Genius, madness, mimesis, and pragmatism in William James's religion

Genio, locura, mimesis y pragmatismo en la religión de William James

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Abstract

The philosopher and religion psychologist William James establishes a double approach to study religion: one genetic and one evaluative. He intends to achieve a more complete understanding of the phenomenon that accounts for its historical conformation and its value. With this double criterion he articulates the heroic theory of history, the pathological method, and the sociological concept of mimesis with his pragmatism. The goal of this paper is to reveal this multiplicity of approaches, which explains his ability to engage with complex religious concepts and respond to great theories of his time while retaining a fresh fertility that continues to appeal to countless readers.

Keywords: William James, religion, genius, mimesis, pathological method.

Resumen

El filósofo y psicólogo de la religión William James establece un doble criterio de abordaje de la religión, uno genético y otro evaluativo. Pretende lograr de esta forma una comprensión más acabada del fenómeno. Que dé cuenta de su conformación histórica y de su valor. Para ello, pone en juego conceptos de gran magnitud en la época, a saber, la teoría heroica de la historia, el método patológico, el concepto sociológico de mímesis y el pragmatismo. El objetivo de este trabajo es evidenciar esta multiplicidad de enfoques que develan un concepto complejo de religión ligado a las grandes teorías de su época, pero que conserva parte de su fertilidad.

Palabras clave: William James, religión, genio, mimesis, método patológico.

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In *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* James asserts that, as a psychologist, he will focus on the contents of religious consciousness, which can be approached from different perspectives depending on whether one asks "How has the religious phenomenon been realized, what shape does it take?" or "What is its meaning and value?".[1] In the former case, we would be asking about the historical formation of a religious belief, while in the latter, we would be inquiring about its value.

Regarding its origin, three notably important concepts in the 19th century intervene in James's formulation: the pathological method, the theory of great men, and the sociological concept of imitation. Indeed, James argues that religion is paradigmatically found in the exaggerated sense of the divine that is seen in its authors, prophets, and saints, who, perhaps to a greater extent than other types of geniuses, were subject to abnormal psychic experiences. Such a feeling provides an "enthusiasm" and an "emotion" that adds a fascination to life which is "imitated," first by a close entourage, then by the followers of the entourage, and so on until it constitutes an "external" and secondhand religion, with its cults, rites, and dogmatic theologies.[2] For this reason, the exaggerated (psychopathological, or near to it) experience of the religious genius is key to understanding normal religion, with perceptions of greatness only emerging after these primal experiences.

However, once the emergence of the religious sentiment and how it propagates have been described, the task of establishing a value judgment about religion and its beliefs remains. James, in a parody of Kant, calls this a "Critique of pure Saintliness."[3] But the Jamesian *werturteil* will evaluate the philosophical truth of religion based on its pragmatic

1 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1917), 5.

2 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 6-7.

3 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 326.

importance, following what he calls the "empirical method"[4] whose aim is to judge its usefulness for individual and collective life. Religion must be evaluated according to its general functioning, its spiritual richness, and its capacity to renew vital energies. But then, what is the point of following the pathological route linked to the origin of religion if its value is found elsewhere? It is because, as James asserts: "…we shall always understand the meaning of a thing if we consider its exaggerations, its perversions, its substitutes, and its nearest equivalents."[5] Thus, it is a matter of using a double approach to better understand the phenomenon.

Next, we will account for the way this double lens operates and show how the American integrated these great 19th-century ideas with his pragmatist philosophical criterion, which refers to the subjective and social effects of religion. These facets make James's concept of religion, during this period, a testament to the philosophical and scientific field at the time. We will trace an arc that culminates in an optimistic conclusion about religion, where madness and the possibilities of functionalism are related, as well as European theoretical tools with a pragmatist evaluation.

The Formation of the Religious Phenomenon: The Pathological Method

Each religion, James proposes, begins in the religious sentiments of its founding geniuses who, with their first-order experience, establish a pattern that will be followed by imitation. In these sentiments, religion presents itself as "an acute fever" where "nervous instability" is frequently

[4] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 327.

[5] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 22.

exhibited and where, probably, these "geniuses" suffered from "abnormal psychic experiences" and invariably "possessed an extraordinary emotional susceptibility."[6] This "opaque origin" does not invalidate religion, since the effects are infinitely more complex than the causes, and the genetic reasoning regarding this origin does not have to end in reductionism. The physiological or even pathological origin of a life perspective does not determine its value—nor does it in art or physics—so why should it in religion?

However, the psychopathic temperament of first-order religious sentiment introduces us to the most hidden sectors of the religious phenomenon, providing a peculiar type of access, functioning as a "scalpel" or as a "microscope";[7] that is to say, an instrument for knowledge. By announcing his "pathological program," James joins a significant series of first-rate intellectuals who embrace this idea,[8] and, therefore, for a true understanding of what James is doing at this point, a schematic reconstruction of this idea at the time is necessary.

Under the necessity of achieving a precise and measurable notion of disease, the 19th century witnessed a process of assimilation that constitutes a paradigm still in force today between the physiological-normal and the pathological. A specific type of relationship is established between these terms where the pathological phenomena of living organisms are quantitative variations on normal physiological phenomena, in degrees. It is easy for us to read a medical analysis today because a quan-

6 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 6.

7 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 27.

8 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente Frühjahr 1881 bis sommer 1882* (Giorgio Colli & Mazzino Montinari, 1973): Ernest Renan, *L'avenir de la science* (Calmann-Lévy, 1923); Émile Durkheim, *Las reglas del método sociológico,* trans. Ernestina de Champourcin (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001); Gabriel Tarde, *Las leyes sociales,* trans. G. Núñez de Prado (Sopena, [n.d.]).

titative value is established for norms and their deviations, which are also quantitative by default or excess. The ontological identity between the normal and pathological state allowed for the inauguration of the pathological method, according to which knowledge of the first domain is enriched by observing the second. The intellectual referents of this theory are Auguste Comte and Claude Bernard, who give it the character of a "dogma" that it comes to acquire.[9]

Auguste Comte constitutes the origin, taking the nosological affirmation made by François J. V. Broussais in *De l'irritation et de la folie* (1828) that all diseases consist fundamentally of the excess or defect of excitation in the various tissues above or below the normal degree. Comte declares it the general axiom that gives the explanatory key of individual and collective biological phenomena.[10] He develops its philosophical potential from three ideas that will acquire permanence: 1. the aforementioned continuity between the normal and the pathological; 2. the idea of the pathological as a spontaneous experimentation that allows the comparison between an unaltered phenomenon and an altered one; and 3. the use of pathological observation as a key to understanding the normal. Part of the authority of these ideas was due to the prestige of Comte, who was read by doctors, writers, psychologists, and the cultured public in general.[11]

Comte was the prophet of the new doctrine, but Claude Bernard provided it with scientific legitimacy, supporting this general principle with experimental trials and quantitative methods. He argues that health and disease are not two essentially different states, as doctors formerly be-

9 George Canguilhem, *Lo normal y lo patológico*, trans. Ricardo Potschart (Siglo XXI, 2015), 17–23. *The translation is mine in all cases where the bibliography is in another language.

