

HENRY JAMES AND THE PRAGMATISM OF WILLIAM JAMES

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At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, pragmatism along with institutionalism, instrumentalism, economic determinism, and legal realism formed a new intellectual pattern in America which replaced the genteel academic tradition of the respectable ministers and lawyers of the nineteenth century. Morton G. White has called this pattern "The revolt against formalism."¹ The older religions and philosophies, such as Puritan theology which denies the freedom of the will, were inadequate in helping modern man improve his conditions, so believed the pragmatists. Pragmatism offered a method founded on human will, experience, and intelligence that was intended to help Americans solve problems in all fields of activity and reflection. In American Thought, (1915), Woodbridge Riley vigorously describes the triumphant emergence of "a typical American philosophy," pragmatism, at this time in the height of its acceptance as the wave of the future. " 'The Western Goth, so fiercely practical, so keen of eye' has at last gotten himself a philosophy. It is pragmatism, the philosophy of practicality, the gospel of energy, whose prime criterion is success."² In a letter to Henry James dated May 4, 1907, William James reveals his confidence in the pragmatic movement by describing it as "something quite like the protestant reformation," which is destined for "definitive triumph."³

According to Ralph Barton Perry there is no evidence in letters or other sources of Henry James's feelings about his brother's psychology or "The Will to Believe," but after the publication of Pragmatism in 1907

1. Morton White, Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism, p. 3

2. Woodbridge Riley, American Thought, p. 297.

3. Henry James, ed., Letters of William James, vol. 2, p. 279.

Henry was sufficiently interested to comment.

October 17, 1907

Why the devil I didn't write to you after reading your Pragmatism - how I kept from it - I can't now explain save by the very fact of the spell itself (of interest and enthralment) that the book cast upon me; I simply sank down, under it, into such depths of submission and assimilation that any reaction, very nearly, even that of acknowledgment, would have had almost the taint of dissent or escape. Then I was lost in the wonder of the extent to which all my life I have (like M. Jourdain) unconsciously pragmatized. You are immensely and universally right, and I have been absorbing more of your followings up of the matter in the American (Journal of Psychology?)...I feel the reading of the book, at all events to have really been the event of my summer.⁴

The Pluralistic Universe and The Meaning of Truth also evoked enthusiastic responses from Henry.

July 18, 1909

All this time I'm not thanking you in the competent way for your Pluralistic volume - which now I effusively do. I read it, while in town, with a more thrilled interest than I can say; with enchantment, with pride, and almost with comprehension. It may sustain and inspire you a little to know that I'm with you, all along the line - and can conceive of no sense in any philosophy that is not yours! As an artist and 'creator' I catch on, hold on, to pragmatism and can work in the light of it and apply it; finding, in comparison, everything else (so far as I know the same!) utterly irrelevant and useless - vainly and coldly parallel!⁵

November 1, 1909

I have beautiful communications from you all too long unacknowledged and unrequited... To these I add the arrival, still more recently, of your brave new book, (The Meaning of Truth) which I fell upon immediately and have quite passionately absorbed - to within 50 pages of the end; a great number previous to which I have read this evening - which makes me late to begin this. I find it of thrilling interest, triumphant and brilliant, and am lost in admiration of your wealth and power. I palpitate as you make out your cause (since it seems to me you so utterly do,) as I under no romantic spell ever palpitate now; and into that case I enter intensely, unreservedly, and I think you would allow almost intelligently.

4. F. O. Matthiessen, The James Family, p. 343.

5. Ibid., pp. 343-344.

I find you nowhere as difficult as you surely make everything for your critics. Clearly you are winning a great battle and great will be your fame...

You surely make philosophy more interesting and living than any one has ever made it before, and by a real creative and undemolishable making; whereby all you write plays into my poor 'creative' consciousness and artistic vision and pretention with the most extraordinary suggestiveness and force of application and inspiration. Thank the powers - that is thank yours! - for a relevant and assimilable and referable philosophy, which is related to the rest of one's intellectual life otherwise and more conveniently than a fowl is related to a fish. In short, dearest William, the effect of these collected papers of your present volume - which I had read all individually before - seems to me exquisitely and adorably cumulative and, so to speak, consecrating; so that I, for my part feel Pragmatic invulnerability constituted.⁶

In The Thought and Character of William James, Ralph Barton Perry says, "It is evident from these letters that Henry let William do his philosophizing for him. There is no indication, even in the passages, of the ideas which the writer so greatly esteems - no exposition of them, still less criticism. In Henry James's other correspondence there is no philosophy at all."⁷ Perry feels that Henry's avowed acceptance of pragmatism is "admiring pride" for one more of William's attainments. Henry only praises William, while William freely offers both advice and criticism to his brother. In a reply to a letter of William's about The Golden Bowl, Henry makes the following comment on November 23, 1905:

I'm always sorry when I hear of your reading anything of mine, and always hope you won't -- you seem to me so constitutionally unable to "enjoy" it, and so condemned to look at it from a point of view remotely alien to mine in writing it, and to conditions out of which, as mine, it has inevitably sprung -- so that all the intentions that have been its main reason for being (with me) appear never to have reached you at all....⁸

6. Matthiessen, op. cit., pp. 343-344.

7. Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, p. 337

8. Ibid., p. 335.

If The Golden Bowl or other of Henry James's novels reveal pragmatism, or ideas sympathetic with William's way of thinking, it seems likely that William would have commented on them. Henry's intentions were different from William's, and William wrote to Henry, "Your methods and my ideas seem the reverse."⁹ Henry David Aiken believes that even though William James is cultivated, cosmopolitan and artistic, he is "tendentiously moralistic" in judging the arts, because he associates the aesthetic with the sensuous and the sensuous with frivolity and decadence.¹⁰ For Henry art and morality are intertwined, and in his style he found a form for his awareness of moral issues. As William H. Gass states it, this awareness "was so pervasive it furniture and walls and ornamental gardens and perched upon the shoulders of his people a dove for spirit...."¹¹

William and Henry do not meet on the plane of expression and style, but both are moralists concerned with the actions and ideas of people or characters involved in personal moral crises. Many recent critics seem to feel that since Henry acknowledges his adhesion to pragmatism (and even though William does not recognize it in Henry's works) this method is used by the characters in Henry's novels to solve their moral dilemma or attain their desires. Whether Henry was a pragmatist in his own life is impossible to determine since he had a "morbid passion for personal privacy and a standing quarrel with the blundering publicities of the age."¹² Henry rarely committed himself to direct statements of his ideas, and he did not seek to impress his opinions on the public. Alwyn Berland believes that Henry James is a pragmatist "primarily in the sense that all novelists

9. Perry, op. cit., p. 335

10. Henry David Aiken, "American Pragmatism Reconsidered", Commentary, September, 1962, p. 241.

11. William H. Gass, "The High Brutality of Good Intentions," Accent, Winter, 1958, p. 63.

12. E.F. Benson, ed., Henry James: Letters to A.C. Benson and Auguste Monod, p. 47.

tend to be: in their concern for testing attitudes or assumptions about life in the specific, dramatic texture of re-created life, and in measuring their consequences in the same way. In this sense, every good novel - including James's - is a 'pragmatic test.'¹³ The last of James's large-scale novels, The Golden Bowl, was finished in 1904, three years before Henry wrote to William that as an artist and creator he could work in the light of pragmatism and apply it; therefore a comparison of his novels and short stories before and after the publication of Pragmatism cannot be made. Some men such as Alexander Cowie, Ralph Barton Perry, and Harold T. McCarthy feel that although Henry James takes a position on the matter of pragmatism, he devoted little time to exploring its implications, since he is not concerned with philosophy per se. Whether Henry James unconsciously pragmatized all his life or not seems to depend on opinions of how this philosophy might have been interpreted by James himself, and also, by the scholar who studies this subject. This method is a rather subjective and speculative way of determining Henry James's position as a pragmatist.

