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Book Review

Consensus Vide Convention

A review of David Lapoujade, *William James: Empiricism and Pragmatism Convention* (Duke University Press, 2020).

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William James's Philosophical Impact

Originally published in French in 1997 and finally translated into English, David Lapoujade's *William James: Empiricism and Pragmatism* (2019) is varnished by the specter of Deleuzian transcendental empiricism. Despite Lapoujade – perhaps the single greatest living French Deleuze scholar – rarely references Deleuze *directly* in this book, he culls James's pragmatistic theory of truth by way of a relational ontology of referential becoming by simultaneously tracking in Deleuzian parlance. From the connective synthesis to the disjunctive synthesis, Lapoujade references key facets of Deleuze's tripartite synthesis of time, bridging these concepts with how, in James's system, continuities function as givens and empiricism, by way of stream of consciousness, weaves co-penetrations with continuous flows. In turn, *William James* is as much an archeological disinterring of Deleuze by way of James as it is a recovery of James's pragmatism from Richard Rorty's neo-pragmatism – an attempt to supersede Rorty's sprawling overhang and commanding philosophical shadow. As Lapoujade markedly articulates in the first few pages of his book, he understands Rorty's neo-pragmatism – and, more specifically, Rorty's notion of “conversation” – as incorrectly reducing James's conception of “convention” to “consensus”. This galvanises the political vim of Lapoujade's project, as he seeks to reveal that the overdetermination of “consensus,” delineated within Rorty's conception of “liberal democracy” – and Rorty's long-term Deweyan pursuit of discovering a moral center vis-à-vis context-dependent truth claims in language-use by way of mutual recognition – elides James's theoretical and conceptual pluralism,

reducing James's "nomadic" thought into a univocal monolith. Indeed, Rorty's interests lied in the indissoluble interwovenness of experience with language, as well in the possibilities and limits of language – Rorty undertook this endeavor by instrumentalising Jamesian pragmatism to tease out contingency in our language-claims while parrying with James's idealised claim of linguistic coherence in regards to supporting truth claims. Contra Rorty, Lapoujade's enterprise is thoroughly Deleuzian; Lapoujade surveys James's literature to excavate how what *really exists* is not things as they are made *a posteriori* but things *in the making*, i.e., reality considered in the moment of its creating.

While Lapoujade's critique of Rorty bookends the project, the plexus of the text is comprised of delineating James's pluralism qua pragmatism as a philosophy of localised transcendence. Consider, for instance, James's apothegm: "[t]o understand a thing rightly we need to see it both out of its environment and in it, and to have acquaintance with the whole range of its variations" (James, 1982 [1902]: 23); readers may recognise this statement as homologous to Deleuze's machine ontology. This is no coincidence, as James's "radical empiricism" had an inestimable influence on Deleuze. However, since Lapoujade frequently utilises Deleuzian verbiage without directly citing Deleuze, it will highly benefit readers to prime themselves on a few central concepts colouring Deleuze's thought. Particularly, in his early account of "transcendental empiricism" Deleuze's materialist transvaluation of the Kantian account of transcendental subjectivity imparts how impersonal, inhuman thinking does not merely represent the natural world but is directly productive of forms (e.g., space and time; Deleuze, 1994 [1968]). In his more mature work, Deleuze accounts for a supplementary account of subjectification, wherein an appeal to the "encounter" ensures the "measure of fit" between transcendental empiricism as a constructivist mathematism of concepts and the world of intensive, *actual* difference. Here, to define an entity is to observe it alongside *what it does*, registering it in the act of translation, a functional appeal – all that exists is actants and their associations, without *a priori* suppositions. The Deleuzian subject emerges as part of the natural world while nonetheless functioning as a catalyst for morphogenesis. Deleuze's pluralist transcendental empiricism is opposed to Kant's transcendental philosophy; where Kantian transcendental subjectivity foregoes the possibility of conceiving of different and differential relations, and interactions between entities themselves, Deleuze's "transcendental empiricism" designates how indirect approximations are the only way by which we come to terms with the "inner beings" of machines.

Perhaps the most critical bricolage for between Deleuze and James is by way of James's two orders of logical inquiry, comprised of i) *existential judgment*, or "thatness" (a proposition about something, which inquires "what is the nature of it?"), and ii) *spiritual judgment*, or "whatness" (proposition of value). According to James, "[n]either judgment can be deduced immediately from the other. They proceed from diverse intellectual preoccupations, and the mind combines them only by making them first separately, and then adding them together" (James, 1982 [1902]: 9). With the twofold relation becoming a threefold, James introduces a *disjunctive relation*. Here James situates a critique of Kant's three syntheses – for James what is qualified as *psychic reality* is not inferior to Kant's higher forms of knowledge. This critique and the *disjunctive relation* will also reappear in Deleuze's critique of Kant's syntheses.

