

In the concluding chapter McGee discusses what he calls the not-so-deadly sins of genetic enhancement. He argues against the slippery slope arguments advocated by so many opponents of genetic enhancement, by showing that the main sins connected with genetic enhancement are in essence extensions of sins that are already committed by parents, like being over calculative, overbearing, or shortsighted, in planning the future of one's child. If we avoid these, as we should, we will be spared of most of the damage genetic engineering may bring us. The true sin, however, seems to be the naive belief in genetic determinism.

McGee conclusively shows that the pragmatic tradition has an enormous potential at two levels: at the practical level it can be used to develop guidelines for parents, lawgivers, and physicians, to deal with day to day problems; at the theoretical level it can be used, for instance, to expose unwarranted genetic determinism. It must be said, however, that McGee's actual use of the pragmatic tradition is slightly disappointing. No substantial arguments given by the pragmatist thinkers are discussed, or even mentioned. The central figure is Dewey, but even he remains largely a prophet in the side-wing; he is represented mainly by short, profound statements. G.H. Mead is not mentioned at all, which is a serious omission given McGee's emphasis on the interaction between biological processes and society, which is a central theme in Mead's work. A more thorough discussion of the idea of the American pragmatists for instance regarding causation (p. 71f.), or the felt aspects of a problem (p. 75) would benefit McGee's discussion. Despite these shortcomings, McGee's book breathes all the virtues of a pioneering work. It puts the issue of human genetic engineering in a fresh perspective, draws the attention to many valuable points, and raises a number of important questions.

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Seigfreid, Charlene Haddock. *William James' Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*
(Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990).

Near the very end of this first-rate study of a truly first-rank philosopher, Charlene Haddock Seigfried suggests that: "James's life and writings will continue to be rediscovered in each generation because they so strongly elicit a sense of the unresolvable tensions at the center of being human. . . . We crave the security of a comprehensive explanation of reality but also the exhilarating sense of the freedom of living in a multiverse that is wide open . . ." (p. 394). James's genius is perhaps most manifest in his indefatigable struggle "to harmonize all of our deepest needs" (p. 254), including the need to articulate a comprehensive vision of the universe and the need to cultivate a dramatic sense of our potentially heroic status in irreducibly plural contexts. While it accomplishes much more than this, Prof. Seigfried's book enables us, at just this moment, to rediscover more fully and finely this aspect of James's genius.

This facet is nowhere more evident than in James's lifelong endeavor to sketch a truly satisfactory account of human rationality: his radical reconstruction of philosophical reflection is of a piece with his radical reconceptualization of human reason. So, it is not surprising that one

central theme in Prof. Seigfried's outstanding study is James's striving to settle accounts with several dominant conceptions of human reason--above all, with the reductionistic conception championed by positivism (its most pernicious form being militantly irreligious empiricism) and the overreaching conception advocated by intellectualism (its most commonplace tendency being the presumption to transcend experience). An indication of this is the prominent place Prof. Seigfried accords to James's to several versions of the early essay entitled "The Sentiment of Rationality." In her judgment, "James radically reconstructs rationality in this early work" (p. 30). She goes on to suggest that: "This reconstruction is central to his project of ending philosophy as an abstract intellectual pursuit of a perfect theory or logical system and beginning it anew as a reflective endeavor to harmonize self and World in pursuit of a better future" (p. 30). Prof. Seigfried is certainly aware that she must make this case for James's radical reconstruction Of reason in the teeth of his own explicit advocacy of anti-rationalism. She acknowledges that: "There is no doubt that from beginning to end James was a Profound critic of rationalism" (p. 374). It is at this point that Prof. Seigfried Jumps in to save James from himself (see, e.g., pp. 376-377). The logic of his own position, properly or fully understood, does not require an espousal of irrationalism but rather a radical reconstruction of our traditional conceptions of human reason. The concluding chapter of this compelling study is, thus, devoted to "Critique and Reconstruction of Rationalism" wherein she identifies pragmatic rationality as the upshot of James's lifelong efforts to displace vicious intellectualism with concrete experience.

