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INTUITION: THE "UNSEEN THREAD" CONNECTING EMERSON AND JAMES*

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Recent scholarly comment on the relation between Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James offers an either–or choice between conflating the two thinkers in a proto-postmodern, antifoundationalist cast or dividing them into mutually exclusive categories of idealist believer and relativist skeptic. Contending that neither of these positions captures the pragmatist adumbrations in Emerson or the transcendentalist retentions in James, this essay turns to James's annotations of Emerson's writings as a singularly revealing yet largely neglected source of information about the exact nature of the Emerson–James connection. This evidence points to a pluralistic and distinctly literary formulation of intuitive insight as the key for opening up the Emerson–James relation and for framing it with a precision hitherto missing in discussions of these thinkers. The balance of the essay presents an analytic overview of the various aspects and implications of Emerson's and James's ideas of intuition. Combining doubt and belief, skepticism and faith, realism and idealism, a particular formulation of intuition is the answer that Emerson and James both offer to the problem of modernity—the problem of locating a source of value that is both of the self and beyond the self.

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly and critical comment on the relation between Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James is sharply divided. A late twentieth-century resurgence of interest in pragmatism has led many to make a case for Emerson as an important progenitor of James's views. Shelving the transcendentalist's belief in spiritual truths, which come to an individual intuitively, Richard Poirier argues that Emerson's "linguistic skepticism" and his emphasis on "transition" and "action" lay the foundation for "American pragmatism, especially as enunciated by James." Following Poirier's lead, Jonathan Levin expands on the centrality of an Emersonian aesthetic of transition to Jamesean pragmatism. Tracing

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pragmatism's philosophical genealogy, Cornel West contends that Emerson's "distinctly American" rejection of foundationalism in favor of "a perennial experimental search ... for the enhancement and expansion of the self" is a forerunner of pragmatism.[1] However, other readers have doubted the connection between Emerson and James. Asking, "What's the use of calling Emerson a Pragmatist?" Stanley Cavell, for example, denies that James's and Dewey's thinking, "so far as it is recognizable as something distinctly called pragmatism, captures or clarifies or retains all that is rational or moral in the Emersonian event." Emerson's "perfectionism" puts him, in Cavell's view, in a lineage distinct from that of pragmatism. Neal Dolan shares Cavell's skepticism of a "pragmatist" Emerson. Accepting, *tout court*, the characterization of Richard Rorty, James Kloppenberg, and many others that pragmatism is antifoundationalist, Dolan argues that characterizations of Emerson as proto-pragmatist are "starkly anachronistic," repressing the fact that the transcendentalist is always committed to "intimations of a metaphysically subsistent moral law."[2] In other words, Emerson's transcendentalism cannot be assimilated with the anti-transcendentalism of Jamesean pragmatism.

While his substitution of Rorty's and Kloppenberg's views for James's is problematic, Dolan's charge of anachronism has to be considered. Even a desultory reader senses in the contrast between Emerson's metaphysical and poetic voice and James's empirical and scientific mode of expression the presence of certain historical differences separating the writers' respective eras.[3] In Emerson's idealism, one hears distinct echoes of Coleridge, Carlyle, Swedenborg, Goethe, and Kant. By contrast, James's pragmatism seems to be composed in a

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[1] Richard Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 11; *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New Haven, 1988), 47–49; Jonathan Levin, *The Poetics of Transition: Emerson, Pragmatism, & American Literary History* (Durham, NC, 1999); Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WI, 1989), 28, 36. See also Russell B. Goodman, *American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition* (New York, 1990); David M. Robinson, *Emerson and the Conduct of Life: Pragmatism and Ethical Purpose in the Later Work* (Cambridge, 1993); Joan Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism* (Cambridge, 2007).

[2] Stanley Cavell, "What's the Use of Calling Emerson a Pragmatist?", in Morris Dickstein, ed., *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture* (Durham, NC, 1998), 73, 79; Neal Dolan, *Emerson's Liberalism* (Madison, WI, 2009), 9, 150–51. For descriptions of pragmatism as antifoundationalist see Richard Rorty, *The Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis, 1982), xxx–xxxi; and James T. Kloppenberg, *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition* (Princeton, 2010), 78–9, 152.

[3] Of course, one can misread such stylistic contrasts. As Charles Capper points out, Santayana thought the core of transcendentalism was "luminously modern" and quite scientific. George Santayana, "'A Little Beyond': The Problem of the Transcendentalist Movement in American History," *Journal of American History* 85 (1998), 502–39, 511–13.

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different key, deriving from David Hume, Jeremy Bentham, Charles Darwin, J. S. Mill, C. S. Pierce, and Charles Renouvier.

In *The Metaphysical Club*, a group biography of pragmatism's originators, Louis Menand dramatizes differences between the two thinkers' respective eras. The "Civil War swept away," says Menand, not only "the slave civilization of the South, but it swept away almost the whole intellectual culture of the North along with it." In this "generational shift," a particularly skeptical form of realism replaced "the individualism, humanitarianism, and moralism that characterized Northern intellectual life before the war." While pragmatism shared "Emerson's distrust of institutions and systems and his manner of appropriating ideas while discarding their philosophical foundations," it did not "share his conception of the individual conscience as a transcendental authority."[4] In richly contextualized historical narratives of this type, the antebellum period's romanticism, idealism, and transcendentalism give way to a postbellum embrace of flux, uncertainty, experimentalism, realism, and science. Literature scholars tracking this disjuncture describe how the muted and skeptical realism of Henry James, Mark Twain, and William Dean Howells replaces the prophetic voices of such antebellum writers as Emerson, Melville, and Stowe.[5]

Yet, despite such differences in historical moment and intellectual background, the writings of Emerson and James unmistakably correspond or converge at various important points. For instance, they both tend to rely on antithesis to structure their thoughts: in "The Transcendentalist," Emerson describes philosophy as divided between the "Idealist" and "Materialist" approaches; in *Pragmatism*, James similarly bisects philosophy into "tender-minded" and "tough-minded" tendencies.[6] Having divided some problem or issue under discussion into a pair of opposed perspectives, each thinker is disinclined to choose one alternative to the exclusion of the other, affirming, instead, that both sides of the dichotomy are necessary. Emerson declares, "The soul is wholly embodied, and the body is wholly ensouled," and James insists on retaining the good things from both the tender- and tough-minded inclinations.[7] Unhappy with the excesses of their respective eras, both thinkers take up a "less-is-more" theme, offering poverty as the antidote to "the vulgar prosperity that retrogrades ever to barbarism" (Emerson) and as a wholesome, nonviolent version of "the

4 Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York, 2001), x, 59, 370.

5 See, for example, Michael T. Gilmore, *The War on Words: Slavery, Race, and Free Speech in American Literature* (Chicago, 2010).

6 Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (New York, 1983), 193 (this volume is hereafter cited as *EL*); William James, *Pragmatism, in James, Writings: 1902–1910* (New York, 1987), 490–91 (this volume is hereafter cited as *W: 1902–1910*, and this work is hereafter cited as *Pragmatism*).

7 "Spiritual Laws," *EL*, 335; *Pragmatism*, 491–2.

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strenuous life" "liberat[ing]" one "from material attachments" (James).[8] And both think of action as the necessary counterpart of thought. Without action, Emerson says, "thought can never ripen into truth." Quoting Kierkegaard, James writes, "We live forward, we understand backward."[9]

Some of the best evidence of the two thinkers' relationship can be found in the nine volumes of Emerson's writings owned by James.[10] James's annotations provide a singular source for precisely gauging the nature and extent of the connection between the transcendentalist and the pragmatist. Part of James's "philosophical library" given to Harvard University by his son, Henry, these books are eye-opening, an intellectual resource until now almost entirely untapped, examined by only a few scholars.[11] This paucity of scholarly comment has proved particularly unfortunate because, as we will see, the earliest scholar to look at the annotations, Frederic Ives Carpenter, drew mistaken inferences misleading subsequent critics and utterly obscuring the two thinkers' embrace of intuition, which I will argue is the key to understanding their relation.[12] Each volume contains multiple layers of marginal notes and marks, attesting to the fact that James carefully read and reread nearly everything Emerson published. Working through the essays and the various annotations is something like reading Emerson

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8 "The American Scholar," *EL*, 63; *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, *W: 1902–1910*, 333 (hereafter cited as *Varieties*).

9 "The American Scholar," *EL*, 60; *A Pluralistic Universe*, *W: 1902–1910*, 739 (hereafter cited as *Pluralistic Universe*).

10 James's library included the following copies of Emerson's writings, which are now a part of the William James *Collection at Harvard's Houghton Library: Miscellanies; Embracing Nature, Addresses, and Lectures* (Boston, 1868); *Essays: First Series* (Boston, 1869); and from *Emerson's Complete Works* (new and rev. edns) published in Boston by Houghton, Mifflin and Company on dates as follows: vol. 3, *Essays: Second Series* (1889); vol. 4, *Representative Men: Seven Lectures* (1895); vol. 6, *The Conduct of Life* (1889); vol. 8, *Letters and Social Aims* (1883); vol. 10, *Lectures and Biographical Sketches* (1884); vol. 12, *Natural History of the Intellect and Other Papers* (1893); and from *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (centenary edn), *Essays: Second Series* (Boston, 1904).

