1. Introduction

Henry James Sr. must have cut an unsettling figure. His body was burned so severely as an adolescent that his leg had to be amputated at the thigh. The burns came from playing what he later described as “the then not unusual game of fire-ball,” where kids would kick a flaming, turpentine-soaked orb through the streets of his native Albany (James 1884a, 147.n). He spent the next two years bedridden, in agony.² Young Henry’s ordeal began—one might even say his intellectual life began—with his own clothes literally engulfed in flames.

The event was transformative. In his mature theological writings, Henry Sr. often referred to “an amputated” part of the self, suggesting that the soul must undergo therapeutic “mortification” (Habegger 1994, 66), and especially urging readers to remember what he called “the morbid” side of life.³

Of all his five children, William in particular internalized the lore of his father’s pain. Not only did the son emphasize suffering in his own philosophical writing about religion, but he also borrowed specific terminology from his father (for example, religion as a balm for “morbid melancholy,” as at VRE 1902, 74, 168, 243).⁴ The inherited terminology

1. This paper began life as an invited commentary for NYU’s twelfth annual History of Modern Philosophy conference. I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me, and I also thank Cheryl Misak, whose provocative and interesting paper provided the subject matter for my commentary. I am very grateful to two anonymous referees for this journal, as well. They both provided careful and perceptive critical feedback.

2. For a full treatment of the accident, including consideration of several different eye-witness accounts of the fire-ball incident, see (Habegger 1994, ch. 6).

3. In his autobiography he wrote that his “boyhood experiences […] exerted a most unhappy bearing upon my intellectual development. They could not fail to do so in stimulating in me as they did a morbid doctrinal conscience” (James 1884a, 178, italics added). Also see (James 1863, 127, 1850, 32). William James also quotes passages where his father uses the term; see (James 1884b, 57, 61, 78).

4. References to James’s texts work as follows: ERM <year> = (James 1982), where the year given is the year of original publication of the referenced article; MT 1909 = (James 1909/1978); P 1907 = (James 1907/1975); PU 1909 = (James 1909/1977); SPP 1911 = (James 1911/1979); WTB 1897 = (James 1897/1979); VRE 1902 = (James 1902/1985). References to The Correspondence of William James (James 1992–2004) are given as CWJ yyyy, v,p, where “yyyy”...
was only a small part of the substantial philosophical debt the son felt he owed his father.  

The melancholic father’s influence might be thought to be of merely antiquarian interest. But attending to the father’s influence helps reveal a framework that ties together an extensive and unusual set of philosophical concerns in William James’s reflections on religion. It is precisely by failing to understand how these varied concerns are related to one another, in fact, that one of the oldest and most common criticisms of James has gained traction. Many critics have granted that religious faith might bring comfort to the melancholic, a point upon which James often insisted; but one also finds lurking in his work intimations that there might be epistemological import to faith’s (purported) therapeutic benefits, and this is where even sympathetic readers have typically balked. For example, according to (Rorty 2004, 86), James took seriously the (absurd) notion that “supernaturalism might be true because it might be good for you” to believe that supernaturalism is true.

In fairness, it is not hard to see why James has been read as endorsing what we might call a “wishful thinking principle”: viz., that the comforts of religious faith provide evidence that God exists. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, for example, he entertains the hypothesis that “God is real since he produces real effects” (VRE 1902, 407). But most of the “real effects” that book documents are subjective, comforting effects stemming from an agent’s belief in God, not effects one would expect if the hypothesis “God is real” were actually true. James’s emphasis on the comforting power of religion is evident in passages like this: “When the outward battle is lost, and the outer world disowns” a person of faith, her religion “redeems and vivifies an interior world which otherwise would be an empty waste” (VRE 1902, 46). And elsewhere, James might appear to claim quite outright that the subjective comfort of religious belief is evidence of truth: “the uses of religion, its uses to the individual who has it, and the uses of the individual himself to the world, are the best arguments that truth is in it” (VRE 1902, 361).

Quoting several of the passages just reproduced, Cheryl Misak has recently put the worry this way. James’s account of religious consolation is fine if what we are inquiring into is what would help this or that person. But it is not fine if we are inquiring into whether there in fact is a God, or a hell or everlasting damnation. The consensus [about the capacity of faith to console] that might arise from the science of religion as James conceives it cannot, it seems, tell us about what exists. (Misak 2017, 67)

To begin with, we must distinguish two different projects James in fact pursued with respect to religion. The first had a therapeutic aim. It sought to identify the potential practical effects (salubrious or harmful) of adopting one or another system of value-beliefs. The second project had a theoretic aim. It asked which systems of value-beliefs are epistemically permissible. As Misak frames it, the question whether God actually exists belongs to this second, theoretic project, a project with which therapy can have nothing to do. Or so she and many commentators have asserted.

In this paper I take issue with the usual estimation of both the relative importance and the relationship between these two projects. On relative importance — Misak exemplifies a common attitude about James’s therapeutic aims when she says it is “fine” if all he is interested in is what beliefs would soothe the “sick soul.” But the therapeutic project

while his father lay on his deathbed, William James wrote a moving, final letter to him from London (dated Dec. 14, 1882), which includes these lines: In that mysterious gulf of the past into which the present soon will fall and go back and back, yours is still for me the central figure. All my intellectual life derive from you; and though we have often seemed at odds in the expression thereof I’m sure there’s a harmony somewhere, & that our strivings will combine. What my debt to you is goes beyond all my power of estimating, — so early, so penetrating and so constant has been the influence. (CW 5.327)
is itself richer and more philosophically interesting than readers have recognized. And on the relationship between the two projects—Misa k says James’s attention to believers’ needs is “not fine if we are inquiring into whether there in fact is a God.” On its face that is an eminently plausible thought. James turns out to reject it and, I shall argue, to reject it for good reason. Let me explain.

James’s religious writing displays a therapeutic concern for two key social problems, I will argue: an epidemic of suicide among educated Victorians who worried (he thought) that a scientific worldview left no room for God; and also material poverty and bleak employment prospects for others. James sought a conception of God that would comfort his melancholic peers while also girding them to fight for better social conditions. Both of these are therapeutic goals.

What is perhaps most unique about James’s approach to religion emerges when we consider his treatment of epistemic issues. For James takes his suicidal peers to need more than tea and sympathy. They need to be convinced, through rational argument, that religious faith is epistemically permissible in light of their methodological naturalism. That is to say that theoretic success in James’s reflections on religion is to be measured by therapeutic success.