Readers familiar with *Difference and Repetition* will immediately remember Deleuze's portraiture of non-chronological time where Deleuze uses Bergson's inverted

cone to model the dynamic representation of regressive memory. Like James, Deleuze is working within a Kantian-Bergsonian hybrid register: *contraction* is the first synthesis (the present, habit); *retention* is the second synthesis (the past, the ground of memory); *expectation* is the third synthesis (the future, the death drive, or “need”). For Deleuze, the difference between foundation and ground is the difference between the present as the most contracted point of experience and the past as the totality of time implied in the present as a continuity between past and present. Expectation allots how something tends towards overcoming its own limit (Deleuze, 1994: 73–74). Like James, Deleuze recalls Kant's three syntheses of: i) apprehension (the synthesis or “synopsis” of the present); ii) memory (recollection “of the thought object and its recognition by a thinking subject” in the sense of the capacity to reproduce, i.e., the synthesis of reproduction); iii) final recognition (knowledge, or the capacity to subordinate memory under concepts). For Deleuze to combat Kantian understanding he distinguishes how, after memory, one does not encounter judgment and recognition but, instead, encounters something that breaks from representation, moving towards the production of the future—that is, “the process of prediction” (Deleuze 1994: 226).¹

In *Anti-Oedipus* (1983 [1972]), we see the *disjunctive synthesis* coming into its full form,² prodding forth material affect(s) and implying a counter-actualisation, a “becoming” of that which it was previously not.³ In such later work, the logic of Deleuze's *disjunctive synthesis* is demarcated within the machine ontology as the *second synthesis*, following the *contractive (first) synthesis* of connecting relations and followed by the *conjunctive (third) synthesis*, which creates externality and residual relations of novelty. According to Deleuze's *disjunctive synthesis*, entities are endowed with a gradient or register of “receptivity” upon which traces of encounters (regarding internal matters of alteration) record themselves, resulting in the “change that is substance itself” (Deleuze, 1990 [1988]: 36).

In James's system, relations are *sometimes connective, sometimes disjunctive* and *always external to their terms*. Like Deleuze's *conjunctive synthesis*, which repeats the logic of the *connective synthesis* but also implies rupture and contiguity through forces of habit, connection, and contraction, for James it is “continuity, the great continuous plane of pure experience” that prevents the movement of relations from being imprisoned within preexisting forms or preexisting relations (Lapoujade 2019: 36). That is, “pure experience” ushers novelty and new relations. For James relations are perceived at the same time as the terms they link; James's radical empiricism rejects any element(s) we do not directly experience – furthermore, we experience terms as *disjunctive* and equally well experience their *connections*. Thus, “likeness” or similarity is perceived at the same time as a second term's difference. Notably, however, Deleuze's elaboration of transcendental empiricism as capable of explaining the genesis of thought's determinations – that is, the real rather than the *a priori* conditions of knowledge – as predicated upon the philosophy of mathematics, with particularly close regard to the distribution of singularities along a manifold, drawing from Albert Lautman's conception of manifolds qua determined objects. James's empiricism, on the other hand, is preoccupied with how *perception* and the *act of belief* facilitate “pure experience” which is (like the Deleuzian virtual) neither reducible to pure sensory matter⁴ nor constituted by forms of pure subjectivity.

Lapoujade stakes the claim that pragmatism is an instrumentalism for judging an idea, doctrine, or statement not as a function of truth but, in surpassing epistemological

value, pragmatism allots judgment by way of consequences for thought, action, or belief. Following Lapoujade, this marks the nexus of James's pragmatism, which promotes a definition of truth as a method for experimentation, a method for constructing novel truths:

A true idea, in the pragmatic sense, is an idea that changes something in the mind of the person thinking, in a satisfactory manner. The true idea is not only what we believe, what we do, or what we think; it is what makes us believe, makes us act, or makes us think. At the same time, then, pragmatism is a method for evaluating truth. (Lapoujade, 2019: 35).

For James, pure experience is the universal, a nonqualified and neutral field prior to psychology or experience. This corresponds to the existence of an external and objective world independent of us, external to our perception, and which precedes the experience(s) we have of it. Thus, an event can be considered in isolation, where it is a matter of "pure experience," or the event can be integrated into a series, where it changes in nature and takes on meaning, becoming a "what" and gaining signification. This happens vis-à-vis interpretation (18). Having adequately mapped the Deleuzean latticework that Lapoujade is tacitly working in, let us now move on to detail other central concepts that Lapoujade illuminates within James's literature.

James's Philosophy of Discrete Multiplicities

Drawing and amending the traditional British empiricism of Locke, Hume, and Berkeley, James's empiricism involves the construction of a plane that allows for observing how excesses, beliefs, and judgments are made. Again, experience is based on fundamental *pure experience* – a first moment of inexperience (i.e., a blank state); James, clearly indebted to classical empiricism, sees this plane as inextricable from the question of inference. James's radical empiricism allows us to begin with a plane of nothing preestablished. No certainty or form of knowledge has yet appeared, and all has the right to be constructed

Distinguishing it from C.S. Peirce and John Dewey, Lapoujade elaborates what, exactly, "the practical" means for James's pragmatism: the point of view where reality, thought, knowledge, and action are considered in terms of *their making*. What does this mean for the idea, then? For James, opposing rationalists and absolutists (esp. Hegelians), it is not sufficient to say the idea is thought within the mind or that the mind represents idea, for this deprives *movement*; for James, philosophy must demonstrate how the idea is made in the mind and how the mind is made by it by way of practical consequences. James's pragmatic criteria is as follows: the idea is not a representation, a reflective act, or the modification of the mind but a process by which the mind is made. A similar concept can be found in James's psychological treatises such as *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), where consciousness is understood as the movement of what is being made conscious – consciousness contracts away from and expands with the unconscious bordering it.

