

# “James’ Pure Experience and the Creative Potential of the Metaxy”

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The elucidation of the creative potential William James’ of ‘pure experience’<sup>1</sup> as an instance of that of the *metaxy* will be undertaken in this paper from the perspective of Eric Voegelin’s explanation of “equivalency of experience and symbolization in history”.<sup>2</sup> Hence a preliminary definition of the basic notions of pure experience and the *metaxy* will begin this essay----with the comprehensive explanations of them to follow in the body of the text. Also, the definition of Voegelin’s “equivalence of experience” will be provided in these introductory remarks because this idea is the methodological one for my study. Finally, it should also be noted that the topic of my research is concentrated on the higher order, open-ended intelligent and conscious capabilities of human beings that excited the attention of both Plato and William James. Hence the emphasis will be on the discovery of the talent of intuitive intelligence with a minimum investigation of discursive abilities of human reason.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William James, “Does Consciousness Exist?” in *William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, edited , with an Introduction and New Preface by John J. McDermott, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 163-183. This essay, reprinted from *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, pp. 1-38, contains a comprehensive articulation and rationale for James’ notion of ‘pure experience’.

<sup>2</sup>Eric Voegelin, “Equivalences of Experience and Symbolizations in History” in Eric Voegelin, *Published Essays*, C.W. 12, edited with an Introduction by Ellis Sandoz, (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), pp. 115-133.

<sup>3</sup>.This differentiation in our understanding of our ability to reason is very well articulated by the scholastics by the terms *intellectus* and *ratio*. See Josef Pieper, “Philosophical Education and Intellectual Labor”, in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, edited by Berthold Wald, translated by Roger Wasserman (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), pp. 14-15. And of course Plato makes an equivalent distinction between *episteme* and *dianoia*.

Pure experience points to “reality of the consciousness of participation”, . . . [it] is the something that can be put into the context either of the subject’s stream of consciousness or of objects in the external world”. James’ insight is that the something that lies between the subject and object of participation in an event of truth is the experience.<sup>4</sup> The *metaxy* is an experienced event also. This event includes the differentiation of the field of noetic consciousness. “The ‘thing’ that is called man discovers itself as having consciousness; and as a consequence, it discovers man’s consciousness as the area of reality in which the process of reality becomes luminous to itself.” It is also experienced as an in-between of knowledge and ignorance.<sup>5</sup> Each of these symbols, pure experience and *metaxy*, signifies the inadequacy of the subject/object dichotomy as a possible seed bed of cognition in which---somehow---the mind inside cognizes the physical world outside. Rather the experienced event is of a mediating “place” in which the truth of reality is articulating itself.<sup>6</sup> One must add the caveat, that this event of truth behind these symbols is not a concept or possession of the mind; it is the insight of the mind into itself as an active searching openness, or “in erotic tension” toward reality in all its mystery.<sup>7</sup>

The philosophical investigations into the basic structures of reality by William James and the Greek philosophers are searches driven by different concerns, circumstances and contexts. Moreover even a casual perusal of James’ writings will show how much he opposed Plato’s

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<sup>4</sup>Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections: Revised Edition with a Voegelin Glossary and Cumulative Index*, CW 34, edited with Introduction by Ellis Sandoz (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2006), p. 168.

<sup>5</sup>Eric Voegelin, *Order and History IV: Ecumenic Age* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), p. 177.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.* p. 186.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 178.

“intellectualism”. The thesis of this paper, however, is that the respective symbols created by James and the classic philosophers represent an equivalency in the generating experiences behind the philosophic articulation that is their mutual esteem for the open ended cognitive possibilities of reason. These experiences and the symbols are essential. Why? It is because the “constants engendering such experiences” that have been mutually recognized and named by the Plato and James are themselves the source of each philosopher’s profound conviction vis-a-vis the creative potential for truth endowing human reason. Hence in a general way, my thesis deals with the fact of the richness of expanding insight that will be ours through the investigation of the philosophical search throughout history into the intelligibility of all reality infallibly available to the knower. This is so even in the case of such diverse philosophers as the classic Greeks and nineteenth and twentieth century pragmatists, represented by Plato and William James.

As a disclaimer I must first write that in his essay on this subject Voegelin asserts that there are really no “constants” in such philosophical history. There is only a renewal and differentiation of truth, hence, “a constancy of a process that leaves a trail of equivalent symbols in time and space”.<sup>8</sup> The many-ness of symbols makes up philosophic history. The ‘many’ itself is a symbol emerging in the process of reality in which the philosophies of Plato and James are importantly a part. But it is true that there can be a feeling of recognition when exploring diverse symbols and tracing their engendering experiences of the constants of existence. What happens is that the experiences of the constants of existence or its truths for each generation in history is one of emergent truth confronting a previous truth which we try articulate in this

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<sup>8</sup>Voegelin, “Equivalences”, p. 132.

language of equivalences.

Voegelin writes, “the equivalence as an immediate experience is to be found only at the point where two symbolisms confront each other in the presence of the process”<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, Voegelin affirmed Aristotle’s conviction that “a truth concerning the reality of man found by one man concretely does, indeed, apply to every man”. Also, the culminating insights of unfolding truth confronting more compact truth in the exegesis of engendering experiences in time has a character of wholeness as an experience according to Voegelin---in a way reminiscent of James’ ideas on “pure experience”.<sup>10</sup> Hence, there is amply justification for the attempt in this paper to compare and contrast “pure experience” and the *metaxy* despite their diversity as symbols.

