

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WILLIAM JAMES' THEORY OF EMOTIONS AND
"THE WILL TO BELIEVE"

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B. A., Madras University, 1953

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History, Government and Philosophy

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
OF AGRICULTURE AND APPLIED SCIENCE

1960

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INTRODUCTION

The thoughts of the philosopher, William James, have had a stirring effect on his own generation and have had continued influence up to the present. The versatility of James contributed to the scope of this influence. James' works are unique. The way in which he used his materials, the methods he suggested, and the manner in which he presented his thoughts are all entirely apart from the tradition.

James' simplicity in presentation of his thoughts and his style are greatly appealing to the reader. Unlike his predecessors, he wanted not to keep his head in the clouds but to stand on solid ground while speculating. James is especially prominent for being practical. His pragmatic method is an attempt to get at metaphysical problems through practical means.

What made James most popular is his interest and enthusiasm to explore into every possible area of knowledge. He studied medicine, physiology, biology, psychology, and philosophy. He attempted to comprehend the complexity of man as a whole from physiological, psychological, and philosophical viewpoints. James always felt that physiology and psychology overlapped. His theory of emotions and his theory of the "will to believe" are good illustrations of his endeavor to observe and study man from different angles.

It is interesting to speculate how James attempted to study the complexity of man from psychological, physiological, and philosophical viewpoints. His theory of emotions is a fair

example of his attempt to understand man from psychological and physiological points of view. Here he made an attempt to give a physiological basis to psychological processes of emotions. The theory of the "will to believe" is a good example of James' philosophy and a means of comprehending man from another angle. I have tried in this report first to interpret his theory of emotions and the "will to believe", and then to inquire whether there is any relationship between the psychological and philosophical ideas involved in these two great works.

JAMES' THEORY OF EMOTIONS

William James first published his theory of emotions in 1884.¹ He felt that the area of emotions had been neglected by the physiologists and took it upon himself to explore this sphere.

The physiologists who, during the past few years, have been so industriously exploring the functions of the brain, have limited their attempts at explanation to its cognitive and volitional performances.... But the aesthetic sphere of the mind, its longings, its pleasures and pains, and its emotions, have been so ignored in all these researches....²

Before stating his theory of emotions, James made an attempt to allot a brain-seat to emotions and felt that the processes involved in the sensorial part are the same as the ones involved in emotions, but differently organized. James divided all

¹James, William, Mind, "What is an emotion?", 1884, 9: 188-205.

²Ibid., p. 188.

feelings of pleasure and displeasure, of excitement and interest, into two categories - those that have bodily expression and those that involve mental processes but do not result in "obvious" physical expressions. Some bodily sensations or their images bring about the latter feelings, without any physical expression, because the degree of feeling brought about in these situations is not enough to result in bodily expression. Pleasure and pain found in intellectual activities, also, do not result in bodily expression. All this goes to show "that there are pleasures and pains inherent in certain forms of nerve-action as such, wherever that action occurs."¹

James was primarily concerned with those feelings in which there are bodily expressions. In these feelings, the bodily expressions result in the experiences of emotions of fear, anger, lust, greed, etc., which are mental states.

The bodily disturbances are said to be the "manifestation" of these several emotions, their "expression" or "natural language"; and these emotions themselves, being so strongly characterized both from within and without, may be called the standard emotions.²

Having explained the above preliminaries, James stated his theory thus:

Our natural way of thinking about these standard emotions is that the mental perception of some fact excites the mental affection called the emotion, and that this latter state of mind gives rise to the bodily expression. My thesis on the contrary is that the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the

¹Ibid., p. 189.

²Loc. cit.

exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion. Common sense says, we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep; we meet a bear, are frightened and run; we are insulted by a rival, are angry and strike. The hypothesis here to be defended says that the order of sequence is incorrect, that the one mental state is not immediately induced by the other, that the bodily manifestations must first be interposed between, and that the more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry, or fearful as the case may be. Without the bodily states following on the perception, the latter would be purely cognitive in form, pale, colourless, destitute of emotional warmth. We might then see the bear, and judge it best to run, receive the insult and deem it right to strike, but we could not actually feel afraid or angry.¹

To prove this hypothesis, James went further to explain the nervous system. Since the nervous system has the inclination to react to the environmental stimulus in certain ways it "is but a hyphen between determinate arrangements of matter outside the body and determinate impulses to inhibition or discharge within its organs."² The actions of living things are in accordance with their expectations of the specific features of their environment. If the perceiving of certain events calls forth emotions, these emotions can be classified as nervous anticipations.

James acknowledged the complexity involved in the bodily changes that accompany emotions. The sensations coming into the body cause various physical changes and that is why it is difficult to create an emotion under controlled conditions. In the case of extreme emotions, bodily changes in skin, liver, bowels,

¹Ibid., pp. 189-190.

²Ibid., p. 190.

bladder, functioning of glands, heart beat, are very significant, while in the case of milder emotions they are not so evident. In emotions, even the voluntary muscles seem to act in accordance with these difficult bodily changes.¹ Another thing that was important for James is that every bodily change that takes place is actually felt at that very moment by the individual, either severely or unnoticed. This, he said, can be proved by introspecting one's self in an emotional mood.²

To support his theory, James said a severe emotion could be imagined from which all the feelings of the bodily changes could be abstracted, when there would not be anything left which could be called an emotion and "that a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains."³ James gave many illustrations to put this point across. He cited many situations in which the people involved could introspect the bodily changes taking place after the perception of an exciting fact and before the mental state of emotion could take place. For example, "If we abruptly see a dark moving form in the woods, our heart stops beating, and we catch our breath instantly and before any articulate idea of danger can arise."⁴

The instances in which James found valuable evidence for the precedence of bodily changes over the feeling of emotion, are those where people get frightened or angry or sad without

¹Ibid., p. 192.

