THE RECEPTION OF PRAGMATISM IN FRANCE & THE RISE OF ROMAN CATHOLIC MODERNISM, 1890–1914

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Early Responses to American Pragmatism in France
Selective Attention and Critical Reaction

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The early French response to American pragmatism took a variety of forms, largely centered around key topics in epistemology, philosophy of science, metaphysics, and religion. This survey of French reactions, from welcoming to hostile, covers the years 1900 to 1914. Reactions by French philosophers primarily depended on three factors: whether the philosopher was already inclined toward pragmatism because he was already persuaded by native French pragmatic trends that predated the appearance of American pragmatism; whether the philosopher was strongly committed to some type of rationalism; and whether a philosopher was concerned to uphold Thomism and/or defended a conservative religious stance. The objections of the most hostile French critics are discussed, alongside a look at some philosophers who facilitated understanding of pragmatism in France. Readers who desire complete citations to works by and about pragmatism mentioned in this chapter may consult the bibliography that concludes this volume.

Attention to American pragmatism in France began not long after William James in 1897 announced the existence of this new philosophical movement. The Catholic Modernist movement, perhaps not coincidentally, reached its zenith during the period roughly from 1898 to 1908; American pragmatism and French Catholic Modernism were reactions against both rationalism and conservatism, and these reactions took similar forms. By the eve of World War I, French philosophers' and theologians' interest in American

pragmatism had run its course and fell into sharp decline. French interest had largely centered on the pragmatism and pluralism of William James, who had nine books published in French during this period. The considerable output of commentary, criticism, and rejection reached its peak in the years 1907 to 1911, from the publication of James's *Pragmatism* to the year after his death. Based on the bibliography of French philosophical and theological publications about pragmatism that I have generated, some conclusions about the scope and nature of the French reaction to pragmatism can be sketched.

By 1903 some of James's writings on pedagogy and psychology were translated into French, but very little notice had yet been taken of James (aside from those who knew him personally, such as Charles-Bernard Renouvier, who in the late 1870s and 1880s had published several French translations of James's articles on effort, Henri Bergson, and Théodore Flournoy).[1] Until 1905, besides the introductions to translations of James, only book reviews directly discussed American pragmatism: three reviews of James's works, one of F. C. S. Schiller's *Humanism*, and one of John Dewey's *Studies in Logical Theory*.[2] Furthermore, there was as yet no notice of fellow American pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce. Still, some French philosophers were well prepared to hear James's message as it began to penetrate France. By 1907 some had also followed James's frequent exhortations to read his pragmatist allies, including the Italian pragmatist Giovanni Papini.

Three interrelated schools of thought already making waves in French philosophy greeted the pragmatists as potential contributors to their own agendas. First, the "school of action" inspired by Maurice Blondel took an interest in James, an interest that was reciprocated. As early as 1888 Blondel had also independently labeled

1. These articles include "The Sentiment of Rationality," *Critique philosophique*, 8me année, 2 (1879): 72–89, 113–18, 129–38; "The Feeling of Effort," *Critique philosophique*, 9me année, 2 (1880): 123–28, 129–35, 145–48, 200–208, 220–24, 225–31, 289–91; "Rationality, Activity, and Faith," *Critique philosophique*, 11me année, 2 (1882): 129–40, 161–66; and "What the Will Effects," *Critique philosophique*, nouv. série, 4me année, 2 (1888): 401–20.

2. References to these reviews can be found in the bibliography at the end of this collection, under the years 1901–1904.

his philosophy "pragmatisme." This school appreciated James's antimaterialism and defense of free will. Second, the neocritical school inspired by Émile Boutroux and Bergson found in James an ally. Third, the scientific constructionism of Henri Poincaré and Pierre Duhem appreciated pragmatism's similarities to scientific positivism and conventionalism.