One of the problems of pragmatism is that it does not lend itself to a summary definition. Each person who calls himself a pragmatist applies his own method to solving his own particular problems. In 1908, when the pragmatic movement was still young, Arthur O. Lovejoy pointed out that the term itself had thirteen different meanings in literature. In 1912 Ralph Barton Perry wrote a book, Present Philosophical Tendencies, in which he states that at this time, "We are as yet too much in the midst of it (pragmatism) to discern its general contour...."¹⁴ Even today, fifty years later, there is no unified system of thought formulated about the

13. Alwyn Berland, "Henry James and the Aesthetic Tradition," Journal of the History of Ideas, July-September, 1962, p. 418.

14. Ralph Barton Perry, Present Philosophical Tendencies, p. 197.

particular tenets of this philosophy. But the most immediate concern of this study is what William James means in Pragmatism when this book was published in 1907.

Charles S. Peirce first conceived the basic idea of pragmatism as early as 1871. His ideas were more fully developed at discussions of the "Metaphysical Club," a group of several members of the Harvard faculty including William James, Chauncey Wright, Francis Ellingwood Abbott, John Fiske, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. These informal meetings were held during 1872, 1873, and 1874. In November, 1877 and January, 1878 Peirce published in the Popular Science Monthly two articles, "The Fixation of Belief" and "How to Make Our Ideas Clear."¹⁵ These articles did not earn Peirce any prominence as an American philosopher until twenty years later in 1898 when his doctrine was revived by William James in an address, "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results," which was delivered in Berkeley, at the University of California.¹⁶ Charles Peirce's pragmatism or "Pragmaticism" as he renamed it, selecting a word "which was ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers"¹⁷ is often referred to as a philosophy of science or meaning. Peirce says that pragmatism is related to the gospel and an application of the sole principle of logic recommended by Jesus: "Ye may know them by their fruits."¹⁸ His principle of pragmatism is that the whole meaning of any idea is to be found by this method. "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object."¹⁹ In an article printed in 1905, "What

15. William Werkmeister, A History of Philosophical Ideas in America, p. 171.

16. Riley, op. cit., p. 281.

17. Philip P. Wiener, Values in a Universe of Chance: Selected Writings of Charles S. Peirce, p. 186.

18. Ibid., p. 181.

19. Ibid., p. 181.

Pragmatism Is," Peirce says that as an experimentalist using the ways of thinking of the laboratory, he has formulated this idea,²⁰ and in 1898 William James states that this was the principle of his pragmatism. But James is set apart from other major pragmatists because of his interest in the psychological, individual effect of terms which lead to a private solution of problems, while Peirce, for example, is concerned with general operational consequences which can be tested by scientific methods used in laboratories. Peirce's pragmatism leads to a theory of meaning, but within the scope of pragmatism James includes a theory of truth, and he confuses the issue of this philosophy by stating the main principle alternately as a theory of the nature of meaning and a theory of the nature of truth.

William James's pragmatism is first of all a method primarily used for settling metaphysical disputes between the temperamental extremes of the "tough-minded" and the "tender-minded" philosophers, the clash which William James regards as the fundamental theme of the whole contrapuntal history of philosophy. A mediating philosophy is of great interest to William; but this aspect of pragmatism has no particular appeal to Henry, for one can see no evidence of metaphysical disputes in his novels or stories. His characters are not concerned with the theory of meaning, the conflict of science or religion, the establishment of an "eternal moral order", or questions such as whether the world is one or many, fated or free, material or spiritual. With the exception of Lambert Strether in The Ambassadors who is concerned with the "illusion of freedom" or free will, Henry specializes his interests on man's relations to man and to

20. Weiner, op. cit., p. 19.

society. He excludes larger problems of man's relation to the universe and to God. According to William, "The whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one."²¹

The characters of Henry James do not use pragmatism as a philosophy for considering world-formulas, for they are not philosophers. They use the method of pragmatism as individuals do in working toward their ends, such as marriage, money, and happiness. Not all of these ends and means would be agreeable to William James, a very ethical man, but he leaves pragmatism "wide-open" without any sort of implied or explicit moral control.

According to C. B. Cox, Henry James emphasizes the importance of moral integrity rather than practical achievement, since Jamesian heroes and heroines find consistent moral behavior more important than riches and prosperity.²² William, on the other hand, is often criticized for being a spokesman for materialistic opportunism, and pragmatism is sometimes found defined as the ideology of American capitalism. William H. Gass writes, "Both Henry James and his brother were consumed by a form of the Moral Passion. Both struggled to find in the plural world of practice a vantage for spirit. But William was fatally eroded in the commercial. How well he speaks for the best of his age."²³ William can be defended from this charge by the statement of his feelings in a letter he sent to H. G. Wells

21. William James, Pragmatism and four essays from The Meaning of Truth, p. 45.

22. C. B. Cox, "Henry James and Stoicism," Essays and Studies, VII, 1955, p. 77.

23. Gass, op. cit., p. 63.

on September 11, 1906. He shows himself a foe of the American worship of the "bitch goddess SUCCESS" with its "squalid cash interpretation" and "Callousness to abstract justice."²⁴ He also believes commercialism would clash with other "vital benefits." But if pragmatism as a philosophy is judged by its emphasis and general tendencies rather than by the character and intentions of its founders, then pragmatism has a tendency to ring with the sound of money and success. Throughout his works William James uses commercial terms, and once Charles S. Peirce and John Dewey saw the result of this practice they tried to distinguish their philosophies from his. Gass points out that in The Varieties of Religious Experience James makes the following statements: "God does a wholesale not a retail business. The world is a banking house. Catholic confession is a method of periodically auditing and squaring accounts."²⁵ In Pragmatism he writes, "Truth lives, in fact, for the most part on a credit system. Our thoughts and beliefs 'pass,' so long as nothing challenges them, just as bank-notes pass so long as no one refuses them. But all this points to direct face-to-face verifications somewhere, without which the fabric of truth collapses like a financial system with a no-cash-basis whatever."²⁶ He also refers to truth's "cash value." "Cash-values!" says Woodbridge Riley. "Such phrases pervert the principle of Peirce into a transaction of the Chicago clearing house."²⁷ The opponents of pragmatism were quick to point out that this philosophy is a materialistic one whose use for ideas is their "cash value." Regardless of criticism, William continues to use business

24. Henry James, ed., Letters of William James, vol. 2, p. 260.

25. Gass, op. cit., p. 64.

26. William James, Pragmatism, p. 137.

27. Riley, op. cit., p. 317.

terms and even expands them. Pragmatism is more than a philosophy typical of the land of the dollar, but this factor must be taken into consideration since so much emphasis has been placed upon it.

One of the reasons the original intentions of William James and the actual uses of the pragmatic method are often two different things is that pragmatism is a "completely genial" philosophy which will consider any evidence or entertain any hypothesis. It has no dogmas, no doctrines and no set results; it is a method and attitude of orientation: "the attitude of looking away from first things, principles, 'categories,' supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts."²⁸ The pragmatic method interprets each notion by tracing its practical consequences, and the meaning of a thought is determined by the conduct it produces. Peirce and William James assume that thoughts and beliefs are really rules for action; for the pragmatist all sincere belief is incipient action and reveals itself only in action. "Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest. We don't lie back upon them, we move forward, and, on occasion, make nature over again by their aid."²⁹ The pragmatist declares himself in what he renounces and what he seeks: "He turns away from abstractions and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards action and towards power."³⁰ From a paraphrase of a notebook entry William James made in 1870, one can see how concerned he is about action. "We need only in cold blood ACT as if the thing in question were real, and keep acting as if it

28. William James, Pragmatism, p. 47.

29. Ibid., p. 46.

30. Ibid., p. 45.

were real, and it will infallibly end by growing into such a connection with our life that it will become real."³¹

Within the scope of pragmatism, William James includes a genetic theory of truth. Truth is an adaptive function of the mind, and beliefs become true as experience bears them out. There is no "stagnant property" in the truth of an idea, for "truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events."³² According to James, "True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot."³³ True beliefs are those that work in aiding men in the conduct of their affairs and which help them get into satisfactory relations with other parts of their experience. Truth instrumentally leads people from old opinions to new ones, and a new idea is true in proportion to its usefulness and expediency to the individual thinker. James also identifies truth as "one species of good," for true ideas are helpful in life's practical struggles. If ideas clash with other vital benefits, they are not true.