²Loc. cit.

³Ibid., p. 193.

⁴Ibid., p. 196.

any apparent cause whatsoever. This is mostly found in pathological cases and it is due to the bodily expression, feeling of which is emotion. In these cases:

...We must suppose the nervous machinery to be so "Labile" in some one emotional direction, that almost every stimulus, however inappropriate, will cause it to upset in that way, and as a consequence to engender the particular complex of feelings of which the psychic body of the emotion consists. Thus, to take one special instance, if inability to draw deep breath, fluttering of the heart, and that peculiar epigastric change felt as "precordial anxiety," with an irresistible tendency to take a somewhat crouching attitude and to sit still, and with perhaps other visceral processes, not now known, all spontaneously occur together in a certain person; his feeling of their combination IS the emotion of dread, and he is the victim of what is known as morbid fear.¹

James said that if his hypothesis were true, then it clearly showed that the mental life and physical body are closely linked.² He made every effort to prove his hypothesis and believed that it is true. Therefore, he also believed that the physical sensations of pain and pleasure seemed to have the same origin as the feelings of joy, pride, anger, love, etc.

Having identified the standard emotions, James attempted to clarify the feelings which do not have obvious bodily changes, namely the aesthetic, intellectual, and moral feelings. These feelings seem to give the "pleasure that seems ingrained in the very form of the representation itself, and to borrow nothing from any reverberation surging up from the parts below the brain."³ But James felt that if these feelings are introspected,

¹Ibid., p. 199.

²Ibid., p. 201.

³Loc. cit.

it will be found that most of them are accompanied by not so obvious bodily changes. Others could result in intellectual emotion involving no bodily manifestations at all; but these, he insisted, are empty and entirely different from "standard" emotions.¹

Coming back to the physiology of the brain, James wrote:

If we suppose its cortex to contain centres for the perception of changes in each special sense-organ, in each portion of the skin, in each muscle, each joint, and each viscus, and to contain absolutely nothing else, we still have a scheme perfectly capable of representing the process of emotions.²

An object excites the cortical centre, James argued, and an idea of the same object takes place in less than a second.

...The reflex currents pass down through their pre-ordained channels, alter the condition of the muscle, skin and viscus; and these alternatives, apperceived like the original object, in as many specific portions of the cortex, combine with it in consciousness and transform it from an object-simply-apprehended into an object-emotionally-felt.³

Despite this elaborate statement of the theory of emotions and their physiological basis, James felt that his theory could not be put to decisive proof. "It must be confessed that a crucial test of the truth of the hypothesis is quite as hard to obtain as its decisive refutation."⁴

In 1890 William James restated his theory in a more organized way and with additions. He felt that emotions should not

¹Ibid., p. 202.

²Ibid., p. 203.

³Ibid., p. 203.

⁴Ibid., p. 203.

be regarded as entities since they are brought about by general causes which are physiological. He based his restatement on the physiological investigations made by the Danish scientist, C. Lange.

Prof. C. Lange of Copenhagen published in 1885 a physiological theory of their [the emotions'] contribution and conditioning, which I had already broached the previous year in an article in Mind. None of the criticisms which I have heard of it have made me doubt its essential truth.¹

Here James called his "standard" emotions the "coarser" emotions, and those whose organic changes are not obvious, he called the "subtler" emotions.²

James believed that there are any number of emotions and that these emotions are felt by the individual in different ways because the sensations from which the emotions result, have nothing definitely fixed about them. The emotions can be classified in any way and every way, but they remain unchanged. The typical expression of any emotion cannot be established objectively.

In 1894, while defending his theory against many criticisms, James wrote:

In the year 1884 Prof. Lange of Copenhagen and the present writer published, independently of each other, the same theory of emotional consciousness. They affirmed it to be the effect of the organic changes, muscular and visceral, of which the so-called 'expression' of the emotion consists. It is thus not a primary feeling, directly aroused by the exciting object or thought, but a secondary feeling indirectly aroused;

¹James, William, The Principles of Psychology, 2: p. 449.
²Loc. cit.

the primary effect being the organic changes in question, which are immediate reflexes following upon the presence of the object.¹

James stated one of the criticisms made by Wundt and answered it in the following way:

How insufficient, he says, must Lange's explanation of emotions from Vaso-motor effects be, when it results in making him put joy and anger together in one class! To which I reply both that Lange has laid far too great stress on the Vaso-motor factor in his explanations, and that he has been materially wrong about congestion of the face being the essential feature in anger, for in the height of that passion almost every one grows pale - a fact which the expression 'white with rage' commemorates.²

THE WILL TO BELIEVE

William James, in his The Will to Believe, set out with a determination to justify beliefs gained through willingness to accept them. He started with an aim to justify the situation especially in "religious matters."

He began his treatise with an explanation of certain technicalities involved in believing. Anything that can be proposed for belief, he called an "hypothesis." If a proposal or hypothesis seemed to be a "real possibility," he wrote, it is a "live hypothesis," but if it does not appeal, then it is a dead hypothesis. A hypothesis becomes live or dead not because of the qualities within the hypothesis but because of the appeal it makes to the individual, or because the individual wants to act

¹James, William, "The Physical Basis of Emotion," Psychological Review, 1894, 1: p. 516.

