

Notes on A Neo-Jamesian Approach to Survival

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Contributory Theories Section

A small essay by William James, published in the collection *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912), called “How Two Minds Can Know One Thing” is key to understanding his solution to two central problems for any survival-friendly theory of reality. In this important treatise, written in 1905, James presents his metaphysics of pure experience in a remarkably clear form and resurrects his notion of “appropriation” by the “I” as found in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890). In the process he does away with any vestiges of a metaphysically founded mind/body duality and reraises the question of the central self or “I” left in suspension since 1890. In addition, he shows how his view of these matters is compatible with speculations, such as Fechner’s, about an encompassing “world-soul.”

How One Mind Can Know A Thing

James tells us that before he can solve the question of how *two* minds can know one thing (or how one thing can enter into two streams of consciousness) he must first show how some segment of pure consciousness can enter into *one* stream, in other words, what does it mean for *one* mind to know a thing, for something to become “conscious:”

In the essay entitled 'Does Consciousness Exist?' I have tried to show that when we call an experience 'conscious,' that does not mean that it is suffused throughout with a peculiar modality of being ('psychic' being) as stained glass may be suffused with light, but rather that it stands in certain determinate relations to other portions of experience extraneous to itself. These form one peculiar 'context' for it; while, taken in another context of experiences, we class it as a fact in the physical world. This 'pen,' for example, is, in the first instance, a bald *that*, a datum, fact, phenomenon, content, or whatever other neutral or ambiguous name you may prefer to apply. I called it in that article a 'pure experience.'

(James 1912, p. 123)

James’s discussion hinges on his recently formulated metaphysics of “pure experience. His notion of pure experience derives from his philosophy of radical empiricism and together they constitute what Charlene Seigfried calls a “radical reconstruction of philosophy,” the implications of which are still not fully recognized by most contemporary philosophers

(Seigfried 1990; see also Lamberth 1999).

James's theory of pure experience postulates that "there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed," and that stuff we call "pure experience" (James 1912, p. 4)¹ The idea is that subjectivity and objectivity are reflective determinations only, not properly attributable to "what an experience is aboriginally made of" (James 1912, p. 141). This means that pure experience is not conscious.

James imagines an objection to this position:

"If experience has not 'conscious' existence, if it be not partly made of 'consciousness,' of what then is it made? Matter we know, and thought we know, and conscious content we know, but neutral and simple 'pure experience' is something we know not at all."...The answer is always the same: "It is made of *that*, of just what appears, of space, of intensity, of flatness, brownness, heaviness, or what not."..Experience is only a collective name for all these sensible natures, and...there appears no universal element of which all things are made.

So the "stuff" of pure experience is not a uniform something that is the same in all beings. Rather it is as diverse and nonuniform as sensible natures can be.

James insists that there is no primary and fundamental distinction between reality-for-us and reality-in-itself, the subjective and the objective (Seigfried 1990, p. 147). In so saying James undermines the "self-evident" distinction between knowledge and reality (p. 241). He comments:

The instant field of the present is always experienced in its "pure" state, plain unqualified actuality, a simple *that*, as yet undifferentiated between thing and thought, and only virtually classifiable as objective fact or a someone's opinion about fact. (James 1912, p. 74)

¹"What are the materials of your universe's composition?'...My hypothesis is that the materials are what I shall call *experiences*. To be a part of the universe is to be experienced; and not to be experienced is not to be, in this philosophy of 'pure experience.' By an experience, I mean what the Germans call an *Erlebniss*—any thing that can be regarded as a concrete and integral moment in a conscious life. The word is exactly equivalent to the word 'phenomenon'....The essential consequence to remember is that, if experiences thus defined are the minimal world-factors, absolute "substances" in the old dualistic sense of 'material masses' on the one hand, and 'souls' or 'spirits' on the other, cannot be allowed to be real. A philosophy of pure experience can admit no "matter" except that which some subject of experience shall perceive or think. The matter is there only for that subject. Conversely it can admit no 'mind' not given in correlation with some material or immaterial 'object' which is felt or thought." (James 1988, p. 21)

