

## Preface

The papers assembled in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* chiefly date from the late work of William James, 1904-1907—the single exception being the final 1884 essay “Absolutism and Empiricism.” James conceived a plan for a book in 1907 and placed a collection of his essays in an envelope carrying the title “Essays in Radical Empiricism,” making the same essays available to students; but he did not live to carry out the plan for the book, and it was left to his friend and colleague Ralph Barton Perry to first publish *Essays in Radical Empiricism* in 1912. The present edition of James’s papers generally follows the 1912 edition.

James regarded his radical empiricism as a modification, correction and amplification of the empiricism of Locke, Berkeley, Hume and J.S. Mill. He aligns himself with the empiricist philosophers and especially in contrast to neo-Kantianism, continental rationalism and holistic, Absolute Idealism. Radical empiricism carries over from empiricism a strong emphasis on “experience” as the source of knowledge, but James rejected atomistic and structuralist conceptions of experience. He placed great weight on introspective methods and awareness of relations in the moving transitions, conjunctions and disjunctions of experience. But it may be doubted that James fully grasped the import of more rigorous accounts of the logic of relations. The point is suggested by James’s pronounced nominalism and his verificationist concept of truth. James’s radical empiricism is linked to and depends on his concept of “pure experience” and to his understanding of the “pragmatism method.” We will not fully understand the development of the pragmatic tradition in American thought, including the re-emergence of naturalism after the death of James, without a deeper understanding and evaluation of James on radical empiricism. Two summary points stand out.

The first is James's background reliance on themes from Charles S. Peirce and his pragmatic conception of meaning in particular. Though James on relations gives distinctive emphasis to relations of one portion of experience to another, and in fact he makes no mention of Peirce in the present book, readers will recall Peirce's "pragmatic maxim," and his work on the logic of relations.<sup>1</sup> The pragmatic maxim tells us that clarity concerning meaning depends on tracing out the conceivable practical consequences of an idea; and Peirce was a great innovator on the logic of relations. It follows that to fully detail the consequences of an idea, one must also attend to consequences arising specifically in light of the logic of relations, and relations in accordance with their logic are no mere "creations of mind." The late development of the logic of relations, a major amplification of traditional logic, has significant consequences for the intentionality of veridical experience in particular.

Secondly, it is important to view the pragmatic maxim and the logic of relations as they condition James's concept of experience. In my Introduction to the present edition, I aim for a deeper view of the pragmatic tradition and of the logic of relations. Given a focus on more recent developments in semantics, the philosophy of language and mind, and functional psychology—including limitations of stand-alone introspection—, a more realist concept of mind and representation and a correspondingly critical approach to James on radical empiricism recommend themselves. A chief result of the present study is to uncover and illustrate strengths and weaknesses of the Darwinian forms of functional psychology which James's *Principles of Psychology* did so much to promote.<sup>2</sup> The popular appeal of radical empiricism has, too often, obscured functionalism in psychology.

The present edition chiefly retains Perry's familiar texts for the James papers, only updating and Americanizing the orthography; and James's longer quotations have been indented.

The footnotes of Perry's edition have been modified for clarity and uniformity of references. James's own footnotes are retained and some are expanded to render references explicit. Readers of the first edition of 1912 were reasonably expected to be more familiar with the cited articles and authors, but this is less true for contemporary readers. The citations of sources are here made more accessible. James's own notes have been identified as such, and I have added others to clarify sources, concepts and briefly develop points of criticism.

A full bibliography including James's sources has been added in the present edition, and the index expanded. The present edition retains the bibliographic information and cross references Perry added in 1912, but that information has been silently incorporated into the editor's annotations and again adjusted to accommodate the changed pagination. Perry's references are put into a uniform, more explicit form.

In my Introduction, I have generally placed radical empiricism in the context of, and in contrast with, the naturalist, psychological functionalism of James's *Principles of Psychology* and related sources, emphasizing the scientific naturalism prominent in James's earlier psychological works. The *Essays* clearly retain a reworking of James's functional psychology, but as I argue, the later, more philosophical elements of the *Essays* including the title theme suffer in comparison with James's functionalism and the *Magnus opus* of James's *Principles*. Contemporary functionalism in the philosophy of mind, philosophy of psychology and related fields stand to benefit from greater attention to Jamesian functionalism in psychology. The point is perhaps best illustrated in the early functionalism of James R. Angell and in the work of the contemporary, French experimentalist and cognitive psychologist Stanislas Dehaene—who explicitly follows James's lead.

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Notes

1. See e.g., C.S. Peirce 1878, "How to Make our Ideas Clear," *Popular Science Monthly*, vol. 12, January issue, pp. 286-302. Reprinted in Justus Buchler, ed. 1955, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover), pp. 23-41; see C.S. Peirce 1870, "Description of a Notation for the Logic of Relatives, resulting from an Amplification of the Conceptions of Boole's Calculus of Logic," *Memoirs of the American Academy*, vol. 9, pp. 317-378. Reprinted in Peirce 1933, *Collected Papers* vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 3.45-3.148.
2. Of particular interest is James's letter of August 9, 1903 to James R. Angell. In response to Angell's work, James wrote, "I wish now that you or someone would write a psychology frankly on 'functional' lines." See Ignas K. Skrupskelis *et al.* eds. 2002, *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 10 (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press), p. 288.