²Loc. cit., p. 517.

according to it. If the hypothesis appeals to the individual's willingness to act, then it becomes a live hypothesis. Presence of will to act means a tendency to believe.

Decision between two hypotheses James called an "option." Options can be living or dead, forced or avoidable, momentous or trivial. He called an option genuine when it is forced, living, and momentous.

In a case where both the hypotheses are live ones (appeal), the option is living. But if either or both hypotheses lack appeal then the option is dead. In this context James said: "But if I say: 'Be an agnostic or be a Christian,' it is otherwise: trained as you are, each hypothesis makes some appeal, however small, to your belief."¹ Here James seemed to have meant that it is one's training which enables him to act willingly or not act willingly toward an hypothesis. Therefore, it is training which presides over one's willingness to act.

A forced option is one in which the hypotheses proposed involve a necessary choice. An avoidable option is one in which there is no force requiring one to decide between alternatives, hence one can get by by choosing something else.²

Finally James had momentous and trivial options. The momentous option involves decision between hypotheses where choice of one renders a unique opportunity which might lead to a unique success. The choice of the other eliminates this opportunity.

¹James, William, The Will to Believe, p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 3.

In a case where neither of the hypotheses renders unique opportunity, the decision between the two is called a trivial option.¹

James said that sometimes our volitional and passional nature leads us to form opinions and sometimes it seems as if the intellect alone is responsible. When the opinions formed through the intellect are examined, it looks as if the beliefs it leads to are made up of "matters of fact, immediate or remote, as Hume said, and relations between ideas which are either there or not there for us if we see them so, and which if not there cannot be put there by any action of our own."²

James proceeded to show, in connection with Pascal's wager, that even though Pascal makes use of reasoning to create a belief in Christianity it does not have any effect on those who do not already have a tendency to believe in Christianity. Therefore, the tendency to believe in Christianity should be present for a proposal to create such a belief. The tendencies to believe (passional tendencies) should be there first for a belief to come about, and only after the belief is formed do intellectual, logical, and rational evidences enter in. Therefore the intellect alone, he concluded, is not the manufacturer of beliefs but the volitional and passional natures are also responsible.³

In the case of the physical sciences, it seems that these sciences in trying their best to get at the facts objectively,

¹Ibid., p. 4.

²Ibid., p. 5.

³Ibid., pp. 5-6.

disregard subjective elements entirely. James said that it is very good to aim at being objective; but that whenever the goal of objectivity runs counter to free will and volition it will have very insignificant claims to belief, for "intellectual insight" and pure reason unaided cannot support beliefs.¹ It is seen that our willing nature is a necessary factor. Dead hypotheses are irrelevant since these are dead because they do not appeal to our willing nature.

Our willing nature consists of such "deliberate volitions as may have set up habits of belief that we cannot now escape from"² and also prejudice, passion, fear, hope, imitation, and partisanship. Most of the time it is not known how or why we believe, only the experience of believing is known. In fact the person who holds a belief has much less insight into its causes than does the person who does not believe it. It is the "prestige of opinions" which makes one believe, rather than real insight. Under these conditions a person is satisfied with a few reasons for his belief, in case his belief is criticized. Here authority and convention play a great part because a person tends to believe in what others believe. The very assumption that there is truth and that the mind can get at it is a "passionate affirmation of desire"³ and is authoritarian. This desire to have truth and our efforts to find it have no logical basis. They represent simply a desire to make an assumption and

¹Ibid., pp. 7-8.

²Ibid., p. 9.

³Loc. cit.

to be willing to go along with it.¹

Again, according to James, we believe in only the things that are useful to us. Even in cases where there might be some evidence leading to a belief, if that belief is not useful, then that opinion is not held, though sometimes it may be "suppressed and concealed."²

This shows that the passional nature, which is non-intellectual, does direct our opinions and beliefs. Actually the volitions and passional tendencies cause beliefs and the intellectual insight and reasoning come only after the belief. This works well only when our passional tendencies incline in the same direction as our insight and reasoning. Therefore, James concluded, our beliefs are not brought about by insight and reasoning alone.

The assumption that there is truth and that it is the purpose of the mind to get it, is passional and also dogmatic. But it can be held in the empiricist's way or in the absolutist's way. The absolutist says "that we not only can attain to knowing truth, but we can KNOW WHEN we have attained to knowing it; while the empiricists think that although we may attain it, we cannot infallibly know when."³ There are thus different degrees of dogmatism in empiricism and absolutism, since the former just simply know a thing, while the latter knows when it knows a thing.

¹Ibid., pp. 9-10.

²Ibid., p. 10.

³Ibid., p. 12.

James wrote that the history of opinions goes to show that the empiricist tendency was prevalent in science, while the absolutist tendency was prevalent in philosophy. Every system in philosophy has treated its own system as a representation of absolute truth. This absolutist tendency finds expression in the doctrine of "objective evidence" of the scholastic orthodoxy. But "objective evidence," in one form or another, plays a role in every philosophic system. Regarding this contention, James stated:

...You believe in objective evidence, and I do. Of some things we feel that we are certain: we know, and we know that we do know. There is something that gives a click inside of us, a bell that strikes twelve, when the hands of the mental clock have swept the dial and meet over the meridian hour. The greatest empiricists among us are only empiricists on reflection: when left to their instincts, they dogmatise like infallible popes. When the Cliffords tell us how sinful it is to be Christians on such 'insufficient evidence,' insufficiency is really the last thing they have in mind. For them the evidence is absolutely sufficient, only it makes the other way. They believe so completely in an anti-Christian order of the universe that there is no living option: Christianity is a dead hypothesis from the start.¹

James said that since all are "absolutists by instinct" this must be regarded as a weakness of nature; but men should try not to be slaves to it. He thought that objective evidence and certitude, though very good ideals, are not found in anything. As far as the theory of knowledge is concerned, James felt that he was an empiricist. The "opinions grow more true,"² if we go on experiencing and thinking about all that we experience.

