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William James' Theory of Emotion

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Graduate Program in Philosophy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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WILLIAM JAMES' THEORY OF EMOTION

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

James Southworth

Graduate Program in Philosophy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

William James' theory of emotion has had a profound impact within philosophy and psychology over the last 130 years. While his counterintuitive James-Lange theory – which asserts that an emotion is the feeling of bodily changes – has been widely criticized, it has also had its supporters over the years, including recently with advocates from neuroscience, psychology and philosophy. In part one (Chapters 1-4), I argue that critics and advocates alike have misinterpreted James on emotion due to a neglect of his overarching framework as developed in *The Principles of Psychology*. The James-Lange theory remains silent on a number of philosophical questions, including the relationship between emotion and consciousness, the nature of an emotional feeling, and the relationship between emotion and other mental and bodily phenomena, such as instinct, habit, will and attention. By considering James' views on these matters, I hope to show that his comprehensive theory of emotion is far different than traditionally conceived. As a result, the standard criticisms of the theory, such as its inability to account for intentionality, cannot be sustained.

In part two (Chapters 5-7), I consider James' later treatment of emotion as developed in *The Will to Believe* and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. While it is generally thought that James employs a cognitive theory of emotion in these later works, I argue that this is not the case; that his treatment of emotion is continuous with his earlier theory. Nevertheless, James does expand his conception of emotion in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* with his discussion of two kinds of emotions: feelings of reality and transformational emotions. I attempt to draw out the important implications that these two kinds of emotions have for the relationship between emotion and belief. In the final chapter, I turn my attention to *The Will to Believe*. I contend that the many misinterpretations of this short essay are rooted in a misunderstanding of what James means by 'our passionate nature'. Drawing upon my previous analysis of emotion, I present what I take to be James' ultimate argument in the essay, which is far more passionate than the prevailing right to believe interpretation.

Keywords

William James, James-Lange theory, emotion, feeling, stream of consciousness, knowledge by acquaintance, knowledge about, intentionality, belief, the unconscious, habit, instinct, attention, feelings of reality, transformational emotions, passionate nature, will to believe

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Introduction: More than a Century of Misunderstanding

One would be hard pressed to name a theory of emotion, whether in the history of philosophy or psychology that is more famous than William James'. The theory challenges common presuppositions about the ordering of an emotional episode. Instead of an emotion causing the bodily changes, James famously asserts that "*the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion*" ([1890], 2: 449). Given this inversion of commonsense thinking, James concludes that we run from a threat not because we are frightened, but rather we are "frightened because we run" ([1890], 2: 450). This counterintuitive theory has become known as the James-Lange theory of emotion, so named because the Danish physiologist Carl Lange came up with a similar view independently of James.¹ Despite the theory's fame, it has been widely criticized, both by James' contemporaries (Gurney [1884], Irons [1894], Wundt [1891]), and more recent critics (Deigh [2014], Gordon [1987], Solomon [2007]). It has even been referred to as "the Dumb View" of emotion (Jaggar [2008]). However, the theory has had its supporters throughout the years, including recently, with advocates from neuroscience, psychology and philosophy (Damasio [1994]; Dewey [1894] [1895]; Laird [2007]; Prinz [2004]; Ratcliffe [2005] [2008]; Robinson [2005]). In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that the theory is currently undergoing something of a revival.

As theorists continue to disagree over the general merits of James' feeling theory, most are in agreement as to what its commitments are. But what precisely is this exegetical agreement based on? Here we find critics and advocates alike focusing exclusively on James' two primary works on emotion: 1) his 1884 article "What is An Emotion?" published in *Mind*, and 2) his chapter on "The Emotions" in *The Principles of Psychology* (hereafter *The Principles*). This is simply too narrow a focus.

¹ While both regard physiological changes as the cause of emotion, Lange emphasizes the role of the vasomotor system, which regulates blood flow. For James, the physiological changes are more extensive, including changes in the viscera, facial expressions, and even expressive behavior.

It is surprising that while James is generally classified as holding a feeling theory of emotion, there has been no inquiry into what he means by ‘feeling’. When we begin to consider James’ conception of feeling, broadly construed, we are led to consider another famous theory he develops in *The Principles* – his stream of consciousness theory. Yet interpreters have for the most part overlooked the relationship between his conception of consciousness and emotion. Moreover, there has been little attempt to draw out the interconnectedness for James between emotion and other mental and bodily phenomena, including belief, instinct, habit, attention and will, which are also developed in *The Principles*. Despite these omissions, a number of critics have suggested that the James-Lange theory is incompatible with James’ later treatment of emotion developed in works such as *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Averill [1992]; Oatley & Djikic [2002]; Solomon [1995]). This later work is thought to contain a richer, cognitive view of emotion, one that constitutes a fundamental break from his earlier feeling theory. However, without understanding what an emotional feeling is for James, and how it relates to other mental and bodily phenomena, we are in no position to assert such a break. All of this raises a concern. The many philosophers who have used James’ theory of emotion as a steppingstone to develop their own view may in fact be stepping over a straw man.

Over the last 130 years, numerous criticisms have been directed toward James’ theory of emotion, which continue to seriously undermine its plausibility. These include the following:

- 1) The theory reduces emotions to mere epiphenomena. Since emotions are causally inefficacious with respect to action, they have no clear function.
- 2) The theory cannot account for the intentionality of emotion. Since emotions are feelings of bodily states, they are neither directed toward nor about the world.
- 3) The theory is undermined by its inclusion of subtle emotions. These emotions, which are comprised of aesthetic, intellectual and moral emotions, are clearly more than the feeling of bodily changes.
- 4) The theory overlooks the fact that our emotions, at least to a certain extent, are socially constructed.

- 5) The theory cannot account for unconscious emotions because emotions for James are necessarily felt. Since there are unconscious emotions, the theory must be false.
- 6) The theory reduces emotions to entirely passive states of consciousness. If emotions are merely feelings of bodily states, then we are in no way responsible for our emotions.

In the first four chapters, I argue that when we situate James' conception of emotion within his overarching framework as developed in *The Principles*, the above criticisms are either false or overstated. In so doing, I will show that James' conception of emotion is not exhausted by the James-Lange theory. This theory, which asserts that the feeling of bodily changes is the emotion, remains silent on a number of philosophical questions. These include the relationship between emotion and consciousness, the nature of an emotional feeling, and the relationship between emotion and other mental and bodily phenomena, such as instinct, habit, will and attention. By considering James' views on these matters, I hope to show that his comprehensive theory of emotion is far different than traditionally conceived.

This analysis will lay the groundwork for the final three chapters, in which I consider James' treatment of emotion in *The Will to Believe* and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In Chapter 5, I argue that while there are some developments to James' view in these later works, these changes are best understood as building upon a theory already in place at the time of *The Principles*. In Chapter 6, I consider the role of emotion in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which surprisingly has not received much scholarly attention. I discuss two unique kinds of emotion, 'feelings of reality' and 'transformational emotions', both of which add new and important dimensions to his earlier view. In Chapter 7, I turn my attention to *The Will to Believe*. I contend that the many misinterpretations of this short essay are rooted in a misunderstanding of what James means by 'our passional nature'. Drawing upon my previous analysis of emotion, I present what I take to be James' ultimate argument in the essay – one that is certainly more passionate than the prevailing right to believe interpretation.

My project of inquiring into the role of emotion throughout a portion of James' career (primarily 1890 to 1902) is not without its dangers. In 1900, James criticized a doctoral dissertation that had been conducted on his work. He objected to the author's approach, which consisted of taking quotes from different texts over different times and for different audiences and then assembling them together to form a philosophical system that was subsequently shown to be internally flawed. As James says, "Building up an author's meaning out of separate texts leads nowhere, unless you have first grasped his centre of vision by an act of imagination" (James [1920], 355).

The concern of assembling together quotes from different texts, written at different times and for different audiences, is less of a worry for the first part of my analysis (Chapters 1-4), as I focus almost exclusively on *The Principles*. Despite the previous publication of many of its chapters in journals, including the chapter on emotion in *Mind*, James intended *The Principles* to be a unified work (James [1892], 9-10).² Nevertheless, even within this purportedly unified work, he alternates between philosophical and psychological perspectives. While *The Principles* was written with the explicit goal of developing psychology as a natural science, James struggles with this project, and often engages in traditional philosophical questions.³ At other times, he assumes certain philosophical positions on pragmatic psychological grounds. Most notably, he assumes a Cartesian dualism on the basis that psychologists must assume that there exist both mental and physical facts ([1890], 1: 185). Even within this single work then, James' purpose is by no means clearly focused. Sometimes he writes from a philosophical perspective, other times from a psychological perspective, and occasionally these different perspectives conflict.⁴ Being attentive to these shifts in perspective is therefore

² This is one of the reasons why I pay more attention to James' chapter on the emotions in *The Principles* than his earlier 1884 article.

³ Bruce Wilshire nicely illustrates this struggle in *William James and Phenomenology* (Wilshire [1968]). As of 1892, in the epilogue of *The Briefer Course*, James seems to have given up on the project of developing psychology as a natural science as "the waters of metaphysical criticism leak at every joint" ([1892], 463).

⁴ James' view on free will provides a clear example of this. As a psychologist, he assumes determinism, but as a philosopher, he holds a libertarian view.

of central importance when considering James' treatment of emotion within *The Principles*.

James' later works, such as *The Will to Believe* and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, also alternate between philosophical and psychological perspectives. These writings were clearly intended for a broader audience than *The Principles*, which, in addition to James' changing metaphysical views, complicates a study of his work on emotion. Despite all of this, I contend that a "centre of vision" does emerge. The central thread that weaves through James' work on emotion is his emphasis on experience. This may seem like an uninteresting connection, but given James' radical empiricism – already in place at the time of *The Principles* in the form of his stream of consciousness theory – it is anything but. Emotions for James are first and foremost experienced; only secondarily are they understood. The philosophical implications of this are considered most explicitly in his later work, where he rejects the feeling-less theories of epistemology that have dominated the history of western philosophy. For James, our emotional feelings not only lie at the root of our philosophical and religious beliefs, but they ought to be the primary epistemic driver in these domains of inquiry. This is truly a Copernican shift. Out of James' radical empiricism we get a radical view of emotion, one that far exceeds the counterintuitive inversion of the James-Lange theory.

This emphasis on the richness of emotional experience may seem difficult to reconcile with the physiological focus of the James-Lange theory. This theory is often perceived in a cold, positivistic, antiseptic way, as if he were attempting to squeeze the passion out of emotion. The idea that mere physiological changes could be the direct cause of all the meaning and value that emotions bring into our lives has left an unsavoury taste in the mouths of numerous critics. In fact, a number of philosophers have argued that James reduces emotion to a mere epiphenomenon, a causally inefficacious byproduct of physical reality (Campbell [1997]; Deigh [2014]; Gordon [1987]; Solomon [1976]). This common view is certainly at odds with what I take to be James' centre of vision with respect to emotion. Rather than a mere byproduct of reality, I hope to show that emotions for James play a primary role both in our acquaintance with reality and our knowledge about reality.

1 Situating Emotion Within Consciousness

On the surface, James' theory of emotion seems simple and clear, but when considered more closely, complexities begin to appear. Some interpreters have recognized this complexity to varying degrees, and have challenged the dominant non-cognitive interpretation as a result. In the following section, I look at three interpretations of James' theory: 1) the dominant non-cognitive view, which I call the standard view; 2) Phoebe Ellsworth's cognitive view; and 3) Gary Hatfield's hybrid view.⁵ I argue that each of these interpretations is flawed in particular respects. In addition, they share a common problem, which arises from failing to situate James' theory of emotion within his stream of consciousness theory. I attempt to clarify matters by articulating an implicit distinction that runs throughout *The Principles* – that between primary feeling and secondary feeling.⁶ Indeed, James uses the term *feeling* in distinctive and various ways. Being attentive to his use of this term is necessary in order to elucidate what exactly an emotion is.

1.1 Three Interpretations

1.1.1 The Standard View

James' theory of emotion challenges the commonsense view of a typical emotional episode. The emotion does not cause the physiological response, but rather “*the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion*” ([1890], 2: 449). The standard view of James' theory takes root from this passage – that emotional consciousness is nothing but

⁵ These three interpretations are the most developed and plausible views of James. Other interpretations have been offered. For example Gilbert Ryle suggests that James attempts to *reduce* feelings to their physiological changes (Ryle [1949]). James, however, consistently maintained that his theory is not materialistic. The feeling may be given by the physiological response, but it is not reducible to it.

⁶ In *The Physical Basis of Emotion*, James refers to emotion as a secondary feeling insofar as it is “indirectly aroused” rather than “directly aroused by the exciting object or thought” ([1894], 516). I am using the term in a different way.

the feeling of bodily changes (Deigh [2014]; de Sousa [1987] [2011]; Goldie [2000]; Gurney [1884]; Irons [1894]; Prinz [2004]; Sartre [1939]; Solomon [1973] [2007]). As a result, James is thought to be unable to account for the intentionality of emotion. Since an emotion is the feeling of bodily states, it is neither directed toward nor about anything in the world. By reducing emotion to the feeling of bodily changes, it seems to follow that an emotion is a non-cognitive state. This is an unfortunate result, as we want to say that a particular emotional response is appropriate or inappropriate, rational or irrational given what it is about. The fear of a spider, for example, is certainly inappropriate and irrational on the face of it. But according to the standard view of James, we are not afraid of the spider; rather, we are afraid because we tremble.

Robert Solomon employed this standard view of James to illustrate that feelings are inessential to emotion. Since feelings fail to capture the intentional component of emotion, Solomon argues that emotions are essentially judgments (Solomon [1973] [2007]).⁷ Jesse Prinz, meanwhile, agrees that the standard view captures the essence of James' theory. Unlike Solomon however, Prinz is a general supporter of the theory. "I have endorsed William James (1884) in presuming that emotional consciousness is consciousness of changes in bodily states" (Prinz [2004], 206). Prinz nevertheless agrees that James' theory cannot account for intentionality, and he seeks to amend this alleged shortcoming by arguing that emotions are embodied appraisals that represent core relational themes.⁸

⁷ Over the course of his career, Solomon did become more receptive to James' theory. In particular, Solomon was interested in James' work on habit (Solomon [2001a]). Moreover, Solomon expanded his conception of judgment in a Jamesian way with his notion of "judgments of the body" (Solomon [2001b]). Jenefer Robinson's "Bob Solomon and William James: A Rapprochement" nicely presents this increasing convergence (Robinson [2010]).

⁸ Prinz argues that emotions represent core relational themes by registering distinct patterns of bodily changes that bear upon an individual's wellbeing in the world, such as danger and loss (Prinz, [2004], 66-69). While the emotion detects the external stimulus through the corresponding bodily changes, Prinz has been criticized on the grounds that these bodily changes do not *appraise* the external stimulus (Deigh [2014]).

To review, the standard view of James' theory maintains that an emotion is nothing but the feeling of bodily changes. There is certainly good textual support for this interpretation, but the problem is that it is limited in scope. Not only is this standard view most often limited to James' two primary works on emotion – his 1884 paper *What is an Emotion?* and his chapter on “The Emotions” in *The Principles* – but it is reliant on a couple of passages. However, other passages within these works, not to mention James' other writings during this period, call into question the standard view. As a result of this narrow perspective, alternate interpretations have been offered.

1.1.2 Ellsworth's Cognitive Interpretation

Phoebe Ellsworth rejects the standard view as too simplistic an account of what is in fact a more complex theory. She argues that, for James, the perception that indirectly causes the emotion involves cognitive appraisal. Ellsworth recognizes that this richer view of perception does not in itself overcome the intentionality problem. After all, the emotion may be indirectly caused by a cognitive appraisal, but it is still directly caused by the bodily changes. The emotion would therefore remain a non-cognitive, non-intentional feeling.

According to Ellsworth, however, the perception not only causes the bodily changes but it is a necessary part of the emotion.

The bodily processes combine with the perception of the object to produce the emotion...emotion is a combination of cognitive and physiological responses (Ellsworth [1994], 223).

Ellsworth thereby attributes a cognitive theory to James. The emotion is irreducibly cognitive because the perception, which is a necessary part of the emotion, involves the evaluation of an object. As a result, emotions are necessarily about objects and have the property of intentionality. In making this claim, Ellsworth draws attention to an important passage – overlooked by the standard view – where James describes the mental and physiological processes involved in an emotional experience. The transition from the

perception of the object to the subsequent feeling, involves a transformation “from an object-simply-apprehended into an object-emotionally-felt” ([1890], 2: 474). This state of consciousness of the “object-emotionally-felt” certainly suggests that an emotion is more than the feeling of bodily changes. Indeed, according to Ellsworth, the perception combines with the feeling of bodily changes in consciousness, which gives the emotion. The standard view of James' theory is therefore incorrect. An emotion is not reducible to bodily states, but is also about objects in the world.

There are some problems with Ellsworth's view, however. First, even if the perception is part of the emotion, not all perceptions involve cognitive appraisal (Reisenzein & Stephan [2014], 37). Some emotions are caused by perceptions that are primarily sensations and therefore do not involve any kind of evaluation. In his 1884 article, James mentions examples of this kind. “In advance of all experience of elephants no child can but be frightened if he suddenly finds one trumpeting and charging upon him” ([1884], 191). The child does not judge the elephant to be dangerous. Rather, the emotion in this instance is automatically set off by an instinctual response. It is examples such as this that lead Damasio to the view that emotions for James are indirectly caused by a perception involving little to no appraisal (Damasio [1994], 130).

Second, Ellsworth's interpretation cannot account for James' commitment to objectless emotions. In the “object-emotionally-felt” passage, James is describing the process of a typical emotion episode, one that involves the prior perception of an object. But a central feature of James' theory is its inclusion of objectless emotions. As he says:

The best proof that the immediate cause of emotion is a physical effect on the nerves is furnished by those pathological cases in which the emotion is objectless...The emotion here is nothing but the feeling of a bodily state, and it has a purely bodily cause ([1890], 2: 458-9).

This “best proof” of James' theory cannot be reconciled with Ellsworth's view. If the perception is not a necessary part of the emotion, then a cognitive component is not essential to emotion. After all, an objectless emotion involves no perception, let alone a cognitive appraisal. Its essence would seem to be a non-cognitive feeling.

1.1.3 Hatfield's Hybrid Interpretation

Gary Hatfield's interpretation of James' theory seems better able to account for its complexities. Just as Ellsworth went beyond James' explicit writings on emotion and considered his work on perception to better situate the theory, Hatfield draws particular attention to the important role of instinct. It is perhaps surprising that James' discussion of fear, anger, sympathy, shame, jealousy, love and other emotions in *The Principles* first occur not in the chapter on "The Emotions" but in the preceding chapter on "Instinct". Since emotion and instinct "shade imperceptibly into each other", Hatfield recognizes that what James has to say about instinct is necessary to fully understand his conception of emotion ([1890], 2: 442).

Emotions begin as innate instinctual responses to certain environmental stimuli. When we first experience a particular emotion we have no previous experience of where this instinctual response will lead us. The instinct is blind. However, unlike many traditional writers on the subject, James sees no reason to limit instinct to actions without foresight of ends. Instincts can cease to be blind when, as Hatfield says, "the associative processes of experience subsequently add content to such sensations" (Hatfield [2007], 417). These associative processes of experience constitute the cognitive appraisal in which an object or state of affairs is evaluated. In short, when cognitive appraisal occurs, which is the case for most adult human emotions, the emotion is no longer a blind reflex; it has intentional content. This is reflected in James' conception of perception, which is a combination of "sensational and reproductive brain-processes" ([1890], 2: 78).

Hatfield thereby splits the difference between the standard view and Ellsworth's cognitive view. Not all emotions are cognitive because some perceptions are merely instinctive responses involving no cognitive appraisal. These are instances where our blind instinct is simply enacted, such as the fear of a child when encountering a charging elephant. Since an emotion can occur either by a blind instinctual reflex or cognitive appraisal, Hatfield attributes to James a theory of emotion that crosses the non-cognitive/cognitive divide. Some emotions are non-cognitive; others are cognitive.

Hatfield describes the non-cognitive emotions in this way:

James' theory of our original emotions may rightly be classified as noncognitive, and in two senses. First, although emotional responses are caused by sensory perceptions, James describes these perceptions as feelings rather than as thoughts.... Second, the emotion itself, as a bare perception of internal perturbations, is not an appraisal or a cognitive response to these bodily states or their causes, but is another feeling (Hatfield [2007], 420).

Hatfield then goes on to discuss how emotions can become cognitive:

However, although emotions originally involve no appraisals, we may come to appraise our emotions, we may come to feel fear as a result of detecting a bear cognitively through evidence that would not trigger our original bear fear-reflex, and we come to view the emotion of fear as a sign that we are in danger. In James' view, these are subsequent cognitive developments, which allow emotional responses to take on cognitive meaning and to be triggered by cognitive appraisal (Hatfield [2007], 420).

While Hatfield seems to presume, like Ellsworth, that an emotion necessarily involves the perception of an object, his view could be easily amended to account for James' commitment to objectless emotions. The non-cognitive grouping would include both objectless emotions and those emotions indirectly caused by perceptions involving sensations – or feeling to use Hatfield's term. The cognitive grouping would include perceptions involving cognitive appraisal, and this perception is a constituent part of the emotion.

In this way, Hatfield's interpretation can be amended to better explain the various components of James' theory, but it is still deficient in some important respects. His bifurcated interpretation is based on a traditional distinction between feeling and thought. While the feeling of an emotion is non-cognitive – “a bare perception of internal perturbations” – the thoughts generated by the appraisal are cognitive and thus are about the world. James, however, rejects this sharp distinction between feeling and thought. This is made explicit in an important passage where he decides what to call states of consciousness throughout *The Principles*.

In this quandary we can make no definitive choice, but must, according to the convenience of the context, use sometimes one, sometimes another of the synonyms that have been mentioned. *My own partiality is for either FEELING or THOUGHT.* I shall probably often use both words in a wider sense than usual, and alternatively startle two classes of readers by their unusual sound; but if the connection makes it clear that mental states at large, irrespective of their kind, are meant, this will do no harm, and may even do some good ([1890], 1: 186-187).

The distinction between feeling and thought is ultimately a pragmatic one, to be employed “according to the convenience of the context”. Part of this pragmatic approach is to call into question his readers' assumptions. By using these terms in unconventional ways – and at times synonymously as we will later see – James hopes that the wedge that has been driven between feeling and thought can be removed.

Moreover, as we will also later see, James' distinction between feeling and thought is not meant to distinguish non-cognitive from cognitive states, but rather distinguish between different *kinds* of cognition. Hatfield's interpretation – similarly to the standard view and Ellsworth – reads into James a cognitive distinction between feeling and thought. But this is not attentive to James' use of these terms.⁹ Hatfield attributes to James a rather messy view, but the theory was intended to provide a single framework encompassing objectless, coarse and subtle emotions. While it is true that subsequent cognitive developments can influence the nature of an emotional experience for James (i.e., its phenomenology), this has little bearing on the essence of an emotion.

⁹ It is interesting to note that five years prior to *The Principles* in *On The Function of Cognition* (1885) James uses the term feeling to encompass all states of consciousness. In this respect he follows such thinkers as Alexander Bain and John Stuart Mill. According to Mill, “A Feeling and a State of Consciousness are, in the language of philosophy, equivalent expressions: everything is a feeling of which the mind is conscious” (Mill [1868], 54).

1.1.4 A Common Problem

In addition to the particular problems that these three interpretations face, there is a problem that they all share. The question of whether for James an emotion is the feeling of bodily changes or the feeling of bodily changes *plus* the (cognitive) perception of the object relies on a common assumption – that individual mental states combine to form a complex state of consciousness. This is a natural assumption to make since many philosophers assume a building block model of consciousness. James, however, rejects that a state of consciousness is composed of parts. According to his stream of consciousness theory, as developed in *The Principles*, a state of consciousness is a simple undivided unity. There are no parts. Suffice it to say, this complicates the question of what an emotion is.

The easy solution to this problem is to say that James was inconsistent on this matter. At first glance, his definition of emotion appears difficult to reconcile with his stream of consciousness theory. The feeling of bodily changes that is the emotion does seem to presuppose a building block model of consciousness, wherein this emotional consciousness combines with other mental states such as visual and auditory consciousness. But this complex state composed of parts conflicts with the simple, undivided structure of his stream of consciousness theory. In the remainder of this chapter, I will show that James' two theories are in fact consistent; and further, that his conception of what an emotion is, is far different than the three interpretations considered here have recognized.

1.2 Primary Feelings

One of James' fundamental projects in *The Principles* is his rejection of the two standard models of the mind – which he calls the 'mind-stuff' and soul theories – in favour of his own stream of consciousness model. According to the mind-stuff theory, "mental states are compounds" meaning that a state of consciousness is composed of individual parts or building blocks that form a complex state ([1890], 1: 145). James is particularly concerned with refuting the 'mind-dust' theory, which is a panpsychist mind-stuff theory,

advocated at the time by thinkers such as William Clifford and Herbert Spencer. Since this mind-dust theory is a version of mind-stuff theories more generally, we can thereby read his critique of mind-dust as an implicit rejection of the traditional Lockean/Humean model of the mind. After all, whether it is Locke's ideas or Hume's impressions and ideas, both presuppose that a state of consciousness is a complex state composed of parts. Just as the atoms within a physical object are its primary stuff, so too it is assumed that the parts of a state of consciousness are its primary stuff.

James' central argument against the mind-stuff theory is that it is logically incoherent. "Idea of a + idea of b is *not* identical with idea of $(a + b)$ " ([1890], 1: 160). Mind stuff theories are unable to explain how the parts of consciousness combine into a unified whole.¹⁰ The parts alone are insufficient as there needs to be something to organize them. It is at this point that James considers the soul theory, which in order to overcome the unification problem, proposes a soul that unifies and orders the parts. While James regards this as a more satisfying account, he is hesitant to endorse it, as he wishes to proceed with as little metaphysical baggage as possible. His solution is to chart a third path. He rejects the presupposition made by both theories that consciousness is made up of parts. Instead, consciousness, as reflected by our immediate experience, is a simple undivided state. "[H]owever complex the object may be, the thought of it is one undivided state of consciousness" ([1890], 1: 276).

This unity feature of James' stream of consciousness theory, while original, owes a great deal to the work of Franz Brentano. In 1874, Brentano published *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, in which he argued, contra Locke and Hume, that consciousness is not a collection of mental states but a unity (Brentano [1973]). As James notes, Brentano's work "on the Unity of Consciousness is as good as anything with which I am acquainted" ([1890], 1: 240). However, the nature of this unity does not

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that James does not distinguish John Stuart Mill from other classical empiricists in this respect, including Hume and James Mill. According to J.S. Mill, a state of consciousness is a unified state insofar as its parts fuse into a new mental whole. In so doing, Mill makes use of a chemical analogy. Similarly to how two hydrogen atoms and an oxygen atom fuse into a new whole to form water, the parts of consciousness fuse into a new whole. Presumably, James thinks that this account is still insufficient insofar as it does not explain the nature of this fusion.

entail that consciousness is undivided in structure, as Brentano distinguishes parts that he calls divisives (Brentano [1973], 161). A divisive does not have an independent existence, but belongs to the “one real entity” which is the unified state of consciousness (Brentano [1973], 161). For Brentano then, there are parts within a unified state of consciousness. While James agrees with Brentano regarding the unity thesis, he disagrees with respect to the question of parts.¹¹

For James, a state of consciousness is undivided both in its synchronic and diachronic structure – that is, at a particular point in time as well as over time. He calls these states the substantive and transitive respectively. “Let us call the resting-places the substantive parts, and the places of flight the transitive parts of the stream of thought” ([1890], 1: 243). With respect to substantive states, James offers the example of drinking lemonade. While the lemonade itself is composed of particular parts, namely its ingredients, the taste of lemonade is not. It does not combine the sweetness of the sugar with the sourness of the lemon. What we experience when we drink lemonade is rather a simple state in which the sweetness and sourness are infused.

As for transitive states, he considers the example of a piercing sound of thunder coming after a long silence. This might suggest that consciousness is not always an unbroken stream, but instead chopped up into discrete parts. James responds to this objection by supplementing his stream metaphor with that of a bamboo.

The transition between the thought of one object and thought of another is no more a break in the thought than a joint in a bamboo is a break in the wood. It is a part of the consciousness as much as the joint is a part of the bamboo ([1890], 1: 240).

A unique feature of James’ stream of consciousness theory is that these transitive states between substantive events are also experienced. As a result, “what we hear when the

¹¹ While James technically disagrees with Brentano with respect to the question of parts, from a practical point of view his approach seems indistinguishable. What I will call secondary feelings appears similar to what Brentano calls divisives.

thunder crashed is not thunder pure, but thunder-breaking-upon-silence-and-contrasting-with-it” ([1890], 1: 240). Since the entire state of consciousness is a simple undivided feeling, “The feeling of the thunder is also a feeling of the silence just gone” ([1890], 1: 241). As soon as we consider the thunder in and of itself without the preceding silence, we have cut out the transitive relation, and have thereby ruptured the primary feeling.¹²

Transitive relations resist introspective analysis. When we try to capture these flights of thought by turning inward we “annihilate them”, as we then find ourselves in a substantive state ([1890], 1: 244). Despite these introspective difficulties, James remains confident that transitive relations are prominent features in our stream of consciousness, which he likens to the structure of language. Connective words such as and, if, but, by, with, etc. are the linguistic equivalents to these transitive relations of consciousness. As James says, “We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of blue or a feeling of cold” ([1890], 1: 245-6). These feelings of transitive relations – whether conjunctive or disjunctive – that connect substantive events will turn out to be important when considering what exactly the feeling of an emotion is.

In an effort to gain clarity on James’ theory of emotion, it will be useful as we proceed to call such undivided states of consciousness that are associated with his stream of consciousness theory *primary feelings*. When discussing primary feelings in *The Principles*, James uses the terms feeling and thought interchangeably. At times he uses the phrase “stream of thought” or simply thought to refer to them. But he also uses feeling to describe such primary states, as in the following passage, which sums up his view quite nicely:

¹² If consciousness is an undivided flux for James, we might then wonder how is it that we can individuate the transitive from the substantive states. According to Andrew Bailey, James’ distinction is not intrinsic to consciousness but “that *we* individuate ‘states’ within it, after the fact” (Bailey [1999], 6). Moreover, this distinction for James, according to Bailey, is ultimately based on the pace of the transitive states (Bailey [1999], 8).

We cannot mix feelings as such, though we may mix the objects we feel, and from their mixture get new feelings. We cannot even have two feelings in our mind at once ([1890], 1: 157).

While James uses the terms feeling and thought interchangeably when discussing his stream of consciousness theory, the distinction becomes useful for him when making a more fine-grained analysis between different kinds of cognition. I turn to this next.

1.3 Secondary Feelings

James makes an important distinction in *The Principles* between ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ and ‘knowledge about’, which according to John Wild “was destined to play a very basic role in his thought, as well as in the phenomenology of the future” (Wild [1969], 43). The distinction points to two different kinds of cognition, both of which have particular functions. The function of our acquaintance, which is a pre-reflective kind of consciousness, is simply the having of an experience. Meanwhile, the function of our knowledge about, which is reflective, is to acquire conceptual understanding about the world and our experience in it. While James does not prioritize one mode of knowing over another in *The Principles*, our knowledge by acquaintance can be considered more primary in at least two respects. First, it is prior temporally insofar as we all first engage with the world not by conceptualizing it but by living it. It is only subsequently, as we develop cognitively, that we acquire the conceptual apparatus to know and understand features of the world. Second, it is logically prior insofar as our conceptual understanding would have nothing to cognize about without the presence of this more basic acquaintance.

These two kinds of knowledge generally map onto the terms feeling and thought respectively, but not the primary feeling-thought of an undivided state of consciousness. Rather these are feelings and thoughts we come to individuate within our stream of experience. As James says:

Through feelings we become acquainted with things, but only by our thoughts do we know about them. Feelings are the germ and starting point of cognition, thoughts the developed tree ([1890], 1: 222).

The thoughts associated with knowledge about include conceptions and judgments, while the feelings associated with knowledge by acquaintance include sensations, such as the feeling of blue or the feeling of thunder; and emotions, such as the feeling of fear (1: 222).¹³ Since knowledge by acquaintance includes emotions, and since our acquaintance with particular aspects of reality emanates from the primary stream of consciousness, emotions can be characterized as *secondary feelings*.

According to James, we may not be able to say anything specific about our acquaintance, but we nevertheless know it in an inarticulate way.

I am acquainted with many people and things, which I know very little about, except their presence in the places where I have met them. I know the color blue when I see it, and the flavor of a pear when I taste it; I know an inch when I move my finger through it; a second of time, when I feel it pass; an effort of attention when I make it; a difference between two things when I notice it; but about the inner nature of these facts or what makes them what they are, I can say nothing at all ([1890], 1: 221).

