

Further Notes on The Philosophy of William James As a Framework for Discussion of Issues Relating to Survival

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In my previous Notes, I pointed out a tension in James's writing in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890/1950) in regard to using a psychological as opposed to a metaphysical approach to experience. He attempted to keep to the psychological, but frequently slipped off into the metaphysical, usually with some apologies. Two years later he was already aware that using a purely psychological approach was not going to be adequate to the task.

In the Epilogue of *Psychology: A Briefer Course* (1892) he comes back to his unfinished business. He tells us that the relationship between known and knower are "infinitely complicated" and cannot be solved by means of a simplistic a common-sense formulation. Rather, "The only possible path to understanding them lies through metaphysical subtlety" (p. 466). He reiterates earlier in the book (p. 216) that states of consciousness are themselves not verifiable facts, not empirical objects of thought, and that from a purely experiential point of view all we can say about the thinker is that he is himself the thought. But in the Epilogue he says that this position is "a mere provisional statement from a popular and prejudiced point of view" (p. 467) He then openly acknowledges the state of tension that I have referred to earlier:

When, then, we talk of 'psychology as a natural science,' we must not assume that that means a sort of psychology that stands at last on solid ground. It means just the reverse; it means a psychology particularly fragile, and into which the waters of metaphysical criticism leak at every joint, a psychology all of whose elementary assumptions and data must be reconsidered in wider connections and translated into other terms. (pp. 467-468)

By this James did not mean that metaphysical assumptions should be permitted to prejudice the data of experience, but that one had to carry out a metaphysical analysis of the issues involved in psychology in order to establish psychology as a valid type of knowledge. He goes on to emphasize how primitive a science psychology is, that it is

in the condition of physics before Galileo and the laws of motion, of chemistry before Lavoisier and the notion that mass is preserved in all reaction. The Galileo and the Lavoisier of psychology will be famous men indeed when they come, as come they some day surely will, or past successes are not index to the future. When they do come, however, the necessities of the case will make them "metaphysical." (p. 468)

Encouraged by James's own remarks on his conclusions of the *Principles*, I would say that while one cannot deny his *psychological* conclusion that the Thought is the Thinker, this does not

provide a thick enough soup to sustain human life. We must look further to try to find a *metaphysical* approach—one with more meat, one that will say more about what the Thinker is in itself.

It will be useful to trace the development of James's thinking in this regard between 1892 and the time of his death. For that reason, I want spend some time on the development of his thought about continuity of personal identity, particularly as found in four of his works: *Human Immortality* (second edition) (1899/1900), *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1903), *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), and *Some Problems in Philosophy* (1911).

Recapitulation

To begin with, let me recall James's ideas about continuity of personal identity. For James, the self is a kind of organizing principle that unifies areas of personal experience. Selves are necessarily multiple in that there are as many as the groups of experiences and relationships that they unify. Thus, there are many material selves and social selves. There is also the spiritual self which represents the central capacities that manifest in human experiences. Selves are eminently empirical and knowable in principle. In addition to these selves, James, under the influence of the ideas of Myers, acknowledged selves or personalities existing in the extra-marginal or subliminal region of the psyche.

James also talks about a non-empirical principle that provides an overall unity and continuity of personal identity. While the selves are multiple, this non-empirical principle is one. In the *Principles* James talks about this principle as the non-empirical aspect of the "center of the sanctuary" of the spiritual self. In his analysis of this principle, he lists its principal functions: it is the Thinker that has the experience; it is the Owner that lays claim to all the selves of the individual and all contents of experience that belong to it; and it is the Agent that makes the judgment of ownership and is the source of will and free choice. It is not made up of the sum of its contents, it is not among the things that are united in a continuity, but on the contrary is what provides that continuity. Without it there would be no continuity of personal identity. Neither is the Owner-Thinker-Agent "an object in its own hands," that is, it cannot know itself directly, in its living moment of existence. It is only an object of thought when the pulse of thought passes and a new pulse takes its place. Then, when it is "dead and gone," it is subject to empirical examination. James tells us that the task of psychology can be fully satisfied with this analysis and that as psychologists we need say no more than that the Owner-Thinker-Agent is simply the passing, judging Thought itself. We experience personal continuity not because this Owner-Thinker-Agent remains constant over time, but because as each pulse of thought, which lasts perhaps only a fraction of a second, passes away, a new pulse comes along to take its place and, as it were, by right of inheritance, lays claim to all that belonged to its predecessor.