Here is James’s argument for the epistemic permissibility of faith, in a nutshell. He often characterizes religious faith as a “hypothesis” (e.g., VRE 1902, 359, 402–403, 405, 407, 411–412, 414). The scientifically

While James’s defense of religion is ultimately vulnerable to some important objections, this paper seeks to leave readers with two overarching points about his program. First, he actually rejected the wishful thinking principle, and so contrary to reputation, his key vulnerability lies elsewhere. He insisted that any religious hypothesis be in principle subject to “experimental tests,” and in fact himself deployed a wishful thinking objection against a rival “monistic” hypothesis. Where James finally did have trouble is in clearly articulating just what experimental tests his pluralistic hypothesis could be expected, realistically, to pass. But his heart was in the epistemological right place, so to speak, even if the substance of his theological ideas contained important defects. Second, I suggest that what is of enduring interest in James’s program is his strategy for employing philosophical argument as an instrument for combating real-world social ills—in this case, melancholy and material poverty. The capacity of philosophical ideas for improving social conditions does not stem from their providing the downtrodden with a merely soothing story, on James’s view. For he imagines the deflated and the despairing as responding to reasons. So whether or not one thinks James was successful in defending the permissibility of
religious faith, his strategy of employing rational argument for therapeutic purposes provides his work with lasting relevance. This aspect of his work has too often been overlooked, especially by his critics.

I begin with what James's therapeutic project owes to his father's legacy.

2. James's Therapeutic Project

William was seven in 1849, the year his father burst onto the public scene as a religious thinker. Henry Sr. had been gaining quiet infamy during the prior years, especially for newspaper articles that advocated divorce and openly rejected monogamy. The father counted Emerson as a friend, but even Emerson had been taken aback by Henry Sr.'s championing of sexual freedom, and of Fourier-inspired utopian socialism to boot (Habegger 1994, ch. 18). The elder James anchored the activist left wing of American transcendentalism, often connecting his reformist agenda to Emanuel Swedenborg's Christian mysticism.

It is often said that Henry Sr.'s extensive theological writing was deeply heterodox, which it was (even to Swedenborgians; see James 1884b, 112). But his writing was animated by a decidedly 19th-century vision of the relationship between religion and moral theory. The 1849 lectures that really launched his career pitted religion against what he called "Moralism," using the latter word in a now-archaic sense. Here is a dictionary definition from the era: moralism is "[t]he practice of morality as distinct from religion; the absorption of religion in mere morality" (Whitney 1890, IV.3856, my emphasis, quoting from the second usage). For Henry Sr. and many others in his generation, moral theory is not just independent of religious faith. The two are in direct competition, so that one can either understand agents as bearing obligations to

“nature and society” (James 1850, 40), or as bearing obligations to God, but not both.

The sense that there is a battle between religion and moral (or political) theory only intensified through William's own lifetime. But what is distinctive about the son's contribution is that he transformed the character of the battle. Where his father's generation saw a theoretic fight over the metaphysics of value, William was more fundamentally concerned with a therapeutic dispute about whether belief in religion or in moral theory is more practically beneficial.

Why did William see a therapeutic dispute at all? He was concerned about two different social problems, primarily. He held that moralistic convictions pull us towards solving one of these problems quite to the detriment of the other; and that religious convictions pull us just the opposite way.

The social problems were material poverty, especially among workers; and emotional poverty (neurasthenia, anxiety, etc.), especially among intellectuals. Moralist convictions spur us to fight material poverty, he held, but provide cold comfort in sad times. Religious convictions give comfort during emotional turbulence, but encourage political quietism or apathy. James sought to develop a conception of God that could satisfy both therapeutic demands at once. This was his fundamental religious question, I submit — a question I will now examine in more detail.

To get a sense of the first social problem, consider that the opening gambit of the Pragmatism lectures sets Leibniz's theodicy against Morrison Swift's anarchism. Swift was a writer, but above all he was an organizer, having led virtually every unemployment protest in Boston from 1894 to 1914 (Coon 1996, 70).

James quotes sympathetically from a newspaper account (one Swift himself had reproduced) of a worker's suicide. The worker was fired from two successive jobs, the second because he was too sick to shovel snow. An eviction notice awaited upon his return home to his wife and six kids. He finished his day (and his own life) by drinking carbolic acid (P 1907, 21).
Here is the lesson Swift draws, in a passage quoted by James. Tragic cases like these cannot be
glozed over or minimized away by all the treatises on
God [...]. These facts invincibly prove religion a nullity.
Man will not give religion two thousand centuries or
twenty centuries more to try itself and waste human time;
its time is up. (Swift 1905, 9–10, quoted at P 1907, 22)

When Swift says the facts of poverty “invincibly prove religion a nullity,” he is primarily making a practical point.8 His goal was social reform, and he worried that religious practice engendered political qui-etism. Thus he saw religious accounts of value as competing with his own anarchism, but not (in the first instance) for a correct account of reality—the two were competing for converts who would remake the social and political environment in starkly different ways.

Now James was concerned not just about material poverty,9 but also

8. At any rate, James presents Swift’s point as fundamentally a practical one. Swift himself may also have intended the theoretic claim that ours must be a godless universe, since no god would allow the evils we routinely read about in the morning paper. But his real target was the God of the philosophers. Indeed, here is the opening line of his book: “There is nothing that a religious philosopher keeps at such a distance as the actual facts of life” (Swift 1905, 3), a line James himself could have penned. Swift’s main line of attack was to recount a string of harrowing suicides, all of which are in some way linked to poverty or unemployment, and then to contend that religious philosophers simply ignore all these tragedies when they attempt to explain away the problem of evil.

9. For another striking example of his concern with material poverty and social stratification generally, see “The Moral Equivalent of War.” We remember that late address as proposing mandatory conscription into a manual labor corps because it would provide a peaceful outlet for militaristic sentiments among the young. But James also emphasized a second important benefit—conscription would produce a new generation of elites who would be more sympathetic to the fundamentally unfair treatment of working persons, who “should have a life of nothing else but toil and pain and hardness and inferiority imposed upon them, should have no vacation, while others natively no more deserving get no taste of this campaigning life at all” (ERM 1909, 171). He continued:

The military ideals of hardihood and discipline would be wrought into the growing fibre of the people; no one would remain blind, as the

about what we might call emotional poverty. To bring this second social problem in focus, consider his discussion of a rather different suicide epidemic10 in his 1895 essay “Is Life Worth Living?”