In his 1904 treatise, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, James inaugurates "radical empiricism," dealing with the notion of *pure experience* by showing how a plane of thought exists which precedes categories of psychology and traditional philosophy. For James, these categories are constituted on the basis of this plane of thought, rather than constituting thought. James opposes binary oppositions such as subject/object or matter/thought, which are not given as *a priori* forms but are processes made within and

alongside thought. Enumerating the scope of his project, Lapoujade details three problems that his review of James' work seeks to resolve:

1) *pragmatism*, "whose problem consists of determining which signs or ideas lead to our being able to act or to augment our power to act" (7-8).⁵

2) *radical empiricism*, "whose problem consists of determining how signs are constituted and the rules according to which they are organized" (8).

3) *psychology*, "whose problem consists of determining what allows consciousness to give meaning to the signs it perceives and how consciousness responds to them through variations in its flow" (8).

James' ambition is to seize reality in the moment of its making by way of a plane of construction, so he cannot adopt psychology or transcendentalism. As a consequence, James must formulate pure experience as neither irreducible to pure sensory matter nor constituted by forms of pure subjectivity. Thus, "[w]hat must be explored are the movements that are located beneath the forms of psychology or inherited from them" (12). Lapoujade traces back relations given in a pure state where they are not yet divided into categorical binaries (e.g., subject/object, matter/spirit, etc.).

Bergson, a contemporary of James's thought (and a linkage evidencing Lapoujade's bricolage between James and Deleuze), conceived of the image as defined *vide matter and movement, wherefore everything is image*. This influenced James's notion of pure experience as being conscious qua perception (i.e., consciousness vis-à-vis what we are conscious of). In turn, James, like Bergson, runs up against the question of how can there be a *pure experience* or an image *in itself*? James and Bergson contest the implicit assumption of the subject as primary and, for James, it is the neutral character of experience where everything remains indefinite; material cannot be qualified as objective, subjective, matter, or mind. This field of indivisible events becomes a necessary point of departure, such that "[p]ure experience is experience from the point of view of the event" (16). Lapoujade argues that the immediate flow of life is asserted as the immanent condition for all experience and, therefore, empiricism rediscovers the transcendental. James denies the immediate certainty of thought; the field of pure experience is deployed for itself. The empirical and the transcendental are equipollent, jointed in an identity relation of equivalency.

As a consequence of reality's being exterior and immanent to us, we need not submit to its principle – the subject is an interpretation of corporeal affections; for James, this means that we have to *make reality* and put it into signs. This is the role of perception and of belief: interpreting as real and signifying as real, the sign is at once both a sign of exteriority and of how events *become real* – Lapoujade terms this a "shock" (21). These "shocks" also create preperceptions, allowing for the accordance of knowledge-constitution such that there is an interpretation, belief, or ego that comes first but, consequently, an intensity that unwinds, making us believe. James's psychophysiological postulate underscores interpretation's apperceptive situatedness, as with any mental flow where what comes first is emotion, which is inseparable from bodily affection and which determines interpretation:

I can not help that ... I, too, have my intuitions and I must obey them. Let the case be what it may in others, I am as confident as I am of anything that, in myself, the stream of thinking (which I recognise emphatically as a phenomenon) is only a careless name for what, when scrutinised, reveals itself to consist chiefly of the stream of my breathing. The 'I think' which Kant

said must be able to accompany all my objects, is the 'I breathe' which actually does accompany them (James, 2010 [1904]: 58).

The reader may, at this point, have formed a bricolage between James's radical empiricism of pure experience and Gilbert Simondon's notion of the neutral field. Thomas Lamarre's "Afterward" pays a great deal of attention to elaborating this similarity by linking the two thinkers' theory of formation and reading James as an early thinker of networked relations. Another important philosophical project bridges James and Simondon: their mutual rejection of Aristotelian hylomorphism.

Simondon begins from matter rather than *a priori* forms, as forms emerge through a difference of matter by which matter is crossed, like a (quantum/differential) field, by a difference of potential. This is also analogous with empirical observations – Simondon thus remarks that, if "to perceive consists in increasing the information of the system formed by the subject and the field in which it is oriented, the conditions of perception are analogous to those of every stable structuration: a metastable state must precede perception" (2020: 269). This "objective field," which Simondon often makes reference to and describes as a primitive, neutral, and "magical" stage is the arena upon which man and mediation find themselves fundamentally structured through circuits of exchange qua being – that is, "[m]an finds himself linked to a universe experienced as a milieu" (Simondon, 2017: 177). Unlike James, however, for Simondon, the objectivation of mediation has a correlative in the subjectivation of mediation, which is object-ified and objectivised by way of the technical object that tethers man and the world to one another. Nonetheless, like James's "pure experience," Simondon's field of reference, what he calls a "magical stage," precedes mediation and, thus, precedes subjectivisation, belief, or objectivisation: it "is only the simplest and most fundamental of structurations of the milieu of a living being: the birth of a network of privileged points of exchange between the being and the milieu" (177).⁶ Likewise, in James's pragmatic method ideas via function not form.

James and Absolutism: Saltatory and Ambulatory Knowledge Qua Convention

For Hegel, the phenomenological propaedeutic, rising to the ideal of a "presuppositionless science" determines that even appeals to sensory immediacy as the ground of experience are always already mediated by the concept. As a philosophical doctrine, rationalism postulates that philosophy must begin by securing the scope of what thought is capable of thinking before it can adequately give an itinerary of what there happens to be (even if what there happens to be is, in the last instance, to be identified with thinking itself, as is the case for idealists). Conversely, we call "Empiricist" any position according to which knowledge about the structure of being or becoming implies an investigation of what is given to sensory experience, of which "thinking being" is but one thing to explain among others. The examples of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume remain paradigmatic: being is disclosed non-inferentially to thought in sensory intuition, in relation to which theoretical speculation and inferential knowledge is considered derivative.

