewey and American Democracy (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), xiv, xvi. Dewey illustrates his radicalism most clearly in his own words when he writes: “The end of democracy is a radical end. For it is an end that has not been adequately realized in any country at any time. It is radical because it requires great change in existing social institutions, economic, legal and cultural. A democratic liberalism that does not recognize these things in thought and action is not awake to its own meaning and to what that meaning demands. There is, moreover, nothing more radical than insistence upon democratic methods as the means by which radical social changes be effected” (LW 11: 298-99).
381 Dussel clearly states that actions following the logic of “the ends justify any means” are “always destructive in the end” (TTP, 97). He also rejects the traditional opposition between reform and revolution: “[R]evolutionaries are often believed to use violent means, producing the transformation from one political-economic system to another immediately, through a leap in time. Social democracy, on the other hand, is presented as an opposing, reformist, peaceful, institutionalist approach, etc. It is time to radically rethink the question” (111).
To gain an integrated individuality, each of us needs to cultivate [our] own garden. But there is no fence about this garden: it is no sharply marked-off enclosure. Our garden is the world, in the angle at which it touches our own manner of being. By [transforming] the corporate and industrial world in which we live, and by thus fulfilling the pre-condition for interaction with it, we, who are also parts of the moving present, create ourselves as we create an unknown future (LW 5:122-23; italics added).

From a place of political exile, Dussel claimed what Dewey would endorse without hesitation or qualification: “In reality, however, no modern State […] contains only a single nation, ethnic group, or language but rather embraces various cultures with their varying languages, histories, and even religions. The cultural unity of the modern State is a fiction” (TTP, 120; italics added).

What remains as an ongoing task for American philosophy is the search for greater community both inside and outside of the United States, at every level of social scale. What most urgently demands our attention is for disparate and (in a sense) distant cultures, countries, and groups to form themselves into global, hemispheric, national, regional, and local publics, not chasing the chimera of cultural unity, but working painstakingly for political solidarity, across various boundaries and borders. To borrow words from Dussel (who in turn borrowed them from the Zapatistas), we need to build “a world in which many worlds fit” (qtd. on TTP, 107). I have undertaken this dissertation in an attempt to understand the religious dimensions of making such a world (part of the “realm of the unseen” at present) feel as though it were both possible and necessary.

382 Dewey actually writes “accepting,” but he does not mean merely passive acquiescence, so I have taken the questionable liberty of modifying his language in the concrete case of not being able to give its context inside the quotation itself. As I have repeatedly noted, Dewey always insists that we must accept the facts, but only as a precondition of intelligently interrogating their meaning and the future possibilities that they might hold for the passionately intelligent transformation of the world. In Democracy and Education, Dewey makes this point clearly with respect to the ambiguous word adaptation: “Adaptation, in fine, is quite as much adaptation of the environment to our own activities as of our activities to the environment” (MW 9:52).

383 With respect to the possibility of such a world, I have three things in mind. The first is from James, who claims that if we were able to follow in the footsteps of his ethical saints, “it would involve such a breach with our instinctive springs of action as a whole, and with the present world's arrangements, that a critical point would practically be passed, and we should be born into another kingdom of being. Religious emotion makes us feel that other kingdom to be close at hand, within our reach” (VRE, 229). The second is the political slogan from the World Social Forum, which proclaims “Another World is Possible.” Finally, the U.S. Social Forum has added a fitting corollary: “Another US is Necessary.”
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