11 Robert D. Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (Boston, 2006), 154; James Bense, "At Odds with 'De-transcendentalizing Emerson': The Case of William James," *New England Quarterly* 79 (2006), 355–86, 360–67; Frederic Ives Carpenter, "William James and Emerson," *American Literature* 11 (1939), 39–57, 54–7; and Carpenter, *Emerson Handbook* (New York, 1967), 169.

12 As James Bense has also noted, Carpenter's errant interpretation of these annotations has influenced many later works, including F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York, 1941), 53–4 n. 10; Charles E. Mitchell, *Individualism and Its Discontents: Appropriations of Emerson, 1880–1950* (Amherst, MA, 1997), 74, 82; James M. Albrecht, "What's the Use of Reading Emerson Pragmatically? The Example of William James," *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 30 (2003), 388–432, 397. Bense, "The Case of William James," 361.

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over James's shoulder. One readily acquires a fairly distinct picture of the parts of Emerson's work that catch James's eye, the parts that correspond with James's views, and the parts that do not (though not without intriguing ambiguities).

Of course, James's vertical or horizontal marks highlighting certain passages are not self-explanatory. At best, one uses the context of James's writings as a whole to make an educated guess as to a particular mark's meaning. For instance, knowing James's conception of consciousness as a process of selection, it seems fairly easy to recognize the sympathetic reaction recorded in his underlining of the following passage from "Spiritual Laws": "A man is a method, a progressive arrangement; a selecting principle." Similarly, agreement would seem to be signaled by the double vertical marks James has put in the margin of "Circles" next to the passage, "There is no virtue which is final; all are initial" (an idea inspiring James's account of how new truth is fashioned in *Pragmatism*).[13] With James's appreciation of the particular in mind, the vertical mark next to Emerson's stated preference for the universal to the exclusion of the particular, "Let us go for universals; for the magnetism, not for the [iron] needles," reads as a sign of disapproval. When, in the same essay, "Nominalist and Realist," Emerson changes direction, talking about how "nature" punishes "abstractionists," "resents generalizing, and insults the philosopher in every moment with a million of fresh particulars," James's vertical mark in the margin would seem to express approval.[14]

Such interpretations become more assured when reading James's annotations. For instance, in his well-worn copy of Emerson's *Miscellanies; Embracing* Nature, *Addresses, and Lectures* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1868), James has noted on the blank pages at the back of the book the passages that are "against my philosophys" and those that correspond with "pragmatism." A passage from *Nature* identified as "against" his philosophy furnishes a specific image of what James most objects to in Emerson's idealism: "Idealism sees the world in God. It beholds the whole circle of persons and things, of actions and events, of country and religion, not as painfully accumulated, atom after atom, act after act, in an aged creeping Past, but as one vast picture, which God paints on the instant eternity, for the contemplation of the soul" (the underlining is James's). Emerson's "one vast picture" freezes everything into a predetermined whole. The upshot of such monism is a universe without agency and surprise, a universe which is already determined, whole, finished, and, consequently, unchangeable.[15] The fact that this determinism is supposedly somehow "ideal" or benign does not make it any less horrible to James.

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13 *Essays, First Series*, 129, 287 (Call no AC85 J2376 Zz869e); *Pragmatism*, 591–2.

14 *Essays, Second Series* (Boston, 1904), 228–9, 236–7 (Call no AC85 J2376 Zz904e).

15 *Nature*, *Miscellanies*, 57 (Call no WJ 424.25.12).

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James's reaction to a passage from "The American Scholar" further illuminates the nature of his disagreement. Here Emerson praises the pleasure we get from the best books: "They impress us with the conviction, that one nature wrote and the same reads." The fact that "this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul, that which I also had wellnigh thought and said," says Emerson, offers evidence of "the philosophical doctrine of the identity of all minds" (James's underlining). James not only underlines the phrase above but also heavily underscores the word "identity" and in the margin writes, "Why not 'commerce.'"[16] James wants to replace "identity" with "commerce" because that substitution allows for a form of unity or connection that does not erase multiplicity and particularity. At the back of the book, he uses the word "monism" to index the passage and to identify the particularly objectionable kind of mystic or idealist unity that destroys all distinction so that the "eachness" of every individual being and thing ultimately has no significance.

But one cannot carefully read James's annotations and markings and conclude that he rejects Emerson's transcendentalism and idealism *in toto*. For instance, he characterizes as "pragmatist" a passage from "The American Scholar" describing the correspondence between the structure of our minds and the structure of the physical universe:

> what is classification but the perceiving that [all] objects are not chaotic, and are not foreign, but have a law which is also a law of the human mind? The astronomer discovers that geometry, a pure abstraction of the human mind, is the measure of planetary motion. The chemist finds proportions and intelligible method throughout matter; and science is nothing but the finding of analogy, identity, in the most remote parts.[17]

James also uses the term "pragmatist" to index Emerson's statement that it is "a mischievous notion that we have come late into nature; that the world was finished a long time ago. As the world was plastic and fluid in the hands of God, so it is ever to so much of his attributes as we bring to it" (James's underlining).[18] As these and other annotations and markings suggest, the idealist's belief in the correspondence between mind and matter, so long as it allows for fluidity, choice, and unpredictability, poses no problem for James.

Frederic Ives Carpenter's early and influential reading of James's annotations supported the "two Emersons" thesis—the idea that James accepted Emerson's

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16 "The American Scholar," *Miscellanies*, 87–8 (Call no WJ 424.25.12).

17 Ibid., 81.

18 Ibid., at 100.

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individualism while rejecting his idealism.[19] While, as we have seen, James plainly distinguished between the acceptable and unacceptable in Emerson, Carpenter's characterization of this distinction is overbroad and inaccurate.[20] A critical error in Carpenter's argument can be found in his reading of James's annotations of a famous passage from "Self-Reliance." According to Carpenter, while James drew inspiration from Emerson's theme of self-trust, he vehemently objected to Emerson's anchoring of self-reliance "on personal intuition."[21] Here is the passage from Emerson:

> And now at last the highest truth on this subject remains unsaid; probably cannot be said; for all that we say is the far-off remembering of the intuition. That thought, by what I can now nearest approach to say it, is this. When good is near you, when you have life in yourself, it is not by any known or accustomed way; you shall not discern the foot-prints of any other; you shall not see the face of man; you shall not hear any name;—the way, the thought, the good, shall be wholly strange and new. It shall exclude example and experience.[22]

Carpenter claims that this passage "angered James. On first reading he called it: 'the anaesthetic revelation,' although he commonly used this phrase only to describe mystical trances induced by drugs, or other artificial means. Then, on a second reading, he indexed the same passage as: 'the tasteless water of souls.'"[23] "[M]ost of all," says Carpenter, James "seemed to hate Emerson's celebration of that purely mystical intuition which 'shall exclude example and experience.'"[24]

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19 Carpenter, "James and Emerson," 54–7; and Carpenter, *Emerson Handbook*, 169. The following pieces variously subscribe to the "two Emersons" thesis: Rev. Julius H. Ward, "Emerson in New England Thought," *Andover Review* (1887), 380–95, 393; Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 53–54 n.10; Frank Lentricchia, "On the Ideologies of Poetic Modernism," in Sacvan Bercovitch, ed., *Reconstructing American Literary History* (Cambridge, MA, 1986), 238; Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York, 1991), 282; Bense, "The Case of William James," 360.

20 A passage from a 1905 notebook indicates that James did, at least on occasion, think of Emerson in a bifurcated fashion, noting "two tendencies in Emerson, one towards absolute Monism; the other towards radical individualism. They sound contradictory enough; but he held to each of them in its extremist form." William James, "Emerson 1905," in *The Works of William James: Manuscript Essays and Notes*, ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt *et al.* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 318.

21 "James and Emerson," 54–5.

22 "Self-Reliance," *Essays, First Series*, 60 (Call no. AC85 J2376 Zz869e). On blank pages at the end of this volume, James has written out an "index" of key passages, including the following: "tasteless water of souls (Blood) 60" and "Anaesthetic revelation, 60." He has also drawn a vertical line in the margin next to the passage from "Self-Reliance" on page 60.

23 "James and Emerson," 55.

24 *Emerson Handbook*, 171.

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Unfortunately, Carpenter's account of James's reaction to this passage from "Self-Reliance" has influenced prominent scholars, such as F. O. Matthiessen and Frank Lentricchia, leading many to think that James rejected intuition, which is, I will argue, an important ground of the two thinkers' philosophical kinship.[25]

Perhaps the first thing that jumps out at one fresh from reading James is that Emerson's insistence on the novelty and firsthand nature of intuitive experience would hardly have discredited that experience for James. Not only did James consider the "faith that in a life at first hand there is something sacred" to be "perhaps the most characteristic note in Emerson's writings," but he also seconded Emerson's theme, welcoming the "novel or unclassified experience," the "mental irritant," that throws our expectation "off its bearings," disrupting the "mental sedative" of "custom."[26] In his researches into consciousness, James preferred immediate, first-hand experiences. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, for instance, he studies "original" examples of religious life, "experiences we can only find in individuals for whom religion exists not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever."[27] As the "example and experience" that Emerson "exclud[es]" in "Self-Reliance" are not "strange" or "new" but, implicitly, prior and habitual ("known or accustomed"), it is really not plausible that James would object.