For James, it is not individuals that come first but the signs that they exchange. Relation has ontological priority over the individual, which is necessarily and directly social; relation and the relational are ontologically primary. Reality is constructed by interpretations, with such interpretations guaranteeing truth. For James satisfaction results from the relation between belief and truth; James does not veer towards not

relativism ("everything is relative") but evinces that truth is inseparable from the point of view stating it. A statement has meaning only under *certain conditions*. James's position is far closer to perspectivism, which is not relativist but refers to the function of interpretation. Taking relations as the point of departure, James not only spars with Aristotle but battles against the monism of the One and All of absolutists and Hegelians – who, according to Lapoujade, begin with pluralism but end with Monism through implication. For James, Rationalism (or what he calls "vicious abstractionism") ignores that an idea is a part of the flow of consciousness. Lapoujade paints a picture of pragmatism as rejecting eternal truths and critiquing representation first and foremost because ideas *are not reproductions* but, instead, are actions/transitions/creations. It follows, in turn, that truth can depend on practical consequences only when they belong intrinsically to the idea: *truth is a process* and "[r]esemblance obviously does not allow us to determine the truth of a new idea since by definition truth does not resemble anything" (Lapoujade, 2019: 33). What is true is, in turn, true by concrete consequences/practice (the pragmatic rule par excellence) rather than ideas (which, for Rationalism, are true in themselves). Lapoujade, in his close study of James, designates pragmatism as an instrumentalism for evaluating truth.

Lapoujade distills that, for James, reality is formed of an incalculable number of networks superposed upon one another, forming a vast reticular ensemble.⁷ Given James's plurality of linear connections, and contra the grand unified system of the Hegelian dialectic, there are systems everywhere:

The result is innumerable little hangings-together of the world's parts within the larger hangings-together, little worlds, not only of discourse but of operation, within the wider universe. Each system exemplifies one type or grade of union, its parts being strung on that peculiar kind of relation, and the same part may figure in many different systems, as a man may hold various offices and belong to several clubs. (James, [2018] 1907: 52)

Having made the case for James as a thinker of multiplicities, Lapoujade details that knowledge, for James, is a set of connections and that it requires a "leap" on the part of the subject to create new bridges. James posits a condition exterior to the relation that makes it (that is, the relation) possible – this allows Lapoujade, defending James as a thinker of "convention" (instead of consensus) qua relative/provisional series, to identify the *departure* towards knowledge with the "*subject*" and the *arrival*, or a term's entry into a new intermediary series, with the "*object*" (45). James's philosophy begins with the subject or consciousness and a "leap" of transcendence is then required for the *subject* to attain the *object*. It follows that, as a first step, forms act as principles and empirical matter fills the chasm of epistemology, positing the foundation of any relation – as with the notion of truth –with anterior and essential content. This exterior immanent condition and the "leap" of transcendence makes possible "a transcendental subject, an absolute mind" (43). Furthermore, this condition of immanence, like the relation (and to the same degree as the relation) is exterior to knowledge. Following James, conditions are, at once, brought down into the subject while a degree of immanence is recovered.

For James, truth cannot be defined apart from the terminating places to which it leads, i.e., its *guidings* – "[t]he word truth *means* just such leadings and guidings" (James, 1907: 290). For James truth is not a matter of mere recognition or discovery; James resists attributing preference to "blood is red because it looks so" over "blood looks so because it's red" or vice versa (290). For James, both are equally correct and it is the

leading that makes us call the idea true, proving that we have called it so justly. By way of pragmatism's practical meaning, truth denotes certain ideas and connotes their "getting there." Accordingly, concrete facts denoted by the word "truth" are ideas that guide us towards certain termini; to be and to guide are equipollent terms. There is no substantive connotation in the word "truth" that is over and above such guiding processes; agreement, correspondence, and thinking the object as it is all resolve themselves into "guides," into "getting there."

James does not solve the problem of passage to knowledge by way of the Absolute, as was the choice method of Kant's successors for whom relations are *interior* to an infinitely comprehensive Spirit. For James, it is the procedural task of knowledge to move beyond dualisms but not by transcending them by simply linking two absolutely independent terms within a common superior form. James deems this type of knowledge "saltatory knowledge." James seeks to formulate an alternative understanding of belief – one that identifies "convention" with form-object unity, where the object is a complex of relations that is *prolonged*, instead of cleaved. For James, an act of *belief* is a *construction*, not a "leap." *Belief* builds a footbridge with relations, retaining their continuity – relations are not interior to their terms but homogenous with them, such that they carry over their roots or virtual content to a new milieu (44). James thus invokes a new type of knowledge that is not "saltatory" but "ambulatory," with ambulation as such leading to provisional terms driven through intervening experiences. As a consequence, those intermediaries determining what particular knowing-function is exerted. Recalling Deleuze, one may say that *difference without repetition* is "saltatory" whereas *difference with repetition* or, *difference as a bridge of intermediaries*, is "ambulatory."⁸