Since emotions also belong to the acquaintance category, the same logic holds true. I am acquainted with fear simply in virtue of feeling it. Whether or not I also know facts about the fear is a separate question. Of course, the very ability to individuate a feeling out of the primary flux of experience involves some discrimination *about* our experience. Hence James' caveat that we know little about our acquaintances, "except their presence in the places where I have met them" ([1890], 1: 221). In order to be acquainted with the feeling of fear then, I simply need to recognize it as an aspect of my experience, to locate

¹³ It is unclear where non-cognitive states such as itches and headaches fit into James' overall framework. He does not include them within the acquaintance category, presumably because they do not involve our acquaintance with the world.

it in some rough way within the stream of experience. But I need not know anything about the fear, such as its composition, in order to experience it.

The difference between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge about is a subtle one with respect to emotion. The actual feeling of the bodily changes as experienced is the acquaintance. Meanwhile, James' definition of emotion provides knowledge about the emotion. By stating that an emotion is the feeling of bodily changes as they occur, he purports to express a fact about emotion. Thus for James, when we have an emotion, what we are acquainted with – whether we know about it or not – is the feeling of bodily changes as they occur. This feeling of bodily changes, which is the emotion, ruptures the simple primary feeling in two ways. First, the transitive relations that connect the emotion to prior and posterior substantive experiences within the primary feeling are severed. For example, in most cases of an emotional episode, there is a transitive relation within consciousness between the preceding perception of the exciting fact and the following feeling of bodily changes. This perception of the exciting fact and the feeling of bodily changes are not discrete experiences. In the primary stream of consciousness they are continuous. They are conjoined by a transitive relation (e.g., a feeling of *and*) that is immediately experienced but impossible to subject to introspective analysis ([1890], 1: 243-6). Once the emotion is dissociated from the transitive relations that bind it to other substantive states, we are left with a derivative feeling, one that has been abstracted out of the unified whole.

In addition, the feeling of bodily changes is isolated from other sensations and perceptions within the same undivided substantive state of consciousness. When we experience an emotion at a particular point in time, we are also experiencing many other sensations and perceptions along with it. We are likely experiencing certain shapes, sounds, colours, and perhaps even thoughts and judgments. All of these states first present themselves as a unified whole, but when we isolate the emotion out of this synchronic unity we are once again rupturing the primary feeling. As a result, the secondary feeling of an emotion has been severed from both its transitive and substantive relations. While the emotion is very much experienced, in order to individuate the emotion within the flux of experience, other aspects of consciousness that are constitutive

of the primary feeling must be abstracted away. While modern critics have failed to appreciate this nuanced point, John Dewey recognized it.

As I understand it, he (James) did not conceive himself as dealing with that state which we term 'being angry,' but rather with the peculiar 'feel' which any one has when he is angry, an element which may be intellectually abstracted, but certainly has no existence by itself, of as full-fledged emotion-experience (Dewey [1895], 16).

Dewey's distinction between being angry and feeling angry seems to map onto my distinction between primary and secondary feeling. The secondary feeling of an emotion involves an abstraction that has "no existence by itself".

This distinction between primary feelings and secondary feelings fully inverts the Lockean/Humean model of the mind. According to James, Locke's simple ideas and Hume's impressions are not primary elements at all. They are abstractions that have been filtered out from a more primary experiential state of consciousness. "The 'simple impression' of Hume, the 'simple idea' of Locke are both abstractions, never realized in experience" ([1890], 1: 487). What is primary for James is the undivided state of consciousness as it is immediately experienced, and the secondary feelings and thoughts are abstractions. As James succinctly puts it, "A pure sensation is an abstraction" ([1890], 2: 3).

With this distinction between primary and secondary feelings in hand, we can make much better sense of the two passages from James' chapter on "The Emotions" that we looked at previously. First, it can explain the passage – highlighted by Ellsworth – of a typical emotional experience in which there is a transformation "from an object-simply-apprehended into an object-emotionally-felt" ([1890], 2: 474). The standard view cannot make sense of this "object-emotionally-felt" because the emotion is nothing but the feeling of bodily changes; it is not about the actual object. Ellsworth's cognitive reading thereby seems more attractive, but when looked at more closely, her view also faces a number of challenges.

In this passage, James is giving a description of the *primary feeling*. The “object-emotionally-felt” is a simple, undivided state of consciousness, which is made clear by the unifying hyphens. It reflects the unity of the substantive state of consciousness at a particular instance. Moreover, the seamless transition from the “object-simply-apprehended” to the “object-emotionally-felt” highlights the transitive relation in the stream of consciousness. While the emotion is certainly linked to the perception within the stream of consciousness via a transitive relation (e.g., a feeling of *and*), the perception is not part of the emotion as Ellsworth and Hatfield maintain.¹⁴

We can also make better sense of James’ famous definition of emotion. Once again, he says that “*the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion*” ([1890], 2: 449). James is here using feeling in its secondary sense, which maps onto our acquaintance mode of knowing. This does not mean that the individual experiencing the emotion knows that his or her emotion is the feeling of bodily changes. S/he simply has the emotion. By using feeling in this secondary sense, both the transitive and substantive relations have been abstracted away, leaving the emotion. This feeling of bodily changes “as they occur” is of course very much experienced, but the feeling is not originally a separate thing. It comes infused within a simple state of consciousness, inextricably bound up with other sensations, perceptions and cognitions.

1.4 The Metaphysical Status of the Emotions

This distinction between primary and secondary feelings reveals a radical aspect of James’ view of emotion. For theorists who hold a building block model of

¹⁴A considerable amount of attention has been focused on the “perception of the exciting fact”. Some theorists have argued that it involves cognitive appraisal (Arnold [1960]; Ellsworth [1994]; Palencik [2007]; Reisenzein, Meyer and Schützwohl, [1995]). Meanwhile, others regard James’ account of perception as simply an instinctual response that involves little to no evaluation (Damasio [1994]; Gordon [1987]). This question has no bearing on what an emotion is for James – that is, as a secondary feeling. It does, however, make a difference with respect to the nature of the primary feeling.

consciousness, an emotion is a part that is immediately accessible. That is to say, it is not infused within a greater whole. For James, however, the transitive and substantive relations within a primary feeling must be severed before we can access the emotion. As a result, an emotion has a derivative ontological status. We never experience fear in and of itself. What we experience is fear that is dispersed within a primary feeling. Trying to access the emotion is like trying to access salt within salt water. It first needs to be filtered out.

Although this derivative status of emotion follows directly from James' stream of consciousness theory, he never explicitly refers to it. Nevertheless, it is implicit in much of his discussion. In fact, it is difficult to make sense of some of the unique features of his view without considering his overarching theory of consciousness. First, an emotion for James is the feeling of bodily changes. The feeling is singular. In this respect, he differs from the influential physiological psychologists of the period, such as Herbert Spencer and Alexander Bain, for whom an emotion is an aggregate of elementary feelings (Dixon [2003], 158). Wilhelm Wundt has a similar view, as he regards emotions as "complexes of feeling elements" (Reisenzein [1992], 143). But for James, the plurality of bodily changes does not give rise to a plurality of feelings. This feature of James' view is difficult to explain without understanding his conception of consciousness. He is not invoking a building block model whereby aggregates of feelings combine. The emotion is attained not by way of adding up feelings, but by subtracting from the primary feeling. Given this reversal, the emotion is a singular feeling not an aggregate.

Second, James begins his chapter on "The Emotions" with a rather startling claim. He says, "The trouble with the emotions in psychology is that they are regarded too much as absolutely individual things" ([1890], 2: 449). He will go on to discuss the different physiological expressions of the emotions, but this more focused critique follows from his larger criticism regarding the nature of consciousness. Emotions are not individual things that combine with other mental states to form a complex state. It thereby follows that the cataloguing and listing of the individual emotions, which has characterized both the history of philosophy and psychology, is "to a great extent either fictitious or

unimportant, and that its pretences to accuracy are a sham” ([1890], 2: 448). Finally, according to James, “*there is no limit to the number of possible different emotions which may exist*” ([1890], 2: 454). This component of his view makes perfect sense given the background of his stream of consciousness theory. Since the emotion is derived from a unique primary feeling, there are as many emotions as can be subsequently discriminated by words. These unique and distinguishing features of James’ theory of emotion are all in accord with his overarching theory of consciousness.

1.5 The Role of Introspection

The task of developing a theory of emotion requires much more than simply being acquainted with the emotions; it requires knowing about them. Acquiring facts about the emotions – such as what constitutes and causes them – involves subjecting emotional experience to thought and analysis. Speaking generally about this process, James says:

We can ascend to knowledge about it by rallying our wits and proceeding to notice and analyze and think. What we are only acquainted with is only present to our minds; we have it, or the idea of it. But when we know about it, we do more than merely have it; we seem, as we think over its relations, to subject it to a sort of treatment and to operate upon it with our thought ([1890], 1: 222).

This progression from acquaintance to ‘knowledge about’ involves introspecting upon our experience. “Introspective Observation is what we have to rely on first and foremost and always” ([1890], 1: 185). It is through introspection that we acquire initial knowledge about the emotions. This may sound surprising given the nature of James’ theory, which purports to measure emotion physiologically. But James’ close attention to his own emotional experience formed the basis of his theory. After the publication of *The Principles*, he remarked that his theory of emotion is based not upon “theoretic grounds, but because of the introspective appearances exclusively” (James [1894], 523).

Indeed, James' main line of argumentation for his theory in his chapter on "The Emotions" comes from introspection. He appeals to his reader to do what he has done – to subject their acquaintance with emotion to immediate introspection.

The next thing to be noticed is this, that every one of the bodily changes, whatsoever it be, is FELT, acutely or obscurely, the moment it occurs. If the reader has never paid attention to this matter, he will be both interested and astonished to learn how many different local bodily feelings he can detect in himself as characteristic of his various emotional moods. It would be perhaps too much to expect him to arrest the tide of any strong gust of passion for the sake of any such curious analysis as this; but he can observe more tranquil states... ([1890], 2: 451).

It is important to note that James is not advising to have the emotion and then introspect on it at a later point in time. He is urging his reader to introspect on their emotional experience immediately. While James believes that this immediate introspection is more amenable to acquire knowledge about the emotion, as opposed to introspection conducted after the event, it is nevertheless fallible. When we immediately turn inward to see what is before our mind, we are no longer in the same state as we were a moment prior ([1890], 1: 190). Nevertheless, the two states are immediately conjoined within the stream of consciousness, and as a result are both part of what James calls 'the specious present'. The present moment for James is not an immediate now, but includes "probably the dozen seconds or less that have just elapsed" as well as a "vaguely vanishing backward and forward fringe" ([1890], 1: 613). Since immediate introspection of one's experience is conjoined in the specious present, this affords greater accuracy to immediate introspection. Non-immediate introspection on the other hand, which falls outside of the specious present, is based on memory, and this involves a different process entirely (Myers [1986], 67).¹⁵

¹⁵ As Myers says of the specious present, "This concept allowed James to hold that the way a mental state felt or registered to preintrospective awareness can be checked against the introspective observation (and report) of it as just-past in testing for observational accuracy" (Myers [1986], 67).

Immediately introspecting on our emotional experience is the best way according to James to acquire initial knowledge about our emotions. In so doing, we are best able to bring certain relations of our emotional experience to light and be more assured that our conceptual understanding is on solid ground. For example, when we retrospect on an embarrassing experience we notice “it is something in the pharynx that compels either a swallow, a clearing of the throat, or a slight cough” ([1890], 2: 451). This activity of the pharynx was not previously unconscious. We always had this knowledge in our unarticulated acquaintance mode of cognition. Through immediate introspection and “by rallying our wits and proceeding to notice and analyze and think”, we are able to bring these features into explicit awareness ([1890], 2: 222). Once again, just as mistakes can be made with our sensory perceptions so too can they be made with our introspection, even when immediately undertaken ([1890], 1: 192). This is because introspection of any kind is unable to capture the transitive relations that connect substantive experiences ([1890], 1: 243-6).¹⁶ Despite these shortcomings, James regards introspective analysis as the best (and only) way to ground a theory of emotion.

While James’ physiological theory of emotion was informed by his own emotional experience, the theory does not attempt to explain the nature of emotional experience. Rather, it attempts to explain why an experience is emotional. Many interpreters of James have not recognized this subtle point. For example, Rainer Reisenzein and Achim Stephan are incorrect when they say, “James’s main explanatory aim was to account for the peculiar phenomenal character of emotion” (Reisenzein & Stephan, 2014, p. 36). This is not the case. The James-Lange theory of emotion is an attempt to reach a deeper level of scientific understanding with respect to the physiological processes and mechanisms that underlie the feeling of an emotion. It is these distinct patterns of physiological expression that explain why a primary feeling is emotional, but it does not seek to explain the nature of emotional experience. It is at the level of James’ stream of consciousness theory, within which an emotion is embedded, that is to explain the nature

¹⁶ James says, “Now it is very difficult, introspectively, to see the transitive parts for what they really are. If they are but flights to a conclusion, stopping them to look at them before the conclusion is reached is really annihilating them” ([1890], 1: 243).

of emotional experience.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the various interpretations of James' theory of emotion fail to capture its complexities. In particular, they fail to situate his theory of emotion within his overarching stream of consciousness theory. As a result, a critical aspect of James' view has been overlooked. An emotion is not a thing that combines with other mental states. Rather, an emotion has a derivative ontological status. It is a secondary feeling that has been isolated from within a primary feeling. An emotion for James is more appropriately conceived of as a process or a current within an undivided stream of consciousness, rather than an "absolutely individual thing".

By equating the feeling of bodily changes with the emotion, James is attempting to acquire knowledge about the physical processes and mechanisms that underlie an emotional feeling. This aspect of James' theory has been well documented. However, his discussion of the mental side of emotion has been largely overlooked. In the next chapter, I inquire into this question.

2 Emotional Feeling

At the time James introduced his theory, the study of emotion was divided between two radically opposed approaches (Dixon [2003]). On the one hand, a scientific approach to the emotions, rooted in the framework of classical British empiricism, was gaining prominence. The physiological psychology of Herbert Spencer and Alexander Bain, who both advocated a mind-stuff theory, was especially influential at this time. Although Spencer and Bain were both dual-aspect monists, and regarded the mental and physical aspects of emotion as two sides of the same coin, they focused almost exclusively on the physical side. As a result, they were often perceived as having a reductionistic, materialistic view of the emotions (Dixon [2003], 181).

This perceived reductionist view of emotion was criticized by many of the moral and religious thinkers of the period, including psychologists, philosophers and theologians. While these thinkers held a variety of views, they can be united insofar as they regard emotion as essentially an activity of the mind (Dixon [2003], 181). The question of physiology is thereby either of no importance or a secondary consideration. James McCosh, who wrote a prominent treatise on the emotions in 1880, summarizes this view nicely:

Emotion is not what has often been presented by physiologists, a mere nervous reaction from a bodily stimulus, like a kick which the frog gives when it is pricked. It begins with a mental act, and throughout is essentially an operation of the mind (McCosh [1880], 4)

It is interesting to note that these two competing views of emotion generally map onto two competing views of consciousness. The physiological writers advocate a mind-stuff theory, while the moral/religious writers tend to advocate a soul theory. James, as we have seen, rejects both conceptions of consciousness that these competing accounts of emotion are based on. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the physiological approach to emotion had an important influence on him. Of particular importance was Alexander

Bain.¹⁷ Although for Bain an emotion – represented by a particular condition of the brain – causes the bodily changes, he recognizes that emotional states can be induced by willful force. As Bain says, “we are sometimes able to assume a cheerful tone of mind by forcing a hilarious expression” (Bain [1859], 361-2). According to James, Bain fails to recognize the implications of this view ([1890], 2: 463). The ability to willfully bring about an emotional feeling is evidence for James of the inversion thesis – that the bodily changes in fact precede the emotion. Indeed, the inversion thesis, according to James, is implicit in Bain’s account.

James’ theory is clearly intended to build upon this physiological approach to emotion. In addition, unlike Bain and Spencer, James emphasizes emotional experience. In this respect, he is influenced not so much by the moral/religious philosophers on emotion as he is with the methodological approach of Brentano. As we have seen, Brentano’s unity of consciousness thesis was an important influence in the development of James’ stream of consciousness theory. This theory has important implications for James’ methodology in *The Principles*, which John Wild has called “a phenomenological psychology” (Wild [1969], 3).

The first task of psychology, as James conceives of it, is to describe these phenomena of mental life exactly as they are lived, so far as this possible, and then to find out something concerning their relations and the patterns into which they fall (Wild [1969], 3).

Describing the nature and structure of experience, including emotional experience, is fundamental to James’ project in *The Principles*. Only when this has been sufficiently accomplished can he then go about the task of acquiring knowledge about this experience, which includes inquiring into the physiological aspect of emotion. This approach is in general accord with Brentano’s, who had earlier conceived of psychology’s primary task as describing the features of experience as best as possible.

¹⁷ In addition to Bain, the Italian physiologist Angelo Mosso, who conducted extensive research on the emotions beginning in the 1870s, was also an important influence. This has recently been recently discussed by Otniel Dror (Dror [2014], 13-14).

Fittingly, he called this approach ‘descriptive psychology’. Only by first paying close attention to the nature of experience, without any philosophical presumptions, can we then proceed with the second task of psychology – that of ‘genetic psychology’. The focus of genetic psychology involves inquiring into the physiological and chemical processes underlying this experience (Mulligan & Smith [1985]). James generally adheres to this same methodological approach in *The Principles*.

In this chapter, I will inquire into the mental side of emotion for James, and in so doing reveal the structure and nature of an emotional feeling. Before looking into this question, however, I will first consider the relationship between emotion and action. James’ theory is well known for putting the action before the feeling, which seems to reduce an emotion to an epiphenomenon. If this is the case, the question of emotional experience seems to be a pointless consideration since emotional feelings would have no causal efficacy.

2.1 Emotion and Action

The enduring fame and criticism of James’ theory of emotion is due not only to his equating the emotion with the feeling of bodily changes, but the conclusion he draws from this with respect to action. After presenting his definition of emotion, in which the bodily changes give rise to the feeling, James concludes that we run from a threat not because we are frightened, but rather we are “frightened because we run” ([1890], 1: 450). Likewise, “we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike” ([1890], 2: 450). We most often think that an emotion plays an important role with respect to motivating an action, but given James’ inversion thesis it appears that this is not the case. As a result, numerous philosophers have complained that James has stripped emotion of any causal role with respect to action (Campbell [1997]; Deigh [2014]; Gordon [1987]). As Sue Campbell says:

The standard criticism of James’s failure to give emotions a significant psychological role follows in a straightforward fashion from the second stage reduction. If emotions are not part of a causal sequence resulting in action, but

are, in fact, our feeling of the bodily changes that are the sensory processes accompanying action, then emotions are mere epiphenomenal accompaniments to action and have no useful biological role (Campbell [1997], 27).

Since for James the emotion does not cause the action, the feeling of the emotion does not factor into the causal chain. If the physiological response is enough to instigate the action, then there is no clear role played by the emotions. They are mere epiphenomena.

According to John Deigh, the radical implications of James' epiphenomenal theory have not been sufficiently recognized (Deigh [2014]). In particular, Deigh argues that the recent neo-Jamesian efforts to rehabilitate the theory, which is most developed in the work of Prinz, is based on "a basic misunderstanding of James's view" (Deigh [2014], 5). Prinz, as we have seen, broadly agrees with James' thesis that emotional consciousness is the feeling of bodily states, but he attempts to account for intentionality, or what Deigh calls an emotion's "evaluative import", by arguing that emotions are embodied appraisals (Deigh [2014], 4). According to Deigh, however, the question of evaluative import is irrelevant for James because emotions do not motivate actions (Deigh, 2014, p. 5). Since we feel "angry because we strike" and "frightened because we run", there is simply no need for the emotion to represent the external stimulus in some way ([1890], 2, 450). Deigh argues that it is our instinctual reflex responses, not emotional feelings, that for James provide the motives for action (Deigh, 2014, p. 10). We do not need to feel fear in order to run from a threat. Rather we instinctually run from the threat, and in so doing come to feel fear.

This epiphenomenal reading of James' theory is bolstered by a consideration of what kind of bodily changes make up the feeling of an emotion. In this respect, James' view differs from that of Lange. The bodily changes that make up an emotion extend beyond the visceral responses of the autonomic nervous system, such as increased heart rate. They also include facial expressions (e.g., a scowl) and expressive behavior (e.g., crying) (Laird & Lacasse [2014], 29). Since expressive behavior is part of the bodily changes that make up the feeling of an emotion, then it seems conclusive that emotion for James is an epiphenomenon.

It is not clear that this is James's more considered view, however. Within his chapter on "The Emotions", he makes contradictory statements with respect to the relationship between emotion and action. At the outset of the chapter, he writes:

Instinctive reactions and emotional expressions thus shade imperceptibly into each other. Every object that excites an instinct excites an emotion as well. Emotions, however, fall short of instincts, in that the emotional reaction usually terminates in the subject's own body, whilst the instinctive reaction is apt to go farther and enter into practical relations with the exciting object ([1890], 2: 442).

While instinctive reactions and emotional expressions are inextricably tied together, instincts and emotions can come apart insofar as the latter need not "enter into practical relations with the exciting object" ([1890], 2: 442). In other words, acting out of the emotion is not necessary for the emotion to be experienced. For example, an individual may feel anger but resist the temptation to fight because s/he has learned that such a response is inappropriate. As James says, "When the outward deeds are inhibited, these latter emotional expressions still remain, and we read the anger in the face, though the blow may not be struck" ([1890], 2: 442). In this case, the strike is not necessary in order to feel anger. This contradicts James's later statement that we feel "angry because we strike" and "frightened because we run" ([1890], 2: 450).

It is only in James' later article, "The Physical Basis of Emotion", where he clarifies his view. Here he recants his earlier counterintuitive view with respect to action ([1894], 519).

I think that all the force of such objections lies in the slapdash brevity of the language used, of which I admit that my own text set a bad example when it said "we are frightened because we run." Yet let the word 'run' but stand for what it was meant to stand for, namely, for many other movements in us, of which invisible visceral ones seem by far the most essential ([1894], 519).

James' more considered view is that it is the physiological changes, "of which invisible visceral ones seem by far the most essential", which precedes and constitutes the

emotional feeling ([1894], 519). It seems that the visceral changes are sufficient for an emotion. This is not to say that the behavioral response cannot also contribute. However, when the behavioral response does contribute to the feeling of an emotion, it must be stressed that the feeling and the action are inextricably woven within an ongoing process. The feeling of bodily changes gives rise to an emotion, the emotion gives rise to an action, the action give rise to a modified emotion, which may in turn modify the action, and so on. As John Dewey says of James' theory, it is only when we run away from a bear that we have the feeling of "running-away-from-bear" (Dewey [1895], 22). In this way, the behavioral response changes the nature of the feeling, which reflects the ongoing interaction between feeling and action.

Since the emotional feeling precedes the action, emotions are able to play a motivational role with respect to action. As a result, the question of evaluative import or intentionality should be a concern for James. After all, if we want to act in an appropriate, rational way, it seems the emotion must be able to represent the situation in some way. However, almost all critics agree that James' theory is deficient in this respect. In the next section, I argue against this prevailing view by illustrating the intentional component of an emotional feeling.

2.2 More Than a Bodily Feeling

In 1927, Walter Cannon claimed to have disproved James' claim that the feeling of bodily changes is the emotion (Cannon [1927]). Cannon's critique had an enormous impact upon emotion theorists at the time, effectively removing James' account as the theory of choice within affective science (Laird & Lacasse [2014]). According to Cannon, the same physiological changes can result not only in different emotions but also in non-emotional states. Since fear and rage have the same physiological response as chilliness, fever and hyperglycemia, the emotion cannot simply be the feeling of bodily

changes (Cannon [1927], 114).¹⁸ A few decades later, in 1962, Schachter and Singer were thought to have confirmed that physiological changes alone are insufficient to distinguish an emotional feeling (Schachter & Singer [1962]). In their study, two groups of participants were injected with adrenaline. The first group was given an insulting questionnaire to fill out, and they showed signs of anger. The second group, meanwhile, was placed in a jovial setting, and they showed signs of happiness. The authors concluded that the difference in emotional response lies not in physiology since both had been injected with adrenaline, but in their interpretation of the particular circumstance (Schachter & Singer [1962]). Thus, just as Cannon had argued, the same physiological response can bring about very different mental states.

This conclusion is far from convincing. Schachter and Singer assume that the physiological response of the two groups of participants remains the same in the changing circumstances (Prinz [2004], 70). Without evidence documenting this, James would surely reject the assumption. For him, the body acts as a sounding board to the continually changing environmental stimuli that we are presented with. While the adrenaline surely played a role in activating an emotional response, the different circumstances the participants were placed in also has an impact on their physiology. Thus, James would surely expect, along with Prinz, that the group A participants had a different physiological response from the group B participants.

While these empirical challenges to James' view have failed to undermine the theory, a common philosophical objection does seem to render it implausible. The view that physiological changes produce a feeling that is the emotion seems unable to account for our basic intuition that emotions are in some sense about or directed towards the world. According to James' inversion thesis – that the bodily changes precede rather than follow the emotion – it would seem that we are afraid because our body trembles rather than our

¹⁸ Cannon's critique of James is based on the view that the emotional feeling is constituted solely by visceral changes. As we have seen, the physiological changes are not necessarily limited to the viscera, but can also include feedback from facial expressions (e.g. furrowed brow) and expressive behavior (e.g. crying). James Laird and Katherine Lacasse have argued that by failing to recognize the extent of the bodily changes, Cannon's criticism of James ultimately fails (Laird & Lacasse [2014]).

commonsense intuition that we tremble because we are afraid of some thing. As Solomon, writing later in his career, says:

The problem with the Jamesian analysis, I now see, is that it has an impoverished account of feeling. Or rather, it reduces all of the richness of emotional experience to the singular sensations of the most primitive bodily feelings (Solomon [2007], 233).

If the emotion is a bodily feeling, as the standard view maintains, James is unable to account for intentionality. Many philosophers have used this view as a foil en route to developing their own view, from Sartre to Solomon to Goldie.

In fact, all three interpretations previously looked at in Chapter 1 assume that the bodily changes that give rise to the feeling of an emotion is a bodily feeling; that is, it is a feeling that has the body as an object. This equation of bodily changes with bodily feelings often stems from a misreading of James's definition that an emotion is the "feeling of the same (bodily) changes" ([1890] 2: 449). First, some theorists reinterpret this as "feelings of bodily changes", thereby turning James's singular emotional feeling into a plurality of feelings (Deigh [2014] 10; Stocker [2009], 406). Once this step is made, it seems natural to assert a one-to-one correspondence between certain bodily changes and certain bodily feelings. This is not the case, however. The many bodily changes give rise to a singular feeling. Other interpreters, meanwhile, regard this feeling as the *perception* of bodily changes (de Sousa [1987]; Hatfield [2007]; Prinz [2004]; Solomon [1973]). If an emotion is a perception of bodily changes, it would be inconceivable to suggest that an emotional feeling has anything but the body as an object.

James was familiar with this particular reading of his theory and he sought to clarify matters. Soon after the publication of "What is an Emotion?" he responded to a letter from Charles Renouvier, who had interpreted his theory in this way.

From what you say I fear you may not have caught the precise meaning of my Emotion theory. I don't mean that the Emotion is the *perception* of bodily

changes *as such*, but only that the bodily changes give us a feeling, which is the Emotion (James [1997], 524).¹⁹

If the feeling of an emotion is not the perception of the bodily changes but is given by the bodily changes, this opens up the possibility that the feeling is more than a bodily feeling; that it is also a feeling that is directed toward the world. Peter Goldie, however, explicitly argues that James does not recognize that emotional feelings point beyond the body. According to Goldie, “James insists that the (emotional) consciousness has to be of *bodily* changes, leaving no room for feeling toward” (Goldie [2000], 54). This concept of ‘feeling toward’ is the lynchpin to Goldie’s view. It explains how feelings can also be directed outward to the world, something that James had allegedly not recognized.²⁰

However, James did recognize this. Matthew Ratcliffe has attempted to show this by arguing that James rejects the dichotomy between feeling and thought that so many of his critics take for granted (Ratcliffe [2005]). It might seem that Ratcliffe would thereby reject the view that the feeling of the emotion is a bodily feeling. This is not the case. He agrees with all other interpreters of James in this respect. However, Ratcliffe argues that the category of bodily feelings extends much further than is traditionally conceived. Not only do bodily feelings include feelings that have the body as an object, but also feelings that are done by the body (Ratcliffe [2008], 88). It is these latter kinds of bodily feelings that can be considered cognitive states. As he says of James, “bodily feelings shape the manner in which things appear to us and structure our reasoning as a consequence” (Ratcliffe [2005], 187). While I agree with Ratcliffe that James rejects the feeling/thought dichotomy, I disagree that he regards emotions as bodily feelings.²¹

¹⁹ James goes on to say, “I feel sure that some part of our emotions is covered by this account; whether the *whole* of them is so covered is a question about which I am still doubtful” (James [1997], 525). Six years later, with the publication of *The Principles*, James does indeed come to the view that this feeling covers the whole of emotion.

²⁰ Goldie is neither the first nor the only philosopher to develop the idea that feelings point outward. For example, Irons [1894], de Sousa [1987], and Charland [1995] have all developed it in some capacity.

²¹ Given Ratcliffe’s broad conception of bodily feelings this seems to be a terminological rather than a substantive difference. However, while I generally agree with his interpretation of James, his approach is problematic. Ratcliffe’s argument proceeds by considering James’s later philosophical works, such as *The Will to Believe* and *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Ratcliffe [2005]). By fitting James’s earlier

In the next section, I consider James' conception of emotional feeling as it is developed in *The Principles*, and argue, in contrast to all other interpreters of James, that it is not to be reduced to a bodily feeling.

2.2.1 Emotion and Sense of Reality

When we situate James's chapter on "The Emotions" within *The Principles* as a whole, it becomes clear that he does recognize the outward directedness of an emotional feeling. If an emotion is not limited to bodily feelings, we might wonder why James is not more explicit about this in "The Emotions" chapter. The reason seems to be that he has explicit intentions with this chapter. He is attempting to motivate the thesis that our feeling of bodily changes is the emotion rather than some kind of preceding purely mental state. As a result, he explicitly draws attention to the bodily feelings that arise from the bodily changes. When considering grief it thus makes perfect sense for him to highlight the bodily feelings by asking, "what would it be without its tears, its sobs, its suffocation of the heart, its pang in the breast-bone?" ([1890], 2: 452). It would serve little purpose to emphasize an outward-directed feeling of emotion because it does not direct attention to the bodily changes that are occurring. By focusing on the bodily feelings then, James is able to bring the bodily changes that directly cause emotions to light.

Nevertheless, allusions are made in "The Emotions" chapter as to what this feeling consists in. In his appeal to readers to introspect on their bodily states during an emotional experience, James recognizes that the "strong gust of passion" towards the exciting stimulus will be arrested ([1890], 2: 451). By introspecting upon our emotional

theory of emotion into this later philosophical framework, Ratcliffe attempts to "piece together a theory" (Ratcliffe [2005], 179). The problem, however, is that we have no assurance that James's conception of emotion and feeling remains consistent throughout his career. In fact, numerous critics have argued that James fundamentally breaks from his theory of emotion in these later works (Averill [1992]; Oatley & Djikic [2002]; Solomon [1995]).

experience what we bring to light are “many different local bodily feelings” ([1890], 2: 451). It might seem that the feeling of an emotion is indeed limited to bodily feelings, but James is well aware that the having of an emotional experience and our immediately reflecting upon that emotional experience are two very different states of consciousness. As soon as we introspect upon an experience we change the nature of that experience.

The present conscious state, when I say 'I feel tired,' is not the direct state of tire; when I say "I feel angry,' it is not the direct state of anger. It is the state of *saying-I-feel-tired*, of *saying-I-feel-angry*, - entirely different matters ([1890], 1: 190).

When we immediately introspect upon an emotional experience by turning inward toward our bodily states, we thereby “arrest the tide of any strong gust of passion” that had been directed toward the exciting stimulus ([1890], 2: 451). We are then only made aware of bodily feelings. But this is not the emotion. The emotion is the prior state, which includes the unintrospectable “strong gust of passion”, which is the outward-directed aspect of the emotional feeling. Indeed, by the time we get to the chapter on “The Emotions”, James has already discussed this outward-directed feeling of emotion in “The Perception of Reality” chapter. By considering this chapter closely, I hope to show that the bodily changes that give rise to the feeling of an emotion is not simply a bodily feeling. The feeling of an emotion has embedded within it an outward-directed feeling – which James calls a ‘belief’ or ‘sense of reality’ – that imbues the world with meaning and value.

In “The Perception of Reality”, James refers back to his stream of consciousness theory, and makes the important point that the stream involves more than the object of consciousness such as the “thunder-breaking-upon-silence-and contrasting-with-it” ([1890], 1: 240). It also includes one’s psychic attitude toward this object of consciousness. James had discussed this aspect of the stream of consciousness in the chapter on the “Stream of Thought” ([1890], 1: 284-289), but it is developed in this later chapter.

What I myself have called (vol. 1, 275) the ‘object’ of thought may be comparatively simple, like “Ha! What a pain,” or “It-thunders”; or it may be

complex, like “Columbus-discovered-America-in-1492,” or “There-exists-an-all-wise-Creator-of-the-world.” In either case, however, the mere thought of the object may exist as something quite distinct from the belief in its reality ([1890], 2: 286).