William James's interest in philosophy is fundamentally restricted to its psychological aspect. He never elaborates any systematic theory of morals, politics, or social organization. In his first lecture on pragmatism he says that the philosophy which is so important to man is not a technical matter: "It is only partly got from books; it is our individual way of seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos."³⁴ James offers to men methods and attitudes which he feels will work best in leading the individual to meet the demands of experience. Since he believes that the questions of religious and moral beliefs cannot be determined by

31. Clinton Hartley Grattan, The Three Jameses, A Family of Minds, p. 146.

32. William James, Pragmatism, p. 133.

33. Ibid., 133.

34. Ibid., p. 18.

the public procedures of science and that they concern the private satisfactions of each individual person, he formulated an attitude in 1896 which he entitled "The Will to Believe." It offers each man a means to test out his ideas about religion and righteousness, for James felt it is better to take a risk and act with belief than to lose all chance of ever attaining truth and more abundant life. "The Will to Believe" justifies faith and defends man's right to adopt a believing attitude in order to solve problems of conduct or right action.

Both pragmatism and the will to believe involve an element of risk which a genuine pragmatist must accept once he acts for what he thinks is a great cause. If a person is wrong, so much the worse for him; but this sacrificial action makes life significant. As a meliorist James believed that the world naturally gets better and especially that it can be made better by human effort. "The world stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hands."³⁵ Thus, William James places much emphasis on action; if man believes and acts, his beliefs will have a chance of becoming real.

Pragmatism is meant to be very utilitarian; William James says truth for the pragmatist "becomes a class name for all sorts of definite working values in experience,"³⁶ and the possession of true thoughts "means everywhere the invaluable instruments of action."³⁷ Within the novels of Henry James are characters whose intellectual growth is very similar to pragmatism's theory of truth. As their stock of old opinions is put under a strain by new experiences, new truths are added to their old opinions. These new truths help them deal practically and intellectually with reality as they better understand it.

35. William James, Pragmatism, p. 35.

36. Ibid., p. 54.

37. Ibid., p. 134.

Within six novels of Henry James - The American (1877), The Portrait of a Lady (1881), The Bostonians (1886), The Princess Casamassima (1886), The Ambassadors (1903), and The Golden Bowl (1904) - American and European characters are found who follow the pragmatic method in working toward various ends. These include Christopher Newman, Noemie Nichole, Olive Chancellor, Paul Muniment, and Maggie Verver. Isabel Archer and Lambert Strether are not pragmatists, but they fall within the scope of pragmatism in that they follow the theory of truth in broadening their experiences and developing their consciousness. Also within these novels are illustrations of persons who, due to personal reasons, are ineffectual as pragmatists. They include the Princess Cassamassima, Hyacinth Robinson, and Miss Birdseye. Valentine de Bellegarde cannot be a pragmatist, as in one sense he wants to be, because of environmental reasons and his sense of family honor.

Christopher Newman in The American is a pragmatist in a commercial sense, taking into account that the appeal to business is a tendency of the movement of pragmatism rather than one of the doctrines of the philosophy established by its founders. Americans worship the practical inventor and the pushing man of affairs. They admire visible consequences, and prosperity seems to hover within the call of Christopher Newman. As James describes him: "he is evidently a man of business, the term appears to confess, for his particular benefit, to undefined and mysterious boundaries which invite the imagination to bestir itself."³⁸ His history is a tale of the Western world which dealt with enterprises "of great financial tides" which James felt were unnecessary to introduce to the reader in detail. Action is as

38. Henry James, The American, pp. 4-5.

natural to Christopher Newman as respiration and he is a born experimentalist. Christopher's sole aim in life had been to make money, or as James says, "To gouge a fortune, the bigger the better." "Life had been for him an open game, and he played for high stakes."³⁹ To move at his ease he needs the sense of great risks, and he has that pragmatic willingness to live without assurances or guarantees. His methods are those of a shrewd, successful businessman who is accustomed to gaining his ends by straightforward, expedient means. He has a lively perception of ends and means. Once he has an idea he is willing to take the risk, act and test it out. As Newman tells Mrs. Tristram, "Present me to a woman who comes up to my notions, and I'll marry her tomorrow.I want, in a word, the best article in the market."⁴⁰ Christopher felt some rare creature all one's own is the best kind of property to possess. "It's the greatest victory over circumstances."⁴¹

If The American had been "real" rather than "romantic" in James's sense, Christopher would have been successful in marrying Madame de Cintre, for James writes in his Preface to The New York edition that the Bellegardes' preferred course, "a thousand times preferred, would have been to haul him and his fortune into their boat under cover of night perhaps, in any case as quietly and with as little bumping and splashing as possible, and there accomodate him with the very safest and most convenient seat."⁴² Once Newman was married to Claire, the Bellegardes would have with eagerness taken everything he could give them, only asking for more and more. But the Bellegardes do not jump at James's "rich and easy" American in the novel; Newman is unsuccessful in gaining the wife he was after. Since

39. Henry James, The American, p. 27.

40. Ibid., p. 49.

41. Ibid., p. 50.

42. Ibid., p. xx.

what would have happened in real life does not happen in the novel, James calls The American a romance. However, by showing that Christopher, in all his New World innocence, lacks the savoir-faire in meeting European experience, Henry James reveals that the use of the pragmatic method alone can lead to unsuccessful results.

The world, to Newman's vision, "was a great bazaar where one might stroll around and purchase handsome things; but he was no more conscious, individually, of social pressure than he admitted the claim of the obligatory purchase. He had not only a dislike but a sort of moral mistrust of thoughts too admonitory; one shouldn't hunt about for a standard as a dog hunts around for a master."⁴³ Europe has a sophisticated social standard, but the complex Parisian world seems to Newman a very simple affair. Thus in being indiscriminating and unperceptive, Newman in a sense fails as a pragmatist since he does not follow the theory of truth by adding new experience to his old opinions. He uses only the method of pragmatism by looking away from first things, a supposed necessity like social pressure, and by looking towards the last thing, his marriage. Even if Christopher Newman had been successful in marrying Claire, only afterwards would he realize that this event was allowed to take place in order for the Bellegardes to have access to his money.

Noemie Nioche is an example of a pragmatist in The American who, unlike Newman, "made her move with her eyes open."⁴⁴ "She had been looking at the wonderful world about her since she was ten years old, and he would have been a wise man who could tell her any secret of the town."⁴⁵ She has never

43. Henry James, The American, p. 87.

44. Ibid., p. 288.

45. Ibid., pp. 76-77.

sacrificed her innocence because she simply never had any to lose. Valentin describes her as intelligent, determined, ambitious, unscrupulous, and capable of looking at a man strangled without changing color. She is "a beautiful little monster" after money. According to Valentin, "She was determined not to let her reputation go till she had got her equivalent. About her equivalent she had high ideas. Apparently her requirements had been met. Well, they've been met in a superior form. The form's fifty years old, baldheaded and deaf, but he's very easy about money."⁴⁶

As Noemie sat daily admiring the dresses of the rich Parisian ladies touring the Louvre, she formed her conclusions of what she wanted in life. She said she would not marry at all if she could not marry well, but the European social scale places her in such a position that her only prospects for marriage are grocers and butchers, men who cannot fulfill her ambitions. She had to give up either her morals or her ideal, and being unscrupulous she sacrificed her morals. Christopher Newman, on the other hand, was deprived by the European social order of his ideal, Claire de Cintre, since her family could not lower themselves to a marriage with a man in business. He loses the tangible fruits of victory, but he captures the prize for morality by exhibiting finer virtues than the Bellegardes in not taking revenge when he has the opportunity. Newman, an American "pragmatist," chooses good in making a moral choice; Noemie, a European pragmatist, chooses evil.

