

DOWNLOAD PDF WILLIAM JAMES : FREE CHOICE IS THE BASIS OF BELIEF

Chapter 1 : Notes on William James, "The Will to Believe"

"The Will to Believe" is a lecture by William James, first published in 1897, which defends, in certain cases, the adoption of a belief without prior evidence of its truth. In particular, James is concerned in this lecture about defending the rationality of religious faith even lacking sufficient evidence of religious truth.

His oldest brother, Henry James, Jr. The family frequently moved between America and Europe, the father having inherited an amount of money sufficient to allow him to enjoy the life of an intellectual. While growing up, William had a passion for drawing. Since he wanted to become a painter, the family moved to Newport, Rhode Island in 1856, where William studied with the leading American portraitist, William Morris Hunt. Although he had talent, he gave up this career goal in less than a year. He had decided that it was insufficient for him to do first-rate work. All this is indicative of three things: In 1862, the American Civil War erupted. However, already in delicate health, he left when it expired after three months. His younger brothers Wilky and Bob served in the Union Army. A couple of years later, he took a year off to join a scientific expedition to Brazil, led by Louis Agassiz. But bad health eventually forced him to quit the expedition, and he returned to medical school the James family moving from Boston to Cambridge, Massachusetts. Again he left, this time to study physiology and medicine in Germany and to recover his health. He failed to find a cure for his curious back pains, but returned to Harvard, passed his medical exams, and received his medical degree in 1869. Nevertheless, he did not plan to practice medicine and seemed lost as to what to do with the rest of his life. His training in hard science was making it impossible for him to believe in human freedom and, thus, in the value of struggling for moral ideals; the despair of materialism was leading him to the depression of determinism. In a barely disguised case history in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, he tells of visiting an asylum while he was a medical student, and seeing an epileptic patient whose condition had reduced him to an idiotic state. James could not dispel the realization that if universal determinism prevails, he could likewise sink into such a state, utterly incapable of preventing it *Varieties*, pp. 11-12. By the spring of 1870, when James was twenty-eight years old, he experienced a critical moment while reading a treatment of human freedom by the French neo-Kantian Charles Renouvier. He discovered the solution to his problem in the voluntaristic act of will whereby he could commit himself to believing in his own freedom despite any lack of objective evidence. He started down the road to recovery, though the remainder of his life would be plagued by seemingly psychosomatic troubles serious eye strain, mysterious back pains, digestive problems, and periods of exhaustion, as well as chronic mood swings, including times of brooding depression. Unfortunately, he still lacked a constructive career goal. He accepted and began his career of more than a third of a century as a faculty member there. The next year, he became an instructor of anatomy and physiology. By the mid-eighteen-seventies, he was teaching psychology there, using the physiological approach he had learned in Germany and establishing the first psychology laboratory in America. He met a schoolteacher named Alice Howe Gibbens, whom he married in 1878. Like his parents, they had five children, naming the first two Henry and William. Alice was adept at handling his neurotic obsessions and emotional moodiness, and they seem to have had a good marriage, living comfortably in Cambridge. The year they married, James agreed to write a psychology textbook; however, by then he was already drifting away from psychology into philosophy. He was a member of a Metaphysical Club that included Oliver Wendell Holmes, who taught law at Harvard and would go on to serve on the U. Supreme Court, and Charles Sanders Peirce, a philosopher of science, who would become the founder of American pragmatism. In 1879, James began teaching philosophy at Harvard, becoming an assistant professor of philosophy the next year. As he got deeper into philosophy, he developed a negative attitude towards psychology. After becoming a full professor of philosophy in 1880 and of psychology in 1882, he published his *Principles of Psychology* in 1890. It had taken him close to twelve years to finish it, and, though it would be extremely successful, he was dissatisfied with it and disgusted with psychology *Letters*, vol. 2. Nevertheless, he agreed to prepare an abridged version, which was published two years later as *Psychology: Briefer Course*; it too would be widely used and

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help to establish his reputation as the foremost living American psychologist. Overworked at Harvard and jeopardizing his fragile health, he suffered a physical breakdown that same year. While recovering his health, he studied a wide range of accounts of religious experience and prepared his Gifford Lectures, which he delivered at the University of Edinburgh in 1890. These were published as *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1890 and proved to be quite successful, although James himself was displeased, believing them to contain too much reporting on facts and too little philosophical analysis. For the remainder of his life, James focused on the development of his own philosophy, writing essays and lectures that would later be collected and published in four books. In the spring of 1890, he took a leave of absence from Harvard to take a visiting professorship at Stanford University, though his lecture series in California was interrupted by the great San Francisco earthquake. In late 1890 and early 1891, he delivered his lectures on Pragmatism in Boston and at Columbia University, publishing them in the spring of 1891. That was also the year he resigned from Harvard, worried that he might die before being able to complete his philosophical system, as he was suffering from angina and shortness of breath. He delivered the Hibbert Lectures in England in 1890, published the next year as *A Pluralistic Universe*, aimed at combating the neo-Hegelian idealism that was then prevalent in Great Britain. Meanwhile, he was under intellectual assault by mainstream philosophers for his pragmatic treatment of truth, which he defended in a collection of essays published in 1890 as *The Meaning of Truth*. He was attempting to complete his textbook on *Some Problems of Philosophy*, but died on August 26, 1892. In 1892, his textbook, edited by his son Henry, and his *Memories and Studies* were posthumously published. His writings have survived in part because of the provocative honesty of his ideas, but also because of the vibrant, sometimes racy, style in which he expressed them. In *A Pluralistic Universe*, he castigates philosophers who use technical jargon instead of clear, straightforward language. He practiced the spontaneous thinking and freshness of expression he advocates there. *Universe*, pp. It has been said by the novelist Rebecca West that, while Henry James wrote fiction as though it were philosophy, his older brother, William, wrote philosophy in a colorful style typical of fiction. Despite impatience with the process of that development, he contributed significantly to moving it along, regarding psychology as the science of our mental phenomena or states of consciousness, such as thoughts, feelings, desires, volitions, and so forth. *The Stream of Consciousness and the Self* In analyzing what can broadly be termed human thinking, James delineates five generic characteristics: The self can be viewed as an object of thought or as the subject of thought. Sensation, Perception, Imagination, and Belief James states that if we track the dynamic of mental activity, we discern a standard pattern from sensation to perception to imagination to belief. Through sensation, we become acquainted with some given fact. This can, but need not, lead to knowledge about that fact, achieved by perceiving its relations to other given facts. Both sensation and perception involve an immediate intuition of some given objects. Imagination, less immediate, retrieves mental copies of past sensations and perceptions, even when their external stimuli are no longer present. Belief is the sense or feeling that ideas or propositions formed in the imagination correspond to reality. Every proposition can be analyzed in terms of its object and whether that object is believed. The object of a proposition comprises a subject such as my horse, a predicate wings, and a relation between them my horse has sprouted wings. The belief is the psychic attitude a mind has towards that object for example, I believe it or deny it or am in doubt about it *Principles*, vol. *Emotion and Will* Like other animals, we have primitive instincts, such as fear, some desires, and certain forms of sympathy, which do not require being taught them or consciously focusing on ends. However, we also have emotions that are learned behavior and do involve such a focus—for example, a fear of failure and the desire for an academic degree. Instincts and emotions thus overlap, the latter tending to cover a broader range of objects than the former. We tend to assume that perceptions trigger emotional responses, eventuating in bodily expressions—that we suddenly see a bear, become frightened, and then tremble and run away. But James thinks the actual sequence is perception, followed by bodily expressions, followed by emotional feeling—that we see the bear, tremble and run away, then feel those physical events as what we call fear. The idea that emotions ultimately have physical causes emphasizes the intimate relationship between our bodies and our mental life *Principles*, vol. *The human will is*