Ambulatory knowledge deals with *intermediaries as they determine particular knowing*, with the intervening experience(s) proffering concrete relation(s) of cognition. For James "knowing" is quite literally *made* via ambulation, as intervening experiences and intermediate experiences get related to a particular object. These intermediaries determine what particular knowing-function the object exerts, giving the object meaning vis-à-vis what it communicates, what it carries over. As it relates to mentality, James here erects a rather rigorous theory of functionalism to understand mental states. For James whenever we take it concretely, cognising means determinate "ambulation," a process that unravels through intermediaries, "from a *terminus a quo* to, or towards, a *terminus ad quem*" (James, 1987 [1909]: 899). Such is James's continuist hypothesis of pure experience, bricolaging epistemological chasms instead of replacing preexisting forms with empirical matter. James organises material in a functional series, such that the process of knowledge draws on vast network of connections. It follows that concepts, as condensed experience, are intermediary series within this network—the concept is in effect a conglomerate of virtual perceptions and, "[a]s with Bergson, perceptions and concepts are prehensions: they hold together the terms of some multiplicity or another; this is what allows them to serve as maps" (Lapoujade, 2019: 46).

Contra the theoretical finality of Rationalism and Absolutism, both of which posit that knowledge has an end in itself, James's pragmatism is a method for what is in the making. This is why Lapoujade refers to it as a "nomadic" epistemology. Unchaining philosophy from theoretical finality, James frees material from its forms, relations from inherence, events from attribution, truth from resemblance, movement from immutability, the ambulatory from the foundation, multiplicities from unity, the idea from representation – freeing "to render it [philosophy] copresent with its creative practice"

(48). In short, for James theory and practice are not two distinct activities such that one is exercised in the speculative, scientific domain and the other in the technical, utilitarian domain. Instead, first comes action and then the theoretical, with the practical coeval to action; knowledge guides or orients our activity but does not constitute it.

Finally, we have arrived at "convention," Lapoujade's mooring. According to Lapoujade, James's conception of "convention" cannot be separated from faith, which is a two-step process: the *first moment* is of *assessment*, the evaluation of a situation; the *second moment* involves *throwing oneself into action*, acting on the idea and making an *agreement* with the idea in order to *act* on it. This agreement entails "faith," proper. In this description of "convention" by means of "faith," James recalls the example of the oarsmen that Hume famously illustrated in both *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) and *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751).

For Hume, the concept of convention is part of an inner sense of duty and articulated via occasions when we are willing to act by way of such duty despite there is no prior natural motive. Ultimately, these are cases of *justice* for Hume, where there is no natural inclination to explain willingness. Justice, as such, is not a natural virtue but artificial, a condition that we acquire because of the influence on us of social institutions and adopt through implicit recognition of common interests. Hume uses the analogy of two oarsmen who row together without any explicit mutual undertaking to do so—despite the duo of oarsmen row in unison, there is no reason for us to presume that they seek a common end. Each may have their own unique aim but, nonetheless, this aim can solely be achieved by way of understanding that the other will behave in a certain way: the boat will veer sharply and rotate to one side if one of the oarsmen rows and the other does not, or if one rows more vigorously than the other. The coordinated endeavor of both oarsmen presupposes that each understand and recognise intentional activity. In turn, Hume's conception of "convention" as the *general sense of common interest* necessitates adherence to a pattern of behavior alongside knowledge of, or belief in, an other's performance, producing a standard of behavior that must be conformed to for any person to derive the benefit that the "convention" confers.

James builds upon this idea of "convention" as an agreement without guarantee: "[t]he particular moment when we place our faith in a series of uncertain signs may be called a convention; convention is defined as a tacit agreement with an idea that is indeterminate (at least with respect to its consequences) in accordance to which we venture into action with a sense of faith" (Lapoujade, 2019: 56). Signs are not over and above us as ideal causes that abolish the distance between those who serve them but are between us and in a relation of immanence. The "indeterminate" here also corresponds to the *indefinite* and this is particularly the case with religion, which appeals to the indetermination (i.e., the force of the margin) in our power to act rather than to a determinate entity. While James demonstrates that religious belief rests on indefinite experience rather than a definite experience, it is more generally due to the character of his plurality that there is a reserve of nonconscious potentiality that embeds indeterminacy into the system. Plurality as such characterises any subject's apparent lack of control over their actions or their failure to know why something has been done, is the case, or is happening. Indeterminacy implies that which is not reducible to form; in short, "[v]ariation is immanent" (102-103).

James's transcendental field, as a plane of immanence, allows a move away from forms and structures towards flows, functions, phases, and fields. For James, there is a

"transmarginal region" that "contains every kind of matter." (James, 1987 [1902]: 338). This implies a plurality of connections in which any organism is ecologically entangled. Just as Deleuze and Guattari's desiring-machine works by breaking down, James's notion of inner variation allows for genuine exteriority and inner diversity, aberration and ill-adaptation, which is not to be overcome rationally/dialectically (as is the case for Rationalism's dealing with theodicy). James tracks contingent impurity and the material flows organised around it by way of energetic systems; this is readily the case when James deals with and tracks socially and psychically marginal experiences. This is particularly prudent with religious experience, which James sees as opening the question of the absolute and putting it into relational becoming, "inwardising" religious experience, dealing with selection and transformation *vide* immanent variation. Similarly, James's engagement with the natural sciences is to evince referential methodologies *qua* groundless ground/prepositive ground. Rather than conceiving of contradiction in terms of rational or dialectical movement in relation to a Grand Absolute or a transcendent point of view, James prods us to think dynamically about contradiction, in terms of transversal movement and by *relation* to an absolute *vis-à-vis* a neutral point (Lamarre sees James's approach here as confluent with Foucault's genealogical contingency; 113).⁹

