THE SELF AND THERAPY

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The Multiplicity of the Self

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William James (1842-1910) was exquisitely sensitive to the complexities of life, self, and world. Always suspicious of reductionist, overly schematic, psychological, and philosophical conceptualizations, he spoke for the "multiverse" in contradistinction to the universe. He himself was a multiverse: artist, naturalist, writer, experimentalist, theorist, physiologist, psychologist, and philosopher; tormented depressive, metaphysical optimist, neurotic enmeshed in his family of origin, urbane man of the world, introverted introspectionist, and warmly involved tender husband, teacher, and father. A multiverse, indeed, who would have gladly endorsed his father's friend Emerson's observation that "consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

William James was born into an extraordinary family. His father, Henry James, Sr., was wealthy, unemployed, brilliant, neurotic, and physically disabled, and knew every thinker and artist of consequence on both sides of the Atlantic. Henry Sr. was the son of an Irish Protestant emigrant who made a fortune by investing in the Erie Canal. The father was an adherent of the Calvinist God of predestination and damnation. Henry Sr. grew up preoccupied with religious guilt and later suffered a "religious crisis." Although less enthralled to a punitive God, William underwent a similar crisis and remained preoccupied with religious questions all of his life. As an early adolescent, Henry Sr. was heating a balloon to get it to rise when some turpentine he had spilled on his leg ignited. He was badly burned, and the leg was amputated above the knee. So William grew up with a disabled father, which must have had something to do with his writing about phantom limb phenomena and bodily intactness. Henry Sr. recovered, although his physicality and free roaming in nature were forever curtailed. He turned to things of the mind, attended Union College in Schenectady, not far from his native Albany, where he was something of a dandy and youth about town, and went on to Princeton Theological Seminary in an apparent attempt to placate his now-dead father. But the dour God of Presbyterianism was not to claim his allegiance. He left the seminary, moved to New York City, married, and became the father of William. When William was 2, the family moved to England, the first of many relocations, transatlantic and domestic. Here, William's father had some kind of breakdown, which he later called a "vastation." William was to suffer virtually the same symptoms, so I defer my account of them for a

generation. Whatever the exact nature of the vastation, it profoundly affected Henry Sr. He remained a shattered human being, his confidence gone, awaiting a new encounter with the abyss. Insofar as he understood what had happened to him at all, he experienced it as some sort of religious crisis. One wonders what it was like for little William to live in a home permeated with fear. He continued to live in that anxiety-permeated ambiance until his father discovered the Swedish mystic Swedenborg. Somehow, reading Swedenborg "cured" him, or at least gave him a God other than the terrifying introject of his father projected onto the cosmos. Henry Sr. did not become an "orthodox" Swedenborgian, but he did become a religious philosopher who incorporated Swedenborgian principles into much of his writings. He published his many works at his own expense. He carried the master's works wherever he wandered throughout his peripatetic life.

So William was born into and grew up in an eccentric, troubled, yet vital and wonderful household. His parents had a gift for friendship, and at one time or another the intellectual elite of two continents dined with them. The conversation was unbridled. The atmosphere of William's home was self-consciously free, open, and challenging. No opinion was safe from attack. His mother, Mary, was formidable in her own way. Henry Jr. called her the cornerstone of the arch that was the family. Strong-minded, she had her own ways of exercising control. Both William and Henry had difficulties separating from her. Rivalry was intense, particularly William's with his younger brother Henry, who was to become a distinguished man of letters. It has been said that William was a psychologist who wrote like a novelist, while his brother Henry was a novelist who wrote like a psychologist. It has been further suggested that William should have been the novelist and his brother the psychologist. Be that as it may, they had a sibling rivalry of monumental proportions that never abated; there was also a deep love between them. There were two younger brothers who never recovered from their experiences in the Civil War, and a sister, Alice, who was sickly and emotionally troubled and who died relatively young. The family roamed across the Continent, went back to the United States, then turned around and returned to England. In the course of his boyhood and adolescence, William James crossed the ocean many times. Perhaps the father's restlessness and constant travel were compensation for his physical immobility. Under the circumstances, William's education was irregular, often a month in one school, a year in another. However, what he lacked in classroom experience he more than made up for in his exposure to high culture, the opportunity to acquire French and German, and contact with the most innovative minds of the time.

Visitors reported that dining at the James's was an education in itself.

Eventually the family settled in New York, and William received some more regular schooling. He had his difficulties relating to his school fellows, which he dealt with by playing the tough guy in contrast to the more sedate Henry, to whom he bragged, "I play with boys who curse and swear." A major part of William's difficulties came from the fact that his father had neither socially recognized role nor sanctioned identity. William and Henry Jr.'s peers' fathers were professionals and businessmen; their father was a disabled conversationalist. When Henry asked, "What shall I say you are?" the father replied, "Say I'm a philosopher, say I'm a seeker for truth, say I'm a lover of my kind, say I'm an author of books if you like; or best of all just say I'm a Student." This being obviously unsatisfactory, he relented to the extent of saying, "Well, you can tell them I'm a writer." But the problem of identity, of who one's father was, of who one was, went deep with William and with Henry. All of his life, William was sensitive to questions of identity and identification, and the diffuseness of his personal self-concept is reflected in and embedded in his theory of the self. James's microcosm becomes his macrocosm; the multiverse is in part a compensation for the lack of a universe. There were more visits abroad, and eventually he studied at what was to become the University of Geneva. While at the university, it became time for William to "choose" a career. He decided that he would become a painter, and his father objected, not for the usual reasons that artists starve or that the artistic life is too unconventional, but rather because he saw the choice of any career as too restrictive, as a diminution of the potential of the self. This was but an extension of the father's theory of education, that there should be no restrictions placed upon the freedom of the mind. In a twist on Kierkegaard's dizziness of freedom, he saw any narrowing—which, of course, is entailed in choosing to actualize one rather than another potentiality—as a loss. Some people can't make decisions because the burden of choice is too anxiety provoking; others choose unnecessarily because openness is too anxiety provoking. It is to the latter that the father objected. What he wanted was for Willie to remain a "student," a thinker without qualification. In a sense that is exactly what William did do, but not immediately. Papa finally relented, and the family returned from Europe so that Willie could study under one of America's leading artists, William Hunt, in Newport, Rhode Island. James was a talented artist, and the sharpness of his eye was later reflected in the sharpness of his prose. He remained a superb descriptive artist in his incarnations as psychologist and philosopher; however, he decided he didn't quite have it as a painter, or at least that he would never really be first rate, and left