10 Canguilhem, *Lo normal y lo patológico,* 25.

11 Auguste Comte, "Considérations philosophiques sur l'assemblage de la science biologique," *Cours de philosophie positive. Vol. III* (Schleicher, 1908), 169–170.

lieved and as some practitioners still believe today, but rather a difference of degrees. "Exaggeration, disproportion, and disharmony of normal phenomena constitute the pathological state."[12] The "method" would easily land in psychology, which at the time was a discipline in formation whose claim to scientific authority was based on its ability to make use of the natural sciences, especially physiology. Strictly speaking, this positivist inclination had its opposite tenet in the spiritualist version of the approach to the unconscious, whose extreme version found form in parapsychology. Following the positivist route, the slippage of the principle in question towards psychology arrives with Hippolyte Taine, but it acquires full self-consciousness with Théodule Ribot. The early publication of *De l'intelligence* (1870) was of great relevance, there the self appears fragmented and Taine's famous affirmation that it is necessary "…to see the broken clock to distinguish the counterweights and the wheels that we do not notice in the clock that runs well"[13] enunciates the pathological method. Taine uses examples taken from physiology, medicine, and pathological psychology, but also from spiritualism and the medium phenomenon, a fact that reveals the aforementioned tension. As will become clear in sections one and two of chapter II, "The Images" are most relevant to our topic.

The genesis of the normal formation of the self can be schematically abbreviated thus: nervous stimulus, sensation, images, antagonistic reducers that are other images, general judgments, or memory. The abnormal disruption of the normal equilibrium shapes the mental illness that is key to reading the normal processes. There is a "struggle for life" in the images,[14] which in their origin have been endowed with more force by proceeding from a sensation accompanied by greater attention, whether

12 Claude Bernard, *Leçon sur la chaleur animale* (Baillières, 1876), 391.

13 Hippolyte Taine, *La Inteligencia*, trans. Ricardo Rubio. (Daniel Jorro, 1904), 16.

14 Taine, *La Inteligencia,* 137.

"horrible" or "delicious," and which have a chance of conquering their rivals, although conquering does not mean annihilation. The defeated images can live a parasitic existence, below consciousness, and have the opportunity to return to the surface.

Indeed, Taine establishes a law of the rebirth of images, which holds that both what we call sensation and what we call image are constituted not by isolated elements, but by a continuum. The images that remain on the surface do not completely break the bond with the "repressed" images which, through such a conduit, are reborn through similarity or contiguity with the conscious image.[15] As the reborn image has the same clarity, energy, and detail as that which comes from sensation, the possibility that they may be confused between one another arises, and then the "internal phantoms" are perceived as existing, which is to say that the hallucinatory state is produced; this, in turn, constitutes an extreme situation that "shows with its exaggeration the nature of the normal state."[16] In such a state, the ordinary image is a double fact that contains a birth and a restriction. Illusion and rectification occur rapidly and become confused, and it is the antagonistic shock that counters the phantom. Today, we would say the reality principle corrects the illusory inclination. Each phantom has its special antagonistic reducer; however, when the antagonistic reducer fails, hallucination is generated.

Taine's mental stability is fragile and depends on a balance that has mechanical features combined with subtle observations that foreshadow dynamic psychiatry and psychoanalysis. To conclude this schematic presentation, Taine's mechanics of the mind can be summarized as follows: Each image contains an echo, which is endowed with an automatic force that spontaneously tends toward hallucination, false memory, and illu-

[15] Taine, *La Inteligencia,* 147.

[16] Taine, *La Inteligencia,* 93.

sions of madness (*folie*). But it is repressed by the contradiction of a sensation, of another image or group of images, of general judgments, and of memories that operate as antagonistic reducers. The counter-impulse and repression shape the balance, but "as soon as it ceases due to the hypertrophy or atrophy of an element, we become totally or partially mad."[17] The normal and pathological mental states are distinguished by an imbalance of the positions in the network of hallucinations that constitute us—ironically, with madness showing the normal functioning of the mind.

Théodule Ribot situates the pathological method within the general methodology of psychology in the publication *De la Méthode dans les Sciences* (1909), but he makes constant use of the method in an earlier publication: *Maladies de la mémoire* (1881). In the methodological text, he points out that experimentation introduces psychology into the cycle of the natural sciences and that it can take two forms: "…depending on whether it is applied to normal phenomena (this is experimentation properly speaking) or used on diseases as a means of investigation (this is the pathological method)."[18] Here Ribot follows Comte, and the method in question is, at the same time, observation and experimentation. Disease, in effect, is an experiment of a subtle order instituted by nature itself. If the disease were to disorganize the mechanism of the mind and produce moral aberrations, who would offer themselves to suffer the process and who would offer themselves to provoke it?[19] Disease is constituted as an instrument and the hospital replaces the laboratory. In *Maladies de la mémoire,* he sets in motion his version of the pathological method. His general hypothesis is Spencerian, and it can be abbreviated as follows: All phenomena in the world are governed by the law of evolu-

17 Taine, *La Inteligencia,* 124.

18 Théodule Ribot, "Psychologie," in *De la Méthode dans les Sciences* (Félix Alcan, 1909), 230.

19 Théodule, "Psychologie," 252.

tion defined as the passage from the simple homogeneous to the complex heterogeneous.[20] Under this framework, Ribot understands disease as involution; that is, as the gradual passage from the complex heterogeneous to the simple homogeneous, a process in which the higher functions of the brain are the first to disappear, while the lower functions, the simplest and most automatic, are the last.[21] It is progressive amnesia that, through a slow and continuous work of dissolution, leads to the total abolition of memory, leaving the subject, in the most extreme cases, in a vegetative state (the most primitive function). Amnesia functions as an inverted mirror that reveals the slow process of acquisition of the most refined and fragile products of memory.[22]

James was familiar with all these arguments; he had the cited sources in his library and corresponded with some of the intellectuals mentioned.[23] In chapters I and II of *The Varieties,* as we have already said, he states that he will follow a "pathological program"[24] to describe the genesis of religious feeling or emotion. To carry out such a description, he constructs what could be called the ideal types of religious mentality —Healthy Minds and Sick Souls—which are determined by the temperamental tone that underlies them.