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crucial for deliberately acting on our beliefs and emotions. Sometimes we consider alternative courses of action and seem to select one among them, as if making a voluntary decision. James maps out five sorts of decision-making: Epistemology Even if philosophically interesting matters such as freedom vs. Whatever approach is chosen, it is clear that James repudiates rationalism, with its notions of a priori existential truths. He is particularly hostile to German idealism, which he identifies especially with Hegel and which he attacks in many of his essays this identification leads him to be remarkably unfair to Kant, an earlier German idealist. The tradition of modern empiricism is more promising, yet too atomistic to allow us to move much beyond the knowledge of acquaintance to genuine comprehension Will, pp. Fortunately, James had already learned about the pragmatic approach from Peirce. The first of its eight lectures presents pragmatism as a more attractive middle ground between the two mainstream approaches of European philosophy. It is difficult to identify many pure types of either of these in the history of philosophy, and some thinkers such as Kant are deliberately mixed, as is James himself. He thinks that most of us want a philosophical method that is firmly anchored in empirical facts, while being open to, rather than dismissive of, moral and religious values. He offers pragmatism as a philosophy that coherently meets both demands. Before we invest much time or effort in seeking the meaning of anything, we should consider what practical difference it would make if we could find out. Providing an example to illustrate his point, James refers to the Hegelian notion of God as the all-encompassing Absolute Spirit. How should we decide whether this is what we should mean by God? Consider the practical consequences for a believer: From that pragmatic perspective, James rejects the Hegelian notion. Undoubtedly, philosophy provides us with only one legitimate approach to belief, as he observes in his fifth lecture, others being common sense with its basic concepts derived from experience and science. However, these others are impotent in dealing with questions of freedom and value Pragmatism, pp. The Pragmatic Theory of Truth It seems that anything knowable must be true. He begins with a standard dictionary analysis of truth as agreement with reality. By contrast, he advocates a more dynamic and practical interpretation, a true idea or belief being one we can incorporate into our ways of thinking in such a way that it can be experientially validated. He is a fallibilist, seeing all existential truths as, in theory, revisable given new experience. They involve a relationship between facts and our ideas or beliefs. Because the facts, and our experience of them, change we must beware of regarding such truths as absolute, as rationalists tend to do Pragmatism, pp. This relativistic theory generated a firestorm of criticism among mainstream philosophers to which he responded in *The Meaning of Truth*. The Pragmatic Approach to Belief Western philosophers have traditionally viewed knowledge as justified, true belief. So long as the idea of truth is pragmatically analyzed and given a pragmatic interpretation of justification, James seems to accept that view. His entire philosophy can be seen as fundamentally one of productive beliefs.

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Chapter 2 : Post-Kantian Approaches to Faith: Kierkegaard and James

Because some beliefs, like the belief that avoiding falsehood is more important than attaining truth, cannot be adopted on the basis of logic alone, and because such beliefs are central to the entire enterprise of believing anything at all, it must be okay, sometimes, to believe things for non-rational reasons.

Most of the ancient thinkers on the problem were trying to show that we humans have control over our decisions, that our actions "depend on us" , and that they are not pre-determined by fate, by arbitrary gods, by logical necessity, or by a natural causal determinism. Almost everything written about free will to date has been verbal debate about the precise meaning of philosophical concepts like causality , necessity , and other dogmas of determinism. The "problem of free will" is often described as a question of reconciling "free will" with one or more of the many kinds of determinism. As a result, the "problem of free will" depends on two things, the exact definition of free will and which of the determinisms is being reconciled. There is also an even more difficult reconciliation for " libertarian " free will. How can a morally responsible will be reconciled with indeterminism or chance? The standard argument against free will is that it can not possibly be reconciled with either randomness or determinism, and that these two exhaust the logical possibilities. Creation myths often end in adventures of the first humans clearly making choices and being held responsible. But a strong fatalism is present in those tales that foretell the future, based on the idea that the gods have foreknowledge of future events. The first thinkers to look for causes in natural phenomena rather than gods controlling events were the Greek physiologoi or cosmologists. Heraclitus, the philosopher of change, agreed that there were laws or rules the logos behind all the change. Our current model of the universe begins with a state of minimal information and maximum disorder. The physiologoi transformed pre-philosophical arguments about gods controlling the human will into arguments about pre-existing causes controlling it. The cosmological problem became a psychological problem. Some saw a causal chain of events leading back to a first cause later taken by many religious thinkers to be God. Other physiologoi held that although all physical events caused, mental events might not. If the mind or soul is a substance different from matter, it could have its own laws different from the laws of nature for material bodies. The materialist philosophers Democritus and Leucippus, again with extraordinary prescience, claimed that all things, including humans, were made of atoms in a void, with individual atomic motions strictly controlled by causal laws. But ironically, he and Leucippus originated two of the great dogmas of determinism , physical determinism and logical necessity , which lead directly to the modern problem of free will and determinism. Leucippus stated the first dogma, an absolute necessity which left no room in the cosmos for chance. Some even argued for a great cycle of events an idea borrowed from Middle Eastern sources repeating themselves over thousands of years. The Pythagoreans, Socrates, and Plato attempted to reconcile an element of human freedom with material determinism and causal law, in order to hold man responsible for his actions. The first major philosopher to argue convincingly for some indeterminism was probably Aristotle. First he described a causal chain back to a prime mover or first cause, and he elaborated the four possible causes material, efficient, formal, and final. Aristotle did not subscribe to the simplistic "every event has a single cause" idea that was to come later. He noted that the early physicists had found no place for chance among their causes. Aristotle opposed his accidental chance to necessity: *Metaphysics, Book V, a25 2a* It is obvious that there are principles and causes which are generable and destructible apart from the actual processes of generation and destruction; for if this is not true, everything will be of necessity: Will this be, or not? Yes, if this happens; otherwise not. He knew that many of our decisions are quite predictable based on habit and character, but they are no less free nor are we less responsible if our character itself and our predictable habits were developed freely in the past and are changeable in the future. This is the view of some Eastern philosophies and religions. Our Karma has been determined by our past actions even from past lives , and strongly influences our current actions, but we are free to improve our Karma by good actions. One generation after Aristotle, Epicurus argued that as atoms

