

Metaphysics as Dilemma: Perspectives from William James's Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the contributions of William James, the American philosopher and one of the leading exponents of pragmatism to the building of the metaphysical edifice. This is pertinent since some scholars consider him merely as a methodologist rather than as a deep metaphysician that he is. James in his Pragmatism advocated for a philosophy which he calls "pragmatism". This philosophy, according to him, is not new. It could be traced back to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Locke, and Hodgson. It is primarily a method of philosophizing. But this assertion of his has misled many into reducing him to a methodologist. This paper therefore attempts to show that James is not merely a methodologist, but a deep metaphysical thinker whose philosophy shifted the boundaries of metaphysics from the science of ousia (or being) to the holistic articulation and resolution of dilemmas. Our analytic-cum-deconstructive study of William James's pragmatism shows that pragmatism as a metaphysical theory is a way of going around versus staying around the traditional metaphysical problems. James practically discussed the dilemmas of substance, design in nature, freewill-determinism and monism-pluralism, as few representations of the traditional problems of metaphysics. He concludes that pragmatism is a common-sense philosophy. Our deconstructive analysis of his positions shows that metaphysics, for James, is a way around the old dilemmas/problems of philosophy; hence, we argue that James made novel contribution to the metaphysical enterprise.

Keywords: Pragmatism, Dilemma, Metaphysics, Method, William James.

Introduction

The place of William James in the erecting of the metaphysical structure remains to be highlighted, hence, many scholars are yet to understand the nature of metaphysics in William James's philosophy. This partly may be due to the fact that the word "metaphysics" itself is misunderstood. Some people associate it with mystical and occultic practices, while others reduce it to the study of non-empirical realities/entities. The word "metaphysics," etymologically, was an editorial error of Andronicus of Rhodes who attempted to name Aristotle's works that came after those of physics or nature. Andronicus had assigned the name "metaphysics" to Aristotle's works that came after

those of physics, without realizing that metaphysics is the science of reality as a whole and not in part. Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* defined metaphysics as the science that studies “ousia,” that is, the science of the ultimate causes of reality or being. It is the science of being qua being. Metaphysics is the science of being as a whole not in part. It includes the study of the causes of the material components of reality. In a related sense, metaphysics is the science of the foundation of reality. It is not just about that which is beyond reality but that which is underneath reality.

However, from William James’s perspective, metaphysics gained another meaning, namely the articulation of philosophical and human problems into dilemmas. Here, metaphysics is not only seen as the science of being or reality, but also as the science that creates and resolves the puzzles of existence. This dilemmatic articulation of philosophical problems may not be solely attributed to William James since philosophers before him had created and attempted to resolve some philosophical problems. James himself tells us that there is nothing absolutely new in the pragmatic method, tracing it back from Socrates, Aristotle, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume through Hodgson. He maintains that pragmatism primarily is a method of settling metaphysical disputes that might otherwise be interminable, “it is a method only” (James, *Prag*, 25). This submission of James himself, has misled many into reducing James to merely a methodologist rather than a metaphysician. Note that to say it is primarily a method of philosophizing, does not reduce him to a methodologist neither does it reduce his philosophy to merely a method. Even though James tells us that there is nothing new about pragmatism as a method, we still find something new that James bequeathed. What is it? The fact that James was the first to historically articulate problems of metaphysics as dilemmas.

This paper sets out to discuss William James’s metaphysics as dilemmas. This endeavor is important since many often neglect the contributions of William James to the overall building of the metaphysical structure. Most scholars often dismiss his thoughts and refer to him merely as a methodologist. This paper will show clearly that William James is not just a methodologist, but a core metaphysician who interpreted metaphysics from the dilemmatic point of view, or from the point of view of the traditional problems that agitated the minds of early metaphysicians.

The Dilemma in Philosophy before the Advent of William James

Prior to the advent of William James, philosophers had reflected on the question of being, ultimate stuff, or reality but upon the advent of James, he did a chronicle of philosophical problems and used it to enunciate his pragmatism which represents his own metaphysical theory. We shall discuss his views on the dilemma in metaphysics under the following sub-headings.