The "school of action" movement was an important component of the Catholic Modernist struggle with Scholasticism. However, Blondel, his friend Lucien Laberthonnière, and many others acceded to the condemnation of Modernism in 1907 by Pope Pius X and fell silent for many years. The neocritical school was exemplified by Bergson's successor Édouard Le Roy, who also came to label his philosophy "pragmatisme." The neocritical school (also inspired by Bergson and Renouvier and allied with Modernism) was not silenced by Catholic anti-Modernists; it remained a voice in French philosophy. Le Roy, perhaps the closest of all French philosophers to James's pragmatic empiricism, was sympathetic with his views on religion and religious experience. Another important member of this school was André Lalande, who was openly dismissive of the pope's efforts to condemn Modernism. The third school, scientific constructionism, argued that scientific theories must be judged only with regard to their ability to account for experimental evidence and to solve practical difficulties. This school looked to pragmatism for assistance with the hard problems of positivism and realism.

None of these three French schools of thought completely abandoned the notions of absolute truth and fixed reality. They refused to use the practical as the sole definition or criterion of the true, although some French philosophers gave qualified approval to the idea that the true could be identified with the practical. Le Roy, for example, expressly denied that his own philosophy reduces truth to utility. "You will please note the difference between the doctrine that I defend and contemporary English 'pragmatism.' The latter, it seems, puts . . . in place of the desire for *truth* a preoccupation with mere utility. I propose nothing of the sort. All I say is that the true must be acted and lived as well as thought out;

that discernment can operate, here, only by . . . putting things into practice—in brief, by making an effort toward effective realization."[3]

A common way, exemplified by Le Roy, to closely connect the true with the practical without making them identical was to agree that the practical is the best *epistemological* criterion of the true. We know the true through the practical, on this halfway view, but the true should remain conceptually distinct from the practical. The question of whether pragmatism was simply a new form of positivism repeated these issues and stimulated further questioning about whether pragmatism was compatible with either scientific realism or metaphysical realism.

Apart from the reactions of these somewhat sympathetic schools of French thought, French philosophers and theologians were generally sharply critical of pragmatism's effort to unify the true and the practical. Some could minimally agree that the true would eventually be practical, but only because what is permanently true would reveal itself as useful in the long run. Others refused to connect the true and the practical in any serious way, finding in pragmatism only a new resurgence of Anglo-Saxon evolutionism, utilitarianism, and hedonism that had overflowed into epistemology and metaphysics.

Many French philosophers had little trouble generating the same sorts of epistemological and metaphysical objections to pragmatism that had been simultaneously raised by hostile American and British philosophers. Primary among the French objections was that the mind's proper function is to apprehend truth as a correspondence with its object and that reason cannot be subservient to the practical needs of the body. Further typical objections proceeded from associating pragmatism with nominalism, psychologism, free will and voluntarism, relativism, subjectivism, and skepticism. Much of the internal debate about pragmatism between its friends and foes concerns whether pragmatism deserves to be classified with these other suspicious "isms."

3. Édouard Le Roy, *Dogme et critique* (Paris: Bloud, 1907), 331, quoting from W. M. Horton, *The Philosophy of the Abbé Bautain* (New York: New York University, 1926), 296.

Concerning pragmatism's philosophy of religion, interest in James's views began to appear frequently in French journals and books in 1906, the year that James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* was published in French. The more conservative wing of French Catholicism immediately condemned James's thought for reducing God to human concepts and desires. Of special interest was the repeated concern that religion should be based not primarily on human experience, but on revelation as elaborated by theological arguments approved by church authority. Other commentators warily approved of James's empiricist spiritualism and his conviction that religious truths (including free will and immortality) must be emotionally lived and confirmed. From a religious standpoint, the question of whether values direct intelligence or reason should dictate values seemed an urgent matter to some French commentators. Some extreme implications of humanistic pragmatism, such as the idea of humanity replacing God as the ultimate value, frightened many French thinkers.

Notably absent from the early French reaction is serious evaluation of the social psychology and social view of language advocated by Peirce and Dewey, apparently because James's personalistic individualism took center stage. Émile Durkheim, who took a deep interest in Dewey's social psychology, is a major exception to this generalization. Another major exception is Georges Sorel, whose views on social myth and action are likewise too complex to be discussed here. Also largely missing from the early French reaction to pragmatism is sustained attention to the impact of pragmatism on moral and political theory, and on education.