move through the void, there are occasions when they "swerve" from their otherwise determined paths, thus initiating new causal chains. Epicurus argued that these swerves would allow us to be more responsible for our actions, something impossible if every action was deterministically caused. For Epicurus, the occasional interventions of arbitrary gods would be preferable to strict determinism. Epicurus did not say the swerve was directly involved in decisions. His critics, ancient and modern, have claimed mistakenly that Epicurus did assume "one swerve - one decision. Parenthetically, we now know that atoms do not occasionally swerve, they move unpredictably whenever they are in close contact with other atoms. Everything in the material universe is made of atoms in unstoppable perpetual motion. Deterministic paths are only the case for very large objects, where the statistical laws of atomic physics average to become nearly certain dynamical laws for billiard balls and planets. Lucretius saw the randomness as enabling free will, even if he could not explain how beyond the fact that random swerves would break the causal chain of determinism. Most of the extensive Stoic writings are lost, probably because their doctrine of fate, which identified God with Nature, was considered anathema to the Christian church. The church agreed that the laws of God were the laws of Nature, but that God and Nature were two different entities. In either case strict determinism follows by universal Reason logos from an omnipotent God. Stoic virtue called for men to resist futile passions like anger and envy. The fine Stoic morality that all men including slaves and women were equal children of God coincided with or was adopted by the church. Whereas the past is unchangeable, Chrysippus argued that some future events that are possible do not occur by necessity from past external factors alone, but might depend on us. We have a choice to assent or not to assent to an action. Chrysippus would be seen today as a compatibilist, as was the Stoic Epictetus. Alexander defended a view of moral responsibility we would call libertarianism today. Greek philosophy had no precise term for "free will" as did Latin liberum arbitrium or libera voluntas. Alexander believed that Aristotle was not a strict determinist like the Stoics, and Alexander himself argued that some events do not have predetermined causes. In particular, man is responsible for self-caused decisions, and can choose to do or not to do something. Alexander denied the foreknowledge of events that was part of the Stoic identification of God and Nature. Actions caused by chance are simply random and we cannot feel responsible for them. But we do feel responsible. Despite more than twenty-three centuries of philosophizing, most modern thinkers have not moved significantly beyond this core problem of randomness and free will for libertarians - the confused idea that free actions are caused directly by a random event. Caught between the horns of a dilemma, with determinism on one side and randomness on the other, the standard argument against free will continues to render human freedom unintelligible. A couple of centuries after Alexander, a subtle argument for free will was favored by early Christian theologians. They wanted human free will in order to absolve an omnipotent God of responsibility for evil actions. This is called the problem of evil. His more sensible contemporary, the British monk Pelagius Morgan held, with Cicero, that human freedom prohibited divine foreknowledge. Because they used Reason, instead of accepting traditional views based on faith and scripture alone, they were called moderns. They were called modern because they tried to use Reason to establish the certainty of Truth including Religion. Descartes found the realm of human freedom in the Mind, which he thought was a separate substance from the material Body. It involves an uncaused cause, which Spinoza felt was impossible. They debated Liberty and Necessity circa Hobbes held that liberty was simply the absence of external impediments to action, because the voluntary actions of a "free will" all have prior necessary causes and are thus determined. He equated necessity to the decree of God. The British empiricist philosophers - George Berkeley 20, John Locke 21, and David Hume - essentially all found chance or indeterminism unacceptable. Determinism was obviously required for us to be responsible for our actions. Hume, a modern Skeptic, doubted the existence of certain knowledge and questioned causality, but he thought correctly, if inconsistently that our actions proceeded from causes in our character. Free will at best was compatible with determinism in the sense that our will caused our actions, even though the willed action was the consequence of prior causes. An uncaused cause the "causa sui" or self-cause, or a free action generated randomly with no regard for earlier conditions "sui generis" or self-generated, was considered absurd and unintelligible. He

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thought it was inappropriate to describe the Will itself as Free. The Will is a Determination. It is the Man who is Free. Leibniz imagined a scientist who could see the events of all times, just as all times are thought to be present to the mind of God. One might naively think that the development of modern probability theory and statistics would have encouraged acceptance of chance in human affairs, but surprisingly, the major theorists of probability were determinists. The mathematical distribution of possible outcomes in games of chance was formally derived independently by a number of great mathematicians in the eighteenth century - Abraham De Moivre , Daniel Bernoulli , Laplace , and Carl Friedrich Gauss Laplace disliked the disreputable origins of this theory and renamed it the "calculus of probabilities. Kant subsumed causality and determinism under his idea of Pure Reason. Indeed he made determinism a precondition for rational thought. But he set limits on the Practical Reason to make room for God, freedom, and immortality. This is despite three great advances in science that critically depend on the existence of real chance in the universe and two developments in logic and mathematics that question the status of philosophical certainty. The alternative is a deterministic law controlling such change, which implies that information about all species has existed for all time. Or perhaps the idea that there is no real change. He was ridiculed by his physicist colleagues in Germany, who rejected the idea of atoms, let alone real chance in the universe. Classical mechanics is now seen as simply the limiting case of quantum mechanics for macroscopic large systems. We can broadly classify these thinkers as determinists, compatibilists, or libertarians, Determinists - Few modern philosophers admit to being "hard" determinists as William James called them ³¹ , who maintain that there is just one possible future, but all determinists believe in "strict" causality. Some argue that without causality knowledge would be impossible, since we could not be sure of our reasoning process and deduced truths. Note that there are as many kinds of determinists as there are determinisms. Compatibilists claim that free will is compatible with determinism, since if determinism did not hold, they think that their will could not determine their actions. William James called them "soft" determinists. Though our will is itself caused, these causes include our own character, and this is enough freedom for them, even if our character was itself determined by prior causes. Many libertarians still hold a dualist view, with Mind able to circumvent causal laws that constrain the Body. Critics call the libertarian view incoherent and unintelligible if it denies determinism and causality, which they take to be a basic requirement for modern science - indeed the basis for logic and reason. And many libertarians admit their unhappiness with chance as the source of freedom.

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Chapter 3 : Project MUSE - The Unity of William James's Thought

Though we touch on this argument briefly below, this entry focuses primarily on the theistic pragmatic arguments found in William James, J.S. Mill, and James Beattie. It also explores the logic of pragmatic arguments in general, and the pragmatic use of moral arguments in particular.

