

FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS OF WILLIAM JAMES

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Habit, Relaxation, and the Open Mind

James and the Increments of Ethical Freedom

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This essay focuses on James's diagnosis of the overstressed American psyche in his *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*, in order to examine both the conservative and prescient aspects of his thinking about women, education, and possibilities for creativity and freedom. The talks to teachers were originally delivered to primarily women teachers in Cambridge in 1892 and subsequently at the Chautauqua Assembly in July 1896, while the talks to students spanned from 1895 to 1898.¹ James first delivered his lecture "The Gospel of Relaxation" at the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics (BNSG) in 1895, addressing a group of graduating college-age women. The school was established by Mary Hemenway in 1891 as a place to provide "the best opportunities in America for men and women who desire to prepare themselves to

conduct gymnasia, or to direct physical training, according to the most approved modern methods" (BNSG 1897, 5). The BNSG was part of a wave of American institutions developed in the 1880s and 1890s devoted to training teachers in physical education—a field just beginning to be granted professional status. As with other comparable programs, the enrollment at BNSG was close to 80 percent female; the school awarded 212 diplomas to women and 6 to men in its first ten years (Verbrugge 1998, 166ff.). Unlike other programs, the BNSG borrowed faculty from MIT and Harvard, implementing a rigorous curriculum in experimental science and psychology as well as applied physiology, anatomy, and Swedish medical gymnastics. The BNSG became part of the graduate programs of Wellesley College in 1917 and continued to prepare young women as physical educators until 1953. One of the early graduates, Ethel Perrin, looked back on her experience in 1930 and described the feminist implications of her education in these terms: "When they went into the field, women in Physical Education were quite looked down upon either as Physical Culturalists or as acrobatic performers. Not until those early graduates began to make their way into educational groups, and take their stand with the best of them, did the professional respect, which the young teacher to-day finds waiting for her, become possible" (162).

James had been invited to address students at various women's colleges, and after delivering his commencement speech at the BNSG, he went on to present versions of "The Gospel of Relaxation" at Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, and Vassar in January and February of 1896. In addition to the mandated stress on pedagogy at Harvard, the years between 1893 and 1899 included for James a transformational immersion in Tolstoy's literature as well as significant hiking in the Adirondacks; work on miracles, conversions, and mental healers; and eight lectures (delivered but never published) on "abnormal mental states." His research was congealing into the material that would later be delivered as the "Gifford Lectures in Natural Religion," subsequently published as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In a letter to his wife, Alice, dated July 9, 1898, James described "the most memorable of all my memorable experiences"—a night spent camping at Panther Lodge Camp with Charles and Pauline Goldmark, Waldo Adler, and a group of girls from Bryn Mawr "all dressed in boys' breeches, and cutaneously desecrated in the extreme from the seven of them having been camping out without a male on Loon Lake." He continued, "The temperature was perfect either inside or outside the cabin, the moon rose and hung above the scene before midnight . . . and I got into a state of spiritual alertness of the most vital description." The spiritual dimensions of hiking and physical

exertion in the wild formed a significant part of and background to James's thinking during these years. His trips to the Adirondacks were also lessons in his own physical vulnerabilities (his injured leg and increasingly severe heart condition) and in the capacities of the women he hiked alongside, who "kept up splendidly, and were all fresher than I" (2008, 76). That is to say, the themes of "The Gospel of Relaxation"—physical exercise, the outdoors, and the spiritual dimensions of social life—relate to James's experience of the mountains as equalizing terrain and his sense of hiking as a therapeutic practice critical to mental health.

Believing that women were more susceptible than men to the anxieties of American life—its frantic pace and competitive spirit—James (1983, 123) began "The Gospel of Relaxation" by writing, "By the sensations that so incessantly pour in from the over-tense excited body the over-tense and excited habit of mind is kept up; and the sultry, threatening, exhausting, thunderous inner atmosphere never quite clears away." He directed "The Gospel of Relaxation" explicitly to *young* women, quoting from Annie Payson Call and other female writers as he implored his audience members to resist succumbing to a (male) archetype of American success, urging them not to overwork themselves and burn out. He stressed the importance of physical education and time spent outdoors, adding, "I hope that here in America more and more the ideal of the well-trained and vigorous body will be maintained neck by neck with that of the well-trained vigorous mind as the two coequal halves of the higher education for men and women alike" (120). In sum, James cautioned the women not to take their studies too seriously or commit themselves prematurely to a single ideal, lest they miss all the surprise, adventure, and happiness in life.

Notably, James delivered this lecture in the midst of widespread cultural debates about the damaging effects of stress, and particularly the effects on women who were beginning to engage in serious intellectual work in colleges and universities. Despite the founding of the Annex (later renamed Radcliffe) by Elizabeth Cary Agassiz and Arthur Gillman in 1879 as a place for women to study with Harvard faculty, in 1896 Harvard was still stridently refusing to admit women to the university and to grant them degrees (it would not embrace coeducation until it adopted an equal admissions process for men and women in 1975). This was also the time period in which the American nerve doctor Weir Mitchell advocated sensory deprivation and an extreme "rest cure," founding the Weir clinic in Philadelphia, where notable women, including Jane Addams and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, were sent for treatment. Gilman sought help there after experiencing debilitating postpartum depression and later criticized the

“rest cure” in her remarkable short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), an account of a woman who goes mad while being treated by Weir.² Other doctors employed massage, electrotherapy, and dieting. This was also an era that saw a tide of self-help manuals, including the 1910 Swedish publication of Harry Bondegger’s *Nervousness Remedied in Two Hours*. James was riding a wave of popular culture in discussing relaxation with women, but he did little to raise the question of whether these trends were further limiting or imprisoning women in the very roles they were trying to escape. He stood, however, somewhat afieled of these trends in his thinking about nervous conditions and their remedies, as he advocated for increased exertion and immersion in the social world rather than either “rest” or retreat to the safe confines of one’s own bed or home. His plea to the women at the BNSG to not take their studies too seriously could be interpreted as yet one more way in which a nineteenth-century man undermined a woman’s opportunity to study, but it also indicates his convictions about the embodied mind and his lived experience of the relationship between solitary, consuming intellectual reflection and debilitating depression.