The Tender-Minded Versus the Tough-Minded Temperaments

William James in the section of his *Pragmatism* subtitled “The Dilemma in Philosophy” argues that “the history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments. Undignified as such a treatment may appear to some of my colleagues, I shall have to take account of this clash and explain a good many of the

divergences of philosophers by it" (James, *Prag* 6). On the other hand, in the section of his work *Pragmatism*, subtitled "the Present Dilemma in Philosophy" he sought to explain and account for the divergences in the opinions of philosophers and human beings in general. According to him, these divergences are to a large extent due to a "conflict of human temperaments". James actually did a historical unveiling of the nature of his problem; hence he called it a dilemma in philosophy. "There are in the history of philosophy men of "radical idiosyncrasy" who have set their stamp and likeness on philosophy. Such men as Plato, Locke, Hegel, Spencer are temperamental thinkers while others are mixture of other temperaments" (moderators).

Now the particular difference of temperament that I have in mind in making these remarks is one that has counted in literature, arts, government, and manners as well as in philosophy. In manners we find formalists and free-and-easy persons in government, authoritarians and anarchists in literature, purists or academicals, and realists; in art, classics and romantics.... in philosophy we have a similar contrast expressed in the pair of terms "rationalists" and empiricists", "empiricist" meaning your lover of facts in all their crude variety, "rationalists" meaning your devotee to abstract and eternal principles (James, *Prag* 8).

Historically, this bifurcation in philosophy predates the modern period which witnessed the full development of the two philosophies mentioned by William James ("rationalism and empiricism"). For example, in the ancient period, we read Plato clinching to principles and Aristotle being friendly with facts. However, James was actually reacting to the prevailing thought form prior to his advent; which was the contention between the "rationalists and the empiricists". In James's view, this debate is dilemmatic. James reduces the rationalists to those with a tender-minded temperament and the empiricists to those with tough-minded temperaments. According to their individual temperaments, philosophers are divided into the "tender-minded" (rationalists) and the "tough-minded" (empiricists) temperaments (Shipman, 884). James identifies each temperament with certain qualities: "I will write these traits down in two columns. I think you will practically recognize the two types of mental make-up that I mean if I head the columns by the titles "tender-minded and tough-minded respectively".

The Tender-minded

"Rationalistic (going by principles)"
Intellectualistic
Idealistic
Optimistic
Religious
Free-willist
Monistic
Dogmatical
(James, *Prag* 9)

The Tough-minded

"Empiricist (going by facts)"
sensationalistic
materialistic
pessimistic
irreligious
Fatalistic
pluralistic
skeptical

James did not delay in stating that his reason for characterizing temperaments is so that it can help him in achieving his ultimate aim which is characterizing pragmatism. Hence, his solution to these dilemmas is pragmatism. "Pragmatism is therefore the mediator between the tender-minded temperament and the tough-mind temperament" (Shipman, 884). James maintains that these two different antagonistic temperaments have a low opinion of each other. "Their antagonism, whenever as individuals their temperaments have been intense, has formed in all ages a part of the philosophic atmosphere of the time..." (James, *Prag*, 9). Why then did James call it a dilemma in philosophy? It is a dilemma because as at the time James was writing his work these two temperaments were so pronounced that to be a philosopher is to appreciate their places in philosophy. According to James, "facts are good – give less plenty of preambles. The world is indubitably one if you look at it in one way, but as indubitably as it is, it is many, if you look at it in another" (*Prag* 10). Emphasizing these "tender-minded and tough-minded" temperaments and how they have dominated the world, James wrote:

Our scientific temper is devout. Now take a man of this type, let him be also a philosophic amateur unwilling to mix a hodgepodge system after a fashion of a common layman, and what does he find his situation to be, in this blessed year of our lord 1906? He wants facts; he wants science; but he also wants a religion... Now what kind of philosophy do you find actually offered to meet your need? (James, *Prag*, 10).

Again, James states: "and this is then your dilemma: you find the two parts of you quasitum hopelessly separated. You find empiricism with inhumanism and irreligion or else you find a rationalistic philosophy that indeed may call itself religious, but that keeps out of all definite touch with material realities and joys and sorrows" (James, *Prag*, 13). The major trait of the tender-minded rationalistic philosophy is religiosity or dogmatism, while that of the tough-minded empirical philosophy is intimacy with fact. James therefore opted to offer a philosophy that will satisfy both needs:

It is at this point that my own solution begins to appear. I offer the oddly named thing pragmatism as a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demand. It remains religious like rationalisms, but at the same time like empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts (James, *Prag*, 18).