Noemie rebels against objective morality, but she is also rebelling against her place in life. She wanted to raise herself on the social scale, just as Newman had been able to do in America, but the European situation

46. Henry James, The American, p. 288.

makes this impossible for Noemie. Valentin de Bellegarde, who is of the elite, wants to "lower" himself and do something. But his sense of honor keeps him within the social order which has priority over his rights as an individual. He has nothing and he can do nothing, for his place in life is made for him. He says, "When I was twenty I looked round me and saw a world with everything ticketed 'Don't touch.'....I couldn't go into business, I couldn't make money, because I was a Bellegarde."⁴⁷ Fixed principles like the honor of the family name keeps Valentin from acting, which results in a tragic waste of high human potential. When he does act to defend his honor, he dies a senseless death in a duel.

Villainy and evil in the novels of Henry James are seen when one person tampers or interferes with another person's freedom. Dogma, closed systems, and fixed principles also interfere with the autonomy of the individual, as is illustrated by the case of Valentin. If Valentin had acted and entered business affairs to save himself from boredom, he would have had to turn against the established social order, and in consequence he would have ruined the family honor. Pragmatic action is not a possibility for Valentin as it is for Newman, or Noemie, who is willing to sacrifice her honor. If nothing else, the illustrations of pragmatism in The American seem to reveal that this philosophy works best in a society where there are more business opportunities and where class status is not determined by heredity. In the fluid society of the United States at this time there were fewer fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins that a pragmatist had to turn from.

Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady "was a young person of many

47. Henry James, The American, p. 47.

theories; her imagination was remarkably active. It had been her fortune to possess a finer mind than most persons among whom her lot was cast; to have a larger perception of surrounding facts and to care for knowledge that was tinged with the unfamiliar."⁴⁸ An American with this type of mind would seem better prepared for Europe than Christopher Newman, but Isabel also has weaknesses. She relies on her own judgment; "She was in the habit of taking for granted, on scanty evidence, that she was right."⁴⁹ Sometimes she discovers she is "grotesquely wrong," but her self-esteem and desire to think well of herself allows her to hold her head high. In her inexperience and with her meagre knowledge Isabel is unable to distinguish between appearance and reality at all times, and she has seen very little evil in the world. She hopes she would never do anything wrong, but like a pragmatist she is willing to face the risk of any commitment she makes. William James and Isabel are alike in the way they look at the universe. "She had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action: she held it must be detestable to be afraid or ashamed."⁵⁰

To act, to strive, one must believe, and William James's "Will to Believe" is similar to the theory Isabel follows. She is ready to act on the basis of conceptions and notions unsupported by final evidence; she marries even against the advice of her best friends. "Act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes," quotes William James.⁵¹ Isabel marries Gilbert Osmond, who she thinks is artistic through and through, and who consults his taste in everything. She has never before met a person of "so fine a grain." With her ardent desire to enlarge and enrich

48. Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady, p. 66.

49. Ibid., p. 67.

50. Ibid., p. 68.

51. William James, The Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy and Human Immortality, p. 30.

her experience of life she feels that Osmond can guide her, for he represents culture, the highest form of human life; Isabel's ideal and the best place to invest her inheritance.

In the years following her marriage the will to believe is replaced by the pragmatic theory of truth in Isabel's mind. As she encounters new experiences her consciousness grows. "New truths are resultants of new experiences,"⁵² writes William James in Pragmatism. "We have to live today by what truth we can get today, and be ready tomorrow to call it falsehood."⁵³ With her deepened awareness Isabel discovers that Osmond's art is empty forms and appearances backed by no ethical responsibility or inward state of grace. In the Notebooks, Henry explains that "The idea of the whole thing is that the poor girl, who has dreamed of freedom and nobleness, who has done, as she believes, a generous, natural, clear-sighted thing, finds herself in reality ground in the very mill of the conventional."⁵⁴

Henry tries to show in The Portrait of a Lady through Ralph Touchett that the quest for culture is not a false goal or ideal, but William would have taken an opposite point of view by applying the pragmatic conception of truth. "Ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience."⁵⁵ "Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events."⁵⁶ Isabel's idea of culture does not help her to get into satisfactory relations with her environment, for Osmond, the representation of her idea, is revealed through events as being a deception. If Osmond had been true, then the idea of culture would have

52. William James, Pragmatism, p. 113.

53. Ibid., p. 145.

54. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, ed., The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 15.

55. William James, Pragmatism, p. 49.

56. Ibid., p. 133.

been true too, in a pragmatic way of looking at results.

In The Bostonians Henry James is not so concerned with the destiny of the characters as he is with giving a pictorial view of American social conditions when the moral backbone of Transcendentalism has broken down, and the lunatic fringe of nature camps, nudist colonies, free unions, women's emancipation and temperance movements developed. Henry laments this period when a feeling prevailed among some people that any change is good. William James seems to support this attitude, for he believes that truth is always in the making, like the perfect society; but for truth and the perfect society to develop there must be action and change.

Henry James felt that America put too much trust in reform movements and the idea that external changes solve everything. Public act should stem from private integrity and Henry tries to illustrate that reformers must be healthy individuals to produce healthy reforms. Miss Birdseye plays an important function in the book. Her features are blurred: "The long practice of philanthropy had not given accent to her features; it had rubbed out their transitions, their meanings. The waves of sympathy, of enthusiasm, had wrought upon them in the same way in which the waves of time finally modify the surfact of old marble busts, gradually washing away their sharpness, their details."⁵⁷ She has lost her identity as an individual, and her private integrity is gone because "she belonged to any and every league that has been founded for any purpose whatever."⁵⁸ She is an "essentially formless old woman, who had no more outline than a bundle of hay."⁵⁹ Henry is more conservative about change than William, and

57. Henry James, The Bostonians, p. 27.

58. Ibid., p. 27.

59. Ibid., p. 29.

one of the messages of the book is that without morality, integrity, and foresight, changes pressed by blurred individuals like Miss Birdseye can bring unhealthy rather than good results to society.⁶⁰

In an article, "Pragmatic Realism in The Bostonians," William McMurrray writes of another unhealthy individual, Olive Chancellor, "who tries hardest of all to make life be a thing that suits herself. Her habit of conduct is characterized by a strenuous egocentricity that she mistakes for idealistic altruism."⁶¹ Olive certainly has pragmatic characteristics -- she visualizes the world as "really malleable," waiting to receive its final touches by her hands. According to Mrs. Luna, "She would reform the solar system if she could get hold of it."⁶² Mr. McMurrray says, "a pathological selfishness impels her to try to make the world reflect her own image."⁶³ She lives largely for the future, and James writes, "The most secret, the most sacred hope of her nature was that she might some day be a martyr and die for something."⁶⁴ Her nature "was like a skiff in a stormy sea,"⁶⁵ and Mr. McMurrray believes she thrived on conflict; "In a pluralistic and opposing world, Olive stands for a monistic absolutism in the name of Chancellor."⁶⁶ She campaigns for the emancipation of women, striking at the heterosexual basis of society, and she is opposed by Basil Ransom who wishes to preserve the "masculine tone." Mr. McMurrray suggests that The Bostonians illustrates pragmatism in the sense "that all absolutisms, when tested by experience, either must yield their claims to sanctity or fall in disaster."⁶⁷ He