James's inscription of the phrases "anaesthetic revelation" and "tasteless water of souls" expresses his association of intuition with Benjamin Paul Blood's "very remarkable little work" *The Anaesthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy* (1874). Blood's account of nitrous oxide intoxication helped James to apprehend the mysterious and elusive intuitive state of consciousness which gives one a "deepening sense of reality and truth" and in which things "seem more utterly what they are, more 'utterly utter' than when we are sober."[28] Far from rejecting such experience, James experimented with nitrous oxide to gain a direct understanding of its nature and effects: "Depth beyond depth of truth seems revealed to the inhaler. This truth fades out, however, or escapes, at the moment of coming to." While not itself a genuine metaphysical experience, this "anaesthetic" form of revelation effectively mirrors the lineaments and feel of such experiences. From his experiments with nitrous oxide, James learned that

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[25] See Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 53–54 n. 10; and Lentricchia, "On the Ideologies of Poetic Modernism," 238 (Lentricchia echoes Carpenter's interpretation of the "tasteless water of souls" inscription without citation of the earlier scholarship). While he does not focus on intuition, James Bense, "The Case of William James," 360–7, has usefully noted other errors in Carpenter's reading of James's annotations of Emerson.

[26] James, "Centenary of Ralph Waldo Emerson," *W: 1902–1910*, 1121; "The Sentiment of Rationality," *W: 1878–1899*, 515.

[27] *Varieties*, 15.

[28] *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), 914 (hereafter cited as *Principles*).

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our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness ... is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different ... No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded ... Looking back on my own experiences, they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance. The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity.

This experience is, James acknowledges, akin to idealism and mysticism, "something like what the hegelian philosophy means." While he may only be able to access it in the "artificial" version, nonetheless, he "cannot wholly escape from its authority."[29]

Near the end of his life, James returned to Blood in "A Pluralistic Mystic." Thinking back to his first contact with Blood's *Anaesthetic Revelation*, James writes, "I forget how it fell into my hands, but it fascinated me so 'weirdly' that I am conscious of its having been one of the stepping-stones of my thinking ever since." As James's title suggests, Blood exemplifies the merger of mystic intuition with a pluralistic, unfinished world. Unlike the "practically unanimous tradition of 'regular' mysticism" which "has been unquestionably *monistic*," Blood's mysticism has "a radically pluralistic sound." Consequently, James can accept Blood's "mystical" philosophy as "in the last resort not dissimilar from my own." He cites the passage where Blood quotes from the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* as an instance of Blood's skill in rendering the contrast between the anaesthetic experience of mystic unity ("the tasteless water of souls" which is, Whitman says, "the true sustenance" uniting all) and the "formal thought" of everyday rationality that returns "as we 'come to.'" Blood inspires James to observe, in lines resembling the "Self-Reliance" passage and quoting from Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," that "[i]n every moment of immediate experience is somewhat absolutely original and novel. 'We are the first that ever burst into this silent sea.' Philosophy must pass from words, that reproduce but ancient elements, to life itself, that gives the integrally new."[30] It is worth pausing to note that James shares with Blood a sense that literature and the aesthetic are connected "to life itself," offering an important record of or vicarious access to such experience. With James's responses to Blood in mind, we can see that James's annotations, "anaesthetic revelation" and "tasteless water of souls," do not betoken an angry rejection of the passage from "Self-Reliance." Instead, these phrases simultaneously identify Emerson with Blood and both men with

[29] *Varieties*, 349–50.

[30] "A Pluralistic Mystic," *W: 1902–1910*, 1295, 1306–7, 1313, original emphasis; Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition* (New York, 1961), 41.

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a pluralistic and distinctly literary formulation of intuitive insight that James embraces, and this embrace, in turn, casts light on the mystic and transcendental side of James's thought. James's sympathy for intuition—what Carpenter and others have failed to grasp—turns out to be the key for opening up the Emerson–James relation and for framing it with a precision hitherto missing in discussions of these thinkers.[31]

Deeply aesthetic, open to the ravishing or harrowing transport of novel or orthogonal truths, working by largely inexplicable forms of analogy and feeling, tied to the immediacy of first-hand experience rather than detached rational analysis, derived from a renunciation of self-will and a receptive kind of "lowly listening," a creature of doubt as well as belief—intuition forms, I will argue, an important bridge between Emerson's transcendentalism and James's pragmatism.[32] Comparing their views of intuition casts needed illumination on

[31] Historians, such as James T. Kloppenberg, characterize intuition as part and parcel of a previous era's romantic outlook left behind by the pragmatists. Like the Scottish realists' confidence in common sense, the idealists' belief in *Geist*, and positivists' faith in science, the romantic embrace of intuition aspired, says Kloppenberg, to an "Archimedean point" of epistemological and metaphysical certainty, a quest rejected by the pragmatists. Describing how evolutionary science "staggered" the Romantics' belief in intuition, Kloppenberg's narrative puts James on the other side of a divide epitomized by the advent of Darwin. James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York, 1986), 19–20, 23, 26. Alan Ryan's biographical study of John Dewey, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 1995), 50–51, 55–56, casts the history of nineteenth-century American philosophy in a similar light, remarking how, in moving toward pragmatism, Dewey came to reject the intuitionalist certainties of such predecessors as James McCosh and H. A. P. Torrey. Philosophers, such as Richard J. Bernstein, define the pragmatists' antifoundational "ethos" of uncertainty in such a way as to exclude intuition. See e.g. Richard J. Bernstein, "Pragmatism, Pluralism, and the Healing of Old Wounds," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 63 (1989), 5–18, 7. This is precisely the type of characterization of pragmatism leading Neal Dolan to object that Emerson's commitment to "intimations of a metaphysically subsistent moral law" cannot be squared with the later thinker's relativism. *Emerson's Liberalism*, 150–51. However, such accounts are overbroad and fail to allow for the fact that James (and Dewey, for that matter) could be critical of the "intuitionalism" of their day and yet remain open to the idea of intuition. As I will demonstrate in this essay, in distinction to such historical and philosophical accounts, the published and unpublished writings of James reveal numerous passages in which he subscribes to intuition and allows for the possibility that it can open the door to transcendental truths. And I will also show that, as James's and Emerson's versions of intuition remain open to change and doubt, their references to this mode of awareness do not entail a larger claim of "Archimedean" certainty.

[32] While tracing the contours and conceptual facets of the particular version of intuition shared and developed by Emerson and James, it is useful to bear in mind the range of meanings associated with the term. Derived from the Latin verb *intueri*, meaning to "look

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the ways in which Emerson's transcendentalism is not impaired by his proto-pragmatist embrace of doubt, uncertainty, and change; and James's pragmatism is not undone by his transcendentalist openness to revelations of higher truths.[33] The transgenerational nature of this connection is emphasized by the fact that James is well aware that his embrace of intuition runs counter to the positivist philosophic trend of his era. As he looks forward, he looks back to Emerson.

This important connection between Emerson and James has been neglected, I suspect, out of a suspicion widespread within the academy of anything smacking of transcendentalism or idealism. As John Searle has said, in the context of "respectable" philosophy, idealism is "dead as a doornail," as if our era were allergic to the mere sight of words such as "truth" or "value," and investigating their use were not even an option. But, as Searle also notes, contemporary analytic philosophy, with its anti-idealist orientation, leaves certain prominent aspects of the mind, such as consciousness and the qualitative aspects of experience, in

upon," "intuition" and "intuitive" have been used both positively and negatively to indicate a variety of mental processes and capacities, such as analytically careless thinking; uncanny or supernatural modes of insight; spontaneous and hence unquestioned perceptions (such as my awareness that I have a pair of hands); a Platonic ability to perceive the realm of ideal forms; a nonrational form of judgment (e.g. a gambler's hunch), an unusually sensitive type of personality; a form of knowledge produced by experience (such as the craftsman's superior understanding and awareness of material); and the type of innate moral feeling discussed by the Scottish common-sense philosophers, such as Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Adam Smith, Thomas Reid, Henry Home (Lord Kames), and Dugald Stewart. For a useful summary of the history of the concept from the ancient world to the present, see Nel Noddings and Paul J. Shore, *Awakening the Inner Eye: Intuition in Education* (New York, 1984), 3–42. And for recent commentary on intuition as a psychological and philsosophical concept see Tony Bastick, *Intuition: How We Think and Act* (Chichester, 1982); Robbie Davis-Ford and P. Sven Arvidson, eds., *Intuition: The Inside Story* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Michael DePaul and William Ramsey, eds. *Rethinking Intuition: The Psychology of Intuition and its Role in Philosophical Inquiry* (Lanham, MD, 1998).