¹Ibid.; pp. 13-14.

²Ibid., p. 14.

When a belief is found it is a mistake to cling to it with an attitude that it will never be changed; and for James evidence that this is a mistake appears in the whole history of philosophy. The only truth that James shared with pyrrhonic scepticism was "the truth that the present phenomenon of consciousness exists."¹ Acceptance of the phenomena of consciousness is the first step towards the gaining of knowledge. It is "the mere admission of a stuff to be philosophized about."² All the different philosophies attempted to discover what this stuff is, and this had been a chief bone of contention among them. There had never been a way to state that a certain thing is true, since what was true for one was held to be false by another. The ideal of objective evidence had never worked perfectly. Now to say that some truths possess this objective evidence is merely to say that that is what one wants to see in them. So one does see that and then one says that he has objective evidence. To believe that the evidence that is made use of is objective, is "only one more subjective opinion added to the lot."³ No absolutist seems to have realized that intellect, being directly in contact with "truth," could be capable of erring in knowing whether it really is truth or not.⁴

Now while the doctrine of objective certitude is given up by us as empiricists, the search for hope and truth is not given

¹Ibid., p. 15.

²Ibid., p. 15.

³Ibid., p. 16.

⁴Ibid., pp. 14-16.

up. One can still believe that it exists and that through experience and reflection truth grows more and more. The difference between scholastic orthodoxy and James' philosophy, in James' opinion, is that the strength of the former's "system lies in the principles, the origin, the terminus a quo of thought," while the latter's "strength is in the outcome, the upshot, the terminus ad quem."¹ For James the origin is not important, but where anything leads to, is important.

It matters not to an empiricist from what quarter an hypothesis may come to him: he may have acquired it by fair means or by foul; passion may have whispered or accident suggested it; but if the total drift of thinking continues to confirm it, that is what he means by its being true.²

In our concern for opinion, there are two different ways of proceeding: "ways entirely different, and yet ways about whose difference the theory of knowledge seems hitherto to have shown very little concern.... We must know the truth and we must avoid error."³ These have been the most important laws to be adhered to by those who want to know. James felt that these two great laws are distinct. They are not just two ways of asserting the same law. Whenever a truth is believed we would likely avoid believing a falsehood, but by not believing a falsehood we do not thereby believe in a truth. On the contrary, while disbelieving a falsehood, we might believe other falsehoods or we might not believe anything, not even the truth. James criticized

¹Ibid., p. 17.

²Loc. cit.

³Loc. cit.

the view, "better go without belief forever than believe a lie."¹ He felt that it was not too bad after all to be duped by error and proposed that a certain amount of risk should be taken.

After having explained these preliminaries, James stated his thesis thus:

I have said, and now repeat it, that not only as a matter of fact do we find our passional nature influencing us in our opinions, but that there are some options between opinions in which this influence must be regarded both as an inevitable and as a lawful determinant of our choice.²

James said that the two laws, believing the truth and avoiding error, are themselves assumptions made on the basis of passional nature. In cases where the decision between gaining the truth and losing it is not momentous, one may wait until evidence comes and by not taking the opportunity of gaining truth, avoid believing falsehood. In human activities in general and in science there is no urgency to act, but in the decisions of law courts there is. In the case of objective nature, we have to believe what we see and questions of truth do not arise as momentous options. All the propositions here are only trivial options. Since the options are not forced, here it is better to propose the "attitude of sceptical balance"³ if we can avoid mistakes. It is better not to make options but be considering all the reasons "indifferently."

¹Ibid., p. 18.

²Ibid., p. 19.

³Ibid., p. 20.

This indifference cannot be maintained, however, in attempts to make discoveries. Science would not have been advanced if the scientists were indifferent in this way and did not have the "passionate desire" to get the evidence to prove their own beliefs. Scientists being interested in proving what they believe in, are eager to avoid deception. And this attitude of the scientist has been organized into a technique known as the "method of verification."¹ The scientists uphold this method so very highly that sometimes it is doubtful whether they care for the truth as such. They are interested in the truth which is gained by this method. Even if the truth is obvious, they have to get this truth only through verification. Since the human passions are stronger than rules (here the method of verification), scientists always prove what they are interested in. In decisions where the option is not forced, our idea should be to be able to decide with disinterested intellect, but in forced options the passional nature enters in. When there is a forced option, one does not sit and wait for the evidence but acts according to his passional tendencies.

Moral questions, according to James, deal with what is good and what will be good. Their "solution cannot wait for sensible proof."² To find the values of all that exists and does not exist, one has to consult his heart since science cannot tell us about that. "Science herself consults her heart when she lays

¹Ibid., p. 21.

²Ibid., p. 22.

it down that the infinite ascertainment of fact and correction of false belief are the supreme goods for man."¹ Science proves this by illustrating how these bring man more benefits, "which man's heart in turn declares."² Our will decides whether we should have moral beliefs or not. "If your heart does not want a world of moral reality, your head will assuredly never make you believe in one."³ For some people moral hypotheses never seem to appeal and in the company of such people the moralists always feel uncomfortable.