James saw a culture in which Americans were losing the ability to play and to relax, capacities crucial for the cultivation of imagination and creativity and central to the cultivation of open-mindedness.³ The human mind, as James envisioned it, sits precariously between openness and closure, primed for becoming entrenched in automatic and habitual organization, yet poised for dramatic growth and transformation. Every maturing mind risks calcifying into an increasingly fixed shape. Yet, as early as *The Principles of Psychology*, James stressed the mind’s essential plasticity and noted the degree to which even the most stubborn habit can be dislodged by a commitment to novel action. In his famous chapter “Habit,” he urged his readers, “Keep the faculty of effort alive in you by a little gratuitous exercise every day. That is, be systematically ascetic or heroic in little unnecessary points, do every day or two something for no other reason than that you would rather not do it, so that when the hour of dire need draws nigh, it may find you not unnerved and untrained to stand the test” (1981, 1:126). James believed that one could prime oneself for truly difficult action (the “hour of dire need”) by a repetitive, daily commitment to novelty in one form or another. He reiterated the same advice, sometimes verbatim, in his *Talks to Teachers*. Devoting his eighth lecture to “the laws of habit,” he implored teachers to help their students learn by doing, and he warned them of the perils of “neglecting the necessary concrete labor,” adding, “By sparing ourselves the little daily tax, we are positively digging the graves of our higher possibilities” (1983, 51–52). James soberly recognized that change

is difficult and cannot happen all at once. His own life was a vast experiment in which he emerged from episodes of depression ever more attuned to the psychophysical risks of self-rumination and inertia. Writing to his close friend Thomas Ward in the winter of 1868, for instance, James admitted, “All last winter . . . when I was on the continual verge of suicide, it used to amuse me to hear you chaff my animal contentment. . . . The fact is, I think, that we have both gone through a good deal of similar trouble; we resemble each other in being both persons of rather wide sympathies, not particularly logical in the processes of our minds, and of mobile temperament.” Later in the same letter, he entreats Ward to place his hope in his daily work and in other people, stating, “All I can tell you is the thought that with me outlasts all others, onto which like a rock, I find myself washed up when the waves of doubt are weltering over all the rest of the world; and that is the thought of my having a will, and of my belonging to a brotherhood of men possessed of a capacity for pleasure and pain of different kinds” (2008, 130–31). These lines presage James’s famous essay “The Will to Believe” (published in 1896), in which he emphasized the degree to which belief and nonbelief are *actions* and expressions of our “passional tendencies”—for better and for worse. Across his career, James stressed the importance of keeping oneself nimble and flexible in mind and body. In his championing of the mind’s power to change and reverse course, James celebrated a human freedom based in incremental acts of creative resistance to routine.

Such resistance not only is crucial to mental well-being and happiness but also grounds James’s vision of ethics as the ongoing and incremental labor of creative attention to myriad forms of life. In the preface to *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life’s Ideals*, James insists that his lectures, though intended for a general audience, elaborate his philosophical commitments and “connect . . . with a definite view of the world and of our moral relations to the same” (1983, 4). The person who becomes a slave to her habits lives at a diminished pitch of energy, unable to tap into her “higher possibilities” (52). She also loses touch with the wider world as her habits isolate her from exposure to alternative ideals. James associated this condition with “a certain blindness in human beings”—an inability to see outside of one’s own limited sphere of concern. He described “the blindness with which we are all afflicted in regard to the feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves” (132) as a natural, if self-perpetuating, form of blindness that renders the pluralistic universe ever more dim. In “What Makes a Life Significant?,” he elaborated the social and historical dimensions of insensitivity as “a great cloud-bank of ancestral blindness weighing

down upon us, only transiently riven here and there by fitful revelations of the truth" (151). The antidote to individual and societal blindness entails immersion in the lives of others, through travel, reading, conversation, and other forms of interaction that may thrust one outside of one's comfort zone and disrupt one's habitual patterns of looking and listening. One result of such immersion is a loosening up of the mind's fixation—an opening of energies allowed to run in new directions. Psychoanalytically, this creative redirection of mental energy sounds like an early form of sublimation. Ethically, relaxation and openness become the basis for experiences of "tenderness and tolerance," which James stressed as hallmark moral feelings.

James forcefully argues for relaxation and openness, play and an aptitude for being surprised, as crucial for ethical attention. This chapter investigates those claims in the context of James's writings about habit and imagination, but also in connection with their feminist implications and their deep relevance to contemporary American life. We have not lost the "bottled-lightning" quality (James 1983, 122) that James feared would oppress American women, deaden their imaginative spirits, and commit them to secluded and emotionally less rich forms of life. This is not to suggest that women, or American women, constitute an undifferentiated, universal block capable of being examined and diagnosed with a single prescription. As Elizabeth Spelman (1991) stresses, women have had a complicated and sometimes vicious relationship to one another, particularly when confronted with the question of who counts (and when and to what degree) as a woman.⁴ James was addressing a narrow subset of college-age middle-class white women in his lectures, without considering the wide array of lives of women of differing classes, races, and cultures—and without a word for all those other women struggling not against the pressures of academia, but in homes, fields, and factories. His ability to speak directly, and often emotionally, to the audience seated immediately before him is simultaneously a strength and a weakness of his lecture. It remains, nonetheless, instructive to reflect on the damaging effects of stress and American idealism on a fledgling group of female intellectuals at a crucial tipping point in American history, if only for the insight it provides into the inherent disparities of higher education. If anything, the qualities James identified in the American psyche in 1895 have only become more extreme over time. What does this tell us about our blindness to other lives in the present age and the degree to which the mind's fixations prematurely commit one to a stasis at odds with, and blind to, life's exuberant, excessive surge? James's concerns about an American cult of speed, automation, and isolating individualism loom exponentially more pressing in contemporary cul-

ture, where lives are increasingly lived online and education is routinely carried out in virtual classrooms.

Americanitis

In 1891, at the height of the American Industrial Revolution, James popularized the term "Americanitis." It relates to Charles Beard's neurasthenia, a weakness of the nerves that results in chronic fatigue, loss of memory, generalized aches, depression, and a host of other debilitating symptoms. James, however, borrowed his term from Annie Payson Call (who attributed it to an unnamed German doctor) in order to describe a distinctly American physical posture and tension produced by habitually overcontracting one's muscles and living on the edge.⁵ Call, a Waltham author who knew James, worried about a chronic inability to relax endemic to American life and particularly damaging for women. In "The Gospel of Relaxation," which explicitly references Call's 1891 book *Power Through Repose* as well as her later book *A Matter of Course*, James's stated goal is to "show the practical applications of [certain psychological doctrines] to mental hygiene,—to the hygiene of our American life more particularly" (1983, 117). James was himself a restless American. His letters show that there was hardly a day that went by when he was not either traveling or planning some future escape.⁶ In diagnosing a specifically American physical/psychological condition, James offers a broad critique of an American way of life and its implications for the health and well-being of its citizens. He insists that American neuroses are not the result of geography or climate (or some coincidence of chance or poor luck). Instead, he points to the pervasive overvaluation of certain ideals (ideals of labor and individualism in particular) and the coincident development of bad national habits. In short, James was convinced that Americans work too hard in the wrong way at the wrong things, perpetuating their behaviors in their children and beyond. Additionally, he worried that the American university system worked to codify and deepen such habits by subjecting students to stresses and demands that would ultimately seal their fates as neurotically overwrought Americans. James foresaw a culture in which American habits would weaken possibilities for collective action and would circumscribe individuals within increasingly narrow, closed spheres of life.