It is imperative that we conclude this section by saying that Jamesian philosophy was actually a reaction to the prevailing thought forms. The controversy between the "rationalists and the empiricists" was a dilemma which James renamed or characterized as the dilemma between the "tender-minded" and the "tough-minded" temperaments. Let me therefore finally dot this section and technically introduce my next section with the last two paragraphs of James's article "The Present Dilemma in Philosophy" thus:

The pragmatistic philosophy of which I hope to begin talking in my next lecture preserves as cordial a relation with facts, and unlike Spencer's philosophy, it neither begins nor ends by

turning positive religious constructions out of doors. It treats them cordially as well. I hope I may lead you to find it just the mediating way of thinking that you require (James, *Prag*, 21).

Towards A Definition of the Term “Pragmatism”

William James began the section of his work entitled “What Pragmatism Means” by telling a trivial anecdote. The subject matter, in a nutshell, has to do with “a live squirrel supposed to be clinging to one side of tree-trunks; while over against the tree’s opposite side a human being was imagined to stand. This human being tries to get sight of the squirrel by moving rapidly and fast round the tree, but as fast as he moves, the squirrel moves fast as well in the opposite direction such that not a glimpse of the squirrel is caught”. The metaphysical dilemma posed therefore is, “does the man go round the squirrel?” To this question, debaters are divided into two groups; the first claiming that the “man does go round the squirrel” and the second taking the opposite position. Upon the advent of James, both groups which were evenly divided beckoned on him to cast the tie-breaking vote for their group but James’ answer was rather the puzzle of a philosopher as he argues that they might both be right depending on the practical meaning or value of the terms “going round”. This trivial anecdote represents a subtle way that James presented what he meant by pragmatism. Pragmatism is given various interpretations by writers, but the core is the belief that the meaning of a doctrine is the same as the practical effects of adopting it (Blackburn, 287).

Pragmatism is a philosophy that stresses the relation of theory to praxis and takes the continuity of experience and nature as revealed through the outcome of directed action as the starting point for reflection (Audi, 638). Etymologically, the term “pragmatism” was derived from a Greek word “pragma” (action or practice). James himself concedes to Peirce the origin of this philosophy. In his words, “it was first introduced into philosophy by Mr. Charles Peirce in 1878 in an article entitled “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (James, 23). However, Peirce later changed his own to pragmaticism to save the word from being stolen. “Pragmatism as here presented, delights in making plain its scorn of all a priori constructions, talks much of facts’ and at every turn coquette with science” (Bakewell, 624). Similarly, Shipman reviewed the question, what is pragmatism, and what is its value to philosophy? His answer is thus (1) “Briefly, it is a method whose essence is action, (2) a genetic theory of what is meant by truth. It represents the empiricist attitude, which turns its back on fixed habits, abstractions, verbal solutions and finality in truth, and faces towards facts, concreteness, action, possibilities of nature and power”.

James’s words are as follows:

Pragmatism represents a perfectly familiar attitude in philosophy, the empiricist attitude, but it represents it, as it seems to me, both in a more radical and in a less objectionable form than it has ever yet assumed. A pragmatist turns his back resolutely and once for all upon a lot of inveterate habits clear to professional philosophers. He

turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power. That means the empiricist temper regnant and the rationalist temper sincerely given up (*Prag*, 23).