Moral scepticism can no more be refuted or proved by logic than intellectual scepticism can. When we stick to it that there is truth (be it of either kind), we do so with our whole nature, and resolve to stand or fall by the results.⁴

In the area of personal relations, whether the truth exists or does not exist depends on one's desires. If we desire its existence, then it exists and vice versa. In any kind of group each individual begins to do his work with an anticipation that the others will do the same thing. "Wherever a desired result is achieved by the cooperation of many independent persons, its existence as a fact is a pure consequence of the precursive faith in one another of those immediately concerned."⁵ In personal relations, it can be seen that many facts owe their existence to a belief that they do exist.

¹Loc. cit.

²Loc. cit.

³Ibid., p. 23.

⁴Loc. cit.

⁵Ibid., p. 24.

And where faith in a fact can help create the fact, that would be an insane logic which should say that faith running ahead of scientific evidence is the 'lowest kind of immorality' into which a thinking being can fall.¹

All this James stated in defense of his thesis: "In truths dependent on our personal action, then, faith based on desire is certainly lawful and possibly an indispensable thing."² The most important of all questions is the question of religious faith, which lays emphasis on everlasting things, passes the final judgment over everything, and assures us of a better life if we believe in these. Assuming that this is true, the "logical elements" this assumption involves may be considered. To be able to consider this question, it must offer a living option. To those for whom it is a living option, religion comes as a momentous option. Whether we should gain through belief or lose through non-belief offers a forced option. In this situation we cannot escape by being sceptical and looking for the evidence to come, because if religion is untrue, we try to avoid error. But if it is true, we lose the good as if we had chosen to disbelieve it. By being sceptical one is not avoiding the decision but is choosing a special kind of risk. "Better risk the loss of the truth than the chance of error."³ The sceptic is taking as much a chance as a believer is and is making a choice as much as a believer. In case of religious hypotheses, if scepticism advises us to wait till "sufficient evidence" is obtained, then it

¹Ibid., p. 25.

²Loc. cit.

³Ibid., p. 26.

is trying to say that it is wiser for us to be afraid of error than be hopeful that such hypotheses are true. Here, therefore, scepticism is not promoting the cause of intellect against passions but proposing a different passion as the basis of intellect. "Dupery for dupery, what proof is there that dupery through hope is so much worse than dupery through fear?"¹

All this leads toward considering religion as a live hypothesis on the assumption that it is a kind of truth. "The more perfect and the more eternal aspect of the universe is represented in our religions as having personal form."² This makes opposition to religious faith sound unreasonable. To the religious, the universe is something sacred, and all relations between individuals are felt here. In spite of the fact that people are "passive portions of the universe,"³ in a sense, they also have an inclination to act as independent entities. It is also felt by them that religion appeals to their "own active good will"⁴ and wants them to meet it half way before any evidence is given -

...one who should shut himself up in snarling logicality and try to make the gods extort his recognition willy-nilly, or not get it at all, might cut himself off forever from his only opportunity of making the gods' acquaintance.⁵

This feeling that there might be a god with its unknown source, forces people to believe in the existence of gods and

¹Ibid., p. 27.

²Loc. cit.

³Ibid., p. 28.

⁴Loc. cit.

⁵Loc. cit.

this in return makes them feel that they are "doing the universe the deepest service"¹ and all this comes as potential essence of the religious hypothesis.

If the hypothesis were true in all its parts, including this one, then pure intellectualism, with its veto on our making willing advances, would be an absurdity; and some participation of our sympathetic nature would be logically required. I, therefore, for one, cannot see my way to accepting the agnostic rules for truth-seeking, or willfully agree to keep my willing nature out of the game.²

James felt that in spite of all this argument in favor of having the right to believe any live hypothesis that appeals to the will, if there are some who do not go by this, it is because they have been thinking about some specific religious hypothesis and not examining it "from the abstract logical point of view."³ Any option which is living to a person does not seem silly to him, and here the freedom to believe can legitimately decide the option if intellect can not. When James looked at all the practical and theoretical possibilities that the religious question involves for concrete men, he felt that it was ridiculous to wait for evidence until the end of life, refusing to believe according to our passional nature. Scholastic absolutists might wait for this evidence, since they would know when this evidence comes. But empiricists will not know when they have the evidence, therefore for empiricists there is no point in waiting for such evidence to come and refusing to believe until then.⁴

¹Loc. cit.

²Ibid., p. 28.

³Ibid., p. 29.

⁴Ibid., pp. 29-30.

In conclusion James advised that each one has a right to believe the way he does, that he should not criticize but respect the mental freedom of others. This leads to tolerance, in which empiricism's pride lies. He endorsed the remarks of a contemporary author, Fitz-James Stephen, about important questions in life:

They are riddles of the Sphinx, and in some way or another we must deal with them.... In all important transactions of life we have to take a leap in the dark.... If we decide to leave the riddle unanswered, that is a choice; if we waver in our answer, that, too, is a choice; but whatever choice we make, we make it at our peril.¹

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE THEORY OF EMOTIONS AND "THE WILL TO BELIEVE"

In his theory of emotions, William James made a distinction between two different ways of thinking, the natural way and the rational way, and he chose to follow the rational way of thinking about the emotions.

Our natural way of thinking about these coarser emotions is that the mental perception of some fact excites the mental affection called the emotion, and that this latter state of mind gives rise to the bodily expression.... The hypothesis here to be defended says that this order of sequence is incorrect,... and that the more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble,²

Contradicting his choice of the rational method in the theory of emotions, James maintains in The Will to Believe that the opinion arrived at through our natural tendency to believe

¹Ibid., p. 30.