This way of looking at the basic given datum of experience is perhaps at first a bit difficult to grasp. This is probably because in a common sense sort of way we *do* tend to think that a thing becomes conscious by having a kind of illumination or light shone upon it, transforming it in some essential way. James says that this is not the way to look at it. In James's schema, a piece of "pure experience," a "pure pen," for instance, simply is what it is, as given. For it to become "conscious" to us, something has to happen, new relations need to be set up. These new relations do not have any affect on the "pure pen." Rather they occur as a second step beyond the pure experience of the pen.

The pure pen has successors, experiences that follow the first pure experience. Speaking of the pen as pure experience, James says,

Continue, if you please, to speak of the pure unit as 'the pen.' So far as the pen's successors do but repeat the pen or, being different from it, are 'energetically' related to it, it and they will form a group of stably existing physical things. So far, however, as its successors differ from it in another well-determined way, the pen will figure in their context, not as a physical, but as a mental fact. It will become a passing 'percept,' my percept of that pen. What now is that decisive well-determined way? (James 1912, p. 128)

The pure pen gets "repeated" by successive experience. With each new moment it is there again in its next form, and these repeatings are "energetically related to it," that is, they are the pure pen taken again in the new moment. In this stage, we are still dealing with the pure pen in its ongoing physical existence.

But if the pure pen's successors differs from it in "another well-determined way," it will become a "mental fact," in which the pen is now taken as "my percept of that pen." James quickly comes to the central point of the whole discussion:

The pen, realized in this retrospective way as my percept, thus figures as a fact of 'conscious' life. But it does so only so far as 'appropriation' has occurred; and appropriation *is part of the content of a later experience wholly* additional to the originally 'pure' pen. That pen, virtually both objective and subjective, is at its own moment actually and intrinsically neither. It has to be looked back upon and *wed*, in order to be classed in either distinctive way. But its use, so called, is in the hands of the other experience, while it stands, throughout the operation, passive and unchanged. (p. 130)

Two points must be emphasized here: when a thing is experienced as "conscious," 1) that experience is a second, later experience that follows the first "pure" experience, and 2) that later experience consists in a very specific action, which James calls "*appropriation*"—the owning of the pure experience, the affirmation "This experience belongs to me." The "pure pen" is, "at its own moment" and before that appropriation occurs, neither objective nor subjective.

To explain what he means, James refers us to what he had written fifteen years earlier in his discussion of the “self” in his *Principles*. In another paper (“The Philosophy of William James As a Framework for Discussion of Issues Relating to Survival”), handed out at our May 2006 Survival Seminar meeting, I have written at length about his analysis of the self in general, and his description there of the appropriation of a previous thought by a succeeding passing thought is crucial to the present discussion. James now, in 1905, calls upon this earlier formulation to elucidate the meaning of an experience becoming “conscious.” It goes:

There must be an agent of the appropriating and disowning; but that agent we have already named. It is the Thought to whom the various 'constituents' are known. That Thought is a vehicle of choice as well as of cognition; and among the choices it makes are these appropriations, or repudiations, of its 'own.' But the Thought never is an object in its own hands, it never appropriates or disowns itself. It appropriates *to* itself, it is the actual focus of accretion, the hook from which the chain of past selves dangles, planted firmly in the Present, which alone passes for real, and thus keeping the chain from being a purely ideal thing. Anon the hook itself will drop into the past with all it carries, and then be treated as an object and appropriated by a new Thought in the new present which will serve as living hook in turn. The present moment of consciousness is thus, as Mr. Hodgson says, the darkest in the whole series. It may feel its own immediate existence - we have all along admitted the possibility of this,² hard as it is by direct introspection to ascertain the fact--but nothing can be known *about* it till it be dead and gone. (James 1890, I, 340-341)

This quotation from the *Principles* makes it clear that “appropriation” or “owning” was already, at this early stage of James’s thinking about the matter, a crucial element in describing how something becoming conscious. In the *Principles* he also poses the vexing question of the nature of the appropriator. Both of these issues are important for our present discussion.