The beginning of this reconstruction is already evident in early "popular" essays eventually published together in *The Will to Believe* (1897). From Prof. Seigfried's perspective, its completion requires going beyond what James himself was, in the end, willing to accept—a vision of our agency-in-the-world which refuses all appeals to the superhuman and the trans-empirical. James simply "could not face a world emptied out of all gods. He was not comfortable with a merely human world, despite his own phenomenal findings ..." (p. 259). What he offered was nothing less than "a concrete analysis of the person-acting-in-the-world-for-a-purpose" (p. 255); what he could not accept (even though his analysis appears—at least to Prof. Seigfried--decisively to point in this direction) was a world completely devoid of purpose and ideals save for those rooted in the actual strivings of human agents. Thus, he could not confess, as Nietzsche did, that "A new pride taught me, and this I teach men [others]; no longer to bury one's head in the sand of heavenly things, but to bear it freely, an earthly head, which creates a meaning for the earth" (quoted on p. 2-54). It is instructive to see how she arrives at identifying this Nietzschean trajectory in the Jamesian texts as the ultimate upshot of James's Intellectual struggle "to harmonizer all of our deepest needs."

She does so primarily by telling, in a detailed, painstaking yet thoroughly, engaging way, a complex story about James's philosophical career. Prof. Seigfried suggests that "[t]here is much to be learned about doing philosophy by tracing the Jamesian odyssey in the meandering of the textual record and also much to be gained from restructuring the material into a more coherent philosophical position" (p. 256; cf. p. 9). It is fortunate that James "does not cover over the traces of his own struggle to reconstruct a world in which we can live, including his own failures as well as his success in this reconstructive project" (p. 255). Even so, mapping the

course of the Jamesian odyssey is no easy task. But Prof. Seigfried proves equal to this undertaking.

Her book is, then, a tale of three crises. For it is in terms of "three major crises in James's life" that she charts the course of his intellectual career (pp. 10ff.), though she readily acknowledges that there "are many other ways to organize the material" (p. 10). In each crisis, we witness "the coming to a head of some psychological/intellectual trauma" (p. 11); and in each case, James's general strategy is the same - to abandon the original formulation of the problem and to devise a more radical understanding of our situated agency, one that gets more deeply at the roots of our embodied, environed, efficacious presence in the world.

The *first* crisis was the spiritual despair and "desperate neurasthenic condition" of the young James who seriously considered suicide as an appropriate response to his "despair over the meaninglessness of life" (p. 12). But, happily, affirmation of his own will and worth (my "first act of free will shall be to believe in free will"), rather than the absolute self-negation of his will and very existence, turned out to be his response to this relatively early crisis, one taking "place off stage" (i.e., one recorded in his diary and letters and not public or published documents). The *second* crisis was rooted in James' conviction that "there is such a thing as neutral, pure description of phenomena" and, moreover, that such a description provides an adequate account of human cognition. What one can discern in this controlling conviction are conflicting motives, some of which serve "be the authority of a positivistic self-understanding of science within James' own discourse and some of which serve to expose the fatal flaws in this self-understanding (see, e.g., p. 333). The *third* crisis "is publicly attested to in the last book he published before he died" - *A Pluralistic Universe*. "Up until the third crisis James sought to 'le his new beginning in a concrete analysis of the human organization of experience with a revised, but still traditional rationalism" (p.378). Very late in his life, however, he came to realize that nothing less than a thoroughgoing rejection of traditional rationalism was required: the inherent thrust of the sort of concrete analyses to which he was decisively committed.

Drawing upon the entirety of James's corpus, unpublished as well as published texts - moreover, in dialogue with the best of the secondary literature on William James Seigfried reconstructs the narrative of these crises, sketching at once in broad strokes and the finest detail. Her prose and sensitivity are manifestly Jamesian. This is nowhere more evident than in Chapter Eight, an extremely illuminating and suggestive treatment of "Analogy and Metaphor." Her attention to the way specific dualisms dialectically structured James's reflections (dry/wet; thick/thin; raw/cooked; and living/dead) is especially instructive. This chapter concludes with a brief section entitled "The Sculptor's Chisel" by alluding to one of James's most famous metaphors (a metaphor to which I will return below).