In the years that followed the publication of the *Principles*, James greatly expanded on his ideas about the self, particularly acknowledging the subliminal or transmarginal aspects. But his ideas

about the Owner-Thinker-Agent developed very little. As a matter of fact, it seems that the Owner-Thinker-Agent remained problematical. When grappling with the problem of survival and particularly the problem of continuity of personal identity, it is not enough to make statements about the empirical self-aspects involved. As James himself indicated in the *Principles*, the analysis of self contributes little to the explanation of personal continuity.

On the other hand, the possibilities for saying anything about the Owner-Thinker-Agent are quite limited. We can, as James does in *Human Immortality*, say that it may be unique to each individual or that it may be an All-thinker (or *anima mundi*) who thinks in us all. But this adds little to our knowledge of what the Owner-Thinker-Agent is *in itself*. That it may be unique to each of us or common to all is, of course, important, but does not take us too far.

James and Substantiality

All this is to say that the central metaphysical issue is the *substantiality* of the thinker and James's consistent rejection of the notion of the substantial soul. If the Owner-Thinker-Agent is not substantial, and if it is legitimate to go beyond the bare psychological dictum that the Thinker is the passing Thought, if it is legitimate to make metaphysical statements on the matter, what is it that can be said?

The issue of substance is a problematic one for James, and his comments give one food for thought.

In earlier writings James was more forthcoming with ideas about the possible validity of the thinking that has led to the concept of substance: "As Peirce's criterion, breadth of relation, only admits as real such elements as enter into *the system*—so that the reality of each thing is measured by a standard extrinsic to its actual existence—so *here*, dynamic connection with other existences becomes the test of substantial reality; or, in other words, a thing only has being at all as it enters in some way into the being of other things, or constitutes part of a universe or organism. In other words, as to their *being* things are continuous, and so far as this is what people mean when they affirm a substance, substance must be held to exist" (Perry, Vol. 1, p. 525).

Moving on to the *Principles*, let us first recall that there James states his difficulties with the notion of "substance" early and late. I beg your forgiveness for the length of the quotation, but its great relevance perhaps justifies the space taken:

At present, then, the only conclusion I come to is the following: That (in some persons at least) the part of the innermost Self which is most vividly felt turns out to consist for the most part of a collection of cephalic movements of 'adjustments' which, for want of attention and reflection, usually fail to be perceived and classed as what they are; that

over and above these there is an obscurer feeling of something more; but whether it be of fainter physiological processes, or of nothing objective at all, but rather of subjectivity as such, of thought become 'its own object,' must at present remain an open question, - like the question whether it be an indivisible active soul-substance, or the question whether it be a personification of the pronoun I, or any other of the guesses as to what its nature may be. (I, 305)

But what is this abstract numerical principle of identity, this 'Number One' within me, for which, according to proverbial philosophy, I am supposed to keep so constant a 'lookout'? Is it the inner nucleus of my spiritual self, that collection of obscurely felt 'adjustments,' *plus* perhaps that still more obscurely perceived subjectivity as such, of which we recently spoke? Or is it perhaps the concrete stream of my thought in its entirety, or some one section of the same? Or may it be the indivisible Soul-Substance, in which, according to the orthodox tradition, my faculties inhere? Or, finally, can it be the mere pronoun I? (I, 318-319)

If, with the Spiritualists, one contend for a substantial soul, or transcendental principle of unity, one can give no positive account of what that may be. (I, 330)