² By the time he wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James had gone beyond the mere “possibility” of feeling the immediate existence of the appropriator and made this feeling an essential element in the “full fact” of experience: “What we think of may be enormous--the cosmic times and spaces, for example--whereas the inner state may be the most fugitive and paltry activity of mind. Yet the cosmic objects, so far as the experience yields them, are but ideal pictures of something whose existence we do not inwardly possess but only point at outwardly, while the inner state is our very experience itself; its reality and that of our experience are one. A conscious field PLUS its object as felt or thought of PLUS an attitude towards the object PLUS the sense of a self to whom the attitude belongs--such a concrete bit of personal experience may be a small bit, but it is a solid bit as long as it lasts; not hollow, not a mere abstract element of experience, such as the "object" is when taken all alone. It is a FULL fact, even though it be an insignificant fact; it is of the KIND to which all realities whatsoever must belong; the motor currents of the world run through the like of it; it is on the line connecting real events with real events” (James 1903, p. 499)

How Two Minds Can Know A Thing

Now, James moves on to show how his discussion of how *one* mind can come to know a thing aids in the explanation for how two minds can know one thing. I do not intend to recap the whole argument, but only mention what is most interesting for us in our quest for a survival-friendly theory.

James tells us that in regard to two minds knowing one thing,

obviously no new kind of condition would have to be supplied. All that we should have to postulate would be a second subsequent experience, collateral and contemporary with the first subsequent one, in which a similar act of appropriation should occur. The two acts would interfere neither with one another nor with the originally pure pen. It would sleep undisturbed in its own past, no matter how many such successors went through their several appropriative acts. Each would know it as 'my' percept, each would class it as a 'conscious' fact....To be 'conscious' means not simply to be, but to be reported, known, to have awareness of one's being added to that being; and this is just what happens when the appropriative experience supervenes. The pen-experience in its original immediacy is not aware of itself, it simply is, and the second experience is required for what we call awareness of it to occur....It is, indeed, 'mine' only as it is felt as mine, and 'yours' only as it is felt as yours. But it is felt as neither by *itself*, but only when 'owned' by our two several remembering experiences, just as one undivided estate is owned by several heirs. (p. 130-131, 132, 133)

When he wrote about this “estate” in *Principles*, it slipped by, as it were, with barely a second glance, since it was presented as a general analogy to illustrate how a series of thoughts can be “appropriated” or “owned” by right of succession (see James 1890, I, 339). But here he examines the matter from an entirely different point of view:

After sleeping, my retrospection is as perfect as it is between two successive waking moments of my time. Accordingly if, millions of years later, a similarly retrospective experience should anyhow come to birth, my present thought would form a genuine portion of its long-span conscious life. 'Form a portion,' I say, but not in the sense that the two things could be entitatively or substantively one--they cannot, for they are numerically discrete facts--but only in the sense that the *functions* of my present thought, its knowledge, its purpose, its content and 'consciousness.' in short, being inherited, would be continued practically unchanged. Speculations like Fechner's, of an Earth-soul, of wider spans of consciousness enveloping narrower ones throughout the cosmos, are, therefore, philosophically quite in order, provided they distinguish the functional from the entitative point of view, and do not treat the minor consciousness under discussion as a kind of standing material of which the wider ones *consist*. (James 1912, pp. 135-136)

James's point is that one piece of pure experience can be appropriated by any number of agents at any subsequent point in time. Also there is no problem for James in the possibility that any number of human beings could appropriate any number of pure experiences which would at the same time be appropriated by a kind of Fechnerian world-soul with a "wider span" or consciousness. This is perfectly feasible for James as long as what is involved is simply an agent capable of appropriating a wider spectrum of experiences, and not a substantial being who incorporates the substances of subordinate beings.