This brief discussion of the early French reaction to pragmatism is organized by philosophical topics, beginning with those that emerged first in French discussions of pragmatism and that James noticed first. They are among the topics that energized Blondel's school of action and to some degree Le Roy's philosophy as well: (1) protecting the original nature of lived experience from rationalism and scientific materialism, (2) taking ideas as essentially connected with voluntary action, and (3) regarding faith as necessary for any practical achievement of truth. The second group of top-

ics revolves around the status of scientific knowledge: (1) whether pragmatism is any sort of realism, conventionalism, relativism, or just subjectivism; and (2) whether pragmatism's affection for pluralism is compatible with the notions of an independent reality or absolute truth. The two sets of issues are deeply connected, because science's claim to dictate the nature of all reality would severely threaten lived experience with reductionism, determinism, and atheism.

EXPERIENCE, IDEAS, AND FAITH

In his preface to *Pragmatism* (1907), James recommended the writings of Le Roy, Blondel, and Bernard de Sailly. If James knew that "Bernard de Sailly" was actually a pseudonym for Blondel, he kept the secret. After Blondel bought the *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* in 1905 and installed his friend Laberthonnière as editor, he occasionally published under pseudonyms in his journal. De Sailly certainly wrote as if he were an authority on Blondel's philosophy, and indeed he was. In his articles of 1905 and 1906 to which James referred, Blondel placed great emphasis on philosophy's proper task of investigating experience as it is lived in action. Unlike the Anglo-American association of "experience" with some sort of subjective immaterial stuff, French philosophy of that time worried that ordinary experience denotes only the material external world of the senses. Whereas James's critics in America worried that a direct appeal to experience leads toward subjective idealism, the French worried that a "common sense" approach to perception leads to materialism. This is why Blondel, Le Roy, and other Modernists inspired by Bergson could not simply appeal to "ordinary common experience" the way James did, but instead talked about philosophy's task of criticizing common sense to reveal evidence of the free will and creativity of the self.

However different their starting points, James and Blondel finally agreed upon some central doctrines of what was called in America "personalism." First and foremost was the empiricist doctrine that the meaning and validity of all ideas rested ultimately on

their foundation in original experience. This original experience was conceived as thoroughly teleological and spiritual, a field of freedom from either laws of nature or of transcendental categories. James, Bergson, and Blondel, and many of their followers, tended toward mysticism rather than maintaining experience as a strictly neutral ground between materialism and spiritualism. However, some French Modernists viewed this tendency toward spiritualism as a great strength supportive of Catholicism. Despite the fact that pragmatism very often sounded like a return to positivism, it was never Comte's positivism, since pragmatic progress was never away from religion, but toward it, in order to encompass it and integrate it with other forms of knowledge. The proper location for this integration was within the full life of each individual, because according to pragmatism the intellect by itself cannot accomplish this task. James sometimes tended toward panpsychism or even pantheism, but these tendencies were largely ignored by French Modernists, who focused on a renewed interest in the individual's own experience. Indeed, a few French thinkers, including some Modernists, pointed out that James seemed to ignore the social and communal nature of religious feeling. Another potential use for the personalistic standpoint that post–World War II Catholicism discovered (but that was largely ignored by pre–World War I French thinkers) was its ability to stress the supreme moral value of each individual.

The "school of action" agreed with another aspect of James's personalist pragmatism: each individual had the responsibility to discover whether ideas were verified by their own experience. This was a democratization of epistemology that appealed to Modernists trying to revive religious interest in the wake of the dead traditions of intellectualism and Scholasticism. However, the enthusiasm that James displayed toward the ensuing relativism engendered by democracy was not shared by most French thinkers. Modernists influenced by Blondel or Le Roy were generally interested in reaching agreement with fundamental Catholic beliefs, and not in provoking another Protestant revolt. Modernists used pragmatic themes for an apologetics that was happy to put certain religious

doctrines to the test of life and see them succeed. What was not needed, in their view, was any test of quite different religious doctrines. By encouraging the notion that a wide range of religious views be taken seriously, James seemed far too liberal for France, as several commentators expressly observed. Indeed, by 1908 Blondel gave up the pragmatism label, since he was seeking a practical certainty regarding the Absolute divinity.