James also has written, in his own unique philosophical style, about both the value and the complexity in the comparative confrontation that seeks out equivalency in human experiences. Thus his ideas complement and support the method of employing equivalency to discover ‘constants’. First, he insists there are no same experiences that can be found among human beings. “Experiences come on an enormous scale”, he writes, “and if we take them all together, they come in a chaos of incommensurable relations that we can not straighten out. . . . [and] a feeling is only as it is felt”<sup>11</sup>. But one experience can be felt in two divergently different ways at once, “as yours, namely and as mine. It is, indeed ‘mine’ only as it is felt as mine, and ‘yours’ only as it is felt as yours”.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, he postulates the wholeness of confronting

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>11</sup>James, in McDermott, “How Two Minds Can Know One Thing”, p. 231.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

experiences in time. “A pure experience can be postulated with any amount whatever of span or field. If it exert the retrospective and appropriative function on any other piece of experience, the latter thereby enters into its own conscious stream”. He also writes, “[A]ccordingly if, millions of years later, a similarly retrospective experience should anyhow come to birth, my present thought would form a genuine portion of its long-span conscious life”.<sup>13</sup>

To make a final summation, Voegelin turns to Aristotle to support his views on the equivalency of symbols and engendering experience. The latter believed that “the symbolisms that appear in the philosopher’s dialogues are equivalent in spite of their phenotypical differences because they express the same reality in various modes of compactness and differentiation”.<sup>14</sup>. Aristotle first articulated this equivalency as wonder as a general human possibility. This wonder disturbs everyman’s existence and the reality is the same for the search it provokes.<sup>15</sup> My thesis is, however, that the “constant in the process of reality” is one of wonder’s inner movement in consciousness: of the Question which is a call, human response of the loving search, simultaneously being informed by a second divine illuminating response. Hence the experiences we will look for in this paper will not only be wonder but the revelatory response which answers it, which Voegelin has named the “luminosity” of reality for its truth. In the comparison of the symbols of the *metaxy* and “pure experience” the experience and expression of this movement is shown to be endlessly different throughout its pluralistic, linguistic thread in the many forms of articulation that have carried it through time.

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<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.* p. 191.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

With these preliminary remarks concluded I can address the first part of my thesis. It is that pure experience and the *metaxy* are symbols arising from two very different contexts in the history of systematic reflection by philosophers, yet they do represent recognizably equivalent experiences of reality. That they do so strengthens James' very idea of 'pure experience'. I will present this first part of my thesis in the comprehensive exploration to identify both symbols. One does ask, what is the *metaxy*? What is pure experience? The first step then will be to answer that question, but it is extremely important to remember that these notions are symbolic and not to be explained in a literal manner.

The second point in my thesis is that both the *metaxy* and pure experience, despite their many meanings which do not come together at all, do reveal a constant in human experience which such words as participation, in-Between", dynamic movement within consciousness, and "relations" in time speak to, that can be exegetically uncovered. I will summarize as the "constant" in the experience of truth as an event, the insight that both James and Plato bring to cognitional theory, one that is completely different than those theories dependent upon a subject/object differentiation—one rather of the unified property of the whole of reason. The human nous depends upon both faith and reason, *intellectus* and *ratio*, *episteme* and *dianoia* then; and also we will see the importance both philosophers attribute to memory.

So yes, the systematic philosophical reflection on these experiences and symbols does break out into a very creative diversity of terms and explanations. One can point to the Greek discussion of *nous* in contrast to James' introduction of the notion of taking an experience "twice over". The Greek philosophy will talk about the experience of existence as its tension stretching out to the Beginning and the Beyond. James will doxologize on the "warmth and intimacy" of a

pluralistic universe. At this point the ideas of pure experience and the *metaxy* may seem to be completely foreign and unrelated terms. And they must be determined differently when interpreted precisely.

But nonetheless, my conclusion will be, that despite these context produced divergence in meanings, pure experience and the *metaxy* are symbols which equally mirror the creative discovery by humanity of the fecund intelligibility of reality—including reality beyond our five physical senses—and the measureless possibilities of human reason in turn to fully encounter and cognize the plethoric spectrum of what is real in a process that is an experienced participation with the illuminating source of truth itself. Finally, although one must properly described the discovery of the constants in such experiences by human beings of their very own reason in dynamic operation as mystic, it is a mysticism demanded of everyone for the full flourishing of creative potential of both the place of the *metaxy* and of pure experience in cognition.

In sum, while William James has written about the fortuity of novelty when the mind is welcoming open to the full experiences available to us in his tenet of “radical empiricism,”<sup>16</sup> the Greek philosophers describe an area of reality experienced by human reason that lies in-between the *Aperion* and the Unlimited. These are entirely different philosophical writings which at first hardly invite comparison. Nonetheless the particular expressions of each point to an equivalence of experience. In this essay I will begin first with a definition of the Greek understandings of the *metaxy* and the experiences which have engendered this symbol before examining pure experience as it arises from James’ experiences of radical empiricism and a pluralistic universe.