The theory of the Soul is the theory of popular philosophy and of scholasticism, which is only popular philosophy made systematic. It declares that the principle of individuality within us must be *substantial*, for psychic phenomena are activities, and there can be no activity without a concrete agent. This substantial agent cannot be the brain but must be something *immaterial*; for its activity, thought, is both immaterial, and takes cognizance of immaterial things, and of material things in general and intelligible, as well as in particular and sensible ways, - all which powers are incompatible with the nature of matter, of which the brain is composed. Thought moreover is simple, whilst the activities of the brain are compounded of the elementary activities of each of its parts. Furthermore, thought is spontaneous or free, whilst all material activity is determined *ab extra*; and the will can turn itself against all corporeal goods and appetites, which would be impossible were it a corporeal function. For these objective reasons the principle of psychic life must be both immaterial and simple as well as substantial, must be what is called *a Soul*. The same consequence follows from subjective reasons. Our consciousness of personal identity assures us of our essential simplicity: the owner of the various constituents of the self, as we have seen them, the hypothetical Arch-Ego whom we provisionally conceived as possible, is a real entity of whose existence self-consciousness makes us directly aware. No material agent could thus turn round and grasp *itself* - material activities always grasp something else than the agent. And if a brain *could* grasp itself and be self-conscious, it would be conscious of itself *as* a brain and not as something of an altogether different kind. The Soul then exists as a simple spiritual substance in which the various psychic faculties, operations, and affections inhere.

If we ask what a Substance is, the only answer is that it is a self-existent being, or one which needs no other subject in which to inhere. At bottom its only positive

determination is Being, and this is something whose meaning we all realize even though we find it hard to explain. The Soul is moreover an *individual* being, and if we ask what that is, we are told to look in upon our Self, and we shall learn by direct intuition better than through any abstract reply. Our direct perception of our own inward being is in fact by many deemed to be the original prototype out of which our notion of simple active substance in general is fashioned. The *consequences* of the simplicity and substantiality of the Soul are its incorruptibility and natural *immortality* - nothing but God's direct *fiat* can annihilate it - and its *responsibility* at all times for whatever it may have ever done.

This substantialist view of the soul was essentially the view of Plato and of Aristotle. It received its completely formal elaboration in the middle ages. It was believed in by Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, Leibnitz, Wolf, Berkeley, and is no defended by the entire modern dualistic or spiritualistic or common-sense school. Kant held to it while denying its fruitfulness as a premise for deducing consequences verifiable here below. Kant's successors, the absolute idealists, profess to have discarded it, - how that may be we shall inquire ere long. Let us make up our minds what to think of it ourselves.

It is at all events needless for expressing the actual subjective phenomena of consciousness as they appear. We have formulated them all without its aid, by the supposition of a stream of thoughts, each substantially different from the rest, but cognitive of the rest and 'appropriative' of each other's content. At least, if I have not already succeeded in making this plausible to the reader, I am hopeless of convincing him by anything I could add now. The unity, the identity, the individuality, and the immateriality that appear in the psychic life are thus accounted for as phenomenal and temporal facts exclusively, and with no need of reference to any more simple or substantial agent than the present Thought or 'section' of the stream. We have seen it to be single and unique in the sense of having no *separable* parts (above, p. 239 ff.) - perhaps that is the only kind of simplicity meant to be predicated of the soul. The present Thought also has being, - at least all believers in the Soul believe so - and if there be no other Being in which it 'inheres,' it ought itself to be a 'substance'. If *this* kind of simplicity and substantiality were all that is predicated of the Soul, then it might appear that we had been talking of the soul all along, without knowing it, when we treated the present Thought as an agent, an owner, and the like. But the Thought is a perishing and not an immortal or incorruptible thing. Its successors may continuously succeed to it, resemble it, and appropriate it, but *they are* not it, whereas the Soul-Substance is supposed to be a fixed unchanging thing. By the Soul is always meant something *behind* the present Thought, another kind of substance, existing on a non-phenomenal plane.