Still, Modernists did agree that the practical consequences of ideas serves as a criterion of truth. This is why they were convinced that each person's religious convictions must be grounded on his or her own witnessing of this practical test in life; Modernists had little difficulty adopting something like James's "will-to-believe" perspective. This view of ideas, practice, and truth, however, is not a thoroughgoing pragmatism. It is one thing to say that people need practice as the test of truth, and quite another to say, as James often did, that the only conception of truth we have is our conception of successful practice. An epistemological criterion of truth is not the same as a definition of the nature of truth. Many American philosophers could agree with pragmatism that practice is our only criterion, but they persisted in the conviction that truth remains distinct from practical results. The same situation obtained in France. Numerous commentators said they could easily adduce examples of ideas that may be practical and yet not true, and other examples of truths that no one ever puts to any practical test. Permitting individuals to think that their useful opinions were final truth could only be devastating for both reason and religion. Of course, the American pragmatists viewed the search for the true as a collective and historical process of seeking truths useful in the long run and for everybody. However, many French critics either ignored this view of truth or worried that what was best in the long run for most people could still be in error, as utilitarianism seemed to demonstrate in the field of morality.

Modernists therefore had to struggle with the implications of a pragmatism that promoted diversity of thinking, and perhaps also of results, that threatened not just absolute truth, but rationality itself. If reason always aims at truth, and if truth is one and

not many, then pragmatism would in the short and perhaps long run offer only irrationalism. By 1906 many French critics, including more conservative as well as some moderate Catholic thinkers, were drawing precisely this conclusion. Modernists, however, took refuge from irrationalism and democracy by emphasizing that adopting pragmatism would have only a gradual and progressive trajectory. They stressed the developmental and evolutionary approach that pragmatism takes toward both science and religion. If past dogmas were useful for their times, and modified beliefs more useful for current conditions, this cultural relativism implied no contradictions. The evolutionary standpoint was also consistent with another Modernist claim, that the Bible should be understood historically and critically. By emphasizing pragmatic evolution, the Modernists could pay due respect to tradition while still asking for gradual change. After all, as they reminded their more Scholastic-minded colleagues, Aquinas's great system was an accommodation of tradition to new learning and new cultural conditions.

The Modernists also reminded the Scholastics that pragmatism was not the first philosophy that connected the True with the Good and the Good with the Useful. Scholasticism was grounded on these connections, argued the Modernists, and all that was needed now was to breathe life back into these formal principles. The first fairly comprehensive survey of pragmatism, that by Charles Louis Dessoulavy in 1905, made this point. Lalande's 1906 article on "Philosophy in France" in the American journal *Philosophical Review* brought attention to Dessoulavy's sympathetic discussion of pragmatism and religion, noting that the article appeared in a French journal, *La revue de philosophie*, directed by ecclesiastics. Lalande's translation of Dessoulavy's text is as follows:

"The advantages of the pragmatic system are numerous and are evident enough without being insisted upon, especially in abstract discussions. We are accustomed to judge a tree by its fruits. . . . This system solves a great many difficulties in philosophy; it explains the necessity of principles marvellously. We desire them, we want them, therefore they are necessary, just as bread is necessary to sustain corporeal life. It solves

directly the problem of psychological liberty where the means to the end are not necessary. The existence of God, Providence, and Immortality are demonstrated by their happy effects upon our terrestrial life, and the proof has the advantage of being simple and comprehensible to anyone who knows the rudiments of history. . . . Have not the scholastics always defended, perhaps rather by instinct than reason, the identity of truth and goodness: bonum = verum? If we consider the matter carefully, it will be seen that the Good is the useful; for not to be good in anything, is synonymous with being bad, and everywhere the true is the useful. It is in this assertion that pragmatism consists."[4]