That life is not worth living the whole army of suicides declare—an army whose roll-call, like the famous evening gun of the British army, follows the sun round the world and never terminates. (WTB 1897, 38)

Concerns about social justice are very much evident in James’s treatment of religion in the Varieties as well. For instance, see his discussion of “social righteousness” and the need to fight “for the world’s welfare” at (VRE 1902, 277, 283), passages whose significance is emphasized in

10. He cites a figure of 3,000 per year at (WTB 1897, 39). This works out to about 4.37 suicides per 100,000 in 1895, the year James published his essay. If the figure can be taken at face value, it is actually considerably lower than more recent rates—for 2014 the National Institutes of Mental Health reports a national rate of 13 suicides per 100,000 (see http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/suicide-in-the-us-statistics-and-prevention/index.shtml). The two figures are difficult to compare for several reasons, though. First, I know of no good estimates of relative reporting rates for suicide during the two eras. Second, without knowing James’s source for his figure, I have no way to know whether it includes or excludes any deaths coroners might have marked as suspicious, but not as suicide. In part because of the use of suspicious death diagnoses, data from Victorian coroners’ offices likely underestimated the actual number of suicides; for such considerations as they relate to the U.K., see (Bailey 1998). In any case, what is important is that Victorians like James apparently perceived suicide rates as rising rapidly. (My 1895 figure assumes an American population of about 68.6 million, which is an estimate based on the U.S. Census data for population size in 1900, the earliest year for which such figures are available. I assume a population growth of 1.5 million per year, which was typical at that time. See http://www.census.gov/popest/data/national/totals/pre-1980/tables/popclockest.txt.)
This piece focused not on workers but on those he called “reflecting men” (WTB 1897, 39) — intellectuals (like his father and perhaps himself as well) who might battle suicidal thoughts stemming from a dark outlook. James thought these intellectuals were pushed to suicide by “an uncanny, a sinister, a nightmare view of life […] which produces a] peculiar unheimlichkeit, or poisonousness.” But Swift would have been appalled at James’s solution: “my final appeal” for comforting these morbid-minded souls, he wrote, “is to nothing more recondite than religious faith” (WTB 1897, 40).

The problem of material poverty came to the fore in James’s writing only in the late 1890s, around the time he began preparing his Gifford Lectures — the economic depression of that decade, along with the U.S. invasion of the Philippines, roused him to participate in street protests, to pen a series of letters-to-editors, and to join the nascent Anti-Imperialist League (Coon 1996). But the problem of emotional poverty had been a longstanding focus for him, and an 1884 treatment of it is particularly instructive.

In his “Introduction” to his father’s literary remains that year, the son drew a distinction between healthy- and morbid-mindedness, a distinction now more familiar from The Varieties of Religious Experience. Emotional poverty — best exemplified by the suicide epidemic among “reflecting men” — is a collective result of many individual persons who are not able to cope with “morbid melancholy,” a mood that the father himself had laid heavy emphasis on. Here is a striking passage on melancholia that the son quotes from Henry James Sr.’s Christianity: The Logic of Creation:

When our worthless ships […] go down at sea, what shrieks we hear from blanched and frenzied lips peopling the melancholy main, perturbing the somber and sympathetic air for months afterwards! When our children die, and take back to heaven the brimming innocence of its throne, and menaces us with a downfall; who then is strong? […] Our ennui and prevalent disgust of life […] lead so many suffering souls every year to suicide, […] drive so many tender and yearning and angel-freighted natures to drink, to gambling, to fierce and ruinous excess of all sorts. (James 1857, 133–134, quoted with minor alterations at James 1884b, 16–17.n)

Son and father alike both worried that morbid-mindedness can push us, ultimately, to suicidal despair.

In contrast, when we are “healthy-minded” we feel “life […] tingling through us,” as the son puts it; we feel ourselves to be “a match
for whatever evils actually confront us.” Healthy-mindedness is characterized above all by “the feeling of action” (James 1884b, 117).

This distinction between two moods would come to feature prominently in The Varieties of Religious Experience. There James characterizes the healthy-minded person as someone “whose soul is of this sky-blue tint, whose affinities are rather with flowers and birds and all enchanting innocencies than with dark human passions, who can think no ill of man or God” (VRE 1902, 73). And the “morbid-minded” person has more than “the [...] intellectual perception of evil, but the grisly blood-freezing heart-palsying sensation of it” (VRE 1902, 135). Some are prone to healthy-mindedness, others to morbid-mindedness (VRE 1902, 114–115), a mood that can “even lead to suicide” (VRE 1902, 59); but most of us can flip between them from day to day (P 1907, 141).

James is particularly keen to insist that whatever disposition we might incline to, however, morbid-mindedness sometimes, eventually, takes hold of us all (James 1884b, 118; VRE 1902, 46; P 1907, 140).

Taking stock, then, we have on the table James’s guiding social problems (emotional vs. material poverty); we have his father’s two, supposedly incompatible belief-systems (religion vs. moralism); and we have a distinction between two moods or constitutions (morbid-vs. healthy-mindedness).

Here is how James links the three distinctions of his “Introduction.” If we want to fight emotional poverty we should encourage people to adopt religious faith, which can soothe our unheimlichkeit and deliver a sense of “well-being” when we feel morbid-minded; but the cost is encouraging social and political quietism, which stands to exacerbate material poverty (hence “to satisfy the religious demand is to deny the demands of the moralist”; James 1884b, 118). If we want to prioritize fighting material poverty, on the other hand, we should encourage people to adopt moralism, which appeals to our healthy-minded “feeling of action,” and to our optimistic sense that we are “a match for whatever evils actually confront us” (James 1884b, 117). But moralism offers only cold comfort in times of emotional turbulence. As he would later put it in Pragmatism, for people feeling morbid, “moralism […] refrigerates the very heart within their breast” (P 1907, 140). At such moments we do not want to be called to activism; we “want a universe where we can just give up, fall on our father’s neck, and be absorbed into the absolute life as a drop of water melts into the river or the sea” (P 1907, 140).

James therefore writes of moralism and religion that “what is meat to the one is the other’s poison” (James 1884b, 118). He sees a deep and abiding impasse.