33 Many scholars have noted Emerson's acceptance of flux and uncertainty (see e.g. Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature*, 47–9), but such acknowledgments tend to come at the cost of his transcendentalism. Certain scholars have noted the intuitional aspect of James's thought. For instance, Judith Shklar's fine essay "Bergson and the Politics of Intuition," *Review of Politics* 20 (October 1958) 634–56, 637, describes how, for James, a "Bergsonian" "[i]ntuitive sympathy with a thing" constitutes the sole "way to really know it." Similarly, Richard M. Gale, "Pragmatism versus Mysticism: The Divided Self of William James," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), 241–86, 277, 242, argues that James's "backyard mysticism" entails a Martin Buber-like I/Thou intuition (curiously, in my view, Gale does not consider how this form of intuition might bridge the split between the promethean pragmatist and mystic sides of James's "divided self"). But Shklar and Gale, like others, leave unexplored the connection between James's and Emerson's views of intuition (Gale mentions Emerson parenthetically). Robert D. Richardson, *William James*, 434, is one of the few who have noted both James's belief in intuition and its derivation from Emerson's work.

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a kind of explanatory limbo—not plausibly explainable either in idealist terms or in scientific or materialist terms.[34] Additionally, intuition's emphasis on the unconscious mind and its nonrational or nonscientific aspects has, in light of certain historical events, seemed deeply dubious to many (see, for instance, Mario Bunge's *Intuition and Science* (1962), which blames romantic intuitionism for the rise of Nazism).

Clearly, the needs and problems of each historical moment shape its approach to any particular mode of thought and awareness. Indeed, when focusing on their respective historical contexts, we see that Emerson's embrace of intuition is plainly part of his reaction against Lockean epistemology and that James turns to the theme to counter absolutist versions of scientism and positivism. Yet, while their respective eras were marked by notable and important differences, both men confronted "the problem of modernity": an increasingly disenchanted modern world in which the organic links connecting individuals and communities to nature were being replaced by the dictates of a commercial, mechanistic, and materialistic outlook. Emerson and James find in intuition—a species of instinctive or mystic insight—an alternative to scientific and instrumental rationality offering, at least on occasion, access to transcendent values trumping the calculations of self-interest.[35] The either–or choice offered

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[34] John R. Searle, *Mind: A Brief Introduction* (New York, 2005), 48, 126.

[35] The phrase "the problem of modernity," calls to mind such familiar terms as "alienation," "anomie," and "estrangement" and such phrases as "the center cannot hold" and "[t]he mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." In a recent essay, Akeel Bilgrami reformulates this problem as the challenge of locating a source of meaning outside the self in a "disenchanted" world. Bilgrami's essay is part of a current resurgence of interest in the problem of modernity, including such works as Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007) and Pierre Hadot's *The Veil of Isis* (2006). Drawing on Weber's "Science as a Vocation" and other works, Bilgrami describes how, from the seventeenth century to the present, a nexus of commercial, religious, and scientific interests has effectively reduced the world to "brute" matter. Lacking full sentience, the things and creatures of this world are subject to human use, change, exploitation, even destruction without regard to anything other than our internally derived notions of value and calculations of self-interest—a license readily and disastrously extended to peoples deemed to be closer to "brute" nature (the used) than to rational humanity (the users). Of course, the sovereignty of the human will has not gone unchallenged. Bilgrami sketches a countertradition beginning in more radical versions of Enlightenment thought (e.g. John Toland) and continuing through Romanticism (e.g. Blake, Shelley, Morris, Thoreau, and Whitman) to such twentieth-century figures as Gandhi. For this countertradition, the world is "not brute but suffused with value," and as a result it makes "normative (ethical and social) demands on one, whether one [is] religious or not." Often, as Emerson and James and many others recognize, these "demands" or "values" are registered intuitively. The attempt by many in Bilgrami's countertradition (which should include Emerson and James) to formulate a compelling account of intuition represents a challenge to the absolute sovereignty of human reason and will. See Akeel

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by recent criticism—conflating Emerson and James in a proto-postmodern, antifoundationalist cast or dividing them into mutually exclusive categories of idealist believer and relativist skeptic—obscures the nature and significance of this connection. Combining doubt and belief, skepticism and faith, realism and idealism, intuition is, I contend, the answer that Emerson and James both offer to the problem of modernity—the problem of locating a source of value that is both of the self and beyond the self. It is my own hunch that Emerson's and James's notions of intuition offer a viable means of rediscovering a universe imbued with value and that this type of recovery of something like enchantment can usefully work to regulate and check our instrumental approach to the world we inhabit.

Naturally, over the course of their writings, Emerson's and James's invocations of intuition change in frequency and intensity, and there are many points where such shifts call out for a detailed contextualized analysis. In this essay, I do not take up such variations and trends in regard to either Emerson or James, aiming instead at a synchronic overview of each thinker's idea of intuition. While, in a shorthand fashion, I do attempt to indicate certain contextual elements bearing on each thinker's conception of intuition, my main concern here has been to focus on the words of both men, thinking that a wide-ranging yet close comparative analysis of their writings is the appropriate introduction to a largely ignored, transhistorical point of connection, a connection which is itself a significant historical as well as philosophical fact.

INTUITION IN EMERSON

In "The Transcendentalist," Emerson suggests that "the tendency to respect the intuitions" is so central to his era that "the history of genius and of religion in these times . . . will be the history of this tendency."[36] Intuition is plainly a fundamental theme in many of Emerson's best known essays. For instance, in "Self-Reliance," Emerson's recommendation of "self-trust" rests on his belief in intuition. When one looks for "the aboriginal Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded," the "inquiry leads us to that source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct. We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition." Intuition is "without calculable elements," a "deep force," a "sense of being which in calm hours rises, we know not how, in the soul," revealing that we are "not diverse from things . . . but one with them:

Bilgrami, "Occidentalism, the Very Idea: An Essay on Enlightenment and Enchantment," *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2006), 381–411.

[36] *EL*, 199. For an account of the precedents for Emerson's intuitionism, focusing particularly on the British romantics, see Patrick J. Keane's *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason* (Columbus, MO, 2005).

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We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity. When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams . . . Its presence or its absence is all we can affirm. Every man discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind, and his involuntary perceptions, and knows that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due. He may err in the expression of them, but he knows that these things are so, like day and night, not to be disputed . . . If I see a trait, my children will see it after me, and in course of time, all mankind,—although it may chance that no one has seen it before me. For my perception of it is as much a fact as the sun.[37]

An involuntary form of understanding, intuition is received from the "not me" or the "thou" of an "immense intelligence" to which we are all connected but which is beyond our will and superior to our merely rational exercises. The truth of the intuitive revelation is 'proven' not by logical demonstration but by the fact that it is eventually shared. In effect, Emerson indicates here the test by which we distinguish the genuine from the false intuition—the former eventually becomes the consensus view.

These excerpts from "Self-Reliance" capture something of the poetic power and unsystematic nature of Emerson's invocations of intuition. Like the idea itself, Emerson's descriptions are imaginative and poetic rather than analytic, attesting to what William James would call the importance of "the vague and inarticulate" to "our mental life."[38] In addition, despite the fact that many of Emerson's lengthier discussions have an "all-at-once" quality giving the reader the impression that intuition is being conjured in its entirety, different passages emphasize different aspects of the concept. The bits and pieces of Emerson's notion of intuition are scattered throughout his writings. Consequently, for a comprehensive understanding of Emerson's view of intuition, one has to collect and work through the many relevant passages, noting the various defining aspects of the concept as well as its myriad aliases, such as a "moral sentiment" (the "Divinity School Address" and "Lecture on the Times"); a "glad and conspiring reception" ("The Method of Nature"); "inspiration" and "ecstasy" ("The Transcendentalist"); "Spontaneity" and "Instinct" ("Self-Reliance"); a "deeper apprehension" ("History"); "revelation" ("The Oversoul," "Intellect"); "deeper insight," "ulterior intellectual perception," and "better perception" ("The

[37] *EL*, 268–9.

[38] *Psychology: Briefer Course, W: 1878–1899*, 164. Joseph Margolis, in *Pragmatism's Advantage* (Palo Alto, 2010), 93, criticizes James's "lax" diction for allowing objectionable idealist notions, such as a glimpsed but never quite fully understood truth, to slip into the discussion as a "limit concept." This, of course, is only a problem if one wants, like Margolis or Rorty, to cast pragmatism as thoroughly relativistic and hostile to all invocations of transcendent truth.