James spent almost all of his academic career at Harvard. He was appointed instructor in physiology for the spring term, instructor in anatomy and physiology in , assistant professor of psychology in , assistant professor of philosophy in , full professor in , endowed chair in psychology in , return to philosophy in , and emeritus professor of philosophy in . James studied medicine, physiology, and biology, and began to teach in those subjects, but was drawn to the scientific study of the human mind at a time when psychology was constituting itself as a science. He taught his first experimental psychology course at Harvard in the 1870 academic year. Louis Menand suggested that this Club provided a foundation for American intellectual thought for decades to come. On hearing the camera click, James cried out: I say Damn the Absolute! Du Bois , G. Lewis , and Mary Whiton Calkins. Antiquarian bookseller Gabriel Wells tutored under him at Harvard in the late s. James was increasingly afflicted with cardiac pain during his last years. It worsened in while he worked on a philosophy text unfinished but posthumously published as *Some Problems in Philosophy*. He sailed to Europe in the spring of 1890 to take experimental treatments which proved unsuccessful, and returned home on August . His heart failed on August 26, at his home in Chocorua, New Hampshire. He was buried in the family plot in Cambridge Cemetery, Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was one of the strongest proponents of the school of functionalism in psychology and of pragmatism in philosophy. He was a founder of the American Society for Psychical Research , as well as a champion of alternative approaches to healing. He challenged his professional colleagues not to let a narrow mindset prevent an honest appraisal of those beliefs. In an empirical study by Haggbloom et al. He had four siblings: Henry the novelist , Garth Wilkinson, Robertson, and Alice. They had 5 children: Henry born May 18, , William born June 17, , Herman born , died in infancy , Margaret born March, and Alexander the artist born December 22, . Writings[edit] William James wrote voluminously throughout his life. A non-exhaustive bibliography of his writings, compiled by John McDermott , is 47 pages long. The *Briefer Course*, was an abridgement designed as a less rigorous introduction to the field. These works criticized both the English associationist school and the Hegelianism of his day as competing dogmatisms of little explanatory value, and sought to re-conceive the human mind as inherently purposive and selective. His pragmatic theory of truth was a synthesis of correspondence theory of truth and coherence theory of truth , with an added dimension. Truth is verifiable to the extent that thoughts and statements correspond with actual things, as well as the extent to which they "hang together," or cohere, as pieces of a puzzle might fit together; these are in turn verified by the observed results of the application of an idea to actual practice. They also were called true for human reasons. They also mediated between still earlier truths and what in those days were novel observations. Purely objective truth, truth in whose establishment the function of giving human satisfaction in marrying previous parts of experience with newer parts played no role whatsoever, is nowhere to be found. He writes, "First, it is essential that God be conceived as the deepest power in the universe, and second, he must be conceived under the form of a mental personality. In other words the "Absolute" with his one purpose, is not the man-like God of common people. The mind, its experiences, and nature are inseparable. In *What Pragmatism Means*, James writes that the central point of his own doctrine of truth is, in brief, that "Truths emerge from facts, but they dip forward into facts again and add to them; which facts again create or reveal new truth the word is indifferent and so on indefinitely. Truth is the function of the beliefs that start and terminate among them. To the contrary, he supported an epistemological realism position. James went on to apply the pragmatic method to the epistemological problem of truth. A belief was true, he said, if it worked for all of us, and guided us expeditiously through our semihospitable world. James was anxious to uncover what true beliefs amounted to in human life, what their "cash value"

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was, and what consequences they led to. A belief was not a mental entity which somehow mysteriously corresponded to an external reality if the belief were true. Beliefs were ways of acting with reference to a precarious environment, and to say they were true was to say they were efficacious in this environment. In this sense the pragmatic theory of truth applied Darwinian ideas in philosophy; it made survival the test of intellectual as well as biological fitness. The lectures inside depict his position on the subject. In his sixth lecture he starts off by defining truth as "agreement with reality". With this, James warns that there will be disagreements between pragmatics and intellectualists over the concepts of "agreement" and "reality", the last reasoning before thoughts settle and become autonomous for us. However, he contrasts this by supporting a more practical interpretation that: For how much more they are true, will depend entirely on their relations to the other truths that also have to be Acknowledged. Pragmatism , p. Saying that these truths agree with the realities pragmatically means that they lead us to useful outcomes. Belief in anything involves conceiving of how it is real, but disbelief is the result when we dismiss something because it contradicts another thing we think of as real. In his "Sentiment of Rationality", saying that crucial beliefs are not known is to doubt their truth, even if it seems possible. James names four "postulates of rationality" as valuable but unknowable: God, immorality, freedom, and moral duty. However, a claim that does not have outcomes cannot be justified, or unjustified, because it will not make a difference. This idea foresaw 20th century objections to evidentialism and sought to ground justified belief in an unwavering principle that would prove more beneficial. Both argued that one must always adhere to fallibilism , recognizing of all human knowledge that "None of our beliefs are quite true; all have at least a penumbra of vagueness and error", and that the only means of progressing ever-closer to the truth is to never assume certainty, but always examine all sides and try to reach a conclusion objectively. Free will[edit] In his search for truth and assorted principles of psychology, William James developed his two-stage model of free will. In his model, he tries to explain how it is people come to the making of a decision and what factors are involved in it. He firstly defines our basic ability to chose as free will. Then he specifies our two factors as chance and choice. James says that in the sequence of the model, chance comes before choice. In the moment of decision we are given the chance to make a decision and then the choice is what we do or do not do regarding the decision. When it comes to choice, James says we make a choice based on different experiences. And will be drawn from as a positive solution. But in his development of the design, James also struggled with being able to prove that free will is actually free or predetermined. People can make judgements of regret, moral approval and moral disapproval, and if those are absent, then that means our will is predetermined. In *The Will to Believe*, James simply asserted that his will was free. As his first act of freedom, he said, he chose to believe his will was free. He was encouraged to do this by reading Charles Renouvier , whose work convinced James to convert from monism to pluralism. In his diary entry of April 30, , James wrote, I think that yesterday was a crisis in my life. At any rate, I will assume for the present "until next year" that it is no illusion. My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will. Old-fashioned determinism was what we may call hard determinism. It did not shrink from such words as fatality, bondage of the will, necessitation, and the like. Nowadays, we have a soft determinism which abhors harsh words, and, repudiating fatality, necessity, and even predetermination, says that its real name is freedom; for freedom is only necessity understood, and bondage to the highest is identical with true freedom. James described chance as neither hard nor soft determinism, but " indeterminism ". He said The stronghold of the determinist argument is the antipathy to the idea of chance This notion of alternative possibility, this admission that any one of several things may come to pass is, after all, only a roundabout name for chance. What is meant by saying that my choice of which way to walk home after the lecture is ambiguous and matter of chance? It means that both Divinity Avenue and Oxford Street are called but only one, and that one either one, shall be chosen. Philosophy of religion[edit] Excerpt James did important work in philosophy of religion. In his Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh he provided a wide-ranging account of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and interpreted them according to his pragmatic leanings. Some of the important claims he makes in this regard: Religious genius experience should be the primary topic in the study

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of religion, rather than religious institutionsâ€”since institutions are merely the social descendant of genius. The intense, even pathological varieties of experience religious or otherwise should be sought by psychologists, because they represent the closest thing to a microscope of the mindâ€”that is, they show us in drastically enlarged form the normal processes of things. In order to usefully interpret the realm of common, shared experience and history, we must each make certain " over-beliefs " in things which, while they cannot be proven on the basis of experience, help us to live fuller and better lives. An Encyclopedia classes him as one of several figures who "took a more pantheist or pandeist approach by rejecting views of God as separate from the world. Ineffability - no adequate way to use human language to describe the experience. Noetic - universal truths revealed that are unable to be acquired anywhere else. Transient - the mystical experience is only a temporary experience. This way of thinking about emotion has great consequences for the philosophy of aesthetics as well as to the philosophy and practice of education. To this simple primary and immediate pleasure in certain pure sensations and harmonious combinations of them, there may, it is true, be added secondary pleasures; and in the practical enjoyment of works of art by the masses of mankind these secondary pleasures play a great part. Classicism and romanticism have their battles over this point. The theory of emotion was also independently developed in Italy by the Anthropologist Giuseppe Sergi,. This obvious answer to a seemingly trivial question has been the central concern of a century-old debate about the nature of our emotions. It was important, not because it definitively answered the question it raised, but because of the way in which James phrased his response. He conceived of an emotion in terms of a sequence of events that starts with the occurrence of an arousing stimulus the sympathetic nervous system or the parasympathetic nervous system ; and ends with a passionate feeling, a conscious emotional experience.

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Chapter 4 : Beliefs On the Basis of Faith – Discourses

William James Together with Charles Sanders Peirce, James founded the philosophical school of pragmatism, which holds that the meaning of an idea is to be sought in its practical effects, that the function of thought is to guide action, and that truth is to be tested by the practical consequences of belief.