"Human Immortality," The Appropriator, and Survival

In the approach discussed above, James envisions an expanse of pure experience, parts of which are appropriated by individuals in any possible combination of overlapping and commonality, including the possibility that there could be centers of appropriation which include vastly more than we do and which appropriate all that humans appropriate and more, and that this could involve a hierarchy of greater centers, each including and appropriating all that is appropriated by lesser centers.

In his *Human Immortality* (1899) James envisioned some possible participation of human minds in a world-soul. He spoke of the relationship between this mother-consciousness and its manifestation in human individuals as "transmissive"—involving the manifestation of the wider consciousness in individual human minds. In this schema our brains are viewed as "transmissive organs" that impose a constraint upon this wider consciousness and makes possible the multiplicity of human minds in the world. Using an idealistic formulation of things, he asks what if one infinite Thought, which is the sole reality, were refracted into "millions of finite streams of consciousness known to us as our private selves"? In this view, our brains are seen as thin, half-transparent patches in the veil between this visible world and that other hidden one. Through these thin spots "glows of feeling, glimpses of insight, and streams of knowledge and perception float into our finite world." Then the "genuine matter of reality, the life of souls as it is in its fullness, will break through our several brains into this world in all sorts of restricted forms, and with all the imperfections and queernesses that characterize our finite individualities here below" (James 1900, pp. 15-17). This state of affairs is full of mystery, however:

Just how the process of transmission may be carried on, is indeed unimaginable; but the outer relations, so to speak, of the process, encourage our belief. Consciousness in this process does not have to be generated *de novo* in a vast number of places. It exists already, behind the scenes, coeval with the world. The transmission-theory not only avoids in this way multiply miracles, but it puts itself in touch with general idealistic philosophy better than the production theory does. It should be reckoned a good thing when science and philosophy thus meet. (p. 23)

James cast this argument in a consciously chosen dualistic form. He says that he had used this form of expression because the physiological objection to immortality has been stated in those

terms. He also insists that he is free “on any later occasion to make an attempt, if I wish, to transcend them and use different categories” (p. 51).

Moreover, James’s description also implies a kind of substance-oriented thinking. If one is to envision the consciousness of the world-soul being transmitted to millions of human souls through their restrictive brains, one is compelled to picture a situation in which the world-soul’s substance, “the genuine matter of reality,” is shared. It evokes a substance-view of the process reminiscent, as James says in the above passage, of idealistic philosophy. James’s later thinking, as described above, embraces an appropriation view with no place for shared substance. Within five years of his writing *Human Immortality* James will have sharply altered his presentation, having found a framework which could finally cement his long-standing anti-substantialist stance, evident from his earliest writings. I would like to add, that this alteration, while seemingly making the idea of “transmission” obsolete, does not rule out the notion of human consciousness being somehow embraced by a Fechnerian world-soul (see, for example, James’s ideas in *A Pluralistic Universe*), as I will discuss below.

In his later writings (from 1904 on) James threw out dualism and continued his opposition to substantialism. He expounded a metaphysics of experience (presented in the discussion above) that completely did away with the dualism introduced into Western thinking by Descartes. In his *La Notion de Conscience* (1905) he lists six propositions³ that explain how the idea of an interaction between a knowing subject and a thing known is philosophically untenable, and substitutes a new, monistic way of understanding the nature of experience. One might speculate that in 1899 James already had an idea that he was headed towards a non-dualistic, non-substantialistic metaphysics that would not be easily expressed in the terms used in this *Human Immortality*. Nevertheless, despite these developments I believe that his philosophy of experience, centrally incorporating as it does the notion of an appropriator of experience, is quite compatible with the 1899 work.