Why did James think that women were more susceptible than men to "this absence of repose, this bottled-lightning quality" of American life (1983, 122)?⁷ He follows Call in emphasizing the degree to which

Americanitis afflicts women, and his insights into a psychological differentiation between men and women and varying reactions to ongoing stress are prescient in many respects. Freud would write his text on mourning and melancholia in 1917 (twenty-five years after James's lecture) without mention of gender as it pertains to melancholia. Seventy-two years later, in 1989, Julia Kristeva devoted *Black Sun* to the examination of feminine depression and forms of melancholia unique to female experience. Kristeva argues that women have a propensity for melancholia as a result of their early identification with and subsequent separation from the mother. According to Kristeva, girls undergo a "two-sided oedipal phase" in which the path to heterosexuality is fraught with an ever-present psychical bisexuality and a pervasive feeling of "extraneousness" in relation to the father/phallic/symbolic order.⁸ The difficulties women face in loving and forming intimate bonds with others arise from their earliest experiences of devotion and ambivalence. One potentially positive result of the extra psychic work that a woman undertakes in her quest for a love object is the development of more open, creative relationships to language and heightened sensitivity to what Kristeva calls "the semiotic"—the gestural, "trans-verbal" undercurrent of organized speech.⁹ Kristeva describes her own work as an analyst in terms of learning to listen for the semiotic (musical, unnameable) undertones erupting beneath the disjointed speech of depressed women—"to interpret the voice" and "to disarticulate the signifying sequences that become banal and lifeless—the purpose being to extract the infrasignifying meaning of depressive discourse that is hidden in fragments of lexical items, in syllables, or in phonic groups yet strangely semanticized" (1992, 55). When women remain or become profoundly estranged from the symbolic order (unable to love, unable to speak), they can experience forms of depression in which "the rhythm of overall behavior is shattered, [and] there is neither time nor place for acts and sequences to be carried out" (34). Kristeva, like James, does not explicitly raise the variable relationship that individuals have to the term "woman," or the degree to which women resist being universally diagnosed under a single rubric of loss, language, or sublimation.¹⁰ Yet *Black Sun* includes a central chapter, "Illustrations of Feminine Depression," devoted to case studies and testimonies from Kristeva's own patients, their voices overtaking the text. This, coupled with Kristeva's focus on specific works of art at the close of her book (in chapters devoted to Holbein, de Nerval, Dostoyevsky, and Duras), reflects her sensitivity to the intricacies and ethical/political significance of singularity. *Black Sun* is an attempt to write a radically poly-

vocal text. It not only advocates but also *demonstrates* the urgency of listening for other voices and other languages.¹¹

James seems poised to articulate something in 1895 that would not fully come into focus for a long time—namely, that the dominant features of American life disproportionately subject women to physical/psychological distress and exile them from normative structures of meaning.¹² In his own lectures, James articulated such a condition in terms of an impoverished sense of possibilities and compromised "spiritual hygiene" (1983, 121). Perhaps James sensed that the guiding ideals of American life in 1895 overemphasized what Kristeva would later call the symbolic order, which stresses modes of discourse and comportment aimed at codifying and categorizing according to definitive norms. James worried about "spiritual hygiene," while Kristeva (2012, 12) worries about a poverty of spirituality in the modern world and a diminishment of what she calls the *sacred*—"the desire of human beings to think, not in the sense of calculation, but rather in the sense of a need for fundamental questioning." She offers an epistemological, rather than a religious, definition of the sacred. For Kristeva, as well as for James, genuine thinking entails radical imagination and risk—something akin to what Hannah Arendt (1971, 417) called "thinking without a banister." Listening for the semiotic registers of language hones a unique capacity for being attuned to silence and open to alternative means of communication, including bodily gesture, glances, nonlinear prose, painting, music, and poetry. Such attunement also requires patience on the part of the listener and time on the part of the speaker. A culture built upon an idealization of speed and a single vision of success loses touch with less rigid and measurable possibilities for flourishing, ultimately blinding itself to alterity and forgetting the labors inherent in genuine thought. James predicted that an unchecked American zealotry for personal success at all costs would marginalize those who fell outside traditional, stereotyped models—women foremost (though certainly not alone) among them. Additionally, some women, particularly those already most marginalized and oppressed in America, would invariably be rendered even more abject than others under the pressure to conform to an ever more remote archetype.

James's sensitivity to the plight of women in 1895 may have been tied to the history of his sister, Alice, who suffered a major breakdown in 1890, was diagnosed with cancer in 1891, and died in London on March 5, 1892. Alice's fate must have been on James's mind as he stood facing a class of young women, their futures before them, in Boston a few years later. They, after all, like Alice, were bright, young, white, northeastern American

women—the kind of women James knew so well from his own upbringing and life in Cambridge.¹³ Writing to his brother Henry after her death, James (1997, 265) offered the dispassionate lament “Poor little Alice! What a life! I can’t believe that the imperious will and piercing judgment are snuffed out with the breath.” In his reply, Henry expressed relief at Alice’s passing, noting the degree to which she was never at home in the world: “Even more than before (though I was particularly conscious of it during all the last year,) I feel that [Alice’s] character was rare & remarkable. How it would have got on with the world if she had had to live in the world I know not; but I think she never *could* have lived in the world” (266). Alice detailed her own experiences in her diary, but the difficulty of her young life, her sense of utter alienation and homelessness (whether in America or abroad), and the depths of her depression had a lasting impression on the James brothers (who each suffered from their own array of breakdowns and nervous conditions).¹⁴ In the years following Alice’s death, William James devoted much of his research and teaching to abnormal psychology and the paranormal, growing increasingly interested in the spiritual and metaphysical implications of his radical empiricism and deviations of “healthy-mindedness.”