Readers might wonder whether these three distinctions really get linked in this way in the Varieties. In fact, crucial elements of

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13. Crucially for my story, the healthy-minded are portrayed as yearning for a pluralistic conception of God (VRE 1902, 113), while the morbid-minded are portrayed as desperately needing a monistic God (VRE 1902, 135). See below for James’s distinction between a pluralistic and monistic God.

14. An anonymous referee, whom I thank for raising the objection, worries in particular whether the Varieties really portrays healthy-mindedness as engendering activism in the manner we have just seen in James’s “Introduction” to his father’s literary remains. It is true that Lectures IV and V in the Varieties open with an initial sketch of healthy-mindedness as a mood exemplified by (among others) Walt Whitman, whose remarkable gift is not activism but an “inability to feel evil” (VRE 1902, 75). A Whitman student is quoted as saying that the master writer never spoke ill of any person or nationality, “nor even against any animals, insects, or inanimate things, nor any of the laws of nature, or any of the results of those laws, such as illness, deformity or death.” James depicts Whitman’s writing as aiming at “persuading the reader that men and women, life and death, and all things are divinely good” (VRE 1902, 76). This sounds awfully close to Panglossian quietism, which contradicts my reading.

But this “inability to feel evil” turns out to be an initial sketch only. James goes on to distinguish between “a more involuntary and a more voluntary or systematic way of being healthy-minded” (VRE 1902, 78), and the latter blossoms into an activism that harkens back to the “Introduction.” Whereas the involuntarily healthy-minded person is “bent on self-protection by ignoring” actual evils, for the voluntarily healthy-minded person “higher inner ideals” come to “have weighty words to say” (VRE 1902, 79). He describes such persons this way:

The common penalities cease to deter the patriot, the usual prudences are flung by the lover to the winds. When the passion is extreme, suffering may actually be gloried in, provided it be for the ideal cause, death may lose its sting, the grave its victory. In these states, the ordinary contrast of good and ill seems to be swallowed up in a higher denomination, an
this framework structure the *Varieties* as much as the “Introduction.” For instance, before introducing the distinction between “healthy-” and “morbid-mindedness” (in Lectures IV–VIII), James prepares the ground by comparing “an abstractly conceived Christian with that of a moralist similarly conceived” (VRE 1902, 45) — that is, he compares a religious with a moralistic attitude. He writes that “for morality, life is war” in that morality is a fight for “objective ends that call for energy, even though that energy bring personal loss and pain” (VRE 1902, 45). He continues:

The moralist must hold his breath and keep his muscles tense; and so long as this athletic attitude is possible all goes well — morality suffices. But the athletic attitude tends ever to break down, and it inevitably does break down even in the most stalwart when the organism begins to decay, or when morbid fears invade the mind. To suggest personal will and effort to one all sickled o’er with the sense of irremediable impotence is to suggest the most impossible of things. What he craves is to be

omnipotent excitement which engulfs the evil, and which the human being welcomes as the crowning experience of his life. This, he says, is truly to live, and I exult in the heroic opportunity and adventure. (VRE 1902, 80)

James does not give much detail about what kind of ‘adventure’ the voluntarily healthy-minded person prefers — canoeing? helping the poor? — but his reference to the pursuit of “higher inner ideals” suggests adventures in good deeds, not adventures in the woods. What is more, he goes on to call the most interesting form of a “deliberately optimistic” attitude the so-called mind-cure movement, exemplified by sects like Mary Baker Eddy’s Christian Science. James credits mind-cure with the following “practical” achievements: “The blind have been made to see, the halt to walk; lifelong invalids have had their health restored. […] Regeneration of character has gone on on an extensive scale; and cheerfulness has been restored to countless homes” (VRE 1902, 81). We are distracted by the apparent quackery; but to James, mind-cure exemplifies voluntary healthy-mindedness precisely because it actively seeks to improve practical conditions, including improving physical health. Thus the *Varieties* presents a spectrum of healthy-mindedness, with activism increasing towards the “voluntary” end. The notion of healthy-mindedness we get in the *Varieties* is therefore not a rejection but an enrichment of the older version of this concept from the 1884 “Introduction.”

In keeping with the framework I have been discussing, here James associates moralism with an “athletic attitude” in which we are willing to wage “war” for our “ideals.” This attitude is clearly meant to prefigure healthy-mindedness, which James depicts (using similar language later in the book) as helping cultivate a “‘muscular’ attitude” (VRE 1902, 81). Here he adds an important point to our framework — not only is there a tradeoff between healthy- and morbid-mindedness, but the former tends to decay into the latter over time, as a matter of human psychology. So when finally, mired in morbid-mindedness, we submit to religious consolation, our “will to assert ourselves” actually gets “displaced” by an attitude of spiritual surrender.

To return now to the 1884 “Introduction,” there is one more distinction to extract, and it is the most important. James distinguishes between two broadly different ways of understanding God’s metaphysical relationship to his creation. Monism treats God as nothing but the totality of all that exists, such that each element (including “the Devil, 15 Michael Slater has remarked that James thinks a theistic way of “overcoming pessimism is more complete and joyous” than a naturalistic way of overcoming it, but that James’s “reasons for holding such a view are not entirely clear” (Slater 2003, 101–102). My reading provides an answer. James contends that the theistic response to despair is preferable because it is more durable — as a psychological matter, James thinks the strenuous mood that spurs moralistic good deeds inevitably wanes, for example through the aging of our bodies (“when the organism begins to decay,” as in the passage quoted in the text). The right kind of theistic outlook can sustain our moralistic enthusiasm for good deeds, James contends.
Christ, the Saints, and we")36 only has being in virtue of taking part in this all-encompassing God. Today we would simply call this pantheism. In contrast, what James calls pluralism treats God as one among many independent elements in the universe.

James associated monism with academic or rationalistic conceptions of God, and with various Asian religions. He occasionally cited Spinoza in connection with monism (as at PU 1909, 27), as one would expect, along with Leibniz (P 1907, 18–20); but his most important monistic targets were the absolute idealists T.H. Green, Josiah Royce, and F.H. Bradley (as at P 1907, 16, 70), and Hegel (as at VRE 1902, 113).