Rebecca Stone writing on the topic “Does pragmatism lead to pluralism?” argues that James identifies a focus on how ideas are put to use in concrete life and a commitment to open-mindedness as the two hallmarks of the pragmatic method (555). Do not forget that there are different strands of the pragmatic theory just as there are different scholars with pragmatic orientation or leaning. Peirce developed the pragmatic doctrine from Kant’s philosophy. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant established a distinction between pragmatic and practical. The later term applies to moral laws which Kant regards as a priori whereas the former term applies to the rules of art and technique which are based on experience and are applicable to experience (Dewey, 1923 in Hickman, and Alexander, eds., 3). Just as we tried to show in our previous section, James maintains that there is nothing absolutely new in the pragmatic method dating it back from Socrates, Aristotle, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume through Hodgson. He maintains that pragmatism primarily is a method of settling metaphysical disputes that might otherwise be interminable, “it is a method only” (James, *Prag*, 25). James here begins to knock off the tender-mind temperaments. He argues: “the general triumph of that method would mean an enormous change in what I called in my last lecture the temperaments of philosophy. Teachers of the ultra-rationalistic type would be frozen out, much as the courtier type is frozen out in republics as the ultramontane kind of priest, is frozen out in protestant lands (James, *Prag*, 26). He unites both temperaments in these words: “Science and metaphysics would come much nearer together, would in fact work absolutely hand in hand” (James, *Prag*, 26). Apart from the primary meaning of the word “pragmatism” which is a method of settling metaphysical disputes, the word in a wider sense has come to be known as a theory of truth - “meanwhile, the word pragmatism has come to be used in a still wider sense, as meaning also a certain theory of truth” (James, *Prag*, 27). We shall attempt to discuss these two perceptions in another paper. In conclusion, the “term pragmatism is an ism according to which use is the criteria of reality” (Chandra and Sharma, 99).

Some Metaphysical Dilemmas

The Dilemma of Substance

Recall, as we have shown repeatedly in this paper and will continue to show, that James argued that pragmatism is a method of resolving metaphysical disputes that may otherwise be interminable. This dilemma makes metaphysics a process of resolving these disputes. James in his third lecture on pragmatism entitled “Some Metaphysical Problems Pragmatically Considered” pragmatically examined some of the age-long metaphysical

dilemmas in philosophy. The first in the order of examination is the dilemma of substance. "I am now to make the pragmatic method more familiar by giving you some illustrations of its application to particular problems. I will begin with what is driest, and the first thing I shall take will be the problem of substance" (James, *Prag*, 39). He began by arguing that everyone uses the old distinction between substances and attributes which according to him is "enshrined in the structure of human language, in the difference between grammatical subject and predicate". The modes or accidents of a blackboard crayon are "whiteness, friability, cylindrical shape, insolubility in water etc. and the substance is chalk. The attributes of the desk inhere in the substance "wood" while those of coat inhere in the substance "wool" and so forth. But in another instance, the substances, chalk, wood and wool could be seen as accidents' whose substance becomes "matter". In a related sense, our thought and feelings are accidents of a deeper substance called 'spirit'. Now what is the thrust of James's argument here? Simply put, he is arguing that accidents or attributes are the practical ways of verifying, experience/knowing the substance. In other words, accidents are direct ways of experiencing substances. Without the accidents we cannot know their cash-value. He speaks for himself:

A group of attributes is what each substance here is known - as, they form its sole cash-value for our actual experience. The substance is in every case revealed through them; if we were cut off from them, we should never suspect its existence, and if God should keep sending them to us in an unchanged order, miraculously annihilating at a certain moment the substance that supported them, we never could detect the moment, for our experiences themselves would be unaltered (James, *Prag*, 39-40).

However, he philosophically adumbrated the various views/schools of thoughts, harnessed and articulated the various arguments advanced by many of them. He wrote: "Nominalists accordingly adopt the opinion that substance is a spurious idea due to our inveterate human trick of turning names into things" (James, *Prag*, 40). Again,

Scholasticism has taken the notion of substance from common sense and made it very technical and articulate. Few things would seem to have fewer pragmatic consequences for us than substances, cut off as we are from every contact with them. Yet in one case, scholasticism has proved the importance of substance - idea by treating it pragmatically (James, *Prag*, 40).

In the foregoing citation, James was actually referring to the water used during the Eucharist. According to him, it was assumed that the accidents of the water do not change, in the Lord's super, but now in the Eucharist, it has become the body of Christ. "The bread-substance must have been withdrawn and the divine substance substituted miraculously without altering the immediate sensible properties" (James, *Prag*, 40). James drives home his point by also referring to Berkeley, Locke and Hume, which is a

clear indication that his philosophy will not be antithetical to the empiricists' thesis. Imagine these sentences (1) "Berkeley's criticisms of matter was consequently, absolutely pragmatic", matter is known as our sensations of colour, figure, hardness and like, they are the cash-value of our term. (2) "Locke, and later Hume, applied a similar pragmatic criticism to the notion of spiritual substance - I will only mention Locke's treatment of "personal identity". He immediately reduces this notion to its pragmatic value in terms of experience (James, *Prag*, 41). To conclude our point here is to reiterate that substance or reality is unveiled through its accidents, hence, the substance and accidents adhere, or cohere, rather with each other. - The substance is in every case revealed through the accident (James, *Prag*, 40).