Whatever the basis for James’s interests in female psychology, there is a potentially dangerous and conservative undercurrent to his 1895 pleas that the young women in his audience “fling away the book the day before [an examination], [and] say to yourself, ‘I won’t waste another minute on this miserable thing, and I don’t care an iota whether I succeed or not’” (1983, 128). Taken out of the broader context of James’s address, this statement could sound like a way of undermining the women’s potential to succeed academically—urging them to find joys in other pursuits, as if they aren’t cut out for the intense concentration required for serious intellectual life. In the early 1950s, there would be a similar effort to return women to the home and family in the wake of their wartime labors, with psychiatrists claiming that ambition in women is tied to mental illness, as well as to homosexuality (Tuana 2011). There are deep feminist tensions throughout “The Gospel of Relaxation”; indeed, Charlene Haddock Seigfried, Erin Tarver, Shannon Sullivan, and others have demonstrated that these tensions punctuate James’s wider work. They go hand in hand with racial, ethnic, and class tensions that have been the focus of Cornel West, Patricia Hill Collins, Jose Medina, and others. James was certainly not trying to undermine the young women he was talking to, but the claims that melancholia and other forms of debilitating psychic stress are gendered has far-reaching and complicated implications, including implications for think-

ing about transgender individuals, heteronormative cultures, and the ever-increasing speed at which life is lived in the digital age. Kristeva works through many of the psychic issues women face with a subtlety well beyond James, and without James’s focus on Americans’ unique neuroses. She underscores the psychic difficulties women face in loving and connecting with others—and, by extension, in forming communities and assuming leading political roles. Nonetheless, James embraced and entered into a wide-ranging conversation about gender, education, melancholia, and social norms as a forerunner in 1895, addressing topics that remain painfully unresolved and under-examined in contemporary life in spite of the first, second, and third waves of feminism. If anything, one could argue that the stresses of American life, particularly as they relate to women involved in higher education, have become increasingly intense and unsustainable over time.¹⁵

Habit

James seems genuinely concerned for the lives of students and the degree to which they condition themselves to become neurotically intellectualized. The bulk of his talks to teachers and to students revolve around discussions of habit—both the formation of good habits and strategies for breaking bad habits. “Habit” has a neutral valence for James. In *The Principles of Psychology*, he explains, “When people use the word ‘habit,’ in the majority of instances it is a bad habit they have in mind. They talk of the smoking-habit and the swearing-habit and the drinking-habit, but not of the abstention-habit or the moderation-habit or the courage-habit” (1983, 49). James is interested in the degree to which habit is both liberating (allowing us to progress from gross motor functions to higher intellectual functions) and imprisoning (committing us to repeating the same actions incessantly and condemning us to an increasingly narrow range of possibilities).¹⁶ The question is how to cultivate positive, emancipatory habits while combating negative, entrenching habits.¹⁷ This is not simple, and it is rendered infinitely more complex by the fact that any habit has the possibility of shifting from something positive to something negative midstream. Habits therefore require constant attention and renegotiation. In addition, James (1981, 1:122) sees the “period between twenty and thirty [as] critical in the formation of intellectual and professional habits, [and] the period below twenty [as] more important still for the fixing of *personal* habits . . . such as vocalization and pronunciation, gesture, motion, and

address." Following Aristotle, James notes that habit formation has an optimal window of opportunity that is tied to biological age and neural plasticity. Accordingly, getting things right at the outset is terribly important for future development and growth.

Habits enable patterns of behavior that get carried out largely unconsciously. It is the nature of habit to sediment certain routines so that one no longer has to think about them. Bringing habits into focus, therefore, means bringing into focus something that usually lurks at the margins or on the "fringes" of consciousness. In "The Gospel of Relaxation," James advocates for a more far-reaching self-awareness and diagnoses the overwrought American psyche in terms of its *fixation* on a single goal or ideal. Elsewhere he talks about how difficult it is to transition from a "focal object" to a "marginal object" of attention (1983, 21).¹⁸ Fixation indicates a stasis at odds with James's overarching emphases on flux and pluralism (most notably expressed in the metaphor of the ever-moving "stream of thought"). What one needs is a habit of disrupting fixations—a very peculiar habit in the art of self-interruption and transformation. Establishing this kind of habit will not be simple, since every habit tends to coalesce the subject into a definitive shape.

James opens his talk by invoking the James-Lange theory of emotions and stressing the degree to which obsession about one's own feelings is a particularly dangerous form of psychic fixation. As Gerald E. Meyers notes, the theory of emotions—one of the most popular of James's psychological theories—held that "emotions are actually the effects of *bodily commotions*, and emotion dies when the commotions perish" (James 1983, xxiii). James argues that feelings are largely outside of our control. We feel impulsively this way or that, and strong feeling tends to occlude every other feeling (as jealousy did for Othello). In the last section of his talk, James turns explicitly to melancholia as an example of a condition in which a person finds herself consumed with her own despair, unable to see past or through the thicket of her emotional life. He explains, "*Strong feeling about one's self tends to arrest the free association of one's objective ideas and motor processes.* We get the extreme example of this in the mental disease called melancholia" (127). What begins as psychic anchorage in an all-consuming feeling leads to the psychophysical embargo on fluidity or movement in any form.¹⁹ James emphasizes the degree to which mental and bodily fluidity fuel each other. Concretely, he hopes to see the American educational system become more attuned to the physical dimension of education and the body, if there is to be any hope of training students who might become flexible, energetic, and creative thinkers.²⁰ He worries that women are particularly susceptible

to the imbalance induced by a one-sided, overly intellectualized education, leaving them without physical resources for sustained (and potentially revolutionary) action.²¹ He was sure to find a receptive audience for these ideas at the BNSG, facing a sea of women trained in physical education. But James was advocating something more radical than additional gym classes or time spent outdoors (though these remain pressing needs in contemporary American classrooms from preschool through college, as students are confined not only to their desks but also to their screens). He envisioned a situation in which thinking and action, no longer viewed in opposition to each other, would be seen on a spectrum of whole-bodied choreography and exertion.²² James believed that thinking is a genuine form of movement, which therefore requires open space and time to develop. His critiques of the American educational system disrupt the notion of a traditional classroom and dovetail with Dewey's more explicit recommendations for educational reforms and his championing of experimental intelligence and plurality in *Democracy and Education* in 1916.