For example, the experience of imagining a horse in a field compared to actually seeing a horse in a field has a markedly different phenomenology. While the object of thought might be the same, we disbelieve that the former is a particular entity that exists outside of our mind and believe the latter to have an independent existence. The primary feeling includes not only the object of consciousness then, but also the psychic attitude towards it.

This psychic attitude “is the belief itself”, and belief is best characterized as a kind of emotion – namely, the emotion of consent or conviction ([1890], 2: 287). As James says, “In its inner nature, belief, or the sense of reality, is a sort of feeling more allied to the emotions than to anything else” ([1890], 2: 283). Later in the chapter, in a subsection entitled “The Influence of Emotion and Active Impulse on Belief” we get a better sense just how belief is allied to the emotions. Belief is in fact a constituent element of the feeling of an emotion.

The quality of arousing emotion, of shaking, moving us or inciting us to action, has as much to do with our belief in an object’s reality as the quality of giving pleasure or pain. In Chapter XXIV I shall seek to show that our emotions probably owe their pungent quality to the bodily sensations which they involve. Our tendency to believe in emotionally exciting objects (object of fear, desire, etc.) is thus explained without resorting to any fundamentally new principle of choice. Speaking generally, the more a conceived object excites us, the more reality it has ([1890], 2: 307).

The feeling of an emotion has two elements that can be theoretically distinguished. First, there is the “quality of giving pleasure or pain”. These feelings are not directed toward anything in the world, but are exclusively bodily feelings. They are feelings that have the body as an object. Second, an emotion involves a “belief in an object’s reality”. By

‘object’, James is referring to the entire object of thought, not a particular object within the stream of thought. It might seem that this close identification of emotion with belief pushes James toward a cognitive theory of emotion. After all, cognitive theorists define emotion in terms of belief or a similar kind of mental state. For a cognitivist, our emotions are beliefs insofar as they express *knowledge about* an object or state of affairs. Thus my anger when I find that my car has been stolen contains within it the belief that I have been wronged in some way. James, however, is using the term belief in a different way. It is not a *thinking about* but a *feeling for*. Specifically, belief is the feeling of conviction in which we become convinced of either a sense of reality (acquaintance with the world) or a proposition (knowledge about the world) ([1890], 2: 287). Since the emotions are states that involve our acquaintance rather than our knowledge about the world, an emotional feeling includes this conviction of a particular sense of reality. For example, fear involves the conviction of a dangerous reality; joy involves the conviction of a benevolent reality; and anger involves the conviction of an unjust reality.

When James says that an emotion involves “our belief in an object’s reality” he is not discussing an emotion in and of itself. The object and the emotion are both entwined within a primary feeling, while the emotion itself, which has been theoretically extracted out of this unified state, is a secondary feeling. While this secondary feeling does not include the object of thought, it is bidirectional in structure, at once directed outward toward the world and inward toward the body. This bidirectional structure of an emotional feeling becomes clear when James considers some examples, which highlights the close relationship between the preceding bodily changes and the subsequent emotional feeling that includes a sense of reality. “[A] man who has no belief in ghosts by daylight will temporarily believe in them when, alone at midnight, he *feels his blood curdle at* a mysterious sound or vision” ([1890], 2: 307; my emphasis). The object of consciousness in this case is the sound or vision, but the sense of reality given toward this object of consciousness is the belief. The feeling of the curdling of the blood is more than a bodily feeling. It is also a *feeling at* the object of consciousness; namely the belief that the sound or vision is dangerous or fearful. It is this feeling of belief in tandem with the bodily feeling of displeasure that constitutes the fear. Emotions have built into them a conviction about the nature of a particular external reality. It is important to note that, for

James, while the emotion itself is directed outward to the world, it is neither about nor directed toward a particular object. It is simply a bidirectional feeling. It is within the undivided primary feeling that the emotion is bound up (most often) with a particular object.

While belief may be best described as a kind of emotion involving consent, this consent need not involve a bodily commotion. It is possible to believe without emotion for James. These kinds of beliefs are of course not passionately felt, and as a result they do not constitute our most deeply held beliefs.

As bare logical thinkers, without emotional reaction, we give reality to whatever objects we think of, for they are really phenomena, or objects of our passing thought, if nothing more. But, as thinkers with emotional reaction, we give what seems to us a still higher degree of reality to whatever things we select and emphasize and turn to WITH A WILL ([1890], 2: 297).

We believe in the reality of objects as a matter of course, but our emotional excitement towards objects affords them a higher degree of reality. Indeed, the more intense the emotional feeling is, the more passionate the belief. In this respect, James considers the religious belief of Caliph Omar (also Umar), who was a Muslim leader and companion to the Islamic prophet Muhammad. Omar's religious belief is of a particularly intense variety, far more passionate than that which is given to everyday passing perceptions.

The reason of the belief is undoubtedly the bodily commotion which the exciting idea sets up. 'Nothing which I can feel like that can be false.' All our religious and supernatural beliefs are of this order ([1890], 2: 308).

Once again we see that the belief is rooted in the emotional feeling, which is given by the bodily changes. These bodily changes give rise not only to bodily feelings but also an outward directed feeling that consents to a particular sense of reality. It is precisely this aspect of the emotional feeling that accounts for the evaluative import of an emotion, as it provides meaning and value to an individual's experience. As a result, James does not

reduce emotional feeling to bodily feeling. Emotions are bi-directional feelings, involving a sense of reality that imbues the world with meaning and value.

This relationship between emotion and belief might appear to be circular. Initially, James defines belief in terms of emotion ([1890], 2: 283), only to subsequently define emotion in terms of belief ([1890], 2: 307). However, it must be remembered that when defining emotion in terms of belief, James is using the term ‘belief’ broadly. Since emotions are acquaintances they confer the world with a ‘sense of reality’. This sense of reality is a feeling for the object of thought. It is not a thinking about. Meanwhile, when James defines belief in terms of emotion, it is not the content of the belief that is emotional, but the act of moving from a state of doubt to a belief state, which involves a feeling of sufficiency.

James discusses the bidirectional feeling structure of emotion in a more concentrated and explicit way four years after the publication of *The Principles* in an article entitled *The Physical Basis of Emotion*. Critics have largely overlooked this important article, but those few theorists who do consider it tend to interpret James as retreating from his earlier theory (Baldwin [1894]; Irons [1894]; Dixon [2006]).²² According to Dixon, “while presented as a plea that he had been misunderstood, (it) amounted in reality to little more than an abject surrender” (Dixon [2006], 216). But having taken a closer look at what James has to say about emotion in *The Principles*, we see that he never intended to reduce the feeling of an emotion to bodily feelings. What he has to say in this later article with respect to the nature of the feeling of emotion is fully consistent with his earlier position – with the exception of the earlier noted “slapdash brevity”.

In *The Physical Basis of Emotion*, as James had done in “The Perception of Reality” chapter, he distinguishes two aspects of an emotion.

²² An exception is Gerald Myers, who holds that James’ position in *The Physical Basis of Emotion* is consistent with *The Principles* (Myers [1986], 220).

[I]n addition to this pleasantness or painfulness of the content, which in any case seems due to afferent currents, we may also feel a general seizure of excitement, which Wundt, Lehmann, and other German writers call an Affect, and which is what I have all along meant by an emotion (James [1894], 523).

An emotion involves two components – the pleasure or displeasure which are purely bodily feelings, and the “general seizure of excitement” (i.e., the sense of reality) that engages us with a state of affairs that we attribute reality to. As James says in *The Principles*, “[W]hatever excites and stimulates our interest is real” ([1890], 2: 295).

James goes into more detail about this bidirectional feeling when he discusses and agrees with David Irons’ notion of a feeling attitude:

This writer further lays great stress on the vital difference between the receptive and the reactive states of the mind, and considers that the theory under discussion takes away all ground for the distinction. His account of the inner contrast is excellent. He gives the name of “feeling-attitude” to the whole class of reactions of the self, of which the experiences which we call emotions are one species. He sharply distinguishes feeling-attitude from mere pleasure and pain – a distinction in which I fully agree. The line of direction in feeling-attitude is from the self outward, he says, while that of mere pleasure and pain (and of perception and ideation) is from the object to the self. It is impossible to feel pleasure or pain *towards* an object. (James [1894/1994], 521; emphasis and brackets in original).

James is in full agreement with Irons that the feeling attitude points “from the self outward”. Where James disagrees with Irons is with respect to the structure of this feeling attitude of emotion. For Irons, the feeling attitude is necessarily bound up with the evaluation of an object that the feeling is for. The perception then is part of the feeling attitude. According to James, however, the bodily changes are all that is required to provide the outward direction of an emotion.

But on what ground have we the right to affirm that visceral and muscular sensibility cannot give the direction from the self outwards, if the higher senses...give the direction from the object to the self? (James [1894], 521).

This points to an important difference between James and Irons. For Irons, the feeling attitude of emotion is connected with the perception and the feeling of bodily changes, while for James it is connected only with the feeling of the bodily changes. It is in this way that James, unlike Irons, is able to account for objectless emotions. Since bodily changes alone can account for the outward directedness of an emotional feeling, it is possible to experience an emotion that is not directed toward a particular object. Even these objectless emotions are intentional states insofar as they are directed toward the world in some capacity. In objectless fear, for example, there is still the sense of a dangerous reality. Even though the fear remains unspecified within the unified stream of consciousness, it has meaning and significance for the individual who experiences it.²³

2.3 The Subtle Emotions

Having a better sense of what an emotion is for James, we are in a better position to assess his argument that the subtle emotions “form no exception to our account, but rather an additional illustration thereof” ([1890], 2: 470).²⁴ James first distinguishes the subtle emotions from the coarse emotions in terms of their intensity, as “those whose organic reverberation is less obvious and strong” ([1890], 2: 449). He subsequently distinguishes them in terms of type, as the aesthetic, moral and intellectual emotions. Adding these two distinguishing features together, it would seem that subtle emotions are more sophisticated and refined feelings that are of a lower feeling intensity. This distinction between coarse and subtle emotions is not meant to distinguish what contemporary theorists call basic and non-basic emotions. Non-basic emotions such as

²³ I will be looking at objectless emotions in more detail in section 3.4.

²⁴ James was not the first thinker to attempt bringing together simple and cognitively complicated emotions under a single framework. In 1863, Wundt had argued that ‘sensory emotions’ and ‘complex emotions’ were both to be explained by the same physiological mechanisms (Wundt [1894]).

jealousy and envy, which seem to require some kind of cognitive appraisal, would fall into the coarse category for James. The difference between the more cognitively complex coarse emotions and the subtle emotions is that the latter “affect us with a pleasure that seems ingrained in the very form of the representation itself” ([1890], 2: 468). For example, the beauty of an object, which gives us an emotional reaction, seems to be in the object itself. In order to pick out and recognize this beauty, some kind of prior aesthetic education or understanding is required. Without this prior understanding, the object would provoke no response whatsoever. This kind of aesthetic appreciation involves more than sensation and association; it also involves a judgment about a fact, namely that the particular object, or a part thereof, is beautiful because of certain features that it possesses. With the coarse emotions, on the other hand, we feel them as a matter of course. We do not feel jealousy having cultivated an appreciation for objects that are worthy of jealousy. In this way, what we are jealous of does not seem ingrained within the form of the object.

James’ inclusion of the subtle emotions within the framework of his theory was considered its weakest link by a couple of his contemporary critics (Gurney [1884]; Irons [1894]). Edmund Gurney admits that there is some truth to James’ bodily changes theory with respect to the coarse emotions, but the theory breaks down with the more conceptually based subtle emotions. In presenting his critique, Gurney focuses on the emotional response to a piece of music.

There can be no better illustration of the issue before us than is afforded by one of Prof. James’s own examples – that of music. His view goes far to confound the two things which, in my opinion, it is the prime necessity of musical psychology to distinguish – the effect, chiefly sensuous, of mere streams or masses of finely-coloured sound, and the distinctive musical emotion to which the form of a sequence of sound, its melodic and harmonic individuality, even realized in complete silence, is the vital and essential object. It is with the former of these two very different things that the physical reactions – the stirring of the hair, the tingling and the shiver – are far most markedly connected... If I may speak of myself, there is plenty of music from which I have received as much emotion in

silent representation as when presented by the finest orchestra; but it is with the latter condition that I almost exclusively associate the cutaneous tingling and hair-stirring (Gurney [1884], 425-6).

Not only is the aesthetic emotion unmediated by bodily changes according to Gurney, but the bodily changes are not even necessary for an emotion to be experienced. Simply recounting the piece of music in his mind is enough to bring about the emotion. It comes without any bodily reverberation whatsoever, be it before or after the emotion.

When Gurney describes having an aesthetic emotion by recounting a piece of music in his mind without a bodily response, what he is really having according to James is a pure judgment. Without some kind of bodily response following such a judgment, which is felt in turn, the experience cannot be said to be an emotional one. As James says:

In all cases of intellectual or moral rapture we find that, unless there be coupled a bodily reverberation of some kind with the mere thought of the object and cognition of its quality; unless we actually laugh at the neatness of the demonstration or witticism; unless we thrill at the case of justice, or tingle at the act of magnanimity; our state of mind can hardly be called emotional at all (2: 470-1).

According to James, there is an important difference between a subtle emotion and a pure judgment. The difference between a primary feeling involving a subtle emotion and one involving a pure judgment is that the former involves both a judgment and a belief while the latter only a judgment. There is a phenomenological difference between these two states. In the case of a pure judgment, we know something to be true insofar as we have knowledge of a fact, but we do not feel it to be true. By contrast, not only is a subtle emotion indirectly caused by our knowledge about an object, but it involves a subsequent feeling that gives reality to that object. As a result, we not only judge the object to be beautiful, we actually feel it to be so. This is how James would ultimately explain Gurney's experience. It is only when in the presence of the orchestra that he in fact has an emotion. He then not only judges the music to be beautiful, he feels it to be beautiful.

When he simply conceives of the music without a bodily response, he only has a judgment of its beauty.

Similarly to Gurney, David Irons also regards the inclusion of the subtle emotions as the weakest part of James' theory (Irons [1894]). According to Irons, when we conceptualize an object or an aspect thereof to be beautiful, it is patently obvious that the emotion immediately follows the perception. It is not that we are made aware of the beauty by the feeling of bodily changes. We have this emotional appreciation of beauty beforehand, and it is this emotion that sets off the bodily changes (Irons [1894], 88). Irons then concludes: "The subtler emotions are the most vulnerable part of the position, and, precisely where the proof should be strongest, there is hardly a show of proof at all" (Irons [1894], 90).

Irons' objection regarding subtle emotions is certainly more difficult for James to respond to. It seems to expose a deficiency in the "vital point" of his theory. As James says:

If we fancy some strong emotion, and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feelings of its bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no 'mind-stuff' out of which the emotion can be constituted, and that a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains ([1890], 2: 451).

According to Irons this argument at best proves that the bodily symptoms are necessary for an emotion, but it does not prove they are sufficient. In fact, Irons likens the argument to saying that since a "shapeless apple cannot exist, therefore an apple is pure shape and nothing else" (Irons [1894], 81). Shape may be part of what an apple is, but it is obviously not the only thing it is. Similarly, the feeling of bodily changes may be part of what an emotion is, but it does not follow that this is all an emotion is. This is especially true for subtle emotions, which are cognitively rich states of consciousness.

As it stands, Irons' argument is a good one. I have tried to show how James responds to this critique with respect to the coarse emotions. The feeling of bodily changes is not limited to a bodily feeling but also includes a sense of reality. However, James' attempt

to include subtle emotions within his theory presents a new challenge. How can a feeling of bodily changes alone account for the judgment that an object is beautiful? Surely the judgment of the object must be a constitutive part of the emotion. For James this is not the case. The judgment of the object that indirectly causes the emotion is of course, along with the emotion, embedded within the primary feeling. But the judgment is not part of the secondary feeling of an emotion. In this way, James' theory of emotion seeks to explain the emotionality of subtle emotions. This emotionality can attach itself to judgments and perceptions of varying degrees of appraisal, but this does not entail that the essence of an emotion has changed. This is not to deny that subtle emotions differ from coarse emotions within primary feelings. For example, a primary feeling that involves a subtle emotion would be a more active state of consciousness. Nevertheless, the structure of the emotion itself, though of different feeling intensity, is the same. Both coarse and subtle emotions are bidirectional feelings, and it is this feeling element, which is brought about by the bodily changes, that accounts for the emotionality of these states. Since it is possible to have a judgment without a feeling response, the emotion is not a judgment. Rather, it is the feeling that is indirectly caused by the judgment that is the emotion.

This account would likely remain unsatisfying to Irons insofar as James only explains part of what a subtle emotion is. For Irons, a subtle emotion involves a feeling *plus* a judgment. At the level of primary feelings, within which the judgment and the feeling are embedded, James would agree. However, when inquiring into what an emotion is, the judgment is simply the indirect cause of the emotion. It is the feeling of bodily changes that not only directly explains the emotion, but also explains why the state of consciousness is emotional. It is the presence of this secondary feeling within a primary feeling that distinguishes an emotional state of consciousness from a non-emotional state. Ultimately, James and Irons are attempting to explain different things. James wants to explain the *emotionality* of subtle emotions while Irons wants to explain the *constitution* of subtle emotions. At the root of this difference seems to be different conceptions of the nature of consciousness. For James, Irons is giving a description not of the emotion but the primary feeling within which the emotion is embedded.

2.4 The Natural Kind Status of the Emotions

In Chapter 1, in the context of James' stream of consciousness theory, I mentioned how the emotions are not "absolutely individual things". Focusing now on the emotion as a secondary feeling, this view has important implications for the natural kind status of the emotions. As James says:

The trouble with the emotions in psychology is that they are regarded too much as absolutely individual things. Were we to go through the whole list of emotions which have been named by men, and study their organic manifestations, we should... find that our descriptions had no absolute truth; that they only applied to the average man; that every one of us, almost, has some personal idiosyncrasy of expression, laughing or sobbing differently from his neighbor, or reddening or growing pale where others do not ([1890], 2: 447-8).

For James, there is a great deal of flux between persons with respect to the bodily changes that cause a particular kind of emotion. Fear, for example, will manifest in innumerable ways based on this "personal idiosyncrasy of expression". Moreover, these variants of fear cannot be clearly demarcated from other emotions. Horror, for example, can blur the line between fear and anger. As James says, "The internal shadings of emotional feeling, moreover, merge endlessly into each other" ([1890], 2: 448). By using the term *shading* James seems to be drawing a comparison between emotion and colour. Green, orange, red and the other colours that we pick out and name do not cut nature at its joints. Rather this picking out is something we do to serve our everyday purposes. There are in fact many shades of green, but we do not discriminate between most of them because there is usually no need to. Occasionally, such as when selecting a paint colour for a room, it becomes useful to distinguish between more shades. Similarly, we pick out fear, joy, anger and other common emotions because they serve our everyday purposes. But what we call fear is in fact a collection of different but closely associated feelings. In some instances, there will be a need to distinguish between some of these feelings. Then variants such as dread, angst, trepidation, terror, anxiety, etc., are named. In this way, the emotions that a novelist will individuate will differ markedly from that of a neuroscientist since they are approaching the phenomena from a different perspective. As James says,

“any classification of the emotions is seen to be as true and as 'natural ' as any other, if it only serves some purpose” ([1890], 2: 454).²⁵ Given all this flux and variation with the emotions it follows that “there is no limit to the number of possible different emotions which may exist” ([1890], 2: 454). The more we can discriminate unique emotional feelings by naming them, the more emotions we will have knowledge about.

Since emotions are not “absolutely individual things”, they are not natural kinds in the traditional sense of the term. There are no necessary and sufficient conditions we can point to for fear for example. What we call fear in fact refers to a range of feelings, which in turn involves a range of physiological expression. James thereby regards his theory of emotion as moving beyond an Aristotelian essentialist framework, based upon classification, and aligning with a dynamic, evolutionary model. According to James, the emotions are not “eternal and sacred psychic entities”, but feelings that can be reliably grouped together on a causal basis.

So long as they (the emotions) are set down as so many eternal and sacred psychic entities, like the old immutable species in natural history, so long all that *can* be done with them is reverently to catalogue their separate characters, points, and effects. But if we regard them as products of more general causes (as 'species' are now regarded as products of heredity and variation), the mere distinguishing and cataloguing becomes of subsidiary importance. Having the goose which lays the golden eggs, the description of each egg already laid is a minor matter. Now the general causes of the emotions are indubitably physiological ([1890], 2: 449; first bracket is mine).

James' distinction between a theory that groups a class of phenomena based on a causal basis rather than classification precipitates Richard Boyd's conception of natural kinds

²⁵ In James' chapter on instinct, he discusses some emotions that are innate. This might suggest that he regards some emotions as basic and thus natural kinds. However, there are many instincts for James. Moreover, once an instinct is experienced, and its ends are known, they can be reshaped in new directions. I discuss instinct in more detail in Chapter 4.

(Boyd [1989]). According to Boyd's more expansive definition, members of a natural kind need not share necessary and sufficient conditions as with the traditional Aristotelian model. Instead, a natural kind is constituted by properties that reliably cluster together as a result of a common causal mechanism. In *The Physical Basis of Emotion*, James reaffirms his earlier position, by discussing this reliable clustering of properties in terms of a "functional resemblance".

[T]he bodily variations are within limits, and that the symptoms of the angers and of the fears of different men still preserve enough functional resemblance, to say the very least, in the midst of their diversity to lead us to call them by identical names. Surely there is no definite affection of 'anger' in an entiative sense (James [1894], 520).

Thus the question of whether or not individual emotions are natural kinds for James depends on the conception of natural kind that we are operating with. On the traditional necessary and sufficient condition model, they are not natural kinds. However, on the homeostatic property cluster model, the emotions would qualify as natural kinds insofar as they have a common causal mechanism.

There is a difference between the natural kind status of the individual emotions and the category of emotion (Charland [2002]; Griffiths [1997]). James' inclusion of coarse and subtle emotions within the parameters of his theory provides good evidence that he regards emotion as a natural kind. Indeed, the criticism James received from his contemporaries regarding the inclusion of the subtle emotions within his theory is ultimately a critique regarding the natural kind status of emotion. Although philosophers of emotion generally speak of emotion as if it were a homogeneous category, most deny that the term picks out a distinct class of phenomena (Griffiths [1997]; Rorty [1978]; Solomon [1995]).²⁶ Such philosophers would join the chorus of James' contemporary critics that the subtle emotions are different in kind from the coarse emotions.

²⁶ There have been a few exceptions. Charland argues that emotion is a natural kind using Boyd's more expansive definition of homeostatic property clusters (Charland [2002]). Prinz, meanwhile, argues that

The thesis that the term emotion does not pick out a unified category is most explicitly defended by Paul Griffiths (Griffiths [1997]). According to Griffiths, our concept *emotion* picks out at least two very different classes of mental phenomena, which should be separated. First, there are basic emotions – mapping onto Paul Ekman’s affect programs – which are universal across the human species and shared with nonhuman animals. Second, there are higher cognitive emotions, which are informed by culture and distinctly human. While we use the term *emotion* to refer to both classes of mental phenomena, Griffiths argues that this is a mistake. The term *emotion* needs to be discarded and “replaced by at least two more specific concepts” (Griffiths [1997], 247). Griffiths’ critique of our folk psychological concept of emotion entails that James’ subtle emotions as well as many of the coarse emotions (e.g., jealousy and shame) are different in kind from other coarse emotions (e.g., fear and anger).

Griffiths’ argument that emotion is not a natural kind is based on a conception of natural kind that is more expansive than the more traditional view. Rather than requiring necessary and sufficient conditions, Griffiths uses Boyd’s more expansive definition of homeostatic property clusters (Boyd [1989]). Despite this more expansive conception of natural kind, Griffiths argues that emotion does not satisfy the requirement. Speaking of the higher cognitive emotions, he says:

Whatever psychological mechanism underlies the irruption of these clusters of desires into belief-desire causation, it is not the same mechanism that allows the affect programs to rapidly engage various effector systems without reference to consciously accessible beliefs and desires (Griffiths [1997], 246).

According to Griffiths, affect programs are distinct from the higher cognitive emotions because they are modular. They are informationally encapsulated, meaning they cannot be influenced by information in other processing systems. For example, the fear of

emotion is a natural kind not only in Boyd’s sense but also in the traditional and more restrictive necessary and sufficient conditions account (Prinz [2004]).

seeing a predatory animal in a forest produces an automated affective response, irrespective of our beliefs and judgments. The higher cognitive emotions, on the other hand, are non-modular. They are not only influenced by other information (i.e. beliefs and desires), but they seem to be in part constituted by beliefs. For example, feeling shame about performing poorly on a test requires the belief that the particular test is both important and that one ought to have done well on the test. If the test were subsequently believed to be unimportant, the shame would subside. These differences, argues Griffiths, point to different underlying causal mechanisms. Thus emotion is not a natural kind even in Boyd's more liberal homeostatic property cluster conception.

James would deny this. Both coarse and subtle emotions are directly caused by the same underlying causal mechanism – namely the preceding bodily changes. Moreover, both coarse and subtle emotions figure into our means-end reasoning. It is not the case that our coarse emotions are informationally encapsulated. While it is true that initially our instinctive emotions blindly move us, once this has been experienced and registered in memory, we have foresight of its end.

Every instinctive act, in an animal with memory, must cease to be 'blind' after being once repeated, and must be accompanied with foresight of its 'end' just so far as that end may have fallen under the animal's cognizance ([1890], 2: 390).

There is no antagonism for James between an instinctive response and a willful action. The instinctive responses of many of our emotions are as much a function of the will as more deliberate cases. It may seem that our fear of a predatory animal is informationally encapsulated, but this is only because we have formed associations based on experience that are in accordance with the instinctive fear. While the emotion may be cognitively impenetrable at this particular point in time, over time – through effort of attention and will – the emotion can be cognitively penetrated. In this way, our emotions are highly plastic for James. I will be looking at this in more detail in Chapter Four, where I discuss the relationship between instinct, emotion and the will.

In fact, James regards emotion as a natural kind not only in the homeostatic sense, but also in the traditional conception of necessary and sufficient conditions. There is no

essential difference between a coarse emotion of fear and a subtle emotion of aesthetic appreciation. Many theorists would argue that the former is simply a feeling while the latter is a feeling plus a belief, pointing to a difference in kind. James would agree that there are important differences at the level of primary feelings, but the emotional component of both coarse and subtle emotions are explained by the feeling of bodily changes. This bidirectional feeling is the essence of an emotion. The difference between coarse and subtle emotions is not a difference in their structure, but in their indirect causes. Thus emotion for James is a natural kind in both the homeostatic and traditional sense.²⁷

With respect to the traditional conception of natural kinds – conceived in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions – emotion, but not the emotions, is a natural kind for James. It follows that the domain of emotion does not come with clearly marked divisions in which we can cut nature at its joints. Instead, it is up to us how we carve this domain up. It would seem that culture would play an important role in this process, but James is generally thought to have little to say about the social element of emotion. This is not the case. In the next section, I consider the importance James attributed to culture with respect to shaping emotional feelings.

2.5 The Influence of Culture

The emotional diversity between individuals for James runs deeper than simply different objects inciting different emotions. If this were the only difference we would have no basis to say that the actual emotion is different. If dogs incite fear in person A but not person B, while mice incite fear in person B but not person A, the feeling of fear in both cases may very well still be the same. But for James the actual physiological expression between individuals is different, resulting in different shades of the same named emotional feeling.

²⁷ In this respect, James' view is similar to that of Prinz (Prinz [2004], 102).

Despite this great diversity in emotional expression, Lisa Feldman Barrett notes that “basic-emotion theorists often claim James as their intellectual predecessor” (Barrett [2006], 42). Indeed, some proponents of basic emotions – such as Ortony and Turner – build upon James’ idea that there is a distinct physiological pattern for each emotion by arguing that some of these emotions are transcultural, universally expressed across the human species (Ortony & Turner [1990]). Feldman rightly points out that this association between James and the basic emotion research program is misinformed. Since there is a variety of bodily expressions within the same emotion category, there is not one thing that anger, fear or any other emotion is (Barrett [2006], 42). Phoebe Ellsworth has also highlighted James’ rejection of anything like basic emotions.

He rejected the categorical view of emotion. Instead he saw emotions like the color spectrum or like the weather – a vast domain with infinite gradations from one region to another with no clear boundaries (Ellsworth [2014], 21).

Where basic emotion theorists emphasize the similarity of emotional expression, James consistently emphasizes its diversity.

Nevertheless, Rainer Reisenzein and Achim Stephan have recently argued that James is best understood as a basic emotions theorist (Reisenzein & Stephan [2014]). They draw attention to James’ evolutionary approach to emotions, and the important influence that Darwin had on his view. Following Darwin, James closely aligns emotions with instincts, which are innate reflex actions.²⁸ All of this is true, but it is not enough to assert that James is a basic emotions theorist. In this respect, Carroll Izard has distinguished five necessary and sufficient conditions for the thesis that there are basic emotions. This includes the requirement that “a basic emotion has a unique feeling component that can be conceptualized as a phase of the associated neurobiological process” (Izard [2007], 262). In other words, “a discrete emotion feeling is innate and its distinctive quality is invariant over the life span” (Izard [2007], 263). James clearly

²⁸ I will discuss the important role of instinct and the influence of Darwin in more detail in Chapter 4 in the context of habit.

rejects this. Fear and other emotions may be an instinctual response that is innate, but it is not a discrete feeling. As we have previously seen, an emotion such as fear or anger refers to a range of feelings, which involves a range of physiological expression. There is not a unique feeling that is fear or anger.

James' association with basic emotion theorists, while misinformed, certainly seems more applicable than aligning him with theorists on the opposite end of the emotion spectrum – social construction theorists. After all, James' point of emphasis throughout his principal works of emotion is on physiology with little mention of the social element of emotion. However, in a popular essay entitled *The Gospel of Relaxation*, published nine years after *The Principles*, James takes quite a different perspective on emotion. Rather than taking a largely theoretical and scientific approach, as in his chapter on “The Emotions”, his purpose is more practical. Indeed, James discusses some of the practical implications of the James-Lange theory.

The general over-contraction may be small when estimated in foot-pounds, but its importance is immense on account of its effects on the over-contracted person's spiritual life. This follows as a necessary consequence from the theory of our emotions to which I made reference at the beginning of this article. For 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 (James [1916], 210-211).

It follows from the James-Lange theory that a tense and over-excited body entails an emotional disposition that is characterized by anxiety, nervousness and over-excitability. Importantly though, these emotional expressions are not simply biological and physiological phenomena. Indeed, for James they also have a social and cultural dimension. With respect to the over-tension discussed above, James regards this as a manifestation of an American custom.

The American over-tension and jerkiness and breathlessness and intensity and agony of expression are primarily social, and only secondarily physiological, phenomena. They are bad habits, nothing more or less, bred of custom and

example, born of the imitation of bad models and the cultivation of false personal ideals (James [1916], 212-213).

James' emphasis on the cultural and social element of emotional expression over their physiology might seem to suggest that he is best characterized as a social construction theorist with respect to emotion. This would be strange given that social construction theorists most often hold a traditionally cognitive theory of emotion. The emotion is socially constructed insofar as the concept that is intrinsic to an emotion is socially constructed. Such an approach need not deny the physiological and evolutionary basis of emotion – particularly if a hybrid cognitive-feeling theory is advocated – but it nevertheless emphasizes the cultural influence that necessarily shapes this biological foundation.

James, as we have seen does not have a traditionally cognitive theory of emotion. He argues for a feeling theory of emotion, and yet he puts an emphasis on the social dimension. This approach nicely shows the false dichotomy between the biological and social elements of emotion, which has been played out by basic emotion and social construction theorists. It is not that the concepts of our emotions add a cultural dimension to the underlying physiological aspect.²⁹ Rather culture affects our very physiology in such a way that the physical basis of emotion cannot be entirely explained from a purely psychological or biological perspective.³⁰ The physiological expression of emotion is at once a biological and cultural phenomenon, and the perspective we take is dependent upon our particular purpose of inquiry. Ellsworth characterizes James' view nicely when she says:

Emotional experience then, is not so much a process of construction as a process of selection, each culture drawing boundaries around certain regions of the infinite complexity and leaving others undiscriminated (Ellsworth [2014], 24).

²⁹ Peter Goldie calls this “the avocado pear misconception of the emotions” (Goldie [2000], 99).

³⁰ This is a position also held by Prinz, who calls attention in a rather Jamesian way to “habits of the body” which can be culturally influenced (Prinz [2004], 142).

As an example of this cultural influence on the physiological expression of emotion, James contrasts the over-excited and over-emotional American demeanour with that of the European. He notes that the “American character is weakened by all this over-tension” in which breathlessness and a sense of hurry predominate, resulting in a state of mind that is anxious and muddled rather than calm and harmonious.

[I]f you breathe eighteen or nineteen instead of sixteen times a minute, and never quite breathe out at that, - what mental mood can you be in but one of inner panting and expectancy... (James [1916], 211).