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<sup>16</sup>McDermott, “Introduction”, pp.xxxi-xxxii,

The reason for this is that the Greek philosophers' full and mature elaboration on *metaleptic* reality is paradigmatic; it provides the foundational precedents for philosophic understanding of humanity's participation in "in-between" reality. Voegelin names their discoveries "the noetic differentiation of consciousness".<sup>17</sup> Philosophers who have experienced, reflected upon, and articulated equivalent experiences of this character of existence have not done so as fully or comprehensively as their Greek forerunners. For example, Voegelin writes about Augustine's movement of *amor Dei* and his investigation of the intermingling of the city of God and of earth as a limited or incomplete experience of the *metaxy*, the historical one.<sup>18</sup>

Voegelin's exegesis of the writings of the Greek philosophers, including several Platonic dialogues—"The Symposium", "Philebus", "Theaetetus"—in his book *Ecumenic Age*, is a valuable source of insights for a definition of the *metaxy* and I will reference his explanations here.<sup>19</sup> As we have seen, there are two words which translate the root words behind the term *metaxy*: the first is participation, the second is in-between. For Plato, the *metaxy* is a symbol for human awareness of existence as always in tension toward divine reality. Humans participate in a flux of divine presence that has an eschatological direction. Thus we live out our lives in the divine/human in-between; it is an area of reality encountered within our

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<sup>17</sup>Eric Voegelin, "Reason: The Classic Experience", in *Anamnesis*, translated and edited by Gerhart Niemeyer (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1978), pp. 89-115. One can read a complete discussion of the noetic differentiation of consciousness and the discovery of reason by the Greek philosophy in this essay.

<sup>18</sup>*Ecumenic Age*, p. 172. Also in *Autobiographical Reflections*, Voegelin writes that Plato has much vaster analysis of the experiences we are investigating and that he "invented" the symbol, *metaxy* to signify them. See CW 34, p. 168.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 2-39, 171-211.



consciousness.<sup>20</sup> If we try to explore this reality we discover that the limits of this in-between are experiential. They are noetic height and aperi-notic depth—we cannot imagine beyond these limits. So in *Philebus* Plato provides the differentiation of the mystery of being as existence between the One and the Unlimited. (16c-17a) The *metaxy* can be defined as the area in-between, that is the domain of human knowledge, in which the One changes over into the many and the Unlimited into the limited. It is the area of ‘form’ and ‘number’. The proper method of its investigation, because it keeps before the mind this in-between, participative characteristic, is dialectics.<sup>21</sup> The existence of the *metaxy* also affirms the necessary mediation that can only be provided by human spiritual powers if there is to any converse by humanity with beyond human reality.<sup>22</sup> This is because it is “half way between” as spiritual, in which the upward human movement is met by the downward divine answers.<sup>23</sup> The experience of the *metaxy* is also a coming to know of an “area of reality” within, or rather is a progression of consciousness.<sup>24</sup>

In sum, Voegelin writes that the *metaxy* is “the area of reality in which the cosmic process becomes luminous for its meaning”. Aristotle also has clarified the meaning of this symbol, he employs the term, “*metaleptic* reality”. Of course, in Aristotle’s definition one detects the analysis by reason that marks his corpus already underway. We wrote above that the

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<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 189, also pp. 2-11..

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>23</sup>“For God with man does not mingle, . . . only through the mediation of spiritual powers can man . . . converse with the gods”. Symposium, 202e-203a in *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 188.

emphasis in this paper is on the *intellectus*, but such an emphasis is not meant to denigrate or deny the theoretic exegency of discursive reason. Wonder is served by ratio and Aristotle's philosophy is the paradigmatic example of this fact. So Aristotle delineates consciousness as the "area of reality" where the divine intellect moves human reason to take up a search for the ground in a carefully analyzed process that insists that divine and human participate in one another. "Thought (*nous*) thinks itself through participation (*metalepsis*) in the object of thought (*noeton*); for it becomes the object of thought (*noetos*) through being touched and thought, so that thought (*nous*) and that which is thought (*noeton*) are the same."<sup>25</sup> . *Metalepsis* is the symbol pointing to the mutual participation in the process of this search becoming "luminous"; it also signifies that this event belongs to the realm of the *metaxy* or *metaleptic* reality.<sup>26</sup>

So what are the predominant experiences generating this creation of the symbol of the *metaxy*—in plain language. The first of course is questioning, searching wonder. This of course points to experience of the world around us and inside of us and all the mystery of it—both tragic and glorious. The quest leads to experiences of the mediating in-between of this two-pronged world and the mystery, linguistically taken hold of in the notions of the hidden depths and the noetic heights of existence. There is also an experience of time and timelessness, a discovery attributed to "Anaximandrian insight"<sup>27</sup> because things in reality emerge in a cosmic process from the depths and then after a time disappear into the *Aperion* again. Nothing exists of itself but rather as the ground to which all return. The character of the process in time is an in-

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<sup>25</sup> 1072b20ff, in *Ibid.* p. 190

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 190-91.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 176.

between one whose horizons are the timeless *arche* of things. The movement is in-between life and death.

Finally, there is a dawning awareness, Voegelin attributes to the Ionian Greeks, of the noetic consciousness as the field, itself belonging to the structure of reality, in which the process of reality is discovered, or rather becomes in a participative characteristic, “luminous to itself”. The completion, but only to repeat itself over and over again, of the movement that starts with the provocation by the mystery of in-between reality, a “call”, stimulating the posture of search as the response, to the second responding participative experience of luminosity revealing truth informing the search, is a fundamental character of the experience of the *metaxy*. There are other language symbols that the Greek philosophers articulate to fully understand the *metaxy*. The *Psyche* is the site of conscious participation in reality, the Depth is its dimension pregnant with new insights, the *Nous* is the faculty for apperceptive participation in the process. Philosophy is the name given to whole movement which is a love of wisdom as the call to the search for truth.<sup>28</sup>

As an experience of cognition, the Greek explanation of the intelligibility of the world and reason’s intelligent power to engage it that arises from an exegesis of the symbol of the *metaxy* could not be more different than our contemporary epistemologies, hemmed in on all sides by the subject/object dichotomy. Voegelin writes, “truth is not an information about reality but the event in which the process of reality becomes luminous to itself. It is . . . an insight arising from the dialogue when it ‘dialectically’ investigates its own suspense “between

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 177.

knowledge and ignorance”.<sup>29</sup> In another language—of the scholastics--- I could paraphrase this: it is the unified insight achieved through a healthy reason that is whole with both its *intellectus* and its *ratio* engaged. Voegelin contrasts the contemporary conception of knowledge, which makes the cognitive relation a contrapositive one between humans and things in the world, with the one of “experience articulating itself”. The latter is the ‘constant’ paradigm for cognition of truth. The truth is assured because it is not some person’s formulated idea, but rather “the dialogue in one man’s soul’ is an event in *metaxy*, the area of reality where one has ‘converse’ with the divine ground of the process that is common to all men”.