60. Alwyn Berland, Lecture Notes.

61. William McMurrray, "Pragmatic Realism in The Bostonians," Nineteenth Century Fiction, March, 1962, p. 340.

62. Henry James, The Bostonians, p. 7.

63. Mc Murrray, op. cit., p. 340.

64. Henry James, The Bostonians, p. 13.

65. Ibid., p. 10.

66. McMurrray, op. cit., p. 340.

67. Ibid., p. 344.

believes American life can be marred by an absolutist psychology, morally and philosophically. "Morally it means that, in pretending to absolutist forms in our activity, we risk spiritual death. Philosophically it means that, in limiting reality and truth to our narrow experience, we falsify them at our peril. A pragmatism that would free us of these things by keeping life 'open' is what James urges instead."⁶⁸ Pluralistic openness agrees with the pragmatic temper best, for as William James says, "It immediately suggests an infinitely larger number of the details of future experience to our mind."⁶⁹

Henry James seems critical of the whole reform movement and each of the reformers. Olive Chancellor's will to believe was so absolute it cut off experience which might have brought clear insight resulting in worthwhile actions. Miss Birdseye is so open to experience she is no longer an individual. Basil Ransom describes the charlatan faith-healer Tarrant as "false, cunning, vulgar, ignoble; the cheapest kind of human product."⁷⁰ It is clear to Olive that "Tarrant was a moralist without a moral sense."⁷¹ When Mrs. Tarrant talks and wishes to insist, "She puckered and distorted her face, with an effort to express the inexpressible, which turned out, after all, to be nothing."⁷² Basil Ransom seems to express Henry's ideas about the age.

The whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solitudes and coddled sensibilities, which, if we don't soon look out, will usher in the reign of mediocrity, of the feeblest and flattest and the most preten-

68. McMurray, op. cit., p. 344.

69. William James, Pragmatism, p. 180.

70. Henry James, The Bostonians, p. 58.

71. Ibid., p. 72.

72. Ibid., p. 114.

tious that has ever been. The masculine character, the ability to dare and endure, to know and yet not fear reality, to look the world in the face and take it for what it is — a very queer and partly very base mixture — that is what I want to preserve, or rather, as I may say, to recover; and I must tell you that I don't in the least care what becomes of you ladies while I make the attempt.⁷³

Henry James does not want a universe with such people contributing to create its truth. Pragmatists views the universe "as growing in all sorts of places, especially where thinking beings are at work."⁷⁴ An empty person like Mr. Tarrant is at work in the world, and he "was incapable of giving an offhand answer or opinion on the simplest occasion."⁷⁵ In an article, "Henry James as a Social Critic," Clinton Oliver says that James is attacking the rise of the aggressive middle class to political and social ascendancy. In European ruling circles James observed men who were of fine breeding and who represented civilization.⁷⁶ In The Bostonians we discover that Olive Chancellor hates Europe and would like to abolish it, and one has the feeling that Henry James would have liked to abolish Olive Chancellor and others with similar hopes of reform.

Before discussing the pragmatic characters in The Princess Casanoviana, it is helpful to note Lionel Trilling's comments in The Liberal Imagination on what he considers the main dispute in the book to be, since it was a primary mark of difference between William and Henry James.

The matter which is at issue in The Princess Casanoviana, the dispute between art and moral action, the controversy between the glorious unregenerate past and the regenerate future, was not of merely general interest to Henry James, nor, indeed, to any of the notable members of the James family. Ralph Barton Perry in his Thought and Character of William James find the question so real and troubling

73. Henry James, The Bostonians, p. 345.

74. William James, Pragmatism, p. 168.

75. Henry James, The Bostonians, p. 103.

76. Clinton Oliver, "Henry James as a Social Critic," Antioch Review, Summer, 1947, pp. 256-257.

in William's life that he devotes a chapter to it. William, to whom the antithesis often represented itself as between Europe-art and American-action, settled in favor of America and action. Henry settled, it would seem, the other way -- certainly in favor of art. But whether Henry's option necessarily involved, as William believed, a decision in favor of the past, a love of the past for, as people like to say, the past's sake, may be thought of as the essential matter of dispute between William and Henry...

William came to suspect that the preoccupation with art was very close to immorality.....James even goes so far as to imply that the man of art may be close to the secret center of things when the man of action is quite apart from it.⁷⁷

Henry's insistence upon art as a primary moralizing force, and William's insistence upon action, cannot be reconciled, because one force tends to destroy the other. Hyacinth Robinson represents the dilemma one is faced with when he must choose between "The flood of democracy rising over the world; that would sweep all the traditions of the past before it,"⁷⁸ and the fruits of the creative spirit founded on the unethical utilization of the great majority of the people for selfish purposes. "There was no peace for him between the two currents that flowed in his nature, the blood of his passionate, plebeian mother and that of his long-descended, super-civilized sire. They continued to toss him from one side to the other; they arrayed him in intolerable defiances and revenges against himself. He had a high ambition; he wanted neither more nor less than to get hold of the truth and wear it in his heart."⁷⁹ Destroying the "despotisms, cruelties, exclusions and monopolies of the past" would dissolve the base upon which the "monuments and treasures of art, the conquests of learning and taste, and the general fabric of civilization" are founded. Hyacinth

77. Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination, pp. 77-80.

78. Henry James, The Princess Casanovissa, Vol. 2, p. 262.

79. Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 264.

cannot reject the past entirely and look towards the future as a pragmatist does, and neither can Henry James. Pragmatism cannot mediate between Hyacinth's love of the beauty of the world and his hate of the iniquity of its social arrangements.

Paul Muniment wears his truth near his heart; everything is wrong and he wants everything changed. He is unlike Hyacinth, who is afraid the democracy wouldn't care for perfect bindings or for the finer sorts of conversation. Such concerns are too trivial for Paul's consideration. "His absence of passion, his fresh-coloured coolness, his easy exact knowledge, the way he kept himself clean...in circumstances of foul contact, constituted a group of qualities that had always appeared to Hyacinth singularly enviable. Most enviable of all was the force that enabled him to sink personal sentiment where a great public good was to be attempted..."⁸⁰ He is after great ends and courses "necessarily averse to the eye of the day and the observation of the police."⁸¹ Muniment is sinister because he does not announce his principles, and he would stop at nothing in order to secure his aims. Yet he is admired by some characters in the novel for his forcefulness as a man of destiny. As an opportunist and pragmatist his actions, particularly the brutal way he uses the Princess, lack a moral quality that William James would have found extremely objectionable. Lionel Trilling says that "Anarchism holds that the natural goodness of man is absolute and that society corrupts, and that the guide to anarchist action is the desire to destroy society in general."⁸² William James is no anarchist although he believes in the goodness of man, particularly Americans.

80. Henry James, The Princess Casanoviana, Vol. 2, pp. 137-138.

81. Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 410.

82. Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination, p. 69.

"When economic troubles became acute and broke out into strikes (in the United States), he treated the matter as a mere case of growing pains. He pointed out to his brother Henry that all the Chicago anarchists were continental foreigners. Native Americans would not engage in such activities!"⁸³ William James should not be suspected of conspiring to support the corrupters of society, but the pragmatic method is the one Mussolini says he used to reach his political beliefs by discarding 'pure reason' or 'a priori principles' and adopting those policies which work out best in practice. The true policies are the expedient policies.⁸⁴ Through Paul Muniment, Henry James shows how pragmatism can be used by cold-hearted egotists since there is no way to guarantee the moral quality of action within the philosophy.