When we brought in the Soul at the end of the Chapter VI, as an entity which the various brain-processes were supposed to affect simultaneously, and which responded to their combined influence by single pulses of its thought, it was to escape integrated mind-stuff on the one hand, and an improbable cerebral monad on the other. But when (as now, after all we have been through since that earlier passage) we take the two formulations, first of a brain to whose processes pulses of thought *simply* correspond, and second, of one to whose processes pulses of thought *in a Soul* correspond, and compare them together, we see that at bottom the second formulation is only a more roundabout

way than the first, of expressing the same bald fact. That bald fact is that *when the brain acts, a thought occurs*. The spiritualistic formulation says that the brain-processes knock the thought, so to speak, out of a Soul which stands there to receive their influence. The simpler formulation says that the thought simply *comes*. But what positive meaning has the Soul, when scrutinized, but the *ground of possibility* of the thought? And what is the 'knocking' but the *determining of the possibility to actuality*? And what is this after all but giving a sort of concreted form to one's belief that the coming of the thought, when the brain-processes [p. 346] occur, has *some* sort of ground in the nature of things? If the word Soul be understood merely to express that claim, it is a good word to use. But if it be held to do more, to gratify the claim, - for instance, to connect rationally the thought which comes, with the processes which occur, and to mediate intelligibly between their two disparate natures, - then it is an illusory term. It is, in fact, with the word Soul as with the word Substance in general. To say that phenomena inhere in a Substance is at bottom only to record one's protest against the notion that the bare existence of the phenomena is the total truth. A phenomenon would not itself be, we insist, unless there were *something more* than the phenomenon. To the more we give the provisional name of Substance. So, in the present instance, we ought certainly to admit that there is more than the bare fact of coexistence of a passing thought with a passing brain-state. But we do not answer the question 'What is that more?' when we say that it is a 'Soul' which the brain-state affects. This kind of more *explains* nothing; and when we are once trying metaphysical explanations we are foolish not to go as far as we can. For my own part I confess that the moment I become metaphysical and try to define the more, I find the notion of some sort of an *anima mundi* thinking in all of us to be a more promising hypothesis, in spite of all its difficulties, than that of a lot of absolutely individual souls. Meanwhile, as *psychologists*, we need not be metaphysical at all. The phenomena are enough, the passing Thought itself is the only *verifiable* thinker, and its empirical connection with the brain-process is the ultimate known law....

Altogether, the Soul is an outbirth of that sort of philosophizing whose great maxim, according to Dr. Hodgson, is: "Whatever you are *totally* ignorant of, assert to be the explanation of everything else"....

The Soul-theory is, then, a complete superfluity, so far as accounting for the actually verified facts of conscious experience goes. So far, no one can be compelled to subscribe to it for definite scientific reasons. The case would rest here, and the reader be left free to make his choice, were it not for other demands of a more practical kind.

The first of these is *Immortality*, for which the simplicity and substantiality of the Soul seem to offer a solid guarantee. A 'stream' of thought, for aught that we see to be contained in its essence, may come to a full stop at any moment; but a simple substance is incorruptible and will, by its own inertia, persist in Being so long as the Creator does not by a direct miracle snuff it out. Unquestionably this is the stronghold of the spiritualistic belief, - as indeed the popular touchstone for all philosophies is the question, "What is their bearing on a future life?"

The Soul, however, when closely scrutinized, guarantees no immortality of a sort *we care for*. The enjoyment of the atom-like simplicity of their substance *in saecula*

saeculorum would not to most people seem a consummation devoutly to be wished. The substance must give rise to a stream of consciousness continuous with the present stream, in order to arouse our hope, but of this the mere persistence of the substance *per se* offers no guarantee. Moreover, in the general advance of our moral ideas, there has come to be something ridiculous in the way our forefathers had of grounding their hopes of immortality on the simplicity of their substance. The demand for immortality is nowadays essentially teleological. We believe ourselves immortal because we believe ourselves *fit* for immortality. A 'substance, ought surely to perish, we think, if not worthy to survive, and an insubstantial 'stream' to prolong itself, provided it be worthy, if the nature of Things is organized [p. 349] in the rational way in which we trust it is. Substance or no substance, soul or 'stream,' what Lotze says of immortality is about all that human wisdom can say:

"We have no other principle for deciding it than this general idealistic belief: that every created thing will continue whose continuance belongs to the meaning of the world, and so long as it does so belong; whilst every one will pass away whose reality is justified only in a transitory phase of the world's course. That this principle admits of no further application in human hands need hardly be said. *We* surely know not the merits which may give to one being a claim on eternity, nor the defects which would cut others off'....