In contrast, James associated pluralism with “[c]ommon-sense theism, the popular religion of our European race” (James 1884b, 113).37 Pluralism offers a picture of a God who is “like a personage in a drama, the lightning of dramatic interest” rather than an encompassing being. This God is an independent and yet dominant element in the universe — a “primus inter pares” who “it does not take a scholar to love and make sacrifices and die for” (James 1884b, 114; also see P 1907, 143).38

16. This quotation, as well as the pluralism/monism distinction, can be found at (James 1884b, 113).

17. Another place where James claims that philosophy and other academic approaches have typically championed a monistic conception of God, while “common sense” has typically championed pluralism, is his preface to Lutynas’s World of Souls (ERM 1899, 106). The distinction between the two conceptions of God also became the focus of a dispute with G.H. Howison and other critics (see ERM 183, n.75.2) upon the publication of James’s Human Immortality lecture (ERM 1898). In letters and an eventual paper, Howison contended that James had at best only defended the prospects of there being human immortality given the pantheistic view endorsed by absolute idealism. So James quickly added a preface to the second, 1899 edition in which he declared himself “anything but a pantheist of the monistic pattern,” attempting to show that his own defense of human immortality is perfectly compatible with a pluralistic God (see ERM 1899, 75–76). For more on the Human Immortality lecture, see fn. 28, below, and for further discussion of James’s notion of a “finite God in a pluralistic universe,” see (Lambeth 1997, esp. sec. iv).

18. That is, James thought it was easy for most European people to be so devoted. At his worst, he argued on racist grounds for the superiority of the pluralistic view, which he said one should not reject unless one is prepared to say that “the spirit of Europe is all wrong, and that of Asia right” (James 1884b, 114). And again on the same page: a monistic God “never can be worshipped by a majority of our race until the race’s mental constitution change.” The strategy was to link high-minded, Western academicians with the supposedly inferior cultures of Asia. One finds a similar argument from supposed racial superiority in G.H. Howison’s response to Royce (in Royce et al. 1897, 92). Incidentally, the debate between Howison and Royce had taken place in front of U.C. Berkeley’s philosophical union in 1895; three years later the same union would hear James’s “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” the lecture that first brought public attention to pragmatist philosophy. On James’s relationship to Howison, see (Perry 1935, vol. 1, ch. 48).

19. That James jettisoned his father’s notion that religiosity and moralism are deeply opposed is clear from the closing section of “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” where we read passages like this: “It would seem, too — and this is my final conclusion — that the stable and systematic moral universe for which the ethical philosopher asks is fully possible only in a world where there is a divine thinker with all-enveloping demands” (James 1891, 353). That is not a thought Henry Sr. could have countenanced.

20. Terminology note: James used the word “salvation” to mean something much broader than deliverance from sin — he meant something like, things working out for the best. See (P 1907, 137).
conception of God. If I espouse monism and believe my fate to be tied up with the fate of everything else, then I hardly have reason to struggle against the evils I read about in the morning paper — such things are, ultimately, out of my hands. But if I espouse pluralism, I must believe there to be at least a metaphysical possibility of piecemeal salvation — and this is what (James thinks) appeals to the healthy-minded, reformist spirit. Salvation is possible — evils can be overcome — but only one by one, through real-world protest, organizing, and political reform (P 1907, 139–144).

Admittedly, religious comfort is somewhat compromised on a pluralistic view, because salvation is not guaranteed for anyone. But here James took his stand. “[T]he chief call for a God on modern men’s part,” he wrote, is for a being who sees us even when we are struggling, one who offers “inward sympathy and recognition, love and admiration” (MT 1909, 103n). This is precisely the kind of comfort we can gain through faith in the anthropomorphic God of popular religion, according to James (James 1884b, 115).

So here is James’s solution to his therapeutic problem: he argues that faith in the “common” person’s God — that is, faith in a primus inter pares of a pluralistic universe — would enable precisely the sort of double-barreled therapy James was seeking. Such faith offered proscribed but real comfort for the morbid constitution, thereby helping alleviate emotional poverty; and it is premised on the thought that salvation is possible, but only if the universe’s disconnected “parts shall do their best” (SPP 1911, 73). This thought appeals to our healthy-minded “feeling of action,” spurring us to be activists against material poverty.

It is not a stretch to say that James’s proposed resolution of this therapeutic problem was absolutely central to his lifelong deliberation about religion. The final lecture of Pragmatism culminates in a proposal along the lines I have suggested (P 1907, 139–142), as does The Varieties of Religious Experience (VRE 1902, 413–414). That the therapeutic problem has been so rarely emphasized in the literature on James is a substantial oversight. James goes as far as to call it “the final problem of philosophy” (P 1907, 141).

3. The Theoretic Project

This brings us back to readers like Misak, Rorty, and others who worry that James considers the purported therapeutic benefits of religious faith to somehow provide epistemic warrant for claims like “God exists.” Are their worries well founded?

James complained bitterly about the reception of his own “[e]ssay unfortunately called the Will to Believe (it should have been the right to believe)” (CWJ 1904, 10.449).22 There is a long-standing tendency to read James as offering “reason to believe in the existence of” God (Rorty 2004, 87). And yet there is scant evidence that he intended to advance any such argument.

Instead, James had likened “God exists” to an underdetermined or simply unconfirmed hypothesis in science; and just as emotions, like a

21. There have been treatments of James’s distinction between healthy- and morbid-minded (or sick-souled) constitutions (e.g., Niebuhr 1997, 220, Kitcher 2004, 123–125, Levinson 1981, 108–111, Ramsey 1993, 89–97), of his distinction between religious monism and pluralism (e.g., Niebuhr 1997, 20–21, Perry 1975, II, 353–355, Hollinger 2004, 23–29), and less often of the James family tendency to pit religiosity against moralism (e.g., Levinson 1981, 91–94, Perry 1935, 116, 56–64). But I have not found treatments that connect this set of distinctions with James’s interest in curbing suicide (fighting emotional poverty) and in anarchist activism (fighting material poverty), or with the theoretic project I outline below. There is a literature that documents Henry Sr.’s interest in social activism (e.g., Levinson 1981, 10–14, Perry 1933, 1.28–38). And James’s interest in anarchism and fighting poverty have lately come to the fore in works like (Livingston 2016, Coon 1996). For someone who dissents from Coon and Livingston’s portrayal of James as an anarchist, see (Throntveit 2014, 6, ch. 4, esp. 112–114). Throntveit, Coon, and Livingston all agree, however, that James was socially engaged, and concerned about political problems like poverty and imperialism; nothing I say here turns on whether James is properly described as an anarchist in a narrow doctrinal sense, or (say) as a proto social-democrat, as he is characterized in (Kloppenberg 1986).