Hunt to enroll at Harvard to study science. Willie's interests were in chemistry, anatomy, and what was then called natural history—ecologic and taxonomic descriptive biology. While at Harvard, James became overtly *neurasthenic*—neurotically incapacitated. Neurasthenia was a new nosological category, having recently been formulated by the American psychiatrist Mitchell Weir. It afflicted intellectually overworked young men and was characterized by ennui, psychosomatic symptoms, lassitude, anxiety, and depression. Freud classified neurasthenia as an "actual neurosis"; that is, one caused by lack of sexual satisfaction rather than by intrapsychic conflict. Freud's notion was that of toxicity (sexual energy that was neither discharged nor sublimated) gone sour, so to speak, and poisoning the bottling- and bottled-up young man. Weir, who was famous for his "rest cure" for emotional illnesses (neuroses), thought differently. Be that as it may, William certainly lacked sexual outlets.

He went off on a trip to the Amazon with the Harvard naturalist, Louis Agassiz. The trip did not go well for him, and he returned to Harvard to study medicine. His illness forced him to take a leave of absence, during which he studied in Europe, principally in Germany. His illness also exempted him from service in the Civil War. James's personal crisis corresponded to his country's crisis, and the two were certainly not unrelated. There was a civil war within as well as without William James. Neither Henry Jr. nor William served in the war, although both their younger brothers did, as did most of their friends, including Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. The younger James brothers participated in the horrors of the attack on Fort Wagner, which was vividly depicted in the film *Glory*. Neither brother entirely recovered from the trauma of combat, becoming drifters, drinkers, and ne'er-do-wells. Both William and Henry were guilt-ridden by their nonparticipation in the war. Many years later, William wrote of the necessity for a "moral equivalent of war" that would draw on the idealism and commitment of youth without destroying them. President Kennedy cited that James essay when he founded the Peace Corps. James finally completed his internship at Massachusetts General Hospital and received his MD. Shortly thereafter, his neurasthenic depression reached its nadir, being encapsulated in the following overwhelmingly intense experience that James reported in the *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). There he attributed the experience to a "French correspondent," but it was his own.

> The worst kind of melancholy is that which takes the form of panic fear. Here is an excellent example, for permission to print which I have to thank the sufferer. The original is in French, and though the subject was obviously in a bad nervous condition at the time of which he writes, his case has otherwise the merit of extreme simplicity. I translate freely.

> "Whilst in this state of philosophical pessimism and general depression of spirits about my prospects, I went one evening into a dressing room in the twilight to secure some article that was there; suddenly there fell upon me, without any warning, just as if it had come out of the darkness, a horrible fear of my own existence. Simultaneously there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum, a black haired youth with greenish skin, entirely idiotic, who used to sit all day on one of the benches, or rather shelves against the wall, with his knees drawn up against his chin, and the coarse grey undershirt, which was his only garment, drawn over them enclosing his entire figure. He sat there like a sort of sculptured Egyptian cat or Peruvian mummy, moving nothing but his black eyes and looking absolutely non-human. This image and my fear entered into a species of combination with each other. *That shape am I,* I felt potentially. Nothing that I can possess can defend me against that fate, if the hour for it should strike for me as it struck for him. There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was as if something hereto solid within my breast gave way entirely, and I became a mass of quivering fear. After this the universe was changed for me altogether. I woke morning after morning with a horrible dread in the pit of my stomach, and with a sense of the insecurity of life that 1 never knew before and that I have never felt since. It was like a revelation; and although the immediate feelings passed away, the experience has made me sympathetic with the morbid feelings of others ever since. It gradually faded, but for months I *was* unable to go out in the dark alone.
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> In general I dreaded to be left alone. I wondered how other people could live, how I myself had ever lived, so unconscious of that insecurity beneath the surface of life. My mother, in particular, a very cheerful person, seemed to me a perfect paradox in her unconsciousness of danger, which you may well believe I was very careful not to disturb by revelations of my own state of mind. I have always thought that this experience of melancholia of mine had a religious bearing. (James, 1902, p. 156)

William James, like his father before him, experienced a panic attack. Modern psychiatry understands such experiences as neurochemical disturbances to be treated with tricyclic (so called because of their molecular structure) antidepressants. The vulnerability to such attacks is held to run in families, so the psychiatrist would not see William's attack as, at least in part, an identification with his father or as a consequence of similar preoccupations and psychic conflicts, but rather as a result of genetically transmitted neurochemical vulnerability. James himself discusses neurology in his book on religion, but he, and I, would maintain that the neurochemical correlatives of a thought or a feeling do not determine its meaning. Also, it is well known that the same psychological symptoms can be the outcome of diverse etiological processes and pathways, so that one person's panic attack may be primarily neurochemical in origin while another's may be primarily psychodynamic in origin. It is worth noting that both Freud and modem organic psychiatry would attribute William's symptom to somatic sources, but that Freud would be interested in meanings and conflicts, while the contemporary organicist would not.

James himself understood his experience as a religious crisis, not so much in his father's sense of terror of a Calvinistic God as in the loss of meaning inherent in (for him) the mechanistic, deterministic explanations of human behavior that he had encountered in his scientific studies. Whatever the more

personal, intrapsychic and interpersonal factors underlying his neurotic incapacitation, the loss of meaningfulness weighed heavily upon him. Scientific explanation, such as the neurochemical account of panic, robbed the inner life of human significance, and this reductive scientism, the prevailing *Weltanschauung* of his milieu, weighed heavily upon him. In fact, he became so depressed that "thoughts of the pistol, the dagger, and the bowl [to catch the blood]" never left him. How close to suicide he came during his period of suicidal ideation, we cannot be sure, but both the despair and the risk were real. He later wrote that no man is entirely educated unless he has had the realization that he can take his own life and has decided to live. When James said *realization,* he did not mean mere intellectual awareness but the deep emotional conviction that suicide is a real option.