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Poet"); "sentiment of right" and "reason of reason" ("Anniversary of West Indian Emancipation"); and "moonshine" (*WO Liberty Journal*).[39]

One of the most important and defining traits of the intuitive experience for Emerson is the sensation that it comes from a source outside the self, "from some alien energy." Suddenly, when one least expects it, some insight, better perspective, or solution to a problem arrives, unbidden and surprising, in "flashes of light," "as if the clouds" covering the truth "parted at intervals." The intuitive insight feels both strange *and* authoritative because it appears to come from outside the self and is beyond one's control: "Thoughts come into our minds by avenues which we never left open." In its novelty and unexpectedness, the intuitive insight is orthogonal, cutting across our routine ways of thinking and being. This disruptive or orthogonal aspect of intuition, the fact that it comes "not by accustomed ways," prevents it from being dismissed as a projection of our own interests, predilections, or biases. The new truth of intuition helps to "disburden the memory of its hoarded treasures as old rubbish." Unlike the thrilling and often disturbing flash of intuition, the common, nonintuitive form of thought resembles "grind[ing] in the mill of a truism, and nothing comes out but what was put in." Locked in our customary points of reference, we formulate proverbs and propositions, which can only reproduce themselves.[40]

Received rather than made, intuition resembles a secular form of grace requiring renunciation and "a certain obedience."[41] "There is," says Emerson, "guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening we shall hear the right word," alluding to Raphael's instruction to Adam in *Paradise Lost* to be "lowly wise" (Book VIII, l. 173).[42] Lowly listening is another name for intuition. Comparable to the self-effacement in John Keats's notion of negative capability, renunciation of self prepares the way for intuitive insight: "Every step so downward, is a step upward. The man who renounces himself, comes to himself." The counterpart of renunciation is sympathy, "the secrets of life are not shown except to sympathy," which, as a type of identification, posits a relation of equals.[43] Together, renunciation and sympathy enable an unmediated and direct encounter with the "not-me" of nature, other people, or God. In a passage anticipating Martin Buber's and Martin Heidegger's notions of intersubjectivity as well as Louis

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39 *EL*, 76, 168, 116–17, 196, 268, 244–3, 392, 422, 455, 456; Emerson, *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, ed. Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson (New Haven, 1995), 37 (hereafter this volume is cited as *Antislavery Writings*); *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. William H. Gilman *et al.*, 16 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1960–1982),14: 404 (hereafter citations of this edition of Emerson's journals appear as *JMN*).

40 "Oversoul," "Experience," "Self-Reliance," "Literary Ethics," *EL*, 385, 484, 395, 271, 100.

41 "Oversoul," *EL*, 391, 392.

42 "Spiritual Laws," *EL*, 309.

43 "Divinity School Address," "Montaigne; Or, The Skeptic," *EL*, 77, 696.

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Kahn's intuitive approach to building materials, Emerson describes sympathetic understanding as a "deeper apprehension": "nobody could draw a tree without in some sort becoming a tree."[44] Through renunciation and sympathy, "the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object," can become "one." For Emerson, this feeling of interconnection defines the "better emotion" or "higher thought" of intuitive reason: "The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them."[45] Emerson uses "occult" here and elsewhere to conjure the sense of realities and relations accessible to intuition, such as the reciprocal awareness of human being and natural object, which are unavailable to ordinary understanding. By enabling us to recognize the unfamiliar in the familiar, the new in the old, intuition prevents the habitual from controlling and deadening our encounters with the "not-me."

Not opposed to but rather a species of cognition, intuition works by analogy to discern some significant correspondence or association between discrete things: for instance, the tourist's sense "on entering York Minster or St. Peter's at Rome" "that these structures are . . . faint copies of an invisible archetype" or a reader's feeling of the kinship between a poem and a "wild mountain walk." Not "obvious to the senses," these strikingly apt feelings of some essential but not wholly accountable resemblance are "occult and out of the reach of the understanding"—here meaning logical analysis.[46] As we will see, William James illustrates intuition's analogical function with the example of the person who senses but cannot explain the likeness of Michelangelo's art and Beethoven's music. Whether the resemblance is testament to an ideal unity (e.g. the spiritual identity of two apparently different things) or whether it is a sense of commonality between essentially discrete things, the process with its mixture of cognition (the act of comparison) and feeling (the vague sense of some essential kinship) is the same.

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44 "History," *EL*, 244. As Anthony Rudd, *Expressing the World: Skepticism, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003) 231–47, points out, both Buber and Heidegger illustrate intersubjectivity by imagining a sympathetic encounter with a tree. Famously, Louis Kahn, *Essential Texts*, (New York: Norton, 2003), 270–71, spoke of honoring the nature of building materials through a form of intuitive recognition: "You say to brick, 'What do you want, brick?' And brick says to you, 'I like an arch.'" Joseph A. Burton, "The Aesthetic Education of Louis I. Kahn, 1912–1924," *Perspecta* 28 (1997), 204–17, 204, cites Emerson and a particular mixture of transcendentalism and pragmatism as early influences on Kahn's aesthetics.

45 "Oversoul," *Nature*, *EL*, 386, 11.

46 *Nature*, "History," *EL*, 43–4, 243. Emerson associates "understanding" with rationalism and "reason" with intuition: "There is no doctrine of the Reason which will bear to be taught by the Understanding." "Divinity School Address," *EL*, 80.

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But intuition is clearly also something more than thought, it is "beyond explanation." Perceiving "that there are far more excellent qualities in the student than preciseness and infallibility," Emerson subordinates rationalism to the "dream" that "may let us deeper into the secret of nature than a hundred concerted experiments." [47] Anticipating a similar observation by James, Emerson notes that intuition brings certainty without analytic proof, it "transcends all proving." Thus, while it is part cognition, intuition does not tally with the typical analytic process (consider, for instance, jurors who know by some inexplicable means when a witness or lawyer is not being honest: "Men know not why they do not trust him; but they do not trust him"). Of course, viewed from a rationalistic perspective, such intuitive conclusions are highly suspect. Rationalism requires an intelligible account of premises, evidence, conclusions, and the analytic process leading from the one to the other, and these requirements are not only hostile to intuition but actively obstruct it, producing self-consciousness about and distrust of the intuition's unaccountable truths. For Emerson, "the unschooled farmer's boy" stands "nearer to the light by which nature is to be read, than the dissector or the antiquary."[48]

Unlike the cool, detached, and ordered sense of attending to rational thought and calculation, intuition is often experienced as a kind of ravishment, a feeling of being carried away or overwhelmed, which can be, as both Emerson and James note, simulated by means of intoxication: "This is the reason why bards love wine, mead, narcotics, coffee, tea, opium, the fumes of sandal-wood and tobacco, or whatever other species of animal exhilaration ... [the] *quasi*-mechanical substitutes for the true nectar, which is the ravishment of the intellect by coming nearer to the fact." By releasing one from the bondage of daily cares, intoxication has the potential to create a sense of endless interconnection with other people and a blissful acceptance of the world in all its diversity. Genuine, non-artificial intuition follows a similar pattern. If one can set aside society's notions of prudent reasoning and "listen with insatiable ears," "richer and greater wisdom" becomes available, and "the sound swells to a ravishing music, he is borne away as with a flood, he becomes careless of his food and of his house, he is the fool of ideas, and leads a heavenly life."[49]

Intuition, like other Emersonian themes, encompasses striking tensions or contradictions. For instance, intuition is a passive kind of "pious reception" in which "[w]e only open our senses, clear away, as we can, all obstruction from the fact, and suffer the intellect to see."[50] Yet it also requires an "active

47 "The Method of Nature," *Nature*, *EL*, 117, 43.

48 *JMN*, 5: 337; "Spiritual Laws," "History," *EL*, 319, 256.

49 "The Poet," "The Method of Nature," *EL*, 460, 124-–5.

50 "Intellect," *EL*, 419.

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soul" and the audacious leaps and inventions "wrought by the imagination" and apparently native to the "intuitive habit of thought."[51] It provides the means of a "deeper apprehension" into the universal "divine model." But it is, says Emerson, irreducibly particular: "It cannot be received at second hand," and, for the person who has not had the experience, the intuitive insight is only a "provocation."[52] As "an influx of the Divine mind into our mind," it seems to give us access to a mystic plane of experience distant from daily concerns.[53] Yet intuition also calls us to the things of this world, directing our practical and moral judgment. The "primary teaching" of the "heart" offers us "new & original confirmation" of truths unafflicted by the "palsy of tradition."[54] Moral intuitions, such as John Woolman's and Thomas Clarkson's epiphanies that slavery is unjust, often seem like "moonshine" to the representatives of convention, which passes for practicality, the "Judges, Bank Presidents, Railroad men, men of fashion, [and] lawyers."[55] However, what begins as an inspired inkling can grow into a consensus. The emancipation in the West Indies was just such "a moral revolution . . . achieved by plain means of plain men, working not under a leader, but under a sentiment."[56]

The most important and defining of these tensions or paradoxes is Emerson's sense that intuition combines both doubt and belief. Intuitive insight is always attended by a humble sense that the view proffered in the moment of inspiration exposes only a small portion of larger truths, which, in their entirety, will always remain beyond human comprehension. A moment's revelation can occasion "uneasiness" and "discontent" by revealing that the "philosophy of six thousand years has not searched the chambers and magazines of the soul. In its experiments there has always remained, in the last analysis, a residuum it could not resolve."[57] The fact that "[t]he last chamber, the last closet . . . was never opened," that "there is always a residuum unknown, unanalyzable," humbles us, but it also fuels our belief that we have "a greater possibility."[58] Emerson's statement that there is always some "residuum unknown, unanalyzable" reminds us of our continuing ignorance, and that ignorance logically entails uncertainty, doubt that flows from uncertainty, and the anticipation of change as new intuitions come along modifying previous insights. Thus the unresolved "residuum" and the doubt

51 "The American Scholar," "Uses of Great Men," *EL*, 57, 622.
52 "History," "Divinity School Address," *EL*, 244, 79.
53 "Oversoul," *EL*, 392.
54 *JMN*, 7: 150.
55 *Antislavery Writings*, 12; *JMN*, 14: 404.
56 *Antislavery Writings*, 26.
57 "Oversoul," *EL*, 385.
58 "Circles," *EL*, 405–6.