³ “1. Consciousness as it is ordinarily understood does not exist, any more than does that Matter to which Berkeley gave the coup de grace; 2. What does exist and constitutes the portion of truth covered over by the word “Consciousness” is the susceptibility possessed by the parts of experience to be reported or known; 3. This susceptibility is explained by the fact that certain experiences can lead some to others by means of distinctly characterized intermediary experiences, in such a fashion that some play the role of known things, the other that of knowing subjects; 4. These two roles can be defined perfectly without departing from the flow of experience itself and without invoking anything transcendental; 5. The attributes “subject” and “object,” “represented” and “representative,” “thing” and “thought” mean, then, a practical distinction of the utmost importance, but a distinction which is of a FUNCTIONAL order only, and not at all ontological as understood by classical dualism; 6. Finally, things and thought are not fundamentally heterogeneous; they are made of one and the same stuff, which as such cannot be defined but only experienced; and which, if one wishes, one can call the stuff of experience in general. James 1977, pp. 193-194.

To see how all of this might fit together in a neo-Jamesian schema, let us take a closer look at the process of appropriation as described by James in the *Principles*.

Its [the Thought's] appropriations are therefore less to *itself* than to the most intimately felt *part of its present Object, the body, and the central adjustments*, which accompany the act of thinking, in the head. *These are the real nucleus of our personal identity*, and it is their actual existence, realized as a solid present fact, which makes us say 'as sure as *I exist*, those past facts were part of myself.' They are the kernel to which the *represented* parts of the Self are assimilated, accreted, and knit on; and even were Thought entirely unconscious of itself in the act of thinking, these 'warm' parts of its present object would be a firm basis on which the consciousness of personal identity would rest....The identity which the *I* discovers, as it surveys this long procession, can only be a relative identity, that of a slow shifting in which there is always some common ingredient retained. f41 The commonest element of all, the most uniform, is the possession of the same memories. However different the man may be from the youth, both look back on the same childhood, and call it their own. Thus the identity found by the *I* in its *me* is only a loosely construed thing, an identity 'on the whole,' just like that which any outside observer might find in the same assemblage of facts. We often say of a man 'he is so changed one would not know him'; and so does a man, less often, speak of himself. These changes in the *me*, recognized by the *I*, or by outside observers, may be grave or slight. (James 1890, I, pp. 341, 372-3)

For James, the “I”, the non-empirical self, is the appropriator. It appropriates not so much to itself as to the “me”, the empirical self. The person’s identity, the result of the appropriation process, is only a loosely constructed thing—the every-shifting “me.” It can change radically, and even be lost if memory is lost. What does not change is the “I”.

Is there a way, then, to describe in Jamesian terms how an individual person might continue to exist once the brain has disappeared? I believe that there is. Even though James did not systematically develop the schema I am about to enunciate, it seems to me that it poses no insuperable problem for the Jamesian vision I have been developing here.

In this neo-Jamesian schema, there is but *one appropriator*—that which, for the sake of simplicity, we might identify as a Fechnerian world-soul. This unique and only “I” of our universe manifests in the world much as James described it in *Human Immortality*, minus any notion of sharing substance. Through its appropriative function, it owns the particular experiences of all individuals. And it does this for all human beings *individually*. The number and nature of the experiences which it can appropriate for each individual are limited to those that are available to the body involved.⁴ This constraining or “filtering” function of the body (and brain) is crucial to the development of the personal identity, for, as the non-empirical owning agent, the “I” (which is the same in all), appropriates *not to itself but to the empirical*

⁴See the perspectival quality of experience in the next section.

“me,” as James points out in the *Principles*. In this way, through appropriation the “I” forms individual personal identities. The “me” embraces all empirical aspects of that individual life, including its memories and dispositions, and is thus the locus of personal identity. The “me” is the center of accretion of experiences, that to which new experiences are “knit” as we live our lives. In this schema, the “me” to which the “I” appropriates experience would have to survive death if there is to be continuity of personal identity. The personal identity would be thoroughly empirical, while the unique “I,” the appropriator common to all, would remain non-empirical and beyond any descriptive predication we could make of it.

Because all empirically identifiable aspects of our persons as individuals are due to the “me,” we do not experience any kind of mixing or melding with other individuals. Our “me”s are experienced as irreducibly separate. We might have our “I” in common, but there would be no sense of that, since all that we know of ourselves is the empirical aspect, and, as James pointed out in the *Principles*, the non-empirical “I” is something of which we can never become directly aware. So in our theories we can say much about what *functions* the “I” must perform, but we cannot say anything about what the “I” is in itself.