Of course, his experience was one of vulnerability as well as one of meaninglessness. It is worth noting that James felt that he could not communicate his terror to his cheerful mother. For all the openness in the family, some things could not be discussed. James came out of his depression (insofar as he did) in a characteristic way. As a consequence of reading the French philosopher Charles Renouvier, he came to the conclusion that the arguments for or against determinism—or to state the alternative, for or against free will—were equally inconclusive. Somewhat in the spirit of Kant's reaction to his antinomies, but coming from a more emotional than logical position, James decided that reason was of no help in deciding whether or not he was a free agent. Furthermore, Renouvier convinced him that mind could affect body, just as body could affect mind. That did it for James. He wrote, "My first act of free will, shall be to believe in free will." He went on to say, "My belief, to be sure, can't be optimistic—but I will posit life ... the self-governing resistance of the ego to the world" (Perry, 1935, p. 121). The corner had been turned. By sheer effort of will, James began his recovery from a decade-long depression.

His illness culminating in his crisis was "overdetermined," as the analysts put it. That is to say, it had many causes: James's identity diffusion; his repressed hatred of his simultaneously loved brother, Henry; his reaction to the carnage of the Civil War and guilt over not fighting in it; his sexual repression; his inability to successfully rebel against his overtly liberal, overtly generous, yet smothering parents; his shock over the loss of his young, beautiful, beloved cousin, Minnie Temple (immortalized as Millie Theale in his brother's novel *The Wings of the Dove),* an event that made death real to him; and his existential despair over the absence of meaning, agency, and belief in his life. James dealt with his illness by an act of will and by an intellectual analysis; one wonders what sort of person he would have developed into if he

had also had the benefit of insight into the emotional and interpersonal roots of his neurasthenia.

James remained a semi-invalid living in his parents' home for several more years. At the age of 30, he emerged from his cocoon to teach at Harvard. His first appointment was as an instructor in anatomy and physiology. He subsequently became a professor of psychology, founding the first laboratory of experimental psychology in America (Wundt founded a similar laboratory at the University of Leipzig in the same year, 1874), and wound up as a professor of philosophy. Thus, his professional evolution was from artist, to chemist, to naturalist, to physician, to physiologist, to psychologist, to philosopher. It was an epigenetic development, with each later stage latent in each earlier stage, and each later stage incorporating the earlier stages. In a sense he was a philosopher all along. His most important works are *The Principles of Psychology* (1890/1983); *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902); "Does Consciousness Exist?" (1904/1912a), an essay in which he first develops the philosophical positions he called *neutral monism* and *radical empiricism; The Will to Believe* (1896/1956); and *Pragmatism, a New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907/1912c). *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912b) and *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909) were published posthumously.

James finally married at the age of 38. His marriage was a happy one and so was his family life. Although he continued to be plagued by emotional pain, he functioned and functioned magnificently, creative and productive in three fields. He also had a gift for friendship. James was loved by his students, his colleagues, his friends, and his family. Toward the end of his life, he met Freud on the latter's visit to the United States to receive an honorary degree from Clark University in 1909. Freud recounted how James, now really physically ill, had an attack of angina during a walk they took together. Freud was impressed by James's calm, grace, and acceptance in the face of not-distant death as he asked his European visitor to walk on while he recovered. Freud commented, "I hope I will show as much courage when it comes to be my time to die."

Eric Erikson, the psychoanalytic theorist who directed our attention to the process of achieving an identity, to the problematic nature of that identity, and to its psychopathological correlative "identity diffusion," used James as a case history of a lifelong identity confusion. He cited a late dream of James's to illustrate the problems of identity confusion in the last stage of life. Here is James's (as cited in Erikson, 1968, pp. 205-207) account of that dream.

I despair of giving the reader any just idea of the bewildering confusion of mind into which I was thrown by this, the most intensely peculiar experience of my whole life. I wrote a full memorandum of it a couple of days after it happened, and appended some reflections. Even though it should cast no light on the conditions of mysticism [which James was then investigating], it seems as if this record might be worthy of publication, simply as a contribution to the descriptive literature of pathological mental states. I let it follow, therefore, as originally written, with only a few words altered, to make the account more clear.

San Francisco, Feb. 14, 1906. —The night before last, in my bed in Stanford University, I awoke at about 7:30 a.m. from a quiet dream of some sort and whilst "gathering my waking wits" seemed suddenly to get mixed up with reminiscences of a dream of an entirely different sort which seemed to telescope, as it were, into the first one, the dream very elaborate, of lions and tragic. I concluded this to have been a previous dream of the same sleep; but the apparent mingling of two dreams was something very queer, which I had never before experienced.

On the following night (Feb. 12/13) I awoke suddenly from my first sleep, which appeared to have been very heavy, in a middle of dream, in the thinking of which, I became suddenly confused by the contents of two other dreams that shuffled themselves abruptly in between the parts of the first dream, and of which I couldn't grasp the origin. Whence come *these dreams?* I asked. They were close to *me,* and fresh, as if I had just dreamed them; and yet they were far away from the *first dream.* The contents of the three had absolutely no connection. One had a Cockney atmosphere, it had happened to someone in London. The other two were American. One involved the trying on of a coat (was this the dream I seemed to awake from?), the other was a sort of nightmare and had to do with soldiers. Each had a wholly distinct emotional atmosphere that made its individuality discontinuous with that of the others. And yet, in a moment, as these three dreams alternately telescoped into and out of each other, and I seemed to myself to have been their common dreamer, they seemed quite as distinctly not to have been dreamed in succession, in that one sleep. *When* then? Not the previous night, either. *When,* then, and *which* was the one out of which I just awakened. *I could no longer tell:* one was as close to me as the other, and yet they entirely repelled each other, and I seemed thus to belong to three different dream-systems at once, no one of which would connect itself either with the others or with my waking life. I began to feel curiously confused and scared, and tried to wake myself up wider, but I seemed already wide-awake. Presently cold shivers of dread ran over me: *am I getting into other people's dreams? Is this a "telepathic" experience?* Or an invasion of (double) or (treble) personality? Or is it a thrombus in a coronary artery? And the beginning of a general mental "confusion" and disorientation which is going to develop who knows how far?