Feeling

James's concern about the blinding effects of strong feeling retains potentially troubling Platonic echoes (even as his commitment to incremental habit formation links with Aristotle's descriptions of the cultivation of virtue). In *The Republic*, Socrates is acutely worried about intense feelings and their destabilizing impact on the young soul. As a result, he cautions against anything that might stir up the "wilder passions," including certain forms of music, dramatic tragedy and comedy, literature, and experiences of grief and love. He also warns about the impassioned ties between family members, especially those between mothers and their children. Circumventing what Kristeva calls "maternal passion" is a central goal of the opening books of *The Republic*, in which Socrates advocates undermining the traditional family structure (disallowing mothers to nurse their own children, for instance) so that local, familial love will be replaced with more global, civic loyalties. Ideally, in disrupting the intimacy of the family, Socrates hopes that children will encounter every other person as a "brother" or "sister," irrespective of birth or blood.²³

James doesn't discuss the family or the ways in which devotion to those closest to one may either help or hinder the development of moral sensibility (although his letters demonstrate the centrality of his friendships and detail the joys and hardships of family life). Instead, in "The Gospel of

Relaxation,” he suggests forgetting feeling altogether—to the degree that it is possible—and focusing one’s attention instead on a particular, practical action. The critique of feeling is strange to hear from a thinker so explicitly committed to integrating mind and body. Seigfried (this volume, 49) points out that James’s work on habit is idiosyncratic in that he seems to “go out of his way to criticize an emphasis on feeling that he usually defended in other contexts.” Yet James has in mind a particular variety of feeling that indicates excessive sentimentality about oneself and inhibits both the mind and the body’s range of possible motion. As in *The Principles of Psychology*, in *Talks to Teachers*, he cautions, “There is no more contemptible type of human character than that of the nerveless sentimentalist and dreamer, who spends his life in a weltering sea of sensibility, but never does a concrete manly deed” (1983, 50). In “The Gospel of Relaxation,” he explains, “There is no better known or more generally useful precept in the moral training of youth, or in one’s personal self-discipline, than that which bids us pay attention to what we do and express, and not to care too much for what we feel” (118). This is another way of saying that we should, whenever possible, orient ourselves outward to the world and our effects on it, rather than inward to our own psyche and boundless intentions. James’s rationale for the shift in focus from feeling to action is that one cannot control feeling, and we may as well not waste energy on things outside our control.²⁴ Action—incremental varieties of action in particular—is more within one’s range of practical power. James assures us that if we recalibrate action, feeling will by necessity follow suit. It may sound as if James is setting up a stark dichotomy between feeling and action, as if they are distinct, separable phenomena. This is not the case. Instead James insists that “action and feeling go together” (118). His point is that viewing the world through the lens of feeling tends to focus one’s gaze inward and minimize one’s sense of agency and responsibility. The same world seen through a lens of action turns the gaze outward and opens up new vistas of possibility, which in turn cultivate new avenues for more expansive feelings.

The first trick, then, to cultivating a more open mind and living at the optimal pitch of energy involves an active forgetting of one’s own feelings and a decisive commitment to actions one has yet to master or believe in.²⁵ A simple example might be to attempt to laugh or smile in the midst of sadness. James’s theory is that the physical act of smiling will do more to dispel a pervasive sense of sorrow than any thinking by itself could ever do. Such actions may be utterly mundane—such as commitments to waking early, exercising, or reading more poetry. They may also be more far-reaching and difficult to begin—a commitment to sobriety, for example. But even in

the case of seemingly impossible actions, James reminds us that action begins with a single step, just as he describes waking up in *The Principles of Psychology* in terms of putting one’s foot on the floor. James’s writings are suffused with an atmosphere of the incremental and the ordinary, coupled with a fascination with “the physical courage of common man” (James 1997, 357). One of the striking features of James’s vision of existence is his belief in the efficacy of even the smallest action and its potential to change the course of an entire life. Freeing oneself from various forms of enslavement entails ongoing movement, however minute—a commitment to an unspecified daily form of what Jaime Schultz calls “physical activism.”²⁶ Focusing on Billie Jean King and women’s tennis in the 1970s, Schultz (2012, 219–20) notes that King and other female players didn’t engage with the theoretical side of the early feminist movement (to the consternation of feminists such as Nora Ephron and Gloria Steinem), but they “shattered the myths of female frailty and, by necessity, cultivated and performed their tenacity, competitiveness, cooperation, independence, stamina, sweat, power, weaknesses, successes, and failures for all who cared to watch.” Rather than articulating any feminist theory or political agenda, they simply played their best tennis and showed the world that what women could do on the court altered conceptions and patterns of behavior on and off the court: “The physical is political” (217). “Physical activism,” however, need not be defined by a commitment to professional athletics or traditional athletics of any kind. It may simply entail exertions beyond the normal range of one’s own physical horizons (which vary widely for differently abled bodies). Importantly, for women whose daily lives consist of repetitive physical labors, Schultz’s concept of “physical activism” is broadened by James’s far-reaching sense of the term “action” and his stress on the intensely active dimensions of relaxation, including resting, stretching, or simply altering the posture of one’s body.²⁷ Each instance of novel action has the power to set a person on a new course, disrupting the paradigm of the entrenched self and reorganizing the habit-body around new patterns of behavior.

Imagination

How is the forgetting of feeling related to an aptitude for relaxation? In some sense, it seems like James is urging the students to do *more*, to become more active and restless. He encourages them to get outside, to move around, to travel and read widely. And yet he urges them to undertake

these activities without thinking too much about them, without stress and worry about how any given act might result or where it may lead. Fixation on feeling is one particularly acute example of mental seizure more generally. The “gospel of relaxation” that he adopts from Annie Payson Call’s *Power Through Repose* entails a relaxation of the mind facilitated by the activation of the body.²⁸ James (1983, 127) explains, “If we wish our trains of ideation and volition to be copious and varied and effective, we must form the habit of freeing them from the inhibitive influence of reflection upon them, of egoistic preoccupation about their results.” The mantra of “The Gospel of Relaxation” is to stop thinking so much about oneself and start doing more, exercising one’s body in new directions. In the process of elaborating the repertoire of the body’s physical limits, the mind acquires new habits of flexibility and creative range.

This is why James references the revolution in Norwegian culture facilitated by women’s practice of skiing and snowshoeing—activities that, in strengthening their physical endurance, strengthened and emancipated their spirits.²⁹ Elsewhere he describes meditation practices and yoga as means of honing attentiveness and letting the body’s energies run more freely.³⁰ Writing about the subject’s tendency to harden into a particular shape, James uses the image of a creased piece of paper to describe the mind’s fixation on a habitual attachment. Once folded, the mind tends to bend along the same repetitive line. This is equally true for the body conditioned into particular postures (bent into a chair or confined to a narrow space, for instance).³¹ Accordingly, James worries about the localization of education to interior spaces that encourage prolonged sitting.