The Dilemma of Design in Nature

Discussing the dilemma of design in nature, James first articulates the problem. "God's existence has from time immemorial been held to be proved by certain natural facts. Many facts appear as if expressly designed in view of one another (James, *Prag*, 51). He technically discusses the issues as though it is narrowed down to Darwinism. Darwin opened our minds to the power of chance happenings to bring forth "fit" results if only they have time to add themselves together (James, *Prag*, 50). What is the dilemma of design in nature and Jamesian pragmatic discussion of the dilemma? The dilemma of design in nature is a puzzle following the claims that all things observable in the universe entail the logical deduction of a designer who could be said to have designed the universe and endowed various species with the nature tools and fitness to perform duties allotted to them by the designer. James gives this example: "Thus the woodpecker's bill, tongue, tail etc, fit him wondrously for a world of trees with grubs hid in their bark to feed upon" (James, *Prag*, 50). James's application of his pragmatic method shows that the abstract word "design" is a blank cartridge. It carries no consequences; it does not execute. He however argues, "Meanwhile, pending the slow answer from facts, anyone who insists that there is a designer and who is sure he is a divine one, gets a certain pragmatic benefit" (James, *Prag*, 50). Dewey captures James's discussion of the problem of design thus: "consider the case of design. Mr. James begins with accepting a ready-made notion, to which he then applies the pragmatic criterion. The traditional notion is that of a seeing force that runs things" (Dewey, in Hickman and Alexander eds., 380). James simply tells us that the term design has no pragmatic value except the vague confidence in the future.

The Dilemma of Freewill and Determinism

The traditional debate or dilemma of free-will and determinism is, is man free from all natural and external influences or are human beings programmed by an external force? Determinists deny freedom and responsibility, while the freewillists believe in human freedom and responsibility. James actually discussed the problem in details in his paper "The Dilemma of Determinism" but, in the section of his pragmatism entitled "Some Metaphysical Problems Pragmatically Considered". "James, only used the pragmatic method to discuss the problem of free-will and determinism". James argues that "free-will pragmatically means novelties in the world, the right to expect that in its

deepest elements as well as in surface phenomena, the future may not identically repeat and imitate the past" (James, *Prag*, 54). In other words, Free-will is thus a general cosmological theory of promise, just like the absolute, God, spirits, or design." James maintains that, taken abstractly, "free-will," just like "God" and "design," has no inner content, and none can retain value in a world that started as a perfect world. Free-will thus has no meaning unless it is a doctrine of belief. As such, it takes its cue with other religious doctrines (James, *Prag*, 54). However, James had discussed the dilemma in another paper where he presented what has become known today as the "two stage model." Doyle states that the genius of the Jamesian picture of free will is that indeterministic chance is the source of what James calls "ambiguous possibilities" and alternative futures" (6). Going away from this outside and reverting to the pragmatic consideration of the dilemma, James tells us that the only pragmatic value or benefit the word "free-will" gives us is that of promise: Our spirit shut within this courtyard of sense-experience is always saying to the intellect upon the tower: "Watchman tell us of the nigh, if it aught of promise bear, and the intellect gives it then these terms of promise other than this practical significance, the words God, free-will design, etc have none" (James, *Prag*, 55).