Decidedly I was losing hold of my "self" and making acquaintance with a quality of mental distress I had never known before, its nearest analogue being the sinking, giddying anxiety that one may have when, in the woods, one discovers that one is really "lost." Most human troubles look toward a terminus. Most fears point in a direction, concentrate toward a climax. Most assaults of the evil one may be met by bracing oneself against something, one's principles, one's courage, one's will, one's pride. But in this experience all was diffusion from a center, and foothole swept away, the brace itself disintegrating all the faster as one needed its support more direly. Meanwhile vivid perception (or remembrance) of the various dreams kept coming over me in alternation. Whose? *whose?* WHOSE? Unless I can *attach* them, I am swept out to sea with no horizon and no bond, getting *lost.* The idea roused the "creeps" again, and with it the fear of again falling asleep and renewing the process. It had begun the previous night, but then the confusion had only gone one step and that seemed simply curious. *This* was a second step— where might I be after a third step had been taken?

At the same time I found myself filled with a new pity for persons passing into dementia with *Verwirrtheit,* or into invasions of secondary personality. *We*>regard them as simply *curious;* but what *they* want, in the awful drift of their being out of their customary self is any principle of steadiness to hold on to. *We ought to assure them and reassure them that we will stand by them, and recognize the true self in them, to the end. We ought*

> *to let them know that we are with them and not (as too often we must seem to them) a part of the world that but confirms and publishes their deliquescence,* [italics added]
>
> Evidently I was in full possession of my reflective wits; and whenever I thus objectively thought of the situation in which I was, my anxiety ceased. But there was a tendency to relapse into the dreams and reminiscences, and to relapse vividly: and then the confusion recommenced, along with the emotion of dread lest it should develop further.
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> Then I looked at my watch. Half-past twelve! Midnight, therefore. And this gave me another reflective idea, habitually when going to bed, I fall into a very deep slumber from which I never naturally awaken until after two. I never awaken, therefore, from a midnight dream, as I did tonight, so of midnight dreams my ordinary consciousness retains no recollection. My sleep seemed terribly heavy as I awoke tonight. Dream states carry dream memories—why may not the two succedaneous dreams (whichever two of the three were succedaneous) be memories of *twelve o'clock dreams of previous nights,* swept in, along with the just-fading dream, into the just-waking system of memory? Why, in short, may I not be tapping in a way precluded by my ordinary habit of life, the *midnight stratum of my past?*
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> This idea gave me great relief—I felt now as if I were in full possession of my *anima rationalis*. ...it seems therefore, merely as if the threshold between the rational and the morbid state had, in my case, been temporarily lowered, and as if similar confusions might be very near the line of possibility in all of us.

James is here describing what has been called the "fragmentation of the self," with its concomitant terror. For Erikson the most salient point about James's account is his reassertion of his professional identity in his objectification and analysis of his experience. For me, the most salient aspect of James's report is his empathy—for others suffering similar experiences and ultimately for himself. Of course, that empathy was part of his professional identity.

James's theory of the self is primarily contained in his *Principles of Psychology,* but his chapters "The Sick Soul" and "The Divided Self' in *Varieties of Religious Experience* in which he recounts his "crisis" are also pertinent, as are his thoughts in his essay "Does Consciousness Exist?"

In the *Principles,* James describes a multiself constituted by an empirical self, or me—consisting of three components, the material self, the social self, and the spiritual self—and by the pure ego.

Schematically:

The empirical self or me	*The pure ego*
The social self	
The material self	
The spiritual self	

Additionally, a complete description of self according to James must include not only the constituents of that self, material, social, and spiritual, but also the feelings and emotions that they arouse, which he denotes *self-feelings,* and the actions they promote, which he denotes *self-seeking* and *self-preservation.*

The Empirical Self, or Me, is what each of us calls *me.* James claims that we know perfectly well what he means, and that each of us has a perfectly coherent experience of self. To deny this is to engage in a metaphysical game and not to be truly empirical. The essential fact is some sort of experience of selfhood. However, James goes on to say that the line between *me* and *mine* is not clear, that is, our identity is not confined to our bodily and mental self. My children, my fame, my reputation, my home, and the products of my work are emotionally invested by me, and are experienced as part of me. It is interesting that James, who wrote of the "Bitch Goddess success," included fame in his list of qualities experienced as *mine.* According to him, the self always seems to be involved in acts of intentionally; that is, I am always conscious of something. James borrowed the idea of the intentionality of consciousness from the Viennese psychologist and philosopher Franz Brentano, whose work he respected. Sigmund Freud, who studied under Brentano, developed Brentano's concept of intentionality into his doctrine of cathexis, the investment of self and others with emotional energy, which is very close to James's notion of the self encompassing all that is mine.

James is quite cognizant of the necessity for emotional investment and involvement of and with the constituents of self. Here he is quite in agreement with Freud. Simply put, if I don't love it, it isn't mine; it isn't a part of me. James points out that even the body can be disowned or disavowed, as when the mystic dismisses his body as a "prison house of the soul." It is only by emotional investment that things, including my body, become part of the self. The me is fluctuating material as my emotional investments change. James concludes that "In its widest possible sense—*a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his"* (1890/1983, p. 273). This is a completely new notion in our history of theories of the self. The boundaries of the self are here quite altered. The closest approach to James's notion hitherto examined is Hegel's concept of the self being constituted by identification with the concrete universals that that self has produced, but Hegel's notion is abstract and metaphysical, while James's is *haimish* and human. Let us look more closely at the constituents of the self.