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and uncertainty it creates are not a cause for despair but a figure of mystery, possibility, surprise, and agency (James welcomes "the unclassified residuum" as the "great field for new discoveries" and objects to Hegel's "all-devouring" idealism on the ground that it "leave[s] no residuum").[59] Uncertainty and doubt as well as hope and faith are the unavoidable aspects of insights produced by "a stream whose source is hidden" and whose "incalculable" truths "balk" the "most exact calculator."[60]

This "pragmatist" embrace of uncertainty and doubt shared by Emerson and James comes with an avid appreciation for the excitement of ideas in flux—the surprise of new realization breaking the routine of past conclusions, past lessons. For Emerson, poetry exemplifies this potential: "some Petrarch or Ariosto, filled with the new wine of his imagination, writes me an ode or a brisk romance, full of daring thought and action. He smites and arouses me with his shrill tones, breaks up my whole chain of habits, and I open my eye on my own possibilities." In "the highest order of minds," James says, the routine of thoughts "patiently following one another in a beaten track of habitual suggestion" is providentially disrupted by "the most abrupt cross-cuts and transitions from one idea to another . . . where everything is fizzling and bobbing about in a state of bewildering activity, where partnerships can be joined or loosened in an instant, tread-mill routine is unknown, and the unexpected seems the only law." Both men relish the discomfort and disorientation that comes from some unlikely expression or startling discovery derailing the stasis of tradition, convention, and habit, their excitement increasing in proportion to the sharpness of the interruption and the turbulence created by the new intellectual action.[61]

Emerson is well aware that many would prefer to "keep forever the beautiful limits . . . and perfect calculation of the kingdom of known cause and effect." But such "peace" is disrupted by intuition: "presently comes a day with its angel-whispering,—which discomfits the conclusions of nations and of years!"[62] "Angel-whispering" is, Neal Dolan argues, "a reference to humanity's distinctive metaphysical hunger, its seemingly innate hankering for 'absolute truth' and 'absolute good,'" which runs counter to the middle way of common sense, moderation, and pragmatism. Dolan writes,

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59 *The Will to Believe, W: 1878–1899*, 680, 672 (hereafter cited as *Will*). For other scholarship placing and elaborating on Emerson's and James's respective acceptances of uncertainty see Paul Jerome Croce, *Science and Religion in the Era of William James: Eclipse of Certainty, 1820–1880* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995); David Jacobson, *Emerson's Pragmatic Vision: The Dance of the Eye* (University Park, PA, 1993); and Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory*.

60 "Oversoul," *EL*, 385.

61 "The Poet," *EL*, 408–9; "Great Men and Their Environment," *Writings: 1878–1899* (New York: Library of America, 1992), 641–2 (this volume is hereafter cited as *W: 1878–1899*).

62 "Experience," *EL*, 482.

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> We must trust our deeper intuitions when they tell us that there is a higher kind of knowledge, a larger and more fundamental moral–metaphysical insight that will not yield itself to the strictly pragmatic mind. To attune ourselves to this transcendent principle or "Power," we need to retain a bit of skeptical openness even as we move beyond skepticism.[63]

Dolan is right that, for Emerson, skepticism is part of and counterpart to intuition. We "undulate" or oscillate, in Emerson's view, between the poles of belief-inspiring intuition and skepticism (indeed, "Undulation, Alternation, is," says Emerson, "the condition of progress, of life."). Skepticism inevitably arises in the periods separating the intuitive "affirmations of the soul." [64] However, Emerson's transcendentalism and James's pragmatism are much closer in regard to this combination of skepticism and belief than Dolan suspects.

Emerson stands on the skeptic's "middle ground" between "[t]he abstractionist and the materialist." "The ground occupied by the skeptic is," Emerson says, "the vestibule of the temple." That is to say, his position is neither wholly without nor within the temple. This skeptical posture keeps the mind open to genuine inspiration by working against both false beliefs *and* the scoffer's hostility to all belief. Unlike habit or conventionality, which keep us comfortable and abort our intuitive perceptions of surprising and discomfiting truths, a healthy skepticism prepares the way for intuition by calling into question "the existing order" and interrogating "custom at all points." It turns out, in Emerson's meditation on Montaigne, that the orientation of the skeptic and the believer are one and the same. The skeptic, says Emerson,

> denies out of more faith, and not less. He denies out of honesty . . . I believe, he says, in the moral design of the universe . . . but your dogmas seem to me caricatures: why should I make believe them? . . . The wise and magnanimous . . . will exult in his far-sighted good-will that can abandon to the adversary all the ground of tradition and common belief, without losing a jot of strength . . . George Fox saw that there was "an ocean of darkness and death; but withal an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over that of darkness."[65]

For Emerson, belief, to be genuine, must combine the skepticism of Montaigne with the mystical perception of George Fox.

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63 Dolan, *Emerson's Liberalism*, 159.

64 *JMN* 7: 14; "Montaigne," *EL*, 706; for an extended discussion of the skeptical aspects of Emerson's outlook see John Michael, *Emerson and Skepticism: The Cipher of the World* (Baltimore, 1988).

65 "Montaigne," *EL*, 693, 702, 707–8.

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INTUITION IN JAMES

Like Emerson, James finds in the vastness of human ignorance the possibility of intuitive understanding. Our human perspective, says James, is analogous to that of our pets: "I firmly disbelieve, myself, that our human experience is the highest form of experience extant in the universe. I believe rather that we stand in much the same relation to the whole of the universe as our canine and feline pets do to the whole of human life."[66] Like our pets, we inhabit a world with meanings and significances far exceeding our analytic abilities and understanding. "After all that reason can do [has] been done," says James, "there still remains the opacity of the finite facts as merely given, with most of their peculiarities mutually unmediated and unexplained." This opacity, similar to Emerson's "unanalyzable residuum," creates a considerable degree of uncertainty: "Objective evidence and certitude are doubtless very fine ideals to play with, but where," James asks, "on this moonlit and dream-visited planet are they found?"[67] Yet such uncertainty is not bad news. On the contrary, "Certainty," says James, quoting Blood, "is the root of despair. The inevitable stales, while doubt and hope are sisters. Not unfortunately the universe is wild—game flavored as a hawk's wing."[68] Uncertainty means there will always be more for us to discover, always the possibility of some new insight or distinctive perspective. For James, by confessing "an ultimate opacity in things" and "a dimension of being which escapes our theoretic control," we keep open the rousing possibility that "our wills are free." And as our pets may have an inchoate and incomplete sense of some broader significance or structure underlying existence, so we too may have kindred, transcendental intuitions "that higher powers exist and are at work" in the universe.[69]

James's idea of intuition shares many defining traits with Emerson's.[70] For instance, the rightness of the intuitive insight is something that is distinctly felt but cannot be fully articulated. James offers Shakespeare as an example of this intuitive power to pass from given premises to surprising but right

66 *Pragmatism*, 619.

67 *Will*, 447, 466.

68 "A Pluralistic Mystic," 1312.

69 *Will*, 564; *Pragmatism*, 619.

70 Any inquiry into the relation between James's and Emerson's views of intuition should note that Emerson, along with Benjamin Blood, Gustav Flechner, Henri Bergson, William Wordsworth, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman, exemplified the intuitive mind to James: "Truth came to [Emerson] in gleams." James, *Manuscript Essays and Notes*, 316. To illustrate the way that a "higher vision of an inner significance . . . often comes over a person suddenly; and when it does so, it makes and epoch in his history," James turns to Emerson: "As Emerson says, there is a depth in those moments that constrains us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences." "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," *W: 1878–1899*, 848.

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conclusions: "The abrupt transitions in Shakespeare's thought astonish the reader by their unexpectedness no less than they delight him by their fitness." "Why, for instance, does the death of Othello so stir the spectator's blood and leave him with a sense of reconcilement," James asks; "Shakespeare, whose mind supplied these means, could probably not have told why they were so effective." The authority of intuition appears to be discerned by the subject, in James's account, as deriving from its mysterious nature—it astonishes and seems to come from some "deeper level" than mere rationality. Its "fitness" is somehow both inexplicably recognizable and surprising. In intuiting something, our "thought obeys a *nexus*, but cannot name it." "[A]sk your most educated friend," says James, "why Beethoven reminds him of Michael Angelo, or how it comes that a bare figure with unduly flexed joints, by the latter, can so suggest the moral tragedy of life," and you will receive no adequate answer.[71] Implicit in James's comparison of Beethoven and Michelangelo is the notion that these very different artists from very different historical and cultural moments share a transcendent aesthetic and moral language and that we dimly perceive that common argot in our intuitive and inarticulate sense of their connectedness.

Though we cannot articulate exactly how it works, the intuitive process draws on and is fed by experience: "Saturated with experience of a particular class of materials, an expert intuitively feels whether a newly-reported fact is probable or not, whether a proposed hypothesis is worthless or the reverse."[72] Recalling Hume's account of the true judge (e.g. the experienced wine connoisseur who can tell which wine comes from the cask with the iron key in it), James uses interest, training, and the accretion of experience to explain, in part, the 'magic' of the apt intuitive conclusion, which seems to come out of nowhere. Confronted with a novel or difficult question, one's extensive experience in the field in question produces an 'instinctive' sense of what "will be the promising course of action." James illustrates this idea with the "well-known" story "of the old judge advising the new one never to give reasons for his decisions, 'the decisions will probably be right, the reasons will surely be wrong.'" The appropriate verdict leaping to the mind of the wise judge is based implicitly on "all the countless previous cases dimly suggested by the actual one, all calling up the same conclusion, which the adept thus finds himself swept on to, he knows not how or why."[73] Experience, in this formulation, grounds a hunch that proves to be better than the expert's best justification. Citing James, Judge Joseph C. Hutcheson Jr and Justice Benjamin Cardozo candidly admit that, in certain instances, judicial reasoning has to proceed "by feeling" rather than "by calculation." In these instances, the

[71] *Principles*, 985–6, 988.