²James, William, The Principles of Psychology, 2: 449-450.

in an opinion has a right to be believed and also can be justified.

...that not only as a matter of fact do we find our passional nature influencing us in our opinions, but that there are some options between opinions in which this influence must be regarded both as an inevitable and as a lawful determinant of our choice.¹

James seemed to renounce the common-sense view and natural way of thinking and championed the rational way of stating the theory of emotions, but in his The Will to Believe he gave primary concern to our passional nature and belief through what comes naturally, giving only secondary concern to reasoning and insight. Also when the question of what brings about a person's beliefs and emotions is considered in The Will to Believe James seemed to rule out the intellectual altogether. Regarding the production of opinions, he seemed to say that it is the tendency or the desire to believe that determines these opinions and not the intellect and logic.

Evidently, then, our non-intellectual nature does influence our convictions. There are passional tendencies and volitions which run before and others which come after belief, and it is only the latter that are too late for the fair; ...and pure insight and logic, whatever they might do ideally, are not the only things that really do produce our creeds.²

In the theory of emotions, James argues that the emotions, being mental, are not caused by a mental state of perception but by physiological changes.

The hypothesis here to be defended says that this order of sequence is incorrect, that the one mental

¹James, William, The Will to Believe, p. 19.

²Ibid., p. 11.

state is not immediately induced by the other, that the bodily manifestations must first be interposed between,¹

Now the general causes of the emotions are indubitably physiological.² ...If we fancy some strong emotion, and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feelings of its bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no 'mind-stuff' out of which emotion can be constituted, and that a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains.³

Thus James seems to believe that both the opinions and emotions are caused directly by something physiological or natural in man and not by the mental processes. The passional nature which brings forth opinions seems to be analogous with the physiological processes that bring about the emotions, while opinions and emotions being mental states and caused by physiological processes, are analogous with each other for James. Therefore, passional nature is to opinions what physiological processes are to emotions.

For William James, the only truth that nobody could question or doubt seemed to be the experience or consciousness of a thing existing. In The Will to Believe James expresses this view thus:

But in our dealings with objective nature we obviously are recorders, not makers, of the truth, ...⁴

The consciousness comes through experiences or sensations. This is where knowledge seems to get started, and only this

¹James, William, "What is an Emotion?", Mind, 1884, 9: 189.

²James, William, The Principles of Psychology, p. 449.

³Ibid., p. 451.

⁴James, William, The Will to Believe, p. 20.

seemed to be the unchangeable truth for James. It seems that there is a parallel to this idea in James' theory of emotions.

If such a theory is true, then each emotion is the resultant of a sum of elements, and each element is caused by a physiological process of a sort already well known. The elements are all organic changes, and each of them is the reflex effect of the exciting object.¹

Both in the theory of emotions and in The Will to Believe there seem to be tendencies of realism. The whole theory of emotion is based on realism. "My theory, on the contrary, is that the bodily changes followed directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion."² For James, the mental status of emotion started with the perception of the object. Therefore, the world of objects is already there even before the mind can perceive it. The same thought can be traced in James' The Will to Believe.

...Throughout the breadth of physical nature facts are what they are quite independently of us and seldom is there any such hurry about them that the risks of believing a premature theory need be faced.³

The existence of the world does not seem to depend on the mind. The mind cannot change anything that is in the world. Here James seems to espouse realism.

As in the theory of emotions, so also in The Will to Believe the mind-body dualism seems to be rejected. In the theory of emotions, James combined the mental and the physical. He

¹James, William, Principles of Psychology, 2: 453.

²Ibid., p. 449.

³James, op. cit., p. 20.

considered mind and body to be continuous with each other and not to be two different entities.

If our hypothesis is true, it makes us realize more deeply than ever how much our mental life is knit up with our corporeal frame, in the strictest sense of the term. Rapture, love, ambition, indignation, and pride, considered as feelings, are fruits of the same sort with the grossest bodily sensations of pleasure and of pain.¹

James said that if his theory of emotions were true, it clearly showed that the mental life and the physical life are closely linked. In presenting his theory, he made every attempt to prove it and believed that it was true. Thereby he seems to have assumed that physical and mental life are linked together. A parallel can be found to this in The Will to Believe where James rules out "pure intellectualism" when one is forming one's beliefs.

...Then pure intellectualism, with its veto on making willing advances, would be an absurdity; and some participation of our sympathetic nature would be logically required.²

Although the mental and the physical are interrelated for James, the mental states seem to depend on the physical for their origin. According to James, it is probable that mental states cannot exist as separate entities.

After studying James' theory of emotions and The Will to Believe, one begins to suspect that the theory of emotions and The Will to Believe are interdependent. The theory of emotions can well have been a project inspired by and sustained by James'

¹James, William, The Principles of Psychology, 2: 467.

²James, William, The Will to Believe, p. 28.

own "will to believe" and The Will to Believe itself may be simply a formal statement of the method James used, perhaps unconsciously, in developing the theory of emotions. For any proposal which appeals to the will was for James a live hypothesis:

Let us give the name of hypothesis to anything that may be proposed to our belief.... A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed.¹

James, when he proposed his thesis on emotions, seemed to have felt this appeal to believe in his theory of emotions. Thus it can be said that it was a live hypothesis for him. "The best thing I can say for it is, that in writing it, I have almost persuaded myself it may be true."² Here one might see the tendency to believe that is so very important for James in the process that brings about beliefs. This theory of emotions was a live hypothesis for James, while it was a dead hypothesis for others.