The Princess Casamassima is another example of a "sick" reformer whose interests are more caprices than moral discoveries. She is an intelligent energetic woman who is bored and world weary. She seeks to give more meaning to her life by becoming a sincere revolutionist with a moral interest in helping the laboring classes. "The extravagance of her attitude in these new relations would have its root and apparent logic in her need to feel freshly about something or other - it might scarce matter what," writes James in the Preface.⁸⁵ She felt she could feel freshly about the sorrow of the people since it is furthest away from anything else she has tried in her attempts to find a strong and final basis for life. William James says, "The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true; is made true by events." In other

83. C. R. Grattan, The Three Jameses, p. 165.

84. William Hocking, Types of Philosophy, p. 144.

85. Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 74.

words if we lack the necessary automatic belief, we must act as if we had the belief, and the belief will come. The Princess throws herself into the cause, acts as if she really believes; but her belief is not made true by events as William James predicts. She moves to a shabby house in Padeira Crescent after she says she sold "everything" to give to the poor. In order to acquaint herself with the sufferings of the poor she wants to feel the sensations for herself, but what poor, wretched person besides the Princess has a piano, a maid, and the finest brand of tea?

Lambert Strether at the beginning of The Ambassadors has not been a very successful pragmatist in achieving practical results. James writes in The Notebooks: "He is an American...who has...the consciousness of a good deal of prolonged effort and tension, the memory of a good many earnest and anxious experiments -- professional, practical, intellectual, moral, personal -- to look back upon, without, for himself, any very proportionate sense of acknowledged or achieved success."⁸⁶

Lambert is a man who hasn't lived at all in the sense of passions, sensations, impulses or pleasures. There were few opportunities for enjoyment in Woollett, Massachusetts. All his life Strether has been "ridden by his New England conscience." James says he is vaguely haunted by the feeling of what he has missed, but Lambert is too innocent or ignorant of life to know that he is an unconscious victim of a stagnated environment. Filled with a priori judgments, Strether goes to Paris as Mrs. Newsome's ambassador to rescue her son Chad from some "wicked woman" who, they are quite sure, is bad for Chad. Miss Gostrey tries to tell Strether at this

86. The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 375.

time that " 'One can only judge on the facts,' " and that this woman could be charming. " 'Charming?' -- Strether stared before him. 'She's base, venal -- out of the streets.' "⁸⁷ These could very well be the words of the "moral swell," Mrs. Newsome, who "pigeon-holed her fellow mortals." She feels this woman in Paris is "above all a low person, a mere mercenary and raving adventuress of the basest stamp."⁸⁸ Lambert is prejudiced against Paris and Chad; either one he feels he cannot like. He braces himself for being distressed about Chad, for he expects to find him coarsened. Woollett had insisted on his coarseness.

Such is the state of Strether's mind when he arrives in Europe, but he is a particularly perceptive person who discovers the positive values of European culture, art, aesthetics. As he is gradually initiated into a world of new values, his prejudices become modified and he finds it necessary to shift his moral position. Gradually he is liberated from narrow-mindedness which has kept him from "seeing" and living. The processes of becoming aware, growing conscious, and satisfactorily adjusting to experience are of interest both to William and Henry James. Chad has been made over and much improved, Strether is surprised to discover. It is perhaps a specialty of Paris, or "admirably Mme de Vionnet who came after a little to stand, with Strether, for most of the things that make the charm of civilization as he now revises and imaginatively reconstructs, morally reconsiders, so to speak, civilization."⁸⁹ The kind of adjustment made by Strether in the novel is discussed by William James in Pragmatism.

87. Henry James, The Ambassadors, Vol. 1, p. 55.

88. The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 301.

89. Ibid., p. 309.

The process of new opinions is always the same. The individual has a stock of old opinions already, but he meets a new experience that puts them to a strain. Somebody contradicts them; or in a reflective moment he discovers that they contradict each other; or he hears of facts with which they are incompatible; or desires arise in him which cease to satisfy. The result is an inward trouble to which his mind till then had been a stranger, and from which he seeks to escape by modifying his previous mass of opinions. He saves as much as he can, for in this matter of belief we are all extreme conservatives. So he tries to change first this opinion, and then that (for they resist change very variously), until at last some new idea comes up which he can graft upon the ancient stock with a minimum of disturbance of the latter, some idea that mediates between the stock and the new experience and runs them into another most felicitously and expediently.

This new idea is then adopted as the true one. It preserves the older stock of truths with a minimum of modification...The most violent revolutions in an individual's beliefs leave most of his old order standing... New truth is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions. It marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity.⁹⁰

As William James describes it in Pragmatism, Strether's mind "grew in spots, and like grease spots, the spots spread." Strether patched and tinkered with his old beliefs and prejudices almost from hour to hour. He reverses his decision to save Chad from Paris and Mme de Vionnet, and in doing so he sacrifices his prospect of marriage with Mrs. Newsome: the promise of ease and security for the rest of his days. He leaves Maria Gostrey also to go back to a life of no prospects at all, for to be right and to illustrate he has maintained his own frame of morality he felt he must not get anything for himself out of the whole affair. Strether's new opinions count as true in gratifying his desire to assimilate the novel in his experience to his beliefs in stock. But they are not true in the practical sense of being good in life. As a man past his prime, he is

90. William James, Pragmatism, pp. 50-51.

better off with his old beliefs because his new beliefs force him to reject the advantages of Woollett. He is able to see Mrs. Newsome as she really is. But more important than material gains to Strether is his intellectually more abundant life. He tells little Billham,

The affair...of life - couldn't, no doubt, have been different for me; for it's at best a tin mould, either fluted and embossed, with ornamental excreescences, or else smooth and dreadfully plain, into which, a helpless jelly, one's own consciousness is poured - so that one 'takes' the form...and is more or less compactly held by it; one lives in fine as one can. Still, one has the illusion of freedom; therefore don't be, like me, without the memory of that illusion....Don't at any rate miss things out of stupidity.Do what you like so long as you don't make my mistake. For it was a mistake. Live!⁹¹

Living all one can developing consciousness, is as important to William James as it is to Henry. For William pragmatism is, among other things, a charter of freedom from the narrow intellectualism and "cognitivism" of the whole Western philosophical tradition.⁹² Although Strether had a predetermined heredity, and his life probably could not have been different, he can still cherish this illusion of freedom. Arnold L. Goldsmith in an article, "Henry James's Reconciliation of Free Will and Fatalism," states that Strether, whom he calls a fatalist, pragmatically accepted the illusion of free will.

Here is William James's pragmatism; if an illusion leads to successful action, to progress, to happiness, then it is meaningful, whether it is true or not. The important fact is not whether science or philosophy can prove or disprove that free will exists, but that some people want to believe that they, to a considerable extent, can control their own actions. In this way, the illusion becomes a major motivating factor in human behavior.⁹³

G. H. Bantock writes in "Morals and Civilization in Henry James," that James became a representative, rounded figure not committed to one attitude

91. Henry James, *The Ambassadors*, Vol. 1, p. 217.

92. Henry David Aiken, "American Pragmatism Reconsidered," p. 122.

93. Arnold L. Goldsmith, "Henry James's Reconciliation of Free Will and Fatalism," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, September, 1958, p. 117.

"which was a sign of his inner emancipation from the narrowness of provincial America." According to Mr. Bantock the most marked feature of James's consciousness is his interest in the desire for extension of experience. In this sense Henry is a pragmatist, and Mr. Bantock supports this idea with a quotation from The Notes of a Son and Brother.