To define the religiosity of a healthy mind, James advances in the analysis of a series of documents from which he infers that the religiosity of this mentality is sustained by the human inclination towards

20 Herbert Spencer, *Progress: Its Law and Cause* (J. Fitzgerald & Co., 1881).

21 Théodule Ribot, *Diseases of Memory, an Essay in the Positive Psychology*, without reference to the translator (D. Appleton & Company, 1882), 127.

22 Ribot, *Diseases of Memory,* Chapter II and III.

23 See Thibaud Trochu, "L'Amérique de Pierre Janet: William James & Co," *Annales Médico-Psychologiques*, vol. 166, no. 3, (2008): 199–205; Philip J. Kowalski, "Guide to William James's Reading," *William James Studies,* last accessed December 12, 2024, https://williamjamesstudies.org/guide-to-william-jamess-reading/.

24 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 52.

happiness and the selective exercise of setting aside, to a greater or lesser extent, the most painful aspects of life in order to make it bearable. What dominates in such a temperament is a certain constant positive emotional ecstasy that relativizes the pain of the world. Although it may seem forced to suggest that the religiosity of Healthy Minds is pathological, James affirms that in certain individuals "optimism can become almost pathological, the capacity to become sad […] seems to have been amputated by some congenital anesthesia."[25] As examples of healthy mentality, we find Rousseau's conception of nature, Walt Whitman's poetry, and a remarkable passage from the theologian Theodore Parker,[26] but also a large amount of documents that James groups under the concept of Mind Cure, where we find representatives of the Christian Science and New Thought movements, whose optimistic spirituality constitutes an American mixture of religion, spirituality, and the advances of a nascent dynamic psychology.[27]

On the other hand, there exists an opposite type of mentality that shapes the religiosity of Sick Souls, to which James dedicates more time and gives more accuracy for the simple reason that it contains tragedy and hope. Melancholy, in these cases, has different levels. James uses the psychological concept of *threshold* for the symbolic designation of the point where one mental state becomes another; those who have a very low threshold for pain have a greater susceptibility, and this allows us to observe a whole series of negative emotions, such as moral pain, helplessness, fear, precariousness, failure, humiliation, and shame. As susceptibility grows, natural goods fade away. As examples, James cites Tolstoy

25 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 87.

26 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 81.

27 Pierre Prades, *De la conversion à la guérison puritanisme, psychothérapies, développement personnel*, last accessed December 12, 2024, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/39990685.pdf/.

and Bunyan;[28] these cases are called religious because they have an outlet through which James understands as conversion, which he explains following the French psychopathological route regarding the multiplicity of personality. Conversion is, for James, the reunification of the multiplicity of the person around a field of consciousness united to the religious ideal (to be completed after evaluation).

The pathological, understood as spontaneous experimentation, enables a specific type of observation. In this framework, the religiosity of Healthy Minds and Sick Souls represents an extreme case that shows the feelings and emotions of normal religiosity. But it is the Sick Souls that provide a richer panorama of the religious mentality. The observation of their emotional movements allows us to understand the psychic dynamic that needs religious change. For James, the paradigmatic experience that takes place in the religious geniuses who found traditions based on their imitated originality has a trajectory that begins with despair and ends in transformation. It is necessary to clearly define the way in which genius influences society and generate a change in history to understand how the exceptional religious individual initiates a church.

The Great Man Theory of History

In general terms, the historical theory of the great man refers to a set of 19th-century reflections on the role that certain individuals play in shaping the culture and future of their time. However, despite the convergence on the topic, we find a marked variety of positions, both among intellectuals and within the very intellectual at different moments of their thought. The classic figure here is Thomas Carlyle, whose influen-

[28] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 157.

tial *On Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841) gave a great impetus to the idea that history is the biography of great men, despite not being a theoretical book. Notwithstanding his influence, his way of understanding the nature of the hero and the relationship he has with the rest of humanity was not a note that other intellectuals adopted. Indeed, it could be said that what constitutes an exceptional individual and the way in which he influences his environment can be used as a criterion of distinction between the multiple positions.

Within James's framework, heroism had its own specific characteristics (to be completed after evaluation). The philosopher explicitly adheres to this way of understanding history and affirms that the elemental and excessive experience of the religious genius is "imitated" and creates second-order products, such as rituals, practices, and theology.[29] The religious genius is the great man or hero operating in this specific field of culture, but the causes of this genius, its constitution, and its mode of influence appear more clearly in another of his works where we can also appreciate the complex and tentative nature of his approach.

In "The Great Men and their Environment" (1880) and "On the Importance of the Individual" (1890), James delineates the role of the hero as a catalyst for societal transformation, introducing a tension that would later be explored in *The Will to Believe* (1896). While acknowledging that not all individuals are heroic, James argues that his heroic interpretation of history, rather than diminish the significance of ordinary people, promotes individual responsibility. In contrast to Spencer's teleological view of history, which leaves little room for personal agency, James, drawing upon Darwin, emphasizes the emergence of unique individuals whom he terms "spontaneous variations." These individuals, he posits, can either be preserved and emulated by society or extinguished.

[29] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 6 and 7.