We should ask: how does this “experience articulating itself” become “dialectically” investigated in the “dialogue” within the *Metaxy*? The answer after all is the practical how of knowing that is Plato’s insight into human cognition. As we wrote before Plato distinguishes between the many forms of human intellection. We wrote about *episteme*, true knowledge and *dianoia*, discursive knowledge. For Plato there is also a hierarchy in knowing. Why? There is the process of reality and hence, the world of becoming and there is *aletheia*, the world of essence. Intelligible reality encountered in its truth by *episteme* is the experience articulating itself within the *metaxy*, and we can call this illuminating event a vision. So for Plato there is both a vision of the *nous* as well as the direct contact of a sense “vision” by the five senses of the physical world. The first form of vision is knowledge which knows reality as it is.<sup>30</sup> For Plato’s thesis is that “the range of human experience [includes] what is seen by the eyes and what is seen

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>30</sup>See the discussion of this in its fundamental form in the *Republic*, 477b.

by the mind.”<sup>31</sup> The latter is *episteme*; for the scholastics it was the work of *intellectus*.

Plato has a very comprehensive and complete explanation of knowledge that is progressively presented in his dialogues with all the different forms of intellection: *episteme*, *dianoia*, *pistis*, *techne*, and as well as the unreliable forms of knowledge, i.e., *eikesia*. A basic and very simple explanation of how we know<sup>32</sup> would be that there must be the ascent of *episteme* and its vision of the forms. This ascent brings luminosity to the mind and its insight into the intelligibility of reality.<sup>33</sup> Then in the descent our mundane knowing will hold this vision with *pistis* (fully formed faith). Faith in the dual sense of vision and opinion submitted to *dianoia*, or the discursive giving of an account then becomes cognition.<sup>34</sup> It’s reliability for reaching truth is assured both by faith in the power of the *nous* to encounter the intelligibility of reality and secondly in the rigor of the dialogue and dialectics in the “giving of the account”.

Plato has elaborated a doctrine of remembrance or anamnesis that explains the ascent. His “myth of anamnesis” explores the divine appeal that compels the wondering search with its accompanying luminosity recognized in anamnesis. Socrates’ ascent to the vision of the Good,

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<sup>31</sup>Diskin Clay, *Platonic Questions: Dialogues with the Silent Philosopher* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), pp. 232-233.

<sup>32</sup>There is no more place in this paper to explain Plato’s cognitional theory than there is to take up the controversy of James and panpsychism. I recommend Diskin Clay’s book, (# 31) and Voegelin’s “Aquinas Lectures. See Eric Voegelin, “The Beginning and the Beyond” in *What is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings*, CW 28, edited with an Introduction by Thomas A. Hollweck and Paul C. Carlingella. (Baton Rouge and London: LSU Press, 1990), pp. 173-232.

<sup>33</sup>This is the meaning of the myth of the creation of the cosmos by the demiurge in *The Timaeus*: see particularly, 45a -48e. The truth which is visible to God is also the likeness available to the logos of the human being who has a participative share in that truth. See Eric Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, pp. 249-250.

<sup>34</sup>The *Theaetetus*, 201d, The *Timaeus*, 29c.

(the *agathon*) in the Republic 508-418 is a famous as well as a complete depiction of the ascent. An example of Plato's doctrine of "yearning and recollection" can be found in *Phaedrus* 247a-e.

In the case of the dialogue within the *nous* it is discursive reason which is at work. The dialogue is a conversation (*logos*) within the metaxy the soul pursues with itself concerning the matter for its thinking. It involves an asking of questions, giving answers, denying and asserting. In the conclusion there is a judgment. The dialectics is the art of making distinctions. It is a mode of inquiry through the constructive exchange of thoughts and answering questions.<sup>35</sup> Because for Plato discursive thinking is the movement up to "first principles" or beginnings, or towards whatever is prior to everything else, the giving of account for *episteme* or *pistis* must be retrospective.<sup>36</sup> Hence, memory or recollection is equally important to the discursive method of analysis which exegetes the participative vision in the *metaxy*. The importance of memory as a condition of possibility for cognition is a theme that will become equally and centrally important—but for an entirely different rationale—in the James' description of cognition. This is why I have included the immediate discussion.

James' definitive exposition of pure experience can be found in his essay, "Does Consciousness Exist?"<sup>37</sup> He will conclude in a second essay, "The Notion of Consciousness" that consciousness does not exist<sup>38</sup>, at least not as a substantial entity as it has been so ordinarily

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<sup>35</sup>The Soliloquies of St. Augustine which are Augustine's inner dialogue with his own reason is an example.

<sup>36</sup>Stephen Menn, "Plato and the Method of Analysis", *Phronesis* XLVII/3 (2002), pp. 194-222.