Hypothesis is anything proposed to be believed. A live hypothesis appears to be a genuine possibility to whomever it is proposed; whereas, a dead hypothesis does not appear to be a real possibility to whom it is proposed. Whether a hypothesis is alive or dead may well largely depend upon the situations we have been exposed to in the past. A living option is living, forced, and momentous. A living option in one in hypotheses are live, i. A living option for someone reading this tutorial might well be to understand some ideas in philosophy. A forced option is a dilemma – the hypothesis cannot be avoided. The choice is not trivial, but significant, because one only has one chance to do it. How can one be sure an option is momentous? Is it possible some momentous options are not evident to us at the time they occur in our lives? Is it possible for us to obtain a second chance to decide a momentous option? Can you construct necessary and sufficient conditions for an option to be a momentous one? A momentous option cannot clearly defined because future opportunities cannot be known with certainty. When Nanson decides to sail again one could seize the opportunity which seemingly was lost the first time. Some dead hypotheses are thrust upon one and become momentous options. An Esprit de corps has an effect on outcomes. Jean-Paul Sartre was influenced by this essay. Sartre points out that "not to choose" is a choice. We play it safe because if things go wrong, we can always say, "See what you made me do. When the lion cornered the rabbit and there appeared to be no escape, the rabbit said, "You certainly have a lot of courage lion to try to catch someone who has razor-sharp ears that can cut you to pieces. The rabbit said, "Oops, too high" but I think I have it just right now. A necessary condition for a momentous option might be the circumstance where a person has the power to impose a life-changing value on what is chosen. In a trivial sense, every moment has the possibility of being momentous since it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that can never be recovered. Probably, a sufficient condition for a momentous option for an individual would singular. James applies his theory to morals, social relations, and religion. Are there any other dimensions of living which should be included? Why cannot the genuine option theory be applied to the scientific method? How is option theory applied to the problem of free will? The genuine option theory applies only to human behavior so the theory would be relevant to most things involving psychological import. Even so, James points out that facts are irrelevant to possibilities. A genuine option cannot be known by factual inquiry. In religion, the choice of a personal religion could be a genuine option. Any instance where there is a life-changing choice could be a genuine option. Scientific research programs operate pragmatically. A researcher might have only one chance to verify or confirm the outcome of an experiment because of personal risk, singular events, or huge costs. The genuine option theory is vital to the existence of free will according to James. Belief in a "fact" can help that "fact" come true. More accurately, without our belief, the potential fact does not become possible if we are passive. Would such a decision be related in any manner to the philosophy of existentialism? Yes, on both counts. Since I have everything to gain and nothing to lose by choosing proactively, I am choosing in accordance with the momentous option of taking charge of my own life. The existentialism believes in radical free will without scientific proof as does the pragmatist. The two philosophies are consistent in this regard. Yes, of course, there are many examples where one risks everything and loses. Can you think of two or three different kinds of examples where "faith in a fact can help create the fact"? Very often in personal psychology if we think we will fail, the chances of success are less than if we think we can succeed in a task. Hence, many examples are available. Truth, for him, is invented – truth is a fixed convention for practical purposes. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

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Chapter 5 : James, William | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy

James was the first thinker to enunciate clearly a two-stage decision process, with chance in a present time of random alternatives, leading to a choice which grants consent to one possibility and transforms an equivocal ambiguous future into an unalterable and simple past.

Pragmatic Arguments As with so much in philosophy, the first recorded employment of a pragmatic argument is found in Plato. Somehow or other I believe you are right. I think I am. There too I am sure you are. Pragmatic arguments are practical in orientation, justifying actions that are thought to facilitate the achievement of our goals, or the satisfaction of our desires. If among your goals is A, and if doing such and such results in your achieving A, then, all else being equal, you have reason to do such and such: As presented this is a particular kind of pragmatic argument, a prudential argument. As we will see, there are pragmatic arguments that are not narrowly prudential but are moral in nature. Pragmatic arguments are relevant to belief-formation, since inculcating a belief is an action. There are, broadly speaking, two kinds of pragmatic arguments that have to do with belief-formation. The first is an argument that recommends taking steps to believe a proposition because, if it should turn out to be true, the benefits gained from believing that proposition will be impressive. The prime example of a dependent-argument is a pragmatic argument that uses a calculation of expected utility and employs the Expectation Rule to recommend belief: Among the various versions of his wager argument, Pascal employs this Rule in a version which states that no matter how small the probability that God exists, as long as it is a positive, non-zero probability, the expected utility of theistic belief will dominate the expected utility of disbelief. Given the distinction between A having reason to think a certain proposition is true, and B having reason to induce belief in that proposition, taking steps to generate belief in a certain proposition may be the rational thing to do, even if that proposition lacks sufficient evidential support. This is an argument that recommends belief cultivation because of the psychological, or moral, or religious, or social, or even the prudential benefits gained by virtue of believing it. Of course, being pragmatic arguments, dependent-arguments are not truth-sensitive in an evidential sense; nevertheless they are dependent on truth since the benefits are had only if the recommended belief is true. In contrast, independent pragmatic arguments, yielding benefits whether or not the recommended beliefs are true, are insensitive to truth. Independent-arguments, we might say, are belief-dependent and not truth-dependent. Moral Arguments as Pragmatic Arguments Pragmatic arguments in support of theistic belief can either be predicated on prudence or on morality. By pragmatic arguments predicated on morality I mean arguments that contend that morality, or some proper part of morality, presupposes, or is facilitated by theistic belief. And if morality, or the proper part of morality, is rational, then so too is theistic belief. It is important to recognize the distinction between theoretical moral arguments for theism arguments intended to show that God exists, and pragmatic moral arguments for the rationality of theistic belief. George Mavrodes, for instance, constructs a theoretical moral argument by contending that it would be extremely odd that we would have moral obligations the fulfillment of which results in a net loss to the agent. Such a world seems absurd Mavrodes, A Russellian world implies atheism. But, real moral obligations would be absurd in a Russellian world, since fulfilling moral obligations often cause a net loss to the moral agent and there is no deep explanation of real moral obligation in a Russellian world the deep features of a Russellian world would be things like forces and atoms and chance. But, fulfilling moral obligation is not absurd. So, in this respect, there is reason to think that the actual world is not a Russellian world. Two examples of pragmatic moral arguments are Adams and Zagzebski Adams builds his argument on the concept of demoralization—“weakening of moral motivation”—and the concept of a moral order—“roughly, the idea that to achieve a balance of good over evil in the universe requires something more than human effort, yet human effort can add or detract from the total value of the universe. While we cannot do it all on our own, the idea is, we can make a significant difference for better or worse. So, there is moral advantage in accepting that there is a moral order, and theism provides the best