The survival and imitation of such heroic figures facilitate social change, whereas their elimination perpetuates the status quo. To understand historical development, James suggests, is to identify these extraordinary individuals, their emergence, and the mechanisms by which their ideas are perpetuated or discarded. In this framework, the model of emergence and conservation of transformative variation is applied to both biological and cultural domains, often in an implicit manner:

> The mutations of societies, then, from generation to generation, are in the main due directly or indirectly to the acts or the example of individuals whose genius was so adapted to the receptivities of the moment, or whose accidental position of authority was so critical that they became ferments, initiators of movement, setters of precedent or fashion, centres of corruption, or destroyers of other persons, whose gifts, had they had free play, would have led society in another direction.[30]

Changes occur due to the influence of genius individuals—that is clear. But is genius a product of previous influences or is it a primary spontaneity? Does genius have a historical relationship with its peers, to whom it is linked by bonds of community? For Emerson, to give an example that James would know personally and intellectually, the originality of Moses, Plato, and Milton lies in the fact that they all reduce the significance of established books and traditions to nothing (1908).[31] Self-reliance connects immediately with the soul of the world. It cannot be affirmed that James followed Emerson in this, but the idea is useful to make the problem explicit: James affirms that he participates in the "cult of heroes";[32] with this expression he seems to support the hypothesis that

[30] James, *The Will to Believe* (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), 227.

[31] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self Reliance* (The Roycrofters, 1908).

[32] James, *The Will to Believe*, 257.

the hero is above his peers, but, conversely, his idea that his way of seeing things "…is one of the most stimulating appeals possible to the energy of the individual"[33] seems to bet on the singular initiative distributed among the multitude. The question is whether history is the biography of great men or, on the contrary, a network of multiple stories connected at a micrological level.

We do not know to what extent James was clear on the matter. Although the social dimension of the hero is crucial for the construction of his concept of religion, his sociology does not possess the complexity of his psychological and phenomenological approaches (to be completed after evaluation). However, there are clear statements in the text: The exceptional individual causes historical transformation and teaches a new horizon with his attitude. For this to happen two conditions must be met: the emergence of the exceptional individual (spontaneous variation) and the positive receptivity of society (apprehension of variation by the environment). The genius action is not imposed despotically, it is imitated, and the whole approach respects, in turn, the contingent aspect of history. As can be seen below, for James the dispute is moral:

> And I for my part cannot but consider the talk of the contemporary sociological school about averages and general laws and predetermined tendencies, with its obligatory undervaluing of the importance of individual differences.[34]

On the contrary, his vision, as he saw it, presupposes an open world where novelty, transformation, and responsibility are possible. James's scenario is dramatic, full of struggle. The exceptional, to survive, must be

[33] James, *The Will to Believe*, 245.

[34] James, *The Will to Believe*, 261 and 262.

in tune with social need, and society, by imitating the exceptional, opens its horizon. The key concept that articulates the relationship between the hero and the crowd is that of mimesis. James affirms, in a footnote, that *Les Lois de l'imitation étude sociologique* (1890) by Gabriel Tarde is the complementary reading. For Tarde, he states, "…imitation and invention are the only factors of social change."[35] The French sociologist also argues with the structuralists of the time. He will have a specific way of understanding social dynamics, the emergence of the great man, and the nature of the power he exercises over the crowd. Addressing this will shed light on James's summary and, perhaps, on a paradoxical position.

Unconscious social mimesis

Gabriel Tarde's thought is complex, replete with clarifications and examples, developed in multiple articles that appeared in the *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* and later collected, to a greater extent, in his three major works: *Les lois de l'imitation* (1890), *La logique sociale* (1895) and *L'opposition Universelle* (1897). Moreover, it has been the subject of multiple reappropriations and readings within the framework of contemporary social theory and philosophy (Mucchielli 2000),[36] thus, we will only highlight what is necessary in his theory to understand how James, as a function of his argumentation, would have read him. To this end, we will outline his general stance based on a text called *Les Lois sociales: Esquisse d'une sociologie* (1900), which Tarde himself wrote with

[35] James, *The Will to Believe*, 261.

[36] Laurent Mucchielli, "Tardomania? Réflexions sur les usages contemporains de Tarde," *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines,* vol. 2, no. 3 (2000): 161–184.

the aim of providing "the quintessence" of his thought (Tarde, n.d.: 3); then we will refer to the specific text that James cites.

The guiding thread of Tarde's thought is the explanatory principle that governs the different phenomenal fields of reality and, among them, the social field. This explanatory principle is that of imitation, whose elements are repetition, opposition, and invention.

In reality, according to Tarde, the most important "laws" are those of imitation and invention; opposition is less relevant but, defined as the intersection of imitations, it is a condition of possibility for invention. Not only in this text, but also in his major works, Tarde polemizes with Spencer and Durkheim, who, in their own way, explain the social based on impositions external to the individual. This brings him closer to James, although his motivation seems to be, above all, epistemological. At this level, his considerations and explanations have global pretensions involving dimensions such as the biological and the astronomical. In terms of the social, the "intra-cerebral" relationship is the primordial element of sociology; this relationship is the pure social event. Thus, what Durkheim calls a "social fact" is explained by "…the suggestion-imitation that a first creator of an idea has progressively propagated by example."[37] Given the existence of a social need, the first to create the invention that satisfies it will be imitated by their close contacts, then by the contacts of these and so on. This propagation is "the key to the social mystery,"[38] and, as may have been noted, it resembles what James says about the formation of a religion.

The tendency of an example to propagate, or "imitate radiation," which as such constitutes an imitation, can encounter resistance from another innovation, but the crossing is not always an obstacle; some-

[37] Tarde, *Las leyes sociales,* 27.

[38] Tarde, *Las leyes sociales,* 31.

times it is an alliance or produces the "chemistry" of some brilliant idea. This is called opposition. Repetition is of vital importance for explaining cohesion, but without opposition novelty cannot be explained. This opposition is already found in the "brain" of the individual traversed by diverse radiations. Tarde writes: "It is truly curious to verify that these subjective quantities, beliefs, and desires, supporting different and opposite signs […] are perfectly comparable to objective quantities and mechanical forces directed in opposite directions on the same straight line."[39] One could say that, at an elementary and not entirely conscious level, diverse imitative radiations operate in the subjectivity that keep it split. Such a split is the primordial support of social fragmentation as we see it, but also the condition of invention.