The major constituents of that self are the Empirical Self (or Me) and the Pure Ego. The empirical self is tripartite: material, social, and spiritual. The *material self,* as it is usually constituted, is primarily a bodily self. It is my body with all of my awarenesses of that body. There is a certain ambiguity in James's inclusion of the body as a constituent of the material self. Is it my body in all of its physicality sitting here writing, or is it only my sensations of body that constitute self? For James, who later denies that there is a mind-body dichotomy, this is a distinction without a difference. But my body as a material thing is different from my body as experience. I don't know that James thought about this ambiguity in his discussion of self in *The Principles,* but I suppose his answer would be that there is only one body, which can be experienced in a variety of ways, and that all of those ways are a part of self. However, as James points out (see earlier), nothing is part of the self unless it is emotionally invested, cared about. So the body may be peripheral to self, or even experienced as nonself, or, as is generally the case, be experienced as more central to the self-experience, although it is not, for most people, at the core of the self. This is an extraordinary notion and a new one in our discussion of self. James is saying that we have many self-experiences that differ in their saliency and centrality, and that their degree of saliency is determined by my affective relationship to that constituent of self. Is there a paradox, or even a logical contradiction, here? Does there not have to be a self to select the constituents of self that constitute it, antecedent to that selection, if James is correct? I am not sure. James does not explicitly conceptualize the self in the cathetic terms I use above, but it is implicit in his discussion of self. What does clearly emerge is the centrality of affectivity, not with Kierkegaard's emphasis on boundary states of despair, dread, and fear and trembling, but rather with the emphasis on ordinary, everyday, ongoing, caring for: valuing of some parts of self more than others, so that a hierarchy of selves is established. James's self is a feeling self, even though those feelings and feelingful choices are not ordinarily in awareness.

For most of us, *body* is an important part of self. According to James, so is everything that I identify with my selfhood, an identification not necessarily conscious at any point in time, but always potentially conscious. He singled out clothes, citing the old joke about the self consisting of my body, my soul, and my clothes. James is, here, highly aware of the symbolic significance of social presentation—of the role one's uniform plays in one's view of self. James's friend, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, was once asked if wearing those judicial robes made any difference. Holmes replied, "It damn well better." Holmes was saying that the robed presentation of self, with the robe symbolizing fairness and justice, should change

the robed experience of self in such a way that the wearer's commitment to fairness and justice is enhanced. Put differently, the robe, at least ideally, changes the robed one's self-concept, which in turn changes his or her behavior so that it is congruent with the altered self-concept. James would entirely agree. Of course, the robe also changes one's social self, the way one is perceived and evaluated by others, but more of this later. The material self includes not only body and clothes, but all of our possessions: home, books, records, boat, and car, for example. Look at the way many people identify with their cars: James is onto something here. The products of my labor are also part of my material self: the things I have built and the money I have earned. Again, these things are more or less central to self depending upon how much they are cared about. James, who as a child was forever relocating, put great emphasis on one's home as a part of self, as something that is loved, enhanced, and experienced as part of self, even to the degree of feeling that one's self is being attacked if one's home is violated, disparaged, or criticized. James also includes under the material self other people insomuch as they are "my possessions." He explicitly talks about family, parents, wife and babes. Though he speaks of them as possessions, he is not unaware of their independent selfhood; rather, here he is speaking of their relationship to me, their existence as a part of me.

In the *social self,* the other side of the coin, my existence for others is highlighted. When those we love (however possessively) die, part of our very selves is gone. Loss entails a "shrinking" of ourselves—again, an entirely new notion of self. This is what a psychoanalyst would call an object-relational notion of self. (Objects are so called because they are the objects of my thoughts and feelings, objects in relation to me as subject. Objects usually are, but need not be, people; the term *object relations* encompasses both interpersonal relations and intrapsychic relations in which I relate to my internal objects, i.e., my mental representations of others.) Implicit in James's notion is the more love, the more self; the more loss, the less self. Freud has similar notions, but because he has the concepts of identification, incorporation, and internalization to work with as well as an explicitly cathetic model, he is able to develop this much more fully. But Freud's statement that "the ego [self] is the precipitate of abandoned object relations" is closely related to, albeit different from, James's notion of loss of loved ones as loss of self. Freud is offering a psychological alternative to James's notion of the self diminished by loss, namely the psychological incorporation of those who have been lost (see Chapter 8). James, like John Donne, believes that each person's loss diminishes me, at least if I love him or her.

So the self, just in its material self, is much more than just my body; it is everything, animate and inanimate, that I care about, everything that I invest with emotion, everything that I experience as mine. Furthermore, the material self is not a given, eternally immutable; on the contrary, it is in a constant state of variably rapid flux.

The social self extends the object-relational aspect of James's conceptualization of self. Since James is, here, as in his discussion of the material self, writing from the viewpoint of the self, his discussion is necessarily narcissistic in the sense that other people are not so much regarded as selves-in-themselves as selves-for-me. Even when others are seen as autonomous in their freedom to evaluate me, the emphasis is on my experience of those evaluations and on the importance of esteem from others for my self-esteem. I do not believe that this says anything about James being particularly narcissistic, but rather, it is ineluctably entailed by his topic being the self—rather than social relations.

In his notion of the social self, James brings to the forefront the centrality of our need for recognition from others. One wonders what Descartes's lonely cogitator would think of this aspect of James's conceptualization of self. James states that, "man has as many social selves as he has significant others" (1890/1983, p. 281). (As far as I know, James is the originator of the now much overused term *significant others.)* Here again we have the paradox, or perhaps the contradiction, of the self that is constituted, at least in part, by the evaluation of significant others, choosing, apparently antecedent to the constitution of that self, who shall be significant for it. Be that as it may, for James we do have some freedom in arranging our hierarchy of significant others, but we are not entirely free in this respect. One's boss is a significant other, as are one's parents, whether or not one wants them to be, although we do have some say in how significant they are for us. In fact, much of psychotherapy can be understood as helping the patient rearrange his or her hierarchy of significance (of others) and in most cases attenuating that significance. James points out that how I feel and how I experience myself is importantly determined by how my significant others treat me. The most significant of the significant others is the person I am in love with; he or she can change my whole state of being with a smile—or with a sneer. My social self, my "other-reflected" perception of self and, conversely, my presentation of self to others, may be harmonious or may be conflictual. Since I play many roles and elicit many different responses, it is likely that my social selves will not be altogether harmonious or consistent. The degree of integration of the social selves varies from person to person, but some degree of "splitting," of disharmony between social selves, is usual. The social