account of why that is. Zagzebski builds her argument upon the ideas of moral skepticism and moral efficacy, and, though she does not employ the term, moral order. Morality is efficacious if we can make significant contributions to the production of good in the universe and to the elimination of evil. Moral skepticism is a doubting of our ability to acquire moral knowledge, and a doubting of moral efficacy. Zagzebski argues that it is rational to try to be moral only if it is rational to believe that the probability that the attempt will succeed and will produce a great good is not outweighed by the probability that one will have to sacrifice goods in the course of the attempt. But given what we know of human abilities and history, it is not rational to believe that the attempt to be moral is likely to succeed if there is no moral order. Since it is rational to try to be moral, it is rational to believe that there is moral order in the universe, and Christian doctrine is, in part, an account of there being a moral order in the universe. The many-gods objection contends that the betting options of the wager are not limited to Christianity and atheism alone, since one could formulate a Pascalian Wager for Islam, certain sects of Buddhism, or for any of the competing sects found within Christianity itself. Pragmatic moral arguments, if they are to provide strong support for theism, must provide reason to think that theistic belief alone is necessary for morality, or that theistic belief best facilitates moral practice. Until reason for thinking that is forthcoming, it would be premature to hold that theistic moral pragmatic arguments provide strong support. James , 28 We might understand the agnostic imperative more fully as follows: If James is correct, then the agnostic imperative is false. But I cannot help doing this great wrong towards Man, that I make myself credulous. The danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things, though that is great enough; but that it should become credulous, and lose the habit of testing things and inquiring into them; for then it must sink back into savagery. Clifford , 6 Clifford presented evidentialism as a rule of morality: The second is that a theistic commitment is permissible. But another strategy is to seek truth by any means available, even at the risk of error. To facilitate matters eight definitions employed by James are paraphrased: A hypothesis is live, we might say, for a person just in case that person lacks compelling evidence disconfirming that hypothesis, and the hypothesis has an intuitive appeal for that person. It is not a trivial matter. The first main argument might be sketched as follows: Two alternative intellectual strategies are available: Risk a loss of truth and a loss of a vital good for the certainty of avoiding error. Risk error for a chance at truth and a vital good. But, Strategy B is preferable to Strategy A because Strategy A would deny us access to certain possible kinds of truth. And, Any intellectual strategy that denies access to possible truths is an inadequate strategy. Among other examples James provides of this particular kind of truth is that of social cooperation: Wherever a desired result is achieved by the co-operation of many independent persons, its existence as a fact is a pure consequence of the precursive faith in one another of those immediately concerned. Of course, accepting proposition 11 , and advancing an alternative strategy of seeking truth by any available means, even at the risk of error, does not entail that anything goes. Among the requirements suggested by James the most important is: Only genuine options that are intellectually open are decidable on passional grounds. Nor is he arguing against the importance of evidence. The requirement that an option is intellectually open may be redundant. If the evidence were compelling, or even strongly supportive of, say, hypothesis a, and you recognized this, it may be that you would find only a alive. In other words, to say that an option is living may imply that it is intellectually open. Additionally, we might ask whether the property of intellectual openness is to be understood as the evidence is lacking, or as the evidence is in principle lacking. That is, is an option intellectually open when the evidence is indeterminate, or when it is essentially indeterminate? The lack of adequate evidence is sufficient to render an option intellectually open. If more evidence appears so that one hypothesis is supported by a preponderance of the evidence, then a commitment to abide by the evidence is triggered. The relevance of all of this to theistic belief, according to James, is that: Religion says essentially two things. The universe is no longer a mere It to us, but a Thou. We feel, too, as if the appeal of religion to us were made to our own active good-will, as if evidence might be forever withheld from us unless we met the hypothesis half-way. James , 25 James asserts that there are two affirmations of religion. By affirmation James means something like an abstract claim, devoid of much doctrinal content,

and found in the major religions. The first affirmation is that the best things are the more eternal things, while the second is that we are better off even now if we believe the first affirmation. The first affirmation is particularly puzzling, since James does not assert that the best things are the eternal things; he says that the best things are the more eternal things. He explicates this affirmation with three metaphors and a slogan: The plurality though is still puzzling. If we take this as a third affirmation of religion perhaps at the risk a charge of theistic parochialism, the possibility that the more eternal things are plural is foreclosed. Monotheism, in other words, and not polytheism is established by the third affirmation. Taken together, then, the first and the third affirmations of religion suggest that the supreme good in the universe is the existence of a personal being that is essentially perfect and sovereign. The second affirmation is that we are better off now by believing in the existence of this perfect being. At least in part, we would be better off now by believing the first affirmation because by doing so the possibility of a relationship with this being is established. According to James, just as one is not likely to make friends if one is aloof, likewise one is not likely to become acquainted with the perfect being, if there is such, if one seeks that acquaintance only after sufficient evidence has been gathered. There are possible truths, James claims, belief of which is a necessary condition of obtaining evidence for them. The Cliffordian may be forever cut off from certain kinds of truth. One might object that James has at best shown that theistic belief is momentous only if God exists. If God does not exist, and, as a consequence, the vital good of eternal life does not obtain, then no vital good is at stake. To answer this objection a Jamesian might focus on what James calls the second affirmation of religion—“we are better off even now if we believe”—and take that affirmation to include benefits that are available, via pro-belief, even if God does not exist. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* James suggests that religious belief produces certain psychological benefits: A new zest which adds itself like a gift to life, and takes the form either of lyrical enchantment or of appeal to earnestness and heroism. An assurance of safety and a temper of peace, and, in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections. In addition this objection is easily evaded if we revise the notion of a genuine option by removing the requirement that an option is genuine only if momentous, although James himself may have been loath to drop that requirement. And, theism is intellectually open. And, there are vital goods at stake in accepting theism. And, no one is irrational or immoral in risking error for a chance at truth and a vital good. So, one may accept theism.

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Chapter 6 : William James - Wikipedia

Born in New York City on January 11, , William James was the oldest of the five children of Henry James, Sr., and Mary Walsh James. His oldest brother, Henry James, Jr., the renowned writer of fiction, was followed by two other brothers and a sister. The family frequently moved between.

In his introductory remarks, James characterizes his lecture by stating that he had "brought with me tonight [Preliminaries[edit] In section I, James embarks upon the task of defining a number of important terms he will be relying upon throughout the lecture: That is, James here seems to reject doxastic voluntarism , "the philosophical doctrine according to which people have voluntary control over their beliefs". By which James means that it is only things we already disbelieve that we are unable to believe at will. Thesis[edit] In his very brief section IV, James introduces the main thesis of the work: More preliminaries[edit] In section V, James makes a distinction between a skepticism about truth and its attainment and what he calls " dogmatism ": Concerning dogmatism, James states that it has two forms; that there is an " absolutist way " and an " empiricist way " of believing in truth. James ends section V by arguing that empiricists are really no more tentative about their beliefs and conclusions than the absolutists: 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. Shall we espouse and endorse it? Not where it comes from but what it leads to is to decide. It matters not to an empiricist from what quarter a hypothesis may come to him: However, James in fact gives in this section a crucial bit of argumentation: We must know the truth; and we must avoid errorâ€”these are our first and great commandments as would-be knowers; but they are not two ways of stating an identical commandment, they are two separable laws. Although it may indeed happen that when we believe the truth A, we escape as an incidental consequence from believing the falsehood B, it hardly ever happens that by merely disbelieving B we necessarily believe A. We may in escaping B fall into believing other falsehoods, C or D, just as bad as B; or we may escape B by not believing anything at all, not even A. We may regard the chase for truth as paramount, and the avoidance of error as secondary; or we may, on the other hand, treat the avoidance of error as more imperative, and let truth take its chance. 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. We must remember that these feelings of our duty about either truth or error are in any case only expressions of our passional life. Biologically considered, our minds are as ready to grind out falsehood as veracity, and he who says, "Better go without belief forever than believe a lie! He may be critical of many of his desires and fears, but this fear he slavishly obeys. He cannot imagine any one questioning its binding force. For my own part, I have also a horror of being duped; but I can believe that worse things than being duped may happen to a man in this world: It is like a general informing his soldiers that it is better to keep out of battle forever than to risk a single wound. Not so are victories either over enemies or over nature gained. Our errors are surely not such awfully solemn things. In a world where we are so certain to incur them in spite of all our caution, a certain lightness of heart seems healthier than this excessive nervousness on their behalf. At any rate, it seems the fittest thing for the empiricist philosopher. That is, James is steadfastly agreeing that we must withhold belief until we possess sufficient evidence when that evidence is forthcoming. Not to do so would be to wholly disregard the duty to avoid falsehood. Here James first identifies areas of belief where he holds that to believe without evidence would be unjustified: In scientific questions, this is almost always the case [In section IX, James moves to investigate whether there