Invention and adaptation are terms used as synonyms and possess a specific meaning. Firstly, it must be discarded that adaptations and novelties precipitate towards a predetermined goal. On the contrary, Tarde verifies that the detail of human facts contains surprising, imperceptible, and unpredictable adaptations. New judgments combine with those already acquired, and desired ends combine with new ones and implement new means. Then, the relationship occurs from brain to brain, and, due to the tendency to propagate a given invention or social adaptation, it combines, complexifies, and increases. This produces new adaptations that, in new encounters and alliances, will lead to a new degree of complexity and so on. This set of small relationships is the origin of the social facts that seem large and stable to us, such as grammar or a code. Small turns, fleeting initiatives, tiny subversions—here is the origin of social change. Now, this summary exposition allows us to understand, to some extent, why James understood that it was a complementary approach. It could be said that they share the focus on detail. However, the divergences soon appear.

[39] Tarde, *Las leyes sociales,* 38.

To explain how imitative radiation multiplies, it is necessary to account for infinitely delicate cerebral facts, with which sociology sinks its roots in physiology and psychology. The complex series of webs that make up social life do not allow us to observe the brain-to-brain relationship that constitutes the elementary relationship, but, Tarde affirms, this is exemplified in the hypnotic experiments of the time. Tarde paid a great deal of attention to this phenomenon in his articles and in his most voluminous publications.[40] In this regard, he affirms:

> Let us suppose a man who, hypothetically withdrawn from all extra-social influence, such as the sight of natural objects or the spontaneous obedience of his various senses, a man whose only contact is with his fellow men and, to simplify matters further, that it is only with one of them. Would it not be this subject that we should study? […] Are hypnotism and somnambulism not precisely the realization of this hypothesis?.[41]

The value of psychopathology to Tarde's developing intersocial psychology lies in its ability to isolate two individuals and observe pure suggestion, thereby revealing the imitative process in its most basic and spontaneous form.

On the other side of the ocean, since 1840, there has been a veritable explosion of mental cures in New England, especially in Boston, which, as we have already said, James groups under the denomination Mind Cure. The philosophy and therapeutic technique vary among the schools of this movement, but there is a convergence in an intense belief in the

[40] Tarde, *Las leyes sociales,* 22.

[41] Tarde, *Las leyes sociales,* 103.

powers of the mind.[42] James developed throughout his life a program of psychological research in this direction.[43]

Tarde uses the terms magnetizer/magnetized and somnambulism in various contexts. Although his appropriation seems quite syncretic, the fact is that, for the second half of the 19th century, research on hypnotic phenomena grew in quantity and depth, becoming the primary way to access the unconscious, with the study of pathological cases acquiring centrality. Although such a phenomenon was not questioned, there was no consensus on what caused it. These discussions from the end of the 19th century are part of a longer trajectory in which a family relationship is observed: It goes from divine intervention in exorcism (Father Johann Joseph Gassner, 1727–1779) through mesmerism and the hypothesis of the intervention and manipulation of a subtle fluid (Franz Anton Mesmer, 1734–1815) to a more modest hypothesis of suggestion (Jacques M. de Chastenet de Puységur, 1751–1825).[44] But the "golden age of hypnosis"[45] arrives with the discussion, after 1880, between the positions developed by Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière and by Ambroise Liébeault and Hippolyte Bernheim in Nancy. The articulations between the hypotheses of these two schools were key to the devel-

42 Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (Yale University Press, 2007).

43 Marcus Peter Ford, *William James's Philosophy: A New Perspective* (The University of Massachusetts Press, 1982); Francesca Bordogna, "Inner division and Uncertain Contours: William James and the Politics of the Modern Self" *The British Journal for the History of Science*, vol. 40, no. 40 (dec., 2007): 505 – 536; Eugene Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States: The Lowell Lectures,* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1986); Krister D. Knapp, *William James: Psychical Research and the Challenge of Modernity* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Jacques Barzun, *A Stroll with William James* (Harper and Row, 1983).

44 Henri Ellenberger, *El descubrimiento del inconsciente,* trans. Pedro López Onega (Gredos, 1976).

45 León Chertok, *Hipnosis y sugestión*, trans. José A. Robles García and Susana Esqueda Aceves (Publicaciones Cruz O.S.A., 1999).

opment of the social theory of the time. The descriptions and analyses of individual cases were extrapolated to think about social phenomena, and the relationship between hypnotist and hypnotized was taken up as a model for thinking about the link between the leader and the crowd.[46] Gabriel Tarde himself says: "I am not lost in any fantasy when I see social man as a true somnambulist."[47] But for him the issue is not as linear as it seems, although he has been criticized for reducing real social relations to somnambulism; it seems to be, rather, a matter of using the advances achieved by the psychology of his time as a theoretical tool to enter into multiple, subtle, and complex social relationships that always involve more than one influence. In this perspective, the hypnotic relationship is an experiment in pure sociology insofar as it artificially strips the social relationship of the plurality of constant irradiations.

This complex unconscious network reveals, at times, that what we call the subject is nothing more than the zone where these relations are inscribed and take shape. Thus, the laws of imitation seem to bind individuals not as to weave a network of "beliefs" and "desires." In the sociologist's words: "Not content with words, I do not admit imitation but the imitation of something, and the substance, the force, transmitted from brain to brain by imitation, is a belief or a desire."[48] The imitation of beliefs and desires would be a form of molecular relationship largely unnoticed by the self, in which it would not be a vehicle of the exceptional individual to the collective, but rather a complex agent creating both. The coincidence exists in that the motive of social change is imitation and invention, but it is not the case that genius invents and is

[46] Ana B. Blanco, "La imitación en los textos de Gabriel Tarde," *VII Jornadas de Sociología de la UNLP* (2012), last accessed December 15, 2024, https://www.aacademica.org/000-097/2.pdf/.

[47] Gabriel Tarde, *Creencias, deseos, sociedades*, trans. Andrea Sosa Varroti (Cactus, 2011).

[48] Gabriel Tarde, *Las leyes de la imitación*, trans. Alejo García Góngora (Daniel Jorro, 1907).

then imitated, but rather that desires and beliefs assemble in the manner described. Tarde is categorical on this point, explicitly stating that he does not believe in Great Men. There has been an error in "…speaking of great men where one should have spoken of great ideas that frequently appear in small men and also of small ideas and infinitesimal innovations contributed by each of us to the common work."[49] For greater precision, in *Les lois de l'imitation* (1890), the book that James cites as a complementary reading, he corrects the heroic perspective of a scholar of religion who adheres to the idea of Carlyle.[50] Thus, Tarde does not participate in the cult of heroes and imitation is not that of the great man.