If convention is a force of law, a category, then what is the role of a *specific choice* among *possible conventions*? Lapoujade remarks that our choice is guided by experimental facts. Necessity is not seen as an intrinsic property of the idea or of reasoning but rooted in the motivations that produce resemblance/agreement. The solutions or rules are immanent in each case and do not depend on values transcending existences. Thus "[i]t is not possible to set up any universal rule" (58), because we always need to update and amend our choices. Any agreement is momentary and does not last beyond resolution of a particular crisis—the impossibility of determining a convention in advance and convention's situational specificity demonstrates how pragmatism is a "method of practical evaluation of conventions" (59). For Lapoujade, pragmatism thus rejects the distinction between theoretical activity and practical activity – every concept harbors practical interest as it refers to different possible circumstances for acting and thinking. This is related to *cohesiveness*, which depends on faith that is distributed within the community¹⁰ – for Lapoujade convention must displace "the contract" and its Rousseauian atomist postulate where the multiple is absorbed into the collective One-All as we pass from the individual to society. According to Lapoujade, James's world has *meaning* not by way of mutual submission to general law but by way of *implicit accord*, and convention allots for such an intrapersonal and interindividual rule of interpretation that is established by way of exchanging signs. For Lapoujade, as Dewey says, the individual is an immediately social reality (i.e., society is principal) and one does not "believe in signs without believing that others also believe in them as well. I believe in a belief" (69).¹¹ Threading James's understanding of convention, we see how the rule of interpretation is nested within convention and established by exchanging signs. Thus, "the real" is a set of objects and relations of a social nature.

Conclusion: Lapoujade *vis-à-vis* Rorty: Language and Ethnocentrism

Lapoujade concludes his project by, once again, return to the neo-pragmatist rendering of Rorty, who he sees as endowing James and pragmatism with an explicitly American criteria of universal democracy, expropriating the United States as an

indigenous source of fundamental values. For Lapoujade, Rorty misrepresents James by reducing his pluralist thought into a univocal monolith. By elucidating "convention," Lapoujade shows how James' pragmatist theory of truth does not come down to validation through action and is not simply a "theory of action," even if James maintains that the truth of the idea (epistemological perspective) lies partly in its practical consequences. It is, instead, a theory of belief qua relationality.

Lapoujade's critique of Rorty is that reducing convention to consensus "entails the production of statements within an ultimately predefined framework" (74). For Lapoujade, Rorty elides any trace of convention here and this leads not to the nature of the concept and its logical or practical liaisons but to intersubjective/communicational agreement, thereby neglecting any increase in the power of our theoretical or practical activity and common interests. According to Lapoujade, Rorty's project promotes mutual recognition among representatives of the same community of thought, risking a philosophy of economic or political opportunism that foments ethnocentrism in the last instance. Lapoujade's project seeks to save James from the exportation of liberal values through communication, illuminating pragmatism as a presentation of salvation or loss where faith is a vital matter.

However, Rorty's engagement with ethnocentrism is not laudatory and this is a distortion of Rorty's critique. As William Gavin, Stefan Neubert, and Kersten Reich remark, for Rorty:

...the task of philosophy is to provide arguments to keep the conversation about values of civilisation going. Any such talk, for him, has a necessarily ethnocentric dimension to it. It is always relative to contexts of history, culture, and language. However, there remains the distinction between good and bad argument in any given discourse even if we cannot claim a last or superior observer position from which to fully evaluate different discourses against each other (2010: 117).

For Rorty, ethnocentrism is unavoidable and perhaps the very operation of his philosophy is a framing operation that seeks to criticise it by way of demonstration – this would mean that, perhaps, Lapoujade is a bit unfair to Rorty. Rorty's fact-constructivism and its relativistic purview sees truths as relative to a theory, language-game, or a way of talking (this is also why Rorty was rather keen on Derrida's critique of logocentrism). In turn, since facts are only facts insofar as they are relative to our language/way of talking, they are shaped by our contingent activities, needs, and interests. That is, for Rorty no fact is independent of our descriptions; given his understanding of humans as linguistic beings in regards to truth, pure experiences can never be pure in the sense of unmediated by language. Therefore, Rorty stresses the unavoidable ethnocentrism involved in all truth-games, as language is always fraught with cultural contexts. Particularly in texts like *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989) Rorty stresses that we should substitute the traditional philosophical mission for uncovering universal consent with this contingency when working with like-minded world-makers via mutually shared language games. This is, in fact, not the trumpeted cry of imperialist spirit and the American enterprise but quite the opposite: Rorty's admission is that, following Wittgenstein, language can be understood as a practice of like-minded world-makers that produce viable truth claims.

In turn, what obtains for one cultural practice is not ethical to transpose to another cosmogony. Rorty thus tempers linguistic solidarity's universalistic orientations,

accepting that the linguistic constructions of other groups or communities other than one's own may be "equally real" or commensurate in truth, as there is no meta-perspective that provides us with a semiological commensurable framework. This is not a denial of virtual unity and the power of belief (i.e., convention) nor does it attempt to purpose a "new model of conversation whose singular merit is to clearly reveal its disturbing ambition to achieve consensus" (Lapoujade: 74). Such "consensus" is precisely what Rorty opposes and this intervention has had lasting metaphysical propriety in those influenced by Rorty. Consider, for instance, how Robert Brandom imports Rorty's suspicion to the realm of propositional attitudes and conceptual competence, performing an alchemic admixture of Hegel with pragmatism. Brandom gives us a rather rich understanding of language not as a formal structure but as a feature of the natural history of sapient beings, characterising the meanings that get conferred on expressions by their roles in discursive practices. As Brandom argues, although to describe and explain the world in the material mode supposes in general the capacity to make and endorse patterns of inference in the formal mode, it does not follow that such descriptions and explanations are about inferential licenses. For the latter is only made available through a metalinguistic apparatus capable of making explicit the infrastructure of normative-discursive practice which guides description and explanation of the world and its alethic modal structure.