Far from being determined by these cultural influences, individuals can become aware of them and ultimately change them. For these emotional expressions are after all habits, and habits can be changed by way of attention and will.³¹

2.6 Conclusion

In this section, I have inquired into the structure of an emotional feeling for James. Emotions are not the non-cognitive perturbances that most interpreters presume them to be. Embedded within the feeling of an emotion, which is given by the bodily changes, is a belief that attributes a sense of reality to the world. It is from this outward-directed aspect of an emotional feeling – which imbues the world with value and meaning – that James can account for the intentionality of emotion. This feeling structure can also help to explain the inclusion of subtle and objectless emotions within the parameters of his theory. James is ultimately concerned with explaining the emotionality of a state of consciousness. Whether the emotion is coarse, subtle or objectless, this emotionality is due to the particular feeling of bodily changes.

³¹ I will be looking at the nature of these emotional habits and how they can be changed in more detail in Chapter 4.

3 The Impossibility of Unconscious Emotions

If an emotion is necessarily felt, as James' theory maintains, then it is impossible to have an emotion that we are not conscious of. An unconscious emotion becomes a contradiction in terms. Numerous critics, within philosophy and psychology, have objected to this implication of James' theory (Berridge & Winkielman [2003]; Deigh [2001]; Jaggar [2008]; Prinz [2004]).

There are at least two ways in which philosophers have understood the notion of an unconscious emotion, which follows from their particular theoretical view. For cognitive and hybrid theorists, who regard a judgment or belief as necessary for an emotion, an unconscious emotion can come about in one of two ways (Suppes & Warren [1975]). First, one can be unconscious of what an emotion is about. For example, an individual may direct anger toward his friend, when really that anger is about something else entirely, such as his parents or spouse. Since the individual is unconscious of what the anger is about, it would follow under such a theory that we have an unconscious emotion. The anger may be felt, but since the emotion is essentially a judgment and not a feeling, the emotion itself is unconscious.³² Freud, who advocates a hybrid theory of emotion, discusses unconscious emotions of this sort.

To begin with it may happen that an affect or an emotion is perceived but misconstrued. By the repression of its proper presentation it is forced to become connected with another idea, and is now interpreted by consciousness as the expression of this other idea. If we restore the true connection, we call the original affect 'unconscious' although the affect was never unconscious but its ideational presentation had undergone repression (Freud [1915/1953-1974], 177-78).

Freud is clear that what is unconscious is not the feeling (i.e., the affect), but the idea associated with the feeling. For hybrid theorists, unlike for cognitive theorists, an

³² Hatzimoysis argues against this thesis. He calls into question whether the thought initially repressed remains the same (Hatzimoysis [2007], 293-4).

emotion is necessarily felt. In this respect, there is agreement with James. However, the feeling, while necessary, is not sufficient for an emotion, as the judgment is also required. If we consider the previous example of an individual directing anger toward his friend, when really the anger is about something else, we also have an unconscious emotion on the hybrid view. The feeling is experienced, while the thought of what the feeling is about remains unconscious.

Second, an emotion can become unconscious when it is denied to have been experienced. For example, an individual may in fact have directed anger towards his friend, but denies ever having done so. In such a case the emotional judgment is experienced, but its denial renders it unconscious. Either way, whether the emotion is misconstrued or denied, it is unconscious.

Alison Jaggar, who can best be described as a hybrid theorist, has argued against the Jamesian view from this perspective. Following Elizabeth Spelman, Jaggar refers to the feeling theory as “the Dumb View” (Jaggar [2008]). She does not mention James by name, but since his theory is the archetype of feeling theories, it is safe to assume that by “the Dumb View” she has in mind the Jamesian view. According to Jaggar:

Another problem with the Dumb View is that identifying emotions with feelings would make it impossible to postulate that a person might not be aware of her emotional state, because feelings by definition are a matter of conscious awareness (Jaggar [2008], 155).

For Jaggar, a viable theory of the emotions must account for instances in which we have an emotion but do not understand what the emotion is about. Just because we experience a feeling, does not mean we have experienced the emotion. While Jaggar may be hesitant to endorse a full-blown cognitivist view, this requirement of knowing what the emotion is about certainly pushes her view in that direction. In this way, we can consider the conception of unconscious emotion from cognitive and hybrid theorists as more or less the same.

The second way in which unconscious emotions can be construed is under a somatic theory of emotion. Somatic theories are distinct from feeling theories insofar as the requisite bodily changes are sufficient for an emotion. These bodily changes need not be registered in consciousness and thereby felt. Somatic theorists recognize that the feeling of these bodily changes may often be present within consciousness, but this feeling is not a necessary condition for an emotion. So long as those bodily changes produce affective behavior, irrespective of being felt, we have the emotion. Jesse Prinz holds a somatic theory of emotion (Prinz [2004]). Prinz, of course, would reject the conception of unconscious emotions as employed by cognitive and hybrid theorists. For him, not only is an emotion not a judgment, it need not even be felt. It is thereby possible to have an emotion without a feeling or a thought registered in consciousness. This is clearly a more extreme conception of an unconscious emotion.

This difference between the cognitive/hybrid view of unconscious emotion and the somatic view lies in different ways that we talk about the unconscious. John Searle has conceptualized this nicely by distinguishing between the ‘dynamic unconscious’ and the ‘deep unconscious’ (Searle [2004]).³³ The dynamic unconscious refers to unconscious states that can in principle be made conscious through effort of attention. This is the view of the unconscious that the cognitive/hybrid theorists have in mind. It is no surprise that Freud operated through this theoretical perspective as psychoanalysis attempts to bring unconscious thoughts, drives and motivations to conscious awareness. The deep unconscious, on the other hand, refers to the unconscious mental processes postulated by cognitive science. These mental processes cannot in principle be made conscious. In other words, its contents cannot be recovered. It is this deep unconscious that Prinz has in mind when he argues that unconscious emotions exist.

In this section, I hope to show that James’ inability to account for unconscious emotions in both the deep and dynamic sense should not be regarded as a deficit of his view. Arguments for the deep and dynamic unconscious – though not distinguished in

³³ The deep unconscious refers to what is often called the cognitive unconscious within cognitive science.

these terms – were present at the time of *The Principles*, and I will show how James responds to them. Before doing so, I will provide a brief historical overview of the concept of the unconscious at the time of *The Principles*.

3.1 The Unconscious in the Late Nineteenth Century

During the period that James researched and wrote *The Principles*, from 1878 to 1890, the concept of the unconscious was at the forefront of philosophical and psychological discussions (Ellenberger [1970], 311). The philosophical precursor to this wave of interest was Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*. Although published in 1819, it was initially ignored, and was not until the latter half of the nineteenth century that the work garnered widespread attention. Schopenhauer's 'will' provides not only a psychological explanation of human behaviour, but also a metaphysical account of the nature of reality. What ultimately exists is the will – a blind, irrational force that is more aptly called the unconscious (Ellenberger [1970]). Following Schopenhauer, Eduard von Hartmann in his *Philosophy of the Unconscious* also develops a metaphysical worldview that hinges on the notion of the unconscious (von Hartmann [1893]).

[T]he principle of the Unconscious is imperceptibly extended beyond the physical and psychical domains to achieve the solution of problems which, to adopt the common language, would be said to belong to the province of *metaphysics*. These consequences flow so simply and naturally from the application of our principle to physical and psychological inquiries, that the transition to another department would not be remarked at all, if the subject-matter of those questions were not otherwise familiar to us (von Hartmann [1893], 3).

In particular, von Hartmann uses the concept of the unconscious to argue against metaphysical materialism in favour of an idealistic theory that synthesizes the work of Hegel and Schopenhauer.

While von Hartmann's work helped to popularize the unconscious within philosophy in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the concept also became central to

psychology, including Pierre Janet's work on dissociation. In Janet's research on hysteria he found that within some individuals there is a splitting of consciousness. For example, Janet discusses a woman who went on a fugue, and who appears to have lost all memory of the time she was away. When Janet put a pencil in her hand, she wrote out in detail exactly what she had been doing during this period. Despite writing this detailed account, the woman maintains that she remembers nothing of the trip (Janet [1907], 62). In such disturbances of the personality, there is a splitting of consciousness into two distinct personalities. In order to describe these dissociated ideas of which the subject is unaware, Janet uses the term *subconscious*. While the unconscious and subconscious are often taken to be synonymous terms, Janet's term has no metaphysical implications. As he says:

The word "subconscious" is the name given to the particular form which disease of the personality takes in hysteria... This word is not a philosophical explanation; it is a simple clinical observation of a common character which these phenomena present (Janet [1907], 65).

Meanwhile for others, such as G.F. Stout, the subconscious refers to that of which we are dimly conscious (Prince [1907], 363). During the period in which James was researching and writing *The Principles*, there was clearly no precise definition for the terms *unconscious* and *subconscious*. As Bernard Hart notes, different authors during this period "speak of the subconscious not only from different points of view, but speak of totally different things" (Hart [1910], 363).

It is within this period of excitement and confusion with respect to the unconscious that James conducted his research and writing of *The Principles*. James is generally regarded as being hostile to the notion of the unconscious during this time. To a certain extent this is true, but we have to be clear what notion of the unconscious he is arguing against. For James, a mental state is necessarily conscious for a particular subject of experience. This "for a particular subject of experience" is important. James discusses at considerable length Janet's empirical research on dissociation, in which there is a splitting of consciousness within an individual. Following Janet, James is content to

discuss the notion of unconscious mental states in a qualified psychological sense to explain these circumstances. While Personality A remains unconscious of Personality B and vice versa, consciousness is always attached to a particular personality. That is, the experience is always conscious for a particular subject of experience. In short, there is no such thing as an unconscious mental state that is not experienced.³⁴

The question of whether or not unconscious mental states exist depends on what our theory of consciousness is. On a building block model, conscious and unconscious states and processes can combine to form a complex state. This is first expressed by Leibniz's notion of 'petites perceptions', which are perceptions that we are not aware of. As these petites perceptions accumulate their combined force breaks into conscious awareness. In this way, the perceptions of which we are conscious are represented by perceptions of which we are not conscious. But according to James' stream of consciousness theory, a state of consciousness is simple and undivided. There are no parts. The unified state of consciousness is thereby necessarily conscious with no unconscious parts underlying it.

In James' "Mind-Stuff Theory" chapter, he devotes an entire subsection to this question entitled "Do unconscious mental states exist?" After going through ten purported arguments for their existence, James responds to each, concluding that unconscious mental states do not exist. Although James does not explicitly make the distinction between the deep and dynamic unconscious, he does provide arguments explicitly targeting these different conceptions. His responses all take either one of two forms. First, many posits of unconscious mental states such as Leibniz's 'petites perceptions', are not mental states at all according to James. Rather, they are physical processes ([1890], 1: 164). These notions of the unconscious map onto what Searle distinguishes as the deep unconscious. Second, other posits of the unconscious refer to

³⁴ According to Gerald Myers, James allows unconscious states to exist in two ways. First, by the splitting of consciousness in which multiple streams occur. Second, "we can be unconscious of experiences when we fail to attend to them" (Myers [1986], 59). This is incorrect. For James, when we fail to attend to certain features of our experience, we are either acquainted with them but do not know about them or else they do not get registered in consciousness at all. Either way, they are not unconscious.

states whereby we subsequently discover something about ourselves which was previously unconscious. James rejects this postulation of the unconscious as a confusion, and introduces his distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge about as better able to explain these facts. In the next two sections, I will present James' arguments in further detail. First, I will consider James' argument against the dynamic unconscious, which cognitive and hybrid theorists of emotion invoke. I will then consider the deep unconscious, which somatic theorists of emotion use to argue for unconscious emotions.

3.2 The Argument from Cognitive/Hybrid Theorists

Cognitive and hybrid theorists of emotion argue that some kind of judgment, belief or thought is necessary for an emotion. Interestingly, as we have seen, James also argues that belief is intrinsic to emotion. However, his conception of belief is very different than the one employed by cognitive and hybrid theorists. Beliefs do not provide knowledge about our emotions as cognitive and hybrid theorists stipulate, but rather attribute a sense of reality to the world. On this basis, he would reject the notion of unconscious emotions.

James does not deny the kind of cases that Freud, Jagger and other cognitive and hybrid theorists of emotion highlight. In the following passage, he considers the argument that a cognitive or hybrid theorist of emotion might offer in support of unconscious emotions.

There is a great class of experiences in our mental life which may be described as discoveries that a subjective condition which we have been having is really something different from what we had supposed...[For example], we deliberately analyze our motives, and find that at bottom they contain jealousies and cupidities which we little suspected to be there. Our feelings towards people are perfect wells of motivation, unconscious of itself, which introspection brings to light ([1890], 1: 170).

James here provides a standard example of a purported unconscious emotion in the dynamic sense. Through introspection, a jealousy that was previously unconscious is brought into conscious awareness. While this may seem to accurately reflect our experience, James finds such arguments to be based on a conceptual confusion.

These reasonings are one tissue of confusion. Two states of mind which refer to the same external reality, or two states of mind the later one of which refers to the earlier, are described as the same state of mind, or 'idea,' published as it were in two editions; and then whatever qualities of the second edition are found openly lacking in the first are explained as having really been there, only in an 'unconscious' way. It would be difficult to believe that intelligent men could be guilty of so patent a fallacy, were not the history of psychology there to give the proof... But once make the distinction between simply having an idea at the moment of its presence and subsequently knowing all sorts of things about it...and one has no difficulty in escaping from the labyrinth ([1890], 1: 172).

The mistake such theorists make is that they treat the subsequent knowing state and the original unconscious state as the same mental state. Central to James' response is that these are in fact two different states of mind – the first is a simple having of the experience, while the second is a knowing about this experience. The latter is a different kind of experience altogether. James will later articulate this as a distinction between the two kinds of knowing that we have already looked at: knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge about.

As we have seen, when we acquire knowledge about our emotions, such as what our jealousy is in fact about, we are acquiring knowledge about a fact. But this knowledge about the emotion is not part of what the emotion is. While the emotional experience may provide the foundation for such conceptual knowledge, the emotion itself is simply the having of the experience, namely the feeling of bodily changes. In order to acquire knowledge about this emotional experience, it requires "rallying our wits" by attending closely to our experience ([1890], 1: 222). These two states of mind are clearly related, insofar as one is about the other, but they are nevertheless two distinct states.

...the difference between those that are mere ‘acquaintance,’ and those that are ‘knowledges-about’ is reducible almost entirely to the absence or presence of psychic fringes or overtones. Knowledge about a thing is knowledge of its relations. Acquaintance with it is limitation to the bare impression which it makes. Of most of its relations we are only aware in the penumbral nascent way of a ‘fringe’ of unarticulated affinities about it ([1890], 1: 259).

According to James, when we subsequently realize that a particular emotion was in fact about something else, we are not bringing to light something that was previously unconscious. What we are bringing to light are the fringe elements within a previous state of consciousness. These fringes were originally experienced in an acquaintance mode, and through introspection we are able to bring these relations of the prior experience out of the background and into the foreground of consciousness. In so doing, we can acquire knowledge about them. For James, these facts that we come to know about were originally experienced in a substantive state as opposed to a transitive state – as we have seen, the latter cannot be introspected upon. When we acquire knowledge about our emotions then, we are bringing to light relations within previously experienced substantive states of consciousness.

Cognitive and hybrid theorists who posit unconscious emotions are thus confused on two fronts according to James. First, the unconscious thought or judgment that is purportedly intrinsic to emotion is not unconscious at all. It was experienced within an acquaintance mode of cognition. Second, such judgments are not even part of what an emotion is. There is a difference between having an emotion and knowing about the emotion. The latter is a thought about the emotion, but it is not part of what an emotion is.

3.3 The Somatic Theory Argument

Recently within psychology, and to a lesser extent philosophy, the possibility of unconscious emotions in a more extreme sense has been given serious scholarly attention. A growing number of theorists now assert that an emotion need not be registered in consciousness at all, be it a feeling or a thought (Berridge & Winkielman [2003]; Winkielman, Berridge, & Wilbarger [2008]; Prinz [2004]). On such an account, an unconscious emotion is defined in the following way:

For an emotion to be unconscious, people must not be able to report their emotional reaction at the moment it is caused. Yet there must be clear evidence of the emotional reaction either in their behavior, or physiological response, or subsequent subjective impressions of an affect-laden event (Berridge & Winkielman [2003], 187).

The possibility of unconscious emotions in this deep sense has been opened up by developments within cognitive science, in which unconscious mental processes have been shown to play important roles in perception, memory and thinking. This gives us good reason to believe that unconscious processes are also at work in emotion (Kihlstrom et al [2000], 31-36). However, the somatic theory requires much more than this. It requires that these unconscious processes are all that are required for an emotion.

Robert Zajonc's work on subliminal priming provides good evidence that these deep unconscious processes are in fact at work in emotion. In his famous 1980 study, participants were subliminally exposed to a specific octagon (Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc [1980]). They were subsequently shown pairs of octagons – one of which they had previously been subliminally exposed to. Participants tended to prefer the octagon they had been subliminally exposed to over the one they had no previous exposure to. Such experiments nicely show that we do not need to know about something in order to have an affective response toward that thing. While Zajonc's work has highlighted the

unconscious causes of emotion/affect, the emotion/affect itself is very much experienced. Indeed, for Zajonc – like James – emotions are necessarily conscious (Zajonc, [2000]).³⁵

More recent work within psychology, which has built upon Zajonc's findings, goes further. Not only is the cause of the emotion unconscious, but the emotion itself is unconscious. Within philosophy, Jesse Prinz engages with this psychological literature in support of the view that emotions need not be registered in consciousness at all. It may seem surprising that Prinz takes this stance given that he spends much of *Gut Reactions* subscribing to a broadly Jamesian view. "I have endorsed William James (1884) in presuming that emotional consciousness is consciousness of changes in bodily states" (Prinz [2004], 206). The temptation is to read Prinz as advocating a feeling theory, but he is not. The above passage comes soon after Prinz's sustained argument that an emotion can be completely unconscious (Prinz [2004], 201-205). As a result, Prinz rejects the feeling theory. "I join the majority in denying that emotions are mere feelings" (Prinz [2004], 198). There is a tinge of irony to this statement. While true, Prinz is really in the minority, as he is denying that emotions need not be conscious at all.

If Prinz endorses James' theory on the one hand, but rejects the feeling theory on the other, what then is his view? Simply put, emotions for Prinz are states that carry information about core relational themes (Prinz [2004], 198). Sometimes we are conscious of this information and sometimes we are not, but in all cases we have the emotion. When the emotion is conscious, the consciousness is of bodily states. Thus Prinz broadly adheres to James' theory with respect to conscious emotions, but he deviates from it by including unconscious emotions as well. When arguing for his broadly Jamesian account that emotional consciousness is consciousness of bodily states, Prinz targets cognitive theories of emotion. But when arguing for the possibility of

³⁵ Berridge and Winkielman go further, and suggest that for James the cause of emotion is also unconscious. "William James' (1894) (sic) theory defined subjective feeling as the essence of emotion. Yet he posited that conscious emotional feeling depended on an unconscious prior cause, namely the bodily reaction to the emotional stimulus" (Berridge & Winkielman [2003], 205). This view is incorrect. The cause of the emotion for James is not unconscious at all. The preceding physiological changes are just that - physiological.

unconscious emotions, Prinz becomes critical of James' view that a feeling is necessary for emotion.

In motivating his argument for deep unconscious emotions, Prinz first considers an anecdotal example of a fearful flyer. As the plane takes off, the individual is in a conscious state of fear. He then becomes engaged in an amusing conversation with the person beside him, during which time he is no longer conscious of his fear. It is only after this conversation that the fear returns to consciousness. Prinz suggests that there are two options available to explain this. Either the fear completely subsided during the conversation or it endured unconsciously. Prinz thinks the latter is the better explanation. We may retrospectively become aware that we were showing physical signs of fear such as clutching onto the armrest, even though we did not feel the fear at the time.

While Prinz uses this example to motivate his thesis that emotions can be unconscious in a deep sense, it seems to be a case of an unconscious emotion in a dynamic sense. Indeed, James would likely explain this example as he would other cases of purported unconscious emotions in the dynamic sense. The fear was in fact experienced but only subsequently does the individual come to know about it. Alternatively, if as Prinz suggests the fear was not experienced, then James would say that there is no emotion; that it did indeed subside. As James says:

When absorbed in intellectual attention we may become so inattentive to outer things as to be 'absent-minded,' 'abstracted,' or 'distracts.' All reverie or concentrated meditation is apt to throw us into this state... The absorption may be so deep as not only to banish ordinary sensations, but even the severest pain ([1890], 1: 418-9).

The question then comes down to the degree of attention for James. If the attention of Prinz's flyer is focused exclusively on the conversation at hand, then it is likely that the fear is completely banished from his consciousness. If the attention is of a lesser degree, however, then the fear would likely be experienced in the fringes of consciousness, which the individual could subsequently come to know about.

Prinz's argument then becomes more focused. He considers a number of experiments that purport to reveal unconscious emotions in a truly deep sense. In one experiment he cites, cocaine addicts were each affixed to two intravenous lines, one containing various amounts of cocaine, the other saline (Fischman & Foltin [1992]). At very low doses of cocaine, subjects reported no difference between the two lines, but they nevertheless pressed the button for cocaine more often. This, as well as the other studies that Prinz cites, seems to show that the experience of emotion and emotionally driven behavior can come apart. Prinz concludes that these subjects are having unconscious emotions (Prinz [2004], 203). Berridge and Winkielman have been at the forefront of this psychological research, and likewise agree that the evidence supports the existence of deep unconscious emotions (Berridge & Winkielman [2003]; Berridge & Winkielman & Wilbarger, [2008]).

Importantly, the subjects involved in these studies were explicitly attending to their conscious state, and reported no change. This indicates that these are indeed cases involving deep rather than dynamic unconscious states. It is for this reason that Prinz is willing to grant Ned Block's distinction between phenomenal and access consciousness.³⁶ Prinz concedes that this distinction might make sense in cases like the fearful flyer where other perceptions occupy his attention. Perhaps the flyer experienced the fear phenomenally but could not access it. But with respect to the experimental findings under question, the distinction is of little use since the participants were directly attending to the issue at hand. As a result:

There is no reason why participants in these experiments should be unable to report on their phenomenal experiences... So even if we grant that phenomenal and access consciousness both exist and can come apart, there is no reason to think they come apart in these experiments. (Prinz [2004], 204).

³⁶ James' distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge about bears a similarity to Block's distinction (Block [2007], 159-213).

According to Prinz, if we are explicitly attending to our experience, then we are able to fully report on that experience. Since the participants in these studies were directly attending to their experience and since they did not report experiencing an emotion, it follows that an emotion was not consciously experienced. The participants, however, behaved in an affective, emotional manner. Therefore, these empirical studies reveal genuine instances of unconscious emotions.

It seems that there are three ways that James' view could account for this empirical research. These different responses depend on whether or not the affective state does indeed break the threshold of consciousness. As James says:

Let the line $a - b$ represent the threshold of consciousness: then everything drawn below that line will symbolize a physical process, everything above it will mean a fact of mind ([1890], 1: 155).

If the threshold of consciousness is not broken in the studies under question, as Prinz assumes, James would explain the affective behaviour not by an unconscious emotion but by a purely physical state. Since the changes in the amount of cocaine do not register in consciousness, the resultant behaviour is caused by a neurobiological process. It is not caused by an unconscious mental process but has a purely physical cause. In so doing, James denies the very notion of a deep unconscious.³⁷

Second, it is possible that the threshold of consciousness in these studies is broken, and the emotion is experienced. If so, James would simply reject Prinz's assumption that experienced states that are directly attended to can be introspected upon and necessarily brought to explicit awareness. According to James, the threshold of consciousness could be broken and yet participants could still be unable to report on it. This inability to report

³⁷ John Searle, who also rejects a building block model of consciousness, has made this kind of argument against the postulation of a deep unconscious. He says: "There is no such thing as a deep unconscious mental state. There are nonconscious neurobiological processes capable of producing states in the conscious form; but to the extent that the mental state is not even the kind of thing that could become the content of a conscious state, it is not a genuine mental state" (Searle [2004], 171).

could be due to deficits in attention, in which case we are dealing with a case of the dynamic unconscious. Indeed, attention for James is a skill that admits of degrees ([1890], 1: 423). It could simply be that the participants in the studies, and perhaps most human beings, have deficient skills of attention.

Third, the threshold of consciousness could be broken, but it might be the case that the so-called unconscious emotions are in fact transitive states of consciousness. As we previously saw, transitive states of consciousness resist introspective analysis. They are flights, always in movement and thus impossible to capture introspectively ([1890], 1: 244). Emotions, however, are not transitive states of consciousness since they attribute reality to a particular substantive state. But transitive states, which are feelings, do seem to have an affective nature, as they can have a significant impact on what James calls the substantive conclusions.

For the important thing about a train of thought is its conclusion. That is the meaning, or, as we say, the topic of the thought... The parts of the stream that precede these substantive conclusions are but the means of the latter's attainment. ([1890], 1: 260).

It is important to note that the same conclusion need not be reached; that different transitive relations that connect substantive events can change the entire meaning of a stream of thought ([1890], 1: 260). The analogy here is language, as prepositions and conjunctions similarly change the meaning of a sentence. Under this reading, these purported unconscious emotions are neither unconscious nor emotions. What we have instead are individuals experiencing an affective state but who are unable to report on it. While the participants in the cocaine study most often make the conclusion to choose the intravenous line with cocaine, this is based on an affective state that cannot be introspected upon – and this affective state in question is *not* an emotion.

Under the first and third potential Jamesian responses, Prinz's core relational themes would capture affective behavior that extends much further than the category of emotion. As an analogy, consider colour. Our experience of colour is a conscious experience, but we are constituted to perceive a certain range of colours within the wavelength. X-rays

and radio waves, for example, fall outside the range that we can perceive. But we do not call X-rays and radio waves colours because they are not experienced. Prinz's notion of a core relational theme seems to be the corollary to wavelength, not colour. It may pick out a genuine class of phenomena, but it is broader than emotion.

James would certainly be troubled by the implication that emotions need not be conscious, for it raises the question why any emotions are conscious in the first place. For James, consciousness is a fighter for ends, and the consciousness of emotion is no different ([1890], 1: 141). From a philosophical perspective, emotions for James provide our lives with meaning, value and interest. Without emotion, our lives become empty, barren and quite literally meaningless. The notion then of an unconscious emotion, on a Jamesian account, surely stretches the concept of emotion too far. For Prinz as well, conscious emotions provide the foundation for value, including our moral judgments. This function of conscious emotions seems to relevantly distinguish it from its genus of affective behaviour, which is more generally concerned with responding to environmental stimuli. Prinz's core relational themes thus seem to pick out the genus to which emotions belong, but this is very different than the emotions themselves. Given these considerations, there are good reasons to maintain with James that emotions are necessarily felt.

3.4 Objectless Emotions and the Unconscious

James' rejection of unconscious mental states might seem difficult to reconcile with the "best proof" of his theory, namely its inclusion of objectless emotions. Although the feeling of bodily changes is most often caused by the perception of an exciting fact, whether in the world or in one's mind, it need not be. This feature distinguished James from his contemporaries, and indeed distinguishes him from most modern theorists.³⁸

³⁸ For many contemporary philosophers an objectless emotion is a mood. In fact, this is how emotion and mood are distinguished. Emotions are about objects; moods are not.

At first glance, if an emotion is objectless it seems that it must be unconscious. But having looked at James' critique of the unconscious in more detail, it is clear that this is not the case. Objectless emotions can occur in ways that does not invoke the unconscious. First, it seems that physiology alone can produce emotional effects, which the consumption of alcohol and other drugs can attest to. Even with an undivided stream of consciousness, within which the emotion is embedded, it is possible that there is no object to which the emotion is directed. Second, objectless emotions could include those instances in which an individual experiences an emotion but the object that it is about remains in the fringes of his or her consciousness. The emotion is thus objectless but not unconscious. Through effort of attention, these fringes can be brought to light, in which case the emotion is no longer objectless.

James' inclusion of objectless emotions within the framework of his theory is thereby not in tension with his position on the unconscious. Objectless emotions can potentially take a variety of forms, all of which need not posit the existence of unconscious mental states, be it of a dynamic or deep variety.

3.5 Conclusion

The critique that James' theory of emotion is deficient because it does not account for the possibility of unconscious emotions turns out to be rather empty. When we delve deeper into his theory of both emotion and consciousness, James can account for all the purported instances of unconscious emotions in the dynamic sense. Moreover, there is good reason to be wary of unconscious emotions in the deep sense, as it seems to stretch the concept of emotion too far.

4 Emotion, Habit and the Self

James' two famous works on emotion – his 1884 article in *Mind* as well as his chapter on “The Emotions” in *The Principles* – have a very clear purpose. By arguing for the thesis that the feeling of bodily changes is the emotion, James hopes to provide a theory that can reach a deeper level of scientific understanding. Instead of simply categorizing the different emotions under different names, his goal is to bring to light the more fundamental physiological processes that underpin emotional feelings. James' discussion is thereby limited to emotions as they occur at a particular point in time – that is, occurrent emotions. As a result, the James-Lange theory is not a comprehensive theory of emotion, at least not for James.³⁹ Questions regarding emotion over time fall outside of its scope. For example, do these occurrent emotions arise from an emotional disposition? If so, to what extent are we responsible for our emotional dispositions? It is certainly possible that defenders of the James-Lange theory could differ with respect to these diachronic aspects of emotion. Nevertheless, critics tend to treat the James-Lange theory as a comprehensive view. In so doing, James becomes an easy target for criticism.

A common criticism that arises from treating the James-Lange theory as comprehensive in scope is that James reduces an emotion to an entirely passive state of consciousness (Sartre [2002]; Solomon [1976]). According to Robert Solomon, since an emotion for James is immediately caused by a physiological response, the emotion simply happens to an individual. Even if, as I have argued, emotional feelings are directed towards the world, thereby imbuing the world with value and meaning, these feelings are still directly caused by a physiological response. Emotions may be directed toward the world in some capacity, but we have as much control over them as we do with sneezing, coughing or having an itch. This leaves “no opportunity for reflection”, which in turn offers no opportunity to change our emotions (Solomon [2007], 139). Reflecting on our emotions with the intention of changing them would be as productive as reflecting on our sneezes. Since these physiological disturbances will happen irrespective of what

³⁹ The James-Lange theory also remains silent on the nature of consciousness and the nature of the feeling that the bodily changes give rise to. I have considered these questions in chapters one and two.

we do, emotions are ultimately resistant to our rational reflections. They are entirely passive, involuntary states that we suffer.

Having already discussed how emotion fits into James' conception of consciousness it should be clear that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as an active or passive emotion. Since an emotion is not a primary state of consciousness, what admits of activity or passivity is the primary feeling within which emotions are embedded. To a certain extent, James' distinction between subtle and coarse emotions reveals this difference. While subtle and coarse emotions are both bidirectional feelings brought about by physiological changes, the primary feelings within which they are embedded vary in their activity. A subtle emotion is indirectly caused by a judgment and is thus embedded within a more active state of consciousness than a coarse emotion, which is indirectly caused by a perception that is more sensation-based. Since the judgment that indirectly causes a subtle emotion is cultivated over time, there is a diachronic component built into these emotions. In fact, this is also the case for many coarse emotions – though to a lesser degree – which are indirectly caused by perceptions that involve associations that have been put in place by individuals over time ([1890], 2: 3).

This diachronic aspect of emotion is more than simply implicit in James. It is explicitly discussed throughout *The Principles*. In the following, I will illustrate how James' work on the self, instinct, habit, and attention, all of which are infused with emotion, inform his comprehensive theory of emotion. In so doing, I hope to show that the passivity critique cannot be sustained.

4.1 Self-Feeling

As we have seen, James' two principal works on emotion have had a profound influence within philosophy. Critics of the theory often use these seminal texts as a foil from which to develop their alternative account. This is perhaps best exemplified in the work of Robert Solomon.

In Sartre's essay of 1938 and in my 1976 book, our shared target was William James. Sartre's and my emphasis on action and choice was in direct opposition to the “passivity” of James's account, especially its emphasis on visceral disturbance and bodily sensations (Solomon [2001], 198).

According to Solomon, wherever the gusty winds of a Jamesian emotion may blow we are swept along for the ride. We are slaves to these visceral disturbances. By contrast, Solomon developed an active theory of emotion. Early on in his career he defended the thesis, following Sartre, that emotions are choices that we make (Sartre [2002]; Solomon [1973]). Solomon would later retract this view, but he consistently maintained that emotions do not simply happen to us; that, for the most part, they are active states of consciousness (Solomon [2001] [2007]).

Rather than being led astray by the irrational winds of our emotions as James' theory purportedly asserts, the emotions for Solomon are the anchor from which we navigate the world. This anchor lies in his concept of self-esteem:

We are fundamentally concerned with our own Self-esteem, our regard for our Selves, our sense of Self-worth, the various ways in which we have invested our Selves in our world. It is the goal of Self-esteem that motivates our actions, our inquiries, and – most importantly – our passions. Self-esteem is the ultimate goal of every passion (Solomon [1976], 97).