self is both what I am to others and what I am for others. The notion of social role is implicit in James's discussion of the social self, as is the variability of the social selves—the selves that I am for others—that are elicited by and, in contemporary language, fed back to me. James postulates an ideal social self that is the possibility of recognition by an ideal other. He points out that we can, and frequently do, give up actual (present) approbations for potentially "higher" (i.e., more valued) approbations from more highly regarded significant others. In this quest for a self through others, we seek an ideal spectator. James's notion here is similar to Freud's notion of the ego ideal, but Freud's ideal other has become internalized and is, in part, an internalized parent, and, as such, is an heir of the past, while James's ideal spectator is an elusive figure, a spectator of the future. We give up present glory to seek the esteem of an ideal other, to consolidate an ideal social self.

James puts a lot of stress on his "Bitch Goddess" success, here wearing the garment of "fame and honors" in his development of the social self. My social self is importantly the degree of fame and honor I can garner for myself. Here James is generalizing what is personally important to him, although he is doubtlessly also generalizing from his experience of the "superstars" who gathered around his parents' table and who served with him on the Harvard faculty. He is also giving tremendous power to his critics and to his public. Whatever the role of his personal bias in his conceptualization of the social self, there is no doubt that what I am for me is importantly determined by what I am for others, and that James was the first to incorporate this insight into a theory of self.

The *Spiritual Self* is my inner subjective being; it is my psychic facilities and disposition. The spiritual self is the most enduring and intimate part of the self. It is that which we seem to *be.* The spiritual self is our core self. It is more central to our being than is the material or social self. It includes our ability to argue and to discriminate (nobody but James, having grown up in the family he did, would have included the ability to argue among the core attributes of the self), our moral sensibility, our conscience, and our will. It is these that are the relatively enduring attributes or constituents of self that make me, me. James goes on to say that if these attributes of self are altered, we are *alienated.* James is using *alienated* in its 19th-century medical sense; to become alienated in that sense means to become psychotic. Indeed, a psychiatrist was called an *alienist.* That is interesting in what it implies as a notion of mental illness. To become mentally ill, or at least psychotic, is to have one's core self, that which discriminates, evaluates, or acts, irreversibly altered. One thinks of James's description of his almost

"losing it," as the current argot would have it, during his terminal dream reported earlier. James points out that the traditional categories of the mind—judgment, perception, and so forth—are abstractions. Not so the spiritual self; it is concreteness itself, that which most gives me the sense of being me.

Concretely, to use James's term, the spiritual self is the "entire stream of our personal consciousness" (1890/1983, p. 284), or the present segment of it. The stream is concrete existence in time. It is Kant's "inner sense," the direct perception of the flow of time within. In *The Principles,* James's chapter "The Stream of Thought" immediately precedes the chapter "The Consciousness of Self." The notion of the stream of thought or, as it is better known, the *stream of consciousness,* is one of James's most widely disseminated and important contributions. The stream of personal consciousness has a unity of a particular kind. That unity is the *process* itself. As Alfred North Whitehead, who was in some ways James's disciple, put it, "the process is the reality." The continuity of the process is directly experienced just as is its discontinuity. Insofar as we are in contact with our spiritual selves, *we think of ourselves as thinkers* and we identify ourselves with *thoughts and thinking as such*, not with the objects of thought. James is here using *thought, think,* and *thinking* in the same way in which Descartes uses *cogito,* that is, to mean any mental activity whatever—thinking, feeling, sensing, doubting, affirming, and so forth. For James there is no separation of thought and thinker. On the contrary, they are one. James notes that *it thinks* has a grammatical structure parallel to the grammatical structure of *it rains,* and that there is no more need to postulate a thinker apart from thinking than to postulate a rainer apart from raining. James is not here denying the personal nature of thought, the "me-ness" of my thinking and of my experiencing of the stream of thought; on the contrary, he is affirming it. What he is denying is the duality of subject and object and the idea that there is some sort of substance or stuff called consciousness, to which or in which thoughts occur or adhere. Consciousness is a succession of thoughts— thinking itself, not some kind of *stuff* that undergoes modifications. There is no substrate of mental activity; there is only the activity itself; the thought and the thinker are one. James expanded the ideas implicit in this conceptualization of the stream of consciousness into an ontology he calls neutral monism (see below). The stream of consciousness is characterized by its flow, which is not even, and in which the immediate past is still part of the present segment of the stream, which also anticipates that which is about to follow. James's conceptualization of the stream of consciousness owes something to Locke's conceptualization of time as perpetually perishing. There are eddies and pools and rapids and dead waters within the

stream, and the qualitative experience of the flow can only imperfectly be captured by words. We all know what the experience is, but we can at best metaphorically allude to it, not directly communicate it.

James goes on to discuss what he calls the *subjective life,* which is characterized by *feelings of agency*. The portion of the stream felt by all people as the innermost center within the subjective life is the *self of all the other selves,* or, to put it differently, the core self (my term). The self of all selves is the active element in consciousness. It is "that Spiritual something that goes *out* to meet qualities and contents which seem to come in....*It is what welcomes or rejects."* It is the "home of interest," that within us "to which pleasure and pain speak." It is the "source of the will." The core self is somehow connected with "the process by which ideas or incoming sensations are 'reflected' or pass over into outward acts, ...a sort of junction at which sensory ideas terminate and from which motor ideas proceed, forming a kind of link between the two" (1890/1983, p. 285). This self-of-selves aspect of the spiritual self seems to reside between the afferent and the efferent, and in that way it shares some characteristics with Freud's ego, that part of the mind in his structural model that delays and decides. At the neurological level, the core self would appear to reside in the interneurons (those between the afferent and the efferent pathways).