22. Also see (WTB 1897, 32, 49) on the “right to believe.”

23. In his response to a 1904 questionnaire circulated by James B. Pratt, James professed to believe in the “existence” of a personal God who must be “cognizant and responsive.” To the question, “do you believe in God” because of “some argument?” James answered: “Emphatically, no” (James 1920, 2.213).
fear of being wrong or even a desire to advance one's career, can play a fruitful role in researching an as-yet unconfirmed scientific hypothesis, so we should feel free to give emotions like our own morbid-minded desire for comfort a role in religious inquiry. *Page Misak,* then, James *does* countenance attending to believers' needs when we "are inquiring into whether there in fact is a God." But that is not because believers' needs somehow provide evidence for God's existence. In the course of a single life, we simply *can* get no "coercive evidence" about whether God exists (WTB 1897, 27, 79), so we are free to give emotional needs a guiding role in inquiry, just as we do (rightly, according to James)\(^\text{24}\) when researching an as-yet unconfirmed hypothesis in science. He insists that when we shift finally to verifying a hypothesis, the "abstract intellect" then must act as an "indifferent ... umpire" (WTB 1897, 27), but he thinks that in what we now regard as the context of discovery, emotion should have a rather freer rein. I have defended this reading of James's theoretic project elsewhere (Klein 2015, 2018; cf. Misak 2018).\(^\text{25}\) Here I will focus on how this theoretic project hooks up with the therapeutic project we have been discussing.

\(^{24}\) Thus in "The Sentiment of Rationality" James writes: "Subjective' be it called! and 'disturbing' to those whom it fools! But if it [sentiment] helps those who, as Cicero says, ‘*vim naturæ magis sentiunt*’ [feel the force of nature more], it is good and not evil. Pretend what we may, the whole man within us is at work when we form our philosophical opinions. Intellect, will, taste, and passion co-operate just as they do in practical affairs; and lucky it is if the passion be not something as petty as a love of personal conquest over the philosopher across the way" (WTB 1897, 77, my underline). Notice his use of the word "form" — James is claiming that sentiment plays a legitimate role in *dreaming up* hypotheses, not that sentiment provides evidence of truth when we are engaged in confirmation.

\(^{25}\) In correspondence, P.D. Magnus asks how my reading squares with James's reference (in "The Will to Believe") to a chemist who apparently is *not* licensed to have faith in her hypothesis because that hypothesis isn't momentous (WTB 1897, 15). I think it is clear that this chemist is not meant to represent scientific practice at large. The point of the example is to emphasize that short-term research may not have momentous consequences — this chemist is portrayed as pursuing a finite, year-long research project only. Compare James's treatment of the chemist in "Sentiment of Rationality" whose research is even shorter — it only concerns testing whether some wallpaper contains arsenic (WTB 1897, 79). That research project immediately gets *contrasted* with "theories like that of Darwin, or that of the kinetic constitution of matter" which "may exhaust the labors of generations in their corroboration." James is very clear that such *long-term* scientific research may permissibly involve faith in an as-yet-unconfirmed hypothesis. So the chemist in "The Will to Believe" is not entitled to have faith in her hypothesis, but that is emphatically not because her hypothesis is scientific. It is because her hypothesis can be corroborated or refuted in the short-term. For more on this example, see below, p. 15.

"The Will to Believe" was originally given as an address to undergraduate philosophy clubs at Yale and Brown in 1896 (WTB 1897, 13). The piece was apparently intended as a follow-up to an earlier essay that James had discussed with Brown's philosophy club the prior year (Boodin 1942/1996, 207–208).

The earlier essay (the aforementioned "Is Life Worth Living?") pursues a therapeutic project:

> [W]hat I propose is to imagine ourselves reasoning with a fellow-mortal who is on such terms with life that the only comfort left him is to brood on the assurance 'you may end it when you will.' What reasons can we plead that may render such a brother (or sister) willing to take up the burden again? (WTB 1897, 39)

Here James is not primarily concerned with the desperate workers Swift would write about — instead, he proposes to help soothe what he calls the "metaphysical *tedium vitæ* which is peculiar to reflecting men" (WTB 1897, 39). So this is therapy, but therapy does not mean irrationalism; James portrays the condition from which "reflecting men" suffer as responsive to "reasons."

Today it would be controversial at best to suggest that what "would-be suicides" (WTB 1897, 39) most need is rational argument. But right or wrong, James depicts these "reflecting" persons as experiencing inner turbulence caused by a commitment to a methodological naturalism (as we might now call it) that seems incompatible with genuine religious faith. In particular, they think this naturalism is committed to the following principle: "[w]e must always wait for sensible evidence with "theories like that of Darwin, or that of the kinetic constitution of matter" which "may exhaust the labors of generations in their corroboration." James is very clear that such *long-term* scientific research may permissibly involve faith in an as-yet-unconfirmed hypothesis. So the chemist in "The Will to Believe" is not entitled to have faith in her hypothesis, but that is emphatically not because her hypothesis is scientific. It is because her hypothesis can be corroborated or refuted in the short-term. For more on this example, see below, p. 15.
for our beliefs; and where such evidence is inaccessible we must frame no hypotheses whatever” (WTB 1897, 50). In other words, for these “reflecting” persons, the only acceptable cognitive standards are those that pass muster in natural science, and science permits no belief in unconfirmed hypotheses, they think.

“Is Life Worth Living?” thus offers a more detailed diagnosis of what is causing the emotional poverty discussed above (in section two). These “reflecting” persons are tied to their senses, restricted to their natural experience; and many of them, moreover, feel a sort of intellectual loyalty to what they call “hard facts,” which is positively shocked by the easy excursions into the unseen that other people make at the bare call of sentiment [...]. [T]he craving, when the mind is pent in to the hard facts, especially as science now reveals them, can breed pessimism, quite as easily as it breeds optimism when it inspires religious trust and fancy to wing their way to another and a better world. [...] Now suppose a mind [...] whose imagination is pent in consequently, and who takes its facts “hard”;

26. The phrase “methodological naturalism” today connotes a metaphilosophy that would have been familiar in spirit, but not in substance, to James’s era. I take the spirit of the position to be that the same epistemic standards that govern the best science govern all areas of inquiry, including philosophy and religion (if they are to be epistemologically defensible at all). This is the “methodological naturalism” James endorses, and that he takes his despairing peers to endorse (Klein 2015). James often defends religion by challenging prevailing assumptions about just what principles the epistemic standards of the best science in fact include. Indeed, the quotation to which this note is appended articulates a principle he thinks his peers wrongly include in these standards. Thus in this sense of the term, two “methodological naturalists” could well disagree about the substance of the epistemic standards governing the best science. In contrast, today the phrase is widely associated with a particular, substantive view about the epistemic standards in question — in particular, with the view that science, and by extension philosophy, is exclusively engaged in a search for synthetic truths using strictly a posteriori methods (Papineau 2016), a view that owes a good measure of its influence to (Quine 1969). I have distinguished James’s view from the latter sort of naturalism in (Klein 2008, 2016, 2018). In this essay I employ the phrase “methodological naturalism” in the former, more general sense.