Perspectival Experience

In *Principles*, the “I”, which is the passing Thought, is a central element in James’s analysis of experience. In his later writings, James allowed himself to become more speculative within his discussion of the “I” and appropriation, and said a few things on a metaphysical level of discourse. Nevertheless, to the day of his death James resisted the notion that the “I” is a substance or a substantial soul. It is important to try to see precisely where James had gotten to in this discussion by the end of his life.

As we have seen, James called the “I” the non-empirical self. By definition that leaves it out of any purely descriptive discussion. But that does not mean that we are therefore reduced to silence in its regard.⁵ Let us move on to metaphysical discourse, as James himself was ready to do shortly after finishing the *Principles*, and see what we can say.

The “I” is intimately connected with the perspectival nature of experience. All experience is perspectival, that is, it is had from a particular, unique point in *space and time* and from a unique vantage point of *interest*. Let me first say something about the space-time perspective.

⁵Even in *Principles of Psychology*, James says a lot about this non-empirical “self of selves.” He calls it the “active element in all consciousness,” that which owns (appropriates) and disowns other segments of the stream of thought, and “what welcomes or rejects.” He declares that “it presides over the perception of sensation, and by giving or withholding it assent it influences the movements they tend to arouse.” He calls it “the home of interest,” “the source of effort and attention, and the place from which appear to emanate the fiats of the will” (James 1890, I, 297-8).

Since it is inextricably tied in with the bodily aspect of our being, our experience must happen from some *where* and some *when*. We cannot have a non-located experience. This means that everything is experienced from a very specific and very unique angle. No two individuals could ever have the same angle, the same perspective on experience, since no two individuals can occupy precisely the same point in space-time.

James had a specific way of seeing the relationship between the moment of experience and time. As we have seen, for James the moment of experience is not instantaneous but has a duration: the moment of experience is not some kind of pure present point. Each moment of experience contains within it still-resounding echoes of the past and anticipations of the future, of what is about to come. So each moment is something of the present, the past, and the future all rolled up into one.

In addition to their space/time aspect, our experiences are perspectival in another important way. Our personal *interests* give our experience a unique perspective, a one-of-a-kind point of view. This second perspectival aspect further enhances the notion that each experiencer has a unique identity. Constantly and moment by moment we involve our particular interests in our experience. We experience and come to know those things that interest us, and we do not experience and come to know what we are not interested in. Our interests direct our attention, in that we notice what interests us and ignore what does not. This is a very necessary thing, for if we did not limit our attention in definite ways, we would be overwhelmed by the fullness and manifoldness of the reality that impinges on us each moment. We would not be able to do anything with our experience. We would be helpless in the face of that utter richness.

From among the nearly infinite number of things I could pay attention to in my moment of experience, I limit my attention to a few things—my attention is selective. I am aware of a book, with its dust jacket; I am aware of the subject matter of the book and its various significances and meanings for me. But the things that I become aware of are very few compared to all I could conceivably become aware of if I let my attention spread out. I could also become aware of all the other objects in front of me, with all their colors, all their significances. I could also become aware of all the possible memories that these significances would stir up and all the mental connections those memories would bring. I could also become aware of my body in its every nerve ending and every organic movement. I could become aware of all the future implications of my awarenesses of the moment and I could become aware of all the past realities that contribute to what I am experiencing at this moment. And thus the possible awarenesses I *could have* multiply themselves until, if I were to *actually* have them, I would end up stunned and paralyzed.