To summarize the matter, before moving on to the question of value, it can be said that what we find in the formation of religion are excessive religious experiences that can be classified into two antagonistic categories and that, following the pathological method, they account for normal religiosity. In turn, such original religious experiences, due to the influence that religious genius exerts on its environment, initiate an imitative current that ends up shaping traditional religions and experiences. James freely appropriates Tarde's concept of imitation, whose anchoring in the psychological phenomenon of suggestion was very familiar to him, and combines it with that of religious genius. Schematically, this is the psychological and sociological genesis of religion. We must still evaluate its value.

[49] Tarde, *Las leyes sociales,* 113.

[50] Tarde, *Las leyes de la imitación*, 107.

The Value of Religion: *The Lowell Lectures*

In Lectures xiv and xv of *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* James shifts from description to appraisal, employing a pragmatic criterion that he terms the "empirical method." This method establishes the value of what is being evaluated on its usefulness for life; more specifically, it is an assessment that asks if, ultimately, the subjective plus acquired in conversion improves existence from an individual and social standpoint. He previously used this mode of evaluation in his *Lowell Lectures on Exceptional Mental States* (1896), reconstructed in 1986 by Eugene Taylor. In these lectures, we find a detailed analysis of the relationship between psychopathology and genius, which is central to The Varieties, and an evaluation of mental peculiarities from the standpoint of their consequences, which allows us to better understand the meaning of his empirical criterion. Here, James expressly wants to avoid "…psychic or occult themes" and, instead, he uses "the new knowledge of psychotherapy, medicine, and psychology."[51] He organized the lectures in such a way that the first four account for his understanding of the psychological dynamics of the unconscious, and the second four demonstrate how this unconscious reality operates in the social sphere. It is precisely in this realm where the figure of the genius is relevant. Let us remember: Religion is paradigmatically found in its founders and prophets.

In Lecture VIII, "Genius," he affirms the classical and academic version of genius, endowed with divine characteristics, but he finds its contrast in contemporary medical investigations of his time, where genius is linked to mental morbidity. However, this "medical" approach, he claims, is as one-sided as the traditional approach in making the psycho-

[51] Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States*, 5.

pathic the foundation of genius. He states, in general terms, that in most cases we find a "mattoide," someone unbalanced, controlled by a fixed idea or an unconscious impulse. This is the opinion of a series of intellectuals that James carefully studies between 1889 and 1896, some of whom are the subject of a critical review loaded with strong irony. James goes into detail, but here it is only necessary to point out the conclusions that provide a general picture.[52]

These studies reflect a unilateral positivism typical of the era and would come to support the claim that science has shown that genius possesses a defective hereditary brain constitution that makes it a mental patient (somewhat degenerate, somewhat epileptic, somewhat delusional). What most strikes James is the linear associations, arbitrary adjections, lack of rigorous statistics, and a total absence of subtle instruments that allow for the pathologization of almost any interior event. He concludes: "…the methods of these authors do not prove the existence of any essential connection between genius and mental morbidity."[53] His opinion is that, in this matter, it is a question of how the subjective components are

[52] Louis François Lélut, in his *Du démon de Socrate* (1836), asserts that the inner voice or character of the philosopher is an auditory hallucination, and that, therefore, if we strip the famous character of his aura, we are left with a madman. Jacques J. Moreau is one of the proponents of the medical perspective according to James, and in his *Psychologie Morbide* (1859), he demonstrates with conviction that many cases of genius would have possessed a hereditary psychopathic character. Indeed, in his tree of mental illnesses, we find branches such as hysteria, paralysis, idiocy, neuralgia, but also archetypes like utopians, criminals, and geniuses. Cesare Lombroso, in *The Man of Genius* (1891), states unequivocally that genius is a morally insane degenerate whose constitution is close to that of the epileptic, and John Ferguson Nisbet, in *The Insanity of Genius* (1891), affirms that science has provided new instruments that allow us to prove the relationship that exists between genius and mental illness, which until now had only been intuited. This was aided by the localization of brain functions and the establishment of the relationships between cerebral disorders and nervous disorders.

[53] Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States,* 157.

balanced, "everything depends on the mixture" [54] of the three elements of character: intellect, heart, and will.

If there is no linear relationship between genius and madness, then why do we so frequently observe such a connection? James's answer is key: Imbalance is a phenomenon in all human beings. Genius is not a homogeneous concept, and there are no incompatibilities in human nature; any random combination of mental elements can occur. Moreover, the category of genius that one typically has in mind is social; there is no point of comparison between a Bonaparte and a Socrates, except that they were outside of the norms and they exerted an influence. For it to be a psychological category, we must delve into the intellect; in this realm, Alexander Bain has said, according to James, something firm: Genius is characterized by an unusual ability to associate by similarity and analogy. In his essay on great men, he follows this idea, in his reflections we can see "the most abrupt jumps and transitions, the most unexpected combinations of ideas, and the subtlest analogies."[55]

Now, this intellectual constitution can be linked to any type of temperament, and the fact is that genius in the combinations of ideas is not sufficient. "Bain's definition is truly psychological, but it does not lead to any consequences."[56] What influence can a shy and lazy temperament exert? It is the effects of genius that matter, and hypersensitivity, impassivity, and obsession can be characteristics of genius when combined with superior reason, great imagination, and a strong will. It is true that a powerful and obsessive intellect is more likely to leave a mark on society, but, again, it is a matter of mixture.

The version that ties genius to nervous disease may be true in some sense, but not as contemporary authors understand it, James asserts. The

[54] Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States,* 159.

[55] James, *The Will to Believe*, 248.