Viewed not from within the stream nor from the experience of agency, the spiritual self can be defined somewhat differently as a "center around which experience accretes" (James, 1890/1983, p. 285); it is something permanent as opposed to changing, yet it changes and it is those changes. One might say that the flow of the spiritual self is slower than the flow of what it experiences, or at least that there is a feeling of ongoingness that is somehow the essence of the spiritual self. James maintains that all —except defenders of abstract philosophical systems—would agree that there is a central or core self around which experience accretes. But what is this core? The soul? An imaginary being denoted by the pronoun *I*? Or something in between the self as soul and the self as grammatical fiction? James responds to this by asking, "How does the central *nucleus* of the self *feel?*" (1890/1983, p. 286). For him the central part of the self is *felt*, which is consistent with his highlighting the affectivity of the material and social selves. The core self is not merely rational, nor is it the sum of our memories, nor is it the sound of the word *I*, but *par contra* something directly experienced. James is, here, flatly contradicting Hume, and he, like Hume, appeals to experience to validate his claim. But James's empiricism, at least in his eyes, is more thorough. It is a radical empiricism, an empiricism that examines experience completely without a priori assumptions such as the assumption that experience is intrinsically atomistic.

What James has to say about a direct sensible acquaintance with the central spiritual self is surprising. What he says is that acts of attending, ascertaining, negating, and so forth are felt as movements of something in the head. The "self of selves…consists mainly in the collection of these peculiar motions in the head or between the head and the throat," and "our feeling of spiritual activity is really a feeling of bodily activity whose exact nature is usually overlooked" (1890/1983, p. 288). So the self of selves is, as experienced, the sum total of usually unattended-to muscular tightenings around my Adam's apple that accompany my voluntary mental activities. A strange notion of the self, to say the least. It finds echoes in its general approach, if not in its particulars, in both Whitehead's insistence on "the 'withness' of the body" in all ideation, indeed in all experience, and in Freud's notion that "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego" (1923/1961, p. 26).

I find James unconvincing here. There are indeed proprioceptive sensations that accompany mental acts, but I can see no reason to maintain that they constitute my self of selves. But I can see that James is being shrewd in telling Hume that he is looking for the self in the wrong place. It isn't in the empty theater that doesn't exist, but it is part of my experience—an experience that James in his philosophical mode maintains is neither bodily nor mental, but something antecedent to both.

James's insistence on the bodily nature of the self or selves brings to mind James's theory of emotion. Known as the James-Lange (nobody knows who Lange is) theory of emotion, it maintains that we are sad because we cry and that we are happy because we smile, not the reverse. It is the proprioceptive feedback from our tears or our facial muscles in the smile that we interpret as the emotions of sadness and happiness. Intriguing as this is, it is probably wrong, or at least only part of the truth about emotions. The expression of emotion appears to be preprogrammed in all mammals and is primarily mediated by a part of the brain called the hypothalmus, while the experience of emotion is a limbic function, the limbic system being a subcortical region of the brain. Most probably there is a cognitive labeling of preprogrammed emotionality, which is, at least partially, learned. Emotional experience is partly an interpretation and not merely given by one's physiological state. James, of course, had theoretical reasons for putting forth this theory of emotions, but the affective source of this theory of affectivity resides in James's self-conscious striving to overcome his depression. He was one of the first to advocate "act as if" ("act as if you are happy and you will be happy"). Or as the Alcoholics Anonymous slogan has it, "Fake it until you make it." This is quintessentially Jamesian, and perhaps it is no accident that the founder of

Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill Wilson, was powerfully influenced by James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* and incorporated some of its conclusions into the Alcoholics Anonymous literature.

James also discusses what he calls the *nuclear self* another aspect of the spiritual self. The nuclear self is that intermediary between ideas and overt acts discussed above. It lives in the interneurons and the cortex. James speaks of two kinds of physiological acts: adjustments and executions. The nuclear self consists of the adjustments collectively considered. The adjustments are what meet what comes in. The executions are responses to incoming stimuli; they too are part of the self, but they are experienced as less intimate; they are the more shifting aspects of self. The nuclear self—our adjustments collectively considered—is the gatekeeper of the mind, whose activities necessarily accompany any mental activity, and is, in that sense, a constant. That is why it is a nucleus; it is always there, and this feeling is all that I know of self. Anything more said about the self is guesswork and metaphysical speculation.

For all the complexity of this theory of James's, its basic thrust is simple: it is radically empirical. It looks to experience to determine what experiences come branded with my brand and are experienced as me. James stresses this in his summary statement of his hierarchy of selves—material, social, and spiritual—in which the key notions are affect and agency: "The words ME and SELF, as far as they arouse feeling and connote emotional worth, are Objective designations—ALL The Things in the stream of consciousness which have the power to produce excitement of a particular sort" (1890/1983, p. 304).

There can be rivalry and conflict between the material, social, and spiritual selves. The degree of harmony or dissension between them is an empirical question, the answer to which varies from person to person and for the same person at different stages of his or her life. There is also rivalry between potential selves. There are many potential selves but only one can be actualized. There is a sense in which the self is chosen and created.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* James discusses in great detail and with exquisite specificity the "Divided Self, and the Process of Its Unification" (1902, pp. 163-185). He does this by using case material derived from both his own life and the writings of others. He is prescient in relating lack of integration of the self to psychopathology, but he refuses to be reductionistic and sees value and insight as well as pain in the divided self. His cures are religious cures, integration through belief and through

conversion experiences of various sorts.

Having described the constituents of the empirical self, James goes on to discuss *self-feeling* and *self-seeking* and *self-preservation*. There is no self without a feeling about that self. We always love or hate ourselves more or less. We experience both self-complacency and self-dissatisfaction. Our self-esteem has a baseline (high or low) and fluctuations from that baseline. In a neat formula, James says that self-esteem equals successes divided by pretensions, so that we can raise our self-esteem either by accruing successes or by lowering our pretensions. Self-seeking and self-preservation engender the feelings of anger and fear. Self-seeking includes the desire to be recognized and spiritual self-seeking as well as material self-seeking. I identify with my body, or any other aspect of self, because I love it, not vice versa; and if I love it, I seek to preserve it. This is much like Spinoza's notion of *conatus,* the striving of all living things to preserve themselves.