<sup>37</sup>McDermott, pp. 169-183.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 194.

understood. Since the *metaxy* has been defined as “an area of reality within consciousness” and as the site of noetic consciousness, the incongruity of these two symbols does seem glaring. Could there ever be any two notions more inconsistent or discordant? Nonetheless, the notion of consciousness that James rejects is quite similar to the psychologized phantasy of a world immanent psyche that Voegelin claims is a corruption of the symbol of the *metaxy*.<sup>39</sup> A perennial problem that James found in modern philosophy was the problem of the unbridgeable gap between subject (inside, thoughts) and object (outside, things). Hence he believed that the theories defining consciousness as an entity rather than consciousness as a function, or as a “epistemological necessity” employed to facilitate a logical correlate within the mind with the world outside, were entirely erroneous. This definition of consciousness makes it one element or factor “of an experience of essentially dualistic inner constitution, from which, if you abstract the content, the consciousness will remain revealed to its own eye”. . . . [his] contention is exactly the reverse of this.”<sup>40</sup> Consciousness to James, then, is a “fictitious entity”. Rather, “thoughts in the concrete are real. But thoughts in the concrete are made of the same stuff as things are”.<sup>41</sup>

James begins to explain his idea of pure experience with a supposition that there is only one primal stuff”. Of course James is not giving a metaphysics of physical being here, and he clarifies this identification of pure experience with primal stuff by asserting that “there is no general stuff of which experience at large is made. There are as many stuffs as there are ‘natures’ in the things experienced. If you ask what any one bit of pure experience is made of,

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<sup>39</sup>*Ecumenic Age*, p. 197.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 171-172

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 183.

the answer is always the same: ‘It is made of that’.<sup>42</sup> Pure experience is simply a collective name for the multiple sensitive natures as well as for time, space and even being. As such it has no universal element of which it is made, basically because it is a functional notion.<sup>43</sup>

James has taken over Shadworth Hodgson’s distinction between pure “thatness” and the whatness of thought. But, as Voegelin writes, while for Hodgson “thatness” and “whatness” pinpointed act and object in what remains dualistic, James has the single bond of pure experience as the origin or reference point of knowing. It is only when pure experience has flown over thatness back to the past and to reflection does it turn into whatness.<sup>44</sup> Hence, first there is pure experience in complete simplicity, then it will break out into separate and different forms as knower and known. He writes, “[T]he peculiarity of our experiences, that they not only are, but are known, which their ‘conscious’ quality is invoked to explain, is better explained by their relations—their relations being experiences—to one another”.<sup>45</sup> (author’s emphasis). So James does recognize the reality of consciousness, but it is entirely re-defined; it “connotes a kind of external relation” and not some entity or way of being.

One can find the seeds of James’ notion of pure experience in his earlier work in psychology. First, James had argued extensively that thought was continuous through substantive resting moments (perchings) and longer transitive ones (flights). The former represent terminal points in which a particular line of thought becomes completed in a judgment.

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<sup>42</sup>James, “Does Consciousness Exist?”, p. 179.

<sup>43</sup>James writes “words stand for a function not an entity”, *Ibid.*, p. 170

<sup>44</sup>Eric Voegelin, *The Form of the American Mind* CW 1, trans. By Ruth Hein., edited by Jurgen Gebhardt and Barry Cooper, (Baton Rouge and London: LSU Press, 1995), p. 31.

<sup>45</sup>“Does Consciousness Exist?”, p. 178



The latter will consist of all the relations among thoughts (of affinity and opposition), and is marked by the quiet fringes of one thought giving away to the full volumed thought in the present moment that becomes the fringe of the next thought. Hence, James posited “the stream of thought” with a “plasticity” of structure that was weak enough to yield but strong enough to be gotten hold of.<sup>46</sup>

Secondly, James had developed a full and mature theory of memory as the direct experience of the past.<sup>47</sup> Memory for James is a form of non-sensory perception and not “a faculty of the soul” that gives us a power to recall.<sup>48</sup> Hence, as with all sensations, we experience a particular memory consciously if we are attuned and attentive. The immediate flux of life was a psychological fact to James, the present moment itself and could never be known until it was ‘dead and gone’.<sup>49</sup> This “darkest moment in the flow”<sup>50</sup>—the law of discontinuous succession in time of percepts to which we cannot easily attend to at once, that require the feeling of duration---already recognized by James the psychologist, will become the thatness of pure experience available to memory to become a whatness in the twice taken over process.

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<sup>46</sup>William James, “The Stream of Thought” in McDermott, pp. 43-74.

<sup>47</sup>Marcus P. Ford, “William James”, in *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy*, (State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 94.

<sup>48</sup>William James, *Talks to Teachers* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1906), p. 117.

<sup>49</sup>William James, *Principles of Psychology*, p. 341.

<sup>50</sup>James asserts the immediate moment is sensed by our “primary memory” and it is a sensation of time; it is “dark—what we do sense is its duration of what he calls, “the specious present” so that the only fact of our immediate experience is this specious present. “In short, the practically cognized present is no knife-edge, but a saddle back, with a certain breadth of its own in which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions. The unit of composition of our perception of time is a duration, with a bow and a stern, as it were—a rearward and forward-looking end. *Principles*, pp. 609, 636..