[56] Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States,* 161.

genius may have nervous instability, but it may be adaptive rather than pathological. The concept of health is "teleological," "[a]ny particularity that is useful to a man is a point of strength for him, and what makes a man strong for one function, may render another deficient."[57] Moreover, we are all social instruments, and if our psychopathological peculiarities combine with the rest of our constitution and prove beneficial to our society, perhaps we should not call them pathological but quite the opposite.[58] Any deviation that deepens the field of our experience and contributes to the storage of humanity's resources is the opposite of disease; there is no a priori weakness. Who can say with certainty that the healthy mind is all there is and that the morbid mind cannot reveal a dimension of the meaning of existence?[59]

In summary, it can be maintained that genius should be judged according to a dual metric: a psychological criterion and the effects it produces; this can be related to the postulation of existential and value judgment in *The Varieties.* The pathological here is also key to understanding the normal, insofar as the mixture clearly observed in the genius, due to the dimension of its personality, is of the same nature and is tied to the same contingencies as in all human cases. Likewise, it is observed, and this is an important point that James perhaps owes to Friedrich Myers,[60] a de-pathologization of the psychic dynamics that is beginning to be explored. In James, this operation is carried out through the use of a pragmatist judgment: imbalances, eccentricities, and automatisms should be judged by their effects; when evaluating sanctity as a result of religious experience, he draws analogous conclusions.

57 Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States,* 163.

58 Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States,* 164.

59 Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States,* 165.

60 Frederic Myers, *The Subliminal Self* (Arno Press, 1977).

Critique of the concept of sainthood

James establishes a link between pragmatism and history, asserting that, although it may seem striking at first glance to judge religion by its individual and social fruits, history itself carries out this estimation and discards what proves to be useless to its time. A bloody, vengeful cult that demands bloody sacrifices, for example, is incompatible with contemporary societies.[61] Ultimately, the gods we believe in are those we trust and can use; therefore, it is legitimate to use the "empirical method" to determine their value. From this point of view, religious fruit, like all human fruit, is prone to deviation; one-sidedness in religious matters is commonplace, and, although, as we have seen, everything depends on the mixture, it often happens in the inclination to holiness that spiritual power is more powerful than the intellectual, which gives rise to all kinds of extravagances. "But when the intellect […] is no bigger than a pinhead and generates ideas about God of similar insignificance, the result, despite the heroism displayed, is totally repulsive."[62] James understands that the fruits of firsthand religious experience are devotion, purity, charity, and asceticism, and that they fall into excess in the unbalanced characters he calls "theopathic."[63] Ultimately, he argues, judgment about these fruits must follow a contemporary criterion where hard-won gains, such as human rights and social justice, cannot be overlooked.

When dealing with the first two dispositions, devotion and purity, he treats them in their deviant constitution, not specifying whether there exists a positive or useful devotion or purity for life or not, but rather maintaining that devotion is a unilateral and violent disposition, a close

61 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 328.

62 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 354.

63 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 354.

relative of fanaticism and aggressive zeal against everything that challenges the cult. Purity, in turn, has generated flight, has no qualms about abandoning the world's problems to their fate, and its egoistic turn does not seem to have much value. In his words: "Thus, in parallel to the militant church, with its prisons, persecutions, and inquisitorial methods, we have the fugitive church, as we might call it, with its monasteries, hermitages, and sectarian organizations…."[64] The documents he reviews on these two fruits are medieval, so it is unknown whether one can think of any purity and devotion with more contemporary overtones. Indeed, it could be argued that Walt Whitman, who is used by James as a prophet, practices a different kind of devotion.

When evaluating charity and asceticism, James's judgment improves. In the case of the charitable and tender disposition, "resisting not evil" and "loving one's enemy," despite being sublime counsels, do not seem to operate in reality, where it is clear that the guilty are punished and fire is met with fire. But we should not abandon ourselves completely to this perspective because the saint, with his extravagances of charity, can be prophetic and bring about what he projects. In this sense, they are promoters of goodness and can activate regions not entirely conscious of individual or collective subjectivity.[65] That goodness, which is a rift in social logic, resembles the utopian dreams of justice of the socialists and anarchists with whom he is familiar. With asceticism, we have that violence towards one's own natural dimension, which is pathological, but, at the same time, the most experienced spiritual masters quickly understood that this was not the way. The ascetic motive is fearless, it constitutes a particular type of vital testimony, with his body it exhibits and at the same time protests against the injustice of the world. It reveals

64 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 349.

65 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 358.

itself against the unbalanced order of being, where the painful struggle for life culminates in the exhaustion of energies and ultimate failure. James affirms that it may not be the best way to deal with the matter, however, as it contains doses of heroism that yearn for justice, it questions, with all its hardness, the bourgeois inclinations towards wealth and comfort typical of the time. The ascetic, in this perspective, appears as a spiritual warrior who questions the natural and social world.[66] This comparison between the warrior and the ascetic will reappear in *The Moral Equivalent of War* (1906).

Despite the criticisms, James acknowledges that the sense of the divine intensifies the ontology of the variety of the world and its details, and that if the fruits of holiness occur in relation to a sharp intelligence, we can find a type of exemplary human being who possesses both firmness and happiness, whose solidarity is broad, and whose sympathy awakens unsuspected possibilities in others. His humility and asceticism make him fit to fulfill his duty, to overcome comfort, and to collaborate in the construction of the public good. However, the inclination to holiness has received radical criticism from Nietzsche, and James believes he must account for it.

It should be noted that James's judgment of Nietzsche must be understood in relation to James himself, as a reveal of his own position more than as a key to any genuine confrontation with the German philosopher. Such an interpretation lies closer to his concern with moral vigor than to Nietzsche's problematic and methodological context, which is more focused on the turning points in which values are founded than on the mere and simple opposition between the strong and the weak (which does, indeed, have some place).

[66] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 365.

James briefly paraphrases the text *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887) where the saint embodies a vile and resentful psychological personality. This "sophisticated invalid" is confronted with the figure of the warrior, whose disposition is to affirm life, to dominate, and to conquer. James affirms that the figure of the saint and the figure of the warrior account for two dispositions whose difference cannot be overlooked, and to settle the dispute he revives Spencer's finalistic argument in the last part of his *Data of Ethics* (1879), despite the fact that, on other occasions, he treats it with irony. Following Spencer, he speculates that the saint is the best figure because he is the one who is adapted to the "highest conceivable society"[67]—in Spencer's terms, in which the struggle for survival turns into altruistic competition. This speculative resource that surreptitiously introduces Spencerian teleology appears, to our eyes, unjustified, as it is James himself who, generally opposes the teleological interpretation of history and has recently undertaken a critique of much that is considered fruits of holiness.