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are areas of belief where belief without evidence would be justified. James gives self-fulfilling beliefs as one example of such beliefs: Whether you do or not depends, in countless instances, on whether I meet you half-way, am willing to assume that you must like me, and show you trust and expectation. But if I stand aloof, and refuse to budge an inch until I have objective evidence, until you shall have done something apt [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. To take a trivial illustration: This feeling, forced on us we know not whence, that by obstinately believing that there are gods although not to do so would be so easy both for our logic and our life we are doing the universe the deepest service we can, seems part of the living 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 wilfully agree to keep my willing nature out of the game. I cannot do so for this plain reason, that a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule. That for me is the long and short of the formal logic of the situation, no matter what the kinds of truth might materially be. In the preface to the published version of "The Will to Believe" James offers a different argument for the way in which the evidence for religion depends upon our belief. There he contends that it is through the failure or thriving of communities of religious believers that we come to have evidence of the truth of their religious beliefs. In this way, to acquire evidence for religious belief, we must first have believers who adopt such belief without sufficient evidence. Much later in life, in his "Pragmatism: The doctrine[edit] The doctrine James argues for in "The Will to Believe" appears often in both his earlier and later work. James himself changed the name of the doctrine several times. First appearing as "the duty to believe", then "the subjective method", then "the will to believe", it was finally recast by James as "the right to believe". Whatever the name, the doctrine always concerned the rationality of believing without evidence in certain instances. Specifically, James is defending the violation of evidentialism in two instances: After arguing that for hypothesis venturing and with self-fulfilling beliefs a person is rational to believe without evidence, James argues that a belief in a number of philosophical topics qualifies as one or other of his two allowed violations of evidentialism e. The reason James takes himself as able to rationally justify positions often not believed to be verifiable under any method, is how important he thinks believing something can be for the verifying of that belief. That is to say, in these cases James is arguing that the reason evidence for a belief seems to be unavailable to us is because the evidence for its truth or falsity comes only after it is believed rather than before. For example, in the following passage James utilizes his doctrine to justify a belief that "this is a moral world": It cannot then be said that the question, "Is this a moral world? Any question is full of meaning to which, as here, contrary answers lead to contrary behavior. And it seems as if in answering such a question as this we might proceed exactly as does the physical philosopher in testing an hypothesis. Epicycle upon epicycle of subsidiary hypothesis will have to be invoked to give to the discrepant terms a temporary appearance of squaring with each other; but at last even this resource will fail. Schiller in his lengthy essay "Axioms as Postulates". It seems to me a pity they [pragmatists like James, Schiller] should allow a philosophy so instinct with life to become infected with seeds of death in such notions as that of the unreality of all ideas of infinity and that of the mutability of truth, and in such confusions of thought as that of active willing willing to control thought, to doubt, and to weigh reasons with willing not to exert the will willing to believe. Bertrand Russell in Free Thought and Official Propaganda argued that one must always adhere to fallibilism , recognizing of all human knowledge that "None of our beliefs are quite true; all have at least a penumbra of vagueness and error", and that the only means of progressing ever-closer to the truth is to never assume certainty, but always examine all sides and try to reach a conclusion objectively. Instead of admitting that some traditional beliefs are comforting, James argued that "the risk of being in error is a very small matter when compared with the blessing of real knowledge", and implied that those who did not accept

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religious beliefs were cowards, afraid of risking anything: However, the chemist adopting a hypothesis to guide years of study is certainly only a special case of hypothesis adoption. James takes believing a proposition to consist in acting as if it were true, so if James considers testing a proposition as acting as if it were true to see if it leads to successful action, then James would be committed to seeing an act of hypothesis adoption as necessarily an act of belief adoption as well. Objection 2 seems to presuppose the ability to will a belief. James believed that when evidence was insufficient to determine the truth or falsehood of a proposition, this uncertainty allowed a person to be able to will a belief by acting as if that belief were true. Objection 2 warrants further discussion over "voluntarism". James sees traditional accounts of truth as explaining one mysterious term "truth" with nothing more than equally mysterious terms e . The only sense James believes we can make of the concept of "truth" is if we count as true the beliefs that lead us to perform actions that "agree" with the world. Those that fit with the world will lead to successful action, those that do not agree with the world will entail actions that lead to failure e . With truth analyzed in this way, James sees no reason to restrict success to predictive success objection 3 and is fully comfortable with the fact that certain beliefs will lead one person to success in the world while failing someone else objection 4. However, this reply to both objections is not open to James since he explicitly claims that his will to believe doctrine does not depend on his pragmatist theory of truth.

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Chapter 7 : James' Will to Believe Argument | A.T. Fyfe - www.nxgvision.com

William James distinguishes between a universe of actualities and a universe of possibilities. In a universe of actualities, the _____ view, no other possibilities exist other than those that occur.

In other words, both Kierkegaard and James assume that human minds lack the necessary capacity to know whether religious claims are true or false: The choice of belief vs unbelief cannot be decided on the basis of reason. The choice is living, momentous, and forced. The practical consequences of suspending judgment deliberately waiting for rational arguments to appear are identical to the practical consequences of choosing unbelief. The practical consequences of choosing belief are usually better than the practical consequences of choosing unbelief. We should choose to believe. Soren Kierkegaard "The Leap of Faith" Religious Existentialism Faith requires that its object be absurd, contradictory, irrational "there can be no reason for it. Faith is by its very nature a leap into the unknown. If irrationality is a kind of madness, then faith must be a kind of madness. The story of Abraham illustrates faith as madness. Religious people are usually not perplexed or deeply disturbed by the story of Abraham. They even see Abraham as a role model of faith. If Abraham is our role model, we should be very afraid, though. Abraham is ready to do something horribly evil, or crazy, because he believes God orders him to. If Abraham is a real person, he must be morally or intellectually defective to carry out the order. He must be a sociopath or insane. OR Abraham must be intellectually defective. He does not think. He does not seem to consider that a good God might not ask this of him. He does not wonder whether the voice telling him to murder his son might be something other than the voice of God: In fact, the last Satanic option seems quite reasonable, given that God has promised Abraham that Isaac his son will be the leader of a great nation. If God is reasonable and consistent a logos-type God, as the Judeo-Christian tradition believes then this rational God, who promised Abraham that Isaac would lead a great nation, would never command Abraham to kill Isaac, thus making it impossible that Isaac become the leader of a great nation. On the supposition that the vision comes from Satan, the right response to the test is for Abraham to ignore the vision and stay faithful to what God has promised him. Someone like Osama bin Laden also has this kind of arbitrary, irrational, inconsistent faith, no? And yet Kierkegaard thinks that we should make the leap of faith anyway.