Our emotions are thereby intimately tied to our conception of self. This helps to sustain Solomon's thesis that emotions are judgments. He concedes that emotions are not like other judgments insofar as they are not necessarily reflective and they can even surprise us. But emotions are judgments nevertheless, not only because they possess the property of intentionality, but also because they are strategies for wellbeing that issue from our sense of self. “Our emotions, to put the matter bluntly, are nothing other than our attempts to establish and defend our self-esteem” (Solomon [1976], 100). As a result,

emotions are something that we actively do, as they ultimately derive from our sense of who we are and what we want.⁴⁰

While Solomon develops this notion of self-esteem in an effort to overcome an alleged inadequacy of James' theory, James by no means neglects the relationship between emotion and the self. In "The Consciousness of Self" chapter, he discusses a particularly important and distinct kind of emotion that he calls 'self-feeling'. Self-feelings lie on a continuum, ranging between two oppositional classes of emotion that are primary to our nature – self-satisfaction and self-dissatisfaction. On the side of self-satisfaction lies feelings such as "pride, conceit, vanity, self-esteem"; while feelings such as "modesty, humility, confusion, diffidence, shame, mortification" lie on the self-dissatisfaction side of the spectrum ([1890], 1, 306).

There is a difference between self-feelings of pride and shame, for example, and feelings of pride and shame about particular objects or events. We can feel pride about doing well in a sporting event, but the self-feeling of pride refers to how one is faring in the world as a whole. As James says, "[T]he normal *provocative* of self-feeling is one's actual success or failure" ([1890], 1: 306). It is this global feature of self-feeling that makes it an emotion of "a unique sort" ([1890], 1: 307). Indeed, self-feelings, ranging from depression and despair on the one hand to arrogance and vainglory on the other, reveal how we are doing. They may constitute a unique kind of emotion, but they are still very much emotions in the James-Lange sense.

Each has its own peculiar physiognomical expression. In self-satisfaction the extensor muscles are innervated, the eye is strong and glorious, the gait rolling and elastic, the nostril dilated, and a peculiar smile plays upon the lips ([1890], 1: 307).

⁴⁰ Maximizing self-esteem may be the function of emotion, but Solomon recognizes not all emotions are successful in this capacity. Emotions can subvert wellbeing. It is here where questions regarding rationality come into play for Solomon. Rational emotions are those that actually contribute to self-esteem, irrational emotions do not. It is the purpose of reflection to make this determination.

Like other emotions then, self-feelings also have their particular physiological expression, and “each as worthy to be classed as a primitive emotional species as are, for example, rage or pain” ([1890], 1: 307).

With respect to the question of activity, it is important to note – particularly in light of Solomon’s critique – that for James “our self-feeling is in our power” ([1890], 1: 311). These emotions do not merely happen to us.

So our self-feeling in this world depends entirely on what we *back* ourselves to be and do. It is determined by the ratio of our actualities to our supposed potentialities; a fraction of which our pretensions are the denominator and the numerator our success: thus, $\text{Self-esteem} = \text{Success} / \text{Pretensions}$. Such a fraction may be increased as well by diminishing the denominator as by increasing the numerator ([1890], 1: 310-11).

We can increase our self-feeling in one of two ways: either by acquiring what it is that we desire or by relinquishing these desires and thereby changing “what we back ourselves to be and do” ([1890], 1: 310). While we are not in complete control with respect to attaining our desires, due to the vicissitudes of life, we are in complete control of what James calls our pretensions. It is in this way that our self-feeling “depends entirely” on how we regard ourselves. One sure way to become depressed, for example, is to work toward impossible goals. No matter how much success will be attained along the way, such an individual will necessarily fail, and self-esteem will fall as a result.

According to James, we have the power to change this self-inflicted feeling by simply relinquishing our desire for certain ends.

To give up pretensions is as blessed a relief as to get them gratified...How pleasant is the day when we give up striving to be young, - or slender! Thank God! we say, *those* illusions are gone. Everything added to the Self is a burden as well as a pride. A certain man who lost every penny during our civil war went and actually rolled in the dust, saying he had not felt so free and happy since he was born ([1890], 1: 311).

It is the possibility to overcome these pretensions that puts self-feeling directly in our power. There are two ways that this overcoming can occur, one by exclusion of the self and the other by inclusion. James discusses Stoic philosophy as a good example of the exclusionary kind. Rather than attempting to acquire a good that might not be attained, one may renounce the good altogether so as not to incur any pain. Thus, instead of becoming attached to people and things that will inevitably be lost and cause pain, better to simply detach oneself. While James sees a certain heroism in the Stoic attitude within its historical context, he is ultimately critical of this approach as it inspires a “narrow and unsympathetic character” ([1890], 1: 312). “Sympathetic people, on the contrary” reduce pretensions by taking a more inclusive and expansive approach ([1890], 1: 313). By regarding themselves as part of a greater whole, as intrinsically connected to others, the pretensions of the self tend to dissipate, thereby increasing self-esteem.

Solomon’s critique of James, which reduces *all* emotions to passive states beyond our control, clearly cannot be sustained with respect to self-feelings. But it could still be the case that the rest of our emotions – which lack the unique global feature of self-feeling – are passive in nature. To see that this is not the case we need to first consider his theory of the self.

4.2 The Self

In his discussion of the self, James follows his radical empiricist approach, and rejects the postulation of a non-empirical self such as a Kantian transcendental ego.⁴¹ He also rejects Hume’s empirical analysis of the self, as it “proceeds to pour out the child with the bath, and to fly to as great an extreme as the substantialist philosophers” ([1890], 1:

⁴¹ While James rejects such a non-empirical conception of the self on psychological grounds, he remains open to it philosophically. “I find the notion of some sort of an *anima mundi* thinking in all of us to be a more promising hypothesis, in spite of all its difficulties, than that of a lot of absolutely individual souls. Meanwhile, as *psychologists*, we need not be metaphysical at all. The phenomena are enough, the passing Thought itself is the only *verifiable* thinker, and its empirical connection with the brain-process is the ultimate known law” ([1890], 1: 346).

352). For James, the self is made up of two interconnected components: 1) the subjective passing thought of the stream of consciousness, which he calls ‘the I’; and 2) the objective collection of habits and dispositions, which he calls ‘the me’.

We may sum up by saying that personality implies the incessant presence of two elements, an objective person, known by a passing subjective Thought and recognized as continuing in time. *Hereafter let us see the words ME and I for the empirical person and the judging Thought* ([1890], 1: 371).

While the self is composed of ‘the I’ and ‘the me’, James further divides ‘the me’ into three parts – the material self, the social self and the spiritual self. The material self is for the most part related to the bodily concern of self-preservation; the social self, meanwhile, is concerned with the recognition one gets from others; and the spiritual self, which is really composed of aspects from the material and social self, is what we take to be the most intimate part of the self, including our moral sensibility and conscience.

The emotions figure prominently with respect to these three parts of ‘the me’. In fact, ‘the me’ is constituted by emotions and instincts. The material self is made up of emotions such as fear and anger as well as instincts including hunting, acquisitiveness and home-constructing ([1890], 1: 307-8). This may seem like a strange grouping, but these emotions and instincts are all united by the function of self-preservation. The social self, meanwhile, is constituted by emotions that are other-related, such as jealousy, envy, shame and instincts such as ambition and power. Finally, the spiritual self includes “every impulse towards psychic progress, whether intellectual, moral, or spiritual in the narrow sense of the term” ([1890], 1: 309). James does not draw the connection to the subtle emotions, probably because he has yet to introduce this concept, but it seems that the cultivation of these more refined emotions fall into this part of the self. While ‘the me’ that ‘the I’ reflects on is largely made up of emotions and instincts, it is not the occurrent emotions that James is concerned with in “The Emotions” chapter. The emotions of ‘the me’ are dispositional in nature. They are habitual emotions.

The central part of the *me* is the feeling of the body and of the adjustments in the head; and in the feeling of the body should be included that of the general

emotional tones and tendencies, for at bottom these are but the habits in which organic activities and sensibilities run ([1890], 1: 371).

There is an intrinsic relationship that holds between self-feeling and these “emotional tones and tendencies” that in part make up the self. By changing our self-feeling, which is in our control, we end up restructuring many of our emotional habits. For example, if I give up the desire for attaining a certain stature in my career, I will no longer be jealous of those who have such a stature; I will no longer respond with anger when my career path is thwarted; and I will no longer experience fear about not attaining this career goal, etc. In short, by changing aspects of one’s global self-feeling many of the emotional habits that constitutes the individual will in turn change. If self-feeling is in our power, then it seems many of our emotional habits are, by extension, in our power as well.

James’ discussion of the self and self-feeling clearly shows that not all of our emotions are beyond our control; that they are not merely passive disturbances that direct us off course. Solomon’s criticism of James is certainly overstated in this respect, but it is not completely without merit. Some emotions for James do indeed simply happen to us. In order to appreciate the range of emotions with respect to the active-passive question, we must consider in greater detail the relationship between emotion, instinct and habit.

4.3 Blind and Habitual Emotions

It is surprising that there has been no serious inquiry to date connecting James’ extensive writing on habit to his theory of emotion.⁴² Habit is a fundamental concept in James’ philosophy and psychology, impacting all areas of our lives. Not only are many of our emotions habitual, but so are our thought patterns, daily tasks, and skills. In fact, even our physical bodies operate by habit.⁴³ While habits govern a large portion of our lives,

⁴² Solomon has noted James’ discussion of habit but does not connect it to his theory of emotion.

⁴³ As James notes, an arm or nose once broken is more susceptible to being broken again.

they arise in different ways. “The habits to which there is an innate tendency are called instincts; some of those due to education would by most persons be called acts of reason” ([1890], 1: 104). Our emotional habits arise out of instincts. Indeed, instinct and emotion “shade imperceptibly” into each other, and it is no accident that the two chapters are positioned successively in *The Principles*, with the chapter on instinct preceding that on the emotions ([1890], 2: 442). Our emotions may flourish in any number of directions depending on our particular experiences, but that we are endowed with the capacity to experience emotions in the first place is due to their being rooted in our innate arsenal of instincts.

The importance of instinct in James’ work reflects the importance of Darwin on his thinking. The theory of natural selection provided a way out of the seemingly interminable debate between the classical empiricists and rationalists. We are neither blank slates nor are we endowed with innate ideas that enable us to arrive at necessary truths about the big questions of philosophy. Instead, we are creatures who come equipped into the world with a bundle of instincts – including emotions – that were successful for our ancestors in solving practical problems. For Darwin, instinct encompasses a range of reflex actions, from sneezing and hiccupping to anger and fear (Darwin [1872/2007]). James expanded the category even further to include instincts such as cleanliness, play, hoarding, acquisitiveness and curiosity. Our practical, emotional and intellectual lives are ultimately rooted for James in instinct.

This emphasis on instinct distinguishes James from the classical empiricists, who did not entirely discount instinct but regarded it as a much smaller category (Myers [1986]). Moreover, what is primary for the classical empiricists are the associations first accrued from experience. It is only subsequent to experience that our instincts are enacted. According to James, the classical empiricists explain all of our actions as the “results of the individual’s education, due altogether to the gradual association of certain perceptions with certain haphazard movements and certain resultant pleasures” ([1890], 2: 406). For example, a child bitten by a dog will subsequently come to associate dogs with danger. Only then is the fear instinct enacted.

For James, however, the relationship between instinct and experience is reversed. Our very first actions occur independently of experience, and are entirely based on our innate instinctive reactions to environmental stimuli. These first actions are not based on association since there is no prior experience from which to base an association on. In order to activate an association, instinct must first blindly move us. James does not discount the importance of association, but it is an insufficient explanation to account for our first actions in which there are no associations to draw upon.

When a particular movement, having once occurred in a random, reflex, or involuntary way, has left an image of itself in the memory, then the movement can be desired again, proposed as an end, and deliberately willed. But it is impossible to see how it could be willed before ([1890], 2: 487).

Initially then, we are carried by our emotional instincts and are completely blind as to their ends and purposes. These blind emotions do indeed happen to us. In this limited respect, Solomon's critique of James is correct. But it is precisely because of this passivity that knowledge is accrued; namely the knowledge of the ends to which the emotion and its associated instinctual action leads. These passive responses are anything but mere visceral disturbances. They ultimately increase our understanding of our selves and our world.

Experience and education can certainly sharpen and refine instincts, but when this occurs the instinct is no longer blind.

Every instinctive act, in an animal with memory, must cease to be 'blind' after being once repeated, and must be accompanied with foresight of its 'end' just so far as that end may have fallen under the animal's cognizance ([1890], 2: 390).

Emotional responses based on memory, and thus association, are not as passive as blind emotions since the individual knows the end to which the act will lead. This is not to say that such emotions are active, as the associations may have accrued passively. Nevertheless, on the active-passive spectrum, primary feelings involving emotions based on memory versus blind emotions are clearly more active states.

In addition to Darwin, Douglas Spalding influenced James' view of instinct, and by extension, emotion. Spalding conducted experiments on newly hatched chicks by blinding them for their first three days. Upon restoring their sight, Spalding observed that the chicks could peck at an approaching fly with great success on the first attempt (Spalding [1873]). This confirmed to James that organisms come into the world already equipped with instincts. It is also from Spalding that James came to the view that "Nature implants contrary impulses to act on many classes of things" ([1890], 2: 392).⁴⁴ As James notes:

Animals, for example, awaken in a child the opposite impulses of fearing and fondling. But if a child, in his first attempts to pat a dog, gets snapped at or bitten, so that the impulse of fear is strongly aroused, it may be that for years to come no dog will excite in him the impulse to fondle again ([1890], 2: 395).

These contrary instincts clearly serve a useful evolutionary purpose, as individuals are able to remain responsive and adapt to novel environmental stimuli. While instinct precedes experience, our experience often awakens one instinct and the opposing instinct fades. Over time a habit can become entrenched. According to James, "most instincts are implanted for the sake of giving rise to habits", which he calls "the law of inhibition of instincts to habits" ([1890], 2: 395). We can thereby distinguish blind emotions from habitual emotions for James. Once an emotional response ceases to be blind and eventually becomes ingrained as a habit, a host of associations will have been made based on the individual's experience with a particular object or situation. For example, the individual who fears dogs may associate with them such things as biting and sharp teeth, and knows the ends to which the feeling of fear will lead – namely safety and security. To this extent, it is a more active emotional response than a blind emotion.

While habitual emotions may not be under our direct control as our self-feelings are, they certainly are not the passive visceral disturbances that Solomon makes them out to

⁴⁴ "Mr. Spalding's wonderful article on instinct shall supply us with the facts. These little creatures show opposite instincts of attachment and fear, either of which may be aroused by the same object, man" ([1890], 2: 396).

be. A habitual emotion, caused by a perception involving a host of associations, clearly involves a primary feeling of consciousness that is more active than one involving a blind emotion. While something in our environment may simply happen to us, it does not follow that the resulting state of consciousness simply happens to us. States of consciousness involving emotion thereby differ widely in their degree of activity, from extremely passive on one end (blind emotions) to extremely active on the other (self-feelings).

4.4 Attention and Breaking Emotional Habits

The emphasis James places on attention in *The Principles* marks another area where his empiricism deviates from the classical tradition. The concept of attention is essentially neglected by the British empiricists (Myers [1986], 182). For empiricist thinkers such as Herbert Spencer, whose ideas were prominent at the time, human experience and perception is an entirely passive process that is subject to the whims and forces of external events. James rejects that we are “absolutely passive clay upon which ‘experience’ rains down” ([1890], 1: 403). Instead, experience involves an active component. Since we cannot fully take in all that is presented to our senses, it is up to us to decide what to select and attend to. Attention does not itself create ideas, but involves the effort of concentrating upon an idea that is already of interest ([1890], 1: 450).⁴⁵ This relationship between attention and interest generally maps onto the two components of the self previously considered – ‘the I’ and ‘the me’ respectively. ‘The I’ is in part constituted by attention, while what is of interest stems from the emotional and instinctual habits of ‘the me’. Indeed, our emotional tendencies and proclivities play a significant role in selecting those aspects of our experience for attention to focus on.

Occasionally ‘the I’ and ‘the me’ come into conflict, and it is in such moments that the dynamic nature of the self comes to the fore ([1890], 1: 310). With respect to the

⁴⁵ Attention is closely related to the will. The will is a broader concept than attention, including not only the concentrating of consciousness, but also a fiat, consent or decision of some kind ([1890], 2: 561).

emotions, this can occur when we experience a habitual emotion, which is part of ‘the me’, which the passing thought of ‘the I’ rejects. Although these habitual emotions are often deeply entrenched, effort of attention can serve to unhinge these habits.

Effort of attention is thus the essential phenomenon of will. Every reader must know by his own experience that this is so, for every reader must have felt some fiery passion’s grasp. What constitutes the difficulty for a man laboring under an unwise passion of acting as if the passion were unwise?... The difficulty is mental; it is that of getting the idea of the wise action to stay before our mind at all. When any strong emotional state whatever is upon us the tendency is for no images but such as are congruous with it to come up ([1890], 2: 563).

Our emotional experiences tend to be dominated by a particular feeling, making it difficult, if not impossible at times, to act in a way contrary to it. The more dominant the feeling within a state of consciousness the more likely a habitual perception-feeling-action link has been formed. Thus the more likely the action is to follow since there is no resistance within consciousness. But occasionally we are presented with an idea within consciousness that runs contrary to the dominant feeling and its associated action. By attending and focusing upon this contrary idea, it is possible to break this habitual link. James is not explicit here how the idea of the wise action can come before our mind in the first place. Earlier, however, he discusses how reason and instinct are never in conflict. Thus, when we experience an emotion that we do not want, it is not the case that we have an irrational feeling that has come into conflict with a rational idea, as the history of philosophy has been wont to characterize it. For James, “there is no material antagonism between reason and instinct” since “the only thing that can neutralize an impulse is an impulse the other way” ([1890], 2: 393). Reason simply attaches to a particular instinct.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ James would thereby take a distinctive approach to the phenomenon of recalcitrant emotions, which has become an important topic in contemporary philosophy of emotion. These are instances where our emotion persists despite our judgment that the emotion is irrational. Thus recalcitrant emotions are seen as irrational. But for James, the conflict is not between reason and emotion, but between two opposing emotional impulses. Recalcitrant emotions are not irrational at all. What admits of rationality or irrationality is the way in which we *attend* to the situation.

It seems that we are back to James' view regarding the opposition of instincts that he adopted from Spalding. In these important experiences, in which attention breaks an emotional habit, two emotional impulses are experienced simultaneously – the faint emotional feeling and the more dominant habitual feeling. It is by means of our attention that we are able to bring the faint feeling into the foreground of consciousness. This becomes clear as James proceeds in his discussion of how “the strong-willed man” responds to such a circumstance.

The strong-willed man, however, is the man who hears the still small voice unflinchingly, and who, when the death-bringing consideration comes, looks at its face, consents to its presence, clings to it, affirms it, and holds it fast, in spite of the host of exciting mental images which rise in revolt against and would expel it from the mind. Sustained in this way by a resolute effort of attention, the difficult object ere long begins to call up its own congeners and associates and *ends by changing the disposition of the man's consciousness altogether*. And with his consciousness, his action changes, for the new object, once stably in possession of the field of his thoughts, infallibly produces its own motor effects ([1890], 2: 563-4; my emphasis).

The strong-willed man is able to seize upon this faint emotional impulse (i.e. the small voice) in spite of the fiery passion, and through effort of attention bring it into the forefront of his mind. Once the idea is assented to, the action follows – an action that is contrary to that which the dominant feeling was linked to. These kinds of experiences point to how our emotional habits can be broken and restructured, thereby “changing the disposition of the man's consciousness altogether”. For a new link has been formed between a feeling, though faint, and an action. A habit is obviously not formed in one instance, but experiences such as this can lay the foundation for the development of a new emotional habit. By directly choosing the appropriate action, which is under the direct influence of the will, we can indirectly choose its associated emotional feeling. Thus, in the future, when presented with a similar situation, it is possible that the instinctual response will arouse this new emotional feeling. Once this occurs, the new emotional habit will be fully entrenched.

James calls attention to these important experiences within his chapter on “The Emotions”. While he focuses on occurrent emotions, he points to the role of attention and will to “conquer undesirable emotional tendencies” ([1890], 2: 463).

There is no more valuable precept in moral education than this, as all who have experience know: if we wish to conquer undesirable emotional tendencies in ourselves, we must assiduously, and in the first instance cold-bloodedly, go through the *outward movements* of those contrary dispositions which we prefer to cultivate ([1890], 2: 463).

Acting deliberately and cold-bloodedly in these instances nevertheless requires seizing upon the faint instinctual impulse that we have already looked at. The ability to even think of smiling while in a state of depression is no easy task, but by attending to this faint emotional impulse and rather cold-bloodedly acting upon it, we can potentially cultivate the kind of emotional tendencies and habits that we want. We may not be in control of our emotions as they occur synchronically, but we can deliberately put in place our emotional dispositions through these kinds of efforts. Our emotional habits thus come in different grades of activity. Those that are put in place by our effort of attention and acts of will are clearly more active than those that become entrenched by the associations we accrue from experience. We quite literally choose these habitual emotions in decisive moments of effort of attention and will.⁴⁷

Since the body is a sounding board for James, action and feeling are intimately linked. As feelings lead to actions so do actions lead to feelings. There is continual feedback between the two. As we willfully act on the basis of a faint emotional impulse we may very well produce the very feelings that we are trying to engender.

⁴⁷ We are then left with the further question of whether or not this choice is free. As a psychologist, James steers clear of the free will question as it is a metaphysical rather than a psychological question. He does note that as a philosopher he endorses free will for “ethical rather than psychological” reasons ([1890], 2: 573). This free will “could only be to hold some one ideal object, or part of an object, a little longer or a little more intensely before the mind” ([1890], 2: 576-7). Free will for James thus lies in attention. James’ philosophical discussion of free will can be found in *The Dilemma of Determinism* (1884).

The reward of persistency will infallibly come, in the fading out of the sullenness or depression, and the advent of real cheerfulness and kindness in their stead. Smooth the brow, brighten the eye, contract the dorsal rather than the ventral aspect of the frame, and speak in a major key, pass the genial compliment, and your heart must be frigid indeed if it do not gradually thaw! ([1890], 2: 463).

The very act of smiling, even if it is forced, can often give rise to a positive feeling. Though actions and feelings are intimately linked, it is the action that is more directly under our control. As a result, it is through actions that we can indirectly choose feelings. In *The Gospel of Relaxation*, James highlights some of the practical implications of the James-Lange theory of emotion. Of central importance is our ability to regulate our emotions.

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 (James [1916], 201).

Remarkably, this essay has gone completely unnoticed by critics of James' theory of emotion. But it clearly articulates what was earlier discussed in *The Principles* nine years prior – that we have considerable control over our emotions. First, we can attempt to willfully bring about an emotional feeling through action. James recognizes that willfully bringing about emotional states pales in comparison to a legitimately induced emotion. The physiological changes of an emotion are complex, and they cannot be fully replicated by sheer effort. Second, even if such an effort of will fails to bring about the desired emotion at that particular moment, the individual may be making inroads in developing the kind of emotional disposition that s/he wants. Over time, through such effort of attention, an individual may find themselves with radically changed emotional habits. It is in this way that 'the I' can restructure 'the me'.

It is clear that for James we have the ability and are thus responsible for putting in place the emotional dispositions that we want. Nevertheless, James' point of emphasis, unlike Solomon, is not so much on responsibility for our emotions but developing good emotional habits. Whether these habits are put in place by our choosing or not is of

secondary importance. In James' *Talk to Teachers*, which draws out some of the practical implications of *The Principles*, he says:

It is very important that teachers should realize the importance of habit, and psychology helps us greatly at this point. We speak, it is true, of good habits and of bad habits; but, when people use the word 'habit,' in the majority of instances it is a bad habit which they have in mind... But the fact is that our virtues are habits as much as our vices. All our life, so far as it has definite form, is but a mass of habits, - practical, emotional, and intellectual, - systematically organized for our weal or woe, and bearing us irresistibly toward our destiny, whatever the latter may be (James [1916], 64).

Teachers, parents and other caregivers can help to awaken certain basic instincts and help nurture good emotional habits. While this may result in emotional habits that are more passive than active, what ultimately matters is that the emotions have positive consequences for our lives. The activity or passivity of these emotions is subordinate to this more primary ethical question. Of course, our upbringings are invariably imperfect, and bad habits, including bad emotional habits, are likely to develop. It is here where our finite resources of attention are to be focused.

4.5 Conclusion

In this section, I have attempted to show that states of consciousness involving emotions vary widely in their activity for James. Some emotions, such as self-feelings, are directly under our control, while others, such as blind emotions, are entirely passive. Moreover, there are differences in degree with respect to habitual emotions. Those that have developed out of a blind emotion are more passive than those that have been put in place by attention and will. Ultimately, what matters for James is that we develop good emotional habits.

5 Developments in James' Conception of Emotion

It has been argued that James' later philosophical works, particularly *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (hereafter *Varieties*), represents a fundamental break from his earlier treatment of emotion (Averill [1992]; Oatley & Djikic [2002]; Solomon [1995]). According to James Averill, James has two distinct theories of emotion: first, a feeling theory, as developed in "What is an Emotion?" and *The Principles*; and second, a cognitive theory, as developed in *Varieties* (Averill [1992], 221). For Robert Solomon, the discontinuity in James' work on emotion is even greater.

I would argue that James has at least three different and sometimes radically opposed theories of emotion. In his 1884 essay, "What Is an Emotion?" he argues both for a physiological and for a behavioral conception of emotions.... James also proposes a very different view of emotions in his religious writings, notably in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, such that emotions clearly emerge as a species of spiritual phenomena and hardly physical or physiological at all (Solomon [1995], 201).

At first glance it might seem that a fundamental break between *The Principles* and *Varieties* does occur. James' discussion in this later work focuses entirely on the cognitive aspects of emotion, which is difficult to reconcile with the standard view of his earlier feeling theory. Furthermore, although emotion features prominently throughout *Varieties*, the James-Lange theory is not referred to once. For Averill and Solomon, it is an omission that surely signals James' abandonment of the theory.

This reading of a fundamental break, I contend, is mistaken. While James does not reference his earlier James-Lange theory of emotion within *Varieties*, he does reference it in support of other later works. In 1899, shortly before he began working on *Varieties*, he published *The Gospel of Relaxation*. In this article, as we have seen, he discusses some of the practical implications of the James-Lange theory of emotion, to which he remains a staunch advocate. Moreover, in 1905, after the publication of *Varieties*, James refers back to his James-Lange theory of emotion in support of his metaphysical theory of 'pure experience' ([1905], 1208).

More importantly, as I have attempted to show throughout my analysis of *The Principles*, James' conception of emotion is not exhausted by the James-Lange theory. This theory focuses on the bodily changes that cause and underlie an emotional feeling, and thereby takes a scientific third-person perspective on the phenomena. But the James-Lange theory remains silent on a number of features of emotion, most notably emotional experience. As we have seen, James inquires into these experiential aspects of emotion in his chapter on "The Perception of Reality". Here he discusses how emotional feelings involve 'a sense of reality' or belief, which imbue experience with meaning and value. This experiential aspect of emotion is continued in *Varieties* in the context of religious experience.

Given these considerations, it might then seem that James' account of emotion undergoes no changes during the intervening twelve years between *The Principles* and *Varieties*. Matthew Ratcliffe has taken this view (Ratcliffe [2005], [2008]). While Ratcliffe's understanding of James' theory is generally astute, he employs a problematic methodology. He takes aspects of James' later treatment of emotion, particularly from *Varieties*, as well as aspects from his earlier view "in order to piece together a theory" (Ratcliffe [2008], 221). This approach rests on the assumption that James' theory remains unchanged throughout his career.

During the period between *The Principles* and *Varieties* three notable changes occur in James' conception of emotion. The first two changes concern his conception of consciousness. First, he comes to accept that mental states do indeed combine. As a result, James is no longer committed to the view that a state of consciousness must be an undivided unity. He now accepts that a state of consciousness can have parts. Second, he explicitly rejects the dualistic interactionism that he had endorsed for pragmatic psychological reasons within *The Principles*, in favour of a monistic metaphysical theory. These changes affect his view of emotion indirectly, and can be considered more minor changes in this regard. The third change, concerning James' discussion of feelings of reality in *Varieties*, is of greater consequence, and I consider their nature and function in close detail in Chapter 6. Here I simply note that these emotions are an addition to James' earlier account, and do not undermine it. Indeed, there is neither a fundamental

break nor seamless continuity in James' theory of emotion from *The Principles* to *Varieties*. The three changes that I consider below are best understood as refining and building upon a theory already in place.

5.1 Three Changes from *The Principles* to *Varieties*

5.1.1 The Compounding of Mental States

The central tenet of James' stream of consciousness theory, which is developed in *The Principles*, is that mental states do not combine to form a complex mental state. Instead, these concrete states of mind, which I have called primary feelings, are a single, undivided unity. They are not composed of parts. However, five years after the publication of *The Principles*, James amends this position. In *The Knowing of Things Together* he comes to the view that some mental states do indeed contain parts.

I see, moreover, better now than then that my proposal to designate mental states merely by their cognitive function leads to a somewhat strained way of talking of dreams and reveries, and to quite an unnatural way of talking of some emotional states. I am willing, consequently, henceforward that mental contents should be called complex, just as their objects are, and this even in psychology. Not because their parts are separable, as the parts of objects are; not because they have an eternal or quasi-eternal individual existence, like the parts of objects; for the various 'contents' of which they are parts are integers, existentially, and their parts only live as long as *they* live. Still, *in* them, we can call parts, parts ([1895]), 124).

James mentions that certain emotions lead him to the conclusion that some mental states do in fact combine. He is not explicit, here or elsewhere, about what kind of emotions he has in mind (Myers [1986]). However, what brought James to this amended view is his recognition that we know some states of consciousness in the same way, whether taken individually or in conjunction with other states. Given this, it seems that he is most likely referring to the subtle emotions in the above passage.

As I attempted to show in Chapter 2, there is a difference between a pure judgment and a subtle emotion for James – the latter includes an emotional feeling in addition to the judgment. In both states of consciousness, however, it seems that we know the judgment in the same way, whether taken singly as a pure judgment or in conjunction with an emotional feeling. Consider again Edmund Gurney’s imagining of a musical piece in his mind versus the actual experience of being at the symphony. In both cases, the judgment that the music is beautiful is the same. The primary feeling involving a subtle emotion would then consist of the judgment of beauty *plus* the emotional feeling. Primary feelings involving coarse emotions, on the other hand, do not seem to have this kind of structure. I may know what a snake is and I may know what fear is taken as individual states of consciousness, but my fear-of-a-snake is something entirely new. My knowledge of the snake and the fear do not combine to form a complex mental state, rather they mix into an indivisible unity. If this is correct, the difference is the nature of the perception that indirectly causes the emotion. In the case of a subtle emotion, it is more conceptual and less sensational. This reading is supported by a passage in James’ chapter on “The Emotions” in *The Principles*. At one point, when discussing subtle emotions, James describes how the pleasure from the emotional feeling is “added” to the judgment ([1890], 2: 468). This “added” seems to conflict with his stream of consciousness theory, as it is suggestive of mental combination. If I am correct that James is referring to subtle emotions, the structure of these emotions would remain the same insofar as they are bi-directional feelings. What changes is the structure of the primary feeling, which is no longer a simple undivided unity, but complex and composed of parts. The judgment does not mix with the emotional feeling, but is rather added to it.

Regardless of what emotions James has in mind, his acceptance of mental combination does not appear to have a significant impact on his conception of emotion. It is important to note that he is not renouncing his previous position in *The Principles* regarding the primacy given to a unified state of consciousness.⁴⁸ He is clear that these

⁴⁸ In *A Pluralistic Universe*, James holds that his theory of consciousness as developed in *The Principles* in which states are a simple undivided unity is still “the best description of an enormous number of our higher fields of consciousness” ([1909], 715).

parts within a state of consciousness cannot be separated like those of a physical object, and he remains critical of the empiricist model of the mind, which equates the whole with the sum of the parts. A unified state of consciousness continues to have a more primary existence. The relation between what I have called a secondary feeling and a primary feeling thereby remains largely intact.

At the time of *Varieties* then, James is committed to the seemingly contradictory view that some mental states are composed of parts and are at the same time a unity. How exactly this is to be reconciled, he is unsure of at this time. In fact, this problem of the relation between parts and wholes was arguably the most troubling philosophical problem James encountered throughout his career ([1907], 542). If a whole is composed of parts, then how is it that we get the whole? It was not until 1909, in *A Pluralistic Universe*, that James resolves the problem for himself. He ends up renouncing the intellectualistic logic in which the problem is framed, by arguing that our immediate experiences simultaneously function both as parts and wholes.⁴⁹

It might seem that this acceptance of mental combination in some states of consciousness is being referred to in James' description of religious emotions in *Varieties*:

As concrete states of mind, made up of a feeling *plus* a specific sort of object, religious emotions of course are psychic entities distinguishable from other concrete emotions; but there is no ground for assuming a simple abstract 'religious emotion' to exist as a distinct elementary mental affection by itself, present in every religious experience without exception ([1902], 33).

⁴⁹ James says: "Sensational experiences are their 'own others,' then, both internally and externally. Inwardly they are one with their parts, and outwardly they pass continuously into their next neighbors, so that events separated by years of time in a man's life hang together unbrokenly by the intermediary events. Their names, to be sure, cut them into separate conceptual entities, but no cuts existed in the continuum in which they originally came" ([1909], 760).