Lapoujade remarks that Rorty's pragmatism is American, consumerist, (neo)liberal. This charge is a crude misrepresentation of Rorty's project and readers will be thankful that such a slapdash exegesis, besmirching an otherwise entirely erudite project, only occupies a sparse few pages of this book. Let us quote, as Brandom explains, the scope of Rorty's neo-pragmatism:

If you ask a contemporary German philosopher about pragmatism, he or she will describe it as a reductive, psychologistic theory that seeks to understand normativity in terms of the grasping selfishness of a bourgeois shopkeeper, whose answer to every question is, "Well, what's in it for me? How can I get some advantage from this?" It is a reductively utilitarian answer to theoretical and epistemological questions in line with the practical philosophy of Bentham and Mill. But there is another way to see it, the way Rorty saw it, as announcing nothing less than a second Enlightenment. The first Enlightenment had the idea of human beings, in their practical conduct, as under the sway of some nonhuman authority, as though the norms that ought to govern our interactions with each other could be read metaphysically off the world. That is opposed to a view that it's up to us to discern moral norms, to decide how we want to behave and ought to behave. That, in Rorty's vision of pragmatism, freed us from the idea that in our account of how things are, we're subject to norms that are somehow written into the way the world is, as opposed to thinking of our cognitive activities as social undertakings where standards of evidence are to be discovered and determined by the inquirers (Brandom, 2013: 379).

As Brandom makes clear, Rorty's ethnocentric exhumation is a critique of normativity and how it operates, *not a prescription of consensus*; it is, if anything, a humble project lighting a candle to mankind's intellectual restraints and limits. As a last word, the tension between Rorty and Lapoujade may relate to what the former is trying to do with James specifically, which is entirely distinct from Lapoujade's machine-

ontological pluralism. For Rorty, James was *unfortunately* both a pragmatist and a radical empiricist, unfortunate because for James his empiricism led him to the conception of religious experience not only as intimate phenomena but also a way to deal “with realities in the completest sense of the term” (James, [1902]: 446). When James conceives of private or personal phenomena, he sees them as real because they are given in immediate unconceptualised experience. This is not simply the domain of the social but the domain of phenomenology by way of the in-itself. James here echoes the Bergsonian position concerning a world of pure experience. However, for Rorty this is an adumbrate view and a chimera, lapsing into the Myth of the Given. While Rorty endorses James’s functionalism qua truth by way of human activities, following Sellars’s and Wittgenstein’s view, for Rorty “there is no such thing as the intrinsic content of an experience. To report an experience is simply to respond to being in a certain brain state with whatever sentences one’s linguistic community has programmed one to use in that situation. If this view is right, then a change from a religious to a nonreligious outlook, or vice versa, can never be a matter of drawing information from the content of a new experience” (Rorty, 2004: 29). Lapoujade’s extension of virtualities in making faith a recipe comprised of ingredients that, themselves, are the vital matter of a social nature, arguably lapses into such Givenness. However, there is also a great deal of agreement between Rorty and Lapoujade—following both thinkers, “we may equally well say that communities are multiple, according to the signs with which they are in agreement” (Lapoujade, 2019: 71).

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Notes

¹ For Deleuze, memory is the whole past—that is, the ground; the present is thus the foundation because it is the most contracted point of the Bergsonian cone of the whole past. More specifically, because the past is continuous with the present, the present is only the most contracted point of the past for Deleuze. Nonetheless, despite these three syntheses in *Difference and Repetition* do break with the Kantian transcendental syntheses, they also coincide with the tripartite Kantian framework, where Kant's intuition, imagination, and understanding correspond to Deleuze's sentiendum (or the being of the sensible), memorandum (recollection), and cogitandum (or noeton, the Essence that is not yet intelligible).

² Note that, with Deleuze's machine ontology, the disjunctive synthesis is not easily reducible to the first, second, or third synthesis in Deleuze's synthesis of memory.

³ At the beginning of *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari outline the machine ontology: "It is at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts. It breathes, it heats, it eats. It shits and fucks. What a mistake to have ever said the id. Everywhere it is machines—real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. An organ-machine is plugged into an energy-source-machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983 [1972]: 1). Accordingly, machines operate via fluxes (including energy, desiring energy, matter, money, and so on) by stopping, using, transforming, and releasing them. For example, Western society responds to the abstract machine of capitalism, which itself organises the work of all the other machine by transforming the fluxes of Capital. Capital is the Body without Organs upon which the *concrete machines* are attached/connected in order to transform and to create an economy from the flux of money. So, not only is there a distinction between fluxes and machines in the machine ontology but any machine and every machine operates specifically with respect to the way in which it uses a particular flux and releases a transformed flux to the (other) connected machines.