Deepening his suspicion of fixation in any form, James critiques the tortured, solitary, and sedentary model of the American intellectual. Without free range of motion (both physical and psychic), a person has limited possibilities for growth and imagination. Women in academia are particularly prone to sedentary lives, but even for women engaged in deeply physical labors, James would worry about the damaging psychosomatic effects of isolation and repetition.³² Imagination, in particular, is crucial to James’s ethical thought. One striking feature of his own writing is its imaginative depth and the degree to which he prioritizes igniting the imaginations of his readers and listeners by intricately setting the stage of his lectures with personal details of place and time. The intimate style of his prose leads, at times, to exaggerations and generalizations. But more often than not, it allows his readers to envision a scene in which they become implicated as fellow thinkers and actors. In the process, his readers practice an imaginative engagement crucial for disrupting entrenched patterns of belief.³³ The

ability to imagine things otherwise, to see beyond the limits of one’s own narrow range of concerns, is tied to a deeper, more substantial form of ethical vision that James elaborates in “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings.” We naturally see things through the lens of our own lives, but we have the potential to expand our lives in the same way that we have the potential to cultivate new habits. James’s own radical empiricism is a way of seeing the complex interconnectivity of things—their pluralistic and chaotic overlapping. Cultivating such a vision entails more than the textbook examination of different forms of life. It requires entanglements in the thicket of new experiences, particularly those experiences that challenge or undercut one’s sure footing and safely guarded beliefs, an exposure to what Cora Diamond names “difficult realities”—“a sense of being shouldered out from our ways of thinking and speaking by a torment of reality.”³⁴ In circumstances where ideals are challenged by an unfamiliar, unforeseen interruption, James (1978, 658) writes, “Your imagination is extended.” Elsewhere he explicitly links an extension of imagination to what he calls “the highest ethical life,” which “consists at all times in the breaking of rules which have grown too narrow for the actual case” (625).³⁵

Human beings are constitutionally blind to the significance of other lives, but perhaps especially to lives lived beyond the familiar intellectual threshold—the lives of animals, the natural world, infants, children, the mute, or the cognitively impaired. The habituated mind tends to organize itself around similar examples of itself—own seeking own. This means that we risk growing into increasingly fixed states regulated by intellectual aims and practical pursuits, living farther afield from what James (1978, 644) called “this mysterious sensorial life, with its irrationality, if so you like to call it, but its vigilance and its supreme felicity.”³⁶ Slave to habit, we are rendered incrementally blind and deaf to the visions and calls of creatures who differ from us in their shapes, voices, and patterns of behaviors.

If this is the course of life—a gradual submission to habit engrained in the biological makeup of our bodies—then how does one retain a touch of youth and animality that might keep one open to the wider world? James argues forcibly for travel and reading, but Annie Payson Call had more explicit recommendations in *Power Through Repose*, which was first published in serial form in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. James wrote an enthusiastic review of Call’s book in 1891, and he borrowed heavily from her thinking as he drafted “The Gospel of Relaxation.” In the middle of his talk, he references Call’s work explicitly, singling her book out for its “radical and general gospel of relaxation” and urging that it “ought to be in the hands of every teacher and student in America of either sex” (James 1983,

126). Foremost, Call advocated spending time with babies and young children so that one might learn from and emulate their physical flexibility. In chapter 11, "The Child as an Ideal," she elaborates,

In play, we find the same freedom. When one idea is being executed, every other is excluded. [Children] do not think *dolls* while they roll *hoop!* They do not think of work while they play. Examine and see how we do both. The baby of one year, sitting on the shore burying his fat hand in the soft warm sand, is for the time being alive *only* to its warmth and softness, with a dim consciousness of the air and color about him. If we could engross ourselves as fully and with as simple a pleasure, we should know far more of the possible power of our minds for both work and rest. (Call 1920, 90)

Call suggests myriad strategies for a more conscious immersion in the here and now, coupled with a willful forgetting of future prospects and outcomes. Her advice to women is to be present in their own lives and in the lives of their children, for whom they are not only or merely caretakers. In Call's descriptions, motherhood becomes a stage of radical experimentation and discovery, with mothers and their infants interacting as fellow adventurers, playmates, scientists, explorers, and artists. The physical flexibility of the infant becomes a catalyst for the mother's own psychophysical expansion. Call devotes chapter 15 of her text to "artistic considerations," recommending daily immersion in some artistic practice as a means of relaxation, the cultivation of a "light touch," and the expansion of imagination (1920, 145).

Call's writings deserve their own sustained study, which goes beyond what I can do here. For the present purposes, it is enough to note that James adopts much from her descriptions, without, however, stressing infancy, artistic practice, and motherhood in the same degree, thereby omitting a critical component of Call's thinking about women's unique experiences. Call's writings, intended for a popular audience, inevitably reached and spoke to a wider group of women, particularly those at home rearing children. Her work helps us underscore the feminist implications of the "gospel of relaxation," encouraging us to remember the relative rarity of a classroom of women in a university in 1895 and to reflect on a typical philosophy classroom or department today, in 2015. Call highlights and dignifies the sphere of the family and the idea of the home as an original school. Her descriptions of infancy and the adult's potential to learn from the infant give urgency and a special priority to the chapter of life in which

one cares for a baby—traditionally and still largely the work of women, particularly in the first year of life. Her writings also foreshadow Melanie Klein's focus on young children and their varying capacities for creative play.³⁷

Most of us in America (and particularly in academia) stand in desperate need of more physical exertion as well as more exertions of imagination (see, for example, Wippman 2012). We could also use more immersion in the lives of nonverbal beings—babies and other animals. As Call stresses, they might be the best (and perhaps only) teachers of how to genuinely play and how to relax. James asks us to think about how we might engender imaginative capacities in ourselves and in others.³⁸ He wonders specifically about the structures of academia and the degree to which universities actively *discourage* imaginative growth. He asks us to break out of our routines and to model the behaviors we hope to see reflected in the world at large. He also reminds us that cultivating imagination, flexibility, tolerance, and openness will be harder later in life. It will also be harder to the degree that physical mobility is limited or compromised. Yet we are not without hope—even if we are biologically beyond the window of optimal plasticity or imprisoned, physically or mentally. James always returns to the incremental act: standing up, getting out the door. These may not, by themselves, be transformative. But together and over time they sketch the parameters of our future selves, which widen and change with each new step.