My final conclusion, then, about the substantial Soul is that it explains nothing and guarantees nothing. Its successive thoughts are the only intelligible and verifiable things about it, and definitely to ascertain the correlations of these with brain-processes is as much as psychology can empirically do. From the metaphysical point of view, it is true that one may claim that the correlations have a rational ground; and if the word Soul could be taken to mean merely some such vague problematic ground, it would be unobjectionable. But the trouble is that it professes to give the ground in positive terms of a very dubiously credible sort. I therefore feel entirely free to discard the word Soul from the rest of this book. (I, 342-350)

Let us now proceed to find out if James gives us any further help in regard to the substantiality or non-substantiality of the Owner-Thinker-Agent.

Substance in *Human Immortality*

James takes up that issue in various writings after the *Principles*, but I do not believe he helps us very much with his later comments. For example, most of what James says in *Human Immortality* has to do with the empirical "self" aspect, not the Owner-Thinker-Agent aspect. The following quotation shows that apart from the reference to the Individual vs. All-thinker issue, the discussion is centrally concerned the empirical aspects of the question:

In note 5 on page 58 I partially guarded against it by saying that the "mother-sea" from which the finite mind is supposed to be strained by the brain, need not be conceived of in pantheistic terms exclusively. There might be, I said, many minds behind the scenes as

well as one. The plain truth is that *one may conceive the mental world behind the veil in as individualistic a form as one pleases, without any detriment to the general scheme by which the brain is represented as a transmissive organ.*

If the extreme individualistic view were taken, one's finite mundane consciousness would be an extract from one's larger, truer personality, the latter having even now some sort of reality behind the scenes. And in transmitting it - to keep to our extremely mechanical metaphor, which confessedly throws no light on the actual *modus operandi* - one's brain would also leave effects upon the part remaining behind the veil; for when a thing is torn, both fragments feel the operation.

And just as (to use a very coarse figure) the stubs remain in a check-book whenever a check is used, to register the transaction, so these impressions on the transcendent self might constitute so many vouchers of the finite experiences of which the brain had been the mediator; and ultimately they might form that collection within the larger self of memories of our earthly passage, which is all that, since Locke's day, the continuance of our personal identity beyond the grave has by psychology been recognized to mean.

It is true that all this would seem to have affinities rather with pre-existence and with possible reincarnations than with the Christian notion of immortality. But my concern in the lecture was not to discuss immortality in general. It was confined to showing it to be *not incompatible* with the brain-function theory of our present mundane consciousness. I hold that it is so compatible, and compatible moreover in fully individualized form. The reader would be in accord with everything that the text of my lecture intended to say, were he to assert that every memory and affection, of his present life is to be preserved, and that he shall never in *saecula saeculorum* cease to be able to say to himself: "I am the same personal being who in old times upon the earth had those experiences." (*Human Immortality* 1899/1900, pp. vi-ix.)

Substance in *Varieties of Religious Experience*

The Continental schools of philosophy have too often overlooked the fact that man's thinking is organically connected with his conduct. It seems to me to be the chief glory of English and Scottish thinkers to have kept the organic connection in view. The guiding principle of British philosophy has in fact been that every difference must MAKE a difference, every theoretical difference somewhere issue in a practical difference, and that the best method of discussing points of theory is to begin by ascertaining what practical difference would result from one alternative or the other being true. What is the particular truth in question KNOWN AS? In what facts does it result? What is its cash-value in terms of particular experience? This is the characteristic English way of taking up a question. In this way, you remember, Locke takes up the question of personal identity. What you mean by it is just your chain of particular

memories, says he. That is the only concretely verifiable part of its significance. All further ideas about it, such as the oneness or manyness of the spiritual substance on which it is based, are therefore void of intelligible meaning; and propositions touching such ideas may be indifferently affirmed or denied. So Berkeley with his "matter." (VRE, 442-443)