That brings us to *The Pure Ego.* The Pure Ego is the abstract "I think" which, like Kant's transcendental ego, must logically accompany every thought. It is also the source of our sense of personal identity. It is the judgment of sameness. The proposition "I am the same" is logically and epistemologically equivalent to the judgment "the desk is the same." A *subjective* synthesis is a bringing together in thought. An *objective* synthesis is an actual unity. Some sort of synthetic form is necessary to all thought. "Only a connected world can be known to be disconnected," reasons James, in perfect parallel to Kant's argument for the transcendental apperception of the ego. The sense of personal identity is an objective synthesis. I am the same self that I was yesterday. My feelings of bodily self and spiritual self (in subliminal muscle movements and in thought) have a characteristic warmth that experiences of the not-me lack; some experiences come with our own brand. Whatever resembles that which has the self-brand on it is ME. Because I have memory, indeed memories, of experience carrying my brand, I can determine what is self and what is not self.

The pure ego is the subjective synthesis of the stream of thought that is different at each instant, yet that each instant thereof is appropriated from the preceding thought. The present content of the stream contains the immediate past contents of the stream, which in turn contains its immediately past content, so that there is a sense in which the entire stream of my consciousness is a unity. "Each thought *hugs to itself* and adopts all that went before . . . stands as a representative of the entire stream" (1890/1983, p.

378). Furthermore, "If the passing thought be the directly verifiable existent that no school has hitherto doubted it to be, then *that thought is itself the thinker*" (1890/1983, p. 324). Therefore, I am unity. That is, if the stream of thought is unity, and I am the stream of thought, then I must be a subjective synthesis—a unity. The sense of personal identity, of the sameness of me at different times, is exactly like other perceptions of sameness between phenomena. Similarity is an attribute of continuity.

There is an "unbrokenness in the *stream of selves,"* but this unity does not preclude a plurality in the selves in other respects. How much unity there is in fact is an empirical question. Resemblance among the parts of a continuity of feelings (especially bodily feelings) experienced along with things widely different in all other regards then constitutes the real and verifiable personal identity that we feel. It is this sense of the continuity of the bodily experience, of the continuity of the stream of thought, and of the continuity of the experience of the central adjustments of the nuclear self that constitutes our personal identity; they are kernels to which the represented parts of the self are assimilated, accreted, and knit together.

James's stream of consciousness found literary embodiment in the works of writers as diverse as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Earlier novelists such as Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* had tried to depict Locke's and Hume's "association of ideas" in the sequence of thoughts occurring in their characters, but there is nothing comparable to Molly Bloom's stream of consciousness soliloquy in Joyce's *Ulysses* before James.

William James described himself as a "metaphysical democrat"; he wished to exclude no aspect of experience from his psychologizing and philosophizing. He is also a democratic self theorist, so inclusive that he becomes prolix and at times confusing. But what he sees is the case: our experience of self is enormously complex; it does include material, social, and what he calls spiritual aspects. Some experiences *do* come stamped "mine," and some do not. The central experiences of self are primarily affective. The experience of agency is central to the selfexperience. Each moment of experience does, in some sense, incorporate and represent all past experience, and in this way forges a unity of—synthesizes—my experiences. The degree of integration of the plurality of my selves isn't determined a priori, and it is indeed an empirical question. Finally, the experience of discontinuity does presume continuity.

William James is identified with two important philosophical doctrines: neutral monism and pragmatism. The first is a metaphysical or ontological theory, the second a theory of truth. Neutral monism is the conclusion he draws from his radical empiricism. It is the doctrine that there is only one kind of stuff in the world, which James calls *experience* and which can be organized in such a way that it is experienced by us as material; alternatively, it can be organized in such a way that it is experienced by us as mental or spiritual. He gives the example paint, which is material in the tube and spiritual in the painting and yet the same paint. In "Does Consciousness Exist?" he demolishes the notion that consciousness is a thing, some kind of stuff, different from material stuff. What it is is one way of organizing the only stuff there is. James is, here, the heir of Spinoza with his doctrine of one substance, Nature or God, having infinite attributes of which we can only know two, thought and extension. But Spinoza is a strict determinist, and in many ways his system is static; not so James's. For James, the universe is a multiverse open to novelty, with an infinitude of nodal points within it that can be experienced as either mind or matter.

Pragmatism is James's theory of truth. It says roughly that if it makes me happy and doesn't hurt anyone else, it is true. He views beliefs as instruments, the truth value of which is determined by their consequences. "By their fruits ye shall know them" is a sentiment with which James would wholeheartedly agree. James came upon pragmatism when he realized that metaphysically ultimate questions are rationally unanswerable, so that we are free to choose our beliefs. Given that, why not choose the ones that bring happiness? In a characteristically American way, James asks, "What is the cash value of a belief?" In an important sense, James is uninterested in whether or not God exists; what he is interested in is whether or not belief in God brings happiness. Pragmatism is a formalization of his own path out of his neurasthenia. It has obvious difficulties as a theory of truth. James divided thinkers into "the soft minded and the tough minded." He is both, but in his theory of truth he was clearly among the tender minded.

I will close my discussion of William James by quoting a letter he wrote to his wife not long after their marriage (James, 1920/1980, p. 109):

> I have often thought that the best way to define a man's character would be to seek out the particular mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive. At such moments there is a voice inside which speaks and says.

"This is the real me!"...Now as well as I can describe it, this characteristic attitude in me always involves an element of active tension, of holding my own, as it were, and thrusting outwards things to perform their part so as to make it a full harmony, but without any *guaranty* that they will. Make it a guaranty—and the attitude immediately becomes to my consciousness stagnant and stingless. Take away the guaranty and I feel (provided I am *uberhaupt* in vigorous condition) a sort of deep enthusiastic bliss, a bitter willingness to do and suffer anything, which translates itself physically by a kind of stinging pain inside my breast-bone (don *7* smile at this— it is to me an essential element of the whole thing!), and which, although it is a mere mood or emotion to which I can give no form in words, authenticates itself to me with the deepest principle of all active and theoretic determination which I possess.