James's pluriverse is a space of decentered subjectivity—a place in which subjects remake themselves and are remade in light of new experiences. There is something prescient and refreshing in James's optimism about the human being's capacities to inscribe himself or herself in original ways into the ever-shifting stream of life, to be more tolerant, more open, and more capable of surprise. In addition to the existential themes of anxiety, freedom, imagination, and embodiment that James explores, there are significant feminist implications to his ideas, insofar as they foreshadow the postmodern deconstruction of identity and set the stage for the idea that subjectivity is something in the making and never entirely made. The women James addressed in 1895 were embarking on their higher education—their lives ahead of them. James encouraged them in their multiple pursuits and multiple beings, entreating them to live more free, creative lives. The possibilities for women being more than one thing, maintaining multiple paths of devotion and cultivating multiple centers of gravity, have historically been more complex and fraught than James acknowledged or could foresee. Still, "The Gospel of Relaxation" resonates in America more

than a century later as a diagnosis of a culture lacking adequate spiritual and physical hygiene, a culture committed to narrow paradigms of professionalization and success, a culture fostering an educational system that largely ignores or subverts the creative dimensions of play, and a culture in which women, among others, still struggle for freedom and equality.

Notes

1. As Gerald E. Meyers notes in his introduction to *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (James 1983, xi–xii), James's interest in the psychology of pedagogy dovetailed with Harvard's focus on pedagogy in the early 1890s, its appointment of Paul Henry Hanus as assistant professor in the history of art and teaching in 1891, and the creation of the Division of Education in 1906. James's wildly popular lectures to teachers appeared in installments in *Atlantic Monthly* before being published together in 1899.

2. For a more detailed account, see Wolff (1990), as well as Gilman's (1914) critique of male-dominated culture and its implications for women in *The Man-Made World*.

3. The BNSG was an ideal venue for James's talk, as it was a training ground for those interested in robust physical, moral, and theoretical education techniques. *One Hundred Gymnastics Games*, a text published by the school in 1897, is essentially a manual of games for children, but opens with a Jamesian observation that "physical, mental and moral training must go hand in hand with joyous recreation" (BNSG 1897, 5).

4. In her essay "The Virtue of Feeling and the Feeling of Virtue," Spelman (1991, 214–15) critiques the language of an "ethics of care" for obscuring the myriad ways in which women have historically cared and not cared for one another. She explains, "It is startling that something as basic as some women's inhumanity to other women has not been a central concern for the variety of inquiries included under the rubric 'feminist ethics.'" She goes on to articulate a problem among contemporary feminists (a problem James was surely guilty of): "Many of us feminists have done little to shake a habit we share with many of our fellow citizens: talking loosely about 'men and women' as if these men and women had no racial, class, or cultural identity."

5. James wrote a glowing review of Call's *Power Through Repose* in 1891 and was heavily influenced by her ideas. For an elaboration of their relationship, see Richardson (2007, 311–12).

6. Charlene Haddock Seigfried (1996, ix) underscores the feminist tension inherent in James's restlessness, asking, "How can James's repeatedly expressed longing for the domestic pleasures of his wife and family . . . be reconciled with his wanderlust?"

7. Seigfried has argued that James's concern with women's susceptibility to "nervous conditions" is emblematic of the pervasive sexism of his writing (itself reflective of damaging Victorian ideals of femininity). She writes (this volume, 33), "James's belief that men are naturally belligerent and women naturally nurturant led him to systematically distinguish male from female virtue."

8. Kristeva (1992, 30) writes, "One cannot overemphasize the tremendous psychic, intellectual, and affective effort a woman must make in order to find the other sex as erotic object." She continues, "If the discovery of her invisible vagina already imposes upon a woman a tremendous sensory, speculative, and intellectual effort, shifting to the symbolic order at the same time as to a sexual object of a sex other than that of the primary maternal object represents a gigantic elaboration in which a woman cathezes a psychic potential greater than what is demanded of the male sex. When this process is favorably carried out, it is evidenced by the precocious awakening of girls, their intellectual performances often more brilliant during the school years, and their continuing female maturity."

9. Kristeva (2012, 11) explains, "The distinction that I have established between the semiotic and the symbolic . . . is simply an attempt to think of 'meaning' not only as 'structure' but also as

'process' or 'trial' . . . by looking at the same time at syntax, logic, and what transgresses them, or the trans-verbal. . . . The semiotic is not independent of language, but underpins language and, under the control of language, it articulates other aspects of 'meaning' which are more than mere 'significations,' such as rhythmical and melodic inflections."

10. The question of the degree to which Kristeva universalizes women goes beyond the scope of the present chapter, but many feminists have challenged the use of the term "woman" as a stable descriptor. Denise Riley (2010, 224), for instance, insists that "the sexed body is not something reliably constant, which can afford a good underpinning for the complications of the thousand discourses on 'women.'" In a similar vein, Judith Butler (2010, 238) writes, "The concept of 'sex' is itself troubled terrain, formed through a series of contestations over what ought to be decisive criterion for distinguishing between the two sexes; the concept of sex has a history that is covered over by the figure of the site or surface of inscription."

11. As Kelly Oliver (2002, xvi) notes, "One of Kristeva's most important contributions to contemporary theory is her attempt to bring the speaking body back into the discourse of the human sciences. Her writing challenges theories that rely on unified, fixed, stagnant theories of subjectivity; she insists on semiotic negativity, which produces a dynamic subjectivity. Yet she challenges theories that would reduce subjectivity to chaotic flux; she also insists on symbolic stasis and identity."

12. For instance, the National Institute of Mental Health cites a 2005 study (http://www.nimh.nih.gov/statistics/1mdd_adult.shtml) showing that American women are 70 percent more likely to experience depression in their lifetime than American men.

13. Seigfried (this volume, 38) has critiqued James for an inability to see the women in his life as anything other than accessories to his own comfort and success. Stressing his blindness to other lives, she writes, "From the way James identifies those in our midst who are usually ignored and with whom 'we' are being asked to sympathize, it is obvious that the authorial we, which encompasses both author and student, is middle-or upper-class, a member of a privileged ethnic group, educated, professional, and male." On James's relationship to Alice, see Seigfried (this volume) and McKenna (this volume).

14. In a remarkable passage from her diary, Alice James (1964, 208) wrote about her doctor's diagnosis of her terminal cancer in June 1891, describing her own death in the following way: "Having [death] to look forward to for a while seems to double the value of the event, and one's wavering little individuality stands out with a cameo effect and one has the tenderest indulgence for all the abortive little stretchings out which crowd in upon the memory. The grief is all for K. and H., who will see it all, whilst I shall only feel it, but they are taking it, of course, like archangels. . . . Poor dear William with his exaggerated sympathy for suffering isn't to know anything about it until it is all over."

15. As one example, see The Stone's recent series of articles on women in philosophy in the *New York Times*, beginning September 2, 2013, with a piece by Sally Haslanger.