It could be said that what holiness is *in toto* for Nietzsche, it is only in part for James. The fanaticism, one-sidedness, egoism, and extravagance that characterize the lives of many saints were extracted from various biographies and criticized with aplomb. Where Nietzsche affirms that philosophers have always had a favorable bias in their treatment of the ascetic ideal because "asceticism," "severe abstinence," and "serenity in the best intentions" are conditions that lead to the "highest spirituality,"[68] James maintains that "symbolically and representatively, asceticism must be recognized […] as a profound way of handling the gift of existence."[69] Before concluding, we should note that Sergio Franzese has

67 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 375.

68 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford U.P., 1996), 91.

69 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 364.

made a comparison of interest on this particular topic[70] and that Sergio Sánchez, on the other hand, has demonstrated that Nietzsche is positioned at the very opposite extreme of Carlylean heroism, namely in the embodiment of the figure of the saint under discussion here.[71]

Conclusion

Our reading (attentive to sources and textual interconnections) of a few pages of James's work reveals how he operates with various weighty theoretical frameworks of his time and how he constructs a psychological approach to religion that has become classic. His dual approach allows him, in epistemological terms, to overcome a dichotomy that is repeatedly reinvoked by a significant segment of philosophical works. Such is the case of the tension between genealogical analyses that indefinitely postpone the evaluative moment and the normative analysis that establishes a critical judgment and leaves the understanding of provenance in the shadows. James, in contrast, combines genealogy and evaluation. To construct the concept of religion, James establishes a historical analysis of exceptional experiences that are used as general keys to understanding. His version of the pathological method picks up the general philosophical idea of proposing a comprehensive analysis of multiple exaggerated variants at a single ontological level. He explicitly states that a careful understanding of unbalanced psychic phenomena leads immediately to one's own tensions, which may or may not be understood as pathological, depending on the functional relationship they have with individual

[70] Sergio Franzese, *The Ethics of Energy: William James's Moral Philosophy in Focus* (Ontos Vrelag, 2008), 193.

[71] Sergio Sánchez, *Los grandes hombres como calamidad pública* (Editorial de la UNC, 2024).

and collective life. It is important to note that the criterion of utility works in relation to the specific historical and cultural heritage of the time. It is within this framework that cases of sick souls and healthy minds must be measured, revealing general inclinations that we all transit and that must be evaluated a posteriori. A naive mentality may be convenient from a natural point of view, but not from a historical one, where transcendence is linked in most cases to a complex perspective made up of nuances and chiaroscuro, which at times seem like dreams or unrealizable utopias.

The personal religion of which James speaks presupposes the historical theory of great men, which, after the totalitarian experiences of Europe, has fallen into disuse, except for a few exceptions. However, the category of charismatic domination persists in sociology, and the influence of certain leaders in specific conjunctures is recognizable. On another level, the historical-critical method and the different approaches to the study of religion show, to put it schematically, that the composition of religion arises from multiple influences operating from different cultural fields. Recourse to original autobiographical texts does not guarantee much, for despite who signs the document, what is poured into it has the logic of a tapestry, woven from phrases that gravitate in the medium and come from the past. This does not challenge the study of singular religious experience, but rather demands a cross-reference with its historical constitution. Perhaps in this, Tarde is more of a contemporary of ours than James: What the Frenchman understands by imitative irradiation is constituted by a set of influences in terms of desires and beliefs that overlap and mutually transform. The concept of mimesis acquires special relevance today because we are currently undergoing new and diverse processes of homogenization. By betting on the cult of heroes, James positions himself against the processes of imposition and homogenization posed by 19th-century positivist sociology; however, we have already pointed out that it is conceivable to think that autonomy is com-

promised if one depends on a hero or on a mechanism that is to some extent structural. The impression that remains is that James bets on the heroism of the democratic individuality that he desires for his environment, but that he does not resolve the tension that exists between the aristocratic romanticism that is inscribed in the cult of heroes and his democratic vocation.

The evaluative question is particularly important, as it links American pragmatism with heroico-mimetic-psychopathological theory. James calls it the "empirical method," but its content clearly refers to the pragmatic criterion according to which a given perspective, regardless of its origin, must be evaluated based on its vital value. From a genetic point of view, we could say, like Freud, that we are dealing with a "collective delusion," but after having accounted for the birth of religious experience, its specific content, and the way in which it propagates, it remains to be seen whether it favors life or if it provides a better, more versatile and resistant tone, both individually and collectively; to do this, we must dwell on the results.

As we have said, the documents reviewed are medieval, so it is unknown whether he conceived them in another way; doing so would not have been surprising for a text that affirms that Whitman and Emerson are prophets stricto sensu and that grants full religious rights to questionable therapeutic-religious movements of his time. Devotion is not only "theopathic"; to give just one example, the feeling of deep respect and admiration that invades multiple poetic and pantheistic forms does not lead to a fanatical mania. In conceptual terms, it can be assumed that, as indicated in the Lowell Lectures, it is about the conditions of an adequate balance between superior spiritual qualities. In general terms, from a pragmatic point of view, the results are positive if they achieve a concatenation that allows: First, the increase of vital energy; second, the overcoming of egoism; and third, greater interest in the common good. The psychological and the social are articulated; the effects of such an

experience shape a balanced subjectivity, better for oneself and for life in common. In these terms, James believes that holiness is good, although he considers it pertinent to confront it with the type of life of the "strong man" as expressed by Nietzsche. Without delving into the complex thought of the German, we have briefly reviewed how James resolves the matter; including a supposedly better society as a higher framework of adaptation, for the saint does not seem to be a good resource, but the criticism of "theopathy" is not entirely far from Nietzschean criticism. For Nietzsche, all holiness is decadent, for James, only some.

James and Nietzsche share many sources, and their arguments, which possess both similarities and differences, are attentive to the decadence of their time and the ways to overcome it. In this direction, forthcoming research that contributes to the work carried out by both intellectuals from the common theoretical resources they handled and from the scientific training they possessed (psychology and philology, respectively) would be valuable. Both conceive, in different ways, an anthropology of overcoming, which contains a broad and robust field of experience, that surpasses the crisis of the *fin de siècle* and nihilism. Under this concern, one rejects religion and the other includes it.

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