We cannot live this way. We must have a limiting factor that not only helps us concentrate on what is of interest, but also, and at least as importantly, cuts out those things that are not of interest. So interests direct out attention, and attention both includes and excludes elements of our experience. James says that the “I” is the “home of interest,” that the “I” carries out its appropriations according to our interests. This ensures that even if we did not have a body, our experiences would still be characterized by a perspectival quality deriving from interest, and we

would still exist as individuals with our own unique experiences.⁶

Multiple Selves

Clinical and experimental evidence indicates that we have multiple centers of consciousness which use the word “I” when communicating about their experiences. These “I”s form separate streams of experience which possess the same basic qualities as those of the main stream as described by James in the *Principles*. Like our everyday consciousnesses, each of these secondary “I”s experience things perspectively and form their own personal memory chain.

Frederic Myers’s work indicates that these secondary centers may be continually coming into existence. Formation of a secondary center occurs when experiences come together in the subliminal self and form a growingly cohesive whole. Upon reaching a certain degree of complexity, it may coalesce into a unity that can in some as yet unknown way become an owner of experience, an “I” that carries out appropriative acts which lend the quality of “conscious” to the experience. Although these centers of consciousness may be many, there is an overall unity within the individually embodied person. Just as, in James schema, many individual “I”s could conceivably appropriate various segments of pure experience while some world-soul “I” appropriates a wider segment that includes all the appropriations of these sub-“I”s, so also *within* the individual, the various appropriations of the many secondary sub-“I”s could be included within a larger appropriation made by the principle “I” of the individual. These sub-“I”s and broader “I” would be Myers’s subliminal selves and Subliminal Self respectively. Although James did not explicitly envision this structure, it would not, I believe, be problematic for him.

Substantial Soul

⁶Our unique interests derive from characteristics that reside in the empirical self, the “me.” The application of them in the moment of the experience is brought about by the appropriative action of the “I,” which appropriates the experience *to* the “me.” This raises a question in regard to James’s solution of the problem of “How Two Minds Can Know One Thing,” the essay mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Here he says that two minds have one bit of pure experience in common and both appropriate that same bit of pure experience, so that both minds know the one thing. The question that must be asked is whether the bit of pure experience held in common is already perspectival. This question is crucial because the perspective of the experiencer is irreducibly unique, and that would rule out two experiencers owning the exact same bit of pure experience. I believe that the answer lies in the simple fact that in the essays discussed above James is describing a *metaphysics* of pure experience where pure experience is the stuff that constitutes all being, and as such is not conditioned by an experiencer’s interest. On other occasions James speaks about pure experience from an *epistemological* point of view; from this point of view the pen is and must be perspectival.

As I have said, James rejected the notion that a substantial soul is at work in these operations. He was, in fact, opposed to any notion of substance as commonly understood:

Substances, whether material or spiritual, are unrepresentable; and the inherence in them, or adherence to them, of properties seems a mere verbal figure....Substance by definition is a non-phenomenal entity. It lies behind the scenes, and we know only the attributes which it presents...To get the notion of the substantial unity of things into a shape fit for discussion at all, we have to translate it into more verifiable terms. If it had any verifiable consequences, the continuity [of our world] just spoken of might be one of them. (James 1988, p.9, 12-13)

James talks about how we should look at the concept of “substance.” First, we must recognize that “substance” is an abstraction—just as “matter,” “body,” and “mind” are abstractions, not entities in their own right. What does the abstract concept “substance” tell us? Essentially, “substance” means that a definite group of sensations with recur (James 1911, p. 61). To take this functionally useful conceptual device and make it into a substance-thing, as though it were an entity to be found in nature, is, on the one hand, to ignore its abstract nature and, on the other, to lose the important work the concept *can* perform. That work is only useful if it can actually make a difference to us: “What difference in practical experience is it supposed to make that we have each a personal substantial principle? This difference, that we can remember and appropriate our past, calling it ‘mine.’ What difference that in this [concrete] book there is a substantial principle? This, that certain optical and tactile sensations cling permanently together in a cluster. The fact that certain perceptual experiences do seem to *belong together* is thus all that the word substance means” (p. 123).