⁴ Unlike empirical matter, for James "material" designates reality that can be simultaneously physical and mental. This means that nothing is purely mental or purely material but that, for James, everything is relationally composited of physical-mental "material". Lapoujade calls this a new rendering of vague monism where monism is reconceived of no longer being a thinking of the All but of the interval, the in-between, the intermediary relation that differentially stretches between mind and matter, "precisely where they are closely emerged, but on the basis of which they are distinguished as well, albeit only virtually" (Lapoujade, 2019: 13).

⁵ Lapoujade defines two aspects of pragmatism:

i) *pragmatism as method of practical evaluation*: examining ideas, concepts, and philosophies by way of function of practical consequences (how they make us act or think).

ii) *pragmatic method*: "inseparable from a tool of construction (or a genetic theory of what is meant by truth, to use James's turn of phrase)" (2019: 4), responding to the question of how to produce ideas for acting or thinking as a method of evaluation (choosing the most beneficial ideas for action or thought—e.g., in choosing between determinism and free will, the former ascribes less voluntary moral ill will in the political realm). Thus, Lapoujade remarks that "[p]ragmatism is not a philosophy but a method for choosing among philosophies" and is a tool for construction, helping us "[c]reate ideas that may be of use in acting or thinking" (4).

⁶ One of the most interesting facets of Lamarre's *Afterward* is the bricolage between Simondon and James. James's concern is the indefinite vis-à-vis the individual rather than the definite (or Hegelian dialectical procedures in which the real is the rational and the movement of reason is one of the sublation of unreason). In James's resistance to rationalism and absolute idealism, we see the description of the individual as a "plane of consistency or composition whose unity is virtual" (Lamarre, 2019: 89). That is, the rational, definite individual of individualism is a constriction of non-rational process of indefinite composition—the plane of composition is thus granted primacy. Thus, in giving priority to material flows, James establishes a transcendental field autonomous of psychology and autonomous of its forms (i.e., the hylomorphic schemata where, as in Aristotle, form has de facto superiority over matter) where the individual organism implies a unity of functions (not forms). The individual is a point of departure for the

establishment of a transcendental field, as James tracks material flows as they are revealed through the experimental vantage of natural sciences, especially concerning evolution. We have a similar idea with Simondon; consider the model of crystallization which, for Simondon, allows him to establish a transcendental field for individuation without positing a substantialist division between different modes of existence, such as “physical” beings (e.g., crystal) and “living” beings (e.g., “plants”). For Simondon, there is an *ontological difference* between “physical” and “living” beings: the former is characterized by carrying its associated milieu with it. For instance, the “crystal stops growing when you remove it from its aqueous solution” while the “plant may stop growing if you do not water it, but it carries a good deal of water with it, which allows for greater regulation of the relation between its inner and external milieus. It even puts water into circulation with its ecology” (Lamarre in Lapoujade, 2019: 109). For Simondon, the transcendental movement of evolution is not teleological or dialectical but deals with structure and reorganized material flows along transindividual relations, recombining aspects. For James, as for Simondon, we can solely understand an individual (psyche, organism, or experience) if we look at it in its environment and vide an ecological disjunctive relation—not one of resemblance or representation but heterogeneous scales, where “the overall coordination of the living system—plant of psyche—might be said to coordinate by hanging together at the edges, which allows for an overall coordination” (Lamarre in Lapoujade: 116).

⁷ Thus, Lapoujade remarks that nature functions exactly “like a postal network on which a telephone network is superposed, partially overlapping with it while nonetheless, establishing specific connections, including new unities” (Lapoujade, 2019: 40).

⁸ Elaborating on the distinction between ambulatory and saltatory knowledge, James writes that: Difference, for example, is saltatory, jumping as it were immediately from one term to another, but ‘distance’ in time or space is made out of intervening parts of experience through which we ambulate in succession.... Now the most general way of contrasting my view of knowledge with the popular view (which is also the view of most epistemologists) is to call my view ambulatory, and the other view saltatory; and the most general way of characterising the two views is by saying that my view describes knowing as it exists concretely, while the other view only describes its results abstractly taken. I fear that most of my recalcitrant readers fail to recognise that what is ambulatory in the concrete may be taken so abstractly as to appear saltatory. Distance, for example, is made abstract by emptying out whatever is particular in the concrete intervals—it is reduced thus to a sole ‘difference,’ a difference of ‘place,’ which is a logical or saltatory distinction, a so-called ‘pure relation.’ My own account of this relation is ambulatory through and through. I say that we know an object by means of an idea, towards the object under the impulse which the idea communicates. (James 1987 [1909]: 888–889).

⁹ Just as there is no relation of resemblance or representation between putative external facts and the overall direction of a system, where internal variation is immanent, Lamarre makes the case that through James, as with Foucault, we can model a conception of the question of power that does not recoil into the domain of external determinants (dominance and dominants, i.e., natural sovereignty) but is posed in light of immanent variation—tracing coordinated heterogeneous flows and functions in the dynamic movement of a system allows for “something like subordination” (Lamarre in Lapoujade, 2019: 116).

¹⁰ James gives the example of train robbers who can solely succeed, despite their scant number, by counting on one another, a relation of faith and belief that works across individuals of convention: “[w]hile the *contract* determines its content through a limitation of powers, the *convention* calls on the indeterminate to actualise itself through rules that are established along the way” (Lapoujade, 2019: 67).

¹¹ Such an epistemology established on a social basis and as a condition of semiological convention has, today, been taken up by Robert Brandom and his notion of “giving and asking for reasons” where belief is stabilised through a set of multiple conventions and we come into agreement about meanings despite the agreement is not, itself, explicitly established.