If, namely, we apply the principle of pragmatism to God's metaphysical attributes, strictly so called, as distinguished from his moral attributes, I think that, even were we forced by a coercive logic to believe them, we still should have to confess them to be destitute of all intelligible significance. Take God's aseity, for example; or his necessariness; his immateriality; his "simplicity" or superiority to the kind of inner variety and succession which we find in finite beings, his indivisibility, and lack of the inner distinctions of being and activity, substance and accident, potentiality and actuality, and the rest; his repudiation of inclusion in a genus; his actualized infinity; his "personality," apart from the moral qualities which it may comport; his relations to evil being permissive and not positive; his self-sufficiency, self-love, and absolute felicity in himself:--candidly speaking, how do such qualities as these make any definite connection with our life? And if they severally call for no distinctive adaptations of our conduct, what vital difference can it possibly make to a man's religion whether they be true or false? (VRE, 445)

Substance in *A Pluralistic Universe*

Let me recall to you the programme which I indicated to you at our last meeting. After agreeing not to consider materialism in any shape, but to place ourselves straightway upon a more spiritualistic platform, I pointed out three kinds of spiritual philosophy between which we are asked to choose. The first way was that of the older dualistic theism, with ourselves represented as a secondary order of substances created by God. We found that this allowed of a degree of intimacy with the creative principle inferior to that implied in the pantheistic belief that we are substantially one with it, and that the divine is therefore the most intimate of all our possessions, heart of our heart, in fact. But we saw that this pantheistic belief could be held in two forms, a monistic form which I called philosophy of the absolute, and a pluralistic form which I called radical empiricism, the former conceiving that the divine exists authentically only when the world is experienced all at once in its absolute totality, whereas radical empiricism allows that the absolute sum-total of things may never be actually experienced or realized in that shape at all, and that a disseminated, distributed, or incompletely unified appearance

is the only form that reality may yet have achieved. (PU, 43-44)

It is impossible to reconcile the peculiarities of our experience with our being only the absolute's mental objects. A God, as distinguished from the absolute, creates things by projecting them beyond himself as so many substances, each endowed with *perseity*, as the scholastics call it. But objects of thought are not things *per se*. They are there only *for* their thinker, and only *as* he thinks them. How, then, can they become severally alive on their own accounts and think themselves quite otherwise than as he thinks them? It is as if the characters in a novel were to get up from the pages, and walk away and transact business of their own outside of the author's story. (PU, 193-4)

This solution is obvious and I know that many of you will adopt it. It is comfortable, and all our habits of speech support it. Yet it is not for idle or fantastical reasons that the notion of the substantial soul, so freely used by common men and the more popular philosophies, has fallen upon such evil days, and has no prestige in the eyes of critical thinkers. It only shares the fate of other unrepresentable substances and principles. They are without exception all so barren that to sincere inquirers they appear as little more than names masquerading--*Wo die begriffe fehlen da stellt ein wort zur rechten zeit sich ein*. You see no deeper into the fact that a hundred sensations get compounded or known together by thinking that a 'soul' does the compounding than you see into a man's living eighty years by thinking of him as an octogenarian, or into our having five fingers by calling us pentadactyls. Souls have worn out both themselves and their welcome, that is the plain truth. Philosophy ought to get the manifolds of experience unified on principles less empty. Like the word 'cause,' the word 'soul' is but a theoretic stop-gap--it marks a place and claims it for a future explanation to occupy.

This being our post-human and post-kantian state of mind, I will ask your permission to leave the soul wholly out of the present discussion and to consider only the residual dilemma. Some day, indeed, souls may get their innings again in philosophy--I am quite ready to admit that possibility--they form a category of thought too natural to the human mind to expire without prolonged resistance. But if the belief in the soul ever does come to life after the many funeral-discourses which human and kantian criticism have preached over it, I am sure it will be only when some one has found in the term a pragmatic significance that has hitherto eluded observation. When that champion speaks, as

he will may speak some day, it will be time to consider souls more seriously. (PU, 209-210)

Substance in *Some Problems in Philosophy*

James—A Process Philosopher?