[72] "Brute and Human Intellect," *W: 1878–1899*, 945–6.

[73] *Principles*, 988.

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judge accepts the novel legal question in its confusing entirety, trying "to feel, or hunch out a new category into which to place relations under his investigation," a concept capable of fully addressing the particular circumstances of the case while serving the normative goal of establishing and/or modifying rules in light of an always developing sense of justice.[74]

This is not to say, however, that intuition is merely a matter of training and expertise. To stimulate the process of intuitive judgment, the question at hand must be unexpected and not easily resolved by reference to precedent. Past experience forms the backdrop for the flash of intuitional understanding but does not fully account for the insight, which can seem like Emerson's "moonshine" from a conventional point of view, especially in the instance of the atypical moral dilemma:

> The most characteristically and peculiar moral judgments that a man is ever called on to make are in unprecedented cases and lonely emergencies, where no popular rhetorical maxims can avail, and the hidden oracle alone can speak; and it speaks often in favor of conduct quite unusual, and suicidal as far as gaining popular approbation goes. The forces which conspire to this resultant are subtle harmonies and discords between the elementary ideas which form the data of the case.[75]

In this passage, James singles out the unprecedented decision as the quintessential example of ethical reasoning (not unlike Emerson's examples of John Woolman's and Thomas Clarkson's antislavery epiphanies). The discordant unconventionality of the decision attests to the genuineness of its moral insight. Orthogonal to one's background and inclinations, intuitive listening to the "hidden oracle" is tied, for James as for Emerson, to the possibility of innovation and discovery.[76]

In the phrase "subtle harmonies and discords," James economically indicates two of the other key facets of intuition: it works by comparison, and it is intimately

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74 Joseph C. Hutcheson Jr, "The Judgment Intuitive: The Function of the 'Hunch' in Judicial Decision," *Cornell Law Quarterly* 14 (1928–9), 274–88, 282, 275.

75 *Principles*, 1265.

76 Many scholars have noted the importance of experience or "life itself" to James's pragmatism. For some, James's turn to experience is overtly antitranscendental and antifoundationalist. See, for instance, Frank Lentricchia, "The Romanticism of William James," *Salmagundi* 25 (1974), 81–108, 107. Charlene Haddock Seigfried, "Like Bridges without Piers: Beyond the Foundationalist Metaphor," in Tom Rockmore and Beth J. Singer, eds., *Antifoundationalism: Old and New* (Philadelphia, 1992), 143–64, 157, argues that James's pragmatic theory of truth redirects our attention from foundations to the "feedback loop" of experience. However, such accounts of James's thought ignore his appreciation of surprising or unexpected insights that cut across or interrupt the feedback loop of our own repeated testing of experience and seem to have a source beyond or supplementary to our usual reasoning processes.

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connected with our aesthetic and poetic sense. "[U]nrivalled powers of similar association," says James, distinguish human beings from other animals. His example of Homer's metaphoric image of the suitors killed by Ulysses—fish scattered "around the sands, while the blazing sun takes their life from them"—captures the comparative and aesthetic aspects of intuition.[77] The metaphor's comparison is apt in that it makes sense, but it is also startling and harrowing. Like W. K. Wimsatt's notion of the concrete universal, the intuitive metaphor combines the *universal* (in the analogy's abstraction of a connection between two discrete things) and the *particular* (in the keen appreciation of the details and entirety of each thing being compared). Mixing certain cognitive acts with aesthetic responses, thought with feeling, intuition is different from analytic reasoning.

Resembling his separation of philosophic orientations into the "tender-" and "tough-" minded "types of mental make-up," James describes the distinction between intuition and analysis as a matter of temperament. "At first sight," James notes, "it might seem . . . that the intuitive mind represented an arrested stage of intellectual development; but the difference is not so simple as this." The analytic or "scientific" orientation may derive from "an *absence* of certain emotional sensibilities." If we suppose, James writes,

> a mind fertile in the suggestion of analogies, but, at the same time, keenly interested in the particulars of each suggested image, that mind would be far less apt to single out the particular character which called up the analogy than one whose interests were less generally lively. A certain richness of the aesthetic nature may, therefore, easily keep one in the intuitive stage.[78]

Once again connecting the intuitive and the aesthetic, James's characterization of the intuitive personality as predisposed to be "keenly interested in the particulars of each suggested image" implies a heightened capacity for "a kind of passive and receptive listening quite contrary to that effort to react noisily and verbally on everything, which is our usual intellectual pose" (a passage recalling Emerson's "lowly listening"). Seeking to "understand life by concepts," analysis "arrest[s]" life's "movement, cutting it up into bits" and "comparing them as dried specimens" so as to "ascertain which of them statically includes or excludes which other."[79] By contrast, intuitions "judge rightly, classify cases, characterize them by the most striking analogic epithets, but go no further."[80] The analytic

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77 *Principles*, 985.

78 Ibid., 984–5.

79 *Pluralistic Universe*, 746, 739.

80 *Principles*, 985.

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personality insists on being in control, seizing the relevant detail and disposing of the rest. The intuitive personality renounces this kind of authority and control.

In marked distinction to Emerson's era, James's own moment is, he observes, decidedly hostile to intuition and bent upon reducing all forms of thought and consciousness to conceptual analysis—an attempt "to abolish the last vestiges of intuition, *videlicet* of concrete reality, from the field of reasoning, which then will operate literally on mental dots or bare abstract units of discourse, and on the ways in which they may be strung in naked series."[81] The analytic may have "the *prestige* undoubtedly, for it has the loquacity, it can challenge you for proofs, and chop logic, and put you down with words," but, James argues, the part such rationalism plays in the "whole" of our mental lives "is relatively superficial."[82] While it is clearly indispensable to our knowledge of how things work, analytic thought is limited to dealing with "surfaces," "It can name the thickness of reality, but it cannot fathom it."[83] The intuitive provides sustaining glimpses of the "flowing sort of reality which we finite beings swim in" and offers the possibility of access to the "higher sort of reality—the 'absolute,' for example," which is "is still less amenable to ordinary logic."[84] Echoing Emerson's notion that intuition is quintessentially a firsthand experience that "transcends all proving," James says that analysis "will fail to convince you or convert you[,] if your dumb intuitions are opposed to its conclusions." Intuitions derive from "a deeper level of your nature" than mere rationalism, including "your impulses, your faiths, your needs, your divinations." This unseen and unseeable process finds its way to a "result" that is "truer than any logic-chopping rationalistic talk, however clever, that may contradict it." Particularly in "the metaphysical and religious sphere," James observes, "articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of the same conclusion."[85]

For James as for Emerson, intuition has two primary functions—as a practical guide and as an avenue of spiritual or mystic insight. For Emerson the practical value of intuition lies in its capacity to impart standards for human behavior, particularly the way it can discover an unconventional but ultimately correct basis for a difficult moral decision. For James, intuition's practical aspect takes the form of a non-analytic approach to problems in which the solution seems to come out of nowhere: "When walking along the street, thinking of the blue sky[,] I may suddenly catch an intuition of the solution of a long-unsolved problem,

81 *Pluralistic Universe*, 740.
82 *Varieties*, 73, original emphasis.
83 *Pluralistic Universe*, 745.
84 Ibid., at 726.
85 *Varieties*, 73–4.

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which at that moment was far from my thoughts."[86] This process is marked by the fact that the solution seems to have an inexplicable source and cannot be willed. In *Varieties*, James provides a commonplace illustration of this process of "letting go"—the unexpected recollection of a forgotten name. We start "by mentally running over the places, persons, and things with which the word was connected." However, James notes, this effort sometimes not only does not avail but seems counterproductive: "you feel then as if the harder you tried the less hope there would be, as though the name were jammed, and pressure in its direction only kept it all the more from rising." The name can only come when you renounce the effort entirely, and, while thinking of "something altogether different," "the lost name comes sauntering into your mind, as Emerson says, as carelessly as if it had never been invited. Some hidden process was started into by the effort, which went on after the effort ceased, and made the result come as if it came spontaneously."[87] Surrender somehow enables the insight to come to one from a "hidden" source in the subconscious or subliminal mind. This process may take place within one's brain, but it is significantly experienced as coming from *outside* or *beyond* the waking, daily self of rational thought and calculation. That the sought-after thing comes when one ceases to struggle for it seems to hint at the presence of another being or an active principle within one's subliminal or unconscious mind which steps in to do what one or one's conscious efforts could not.