The physiologists who, during the past few years, have been so industriously exploring the functions of the brain, have limited their attempts at explanation to its cognitive and volitional performances. ...But the aesthetic sphere of the mind, its longings, its pleasures and pains, and its emotions, have been so ignored in all these researches that one is tempted to suppose that if either Dr. Ferrier or Dr. Munk were asked for a theory in brain-terms of the latter mental facts, they might both reply, either that they had as yet bestowed no thought upon the subject, or that they had found it so difficult to make distinct hypotheses, that the matter lay for them among the problems of the future, only to be taken up after the simpler ones of the present should have been definitively solved.³

¹Ibid., p. 2.

²James, William, Mind, 1884, p. 205.

³Ibid., p. 188.

The same hypothesis is live for James, while it is dead for other physiologists because James might have been willing to act while the men he mentions above were not. As James remarks in another connection, "This shows that deadness and liveness in an hypothesis are not intrinsic properties, but relations to the individual thinker. They are measured by his willingness to act."¹

In the theory of emotion, regarding the succession of the mental and physical states involved in an emotion, James was confronted with two propositions: first of all, that a mental state can bring about another mental state, and, secondly, that one mental state cannot bring about another mental state.

The hypothesis here to be defended says that this order of sequence is incorrect, that the one mental state is not immediately induced by the other, that the bodily manifestations must first be interposed between....²

Both of these propositions seemed to have appealed to James and so were live hypotheses; they offered him a living option. "A living option is one in which both hypotheses are live ones."³ He also seemed to have felt the force that he must choose between them. This feeling is evident from his theory of emotions, and he made the option a forced one.

But if I say, 'Either accept this truth or go without it,' I put on you a forced option, for there is no standing place outside of the alternative. Every dilemma based on a complete logical disjunction, with

¹James, William, The Will to Believe, pp. 2-3.

²James, William, The Principles of Philosophy, 2: 450.

³James, William, The Will to Believe, p. 3.

no possibility of not choosing, is an option of this kind.¹

Since the other physiologists did not attempt to make a study of emotions,² James seemed to have felt that either he should present a theory of emotions or none would be offered. This convinced him that the option was momentous.

...for this would probably be your only similar opportunity, and your choice now would either exclude you from the North Pole sort of immortality altogether or put at least the chance of it into your hands.³

Since the option between the two propositions in James' theory of emotion seemed to be living, forced and momentous, it was a genuine option.

One of the several ways in which James seemed to allow belief is through simple perception. Here the subjective elements do not seem to take any part.

We can say any of these things, but we are absolutely impotent to believe them; and of just such things is the whole fabric of the truths that we do believe in made up, - matters of fact, immediate or remote, as Hume said, and relations between ideas, which are either there or not there for us if we see them so, and which if not there cannot be put there by any action of our own.⁴

In such cases where the belief is dependent entirely on perception, no human desires, wishes, and emotions seem to be present. Here the beliefs seem to be purely objective. Beliefs which are gained purely through perception may be compared with what James called aesthetic emotion at its primary level.

¹Loc. cit., p. 3.

²Refer to page 28.

³James, op. cit., p. 4.

⁴James, William, The Will to Believe, p. 5.

In reply to this we immediately insist that aesthetic emotion, pure and simple, the pleasure given us by certain lines and masses, and combinations of colors and sounds, is an absolutely sensational experience, an optical or auricular feeling that is primary, and not due to the repercussion backwards of other sensations elsewhere consecutively aroused.¹

Beliefs which are gained through simple perception seemed to be the only instances where the passional nature did not seem to affect the beliefs, as the aesthetic emotion only at its primary stage seemed to be purely intellectual - lacking any physical expressions. They both seem to involve the same kind of mechanism - simply recording the facts or images, without any kind of subjective reaction.

James in The Will to Believe, felt that no beliefs can be gained through pure intellectual insight. He was very sure that subjective elements do enter and have to enter into our opinions.

Yet if any one should thereupon assume that intellectual insight is what remains after wish and will and sentimental preference have taken wing, or that pure reason is what then settles our opinions, he would fly quite as directly in the teeth of the facts.²

In fact, for James, the subjective element of the passional nature produces beliefs, and the intellect and reasoning have very little to say.

There are passional tendencies and volitions which run before and others which come after belief, and it is only the latter that are too late for the fair;....³

It is possible that this is what happened in the case of James' theory of emotions. He seemed to have a natural tendency

¹James, William, The Principles of Psychology, 2: 468.

²James, op. cit., p. 8.

³Ibid., p. 11

to believe in his theory even before it was put to positive proof.

Thus will the publication of my articles have been justified, even though the theory it advocates, rigorously taken, be erroneous. The best thing I can say for it is, that in writing it, I have almost persuaded myself it may be true.¹

Here he does not only seem to show his passional tendency to believe, but he also seemed to go by what he later believed in regard to the avoidance of error and the knowing of truth.

Clifford, in the instructive passage which I have quoted, exhorts us to the latter course. Believe nothing, he tells us, keep your mind in suspense forever, rather than by closing it on insufficient evidence incur the awful risk of believing lies. You, on the other hand, may think that the risk of being in error is a very small matter when compared with the blessings of real knowledge, and be ready to be duped many times in your investigation rather than postpone indefinitely the chance of guessing true. I myself find it impossible to go with Clifford.²

Dupery for dupery, what proof is there that dupery through hope is so much worse than dupery through fear? I, for one, can see no proof; and I simply refuse obedience to the scientists' command to imitate his kind of option, in a case where my own stake is important enough to give me the right to choose my own form of risk.³

James seemed to prove that "dupery through hope" is better than "dupery through fear" and took the risk in presenting his theory of emotions.