What is the essence of the problem of substantiality, and what are James' actual views on the matter? Marcus Ford (1982, p. 9) puts James' opposition to the notion of "substance" in the broadest possible context, saying that he is opposed to several "substance psychologies:" the "mind-stuff theory," the "associationist theory" and the "spiritualist" or "transcendentalist theory." In describing these psychologies as "substance psychologies," Ford expands the meaning of the term "substance" beyond the classical notion of an unexperienceable something in which faculties and accidents "adhere," and takes it to mean elementary entities, such as units of consciousness or simple sensations or perceptions (pp. 9-11). Playing on James' notion of a substance as "a self-existent being, or one which needs no other subject in which to adhere" (I, 344), Ford seems to see "substance" in practically every entity that we classify as a noun. Emphasizing James' opposition to the substance-view of the world, Ford prepares the reader for his thesis that James' was a "process philosopher," *à la* Whitehead. Ford believes that "the most significant feature of James' psychology is his process view of the self—the "stream of thought" (p. 9)

Ford quotes James' comment on his final philosophical manuscript: "Say that I hoped by it to round out my system, which now is too much like a arch built on one side," and contends that "Whitehead's 'philosophy of organism' is the other half of James' arch" (Ford 1982, p. 8).

What Problem Was the Notion of "Substance" Meant to Solve?

The issue of substance is a problematic one for James, and his scattered comments give one food for thought.

In earlier writings James was more forthcoming with ideas about the possible validity of the

thinking that has led to the concept of substance: “As Peirce’s criterion, breadth of relation, only admits as real such elements as enter into *the system*—so that the reality of each thing is measured by a standard extrinsic to its actual existence—so *here*, dynamic connection with other existences becomes the test of substantial reality; or, in other words, a thing only has being at all as it enters in some way into the being of other things, or constitutes part of a universe or organism. In other words, as to their *being* things are continuous, and so far as this is what people mean when they affirm a substance, substance must be held to exist” (Perry, Vol. 1, p. 525).

In the *Principles* he wrote:

The unity, the identity, the individuality, and the immateriality that appear in the psychic life are thus accounted for as phenomenal and temporal facts exclusively, and with no need of reference to any more simple or substantial agent than the present Thought or 'section' of the stream. We have seen it to be single and unique in the sense of having no *separable* parts (above, p. 239 ff.) - perhaps that is the only kind of simplicity meant to be predicated of the soul. The present Thought also has being, - at least all believers in the Soul believe so - and if there be no other Being in which it 'inheres,' it ought itself to be a 'substance'. If *this* kind of simplicity and substantiality were all that is predicated of the Soul, then it might appear that we had been talking of the soul all along, without knowing it, when we treated the present Thought as an agent, an owner, and the like. (I, 345)

To say that phenomena adhere in a Substance is at bottom only to record one’s protest against the notion that the bare existence of the phenomena is the total truth. (I, 346)

James (*Principles*) is the not the first to call the Owner-Thinker-Agent “problematic.” Du Prel, Searle,.....

Central to this problem is the issue of “substantiality.”

Also “problematic” is the problem of a self without a body—an empirical reality totally different from our earthly one.

When we look at the issue of the “transmarginal” and Myers’s “subliminal self,” we run into further problems.

Center==Margin==Transmarginal

Taking up Myers's list of elements of the subliminal self, we have to face the issue of multiple selves. This actually means multiple identities, and therefore multiple streams. But many streams means many thinkers. Each stream has all the qualities and capacities of the selves examined in the *Principles*. Each of these many selves, identities, personalities must, if it is to have a sense of personal continuity, a corresponding Owner-Thinker-Agent. In one individual, or body, is there one or many Owners-Thinkers-Agents?

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