Thus James had already investigated and resolved issues involving time and duration. So he could posit a theory of pure experience, in which the relationship of knowledge to its object could occur outside the simplest unit of the present moment in a subsequent reflection because he understood “extensity” in time.<sup>51</sup>

There are several places in James’ writing in which he attempts to clarify his ideas on pure experience in which he introduces the term “relations”. So he writes, “knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter. The relation itself is part of pure experience, one of its terms becomes the subject or bearer of knowledge, the knower, and the other becomes the object known”.<sup>52</sup> The relations make up the whole that is pure experience then which is ever a process (in time) in which the object forever turns subject which turns into our apprehension of the object.<sup>53</sup> In other words it is experience itself which makes up the relations; the relation is in-between the experiences themselves. The immediate field of the present is where he spots pure experience. It is only vertically or potentially either object or subject by becoming something represented or becoming a representing thought in a later relational moment. In this immediate field it should be characterized as “unqualified actuality”.<sup>54</sup>

There are two explanatory points I can make on pure experience articulated as

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<sup>51</sup>The vocabulary is Bergsonian. “There is no sensation without extensity.” Bergson quotes James as a source for this statement using the words, “feeling of volume”. Henri Bergson, *Memory and Matter*, trans. By N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 217.

<sup>52</sup>James, “Does Consciousness Exist?”, p. 170.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

“relations”. The first James is making an argument against Descartes and the whole tradition which explains cognition founded on Cartesian doubt. Descartes “defined thought as the absolutely un-extended”, James writes.<sup>55</sup> But in his work on memory James had already fully validated extension in thought—and he insists “that of every extended object the *adequate* mental picture must have all the extension of the object itself”. The relations in this extension are different of course. Space makes the extents in the physical world carry themselves adversely and exclude each other but in the inner world the order is loose. But the two worlds differ by the relations of the extensions which in both worlds exist. This is easily affirmed if we consider relations not only from the perspective of space but also from that of time. Experience molds us every hour, James had written, and makes our minds a mirror of the time and space connections between the things of the world. The order of experience in this time/space conjunction of things is the cause of the forms of our thoughts.

I had mentioned above that pure experience is a functional rather than a metaphysical postulate. However, James does write about pure experiences as ‘real’ in every sense this can mean. And this is my second point. His thesis about pure experience is that everything real must be experienced somewhere.<sup>56</sup> And he will add every kind of thing must somewhere be real. So James understands pure experience to be an event of truth. In that dark moment of its simplicity, before any doubling retrospective reflection of it in a second experience, pure experience is always truth, practical truth ready for the cognitive action — truth in its own

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<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 180. The paragraph elaborates this idea.

<sup>56</sup>James, “The Experience of Activity”, p/ 279.

moment. It would be absolute truth if the world ended.<sup>57</sup> It is the real fact somewhere then. At this point pure experience is also a methodological postulate also. James writes, “nothing can be admitted as fact, . . . except what can be experience at some definite time by some experient; and for every feature of fact ever so experienced, a definite place must be found somewhere in the final system of reality”.<sup>58</sup>

The question that must be addressed at this point is the methodological one ordering my paper and that is, can any equivalences of experience be found between James’ replete symbol that is pure experience and those we have associated with the metaxy? The two topics, books of essays really, in which James explores the particulars of experiences associated with his theory of pure experience are *Essays in Radical Empiricism* and *The Pluralistic Universe*. Hence, some general identification of these two uniquely Jamesian ideas will be presented initially. However, we have already given some plainly spoken names to experiences associated with and important to the definition of the constants in the Plato’s metaxy. Hence it is necessary to look for and elaborate on these particular experiences that we have named: participative reality, the movements of call, responding quest and illuminating response, the In-Between, experiences of death and life and the process of reality in time.

James defines his idea of radical empiricism in the essay, “A World of Pure Experience”.<sup>59</sup> He writes that radical empiricism is his worldview, *Weltanschauung*, and it is one that is formed in opposition to rationalism and is exigency to create systems and think in

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<sup>57</sup>James, “Does Consciousness Exist?”, p. 178.

<sup>58</sup>James, “The Experience of Activity”, p. 279.

<sup>59</sup>McDermott, pp. 195-214.

terms of universals and abstraction. His way of doing philosophy will in contrast be one that “starts with the parts and makes the whole a being of the second order. It is a “mosaic philosophy”. And it is radical because it refuses to admit into its construction any element that is not directly experienced or to exclude any element that is experienced. A real place in reasoning must be found for everything that is experienced.

So basically, while James pays close attention to the things in space he also gives equal attention to what makes up experiences in time. For James that is the relations that connect experience. He writes, “*the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system.*”<sup>60</sup> (Author’s emphasis) In sum, James writes elsewhere that radical empiricism is the postulate that the terms in philosophical debate must be definable experientially. Second, the fact is that relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive are matters of direct experience. And finally, the directly apprehended universe does not depend on the help of trans-empirical categories, “but possesses in its own right a concatenated or continuous structure”.<sup>61</sup>

What are the relations? They happen in different degrees of intimacy James writes. The most external is “being with” but then there are simultaneity and the time-interval, relations of distance, likeness and difference, change, tendency, resistance, the organization of the Self as a system of memories, strivings, fulfilments or disappointments—all becoming more intimate with the “co-conscious transition by which one experience passes into another when both belong to

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid. p 195.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

the same Self as an example of great intimacy.<sup>62</sup> The relations we experience may be conjunctive or disjunctive but are always continuous; there is a continuity of experience that itself is one of our experiences. Hence, “every examiner of the sensible life *in concreto* must see that relations of every sort, of time, space, difference, likeness, change, rate, cause, or what not, are just as integral members of the sensational flux as terms are.”<sup>63</sup> Hence James writes that knowledge of sensible realities, the only knowledge found valid by “positivists”, still must come to life “inside the tissue of experience”.<sup>64</sup> This is a significant statement. James recognizes and insists on the equal value of the non-sensory percepts, then, to the sensory ones in thinking. All are actual experiences belonging to the same subject and in the “loose world “of the mind there is an open-ended possibility for such experiences.