The Dilemma of Monism and Pluralism

On the age-long dilemma of one and many, James applies the pragmatic method to ascertain the cash-value or truism of both sides of the debate. It is deducible that James will favour pluralism, given his temperamental disposition. He argues that "pragmatism, pending the final empirical ascertainment of what the balance of union and disunion among things may be, must obviously range herself upon the pluralistic sides" (James, *Prag*, 73). He argues further that some absolute monism prohibits some hypotheses from being admitted or considered; pragmatism should turn its back against absolute monism and follow pluralism which is a more empirical path. This conclusion was drawn following James' "discussions of the pragmatic value of the one and many debate". James raises the question, "granting the oneness to exist, what facts will be different in consequence? What will the unity be known as? The world is one - yes, but how one? What is the practical value of oneness for us?" (James, *Prag*, 59). However, he maintains that asking the above questions, we pass from the vague to the definite, from the abstract to the concrete. Stone states Bruner's and James's positions thus:

The committed pragmatist must be willing to accept a counter-perspective that may arise in the future, and then be willing to accommodate that new experience. Thus, for Bruner, the value of open-mindedness already entails a kind of solution to the cash – that is when world-views clash, one should try to find a way for them to co-exist, because open-mindedness points to pluralism... (555)

Gavin captures it thus: "instead of consciousness being viewed metaphysically as a continuously charming stream, being, or the "really real" is now so viewed, and logic,

or “ideal” languages are viewed as insufficient, i.e., incapable of completely capturing the flux of experience necessary yes but sufficient no as James in pluralistic universe” (284). On the question, of what is the practical value of the oneness to us, James itemized eight different ways in which oneness predicated on the universe might make a difference. These include: (1) “the world is at least one subject of discourse if its manyness were as irremediable as to permit no union whatever of its parts, not even our minds could mean the whole of it at once”. (2) “The parts of our universe hang together, instead of being like detached grams of sand hand together through the space in which they are embodied”. (3) Lines of influence can be traced by which things hang together e.g. greatly and heat-conducted are such all-unity influence. James shows us that there is a practical cash-value in the belief in monism -“From this “systematic” point of view, therefore, “the pragmatic value of the world unity is that all these definite networks actually and practically exist” (James, *Prag*, 61). (4) All these systems of influence or non-influence may be listed under the general problem of the world’s causal unity. (5). The most important sort of union that obtains among things pragmatically speaking is their generic unity – that is to say that things exist in kind or specimens. (6) Another specification of what the phrase “the world is one” may mean is unity of purpose – that is teleological union. (7) “Aesthetic union among things also obtains and is very analogous to teleological union”. (8) “The great monistic denkmittel for a hundred years past has been the notion of the knower. The many exists only as objects of consciousness or thoughts, but there is only one subject who attempts to know this many”.

After careful examination of the monistic positions, James seems not satisfied since for him, “the temper of monists is so vehement and convulsive. In fact, the theory of the absolute, in particular, has had to be an article of faith”. He therefore chose to favour pluralism since it does not harbor dogmatism. For him, therefore, which is a result of his application of the pragmatic method to these metaphysical dilemmas, pragmatism tends to “unsiffen all our theories” (James, *Prag*, 71). This calls to mind the theory-practice dichotomy. Pragmatism therefore, from our understanding of its Jamesian strand, is a remedy or solution to the problem. James shows his support for pluralism in different ways. “This pluralistic view, of a world additive constitution, is one that pragmatism is unable to rule out from serious consideration” (James, *Prag*, 73). We think it most appropriate to conclude this section with James’s words below:

This is the hypothesis of noetic pluralism, which monists consider so absurd. Since we are bound to treat it as respectfully as noetic monism, until the facts shall have tipped the beam, we find that our pragmatism tho (Sic) originally nothing but a method has forced us to be friendly to the pluralistic view (James, *Prag*, 73).

“The word is indubitably one if you look at it in one way, but as indubitably is it many, if you look at it in another. It is both one and many, - let us adopt a sort of pluralistic monism” (James, *Prag*, 10).

Pragmatism and Common Sense

William James also could not run away from establishing the relationship between pragmatism and common sense. In his lecture or the section of his *Pragmatism* entitled "Pragmatism and Common Sense," James pushed through the thesis that pragmatism is a common-sense philosophy or knowledge. According to him:

My thesis now is this, that our fundamental ways of discoveries of exceeding remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves through-out the experience of all subsequent time. They form one great stage of equilibrium in the human mind's development, the stage of common sense. Other stages have grafted themselves upon this stage, but have never succeeded in displacing it (James, *Prag*, 78).