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Chapter 8 : William James Quotes - BrainyQuote

James indicates the situation in his university --namely, that free-thinking students do not believe one should have religious faith since it cannot be rationally demonstrated. James believes differently, namely that faith is sensible, though not rationally demanded.

James, William *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* James actually agrees with what Clifford has to say, but he says that there are certain situations, in which it is proper, rational to believe without sufficient evidence. Belief in God is a forced wager: Both James and Clifford are working with similar notion of belief; belief is a basis of an action. To believe something is the same thing as being willing to act in accord with it. Both Clifford and James are interested in the practical difference of belief. James says if both options are undetermined by evidence, choose that belief theory which will help you get on with your life; for most people religious belief is of superior practical value than atheism; answers more of our questions; James is a member of an American School of thought known as Pragmatism. Pragmatists go beyond the normal claim that whether a theory is useful in organizing and predicting experiences is a good test of truth, to the more extreme claim that all we mean by claiming a theory is true is that it is useful in organizing and predicting experiences. This implies that theories can be true for a while and then stop being true, though not all pragmatists wanted to take their theory that far. They did all agree that what counts most in a good theory, be it scientific, educational, psychological, moral or religious, is whether or not it was useful in solving relevant problems. Scientists evaluate theories in virtue of their explanatory power. James is suggesting that this amounts to the ability the theory demonstrates to solve the problems we are trying to solve and unify our experiences into a coherent narrative. He therefore claims that we should apply the same standard of evaluation to religious beliefs to see if they merit our rational assent. He believes it does because many religious belief assists us in solving many of the practical problems we have in life. He acknowledges that believing in God might not have pragmatic value may be burdensome for some people for people. Also, for some it may not be a live option. In either case, religious belief without sufficient evidence would NOT be rational according to James. However, contra Clifford it is immoral to believe without sufficient evidence James claims that not immoral or irrational when it is a forced wager and the pragmatic value for belief outweighs the pragmatic value of non-belief. Is there life after death or not? And suppose that this question represents a genuine option for me. That is, I could either believe that there is life after death, or I could believe that there is not. Further, suppose that I feel that I must choose between the two hypotheses, that I am faced with a forced choice. To suspend belief is as near as makes no difference to believing that there is not life after death. Thus, I must either believe or disbelieve in the reality of life beyond death. Finally, the consequences of believing one way or the other on this issue will be momentous for me e. According to James, I am justified in believing that there is life beyond death if so believing is more satisfying to me, accords more with my hopes and desires, gives me more happiness than if I were to disbelieve in trans-mortal survival. In this case, remaining in doubt will not make me as unhappy as I would be if I positively disbelieved in life beyond death; but also, it will not make me as happy as I would be if I were to believe in trans-mortal survival. So I must decide what I will believe. This is itself a passional not intellectually-required decision. It is similar to deciding for one or the other of two hypotheses. A decision to remain in doubt on the issue runs the same risk of losing the truth. James notes a distinction between: However, the pursuit of truth may lead us into error; and the avoidance of error may cause us to miss the truth. James argues that, in situations where the option between gaining and losing the truth is not genuine i. But when the option between gaining and losing the truth is genuine i. Is there life beyond death or not? Suppose that this question represents a genuine option for me. I feel that I must choose between the two hypotheses, that I am faced with a forced choice. I must either believe or not believe in the reality of life beyond death. The consequences of believing one way or the other on this issue will be momentous for me e. Suppose further that there is no factual or logical proof either

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way. According to James, I am justified in believing that there is life beyond death if so believing is more satisfying to me, accords more with my hopes and desires, gives me more happiness than if I were to not believe. This certainly does not prove my belief is true. But he does think it shows my belief is rational. After all I could be wrong in any case. I might as well risk error and be happier. James distinguishes two positions: Absolutism and Empiricism For the absolutist, we can know the truth, and we can know that we know it. For the empiricist by contrast, our beliefs can be true, but we can never know with certainty that they are true. The empiricist believes that we can get closer and closer to the truth through scientific inquiry into the facts of experience and through logical thinking. However, the empiricist doubts that we can ever be certain that our beliefs are true even if they are, as a matter of fact, true.. He mentions many examples of conflicting certainties, i.

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Chapter 9 : The Will to Believe - Wikipedia

Everyone who accepts a belief should do so on the basis of reason and evidence. William Clifford Rejecting both fideism and neutralism (foundationalism), makes his case for critical dialog in which we rationally test our religious beliefs even though we recognize our inability to conclusively prove them.

An option is a decision between two hypotheses. A momentous option is an irrevocable option for significant stakes; a trivial option is an option which is not irrevocable or for significant stakes. And finally, and most importantly of all, a genuine option is an option which is simultaneously living, forced, and momentous. The non-intellectual components of our mind for example, our emotions and desires partially determine what beliefs we have. We can, through will, conjure up belief in any live hypothesis and hypotheses which are dead for us are dead for us because we have previously exercised our will in a certain way say, by being influenced by the opinions of those around us. Given that our will does plays a role in determining our belief, should we embrace this as a fact of psychological life, or should we struggle against it? In addressing this question, James notes that we have two epistemic duties: These duties sometimes conflict. In order to believe the truth, we must have beliefs and so we risk having false beliefs. In order to avoid having false beliefs, we may avoid believing things and so we may risk losing true beliefs. Clifford thinks that believing falsehoods is worse than failing to believe truths and so he recommends believing only things which are well-justified. Because some beliefs, like the belief that avoiding falsehood is more important than attaining truth, cannot be adopted on the basis of logic alone, and because such beliefs are central to the entire enterprise of believing anything at all, it must be okay, sometimes, to believe things for non-rational reasons. Here, we should suspend belief until the evidence comes in. In two kinds of cases, however, we should or at least we may will to believe in the absence of rational justification. The first type of case is an option between self-fulfilling hypotheses. In such cases, it would be self-defeating to refuse to adopt the belief until you have sufficient evidence for the fact. The second type of case is belief involving a genuine option, or an option which is simultaneously living, forced, and momentous. And it may be living for us as well, if both the existence and the non-existence of moral truths present themselves to us as possible things to believe. Presumably, if the evidence against a certain hypothesis is especially compelling, that hypothesis will no longer be live for us and so will not be part of a genuine option. James notes that the religious option is momentous: The option is also forced, because there is no third alternative to believing or failing to believe. I think that this argument is undermined by its anthropomorphism. I have three questions: 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 they are not too late when the previous passional work has been already in their own direction. How would James respond to the observation that some beliefs, such as those acquired through the immediate evidence of our senses, rationally compel our assent, with no room to be played by our will or emotions? Second, competing religious traditions can be live for us. Finally, do we have an obligation to keep certain hypotheses alive, or to resurrect certain dead hypotheses? At one time, for example, the idea that germs cause disease was probably not a live hypothesis for people. If so, can James accommodate this fact? What would he say to missionaries who maintain that they have a duty to make a previously dead or unknown religious hypotheses alive for people, and to convince them adopt it?