That’s it. That’s the long and the short of it for the empirical philosopher. If we stay close to experience, if we do not create entities out of thin air, if we use our abstractions in clear and useful ways, we will not go astray. Not that this has told us anything about *why* it is possible that we can remember and appropriate our past. Not that this has revealed anything about *why* certain optical and tactile sensations cling permanently together. To answer those *why* questions takes us into realms of speculation, to the spinning of metaphysical theories that we may never be able to verify through experience. James would not forbid the philosopher such speculations. He would just demand that he know what he is doing and not naively give entitative qualities to abstractions.

Continued Existence After Death

If my personal self is to continue to exist after death, it must continue to have experiences and those experiences must be perspectival—if not spatially perspectival, then perspectival on the basis of interest. Without perspectival experience, without experience from a certain stance, there can be no person at all.

Continued experience after death must involve an appropriator. Our unique segment of pure

experience, viewed from the perspective of a certain group of characteristic interests, can be made conscious only through the appropriation of that experience. The characteristic interests involved are a central part of what constitutes our unique individual identity. As I have pointed out, they derive from the “me” that the “I” appropriates *to*.

According to James, we create worlds or universes that are governed by our interests. That is, whenever we apply consistent attention to certain things and ignore others over time, we create a world. There is the world of art, of engineering, of science, of ethics, of mathematics, etc. There are also much more specific worlds, such as the world created by an intimate relationship, the world of a client-therapist interaction, the world of IBM, etc. There is the world of North American culture, the world of Italian soccer, the world of the Smith family life. There is also the big World of our reality as a whole. This too involves attention in which, over our lifetime, some things are seen and other things are not.

After death we must find ourselves involved with worlds. If there is personal continuity, and therefore memory of what we have experienced, we must bring with us our worlds as constituted thus far in our span of existence. Even where these worlds are populated by abstractions, they are nonetheless real and essential to any kind of human life. The question is, do we, after death, find ourselves in a situation in which, as now, we continue to form new worlds and revise our old worlds according to the experiences we are having? And, following James’s model as described in this paper, do we again find that two people can know one thing? Is that environment also constituted by the experiences which we, as before, each appropriate? And in this environment is there some over-soul that appropriates a wider, more inclusive span of pure experience which includes our own appropriated segments?

Does anything at all need to change with death—anything beyond the loss of the ability to use the physical body perspectively in making our appropriations? Could we not simply go on making our appropriations from the stuff of reality which James calls pure experience? After all, pure experience does not consist solely of sense experience. For James mystical experience, for example, can be seen as pure experience, even though it may have no sensual component. The same holds true of those aspects of the subliminal life--experiences beyond the margin--that do not derive from sense experience but arise through some lowering of the threshold of consciousness. Concepts, memories, mathematical relations, etc. are also parts of pure experience. So with the loss of the body, we do not have to lose our ability to access and appropriate our experiences.

The Appropriator and Survival

James’s metaphysics of experience allows two minds to know one thing. Specifically there can be one “I” with a broader field of experience that knows all that is known by subordinate “I”s with lesser range. The broader “I” might be a Fechnerian world-soul that includes within its wider span of consciousness our many human “I”s of lesser range. It might also be the

Subliminal Self of Myers with a wider span that includes and coordinates “I”s of narrower span, our subliminal selves.

In Myers’s schema it is the Subliminal Self that survives death. The Subliminal Self as appropriator owns all the experiences of the subliminal selves and the supraliminal self, and, if it survives death, holds them as memories. This Subliminal Appropriator with its appropriated experience would constitute my surviving identity and it would include both its “I” and its accompanying “me” (embracing my memories, dispositions, interests, etc.). Whether my Subliminal Self is in turn an “I” that is subordinated to some “I” of greater span (e.g., a world-soul) is a matter for further speculation.

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These thoughts about a neo-Jamesian approach to the fundamental problems relating to survival are based on my understanding of James’s writings. Nowhere in his works can one find a detailed, unified, and explicit discussion of the issues as formulated here. I believe, however, that the ideas found scattered throughout James’s writings do exhibit a coherence and intrinsic power that has much to offer us in our search.

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