He drew a distinction between the concept of common sense as used in the layman's conversation and the concept as used in philosophy. According to him, in the layman's conversation, "a man's common sense means his good judgement, his freedom from eccentricity, his gumption, to use the vernacular word. But in philosophy, it means something entirely different; it means his use of certain intellectual forms or categories of thought" (James, *Prag*, 75). How then is pragmatism common sense? Pragmatism is common sense "in that common sense is a perfectly definite stage in our understanding of things, a stage that satisfies in an extraordinary successful way the purposes for which we think, and pragmatism helps us to know this stage". In other words, this stage of satisfaction is the practical or pragmatic stage. It is the stage that all previous thoughts, forms, theories, etc. are geared towards and verified. To make more explicit these points, recall that James at the beginning of his work told us that there are three stages in the development of a theory. Firstly, a theory is vehemently opposed by many, secondly, it is partly admitted and finally it is adopted such that its adversaries claim that they are the originators of the theory. The point in focus here is that common sense is that point of agreement of most theories. In the history of philosophy, pragmatism represents these points of agreement. Recall again James's remarks in his second lecture on *Pragmatism* thus:

Being nothing essentially new, it harmonizes with many ancient philosophic tendencies. It agrees with nominalism for instance, in always appealing to particulars; with utilitarianism in emphasizing practical aspects; with positivism in its disdain for verbal solutions, useless questions and metaphysical abstractions (James, *Prag*, 26).

What it means is that common sense is the point of unity in the thoughts and experiences of different ages and doctrines. To this extent, we can say that pragmatism is common sense. It unites nominalism, utilitarianism, positivism, empiricism, realism, et al.

Again, James tells us “that common sense appears thus, as a perfectly definite stage in our understanding of realities, a stage that satisfies in an extraordinary successful way the purposes for which we think. This stage is practical and as such commonsensical”. James actually wants us to retain two major points arising from his discussions on the relationship between pragmatism and common sense.

The first one relates to common sense. We have seen reason to suspect it, to suspect that in spite of their being so universally used and built into the very structure of language, its categories may after all be only a collection of extraordinarily successful hypothesis historically discovered or invented by single men (James, *Prag*, 85).

He buttresses this point earlier by claiming that when we take a retrospective look at our process of arriving at our common categories, it reveals they may have been successfully discovered by prehistoric geniuses whose names might have been shrouded in the night of antiquity. The second point to be retained is that the fact that there are many theories arising from the various forms of thinking lends credence to the pragmatic thesis that theories are instruments and “mental modes of adaptation to reality, rather than revelations or gnostic answers to some divinely instituted world-enigmas” (James, *Prag*, 86). James therefore concludes that pragmatism is common sense.

Conclusion

Metaphysics as a branch of philosophy is considered the core of philosophy to the extent that no individual or group of individuals could be said to have done a philosophical work without taking a metaphysical position or at least, grounding his or their work on already existing metaphysical theories. But some scholars characterize William James one of the leading exponents of the metaphysical theory of pragmatism as a mere methodologist rather than a metaphysician. They hold this view perhaps, considering metaphysics as a mystical science alone rather than the science of reality as a whole. Our study here shows that William James is not just a metaphysician but he caused an innovation in metaphysics to the extent that metaphysics can be considered as the articulation of the dilemmas of existence. He was a metaphysician not only to the extent that he held a metaphysical position, but also because he did historically chronicle the puzzles or dilemmas that agitated philosophers prior to his emergence. It is these dilemmas that he called a going around versus staying around.

By our assessment of his metaphysical position metaphysics can be defined as the going around of dilemmas or philosophical problems. He started by stating the two different temperaments which he called tender-minded and tough-minded temperaments. The former are believers in abstract principles, while the latter stay true to facts. Recall that James was a psychologist, hence, he brought his experience to account on his analysis of previous philosophers. From there, he proceeded to discuss various metaphysical problems that philosophers had engaged over the years. Such dilemmas as substance and attributes, design and nature, free-will and determinism, monism and pluralism etc. Every serious philosophical engagement must be about the going around versus the staying around of these philosophical dilemmas; for it is this going around versus staying around that he characterized as pragmatism. He further claims that this pragmatism is a common sense philosophy. Our

analysis shows that William James not only deepened the concept of metaphysics, he also challenged traditional conception of metaphysics and mooted a new conception which sees it as the articulating and resolving of the traditional metaphysical dilemmas.

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