Can we find some equivalency of experience between these radical empiricist positions of James and the Greek philosophers on metaleptic reality. A careful reading shows they are there. First, there is the notion of reality as being a process in time. As we have seen, he speaks of both the experience of the sensational flux as well as the stream of thought even though the span on consciousness with its “darkest” present moment is too short to grasp the collectivity. But this experience itself is an “in-between” one. The concepts of oneness and manyness do not have to exclude each other, James writes, if we look to the more primitive flux of the (full—radical empiricist’s) sensational life for reality’s true shape. “The concrete pulses of experience appear pent in by no such definite limits as our conceptual substitutes for them are

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<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 201.

confined by. They run into one another continuously and seem to interpenetrate. What in them is relation and what is matter related is hard to discern. You feel no one of them as inwardly simple and no two as wholly without confluence where thy touch.” This fact touches the realm of mystery.<sup>65</sup> So James concludes that it is “**inside** (emphasis mine) of the minimal pulses of experience” that the “very inner complexity . . . [that what] only the absolute can genuinely possess” is discovered.<sup>66</sup> James also attributes a compact luminosity—as Voegelin has explained the Greek penetration into this reality remains the most differentiated—to radical experience. The peculiarity of the experience, he writes, is that the fact comes light in it and this is how awareness of content takes place.<sup>67</sup>

What about the structure of the movement in the process of reality as it occurs in the metaxy of the human psyche? Is there appeal, response and informing luminosity? In his discussion of the cognitive relation there are intimations of this structure but these remain just that, intimations. For example, James writes that knower seeking the known engages in the process of the intermediary relations of cognitive activity with its continuously developing progress, finally comes to fulfilment. Experience is a process in time and experiences can know each other and take each other’s place, representing them in this process. Future experiences then can inform the process by “substituting” for past ones until the terminal of the thought is completed. However, from this example one must conclude that the appeal/response aspect of thought does remain in compact form in James’ radical empiricism, but the possibilities for its

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<sup>65</sup>James, p. 294.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 171.

potential development are there due to the opening of consciousness to the experiences of non-sensory perception in the pluralism of relations in the universe.

Hence, if we turn to James' ideas on a pluralistic universe, there is more likelihood that we can uncover the appeal/response structure in the process of reality. First, James' experience of the death and life mystery of existence took the form of frightening images of the horrific dredges of humanity in a founding moral encounter by James with existence—a moral death if you will. It took the form of a vastation, a term that refers to the projecting of the inner self into some outwardly grotesque form. James happened to glance at a poor epileptic inmate in an asylum and had the fearful sensation “that shape am I”. The brief experience left him paralyzed with fear for months and he even contemplated suicide. He withstood this temptation and decided to follow the moral call inherent in human life, “my first act of free will shall be to believe in free will”. He took on the human moral task as a life long search which as it increased in his understandings became the relentless religious search for authentic truth.<sup>68</sup> His psychology and philosophy do witness to the open-to-what-is-really-true self he became. His belief and detailing of a pluralistic universe in turn point to the responding luminosity that informed this search.

McDermott writes that “belief for James is a wedge into the tissue of experience for the purpose of liberating dimensions otherwise closed to the agnostic standpoint”.<sup>69</sup> The first point

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<sup>68</sup>John McDermott, in the Introduction to *The Writings of William James* quotes Oliver Wendell Holmes and John Jay Chapman to support this view. Holmes wrote that his “whole business was religious” and Chapman wrote about the “great religious impulse” in back of all his work, pp. xxvi-xxvi.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxx.



we can make about the pluralistic universe is that for James, it is intelligible, pregnant with possibilities for meaning. Intelligibility is the function of pure experience, founded in the plethora of radical experiences in the interaction of the self and the world—both inner and outer. The caveat lies in the philosopher's vision or worldview. Is it one open to the multifarious shape of the universe? Is this philosophy both tender and tough? The latter without the former to James is cynical materialism which employs an abstract conceptualism condemned to fall far short of knowing all there is to know. James also had little regard for traditional dogmatic worldviews which placed the divine outside and at a distance from the world. He described his world view as an intimate one in which the vision of God is an indwelling divine rather than an external Creator. His understanding harmonizes with the participative one that was held by the Greek philosophers. Human life, he wrote, was a "part and parcel of the deep reality".<sup>70</sup>

Eric Voegelin wrote that James has produced a more systematic development of visionary ideas of Charles Peirce on the universe, i.e., synechism as the tendency of continuity and agapism which stands for restorative love.<sup>71</sup> The former was addressed by radical empiricism and the latter is explored in James' notion of a pluralistic universe. Peirce has experienced the divine participative presence in the human search and work to derive order in the chaos of existence. A summation of this principle is that "it is possible only through lovingly submerging oneself in a richer person than the human one" that we can come upon new knowledge. Knowing can properly be called "divination because the new material is found in

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<sup>70</sup>McDermott, "The Types of Philosophic Thinking", p. 493.

<sup>71</sup>Voegelin, *The Form of the American Mind*, p. 49.

the mind of God”<sup>72</sup> Now we have already wrote that James believed the experience of one can join the experience of another even across a “million year span”.

His ideas are in continuity with the agapism of Peirce. In a pluralistic universe, in which the substance of reality is continually in the process of collection of “each forms” the philosopher in “intimate” relations with the universe may participate in the fullest experiential knowledge of pure experience. His philosophy may be a part “momentous enough to give a different turn to what the other parts signify” In an echo of the Greek experience of luminosity, he adds, “it may be a supreme reaction of the universe upon itself by which it rises to self-comprehension”.<sup>73</sup> He further comments that the “absolute and the world are one fact, . . . when materially considered and our knowledge is a part of the absolute’s own knowledge.” Here he does recognize that participation which is central to the Greek experience of the metaxy. The unity of the whole of knowledge can be described in its “wholeness as one luminously transparent conscious moment”.