27. This is a more specific, perhaps more rarefied version of the melancholia that William learned to take morbid-mindedness as an important part of life to be wrestled with openly and seriously in philosophy, not swept aside as some kind of embarrassment.

28. In the preface to the second edition of *Human Immortality*, James sums up the aims of his lecture this way: “But my concern in the lecture was not to discuss immortality in general. It was confined to showing it to be not incompatible with the brain-function theory of our present mundane consciousness. I hold that it is so compatible [...]” (ERM 1899, 76, italics original). Here the issue is the compatibility of belief in an afterlife with the basic thesis of “physiological psychology,” namely, that our conscious thoughts are all “functions” of our brains (ERM 1898, 79). There is an obvious kinship between this compatibility question and the issue of whether methodological naturalism is compatible with belief in God’s existence.
Rorty, Misak, and other critics, James’s theoretic project was simply not to prove that God actually does exist—that question “cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds” (WTB 1897, 20, italics original). The question for the “would-be suicide,” instead, is whether naturalists have a “right to believe” (WTB 1897, 32, 49) in God. James, of course, answered in the affirmative.29

The point of contact between James’s theoretic and therapeutic projects is precisely the religious pluralism I discussed in section two. To get a grip on this, let us return to the Varieties passage where James entertains the principle that “God is real since he produces real effects” (VRE 1902, 407). Misak worries that that the “real effects” at issue are just the comfort someone might feel upon believing that God is real. But we are now in a position to make better sense of that passage. It continues this way:

Only when this farther step of faith concerning [a primus inter pares] God is taken, and remote objective consequences are predicted, does religion, as it seems to me, get wholly free from the first immediate subjective experience, and bring a real hypothesis into play. (VRE 1902, 407, italics original)

Religious pluralism proposes the existence of an independent being who is like a “personage in a drama”—that is, it proposes that God is a being whose effects we could observe if we were appropriately situated. This is why pluralism “bring[s] a real hypothesis into play.”

The key contrast, of course, is with religious monism. James’s central theoretic charge against this doctrine is that since it regards God as the totality of all that exists, it is not proposing a universe that would be different in any verifiable way from a Godless universe. His complaint is that monism is a purely subjective, empirically-vacuous hypothesis that is therefore not permissible for a naturalist to entertain. In sharp contrast, James writes, pluralism is not a mere illumination of facts already elsewhere given, not a mere passion, like love, which views things in a rosier light. It is indeed that, as we have seen abundantly. But it is something more, namely, a postulator of new facts as well. The world interpreted religiously [he means via pluralistic, common-sense religion—AK] is not the materialistic world over again, with an altered expression; it must have, over and above the altered expression, a natural constitution different at some point from that which a materialistic world would have. It must be such that different events can be expected in it, different conduct must be required. This thoroughly ‘pragmatic’ view of religion has usually been taken as a matter of course by common men. […] It is only transcendentalist metaphysicians who think that, without adding any concrete details to Nature, or subtracting any, but by simply calling it the expression of absolute spirit, you make it more divine just as it stands. I believe the pragmatic way of taking religion to be the deeper way. (VRE 1902, 407–408, my underline)

In this important passage James tells us that monism is effectively a pseudo-hypothesis. Only pluralism passes methodologically-naturalistic muster as a permissible hypothesis to entertain, for James. Again, the issue is that monism proposes that God is nothing but the totality of everything that exists. James thinks it follows that there could in principle be no testable differences between a universe where the monistic hypothesis is true, and a universe where it is false. That only pluralism can “free” the religious hypothesis from its origins in mere “subjective experience” suggests that James believed the only reasons one could have for being a monistic theist would be purely sentimental. This is a remarkable charge coming from someone who has so often been read as holding that subjective comfort is by itself a good

29. For a response to the objection that science only allows us to entertain an unconfirmed hypothesis, not to outright believe it, before the evidence is in—an objection Peirce actually raised against James—see (Klein 2015, 77–78, 96–97).
reason for thinking the hypothesis “God exists” is true. In fact, the very absurdity of treating such “subjective experience” as evidence is precisely the objection he is raising against religious monism.

In contrast, the pluralistic hypothesis postulates the existence of a particular, divine being in the universe whose actions affect events. If we cannot directly observe this being, nor directly observe surprising effects in the universe that would be a matter of course if the being existed (P 1898, 263–266), then we should abandon the hypothesis. That is to say, the pluralistic hypothesis has empirical content; the monistic hypothesis does not.

We now arrive at a weak point in James’s theory. For the pluralistic hypothesis to have empirical content, there have to be some clear tests we could eventually run to check for expected effects of a pluralistic God. But James is vague about just what sorts of effects we should be on the lookout for; and when he is not vague, he is unrealistic.

Let’s begin with an unrealistic passage. In his 1898 “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” James suggests that if a pluralistic God were to exist, we might expect some concrete thermodynamic results (the passage also appears in Pragmatism):

\[\text{According to the theory of mechanical evolution, the laws of redistribution of matter and motion, tho they are certainly to thank for all the good hours which our organisms have ever yielded us and for all the ideals which our minds now frame, are yet fatally certain to undo their work again, and to redissolve everything that they have once evolved. I cannot state it better than in Mr. Balfour’s words: “The energies of our system will decay, the glory of the sun will be dimmed, and the earth, tideless and inert, will no longer tolerate the race which has for a moment disturbed its solitude.” (P 1907, 53–54)}\]

Alluding to the idea of the eventual heat-death of a purely mechanical universe, James goes on to intimate that this process might somehow be altered if a pluralistic God were to exist.