Emotional responses to religious symbols, art, iconography, etc., would certainly be considered subtle emotions for James. If I am correct that subtle emotions involve mental combination, then it follows that in these instances the emotions involve the combination of parts – that is, a judgment *plus* a feeling. However, James is not concerned with subtle emotions in *Varieties*. The religious emotions he is concerned with, as will become clear in Chapter 6 with my discussion of feelings of reality and transformational emotions originate from our immediate acquaintance with reality, not our knowledge about reality. The *plus* in the above passage should not be read literally. James is referring to the contents of a unified state of mind (i.e., a concrete state), and it is difficult to do so without using the language of parts. His ultimate point is that there is no such thing as a religious emotion in itself “but only a common storehouse of emotions upon which religious objects may draw” ([1902], 33). The emotion in itself is the love, awe, wonder, fear, anger, joy, etc., which he notes has a bodily manifestation. This goes to show that by ‘religious emotion’ James does not mean some spiritual entity, but an emotion like any other emotion.

To summarize, James’ acceptance of mental combination in some cases of emotion – likely that of subtle emotions – changes the structure of these emotions from a simple to a complex state. Nevertheless, the primary feelings within which these emotions are embedded, which James here calls ‘concrete states of mind’, continue to have a more primary existence than the secondary feelings and thoughts that compose them.

5.1.2 From Dualism to Neutral Monism

Another development that occurs between *The Principles* and *Varieties* concerns James’ overarching metaphysical worldview. In *The Principles*, he pragmatically endorses a dualistic philosophy on the grounds that psychology must assume both mental and physical facts; and that the ultimate nature and relation of these mental and physical facts is a question for metaphysics. As Bruce Wilshire has shown, James struggles with this dualistic assumption throughout his treatise, and thereby struggles to keep psychology distinct from metaphysics (Wilshire [1968]). Indeed, in James’ 1904 article *Does*

Consciousness Exist, where he first introduces his metaphysical theory of pure experience, he says, “for twenty years past I have mistrusted ‘consciousness’ as an entity” ([1904], 1141). During the writing of *The Principles* then, James had doubts not only about dualism but the metaphysical status of consciousness. It was not until 1895, in *The Knowing of Things Together*, that James first gave voice to these doubts.

What, then, do we mean by 'things'? To this question I can only make the answer of the idealistic philosophy. For the philosophy that began with Berkeley, and has led up in our tongue to Shadworth Hodgson, things have no other nature than thoughts have, and we know of no things that are not given to somebody's experience. When I see the thing white paper before my eyes, the nature of the thing and the nature of my sensations are one ([1895], 106-7).

We see here the seeds of his later neutral monism, wherein thoughts and things are both derivative of and reducible to a more primary stuff. This important change to James' philosophy is operating in the background as he writes *The Will to Believe* and *Varieties*, which were written after *The Knowing of Things Together*, although before his more developed 'pure experience' theory.

According to James' theory of 'pure experience', experience is neutral with respect to the distinctions that we impose on it, including the distinctions between subject-object and mind-matter. In 1905, James published *The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience* where he responds to the objection from his critics that the emotions are exclusively inner, subjective, mental events, thereby posing a counterexample to his theory. In response, James argues that there is in fact an ambiguity with respect to the emotions that is in perfect accord with this theory of pure experience.

With the affectional experiences which we are considering, the relatively 'pure' condition lasts. In practical life no urgent need has yet arisen for deciding whether to retain them as rigorously mental or as rigorously physical facts. So they remain equivocal ([1905], 1210).

James' point is that it is only secondarily that we class an emotion as either happening *to*

us as a physical object or happening *in* us as a mental subject. This ambiguity is consistent, as he notes, with his earlier James-Lange theory of emotion, which gives emphasis to the physical side ([1905], 1208). Moreover, it is fully consistent with his treatment of emotion in parts of *The Principles* and *Varieties*, which gives emphasis to the mental side. Whether we emphasize emotion as a physical fact or as a mental fact, these are two ways of classifying the same pure experience. James is no longer committed to the view that the bodily changes and the feeling of an emotion are two distinct kinds of stuff. Rather, they are both derivative of and reducible to a more primary stuff – pure experience. I will not be considering the role of emotion within James’ theory of pure experience, as this is developed after *Varieties* and is beyond the scope of my project. I mention it here because these changes in James’ metaphysical worldview are being developed concurrently to his writing of *The Will to Believe* and *Varieties*.

5.1.3 Feelings of Reality

The most significant change in James’ conception of emotion from *The Principles* to *Varieties* concerns the addition of an affective category he calls ‘feelings of reality’. This is where Ratcliffe’s view that James’ theory of emotion remains the same throughout his career is difficult to maintain, as the notion of feelings of reality is not developed within *The Principles*. As we have seen, James does discuss the sense of reality, which constitutes the outward-directed feeling of an emotion. However, by feelings of reality he is pointing to something different. It is only in *Varieties* that these unique emotions are explicitly discussed, although they are present in a less explicit way in *The Gospel of Relaxation* and *The Will to Believe*. I will look at feelings of reality in close detail in the next chapter. Here I simply note that these emotions do not undermine James’ previous theory, but add to it, thereby broadening the category of emotion.

5.2 Terminological Changes

In addition to the more substantive changes noted above there are some terminological changes that occur from *The Principles* to *Varieties*. Most notably, there is a change in James' metaphor of choice to describe consciousness. Instead of the stream of consciousness, it is now described as a field. These terms are used more or less synonymously.⁵⁰

This terminological change seems to come about as a result of James' increased emphasis on the subconscious in *Varieties*. Although he has the theoretical tools to account for the subconscious realm in *The Principles*, two main reasons explain its growing emphasis in his work. First, during the period between 1890 and 1902 a great deal of research had been conducted on the subconscious. As James notes:

In the wonderful explorations of Binet, Janet, Breuer, Freud, Mason, Prince, and others, of the subliminal consciousness of patients with hysteria, we have revealed to us whole systems of underground life ([1902], 217).

Moreover, the work of Frederic Myers on *The Subliminal Consciousness*, published in 1892 was particularly influential for James ([1902], 457). This growing empirical research convinced him that "The subconscious self is nowadays a well-accredited psychological entity" ([1902], 457). The second reason for this emphasis on the subconscious concerns the nature of James' inquiry in *Varieties*. In much of this work, he is trying to provide a theoretical framework that can explain the various first-person accounts of religious experience, particularly experiences of conversion. This task is difficult in itself, but without invoking the subconscious realm such an attempt would pose even more challenges.

It is this growing emphasis on the subconscious in his work that seems to motivate the change to a field of consciousness. According to James, this metaphor is better able to

⁵⁰ Writing later in his career, in *A Pluralistic Universe*, James refers to his theory of consciousness in *The Principles* not as a stream but as a field ([1909], 720).

capture the important role of the subconscious realm, which is associated with what he calls the margin.

The important fact which this ‘field’ formula commemorates is the indetermination of the margin. Inattentively realized as is the matter which the margin contains, it is nevertheless there, and helps both to guide our behavior and determine the next movement of our attention. It lies around us like a ‘magnetic field,’ inside of which our centre of energy turns like a compass-needle, as the present phase of consciousness alters into its successor ([1902], 214).

A state of consciousness for James is now conceived of like a field of energy, where it is most intense at its centre (i.e., its focus) and which gradually dissipates as the field extends into the margins, wherein the subconscious lies.

5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that James does not break from his theory of emotion during the period between *The Principles* and *Varieties*. While there are certainly some amendments to his view, these changes are best understood as refining his theory developed in *The Principles*. In the following two chapters, I will look more closely at James’ developing account of emotion within *Varieties* and *The Will to Believe*. In Chapter 6, I consider the nature and function of two kinds of emotions that are discussed throughout *Varieties* – feelings of reality and transformational emotions. In Chapter 7, I consider James’ argument in *The Will to Believe* by looking closely at his notion of the passional nature.

6 Feelings of Reality and Transformational Emotions

According to traditional rationalist and empiricist theories of epistemology, feelings have no role to play in our knowledge about the world. Many rationalist philosophers, through the guidance of reason, claim to have untangled all of the problems of philosophy and thereby arrived at necessary truths about the world. This includes the question of God's existence, which they purport to demonstrate – such as with the ontological argument – by pure reason. Emotion and feeling are excluded from the rationalist's method, at best regarded as irrelevant, and at worst, a corrosive influence that stains the entire process. James rejects rationalism since it is not attentive to the facts of experience. Whereas the world is messy and complicated, rationalist theories are clean and simple. The grand philosophical systems conceived of by rationalists are for James abstractions that have essentially lost touch with reality. With respect to the existence of God, rationalists may be convinced by their philosophical arguments, but this conviction according to James is not ultimately an intellectual matter based on logic and reason. Rather, it is based on feeling ([1902], 387).

Meanwhile for traditional empiricists, beliefs are proportioned to the amount of available evidence in the world. Since there is no evidence in the world for God, an empiricist has no grounds for belief. What one feels to be the case is entirely irrelevant, as these feelings are merely subjective phenomena that are not about the world. James rejects traditional empiricism on the grounds that it does not take experience far enough. By excluding the relations that connect experiential events and our feelings of those events, traditional empiricists end up excluding facts of experience from their philosophical inquiry. This is especially pertinent in the realm of religion, for according to James, “feeling is the deeper source of religion” ([1902], 387). James' radical empiricism, already present in his stream of consciousness theory, thereby carves out a distinct methodological approach, one that is empirical but which makes room for religious belief.

James' rejection of the cold, feeling-less epistemology that both traditional rationalists and empiricists subscribe to comes as a result of his rejection of the traditional knower-

known relation, most explicitly discussed in *Pragmatism*, but already present in *The Principles*. We are not simply passive knowers who come to know a world that is “out there”, be it through reason or the senses. Rather, we are inextricably bound up with the world, and are as much contributors to knowledge as we are receivers. This contribution derives from an ineliminable feeling foundation that colours our entire experience. Of all James’ works, it is *Varieties* that inquires into the nature of this feeling element most explicitly.

Much has been written on *Varieties* across numerous disciplines, and the prominence of emotion within the work, including its seeming tension with his earlier theory, has been well documented (Averill [1992]; Carrette [2005]; Myers [1986]; Solomon [1995]). However, there has not been a sustained, close analysis of James’ treatment of emotion within *Varieties*. In the following chapter, I hope to elucidate two distinct but interconnected kinds of emotion that are central to the work. I first consider the role that feelings of reality play in shaping our respective experience of the world. I then turn my attention to transformational experiences, which involve not only feelings of reality but also transformational emotions. I show how a transformational emotion can completely reorient an individual’s perspective on the world, and thereby put in place new feelings of reality from which new beliefs about the world emerge. Before embarking on this task, I will first briefly describe James’ methodological approach in *Varieties*.

6.1 James’ Methodology in *Varieties*

James engages with two central questions in *Varieties*, which divides the work in two parts. First, he inquires into the nature of the various religious feelings and experiences individuals have had. Second, he considers what general conclusions can be drawn from this preceding inquiry, if any, about the nature of reality ([1902], 13). The large majority of the work is focused upon the first question, which is fitting given that James’ subtitle to *Varieties* is “a study in human nature”. It is in this respect that emotion figures prominently. In fact, upon re-reading this first section of his manuscript James says, “I am almost appalled at the amount of emotionality which I find in it” ([1902], 435).

Since *Varieties* is primarily a study in human nature, James does not approach the topic of religion from the perspective of a theologian, but – given his expertise – from that of a psychologist ([1902], 12). However, his approach is not the physiological psychology that he employed in much of *The Principles*, including the chapter on “The Emotions”. Rather, it is the descriptive psychology utilized in chapters such as “The Stream of Thought” and “The Perception of Reality”, which pays close attention to the nature of experience itself. This becomes evident in the opening chapter of *Varieties*, entitled “Religion and Neurology”, where James is concerned with refuting ‘medical materialism’. According to this view, religious experiences are symptomatic of pathological physiological states, and can be entirely disregarded as a result. James concedes that the physiological conditions underlying some religious experiences are pathological, but he argues that this has no bearing upon the philosophical significance of the experience.

When we think certain states of mind superior to others, is it ever because of what we know concerning their organic antecedents? No! it is always for two entirely different reasons. It is either because we take an immediate delight in them; or else it is because we believe them to bring us good consequential fruits for life ([1902], 22).

It is not surprising then that the James-Lange theory of emotion, which is concerned with the “organic antecedents” of emotion, is not referred to in *Varieties*. No matter what bodily changes may cause and accompany an experience, emotional or otherwise, they are irrelevant to the question of meaning and significance. This does not mean that James has abandoned his earlier theory. The physiological changes that cause and underlie an emotion continue to be an important aspect of emotion, but given the nature of his inquiry, they are simply not pertinent.

Having argued against medical materialism, James then proceeds with his project of considering the nature of religious experience itself. Here he describes his general methodology:

If the inquiry be psychological, not religious institutions, but rather religious feelings and religious impulses must be its subject, and I must confine myself to those more developed subjective phenomena recorded in literature produced by articulate and fully self-conscious men, in works of piety and autobiography ([1902], 12).

James' inquiry, concerned with understanding the nature of religious experience, is ultimately phenomenological in approach. Not only is he interested in detailing the structural components of these experiences, but also the meaning and significance that they confer for those who experience them.⁵¹ Central to this are two distinct kinds of emotions: feelings of reality and transformational emotions, which the remainder of this chapter is focused on.

6.2 Feelings of Reality

The nature of religious belief is not a central concern for James in *The Principles*, although he does touch upon it in his chapter on "The Perception of Reality". He notes that it is the intensity of emotional feelings toward religious objects that explains the individual's belief.

The reason of the belief is undoubtedly the bodily commotion which the exciting idea sets up. 'Nothing which I can feel like that can be false.' All our religious and supernatural beliefs are of this order ([1890], 2: 308).

A similar view is presented in *Varieties*:

⁵¹ According to James Edie: "William James was the first to attempt a phenomenology of religious experience in an experiential sense, and I would point out that he has had almost no successor in this endeavor up to the present time" (Edie [1987], 52).

The truth is that in the metaphysical and religious sphere, articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of the same conclusion ([1902], 74).

In both cases, our explicit religious beliefs take root from an underlying feeling foundation.⁵² The nature of this feeling foundation undergoes an important shift in the period between *The Principles* and *Varieties*. James' earlier treatment of emotion had focused exclusively on emotions felt at particular points in time. He also considered how many of our emotional reactions are structured by habitual patterns of response. All of this remains consistent in *Varieties*. What is new to James' account are feelings of reality.

Feelings of reality are discussed throughout *Varieties*, but are given their most explicit theoretical attention in the chapter aptly entitled "The Reality of the Unseen". These feelings are not directed toward sensible objects within the world, but nor are they abstract ideas.⁵³ As James says:

It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call 'something there,' more deep and more general than any of the special and particular 'senses' by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed ([1902], 59).

James is not here describing mystical states of consciousness, which *Varieties* is well known for, but everyday states of consciousness in which a sense of reality is continuously but dimly felt. These feelings are "more deep and more general" than other elements within consciousness: they are "more deep" insofar as they lie not in the foreground of consciousness but in the background; and they are "more general" insofar

⁵² A similar view is present in James' earlier essay "The Sentiment of Rationality" (1879).

⁵³ As James says, feelings of reality are "more like a sensation than an intellectual operation properly so-called". He says they are "quasi-sensible realities directly apprehended" ([1902], 64).

as they are not particular feelings, but rather give shape and structure to the contents of a conscious state. As his discussion progresses it becomes clear that feelings of reality provide an individual with a foundational orientation to the world, a kind of lens through which things and events are experienced. While the different feelings of reality that characterize these ways of being often result in different religious beliefs, James is not interested in the various philosophical arguments that have been put forth to defend these positions. Nor is he interested in the theological dogma associated with the respective religions. He considers these philosophical and theological aspects of religion “secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue” ([1902], 387).⁵⁴ For James, “feeling is the deeper source of religion”, and the deepest of these feelings are feelings of reality ([1902], 387).

Feelings of reality may be inarticulate, but they can be given verbal expression to some extent by what James calls “our total reaction upon life”. This process involves bringing one’s feelings of reality before one’s attention, which he describes in the following passage:

To get at them you must go behind the foreground of existence and reach down to that curious sense of the whole residual cosmos as an everlasting presence, intimate or alien, terrible or amusing, lovable or odious, which in some degree every one possesses. This sense of the world’s presence, appealing as it does to our peculiar individual temperament, makes us either strenuous or careless, devout or blasphemous, gloomy or exultant, about life at large; and our reaction, involuntary and inarticulate and often half unconscious as it is, is the completest of all our answers to the question, “What is the character of this universe in which we dwell?” ([1902], 39).

These different feeling orientations toward the world - whether it is felt as “intimate or alien, terrible or amusing, lovable or odious” – lie at the foundation of the various

⁵⁴ This is elucidated by a letter James wrote to Frances Morse regarding *Varieties*: “The problem I have set myself is a hard one: first, to defend... ‘experience’ against ‘philosophy’ as being the real backbone of the world’s religious life...” (Perry [1948], 257).

religious (including irreligious) ways of being in the world. If the universe is felt as having no divine significance beyond what is given to our senses, then an individual's feelings of reality can be described, at least in part, as a feeling of disconnectedness or alienation. This is not to say that such individuals will necessarily find no meaning and significance in life, but rather the self is not felt to be an intrinsic part of the universe as a whole. If, on the other hand, the universe is felt as having a divine significance with a transcendent order to which the individual is a part, then this self-world relation can be characterized by a feeling of intimacy.

Feelings of reality are certainly the most primordial and basic affective category for James, but they are not to be understood as moods. The term *mood* is used sparsely throughout his works, and is not given a clear definition. Nevertheless, mood does figure prominently at times, particularly in James' distinction between the 'strenuous mood' and the 'easy-going mood' in *The Moral Philosopher and Moral Life*, which is also referred to in other works ([1912], 211).⁵⁵ In fact, this distinction is implicit in the passage above where James mentions the "strenuous or careless" temperament. Although he does not explicitly discuss the relationship between feelings of reality and mood, the above passage does provide some hints. As he says, when these feelings of reality appeal to an individual's particular temperament, this "makes us either strenuous or careless, devout or blasphemous, gloomy or exultant" ([1902], 39). Whereas in this passage James speaks of a strenuous temperament, in other works, including *Varieties*, *The Principles*, and *The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life*, he speaks of the strenuous mood. In this respect then, James seems to be using the terms *mood* and *temperament* interchangeably. As a result, it is not entirely clear whether these moods are to be regarded as affective states, dispositions of character, or both.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ This important distinction, which is made most explicitly in James' moral philosophy, has been discussed by Hunter Brown to better elucidate James' argument in "The Will to Believe" (Brown [2000]).

⁵⁶ Later in this section, I will discuss what James describes as 'the habitual centre of personal energy'. This term seems to capture what he means by mood and temperament.

In *Varieties*, James is primarily concerned with different religious ways of being in the world, and he focuses most explicitly upon three types: ‘healthy-mindedness’, ‘saintliness’, and ‘the sick soul’. The healthy-minded and saintliness types both feel that a “more” exists behind the veneer of our sense experience, and thereby share a feeling of intimacy with the universe at large. James describes the healthy-minded type as having a feeling of being in “union with the divine” ([1902], 78), while the saintliness type has a “A feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world’s selfish little interests” ([1902], 249). Where their feelings of reality differ is with respect to the nature of this intimacy. For the healthy-minded type, the self is an intrinsic part of a loveable and beautiful universe. These individuals look “on all things and sees that they are good” ([1902], 85-6). As a result, they have “an inability to feel evil” or to experience any prolonged suffering ([1902], 82). It is these loving and intimate feelings of reality that underlie their optimistic and enthusiastic temperament.

Meanwhile, for the saintliness type this feeling of intimacy is tempered by a feeling of repulsion towards evil in the world. Whereas the healthy-minded type does not regard evil as an intrinsic component of reality and thereby does not focus upon it, the saintliness type seeks to confront and overcome evil in order to get into better relations with the divine. In so doing, the saintliness type is most often impelled to follow certain religious and moral ideals, which may involve forms of asceticism that can even “turn into self-immolation” ([1902]: 249). This feeling of intimacy coupled with a feeling of repulsion, which make up the feelings of reality of the saintliness type, seems to map onto what James calls the strenuous mood.

As we have seen, the healthy-minded and saintliness types both feel a divine presence behind the world that is presented to our senses. In this way, their feelings of reality differ markedly from what James calls the sick soul. The same facts that are presented to the exultant temperament of the healthy-minded type are given a much different interpretation by the sick soul type. Whereas the former has an inability to feel evil, the latter has an inability to feel goodness. For the sick soul type, there is no unseen reality behind things and events within the world. Seemingly good things that occur are fleeting. Since nothing good is everlasting, the world to the sick soul is at once pointless and

wicked – it “looks remote, strange, sinister, uncanny” ([1902], 142). These dark and dreary feelings hang over all of experience like a cloud, resulting in a kind of existential depression.

The sick soul type shares similar feelings of reality with those carefree individuals that James characterizes as having an easy-going mood. These types of individuals are not discussed in *Varieties*, but are referred to in *The Moral Philosopher and Moral Life* ([1912], 211). Similarly to the sick soul type, the carefree type feels no transcendent order behind the world that is presented to our senses. What is seen is all there is. In this way, both share a self-world relation characterized by a feeling of alienation insofar as the self is not part of a greater divine order. However, whereas the sick soul type feels this alienation to be terrible, the carefree type feels it in a more positive (or at least neutral) way. It is this difference that explains why the sick soul type is beset by existential dread.

The following chart summarizes the four religious ways of being for James.

| Religious Type | Feelings of Reality | Response to Evil | Mood/Temperament |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Healthy-minded | Intimate and loveable | Turning away | Exultant |
| Saintliness | Intimate and odious | Confronting | Strenuous |
| Sick Soul | Alien and terrible | Dread | Gloomy |
| Carefree | Alien and amusing/neutral | Shrinking from (out of self-interest) | Easy-going |

In the following passage, James describes how the different feelings of reality of the healthy-minded and sick soul types lead to fundamentally different experiences of the world.

Let our common experiences be enveloped in an eternal moral order; let our suffering have an immortal significance; let Heaven smile upon the earth, and deities pay their visits; let faith and hope be the atmosphere which man breathes in; - and his days pass by with zest; they stir with prospects, they thrill with

remoter values. Place around them on the contrary the curdling cold and gloom and absence of the permanent meaning which for pure naturalism and the popular science evolutionism of our time are all that is visible ultimately, and thrill stops short, or turns rather to an anxious trembling ([1902], 133).

Feelings of reality are not directed toward a particular thing, but envelop our common experiences. They are like an experiential lens through which all of reality is perceived. Needless to say, the healthy-minded type sees the world through a rosy lens, while a dark lens pervades the experience of the sick soul type. Since feelings of reality envelop our day-to-day experiences, the ideas and activities of the individual oriented to the world by feelings of zestful enthusiasm will be entirely different to the individual whose experience is pervaded by gloomy pessimism. Around their divergent foundational feelings of reality are built entirely different systems of ideas.

James calls this complex of feelings, ideas, and activities ‘the habitual centre of personal energy’. This habitual centre seems to bear a relation to what James earlier also calls temperament or mood. Since James focuses more attention detailing the nature of this habitual centre, I will focus more on it. He says:

Let us hereafter, in speaking of the hot place in a man’s consciousness, the group of ideas to which he devotes himself, and from which he works, call it the habitual centre of his personal energy. It makes a great difference to a man whether one set of his ideas, or another, be the centre of his energy; and it makes a great difference, as regards any set of ideas which he may possess, whether they become central or remain peripheral in him ([1902], 183).

Feelings of reality provide the underlying support to the habitual centre, much like the foundation of a building, and it is their presence that makes a group of associated ideas hot. As we will see when looking at transformational experiences, when the feelings of reality no longer support the habitual ideas and activities, the edifice will subsequently crumble.

Since feelings of reality function as a kind of magnetic force around which a system of ideas and activities rotate, our explicit philosophical and religious beliefs take direct root from this feeling foundation. Healthy-minded types are inclined toward what James calls a pluralistic religion, in which there is not one absolute fact, but rather a collection of principles ([1902], 125). In this way, what is good can be conceived of as the ultimate principle and “evil would not be essential” ([1902], 125). The sick soul type meanwhile is often atheistic ([1902], 132-3), while the saintliness type, who has “a feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world’s selfish little interests” is compatible with both monotheism and pantheism ([1902], 249). These modes of being also inform philosophical beliefs. For example, James likens Spinoza’s philosophy as healthy-minded in temper ([1902], 121); and he associates positivistic and naturalistic approaches to philosophy with the sick soul orientation ([1902], 132).⁵⁷

While an individual’s religious and philosophical beliefs are rooted in their particular feelings of reality, there is not a necessary one-to-one mapping between the feeling and the belief. Certain feelings of reality do not necessarily cause specific religious and philosophical beliefs. For example, James speaks of healthy-minded Christians. His central thesis is that whatever our religious and philosophical beliefs may be, it is our feelings of reality that “have prepared the premises” for them ([1902], 73).

I spoke of the convincingness of these feelings of reality, and I must dwell a moment longer on that point. They are as convincing to those who have them as any direct sensible experiences can be, and they are, as a rule, much more convincing than results established by mere logic ever are ([1902], 72).

It is for this reason that philosophical argumentation often has little success in changing people’s beliefs, as cold logical analysis does not touch upon the deeper feelings of reality. Even if one’s argument is shown to be logically flawed, we often stick to our

⁵⁷ James goes into more detail concerning the feeling basis of philosophical beliefs in *Pragmatism* (published after *Varieties*), where he distinguishes the tough-hearted from the tender-hearted philosopher.

original conclusion. As James says, “something in you absolutely *knows* that that result must be truer than any logic-chopping rationalistic talk, however clever, that may contradict it” ([1902], 73).⁵⁸ In order for an individual’s religious and philosophical beliefs to change, the feelings of reality must first change. Rather than by either philosophical reflection or argumentation, our beliefs are more likely to change by one of two ways. The first is by a powerful and sudden affective experience that reorients an individual’s perspective – and thus feelings of reality – to the world. The second is by a gradual process involving conscious effort, supported all the while by one’s feelings of reality. I consider the first way later in this chapter by a discussion of transformational emotions; and the second way in the next chapter by elucidating James’ famous will to believe thesis.

First, there remains an important question to consider: What exactly are these feelings of reality for James? Are they emotions or do they form a distinct kind of affective category? There are good reasons to think that James does not regard these feelings as emotions. Unlike emotions, which lie in the foreground of consciousness, feelings of reality are “more deep and more general”. They lie in the background regions of consciousness. In so doing, they provide a foundational orientation through which all of our specific engagements within the world are experienced. In addition, feelings of reality are not short-term feeling states as emotions are for James in *The Principles*, but can persist for protracted periods of time.

On the other hand, there are also good reasons to think that they are emotions. First, a central pillar of his earlier James-Lange theory is its inclusion of objectless emotions, which are not indirectly caused by anything within the world, but are nevertheless directed toward the world. Similarly, feelings of reality are not indirectly caused by

⁵⁸ In *Varieties*, James is content to present this as a psychological thesis, and does not question whether it is a good or bad thing. In *Pragmatism*, however, he goes into more detail concerning the relationship between feeling and philosophical beliefs. He argues that such feelings, which motivate philosophical positions, should not be hidden in philosophical discourse, but brought to light. His discussion has important implications for doing philosophy, but is beyond the scope of my dissertation.

objects within the world, whether sensible or abstract. Second, feelings of reality may only be dimly felt, but James' theory, as we have seen in Chapter 3, is inclusive of feelings of lower intensity. Finally, feelings of reality like emotions are bi-directional feelings. They extend beyond the body and are directed toward the world. In this way, feelings of reality, like objectless emotions, would seem to fall under the larger category of emotion.

At no point within *Varieties* is James explicit about whether or not feelings of reality are emotions. However, two passages do seem to point in the direction that they are indeed emotions. The first is his assessment in re-reading the first part of *Varieties*, which I have already alluded to, in which he says, "I am almost appalled at the amount of emotionality which I find in it" ([1902], 435). If James did not consider feelings of reality emotions, he would likely have not used the term *emotionality* here. After all, if feelings of reality were not emotions, the amount of emotionality in *Varieties* would be significantly reduced. Moreover, at one point he describes what appears to be feelings of reality as a "lower emotion" ([1902], 199). The "lower" seems to refer to the fact that feelings of reality are in the background rather than the foreground of consciousness. These two passages tip the balance in favour of reading feelings of reality as emotions. If this is the case, it comes with a rather surprising implication, namely that we are continually in a state of emotion. This may seem like an absurd consequence of the view, but we need to remember that James conceives the category of emotion broadly.⁵⁹ If an emotion is a bidirectional feeling, then feelings of reality are emotions. As I proceed, however, I will continue to use the term feelings of reality in order to distinguish these feelings from the more standard occurrent emotions.

What James calls feelings of reality has not received much attention within philosophy, but a few theorists have discussed something similar. Heidegger's treatment of mood in *Being and Time* draws attention to the more primary orientation to the world

⁵⁹ This is not a unique feature of James' view. For Alexander Bain, the category of emotion is even broader, including pleasures and pains. "Emotion is the name here used to comprehend all that is understood by feelings, states of feeling, pleasures, pains, passions, sentiments, affections" (Bain [1859], 3).

that we “always-already” find ourselves in. According to Heidegger, “The mood has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself toward something” (Heidegger [1962], 176). Through the use of the term *mood*, Heidegger highlights the pre-reflective world that we most often take for granted, one that we are always attuned to in a particular way. Meanwhile for James, feelings of reality are conceived of as background feelings within a state of consciousness. Nevertheless, both seem to be getting at the same affective phenomena; namely those feelings that bridge the self-world relation.

More recently, Damasio has posited a class of feeling called ‘background feelings’, which he distinguishes from emotions and moods.

I am postulating another variety of feeling, which I suspect preceded the others in evolution. I call it *background feelings* because it originates in “background” body states rather than in emotional states. It is not the Verdi of grand emotion, nor the Stravinsky of intellectualized emotion but rather a minimalist in tone and beat, the feeling of life itself, the sense of being (Damasio [1994], 150).

Like James’ account, Damasio gives emphasis both to the faintness and long-lasting nature of these feelings. However, background feelings for Damasio are exclusively perceptions of bodily states, and are therefore not directed outward as they are for James. Damasio claims that these feelings provide the basis for our feeling that we are enduring selves (Damasio [1994], 151).

Finally, Matthew Ratcliffe has distinguished an affective category that he calls ‘existential feelings’, which is very similar to James’ feelings of reality (Ratcliffe [2008], [2009]). For Ratcliffe, existential feelings “constitute a sense of relatedness between self and world, which shapes all experience” (Ratcliffe [2009], 180). He regards James’ work on emotion, particularly the feelings of reality as discussed in *Varieties*, as an important influence in this respect. Ratcliffe writes, “By ‘feelings of reality’, I think James means something very similar to what I have described using the term ‘existential feeling’” (Ratcliffe [2008], 244). Ultimately, both philosophers are concerned with highlighting the primordial feelings that underlie an individual’s particular activities and beliefs.

Ratcliffe, like Heidegger, approaches this relationship by emphasizing the pre-reflective world that we always-already find ourselves in. James, on the other hand, highlights the background role these feelings have within a state of consciousness. These are two different ways of approaching the same self-world relation. Ratcliffe gets there via the world, whereas James comes by way of the self.

By existential feelings, Ratcliffe has in mind the following kinds of feelings:

People talk of feeling conspicuous, alive, distant, dislodged, overwhelmed, cut off, lost, disconnected, out of sorts, out of touch with things, out of it, not quite with it, separate, detached, at one with the world, in harmony with things, and part of things. There are feelings of being, unreality, heightened reality, surreality, familiarity, unfamiliarity, strangeness, isolation, emptiness, belonging, being at home in the world, being at one with things, significance, and insignificance, and the list goes on (Ratcliffe [2009], 181).

Ratcliffe admits that this list is incomplete, but it is certainly more extensive than the feelings of reality that James' discusses. This is because Ratcliffe does not limit his account to religious orientations to the world, but considers all feelings that are associated with this self-world relation. There is clearly a considerable overlap, however.⁶⁰ Feelings of aliveness, detachment, disconnectedness, being in harmony, etc., can all be found in James' account.

Although James and Ratcliffe are referring to the same affective category, there are some notable differences between their views. One significant difference concerns the relationship between these self-world feelings and occurrent emotions. Ratcliffe distinguishes existential feelings from emotions on the basis that they concern a sense of belongingness to the world. In this way, he regards existential feelings as

⁶⁰ This is in part due to James' broad definition of religion. He defines religion as "*the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine*" ([1902], 36). In fact, for James everyone has a religion insofar as everyone has a 'total reaction to life'.

phenomenologically prior to emotions. For example, in order to experience anger at an injustice within the world, one must already have a particular sense of belonging. If one feels completely disconnected from the world, one would not be roused into anger in the first place. Ratcliffe nevertheless concedes that some emotions are also existential feelings; that the two affective categories are not absolutely distinct. He provides the example of intense grief, which is not only directed toward a particular thing, but also takes the “form of an all-enveloping alteration of relatedness to things” (Ratcliffe [2009], 182). Most emotions for Ratcliffe, however, are not existential feelings. They do not have this sense of belonging to a world, but rather presuppose it. Since we are always in an existential feeling of some kind or another, he seems committed to the view that during most emotional experiences, an individual feels both the emotion directed toward a particular object *and* the background existential feeling; that they are two separate feelings within consciousness.