16. James (1983, 48) writes, "So far as we are thus mere bundles of habit, we are stereotyped creatures, imitators and copiers of our past selves."

17. Quoting at length from a German psychologist in *The Principles of Psychology*, James (1981, 1:112) explains, "Dr. Carpenter's phrase that *our nervous system grows to the modes in which it has been exercised* expresses the philosophy of habit in a nutshell." A few pages later, he writes, "The great thing, then, in all education, is to *make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy*" (122).

18. James describes the facilitation of this transition as one of the primary tasks of the teacher, who must render the marginal object interesting enough that it might flare up for the naturally distracted, self-concerned pupil. Teaching is, then, the art of rendering the marginal focal.

19. See James's chapter on will in *The Principles of Psychology* (1981, 1:486–592).

20. James (1983, 121) writes, "Even if the day dawns in which [muscular vigor] will not be needed for fighting the old heavy battles against Nature, it will still always be needed to furnish the background of sanity, serenity, and cheerfulness to life, to give moral elasticity to our disposition."

21. Passionate feeling about one thing tends to obscure the importance of anything else. And yet passionate feeling is also crucial to what James elsewhere calls the "strenuous mood," which he associates with taking bold moral action. In "The Energies of Men," he explains, "The capacity for the

strenuous mood probably lies slumbering in every man, but it has more difficulty in some than others in waking up. It needs the wilder passions to arouse it, the big fears, loves, and indignations" (1978, 627). How one retains "wilder passions" in relation to the ideals animating one's life without rendering oneself blind to new demands remains one of the most complicated aspects of James's ethical psychology.

22. In her essay "The Physical Activism of Billie Jean King," Jaime Schultz (2012, 220) uses the term "physical activism" to describe the political significance of female athletes and athletics, stressing that "athletic participation is not an isolated, apolitical, or trivial realm, but a field rife with potential for both the individual and society." Without making a claim as explicit as Shultz does, James invokes the emancipatory, political power of physical activity. In essence, he was applauding the women before him for their commitment to physical education, while urging them toward an even greater, more life-altering "physical activism."

23. Kristeva (2012, 79–94) describes maternal love as "a core passion" and "an inaugural passion"; it differentiates humans from other animals and hinges on the mother's intense attachment to and detachment from her own child—a perpetual working-through that Kristeva associates with sublimation.

24. James (1983, 118) explains, "Action seems to follow feeling, but really action and feeling go together; and by regulating the action, which is under the more direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling, which is not."

25. There's a strong resemblance here to Friedrich Nietzsche's celebration of forgetting in "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life." Like James, Nietzsche stresses the therapeutic value of action, writing, "Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic." He continues to diagnose his own sense of a spiritual crisis in Germany in 1874, explaining, "There is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living being, whether this living being be a man or a people or a culture" (Nietzsche 1983, 62).

26. For instance, James (1983, 51–52) writes, "By neglecting the necessary concrete labor, by sparing ourselves the little daily tax, we are positively digging the graves of our higher possibilities."

27. James effectively undoes the active/passive dualism in a way that prefigures Levinas's later efforts to show the activity of seemingly passive phenomena such as sleep, patience, aging, bearing witness, and so on.

28. Call, who published her work in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, details specific strategies for allowing mind/body relaxation, including observing and trying to emulate the movements of infants. Her theories relate to Frederick Matthias Alexander's formulation of the Alexander Technique, an educational process in which students are trained to stop using unnecessary muscular and mental tension during everyday activities. Alexander published his first book on the topic, *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, in 1918.

29. James (1983, 119–20) writes, "Fifteen years ago the Norwegian women were even more than the women of our lands votaries of the old-fashioned ideal of femininity, 'the domestic angel,' the 'gentle and refining influence' sort of thing. Now these sedentary fireside tabby-cats of Norway have been trained, they say, by the snow-shoes into lithe and audacious creatures, for whom no night is too dark or height too giddy, and who are not only saying good-bye to the traditional feminine pallor and delicacy of constitution, but actually taking the lead in every educational and social reform."

30. Richard Shusterman (2007, 34) has stressed this aspect of James's thinking, linking it to his own experiences with Zen training in order to argue that "methodical somo-aesthetic reflection can develop one's power of volition by directing intensely focused consciousness to one's breathing or other somatic feeling (such as the contact of one's feet with the floor in walking meditation)."

31. In chapters 1 and 6 of *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard (1964) examines the role of a child's first home on the physical and psychological shape she assumes for the rest of her life, as well as her susceptibility to fold herself into spaces that mimic her earliest experiences of safety and enclosure.

32. James refuses to prescribe a single activity above others as he implores the students to find their own paths toward well-being. His advice may not resonate in the same way for women who work under extreme physical conditions (for whom snowshoeing would never be an option, for example, let alone a chosen recreation), but his central point is that women need to exercise their bodies in new directions, however incremental or seemingly insignificant.

33. Seigfried stresses the degree to which James's imaginatively engaging scenes of heroism are always male and therefore exclude and marginalize the experiences of women. Erin Tarver (this volume, 109) adds, "We are surprised by greatness—which is why we feel it is so important to explain its origins. Contrariwise, James does not seem surprised by the apparently overwhelming masculinity of that greatness, leaving it as unremarked as a dog's lack of speech. We are, as a result, left to wonder where women fall on the human/dog continuum."

34. Cora Diamond (2008, 71) expresses this widening of one's sense of life and honing of moral imagination in terms of "exposure to difficult realities"—that is, to realities that challenge readymade paradigms and subject a person to experiences that she has no way of thinking through in advance.

35. As I've suggested in Craig (2010), James, like Levinas, insists that every ethical problem is a singular case, one that fails to fit neatly into a readymade category. James emphasizes the role of imagination and psychic/physical flexibility in responding to life's inevitable flux. Keeping imagination open and elastic prepares one for thinking beyond the narrow paradigms of the past, poised to encounter life in its singular ruptures.

36. James is close to his friend Henri Bergson on this point.

37. Melanie Klein, in "The Psycho-analytic Play Technique," describes the difficulty that one of her young patients, Rita, had in playing. Rita's obsessional dressing and undressing of her doll led Klein to the conviction that "a precondition for the psycho-analysis of a young child is to understand and to interpret the phantasies, feelings, anxieties and experiences expressed by play, or if play activities are inhibited, the cause of the inhibition" (1986, 38).

38. Stephen Fesmire (2003, 51ff.) links Dewey's account of imagination with James's work on emotional intelligence, critiquing the "sexist" equation of emotion with "feminine intuition" in James, but applauding the degree to which James makes emotional engagement central to any account of rationality.

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