But to the extent that James fleshes out just what thermodynamic consequences we should expect to find if God were to exist, the effects he specifies would not be verifiable in any recognizable sense: “A world with a God in it to say the last word, may indeed burn up or freeze, but we then think of him as still mindful of the old ideals and sure to bring them elsewhere to fruition” (P 1907, 55). James is not naïve enough to suggest that God might reach down and bend the second law of thermodynamics. Instead, he seems to think that if this universe “burn[s] up or freeze[s],” God might go on to create another universe with “the old ideals” still intact. But it is just not realistic to think we ever could detect this effect, since no observer from this universe could ever be in a position to verify the supposed result.

James obviously does intend his pluralistic religious hypothesis to be verifiable in principle, even if he has difficulty spelling out what such verification would look like. For in other passages he repeats the idea that this hypothesis can (somehow) be tested, though he retreats to vagaries in spelling out how these tests might work. For example, in the preface to The Will to Believe he writes:30

\[\text{If religious hypotheses about the universe be in order at all, then the active faiths of individuals in them, freely expressing themselves in life, are the experimental tests by which they are verified, and the only means by which their truth or falsehood can be wrought out. The truest scientific hypothesis is that which, as we say, “works” best; and it can be no otherwise with religious hypotheses. Religious history proves that one hypothesis after another has worked ill, has crumbled at contact with a widening knowledge of the world, and has lapsed from the minds of men. Some articles of faith, however, have maintained themselves through every vicissitude, and possess even more vitality to-day than ever before: it is for the “science of religions” to tell us just which hypotheses these are.}\]

30. I thank an anonymous referee for pressing me to grapple with this passage.
Meanwhile the freest competition of the various faiths with one another, and their openest application to life by their several champions, are the most favorable conditions under which the survival of the fittest can proceed. (WTB 1897, 8)

This passage makes the naturalistic claim that only a religious hypothesis that can in principle be “verified” by “experimental tests” is genuine. James likens this testability requirement to what we demand of a “scientific hypothesis.” Once we formulate testable hypotheses, a kind of natural selection of ideas can proceed, where only “the fittest” — only those that remain consistent with “experimental tests” — survive.

But James still owes us a story about what kinds of “experimental tests” we might put our religious hypotheses to. For critics will immediately suspect that religious ideas might sometimes survive in virtue of their therapeutic effects alone, and not in virtue of being well-supported in any empirical sense. I take myself already to have shown that, particularly in his attack on the monistic religious hypothesis, James makes clear that he denies that emotional comfort can provide epistemic support in the context of justification (even if it can provide practical guidance in the context of discovery). So his discussion of the “experimental tests” of religion in the above passage is not intended to refer to the comfort people might take in the idea of God, I contend. Still, James has trouble either plausibly or clearly articulating just what empirical effects we might expect from his pluralistic hypothesis. That strikes me as the real weak point in his account.

James can respond to these worries by suggesting that even if we have not yet figured out how to run “experimental tests” of the pluralistic religious hypothesis, we someday might. This response fits with texts where he contends that religion and science do not differ with respect to epistemic standards, but rather with respect to how long it might take to devise effective experiments and gather persuasive evidence. “Faith is synonymous with working hypothesis,” James writes. “The only difference is that while some hypotheses can be refuted in five minutes, others may defy ages” (WTB 1897, 79). He goes on to contrast a chemical test of whether some wallpaper contains arsenic with a biological test of Darwin’s entire theory of evolution. The former can be done instantly, while the latter “may exhaust the labors of generations in their corroboration,” and James’s suggestion is that corroboration of the religious hypothesis might well take even longer.

Still, I think we must acknowledge that the answer may ultimately be unsatisfying to the anxious naturalist. James’s message is that religious faith is compatible with naturalism because there is a way of construing the religious hypothesis — the pluralistic way — as a conjecture that will one day be testable. But he is able to muster little concrete detail about how such tests might actually work.

So I think the deepest philosophical vulnerability of James’s view lies elsewhere than critics like Misak, Rorty, and so many other have supposed. James in fact denied that subjective comfort of the hypothesis that God exists somehow provides epistemic support for that hypothesis. Instead, I have argued that the central trouble with James’s position is as follows. He wanted to craft a religious hypothesis that would be naturalistically permissible to believe. To be naturalistically permissible to believe, his religious hypothesis must have empirical content, even if it has not yet been verified. And yet he fell short on this last step, in my view, for he was ultimately unable to specify any clear or plausible consequences one could hope to observe if a pluralistic God were actually to exist.

To sum up — in section two I tried to show that James gives us four therapeutic (non-evidentiary) reasons for accepting the pluralistic hypothesis about God: 1) The hypothesis stands to appeal to our “feeling of action” when we are healthy-minded; 2) it stands to provide comfort when we are feeling melancholy; 3) because of (1), it stands to spur us to combat material poverty; and 4) because of (2) it stands to help us combat emotional poverty as a social problem.

In section three I tried to show that James’s theoretic project with respect to religion is largely undertaken in service to the emotional poverty problem, a problem he thought was particularly acute when
it came to “reflecting” persons. These persons supposedly despair because they regard their own methodological naturalism as incompatible with religious faith. So James’s theoretic project is to console such “would-be suicides” by showing that religious pluralism amounts to a verifiable hypothesis that meets the usual standards of methodological naturalism.

His results were mixed. Nevertheless, Rorty is quite wrong to suggest that The Varieties “dithers” (Rorty 2004, 92) between advancing what I am calling the “therapeutic” project of showing that religion can be comforting, and on the other hand offering evidence for God’s existence, or in other words developing a “natural theology” (Rorty 2004, 87). Rorty’s mistake is, ultimately, the same as Misak’s: they both think only these two theological projects are available to James, and they both read him as unable to make up his mind about which of these projects he wants to pursue.

Instead, I have argued that James was not developing a natural theology at all. His theoretic project was instead about “permission” to believe in God for the committed methodological naturalist, not about finding evidence for God’s existence that would compel any reasonable inquirer. And I have argued that James’s theoretic project is designed to satisfy the therapeutic needs of “reflecting” Victorians who had fallen prey to a chronic melancholy, but a melancholy he thought was responsive to reason. James’s theoretic project ultimately fell short. But his strategy for pressing theoretical philosophical reflection into service for addressing some of the concrete social ills of his own day — material poverty and suicidal despair, respectively — was ingenious, and deserves closer scrutiny than it has yet received.

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