Since James regards feelings of reality as a kind of emotion, he would reject Ratcliffe’s distinguishing existential feelings from most emotions on the basis of a sense of belonging to a world. All coarse emotions for James have this feature, but we are less likely to recognize it because they most often last for brief periods of time. When in a state of fear, for example, the fear is not only directed toward an object, but our entire orientation to the world is framed by a dangerous reality. Take the fear of a predatory animal. In such a circumstance, we are simply unable to think of anything happy or serene because our entire sense of reality is imbued with a sense of danger. The same is true of happiness. As James says:

[H]appiness, like every other emotional state, has blindness and insensibility to opposing facts given it as its instinctive weapon for self-protection against disturbance. When happiness is actually in possession, the thought of evil can no more acquire the *feeling of reality* than thought of good can gain reality when melancholy rules ([1902], 86).

All coarse emotions for James reorient one's relation to the world.⁶¹

Of particular relevance to this reorientation to the world that an occurrent emotion temporarily brings is James' previous essay *The Physical Basis of Emotion*. He is clear that it is not a particular object that indirectly causes an emotional reaction, but the entire situation of which the object is a part.

'Objects' are certainly the primitive arousers of instinctive reflex movements. But they take their place, as experience goes on, as elements in total 'situations,' the other suggestions of which may prompt to movements of an entirely different sort. As soon as an object has become thus familiar and suggestive, its emotional consequences, on any theory of emotion, must start rather from the total situation which it suggests than from its own naked presence ([1894], 206).

There is an important difference between seeing a bear caged up in a zoo and seeing a bear in the wild. It is a difference between a reality that is safe versus one that is dangerous. A particular object may indirectly cause our emotional reactions, but that object is itself part of a contextual setting. It is this 'total situation' that ultimately sets off the emotional response. An emotion then is ultimately a response to one's "total situation". It concerns one's entire sense of reality.

This lends further support to the thesis that feelings of reality are emotions for James since all emotions confer a sense of reality. It follows that on James' view, when we are in the midst of an occurrent emotion, we do not experience both the occurrent emotion and the feeling of reality. Instead, the occurrent emotion replaces the background feeling of reality for this brief period of time. In this way, James' view differs from Ratcliffe's, but is similar to Damasio's. According to Damasio:

⁶¹ As for subtle emotions, it seems to be different. Here James' acceptance of mental combination in some circumstances would seem to be involved. The subtle emotion would be one feeling and the baseline feeling of reality another.

A background feeling corresponds instead to the body state prevailing between emotions. When we feel happiness, anger, or another emotion, the background feeling has been superseded by an emotional feeling (Damasio [1994], 150).

It is not that both feelings are felt in consciousness during an occurrent emotional episode, but rather the occurrent emotion supersedes the feeling of reality. I will return to this question of the relationship between feelings of reality and occurrent emotions later in this chapter, after having presented James' view of transformational emotions.

Another difference between James and Ratcliffe concerns the role of the body in these self-world feelings. In *Varieties*, James is not concerned with the physiological component of emotion, and consequently does not inquire into the bodily role of feelings of reality. Speaking of feelings of reality, he says:

For the psychologists the tracing of the organic seat of such a feeling would form a pretty problem – nothing could be more natural than to connect it with the muscular sense, with the feeling that our muscles were innervating themselves for action... But with such vague conjectures we have no concern at present, for our interest lies with the faculty rather than with its organic seat ([1902], 63-4).

While the physiological aspect is not James' concern, it is a safe assumption that he would regard the bodily sounding board to be continually at work with respect to feelings of reality. In *The Gospel of Relaxation*, published only a couple years prior to *Varieties*, he does discuss more background feelings and this is the view that he takes ([1899]).

Ratcliffe, meanwhile, draws explicit attention to the bodily component of existential feelings, and argues that they are bodily feelings. Most often we regard bodily feelings as states that have the body as an object – for example, a pain in one's foot is a bodily feeling insofar as it is about a part of the body. According to Ratcliffe, there is a second kind of bodily feeling, which does not have the body as an object, but rather works through the body and projects a feeling outward onto the world. As he says, it "is a feeling done by the body that has something other than the body as its object" (Ratcliffe [2008], 88). In this way, Ratcliffe distinguishes his view from Damasio, who regards

background feelings as more traditional bodily feelings. Moreover, he distinguishes his account from Michael Stocker and Peter Goldie who regard emotional feelings as consisting of bodily and non-bodily feelings (Ratcliffe [2008], 35). Ratcliffe notes that this duality between bodily and non-bodily feelings is not felt within emotional experience itself; and that Goldie and Stocker are therefore “mistaken in claiming that there are two different kinds of feelings involved” (Ratcliffe [2008], 34). There is a tension here in Ratcliffe’s account. When discussing the phenomenology of emotional experience, he notes that there is a single undivided feeling. However, given the way he distinguishes existential feelings from most emotions, he seems committed to the view that both feelings are experienced within consciousness.

James would certainly agree with Ratcliffe’s assessment regarding the phenomenology of emotional experience – that the feeling is unified. Nevertheless, as I have argued in Chapter 2, emotions for James are bi-directional feelings, which consist of bodily feelings and an outward-directed sense of reality. However, the emotional feeling as it is immediately experienced is single and undivided. The subsequent division into a bodily and non-bodily feeling is an abstraction about experience that can be helpful in understanding the nature of these feelings, but this division is not intrinsic to them. While James would agree with Ratcliffe’s phenomenological account, he would not want to call these feelings bodily feelings. The feelings certainly have a physiological basis, but it is rather odd to speak of a “feeling done by the body” that does not have the body as an object. Ultimately, the difference between Ratcliffe and James appears to be rather minor as they are simply calling the same phenomenon by a different name – *bodily feeling* as opposed to *feeling*.

It goes without saying that for Ratcliffe we are continually in an existential feeling of some kind as we can never step outside of the self-world relation. James, however, is not clear on this matter. At one point he says that “in some degree every one possesses” feelings of reality ([1902], 39). However, he later says that “One may indeed be entirely without them; probably more than one of you here present is without them in any marked degree” ([1902], 72). James is referring specifically to those individuals that he calls rationalists, who insist “that all our beliefs ought ultimately to find for themselves

articulate grounds” and that “vague impressions of something indefinable have no place” ([1902], 72-73). An individual with such an outlook, many of whom James was certainly speaking to in his lectures, would certainly argue that their beliefs about the world are not rooted in any such feelings but are rather “definitely statable abstract principles” ([1902], 72-3). It is not clear how to read James’ inconsistency on this point. It seems most likely that he is placating to certain members of his audience, who would surely reject that they experience anything like feelings of reality. Of course, the denial that certain feelings exist does not prove their non-existence.

Ratcliffe’s treatment of existential feelings in and of themselves is certainly more developed than James’ discussion of feelings of reality. This is no doubt a result of their respective inquiries. James engages with these feelings only insofar as it contributes to his discussion of religious experience. Meanwhile, Ratcliffe’s explicit focus is on feelings of being in general. However, because of their different purposes, James pays considerable attention to aspects that Ratcliffe neglects. First, he considers the underlying condition of what he calls the divided self, which can include cases in which an individual’s feelings of reality are no longer in accord with their activities and pursuits within the world. Second, he focuses on conversion experiences, which brings to the fore the interconnection between feelings of reality and another distinct kind of emotion – transformational emotions.

6.3 The Divided Self and Conversion

Before looking at the nature of transformational emotions, it is important to first consider the psychic conditions that need to be in place in order for the kind of conversions that James is interested in to occur; namely, those conversions in which a previously divided self becomes unified. In this respect, his chapter on “The Divided Self” serves as a bridge between his previous chapter on “The Sick Soul” and his two subsequent chapters on “Conversion”. The process of religious transformation, from non-belief to belief (or vice versa), involves an intermediary stage of conflict in which the self is divided. James is not explicit about what the psychological nature of a divided self consists in. James

discusses a number of examples, and given his analysis, it seems there are in fact two ways in which this division can occur. The first kind of divided self involves a conflict between two different habitual centres of personal energy. The second is a conflict within a single habitual centre of personal energy. I will discuss these in turn, as the distinction is important for distinguishing between different kinds of conversions.

The most notorious kind of divided self involves cases in which there is a battle of two opposing wills within an individual. Augustine, who James discusses at length, nicely represents this kind of division. Augustine's well-known struggle, recounted in his *Confessions*, involved choosing between a life of bodily pleasures versus a life of purity and devotion to God. These two modes of being, as Augustine conceived of them, could not be reconciled. Even though he knew that his devotion to God and a pure, chaste life was what he ultimately wanted, he struggled from a weakness of will to act accordingly. Augustine describes this weakness as:

...a disease of the mind, which does not wholly rise to the heights where it is lifted by the truth, because it is weighed down by habit. So there are two wills in us, because neither by itself is the whole will, and each possesses what the other lacks (Augustine [1961], 172).

Augustine's struggle was one between two conflicting habitual centres of personal energy, each corresponding to one of his wills. Of course, these opposing wills are built upon conflicting feelings of reality. Sometimes Augustine would relate to the world in a healthy-minded way, characteristic of his largely pagan upbringing, and other times in a more austere saintliness way. Only gradually did Augustine's will for a pure, austere life devoted to God drive out the more ingrained habitual mode of being. It was largely through conscious effort that Augustine was able to gradually replace this dominant habitual centre with the one of his explicit choosing. He knew the kind of person that he wanted to be, but it took time for the more dominant habitual centre to be driven out by his will to believe.

The second kind of divided self that James discusses does not involve the traditional battle of wills that we see in Augustine, but a division within a single habitual centre of

personal energy. We saw previously that a habitual centre of personal energy consists of a system of ideas that motivates a habitual pattern of aims and activities within the world. At the foundation of this system are feelings of reality, which function much like the foundation of a building. A self can become divided when the feelings of reality no longer align with the habitual aims and activities of the individual. In such circumstances, the aims and activities that previously animated an individual begin to lose their motivational force, and “for a time keep upright by dead habit” ([1902], 184).

This is the situation that Tolstoy found himself in, who James discusses at considerable length. At the height of Tolstoy’s fame, living a life that outwardly seemed ideal, he came to view the world and his existence within it as pointless. His previous aims and activities as a writer, husband and father, no longer motivated him. As Tolstoy says:

I felt that what I had been standing on had collapsed and that I had nothing left under my feet. What I had lived on no longer existed, and there was nothing left (Tolstoy [1998]: 11).

According to James’ framework, Tolstoy’s feelings of reality that had supported and underpinned his previous aims and activities had been uprooted. He no longer saw himself as part of an intellectual and artistic community that was doing a great service for humanity. Rather, he came to regard these activities as immoral. What was previously a self-world relation characterized by feelings of connection and vigor was now one of disconnection and foreboding. As James says of Tolstoy: “Life had been enchanting, it was now flat sober, more than sober, dead. Things were meaningless whose meaning had always been self-evident” ([1902], 142). In short, Tolstoy’s self-world relation had fundamentally transformed. In order to overcome the divided state that he now found himself in, another transformation would be necessary. Yet, for a period of time, Tolstoy went through the motions of his previous aims and activities. James characterizes Tolstoy’s situation nicely when he says: “A mental system may be undermined or weakened by this interstitial alteration just as a building is, and yet for a time keep upright by dead habit” ([1902], 184). This “interstitial alteration” refers to the shift in

feelings of reality. With this shift in the foundation of the mental system, the conditions are ripe for the unsupported edifice of ideas and activities to crumble by way of a transformative experience.

There is an important difference to note between these two kinds of divided selves. The self divided by two opposing wills most often has the intellectual knowledge about what he or she ought to do. The trouble is acting in accordance with this knowledge, which Augustine's struggle nicely illustrates. Tolstoy, meanwhile, lacked knowledge of what he ought to do. He felt lost, and went on a search to try and find answers to his predicament. It is the kind of divided self that we see in Tolstoy that most interests James in *Varieties*. While Tolstoy's own conversion process was more gradual, the nature of his kind of divided self can often give rise to instantaneous conversions, in which a new orientation to the world is put in place by a transformative affective experience.

Much of *Varieties* is dedicated to understanding the process of conversion – how it is that an individual's religious beliefs can radically transform, and in the process overcome a divided nature. This conversion process involves a complete reorientation to the world. This can occur in either a gradual or in a sudden way, which James distinguishes as the 'volitional' and 'self-surrender' type of conversion ([1902], 192). Transformations that are gradual tend to be more volitional, while transformations that are sudden tend to be involuntary. James admits that this is a very rough distinction, as most conversions involve both voluntary and involuntary aspects. Nevertheless, he is clearly more interested in sudden conversions. As he says, conversions brought about by volition are "as a rule less interesting than those of the self-surrender type" ([1902], 193). Whereas willful conversions come from within the individual, those who have experienced involuntary transformations describe them as coming from an outside power. James was particularly interested in self-surrender transformations in part because he saw them as supporting a view of the brain that transmits consciousness rather than produces it.⁶² In

⁶² This is discussed in James' *Human Immortality* (1898), in which he argues that physiological psychology is consistent with the possibility of human immortality. Alva Noë has recently argued against the productive theory of the brain, although he does not draw any metaphysical conclusions from this (Noë [2009]).

fact, it is these sudden conversion experiences, in conjunction with mystical experiences, that provides the basis for James' 'over-belief' in *Varieties*.⁶³

Instantaneous conversions of the self-surrender kind were certainly not a priority for James in *The Principles*. Nevertheless, at the end of his chapter on "The Perception of Reality" he does mention them.

Nature sometimes, and indeed not very infrequently, produces instantaneous conversions for us. She suddenly puts us in an active connection with objects of which she had till then left us cold. "I realize for the first time," we then say, "what that means!" This happens often with moral propositions. We have often heard them; but now they shoot into our lives; they move us; we feel their living force. Such instantaneous beliefs are truly enough not to be achieved by will ([1890], 2: 322).

While James recognizes in *The Principles* that such involuntary conversions do occur, his account of them is vague to say the least, content to say that it is something "nature" does. He certainly had the theoretical tools at the time of *The Principles* to offer a more detailed framework of these phenomena, but as I noted in the previous chapter, he is not as willing at this time to invoke the subconscious realm in his explanations. This changes in *Varieties*, which enables him to provide a much richer analysis. However, James still admits that such sudden conversions are difficult to grasp theoretically.

Now if you ask of psychology just how the excitement shifts in a man's mental system, and why aims that were peripheral become at a certain moment central, psychology has to reply that although she can give a general description of what happens, she is unable in a given case to account accurately for all the single forces at work. Neither an outside observer nor the Subject who undergoes the

⁶³ James says, "The whole drift of my education goes to persuade me that the world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds of consciousness that exist, and that those other worlds must contain experiences which have a meaning for our life also; and that although in the main their experiences and those of this world keep discrete, yet the two become continuous at certain points, and higher energies filter in" ([1902], 463).

process can explain fully how particular experiences are able to change one's centre of energy so decisively ([1902], 183-4).

There is a complexity to transformational experiences that the “hackneyed symbolism of a mechanical equilibrium” cannot fully account for ([1902], 183-184). Nevertheless, it is a model of mechanical equilibrium that James utilizes, one that makes considerable use of the subconscious realm. In the next section, I consider James' theoretical account of conversion experiences, to which transformational emotions and feelings of reality figure prominently.

6.4 Transformational Emotions

For the most part, James' pervasive discussion of emotion within *Varieties* can be distilled down to two kinds of emotions. I have already looked at feelings of reality, which provide the background orientation through which an individual engages with the world. In this section, I consider transformational emotions. This is not James' term, but it will help to articulate his account of conversion experiences. Keith Oatley and Maja Djikic have called attention to the important role that emotions play in transformative experiences for James (Oatley & Djikic [2002]). However, their analysis fails to capture the depth of James' theoretical framework. They are content to say that, “Conversion, then, is an invariably emotional process, a shift from one emotional centre to another” (Oatley & Djikic [2002]). They do not provide any detail as to what this emotional process consists of. For example, there is not any discussion of feelings of reality, nor is there any sustained discussion as to the features of transformational emotions themselves.

Unlike most emotions, transformational emotions are not structured by habitual reactions to the world, be it to a particular object or circumstance. As we saw in Chapter 4, most of an adult's emotional reactions for James are structured by habits. These reactions are not blind instinctual responses but have been learned over time, and as such there is an awareness of the ends to which the emotion leads. Transformational emotions bear a resemblance to blind emotions insofar as the ends of the emotion are not known. The primary feelings within which these emotions are embedded are thereby extremely

passive states. However, they can be distinguished from blind emotions in that they serve to break and overturn previous habitual patterns of being, and lay the groundwork for a new self-world orientation, upon which new habits – including emotional habits – can be built.

James is interested in the process by which an individual in a religiously divided state becomes psychically unified, particularly those involving a discord between an individual's feelings of reality and his or her habitual aims and activities within the world. Transformational emotions are central to this unification process, but they are not limited to these occasions. They can equally bring an individual from a state of unification into a divided state. Ultimately, transformational emotions reorient an individual's perspective, and this can fracture a previously unified way of being as much as it can unify a previously fractured way of being. In addition, transformational emotions are not limited to the religious domain. James discusses how similar processes are at work when individuals fall in and out of love ([1902], 141).⁶⁴ He also provides an example of a miser who instantaneously changed his miserly ways ([1902], 166-7). What is perhaps most important to the transformational emotions that James discusses in *Varieties* is their relation to the subconscious regions of the personality.⁶⁵

The role of the subconscious in transformative experiences is most clearly evident in what James calls the self-surrender kind of conversion, which tends to be sudden and instantaneous. In cases of self-surrender, the divided individual has grown so weary of life that he or she essentially gives up. The habitual aims and activities, which are no

⁶⁴ Philippe Pinel provides a detailed example in this respect: "A young man was unable to obtain the hand of someone with whom he had fallen hopelessly in love. His offers were disdainfully rejected by her parents. He became taciturn, unresponsive to all pleasures and entertained only suspicious and sinister forebodings. He lost his temper over the most trivial things and fell alternately into a state of discouragement and utter perplexity. The company of his friends became more and more of a burden and he ended up in a state of a true melancholic delirium" (Pinel [1809], 15).

⁶⁵ This is not to say that all transformational emotions have deep connections to the subconscious. Dramatic and shocking external events experienced by an individual can also induce a transformational emotion.

longer supported by the feelings of reality, are finally renounced. According to James, such individuals get:

...so exhausted with the struggle that we have to stop, - so we drop down, give up, and don't care any longer. Our emotional brain-centres strike work, and we lapse into temporary apathy. Now there is documentary proof that this state of temporary exhaustion not infrequently forms part of the conversion crisis ([1902], 197).

It is under these conditions of exhaustion, with the will surrendered, that the boundary between the subconscious and consciousness relaxes. Given the right kind of external stimulus, this levee can break, and a wave of emotional feeling then floods into consciousness. In this respect, James agrees with Starbuck, who also attributes an important role to the subconscious in conversion experiences.⁶⁶

He (Starbuck) seems right in conceiving all such sudden changes as results of special cerebral functions unconsciously developing until they are ready to play a controlling part, when they make irruption into the conscious life. When we speak of sudden 'conversion' I shall make as much use as I can of this hypothesis of subconscious incubation ([1902], 168).

Most conversions that James discusses involve elements that are both involuntary and voluntary, and the distinction between sudden and gradual conversions is most often blurred in practice. As he says, most conversions are "due to explicitly conscious processes of thought and will, but as due largely also to the subconscious incubation and maturing of motives deposited by the experiences of life" ([1902], 213). These voluntary and involuntary aspects are interwoven, as willful effort once ceased can subsequently be taken up further in the subconscious domain ([1902], 191).

⁶⁶ Edwin Starbuck was a student of James' at Harvard. His work in the psychology of religion was a valuable resource to James in *Varieties*.

We see this close connection between willful effort and the subconscious in Tolstoy. As a result of his crisis, in which he came to regard the world as intrinsically evil and wicked, the only rational conclusion he saw fit was to commit suicide. Yet, he was motivated by a non-rational force that directed him away from this course of action.

Reason worked, but something else was also working which I can only call a consciousness of life. A force was working which compelled me to turn my attention to this and not to that; and it was this force which extricated me from my desperate situation and turned my mind in quite another direction (Tolstoy [1998], 31).

Tolstoy's gradual conversion process clearly involved both involuntary and voluntary components, inextricably woven together. Even in cases of gradual conversion then, in which conscious effort is more pronounced, there are still often instances of sudden insights within the protracted process.⁶⁷

The actual conversion experience occurs when the subconscious regions of the personality break into consciousness in the form of a transformational emotion. The examples that James discusses are most often set off by seemingly uneventful external events. For example, in a footnote James cites the transformational experience of John Stuart Mill, which although more moral than religious in nature, nicely reveals this transformative kind of emotion. At the age of twenty, Mill suffered from a deep depression, and like Tolstoy he came to seriously question the meaning of his existence. He continued in this divided state for a period of time, until one day he read a particular passage from a book. Mill here recounts his transformative experience:

I frequently asked myself, if I could, or if I was bound to go on living, when life must be passed in this manner. I generally answered to myself that I did not think

⁶⁷ We see such instances within Augustine's more gradual, willful conversion. For example when he describes the impact of reading Cicero's *Hortensius* had on him: "It altered my outlook on life. It changed my prayers to you, O Lord, and provided me with new hopes and aspirations. All my empty dreams suddenly lost their charm and my heart began to throb with a bewildering passion for the wisdom of eternal truth" (Augustine [1961], 58-59).

I could possibly bear it beyond a year. When, however, not more than half that duration of time had elapsed, a small ray of light broke in upon my gloom. I was reading, accidentally, Marmontel's *Mémoires*, and came to the passage which relates his father's death, the distressed position of the family, and the sudden inspiration by which he, then a mere boy, felt and made them feel that he would be everything to them—would supply the place of all that they had lost. A vivid conception of the scene and its feelings came over me, and I was moved to tears. From this moment my burden grew lighter. The oppression of the thought that all feeling was dead within me was gone (Mill [2004], 81).

Although Mill's transformational process was gradual in nature, it had instances of sudden insight along the way, as can be seen by the transformational emotion described in the passage above. This experience reoriented Mill's perspective on the world, and directly resulted in a number of changes to his philosophical beliefs. For example, from this experience, he came to reject the doctrine of psychological egoism in favour of a view in which altruism could motivate action (Mill [2004], 83). It is also from this experience that his view on free will shifted from a hard determinist position to that of soft determinism (Mill [2004], 98). In addition, Mill came to see that happiness as an end is best pursued indirectly rather than directly, which would later inform his utilitarian theory (Mill [2004], 82).

James, of course, is more interested in explicitly religious conversions. One of the examples he cites is that of David Brainerd, who suddenly went from a "mournful melancholy state" to one of "unspeakable glory" ([1902], 198).

...as I was walking in a thick grove, unspeakable glory seemed to open to the apprehension of my soul. I do not mean any external brightness, nor any imagination of a body of light, but it was a new inward apprehension or view that I had of God... I continued in this state of inward joy, peace, and astonishment, till near dark without any sensible abatement; and then began to think and examine what I had seen; and felt sweetly composed in my mind all the evening

following. I felt myself in a new world, and everything about me appeared with a different aspect from what it was wont to do ([1902], 198-199).

Similarly to Mill's experience, Brainerd's transformational emotional experience is not caused by a dramatic external event. Rather it is a process that is working through him, which for James involves "subconscious incubation". Moreover, there is a clear articulation by Brainerd of an entirely new perspective of the world, which is brought about by the transformational emotion.⁶⁸

Having presented a number of cases of sudden conversion experiences, such as the Brainerd example above, James then provides a theoretical framework in an attempt to explain these phenomena.

In a large proportion, perhaps the majority, of reports, the writers speak as if the exhaustion of the lower and the entrance of the higher emotion were simultaneous, yet often again they speak as if the higher actively drove the lower out. This is undoubtedly true in a great many instances... But often there seems little doubt that both conditions – subconscious ripening of the one affection and exhaustion of the other must simultaneously have conspired, in order to produce the result ([1902], 199).

The "higher emotion", with its "subconscious ripening" is what I am referring to as the transformational emotion. While it is directed toward a particular thing or event in the world (such as Marmontel's *Mémoires* for Mill) its intensity derives from the "subconscious ripening". By "the lower emotion" James seems to be referring to the feelings of reality, which were previously felt before "the higher emotion" came into consciousness. However, it is not that the two feelings – the previous feelings of reality and the transformational emotion – are felt at the same time during the conversion

⁶⁸ Following James, a number of more recent kinds of transformational experiences have been collected, documented and analyzed by psychologists William Miller and Janet C'de Baca in *Quantum Change* (Miller & C'de Baca [2001]).

experience. Rather, it is a single process in which the ‘transformational emotion’ drives out the old feelings of reality. As James says in a footnote to the above passage:

Describing the whole phenomenon as a change of equilibrium, we might say that the movement of new psychic energies towards the personal centre and the recession of old ones towards the margin were only two ways of describing an indivisible event ([1902], 199fn).

The “higher emotion” is transformational precisely because the old feelings of reality are permanently removed from consciousness. Once the intensity of the ‘transformational emotion’ has subsided, the individual’s perspective on the world has been restructured in some respect, which is reflected by new feelings of reality. This is what accounts for the “change of equilibrium”.

The transformational emotion is thereby a kind of bridge between two different orientations to the world. As James says of these kinds of “emotions characteristic of conversion”:

Emotional occasions, especially violent ones, are extremely potent in precipitating mental rearrangements. The sudden and explosive ways in which love, jealousy, guilt, fear, remorse, or anger can seize upon one are known to everybody. Hope, happiness, security, resolve, emotions characteristic of conversion, can be equally explosive. And emotions that come in this explosive way seldom leave things as they found them ([1902], 184-5).

Out of this shake up of the mental system, caused by the transformational emotion, an individual’s baseline feelings of reality change. As James says, there is “a transfiguration of the face of nature in his eyes. A new heaven seems to shine upon a new earth” ([1902], 142). The process of conversion thereby involves three successive emotions: the old feeling of reality, the transformational emotion, and the new feeling of reality.

James’ emphasis on transformational emotions has deep connections to the subconscious, but they can also be brought about by dramatic external events. Ratcliffe’s example of intense grief, often caused by the death of a loved one, provides a good

example. Ratcliffe conceives of the intense grief as an instance in which the categories of emotion and existential feeling overlap. However, it seems that we can better characterize this intense grief as a transformational emotion that subsequently puts in place new feelings of reality. We have here two feelings, not one. Ratcliffe's view that existential feelings are phenomenologically prior to emotions is thereby called into question by transformational emotions. After all, an emotional experience can entirely change our sense of belonging to the world.

There has been little attention paid to transformational emotions within the history of philosophy.⁶⁹ Sartre describes emotions as 'transformations of the world' (*une transformation du monde*), but these transformations are short-term states (Sartre [1939]). Once the emotional state ceases, the individual's experience of the world is not transformed in any way. With respect to more contemporary philosophers, transformational emotions have been neglected.⁷⁰ This seems to be because transformational emotions challenge the presuppositions of the standard philosophical theories. Contemporary theorists tend to agree that emotions are about objects in the world. Where they disagree is with respect to the nature of the intentional content that emotions have. According to cognitive theorists, emotions are essentially beliefs or judgments. Transformational emotions, however, are not judgments. These emotions, at least those that James describes, emanate directly from the subconscious region of the individual. Once made conscious, these feelings do not express knowledge about reality but rather acquaintance with reality. Moreover, the feeling element of an emotion on a cognitive theory is subordinate to the judgment. In this way, our emotional reactions, which emanate from our emotional dispositions, can only ever express what we already know to be the case. For example, if I get angry when somebody steals my car, this

⁶⁹ There has been more emphasis on these kinds of emotions within the history of psychiatry. For example, the French psychiatrist Jean-Étienne Esquirol, in his treatment of melancholy, notes: "A sudden, strong, and unexpected emotion, a surprise, fear and terror, have sometimes been successful" (Esquirol [1845], 229). In this way, transformational emotions have been induced by clinicians in order to reorient the baseline feelings of reality of their patients.

⁷⁰ Jon Elster discusses transformational emotions in a different sense. He focuses on how we often transform or 'transmute' our real motivations into ones that are more acceptable to us. For example, instead of acting out of envy or jealousy, we tell ourselves that we are acting out of justice (Elster [1999]).

anger, according to a cognitivist, is essentially my knowledge that I have incurred an injustice. But this knowledge is based on a complex history in which I have come to associate theft with anger. With a transformational emotion on the other hand, there is no prior knowledge to support the purported judgment. The previous feelings of reality have been wiped away. There is only an intense feeling, one that most often does not align with what the individual previously knew about the world.

Transformational emotions also pose a challenge to perceptual theories, which regard emotion as generally analogous to visual perception. These theories take a middle ground between non-cognitive feeling theories, which face problems accounting for the intentionality of emotion, and cognitive theories, which tend to over-intellectualize the emotions. Like visual perceptions, emotions are at once directed toward objects in the world and are thus intentional and yet they are not propositional beliefs about the world. However, there is nothing in the domain of visual perception that is analogous to transformational emotions. We do not experience visual perceptions that bring lasting changes to the way we perceive the world. There are of course different ways of seeing, which ambiguous images such as the rabbit-duck illusion bring to light. However, these illusions involve reverting back and forth between the different images. The perceptions do not bring about a new and permanent way of seeing.

In short, both perceptual and cognitive theories – as well as the various theorists that regard emotions as having intentional content somewhere in between perceptions and beliefs – agree that emotions have a mind-to-world direction of fit. In this way, emotions are intentional states that can be assessed for their rationality. However, these theoretical accounts are insufficient to explain how transformational emotions can bring instant and lasting change to the way the world is perceived. Indeed, these emotions are not only responses to objects in the world, but they also transform the world. In so doing, transformational emotions provide a fertile ground for new beliefs about the world to grow. Rather than the traditional Aristotelian model of moral psychology in which our emotions are gradually brought in line with our beliefs, in these cases it is our emotions that are the epistemic driver, and it is our beliefs that follow.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented two unique kinds of emotions that are central to James' discussion within *Varieties* – feelings of reality and transformational emotions. While James is concerned with these emotions in the religious domain, they clearly relate to all aspects of experience. These emotions have important implications to James' wider philosophy, which I have been unable to consider in this chapter. For example, the interconnection between feelings of reality and transformational emotions is central to our notions of the self and personal identity. James' work on feelings of reality, most developed in *Varieties*, also seem important to his pragmatic theory of truth. These questions, however, are beyond the scope of my project.

In the next chapter, I consider James' famous essay *The Will to Believe*, paying particular attention to his notion of our passional nature.

7 The Passional Nature and The Will to Believe

In *Varieties*, James is particularly interested with religious conversions that are involuntary and instantaneous. When conversions occur in this way, there may be insufficient objective evidence to support the religious belief, but the transformative experience provides its own justification. The individual's feelings of reality have been reoriented, and he or she simply believes (or does not believe) as a matter of course.⁷¹ In *The Will to Believe*, published a few years prior to *Varieties*, James is also concerned with religious conversions, but those of a more voluntary kind.⁷² In these more willful cases of conversion problems seem to immediately arise. First, there is the problem of possibility. We may want certain propositions to be true, but this does not mean that we can will them to be true. It seems that a power is being attributed to the will that it does not have. Second, there is the problem of permissibility. Supposing that it is possible in some sense to will to believe, it seems epistemically unlawful given that there is insufficient evidence to support the belief.

Supporters of James often reject the problem of possibility by noting that he does not invoke a voluntaristic conception of the will. Rather, it is the question of permissibility that he is concerned with. In other words, James is not so much concerned with the will to believe as he is with the right to believe (Franks [2004]; Gale [2009], Jackman [1999], Slater [2009]). According to these advocates, James is ultimately arguing that religious belief is epistemically permissible given that it is a genuine option – that is, a hypothesis that is live, forced and momentous – where sufficient evidence is lacking.⁷³ Even James would later remark, given the voluntaristic misinterpretations, that he should have called

⁷¹ The individual may subsequently reconsider how much epistemic weight to attribute to this single transformative experience. In such a case, the self has returned to a divided state, and the religious question remains an open one.

⁷² At the same time, James is attempting to provide a justification of faith for those who already believe.

⁷³ I will be discussing these three features of a genuine option throughout this chapter. Briefly, a question is live if there is a preexistent feeling that inclines toward the belief. A question is forced if it is an exclusive disjunction, meaning there is no possibility for an individual to remain indifferent to the hypothesis. Finally, a question is momentous if it makes a significant difference in the life of an individual in believing versus not believing. In other words, the question is not trivial.

his essay *The Right to Believe* ([1904], 600).⁷⁴ This would certainly have obviated the problem of possibility and focused more attention on his epistemic argument. Of course, criticism has also been levied against James on this front. Critics argue that he is giving individuals a license for wishful thinking (Miller [1898]; Hick [1957]). Just because there is insufficient evidence with respect to the existence of God, our believing that God exists does not make it the case. Simply put, we do not have a right to make believe.