It takes some extraordinary set of circumstances or time of life, I think, either to beguile or to hustle us into indifference to some larger felt extension roundabout us of 'the world' - a sphere the confines of which move or even as we ourselves move and which is always there, just beyond us, to twist us with the more it should have to show if we were a little more 'of' it.⁹⁴

Joseph J. Firebaugh and Marius Bewley believe that the unquestionable root of The Golden Bowl is pragmatic thought. Mr. Bewley said Maggie Verver is the greatest pragmatist in literature because she showed how truth can be constructed out of lies. The verity of that truth "is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself..."⁹⁵ According to Mr. Bewley what constitutes so much of Henry James's "American flavour" is this pragmatic bent in his behavior, "this 'extreme freedom of improvisation' in the world of human behavior - this belief that there is no immutable reality behind appearances, but that appearances can always be twisted into new and convenient realities."⁹⁶ Pragmatism existed in America before William James formulated it into a philosophy. Americans had been successful in making reality fit their own needs, and they were optimistic about continuing to do so in the future. Expediency had come to be the good and the true.⁹⁷ In 1915 Woodbridge Riley described the feeling of the age.

94. G. T. Bantock, "Morals and Civilization in Henry James," Cambridge Journal, December, 1955, p. 159.

95. Marius Bewley, "Correspondence: The Relation Between William and Henry James," Scrutiny, March 1951, p. 332.

96. Ibid., p. 333.

97. Ibid., pp. 332-333.

In his collective capacity man now finds that his fate is not wholly made for him either by mechanical forces or supreme powers. In the high confidence that the strong will win, that nothing is impossible to the powerful, he comes to the conclusion not that he must adapt himself to the environment, but that the environment must adapt itself to him. In a word, finding the world so plastic, he comes to believe himself no longer man, but super-man.⁹⁸

Maggie Verver, indeed, concludes that the environment must adapt itself to her desires, and she is successful unlike Christopher Newman, Isabel Archer, or Lambert Strether who find themselves adapting to the environment when they are foiled in attaining their ends. Joseph J. Firebaugh takes a radically different viewpoint about Maggie than other critics. He describes Maggie as a tyrant, absolutist, Machiavellian creature who manipulates life to her purposes. During the first volume of the book she is innocent, but when she attains knowledge she uses it "with all the ruthlessness of the moralist who never doubts his vision of righteousness."⁹⁹ Mr. Firebaugh feels this sense of righteousness lead her to the most selfish, heartless, and cruel sort of conduct, which James did not admire. She preserves appearances and vindicates herself by manoeuvring others. Maggie wins back her husband's love, but in abandoning her innocence she becomes monstrous. James is condemning "authoritarian treatment of the sinful," writes Firebaugh.

The Golden Bowl is a gigantic horrified protest against the manoeuvring of appearances to favor a priori concepts of the good, the true, and the beautiful; against the use of knowledge to preserve a specious appearance in innocence. Thus it attacks the gentility of James's era. But it does more; it attacks the effort to maintain an absolute in theory and in appearance long after the absolute has been abandoned in practice. It is more than social criticism; it is criticism of the very basis on which the notion of the absolute stands.¹⁰⁰

98. Woodbridge Riley, American Thought, pp. 279-280.

99. Joseph J. Firebaugh, "The Ververa," Essays in Criticism, October, 1954, p. 405.

100. Ibid., p. 410.

Firebaugh finds a terrifying foreign quality of the absolutists, Maggie and Adam Verver, and he quotes William James, from a source he does not specify. "We must always apprehend the absolute as if it were a foreign being."¹⁰¹ If Henry James did not approve of Maggie using a specious appearance of innocence in gaining her end, James is criticizing pragmatism on the basis of using any old thing that works, as Firebaugh suggests he is.

Bewley, on the other hand, points out that even though Maggie is shown as a kind of puppeteer who controls events and persons with treachery, she lies with thought and purpose for something sacred and dear - her happiness. Bewley writes, "The thing to insist on here is that the lie is not merely a lie of convenience; James deliberately invests it with a certain sanctity: It seems to be offered, not only as the expression of a beautiful consciousness, but as a kind of philosophic comment on the nature of reality."¹⁰²

It is interesting to find two critics who present such opposed points of view of Henry James's feelings about pragmatism in The Golden Bowl. However, the reader looks at Maggie, she is successful in winning back her husband. At the beginning of the novel she is innocent and ignorant of evil. She wants to remain "outside of ugly things, so ignorant of any falsity or cruelty or vulgarity as never to have to be touched by them or to touch them."¹⁰³ She would like to go through life "with bandaged eyes,"¹⁰⁴ She says, "I live in the midst of miracles of arrangement, half of which I admit, are my own; I go about on tiptoe, I watch for every sound, I feel every breath, and yet I try all the while to seem as smooth as old satin

101. Firebaugh, *op. cit.*, p. 410.

102. Marius Bewley, The Complex Fate, pp. 89-90.

103. Henry James, The Golden Bowl, Vol. 2, pp. 115-116.

104. Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 109.

dyed rose-colour."¹⁰⁵ Fanny Assingham says she kept out to sea away from the rocks. When Maggie becomes aware of the adulterous relationship between Charlotte and her husband, she has to face the ugly truth. "It was a scene she might people, by the press of her spring, either with serenities and dignities and decencies, or with terrors and shames and ruins, things as ugly as those formless fragments of her golden bowl."¹⁰⁶ These are the two possibilities of action as Maggie sees them. She decides to repress all natural emotions, avoiding a direct confrontation of the truth, shame and ruins; she remains "as smooth as old satin." When Charlotte Stent asks Maggie if she has done anything to perplex or worry her, Maggie replies, "I've not felt at any time that you've wronged me." James writes that "It positively helped her to build up her falsehood -- to which accordingly, she contributed another block."¹⁰⁷ By keeping silent Maggie leaves Charlotte and the Prince to fight the battle.

In deciding whether Henry James unconsciously pragmatized as he says he does all his life it is interesting to see how his pragmatic characters fare in achieving their goals. Christopher Newman is a person with innate integrity who believes and acts morally, if somewhat blindly, in an effort to attain his goal. In a practical sense he fails; he is deceived by European social standards in being rejected by Claire de Cintre's elite family.

Another general category of pragmatists are the Europeans, Noemie Nioche and Paul Mariment, who use immoral means towards a practical end - money - and both are successful in gaining it. Undeceived and unconvinced

105. Henry James, The Golden Bowl, Vol. 2, pp. 114-115.

106. Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 242.

107. Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 256.

by standards, they turn from them. Mommie uses men for money and Paul uses the Princess Casanovissa. Henry James shows that it is easier to be an ethical pragmatist in America than in Europe because of the differences in the societies. America was civilization in the making where a pragmatist faced a fluid society, an open economic system, and few fixed principles. A European pragmatist, on the other hand, faced a static society, a closed economic system, fixed principles, and control. One of the chief uses of pragmatism that William James had in mind, when he presented his philosophy, was a method to help people make moral discoveries, and to help them establish their relationships with the universe and God. In Europe morality and these relationships were established by society.

Both William and Henry believe in individualism; man should be a free agent with free will, or at least he should have that illusion. Valentin Bellegarde, a European, is ineffectual because he is so tied down by his static society and fixed principles that he cannot act at all, except on a hollow ideal of honor. He loses his identity because being a Bellegarde is more essential than being an individual. Henry James is criticizing Europe for the tragedy of Valentin Bellegarde, but there is an equally ineffectual American character, Miss Birdseye, who finds too many loose principles and ideas floating around in her fluid American society. She acts on all of them and spreads herself in so many directions that she loses her outline as an individual. Neither of these people can be successful pragmatists because Valentin cannot act, and Miss Birdseye acts too often.

Hyacinth Robinson and the Princess Casanovissa fall into another category of non-pragmatists who are unsuccessful. Hyacinth has the belief

and the freedom to act, but his ends, anarchy and culture, simply cannot be reconciled in his mind, or in real life. The Princess, who also is able to act, chooses anarchy and rejects culture, but she is unsuccessful in finding a firm basis for life because she lacks genuine belief.