Intuition's other main function for James is as an occasional, nonrational form of insight into broader, transcendent truths about our relation to each other and the world we live in. To illustrate the mystic version of intuition, James quotes from Whitman's *Specimen Days*:

> "There is," he writes, "apart from mere intellect, in the make-up of every superior human identity, a wondrous something that realizes without argument, frequently without what is called education (though I think it the goal and apex of all education deserving the name), an intuition of the absolute balance, in time and space, of the whole of this multifariousness, this revel of fools, and incredible make-believe and general unsettledness, we call the world; a soul-sight of that divine clue and unseen thread which holds the whole congeries

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86 *Will*, 643

87 *Varieties*, 191. Compare James's description of the unlooked-for solution and Emerson's account of the "unannounced truth": "We say, I will walk abroad, and the truth will take form and clearness to me. We go forth, but cannot find it. It seems as if we needed only the stillness and composed attitude of the library to seize the thought. But we come in, and are as far from it as at first. Then, in a moment, and unannounced, the truth appears. A certain, wandering light appears, and is the distinction, the principle, we wanted . . . So now you must labor with your brains, and now you must forbear your activity, and see what the great Soul showeth." "Intellect," *EL*, 420.

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of things, all history and time, and all events, however trivial, however momentous, like a leashed dog in the hand of the hunter."[88]

More than mere intellect, beyond argument and education, intuition, in its mystic form, offers a vision of the "divine clue and unseen thread" running through all things. But it is worth noting that in Whitman's formulation this intuitively divined "thread" does not deny or erase "multifariousness" and "unsettledness" of the world or the foolishness of our various revelries. The trivial and the momentous are connected but are not thereby made homologous.

Trying to explain in empirical terms the mental mechanism of such intuitive and mystic visions, James speculates in *Varieties* that the mind may have a subliminal mode of connection to a higher order of experience. Just as everyday rational consciousness opens the senses to material reality,

> so it is logically conceivable that *if there be* higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch us, the psychological condition of their doing so *might be* our possession of a subconscious region which alone should yield access to them. The hubbub of the waking life might close a door which in the dreamy Subliminal might remain ajar or open.[89]

In other words, having earlier in the same text considered the spontaneous arrival of an intuitive solution to a problem such as a forgotten name to be the product of a "subconscious" or "subliminal" facet of the brain, James here theorizes that this less voluble and less self-conscious part of our mental makeup may, on occasion, open on to a vista of the transcendent.[90] For James, "states of mystical intuition may be only very sudden and great extensions of the ordinary 'field of consciousness.'"[91]

To understand the relation of James's idea of intuition to his pragmatism, one has to separate his openness to any form of insight, including mystic revelation, from the consequentialism that ultimately justifies our belief in any idea or conception: "On pragmatic principles we can not reject any hypothesis if consequences useful to life flow from it."[92] In other words, the pragmatist tests any intuition by looking to its effects, its results, the way it addresses

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88 *Varieties*, 357 n. 1.

89 Ibid., 223, original emphasis. For James, the chief "originality" of *Varieties* "consists in the suggestion (*very* brief) that our official self is continuous with more of us than appears (subliminal self) which accounts for the 'striking' experiences of religious persons; and this 'more' on the farther side lies open to transempirical realities, and this might allow for the sense of 'union' and other mystical experiences being true." Frederick J. Down Scott, ed., *William James: Selected Unpublished Correspondence—1885–1910* (Columbus, OH, 1986), 280–81.

90 *Varieties*, 193.

91 "A Suggestion about Mysticism," *W: 1902–1910*, 1272.

92 *Pragmatism*, 606.

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our needs or makes the world a better place: "The gods we stand by are the gods we need and can use, the gods whose demands on us are reinforcements of our demands on ourselves and on one another."[93] As is the case with Emerson, James's openness to mystic insight does not negate the uncertainty and doubt that attend all mental endeavors: "to hold any" belief "as if it never could be re-interpretable or corrigible" is "a tremendously mistaken attitude."[94] When it comes to religious experience, James notes, uncertainty is particularly unavoidable. "A genuine first-hand religious experience like [George Fox's]," James observes, "is bound to be a heterodoxy to its witnesses, the prophet appearing as a mere lonely madman." Whether the mystic's vision becomes common wisdom or is permanently consigned to the class of eccentric delusions depends on its adoption by others, a point resembling Emerson's description of how the genuine intuition eventually becomes the consensus view.[95]

To gauge the general value of this mystic type of intuition, James suggests that we consider the critical stakes raised by his era's turning away from the absolute:

> The prestige of the absolute has rather crumbled in our hands . . . But if we drop the absolute out of the world, must we then conclude that the world contains nothing better in the way of consciousness than our consciousness? Is our whole instinctive belief in higher presences, our persistent inner turning towards divine companionship, to count for nothing?[96]

To answer "yes" to these questions is to make human reason and its calculations of self-interest the measure of all beings, things, and behaviors. It is to abandon hope for a locus of meaning and value outside the self. To borrow from Alfred North Whitehead, this outcome presents us with a "trivial" universe robbed of its essential importance.[97]

This is the crucial need addressed by intuitions of the mystic or transcendent type. Instead of an Olympian or Archimedean analytic frame of reference from outside life, monistically containing and explaining existence in its entirety, intuition, in its pluralistic form, is a mode of consciousness that, engaging this world in all its particularity and richness, can "redeem life from its insignificance."[98] It reveals, says James, a transformed, value-filled cosmos: "The universe is no longer a mere *It* to us, but a *Thou*" (when Martin Buber described his

93 *Varieties*, 303.
94 *Will*, 466.
95 *Varieties*, 305–6, 307.
96 *Pluralistic Universe*, 690.
97 Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York, 1938), 84, 148.
98 "What Makes a Life Significant," *W: 1878–1899*, 877.

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intellectual family tree, he listed James as one of his philosophical forbears).[99] To illustrate, James quotes a passage from *Walden*, resembling Emerson's description of the "occult relation between man and vegetable": "Every little pine-needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again." Intuition of this type puts the individual into meaningful and reciprocal relation with creation. As James puts it in *Varieties*, such experiences provide a view of something "higher" or "more" than the thoughts and calculations encompassed by mere rationality.[100]

CONCLUSION

The idea of intuition shared by Emerson and James is perhaps most familiar to us as John Keats's "negative capability," canonized in the postwar era as the very signature of humanistic understanding in opposition to the "anti-thought" of both Stalinism and mass consumerism. In *Art as Experience*, John Dewey uses "intuition" to gloss Keats's idea of a "negative capability" that trumps "consecutive reasoning," "even against objections" raised by analytic "reflection."[101] In addition to signifying a capacity of going beyond the self ("Shakespeare had only to think of anything in order to become that thing," says William Hazlitt, in a famous phrase influencing Keats), negative capability signals a marked tolerance of doubt and indeterminacy.[102] Skeptically robust, in Geoffrey Hartman's words, "'negative capability' . . . aims not to overcome the negative or indeterminate but to stay within it as long as it is necessary."[103] It resembles Henry James's description, in *The Ambassadors* (1903), of the "detachment in [Lambert Strether's] zeal" and the "curiosity in his indifference," attributes which are critical to Strether's exceptional ability to remain in a state of uncertainty waiting for a hunch or moment of insight.[104] Or as Lionel Trilling puts it, the self, endowed with negative capability, "can do without the armor of systematic certainties" and "refus[es] to be fixed in any final judgment."[105] What Keats called negative

99 *Will*, 476, original emphasis; Rémi Brague, "How to Be in the World: Gnosis, Religion, Philosophy," in Paul B. Mendes-Flohr, ed., *Martin Buber: A Contemporary Perspective* (Syracuse, NY, 2002), 133–47, 139.

100 *Varieties*, 252 n. 1, 455–6.

101 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York, 2005), 33–4.

102 W. Jackson Bate, *John Keats* (Cambridge, MA, 1963), 260.

103 Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today* (New Haven, 1980), 270.

104 Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (New York, 1986), 56.

105 Lionel Trilling, *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent: Selected Essays* (New York, 2000), 249–50, 245.

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capability and John Dewey, James, and Emerson called intuition, in which belief arises from and does not rout uncertainty and skepticism, is arguably now what we mean by "intelligence."

By combining belief and skepticism in a productive and mutually sustaining relation, intuition presents an alternative to the "either–or" choice between "rational nihilism or irrational fideism," and it illuminates the common ground between Richard Poirier's notion of a "linguistic skepticism," enabling Emerson and James to go "beyond skepticism, to possibilities of personal and cultural renewal," and Stanley Cavell's idea of Emersonian perfectionism, which proceeds "aversively," accepting skepticism as intrinsic to "our investment in words, in the world."[106] The issue is not how we can get from doubt to faith but how we can simultaneously sustain, as James Merrill says, two minds—the skeptical and the credulous.[107] Emerson and James share a desire to have it both ways, and like T. S. Eliot's fictional character Eeldrop (surely a self-portrait), they tend to be "sceptic[s] with a taste for mysticism" (or mystics with a taste for skepticism).[108]

[106] Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 44, 324; Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism*, 11; Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago, 1990), 61.

[107] Marshall Brown, "Negative Poetics: On Skepticism and the Lyric Voice," *Representations* 86 (2004), 120–40, 133.

[108] Jeffrey M. Perl and Andrew P. Tuck, "The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot's Indic Studies," *Philosophy East and West* 35 (1985), 115–31, 126.

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