In his The Will to Believe, James seemed to have felt that "objective evidence" is a very nice ideal to have but that nobody could be completely objective. He felt that scholastic

¹James, William, "What is an Emotion?", Mind, 1884, 9: 205.

²James, William, The Will to Believe, p. 18.

³Ibid., p. 27.

orthodoxy made an attempt to get at truth through "objective evidence," while the scientists tried to use the method of verification to get at truth. James felt that science and the scholastic theorists looked only for the evidence that they needed to prove their hypotheses and that they were never completely objective.

"Objective evidence and certitude are doubtless very fine ideals to play with, but where on this moonlit and dream-visited planet are they found?"¹

The much lauded objective evidence is never triumphantly there; it is a mere aspiration or Grenzbegriff, marking the infinitely remote ideal of our thinking life. To claim that certain truths now possess it, is simply to say that when you think them true, and they are true, then their evidence is objective, otherwise it is not. But practically one's conviction that the evidence one goes by is of the real objective brand, is only one more subjective opinion added to the lot. For what a contradictory array of opinions have objective evidence and absolute certitude been claimed!²

It is possible that since James rejected objective certitude, he may have paid too little attention to the evidence that some of the physiologists came up with in regard to his physiological basis of emotions. James inquired of Dr. Strumpell regarding his case of total anaesthesia, asking him whether the grief and shame felt by the patient were "real feelings" in his mind or whether they were only physical manifestations to which the patient was insensible but which the observer could notice.³ In reply to this, Dr. Strumpell stated:

¹Ibid., p. 14.

²Ibid., pp. 15-16.

³James, William, "What is an Emotion?", Mind, 1884, 9: 204.

...Nevertheless I think I can decidedly make the statement, that he was by no means completely lacking in emotional affections. In addition to the feelings of grief and shame mentioned in my paper, I recall distinctly that he showed e.g., anger, and frequently quarrelled with the hospital attendants. He also manifested fear lest I should punish him. In short, I do not think that my case speaks exactly in favour of your theory. On the other hand, I will not affirm that it positively refutes your theory.¹

When James received this reply, he went ahead to find the evidence that he needed. He could be said to have had a strong tendency to believe in his hypothesis.

...is it not, I say, at least possible, that Dr. Strumpell, addressing no direct introspective questions to his patient, and the patient not being of a class from which one could expect voluntary revelations of that sort, should have similarly omitted to discriminate between a feeling and its habitual motor accompaniment, and erroneously taken the latter as proof that the former was there?²

This might indicate that James did not have very much faith in objective evidence but believed in introspection. He seemed to have felt that if the boy had been asked to introspect himself, his feelings would have proved the theory. In The Will to Believe James seemed to trade objective evidence for experience.

I live, to be sure, by the practical faith that we must go on experiencing and thinking over our experience, for only thus can our opinions grow more true; but to hold any one of them - I absolutely do not care which - as if it never could be reinterpretable or corrigible, I believe to be a tremendously mistaken attitude, and I think that the whole history of philosophy will bear me out.³

¹Ibid., p. 205.

²Loc. cit.

³James, William, The Will to Believe, p. 14.

All the foregoing relationships between James' theory of emotions and the theory of the will to believe illustrate that the former's proof is at least partially dependent on the latter. The theory of emotions gets much of its strength and support from The Will to Believe and cannot stand by itself. James made use of his will to believe in proving the theory of emotions, at the expense of objective evidence. He believed in his theory of emotions because of his passional nature. The Will to Believe is his theory of getting at a belief while his theory of emotions is the belief that he got by applying his theory.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is indebted to Mr. Cecil H. Miller, major professor, for his encouragement, assistance, guidance, and constructive criticism throughout the writing of this report.

Suggestions and comments offered by various staff members of Kansas State University, particularly Mr. Carroll E. Kennedy, Instructor, Psychology, were greatly appreciated.

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WILLIAM JAMES' THEORY OF EMOTIONS AND
"THE WILL TO BELIEVE"

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B. A., Madras University, 1953

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History, Government and Philosophy

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
OF AGRICULTURE AND APPLIED SCIENCE

1960

The varied interests of the philosopher, William James, led the author to inquire whether James' thoughts ran parallel to each other or not, in his philosophy and in other fields of knowledge that he was interested in. In order to determine this, James' theory of emotions and The Will to Believe were selected from his psychology and philosophy respectively. In this report an attempt is made to decide what relationships, if any at all, exist between the theory of emotions and the doctrine of the will to believe.

First of all interpretation of the theory of emotions and The Will to Believe was attempted. Later different ideas presented in the theory of emotions were compared with those in The Will to Believe.

James' main purpose in The Will to Believe was to show that beliefs or opinions are determined by the passional nature or the desire to believe and that it is rightful for opinions to be formed that way. This main idea supports the theory of emotions, since the latter did not have very much of objective evidence. This suggested that it was the passional nature in James that led him to believe his theory of emotions.

In The Will to Believe James considered objective evidence only as an ideal which at times can be closely approximated. In his theory of emotions he tended to neglect objective evidence and sought to use introspection as a method. He applied the subjective method to his hypothesis in the theory of emotions long before he propounded it officially in The Will to Believe.

The theory of emotions got most of its strength and support from James' "will to believe." The theory in The Will to Believe merely elaborates and explicates a working hypothesis lying behind the theory of emotions. The theory of emotions and The Will to Believe are thus very closely related, representing as they do two expressions of the same philosophical principle.