Lambert Strether grows closer to reality and a more abundant life as his opinions and ideas develop and become true. They are made true by events as pragmatism's conception of truth works. But gaining truth is not good for Strether in a practical sense of being profitable; he is too old to make use of new awareness. His current ideas force him to renounce his old. In doing so he not only realizes he has made a mistake in life, but he sacrifices peace and security for the rest of his days. Isabel Archer, like Strether, develops new awareness; but gaining truth is not profitable to her either. She realizes when it is too late that she has made a mistake by marrying Gilbert Osmond.

In looking over the general patterns up to this point, one can conclude that in these five novels Henry James shows that fulfilling the definition of a pragmatist can be a frustrating experience. Pragmatism looks reasonable as a theory on paper, but in actuality it does not always work - in fact, more often than not it fails. Valentin Bellegarde's case illustrates that in being free to act one must have no fixed principles or closed systems that are impossible to turn from. Having the right to believe, one must believe, but the Princess Casamassima's failure proves that belief does not necessarily come with action as William James says it would. In looking towards the consequences, the fruits or ends of action, one's ends must not be contradictory, which is Hyacinth's dilemma. If one's ends are achieved, one must be prepared for deception or reversal of

purpose, since pragmatism guarantees no results, as Isabel discovers. Olive Chancellor learns that the world really isn't malleable and waiting to receive its final touches by her hands.

Another problem arises in establishing the degree of devotion to a cause. One must not be absolute, cutting off experience and other possible means; yet one must not be "wishy-washy" either. The one successful ethical pragmatist in these novels, Christopher Newman, has free action, belief in himself, the will to take risks, the desire to see things through, and ends that were possible to achieve in America at that time. Henry James does not elaborate or emphasize Newman's commercial successes. He is a rich man, but James does not feel his money-making methods are of enough importance to introduce in detail to the reader. Nannie Wincho is also a successful pragmatist, but in order to attain her goal she has to become unethical, sacrificing her reputation and her morality.

If Maggie Verver is the evil, Machiavellian, tyrannical monster who vindicates herself by manoeuvring others, as Mr. Firebaugh says, she is just as wicked and sinister as Paul Marimont who does not announce his principles. But if she is the sweet, good, lovely person of moral beauty and high conscience whose great discovery is that "humbug is necessary in the service of good,"¹⁰³ as R. P. Blackmur describes her, then Henry James is illustrating a pious person who assimilates the novel in her experience. Both of these estimates of Maggie seem too extreme. As a sensitive, perceptive, wholesome girl who really loves her husband, she decides that telling a few out-of-character lies is better than being ethical and forcing a

103. The Golden Bowl, Grove Press edition, 1962, p. xv.

humiliating scene, which would probably lead to the loss of her husband. Two paths of action are open to her and she chooses the most decent, civilized one, revealing that she is more intelligent and less shallow than she appears. Charlotte Stant has underestimated her, but the Prince recognizes and appreciates her developed depth. Instead of remaining all innocence and goodness, she has become a "mistress of shades" through the growth of awareness - making her a much more human and interesting person. Gilbert Osmond wants a wife who likes "living in the miracles of arrangement," but this is not the sort of woman that the Prince would find satisfying. Maggie, then, is in a category by herself by being a character James was sympathetic with who was being successful as a pragmatist. In order to attain her end Maggie has to step out of her moral frame, but she gains much by doing so.

Henry James finds something he likes in pragmatism, as is proved by his letters to William. He likes what pragmatism is intending to do in helping people to find a more abundant life, to make moral discoveries, and to grow in consciousness; but he does not like some of its tendencies when it is tried out in actuality. It can be used by people lacking intelligence, insight or morality. He does not approve of the aggressive or unhealthy absolutist pragmatists after money or reforms who are willing to use any means to achieve their ends. Also he shows the results of overlooking first things, principles, and necessities in turning towards consequences. His test of ideas does not lie in pragmatic action or in doing, but in contemplation, or being in an increase of awareness and sensitivity.

While Henry James does not fully endorse the method of pragmatism in his novels, he seems to be in agreement with the theory of truth. He

wanted his good characters to live and see and grow in consciousness by assimilating the novel in their experience, bringing them closer to reality. It is a mistake to cut off new experiences with old prejudices. As William James writes in Pragmatism, the notion of truth "is bound up with the way in which one moment in our experience may lead us towards other moments which it would have been worth while to be lead to."¹⁰⁹ Both William and Henry believed in pluralism, making the possibilities of new experience more numerous. They also believe heroism makes life significant. William writes, "I find myself willing to take the universe as really dangerous and adventurous, without therefore backing out and crying 'no play.'"¹¹⁰ The most admirable of Henry's characters do not back out; they see their actions through with stoic renunciations of natural human impulses such as revenge, escape or marriage. With the support of the novels one can say that Henry James is not an avid pragmatist advocating this method, even unconsciously, to his readers. In fact he seems to be warning them of the outcomes of action before reflection. Yet he urges the theory of truth. "Don't at any rate miss things out of stupidity," says Lambert Strother. "Do what you like so long as you don't make my mistake. For it was a mistake. Live!"

109. William James, Pragmatism, p. 135.

110. Ibid., p. 190.

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HENRY JAMES AND THE PRAGMATISM OF WILLIAM JAMES

by

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ABSTRACT FOR
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Henry James and the Pragmatism of William James

With the introduction of William James's Pragmatism in 1907 comes Henry James's enthusiastic response. In letters to William, Henry expresses that he can work in the light of pragmatism and that he is lost in the wonder of the extent to which all his life he has unconsciously pragmatized. William, on the other hand, gives no indication that he recognizes pragmatism in Henry's works.

The last of Henry's large-scale novels, The Golden Bowl, was finished in 1904, three years before Henry acknowledged his adhesion to pragmatism; therefore, a comparison of his novels and short stories before and after the publication of Pragmatism cannot be made. Whether Henry was a pragmatist in his own life is impossible to determine since he rarely committed himself to direct statements of his ideas - he did not seek to impress his opinions on the public. The purpose of this report is to determine why Henry James acknowledged his adhesion to William James's pragmatism, and just what in this philosophy he found particularly appealing. The procedure is to study evidences of pragmatism as William James presents it in six novels by his brother - The American (1877), The Portrait of a Lady (1881), The Bostonians (1886), The Princess Casamassima (1886), The Ambassadors (1903), and The Golden Bowl (1904) - for it is here that Henry James's ideas and feelings can be found.

The pragmatism of William James includes a method and a theory of truth. This method can be used by philosophers in settling metaphysical disputes, but some of the characters in Henry James's novels follow a method very similar to pragmatism's as individuals do in working towards their ends: marriage, money, and happiness. Others follow the theory of truth in developing consciousness and coming closer to understanding reality.

The novels illustrate that the intentions of the founders of pragmatism and the tendencies of the movement are often two different things. Noemie Nicohe and Paul Muniment are European pragmatists who use immoral means toward a practical end - money - and both are successful in gaining it. Henry James makes it obvious enough that he does not admire these people. The Princess Casamassima, Miss Birdseye, and Olive Chancellor are also examples of characters Henry James is unsympathetic with because they are unhealthy reformers. Henry does not approve of people lacking intelligence, insight, or morality after money or reforms who are willing to employ pragmatism as a theory of using any means to achieve their ends.

Isabel Archer, Lambert Strether, and Maggie Verver are examples of good people in the novels who follow the theory of truth, assimilating the novel in their experience. They are better able to understand reality after this growth of awareness. Unlike William, Henry James's test of ideas does not lie in pragmatic action or doing, but in contemplation, or being, in an increase of awareness and sensitivity.

From a study of the pragmatism of William James in the novels of Henry James, it can be concluded that even though Henry James does not endorse the method of pragmatism which overlooks first things, principles, and necessities in turning toward consequences; he likes what the pragmatic theory of truth is intending to do in helping people to find a more abundant life, to make moral discoveries, and to grow in consciousness.