As Prof. Seigfried Stresses here, "all of James's central concerns are expressed in striking metaphors and analogies" (p. 214). Not only are his "metaphors richer, more informative and more provocative than their conceptual equivalents" (p. 215), but also James "frequently forwards his arguments by extending and developing them" (p. 212).

At all levels of human consciousness, selective interest is operative; indeed, such interest is constitutive of our consciousness. Rationality must, in the end, be explained in terms of this selectivity. In other words, James places rational thinking within the much wider continuum of the purposeful organization of the experiential flux (p. 100). At all levels of consciousness, what we witness is a process "of weaving chaos into order-" (p. 100). Hence, at the level of rationality itself, we also see just this process.

At or at least near the center of James's vision is the concrete analysis of our purposeful organization of the experiential flux. Truly (it the center of this analysis is one of James's most famous metaphors--that of a sculptor confronting a block- of marble (see pp. 234-235).

Contra James and apparently also Seigfried, I am disposed to suggest that other metaphors are needed to do 'justice to the otherness of the world and the fluidity of our interactions with a world which is, simultaneously, supportive of and resistant to our undertakings. Gardening, dancing, making love, Jazz improvisation seem more apt than the metaphor of sculpting because these grant to the other (the plant being tended, the partner with whom one is striving to coordinate one's own movements, etc.) a status and dynamism simply not suggested by the image of a block of marble. It is rarely the case that the concrete others encountered in our actual experience are recalcitrant presences determinedly, but patiently, resisting our efforts to shape them to our purposes. Most often, these concrete others are variable and expressive presences quite insistent upon being recognized not only as being here in some negligible manner but being here in some unique or distinctive way. The presence of the concrete other manifests a differentiated mode of being: Things stand out, they insist upon recognition, they call out for attention. But they do not stand out as monotonous, let alone mute, presences. The monotonous and inexpressive chaos out of which different minds carve different worlds is not a direct disclosure of our ordinary lived experience but a philosopher's fiction or, at most, the supposed revelation of highly unusual experiences (e. g., an experience induced by drugs).

Hence, while Prof. Seigfried tries to drive a wedge between James's pragmatism and his commitment to realism (see, e.g., p. 371), I want to insist that pragmatic realism is a defensible position. Let us admit, with James, that "the world that each of us feels most intimately at home with is that of beings with histories that play into our history, whom we can help in their vicissitudes even as they help us in ours" (McDermott, p. 499). Let us further admit, with him, that traditional philosophy has been preoccupied with what is and neglectful of what goes on, taking what is as that which is fixed, once and for all, antecedent to inquiry and independent of our interventions as observers and investigators (McDermott, p. 500). But, a painstaking and faithful concern with what is going, on and, in some respects, could go its own way without any help from us does not commit us to any objectionable form of the correspondence theory or, for that matter, to any rationalistic disfigurement of temporal processes. Such a concern might be likened to the way two dancers respond to the movements of each other, such might be a pragmatic take on correspondence. So, too, might our conceptualization of a process be taken not as a static cut in a dynamic continuum but as an indication of how to shift our weight or to adjust our Step to the movement of some other. It articulates the form of a process in accord with the way any processive continuum (e.g., the life or experience of a human being) articulates

itself in and through its intersection with other such continua. Rather than arresting the flux of experience such conceptualizations would help us get into the swing of things! Indeed, James's own metaphors and Seigfried's explication of these do at least this much.

In sum, Charlene Haddock Seigfried's own ongoing efforts to think *with, through, and beyond* not only William James but other thinkers within our indigenous intellectual traditions (a recent fruit of which is *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* [University of Chicago, 1996]) unmistakably indicate her nuanced, contextual, improvisational ability to respond creatively to the complex demands of an ever changing present.

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