The question that has arisen for contemporary readers of James asks if these episodes in his writings are mystic or do they point to a belief in panpsychism?<sup>74</sup> Is he experiencing metaleptic reality? The fact that James posits a pluralistic universe does indicate mystic

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<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>73</sup>McDermott, “The Types of Philosophical Thinking”, p. 495.

<sup>74</sup>There are several contemporary authors, for example Marcus Ford, whom we quote on James and memory, who have argued the thesis that James’ systematic reflection on his experience of reality as it occurs in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* and *The Pluralistic Universe* point to his acceptance of “pan-psychism” as a theory (rather than the ‘metaxy’). The topic is too enormous to take up in this essay, although I will say that James does denigrate theories of a “world soul” or “dabbling in panpsychic speculations”. McDermitt, “A World of Pure Experience”, p. 194.

experience, not the special and full mysticism of the saints, but one that is an echo of this, as Bergson would say, in the common person who experiences the depths and heights of the universe. Voegelin writes that because for James we find God within the universe of our experience rather than outside of it, there is the possibility of a higher entity (open to our non-sensory perception of it I would add) and for a conception of God available to the “common man”.<sup>75</sup> So James’ notion of a pluralistic universe is that even if in a material sense it is one with the absolute substance, in a formal sense a pluralism breaks out. As finite selves our material identity with God comes distributively and separately. It is taken twice over and over, and difference emerges—that of “each forms”. “Things true of the world in its finite aspects, then, are not true of it in its infinite capacity. *Qua* finite and plural its accounts of itself to itself are different from what its account to itself *qua* infinite and one must be”<sup>76</sup> This points to a mystic rather than a panpsychic experience of God that affirms the Greek experience of metaleptic reality.

Why is this so? Panpsychism is the view that all parts of matter involve consciousness, or the more holistic view that the whole world is the veil of an infinite realm of mental life.<sup>77</sup> James mentions Fechner’s notion of a “world soul” disparagingly in several places in his corpus. But he does respect his insight that conscious experiences compound and separate themselves.<sup>78</sup> Radical empiricism is built on the understanding of a multiplicity of experiences. It is a theory

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<sup>75</sup>Voegelin, *On the Form of the American Mind*, [ . 61.

<sup>76</sup>McDermott, “The Types of Philosophical Thinking”, p. 496.

<sup>77</sup>*Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, edited by Simon Blackburn (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 275.

<sup>78</sup>McDermott, “Concerning Fechner”, p. 545.

that attempts to develop an understanding of a pluralistic universe, in which all the parts are made of what they are made of—material as well as spiritual parts. It is not just one substance imbued with a spirit for James; it is exactly the opposite—full of myriad “stuffs”. But this universe is apperceived by James to be congenial to human cognition with all its “each forms”. In fact God is only one of these “each forms”, his make up being the divine Stuff.<sup>79</sup> But a pluralistic universe does also create an a demand for intimate and satisfactory relations vis-a-vis the philosopher. Enabled by mystic agapism, this form of philosophy can be understood as a erotic search for wisdom, stirred on by the non-sensory experiences available to intuitive intelligence. This intelligence is the in-between functional where the divine and human can engage in mystic converse, first through percepts of the mediating reality which is pure experience, and secondly when it is brought a second time to interpretive understandings in discursive reflection.

To conclude, I would like to return to the methodology of equivalency in experiences. As demonstrated above, there have been some dove tailing experiences that mark James’ pure experience and the Greek philosophers’ metaleptic reality. The next step would be to take the truths discovered in these experiences, from “the trail of their equivalent symbols in time and space” and make them confront one another in their compactness and differentiation. First, the Greeks achieved the “noetic differentiation of consciousness”; they discovered reason in a paradigmatic moment in the history of philosophy. Theirs is the significant and supreme differentiation. I believe we should recognize that James’ philosophical investigations, in which he argues continuously and vehemently against the superficial nature of intellectualism and the

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<sup>79</sup>cDermott, “Monistic Idealism”, p. 497.

limited possibilities of logic, as work of restoration of the Greek discovery of the whole of reason, with its intuitive, hence able to perceive and apperceive, as well as its discursive parts. I did not discuss James' practical ideas on cognitional theory, pragmatism as a method and a genetic theory of truth. However, the two-fold presentation of reason is apparent in his work. First there is the fact of pure experience which is directly perceived in a knowledge of acquaintance, an intuitive process. Secondly, with absolute indebtedness to memory, there is the endless diversity of the discursive taking up the experience twice and multiple times over. This for James of course will be guided by the pragmatic principle of its "cash value" or practically real standards.

But secondly, perhaps there are some seeds of static reification in the Greek symbols. The psyche in philosophical history does get transformed into independent entity and loses James' openness out to pluralistic universe given his description of consciousness. This truth enables a more correct exegesis into the Greek writing on the subject. Also, while the "whence" of luminosity is so much more clearly portrayed in its symbols, I think the intimacy of a pluralistic universe of "each forms" contiguous in love, an idea in James that has been faithful to in Peirce's philosophy, gives his symbols—pure experience, radical empiricism, the pluralistic universe, a more hopeful mood. The world is intelligible to the knower in both philosophies, and the work is one of participation worked out in an in-between process in time, made possible by the experiences memory provides of the human share in the a greater reason—the divine *Nous*. But the Christian element of religious love in the James' corpus chases out the anxiety that we cannot drink at the fountain of this intelligibility with our minds to satiation. His American optimism shows through!