This emphasis on what we have a right to believe, while an important argument within the essay, continues to overlook James' primary thesis. He is not only arguing that it is permissible in certain circumstances to believe in God, but that individuals who find themselves in these circumstances *ought* to summon up their courage and believe. This ought is not to be understood as a moral ought. It is not that an individual is morally blameworthy if they do not believe under permissible circumstances. Nor is it a prudential ought, whereby it is better for us if we believe, although this crude pragmatist reading is common. Rather, the ought is what I am calling an existential ought, which maps onto what some existential writers call 'authenticity'.⁷⁵ For James, having the will to believe is about having the courage to act in the world according to one's own convictions, which means having the courage to believe on the basis of one's feelings. This believing and acting is not about being good or moral; it is about having the courage to be oneself. Importantly, this does not involve transcending or abandoning reason. Unlike Kierkegaard's leap of faith, James' will to believe is presented to be eminently rational.

James' primary thesis then is not an epistemic argument, but an existential argument, which I argue is captured by the will to believe. In making this case, I will inquire into

⁷⁴ James says: "I once wrote an essay on our right to believe, which I unluckily called *The Will to Believe*. All the critics, neglecting the essay, pounced upon the title. Psychologically it was impossible, morally it was iniquitous. The 'will to deceive,' the 'will to make-believe,' were wittily proposed as substitutes for it" ([1904], 600).

⁷⁵ For Heidegger, authenticity is closely connected to Dasein coming out of the fog of the they-self; for Kierkegaard, it is connected to recognizing one's particularity and individuality; for Sartre, authenticity is closely connected to not giving in to external, public pressures.

what James means by the passional nature, a concept that has received little serious investigation (Jackman [1999], 7). By drawing upon James' more extensive work in *The Principles and Varieties*, I hope to show that the passional nature with respect to belief extends further than commentators – critics and advocates alike – have recognized.⁷⁶ It consists of three components: 1) a preexistent feeling for the belief (i.e. feelings of reality); 2) volitional effort that seizes upon this feeling and works toward the belief; and 3) the emotional constitution of belief, in which the belief is consented to.⁷⁷ These three components comprise James' psychological thesis. Only by understanding the full scope of the passional nature can we appreciate the various philosophical arguments that are interwoven throughout *The Will to Believe*.

7.1 The Passional Nature

It is no secret that the passional nature plays a pivotal role in the development of James' argument. It is referred to throughout the essay, including in critical passages.

Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds. For to say, under such circumstances, "Do not decide, but leave the question open," is itself a passional decision, - just like deciding yes or no, - and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth ([1897], 11).

How James' essay is interpreted depends largely on how the passional nature is interpreted. Those who read him as a voluntarist conceive of the passional nature

⁷⁶ It might be objected that this approach draws upon work at different stages in James' career, which does not necessarily remain consistent. However, I use these other works only to further develop what James already says in *The Will to Believe*. The essay is short and complex, and in order to present it in its proper light a larger context is required.

⁷⁷ As we have seen, James uses the term belief in various ways. It can refer to our conviction with respect to a sense of reality (i.e., our acquaintance with the world) or our conviction with respect to a proposition (i.e., our 'knowledge about' the world). It is important to note that belief in *The Will to Believe* refers to our knowledge about the world.

exclusively in terms of volition and desire (Miller [1898]; Barrett [1978]). On this reading, adopted by William Barrett, James is encouraging his reader “to produce out of oneself something that is not there to begin with” (Barrett [1978], 309). In other words, James is attributing to the will a power that does not exist within it; namely the power to convince without any prior conviction for the belief. This voluntaristic reading, if correct, would seem to undermine James’ entire argument. Since we are unable to will to believe in this voluntaristic sense, the question of whether or not it is epistemically permissible to will to believe is a moot point.

This voluntarist reading might at first glance appear justifiable given that James is using the terms *passional nature* and *willing nature* synonymously throughout the essay.⁷⁸ But James is very clear what he means by this latter term:

When I say ‘willing nature,’ I do not mean only such deliberate volitions as may have set up habits of belief that we cannot now escape from, - I mean all such factors of belief as fear and hope, prejudice and passion, imitation and partisanship, the circumpressure of our caste and set. As a matter of fact, we find ourselves believing, we hardly know how or why ([1897], 9).

Our willing nature/passional nature is not reducible to our deliberate, voluntary decisions, but also includes all of those involuntary decisions based on our habits, emotions and feelings in which we simply “find ourselves believing”.

James then, as has been well documented, does not have a voluntaristic conception of the will (Brown [1997]; Franks [2004]; Jackman [1999]; Yeager [1989]). He is not

⁷⁸ While James does use these terms synonymously in the essay insofar as he is concerned with action, our *passional nature* is certainly more extensive than our *willing nature*. We need only consider those instances in which we react emotionally but have no inclination to act, such as when watching an artistic performance. In fact, in *The Principles of Psychology*, James distinguishes emotion from instinct on the basis that we need not act out of emotion. In this way, an emotion can be experienced but there is no action. Thus our *passional nature* is activated but not our *willing nature*.

arguing that we can simply believe whatever we want to believe by pure volition. This is made evident throughout *The Will to Believe*.

Can we, by any effort of our will, or by any strength of wish that it were true, believe ourselves well and about when we are roaring with rheumatism in bed, or feel certain that the sum of the two one-dollar bills in our pocket must be a hundred dollars? We can *say* any of these things, but we are absolutely impotent to believe them ([1897], 5).

The reason we cannot believe these propositions is that we are already convinced otherwise by the facts. When I see a red apple, I cannot will it to be blue. The facts simply constrain my belief, and there is nothing that my will can do to change this. As James says, “in our dealings with objective nature we obviously are recorders, not makers, of the truth” ([1897], 20). We cannot help but believe in these instances. With respect to other questions, however, we are not merely recorders of the truth, but active participants.

When we look at certain facts, it seems as if our passional and volitional nature lay at the root of all our convictions. When we look at others, it seems as if they could do nothing when the intellect had once said its say ([1897], 4).

When empirical evidence for a particular question is lacking, the passional nature lies at the very foundation of belief. If this passional nature is not reducible to volition and desire, the question remains what exactly does it consist of?

According to Yeager, the passional nature for James is the will, but it is not to be understood in a voluntaristic sense. She says that the will for James is “a constellation of prerational passions and predispositions that constitute the indelible affective core of the individual personality” (Yeager [1989], 471). Yeager accepts that this view is not consistent with James’ chapter on “The Will” in *The Principles*, where, for example, he says, “Effort of attention is thus the essential phenomenon of will” ([1890], 2: 562). However, she looks to other chapters within the treatise for support. While Yeager purports to provide an analysis of the *will* she is in fact more concerned with what James

calls the *willing nature*. These terms are not co-extensive for James. Henry Jackman, meanwhile, has suggested that the *passional nature*, in addition to volition and desire, also includes feelings and emotions (Jackman [1999], 7). This is certainly true, and while this helps to refute the voluntarist reading, it does little to shed light on other aspects of James' paper. Indeed, Jackman does not consider any of these components of the *passional nature* in detail.

For the remainder of this section, I will examine what the 'passional nature' with respect to belief consists in for James. There are three components to the 'passional nature'. The first is a feeling foundation for the belief. This comes to light when we consider James' notion of liveness, which is the first of three conditions of a genuine option. As Hunter Brown has illustrated, a hypothesis only becomes live for an individual when there is a preexistent feeling to believe it (Brown [1997], 98). Simply wanting something to be the case is not enough for a hypothesis to become live. As James says:

If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi, the notion makes no electric connection with your nature, - it refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all. As an hypothesis it is completely dead ([1897], 2).

Where there is no electric connection to one's nature, there is no feeling foundation for the belief. For a hypothesis to be live, a preexisting feeling for the belief is required. Only then can our volitional effort be roused into action.

James makes reference to this foundational feeling that is necessary but not sufficient for belief when considering Pascal's wager. "It is evident that unless there be some pre-existing tendency to believe in masses and holy water, the option offered to the will by Pascal is not a living option" ([1897], 6). According to James, Pascal's argument will necessarily fail for the individual who has no "pre-existing tendency to believe"; that is, no foundational feeling upon which the will can work on. If, however, a preexisting feeling is in place, the result can be quite different. As James says: "Pascal's argument, instead of being powerless, then seems a regular clincher, and is the last stroke needed to make our faith in masses and holy water complete" ([1897], 11). Pascal's argument can

be effective, according to James, depending on the feeling constitution of the particular individual. If there is a feeling foundation already present that the argument resonates with, the belief can then be “clinched”. The difference between the individual who accepts Pascal’s argument versus the individual who rejects it, often comes down to the foundational feelings of reality. These feelings “have prepared the premises” for the belief ([1902], 73).

This “pre-existing tendency to believe” that James discusses in *The Will to Believe* is ultimately what he describes as feelings of reality in *Varieties*. These feelings provide an individual with a foundational orientation to the world. If the question of God’s existence is a live hypothesis for an individual, then there must already exist feelings of reality that can underpin this belief. This does not mean that the individual fully believes, as there can also exist feelings of reality that incline the individual toward the opposite belief. It is these conflicting feelings that ultimately produce a state of doubt ([1890], 2: 393). However, the possibility exists in these situations of conflict for the individual to attend to particular feelings of reality, and through conscious effort and volition, work toward fully believing.

Here we come to the second aspect of the passional nature – the volitional component. The volitional aspect of the passional nature highlights the effort put in by the individual to nurture and develop the preexisting feelings for the belief. With respect to religious belief, this effort could come in the form of an individual engaging in the rituals and practices of a particular religion. Although he or she does not yet fully believe, such actions can gradually bring about the belief. As James says in *The Principles*:

But *gradually* our will can lead us to the same results by a very simple method: *we need only in cold blood ACT as if the thing in question were real, and keep acting as if it were real, and it infallibly end (sic) by growing into such a connection with our life that it will become real.* It will become so knit with habit and emotion that our interests in it will be those which characterize belief ([1890], 2: 321).

Although actions that come from our conscious effort appear cold and calculating, they are nevertheless supported by underlying feelings. Without this feeling foundation already in place, the individual would never be inclined to act in the first place. The hypothesis would remain dead. We saw this aspect emphasized in Chapter 6 with Augustine's struggle. Through conscious effort, Augustine was able to seize upon his feelings of reality that supported his Christian belief, and over time, as he overcame his divided state of being, he fully believed. Without these preexistent feelings his willful conversion would never have occurred, as the possibility of a Christian God would have remained a dead hypothesis.

The feeling foundation of belief, and the volitional effort that seizes upon these feelings are not enough to bring about belief. There is a third component to the passional nature in which the belief is consented to. I call this the emotional *constitution* of belief. In *The Principles*, James notes that "In its inner nature, belief, or the sense of reality, is a sort of feeling more allied to the emotions than to anything else" ([1890], 2: 283). Specifically, belief is constituted by a feeling of consent, in which the reality of a state of affairs or the truth of a proposition is assented to ([1890], 2: 287). This feeling brings us from a state of unrest and doubt to one of rest and belief. A similar idea is presented in his earlier essay *The Sentiment of Rationality*. Here James describes this transition from doubt to belief as a feeling of sufficiency, in which no more inquiry is needed to "explain it, account for it, or justify it" ([1879], 317). In *The Will to Believe*, James refers to this emotional aspect of belief when he says that "there is something that gives a click inside of us" ([1897], 13). This "click" is the feeling of sufficiency as described in *The Sentiment of Rationality*, and as a result of this feeling a previous state of doubt gives way to belief. The two epistemic laws that James highlights in *The Will to Believe* – "Believe truth" and "Shun error" – further reveals this emotional constitution of belief ([1897], 18).⁷⁹ According to James, the drive to avoid error is motivated by fear, while the believing of truth is motivated by hope ([1897], 18-19). These opposing laws often

⁷⁹ Jackman regards these epistemic laws as referring to the emotional foundation of belief (Jackman [1999]). This is not the case. The tension between these epistemic laws rather reflects the emotional constitution of belief; that belief itself in cases of forced options is irreducibly emotional.

come into conflict, and depending on how this emotional tension is navigated, different individuals will have different believing constitutions. Whether an individual is a gambling believer or a risk-averse believer is thereby part of their passionate nature.

The latter two aspects of our passionate nature can help to shed light on how James would respond to Bertrand Russell's critique that James confuses belief with hypothesis-adoption (Russell [1972]). According to Russell, in cases where evidence is lacking we ought to proceed on the basis of a hypothesis not a belief. To a certain extent, James would agree. The individual who engages in the cold and willful action described above does not yet fully believe. This kind of action, for example inquiring into or participating in a particular creed, practice, ritual, etc., can be construed as a kind of hypothesis adoption – that is, acting on the basis of a hunch in order to acquire more facts. While an epistemic approach of hypothesis adoption can start off the volitional process, it is not sufficient for James. This is because James construes belief in terms of action, and those individuals who remain in a hypothesis adoption state will not be inclined to act in the world as if the belief were true.

In this section, I have attempted to flesh out James' conception of the passionate nature with respect to belief. It consists of three elements: 1) a preexistent feeling for the belief, 2) volitional effort that seizes upon this preexistent feeling, and 3) the emotional constitution of belief that finally consents. Taken altogether, these three components of the passionate nature comprise James' psychological thesis. Each of these aspects of the passionate nature provides support to the three philosophical arguments in *The Will to Believe*. In the next section, I consider James' argument against Clifford's evidentialism, which relies on the third feature of the passionate nature - the emotional constitution of belief.

7.2 The Argument Against Evidentialism

James wrote *The Will to Believe* in part as a response to William Clifford's essay *The Ethics of Belief*. According to Clifford, "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone,

to believe anything upon insufficient evidence” (Clifford [1876], 295). This epistemological ethic, in which sufficient evidence is required for belief, is known as ‘evidentialism’. With respect to non-genuine options, James agrees with Clifford that this is the most prudent way to proceed. This is because for many questions, as with scientific questions for James, we are mostly recorders of the truth. As a result, a policy of remaining patient until sufficient evidence has been acquired is the optimal way to proceed in these matters.

It is important to note that the philosophical skeptic parts ways from Clifford and James with respect to these non-genuine options. The philosophical skeptic is the archetype of the conservative believer. On the spectrum of consent ranging between hope and fear, the skeptic’s disposition to believe is motivated predominately by fear. By not consenting to the belief that truth exists or at least a truth that we can know, the skeptic can be quite assured that epistemological errors will not creep into his or her belief system. The skeptic will not be *duped* to use James’ term. However, this risk-averse approach comes at a significant epistemic cost. For if we are in fact able to know the truth, regardless of what it may be, the skeptic will necessarily go without it. By contrast, the individual who believes too easily without sufficient rigour lies on the opposite side of the spectrum. The odds that these individuals will capture the truth is high, but this comes at the cost of letting many falsehoods into their belief system. Their undisciplined approach, motivated predominately by hope, is unable to adequately distinguish truth from error.

As James rightly notes, the difference between a skeptic and the individual who believes in truth is not a matter of philosophical analysis or logic. There is no way to logically disprove the skeptic. All the rest of us can do is proceed with our hope that there is a truth of some kind. As James says:

Our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth, and that our minds and it are made for each other, - what is it but a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs us up? ([1897], 9).

The question of whether or not there is a truth – be it a particular truth or truth in general – is a forced choice, which is James’ second condition of a genuine option. Even if one prefers to remain indifferent to the question that is proposed, this is akin to going without the truth. The skeptic who remains agnostic with respect to the possibility of truth is for James essentially consenting to go without it – a consenting that is motivated by the fear of being a dupe.

Just as the skeptic parts ways from Clifford and James with respect to non-genuine options, so too does James part ways from Clifford with respect to genuine options. This is ultimately because James is more of an epistemological risk-taker than Clifford, motivated more by the hope of truth rather than the fear of error. This difference of perspective is not a matter of reason or logic, but of feeling and emotion.

I myself find it impossible to go with Clifford. We must remember that these feelings of our duty about either truth or error are in any case only expressions of our passional life ([1897], 18).

James is not critical of Clifford for not believing in God since this belief is an expression of his passional nature. Rather, James is critical of Clifford’s evidentialism, which issues an a priori prohibition on religious belief. It is the rules prescribed by evidentialism that James regards as irrational ([1897], 28).

The third component of James’ passional nature figures importantly here – the emotional constitution of belief. After all, Clifford could accept that a feeling foundation is necessary for a belief, and also that volitional effort is required. With respect to the latter, Clifford says that it is wrong “to nourish belief by suppressing doubts and avoiding investigation” (Clifford [1876], 292). Clearly volitional effort is required in some cases in order to acquire facts. However, Clifford would maintain that we ought not to consent to the belief until there is sufficient evidence for it. For genuine options, this strategy means that Clifford will necessarily not believe. According to James, Clifford has every right not to believe on the basis of insufficient evidence with respect to genuine options, but he is not justified in proclaiming that it is unlawful to believe the other way. Indeed,

Clifford does not recognize that his evidentialist ethic is an expression of his own passional nature – one that is motivated by the fear of being in error.

It is from this irreducibly subjective element of belief, which is a manifestation of our emotional constitution, that we are continually waging bets on the truth. Some of us are more aggressive epistemic betters; others are more conservative. These are simply psychological facts for James. One of the purposes of his essay is to provide a philosophical argument for the optimal balance of this emotional constitution of belief, whereby we can maximize truth and minimize error. The discipline of philosophy is in many ways concerned with navigating these two competing epistemological laws, and to find that optimal point. Philosophers most often agree that this optimal point is one in which belief is withheld until sufficient evidence is acquired. What counts as evidence and what counts as sufficient is of course a matter of dispute, but generally this strategy seems best equipped at avoiding error on the one hand and gaining truth on the other. However, James rejects that we should apply the same standard to all beliefs. He is arguing that we ought to relax the impossible evidentialist requirements for genuine options by employing a more liberal epistemic policy in these cases. James regards his heterogeneous policy with respect to belief, which requires sufficient evidence for some questions but not for others, as the optimal point for managing these conflicting epistemological laws.

7.3 The Right to Believe Argument

There are numerous arguments running through *The Will to Believe*, and it can be challenging to keep them distinct. The voluntarist reading of James conflates his argument against evidentialism with his argument for the will to believe. Since according to the evidentialist critique we need not have sufficient evidence in order to believe, we can legitimately will to believe God's existence. This is obviously a misreading. It is important to separate James' argument against evidentialism from his argument in support of the will to believe and the right to believe. These arguments differ in their scope. The argument against evidentialism is directed toward *all* readers. The dictum

that it is always wrong to believe without sufficient evidence is, according to James, an irrational rule, one motivated predominately by fear ([1897], 28). The right to believe argument on the other hand, which builds upon the argument against evidentialism, is directed toward a much smaller audience. This is made clear by James as he transitions from his argument against evidentialism to his argument for the right to believe:

If for any of you religion be a hypothesis that cannot, by any living possibility be true, then you need go no farther. I speak to the ‘saving remnant alone’ ([1897], 26).

One could agree with James’ argument against evidentialism, but still not be part of this saving remnant, since the religious question remains dead. Indeed, James is now only speaking to those individuals to whom the religious question is live.

While liveness is a necessary condition in order to have the right to believe it is not sufficient. This subtle point has not been appreciated by many of James’ advocates, who argue that anybody in a state of doubt – that is, to whom the question is live – thereby has a right to believe (Gale [1999]; Jackman [1999]; Slater [2009]). James is not saying that anyone who has preexisting feelings to believe thereby has a right to believe. He is appealing specifically to those individuals whose feeling foundation is *more* strongly inclined to believe in the God hypothesis, which he makes clear in the opening paragraphs of the essay:

I have long defended to my own students the lawfulness of voluntarily adopted faith; but as soon as they have got well imbued with the logical spirit, they have as a rule refused to admit my contention to be lawful philosophically, even though in point of fact they were personally all the time chock-full of some faith or other themselves ([1897], 2).

The students that James is concerned with are not only in a state of doubt, but in a particular state of doubt. It is a conflict between their preexisting feeling for some faith that is “chock-full” and their “logical spirit”. The essay is thus primarily directed toward those individuals whose strong preexisting feeling to believe in some faith has been

stifled by their “merely logical intellect” ([1897], 1-2). Of the two live propositions that are in conflict then, James is targeting those individuals who are more inclined toward belief in God.⁸⁰ Being in a psychological state of doubt is thereby necessary but not sufficient to have the right to believe. As James says, “we have the right to believe at our own risk any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt our will” ([1897], 29). Belief requires more than liveness. The hypothesis has to be “live enough to tempt our will”. Presumably, James thinks that we can only accomplish so much by our volitional effort; that only those individuals who are already more inclined to believe have the *possibility* to believe. Right implies can.

Meanwhile, an individual for whom the question is live, but the feeling for the belief is faint, does not have the possibility to believe. Their will simply will not be tempted, and as a result it is pointless to say that these individuals have a right to believe. For the individual to whom the religious question is live but nevertheless faint, it would follow that they have the right not to believe in God. Since their will is more tempted by the non-believing hypothesis, these individuals have the right to overcome their uncertainty and firmly believe in the non-existence of God. While James is a theistic sympathizer advocating belief to an academic audience, his argument equally applies to an atheistic sympathizer advocating disbelief to a religious audience. For example, it would apply to those individuals who are going through the ritualistic motions of religious faith but who have deep lingering doubts.⁸¹ These individuals have a right to believe in atheism since their will is most tempted in that direction.

⁸⁰ This reading is further supported by a letter James wrote to Mark Baldwin, which is discussed by Hunter Brown. Brown says: “On the whole, then, with respect to the first major characteristic of liveness, I am proposing that James’s main concern in *The Will to Believe* is with situations in which one has a certain existing belief or propensity to believe which, as he described it to Mark Baldwin, is “threatened” by an alternate proposition towards which one also finds a propensity to believe” (Brown [2000], 40).

⁸¹ Of relevance here is Daniel Dennett and Linda LaScola’s *Preachers Who Are Not Believers* (2010). These authors present a number of cases of Christian preachers who have either lost or are in the process of losing their faith, but nevertheless continue to preach. This paper is part of a bigger project called The Clergy Project.

For the individuals that James is focusing upon, however, their options are either to remain in a state of doubt or to believe in some kind of religious faith that makes a connection with their existent feelings. Not only must the passionate nature decide this question, but it may lawfully choose either option. It is important to note that with respect to this right to believe thesis that James remains entirely neutral as to what the individual should do. He is not advocating that such individuals should believe. He is simply saying that it is permissible for them to believe, just as it is permissible for them to remain in a state of doubt. This cold, neutral argument for the permissibility of belief is not James' ultimate argument, however. I consider his primary argument – the will to believe thesis – in the next section.

7.4 The Will to Believe Argument

Amongst advocates of James' essay, it is standard practice to distinguish the right to believe from the will to believe. Most often the will to believe is read as a psychological thesis, which supports his philosophical right to believe thesis (Franks [2004]; Slater [2009]; Yeager [1989]). While I agree that James' psychological thesis (namely the passionate nature) informs his epistemic thesis, I disagree that the will to believe is a psychological thesis. Instead of interpreting the will to believe as informing a more primary epistemic argument, I argue that it is the primary argument of the paper.⁸²

⁸² Gail Kennedy also argues that the will to believe is James' more primary argument: "James asserts two different propositions, not kept as distinct as they might have been either by him in that essay nor by his critics. The first is concerned with what should be called the "right to believe: it is, that under certain conditions one is entitled to believe in the existence of a fact in advance of having complete evidence... The second is concerned with what properly should be called the "will to believe": it is, that there are certain cases where the belief in the future existence of a fact may itself help to produce that fact (Kennedy [1958], 579-80)." This argument, however, confuses James' argument against evidentialism with his 'will to believe' argument. By believing in God, James does not think that we "produce" the fact. His argument that faith can produce facts, such as when we believe we can jump over a precipice, is intended to undermine evidentialism.

We have seen that for James only particular individuals, based on the particular makeup of their passional nature, have a right to believe in God. He remains completely neutral with respect to what these individuals should choose. It is permissible that individuals believe in these circumstances just as it is permissible that they remain in a state of doubt. But this permissibility misses the central thrust of James' argument. Indeed, the will to believe thesis goes further than mere permissibility. According to James, those individuals who have a right to believe ought to believe. This *ought* is not to be understood in terms of a moral duty to believe.⁸³ Nor is it to be understood as a prudential ought; that we ought to believe because it is better for us. In this respect, Hunter Brown has brought to light the importance of the strenuous mood to James' moral and religious philosophy (Brown [2000]). James does not think that believing in God will bring ease and comfort to the individual. Rather, belief in God often requires living strenuously, whereby an individual is required to confront and act against evil in the world, which can entail sacrifice and pain. As a result, a crude pragmatist reading of *The Will to Believe* fails to capture the essence of the essay. James is not arguing that we should believe in God because it is expedient to do so.

The ought is rather an urging that individuals take responsibility for themselves by acting according with their deepest convictions. In cases of genuine options, where an individual has a right to believe, James is advocating that individuals have the courage to trust their own feelings and believe.

When I look at the religious question as it really puts itself to concrete men, and when I think of all the possibilities which both practically and theoretically it involves, then this command that we shall put a stopper on our heart, instincts, and courage, and wait...seems to me the queerest idol ever manufactured in the philosophic cave ([1897], 29-30).

⁸³ Interestingly, in 1875, in a review for *The Nation*, James took such a view. Peter Kauber and Peter H. Hare in *The Right and Duty to Believe* (1974) go into further detail on this duty to believe. In fact, they ultimately argue that James did not retract this thesis; that James is ultimately arguing for the duty to believe. In making this argument they look at James' philosophy as a whole, particularly his essay, *The Moral Philosopher and Moral Life*. However, there is little if any textual evidence to support this view in *The Will to Believe*.

James is going much further than simply arguing for the lawfulness and permissibility of religious belief. He is advocating that we ought to remove this “stopper on our heart, instincts and courage”. In a letter to Peirce, in which James explains his position in *The Will to Believe*, he claims he was trying “to legitimate the individual in ‘trusting his lights’ at his own risk” (Dooley [1972], 142; quoting an unpublished letter of James). Here again we see that James is ultimately concerned with instilling in his reader the conviction to trust his or her own feelings, rather than the norms of the culture, and have the courage to believe.

Of central importance to this reading of the will to believe is James’ third requirement of a genuine option; namely that it be ‘momentous’.

So proceeding, we see, first, that religion offers itself as a momentous option. We are supposed to gain, even now, by our belief, and to lose by our non-belief, a certain vital good ([1897], 26).

The “vital good” that we gain with religious belief is a universe that we are deeply connected with. As James says of the religious convert, “The universe is no longer a mere It to us, but a Thou, if we are religious” ([1897], 27). This is the feeling of intimacy that we saw in the previous chapter. Of course, this feeling of connectedness to the world comes with the potential loss of being duped. A question is thereby momentous when the stakes in either believing or not believing are high. As a result, whether we believe or do not believe, we are taking a gamble. This gamble, which is so momentous to the life of the individual, is essentially a bet between one’s own deeper feelings and a cultural norm. It is far better, according to James, to win or lose by trusting your own lights than to win or lose by following some external standard. With these momentous choices, the choice is ultimately between choosing on behalf of one’s self versus abdicating one’s self in favour of an external rule. By following the societal norm, we end up acting in a kind of Jamesian bad faith, whereby we turn away from our deeper convictions.

According to James, those individuals who have a right to believe in God, ought to summon up their courage to believe. This summoning up of courage requires effort of will – hence the will to believe. Indeed, it is no accident that James concludes his essay

by quoting a passage from Fitz James Stephen. “In all important transactions of life we have to take a leap in the dark... If we decide to leave the riddles unanswered, that is a choice... What must we do? ‘Be strong and of a good courage’” ([1897], 31).

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to shed light on what the passional nature with respect to belief consists of for James. The various misinterpretations of his essay, be it from critics or supporters of James, stem from a failure to appreciate the scope and structure of the passional nature. Each of the three components of the passional nature provides support for one of James’ three arguments in *The Will to Believe*. The emotional constitution of belief supports James’ argument against evidentialism; the feeling foundation of belief supports his right to believe argument; and the volitional aspect of belief supports his will to believe argument.

The emphasis that has been placed on James’ right to believe thesis fails to capture the passion, emotion and feeling that runs through *The Will to Believe*. James is ultimately arguing that those who have a right to believe ought to trust their feelings, be courageous, and will to believe.

8 Conclusion

As a philosopher, James makes daring intellectual leaps, but in the process he can be inattentive to detail, leaving behind a trail of confusion. This is certainly the case with his work on emotion, where more than a century of misunderstanding has distorted his view. Over the last seven chapters, I have attempted to clarify James' work in this domain by inquiring into his conception of consciousness, the nature and extent of emotional feelings, and the relationship between emotion and other mental and bodily phenomena. This clarification of James' view is only possible to the extent that there is consistency in the use of his terms. I have argued that James has a broad understanding of the concept *emotion*. It refers not only to coarse emotions, but also objectless emotions, subtle emotions, self-feelings, blind emotions, habitual emotions, feelings of reality and transformational emotions. All of these affective states are emotions insofar as they are bidirectional feelings – that is, they are at once bodily feelings and feelings directed toward the world. With the terms *mood* and *passion* on the other hand, no clear definition emerges in James' work. On some occasions these terms are used synonymously with emotion, while at other times they seem to take on a different meaning. For example, James' discussion of the strenuous mood seems to include not only feelings of reality but also a constellation of associated ideas. Likewise, the passionate nature extends further than the category of emotion, as it also includes the volitional aspects of the self. This is a reminder that the emotional domain for James is ultimately difficult to clearly demarcate as it is intimately tied up with instinct, habit, attention and will.

As opposed to the standard view of James, whereby he is thought to reduce an emotion to bodily feelings, I have argued that emotions imbue our experience of the world with meaning and value. Moreover, our philosophical and religious beliefs about the world are built upon an underlying emotional foundation. There is little doubt that emotion is a core element within James' overall philosophy, but I have yet to mention his way of philosophizing. In this respect, the content of his view is in perfect harmony with his style. James injects passion and feeling into his writing, breathing new life and urgency into age-old philosophical questions. When one reads James, it is eminently

clear that he has felt the force of the philosophical questions that he engages with. This passionate style, combined with what seems to be an effortless talent for writing, resonates with readers. Owen Flanagan has said that William James is his favourite philosopher and yet he disagrees with almost everything he says (Flanagan [1997]). This is surely a testament to James' style. He does not treat philosophical questions as abstract curiosities, to be thought about from a safe intellectual distance. He rejects this traditional approach to philosophy in which we simply observe and think about the world. We are not “absolutely passive clay upon which ‘experience’ rains down”, but are active beings, who shape the world as much as the world shapes us ([1890], 1: 403). Try as many philosophers may, James does not keep his feelings out of the philosophical domain.

While I hope my work has clarified aspects of James' understanding of emotion, there are certainly further questions that remain. Emotion figures prominently in both *Pragmatism* and *Essays on Radical Empiricism*, two of James' later works that I have not considered here. With respect to the latter, James' metaphysical theory of pure experience is informed, in part, by his understanding of emotion. This aspect of James' work, particularly as it is developed in *The Place of Affectional Facts In Pure Experience* has received little scholarly attention. As for James' pragmatic theory of truth, there continue to be ongoing debates about its commitments. For example, the most prominent argument against his theory is that it reduces truth to subjective contentment (Russell [1910/2009], Moore [1907]), Rescher [2000]). Hilary Putnam, however, has argued that there is a “Peircian strain” to James' theory, wherein truth is ultimately regarded as a collective matter (Putnam [1997], 166). A fully fleshed out Jamesian conception of emotion, including the relationship between emotion and belief, could help to resolve this and other questions.

Furthermore, I have not inquired into the relevance of James' views to contemporary philosophy of emotion. However, it certainly seems to have important implications to current debates. James challenges numerous assumptions, such as the building-block model of consciousness, the feeling-thought distinction, and the scope of the category emotion. Moreover, he focuses in detail on affective states that have not received much

attention in contemporary emotion theory, including feelings of reality and transformational emotions. His discussion of the relationship between emotion and belief, a theme that runs through much of his writing, is another area where James is of relevance within the current climate of philosophy.

To conclude, it might seem that James' views on emotion, particularly his later views, leaves the practice of philosophy in a precarious position. If our philosophical beliefs necessarily take root from an underlying feeling foundation, then this seems to degrade the rational undertaking of philosophical inquiry and debate. This conclusion is too hasty. First, it might be the case that some feeling orientations to the world are more rational than others. This appears to be the view that James takes in *Pragmatism*, where he tries to find a more balanced perspective than the "men of radical idiosyncrasy" who have largely dominated western philosophy ([1905], 489). Second, bringing more attention to this affective foundation, both in ourselves and in others, might in fact serve to benefit the nature of philosophical inquiry. It could very well inspire more humility in our beliefs, further developing the intellectual virtues of curiosity and open-mindedness, which could help to bring about a more inclusive and vibrant philosophical environment.

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