Lalande also continued the only substantive article about pragmatism published in France during 1906. He avoided the religious question, concentrating instead on metaphysical and epistemological issues. For the first time, Peirce's views were described and compared with those of other American and French thinkers. Lalande emphasized how pragmatists recognize the existence of real universals in nature, because their empiricism is not trapped in nominalism. The American pragmatists, Lalande explained, hold that relations are already in our experience of the world; this tenet dramatically changes the debate between intellectualism and pragmatism. The work of thought is not needed to hold together an otherwise fragmented reality. Instead, according to pragmatism, thought is the work of anticipating and following out the consequences of our actions. Such anticipations are possible because both we and the world follow patterns or habits, which can be mutually adjusted to our benefit.

In 1907 debate erupted in France over pragmatism and religion. That year several journals, including the *Revue néo-scolastique,* published articles about pragmatism. In preceding years, a total of five major reviews of James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* had been published, and by 1907 the main principles of his pragmatism were known to many French scholars. Perhaps more importantly, some writers were recognizing that the pragmatic movement was a

4. Andre Lalande, "Philosophy in France (1905)," *Philosophical Review* 15 (May 1906): 245–46, quoting from Charles Dessoulavy, "Le pragmatisme," *Revue de philosophie* 7 (1 July 1905): 94.

splintered and diverse group, adding sophistication to the simplistic formulas labeled as pragmatism in earlier years. For example, Léon Noël, writing in *Revue néo-scolastique,* covered the main epistemological views of various pragmatists: Americans Peirce, James, and Dewey; the British Schiller; the Italian Papini; and the French Le Roy and Blondel. The primary arguments against applying pragmatism to religion were that the individual's own emotional needs should not decide theological matters, that reason and truth should not be abandoned as ways to religious knowledge, and that pragmatism leads only to relativism, subjectivism, and skepticism.

All these complaints and many more were covered in Marcel Hébert's hostile book on pragmatism. Similarly hostile articles appeared in 1907 by Jean Bourdeau, later collected in his 1909 book describing pragmatism as the energetic philosophy to be expected from a race of semibarbarous engineers and bankers. However, some French thinkers were willing to compromise with pragmatism. In 1908 several such overtures were published. Alphonse Chide raised the aforementioned difficulties, yet asked for a moderate pragmatism to counterbalance Cartesian rationalism. Léon Cristiani's short book on pragmatism argued that the Catholic Church ought to absorb some lessons about religious experience from pragmatism. Émile Boutroux's book on science and religion in contemporary philosophy approvingly discussed James's psychological and philosophical views on religious belief. Compromise was on Lalande's mind as well; he argued that although we cannot simply proceed from our needs to the true, pragmatism's essential thesis, that truth is shown in usefulness to all, was still valid.

It must be emphasized, however, that by the end of 1908 the discussion of pragmatism in France took on a different tone. After Pope Pius X condemned Modernism with his encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis* (September 1907), even philosophers who had no interest in Scholasticism were affected by the pope's wide-ranging indictments. In 1908 Blondel fell silent. He continued to publish his journal until 1913, when it was placed on the Index of Forbidden Books, but he did not resume his efforts to reform Catholi-

cism until many years later. Other philosophy journals changed course. *Revue de philosophie* began a series of articles in May 1908 that defended Aristotelian and Scholastic philosophy against pragmatism's theory of truth and reality. The *Revue néo-scolastique* continued to publish articles and reviews about the views of various pragmatists, but without any approving commentary. Even journals with no ecclesiastical oversight began welcoming antipragmatist articles that hammered at now-familiar themes of anti-intellectualism, relativism, and skepticism. Le Roy, however, was not intimidated; as a layman whose status and academic position were not controlled by the Church, he was freer than his clerical counterparts to continue his efforts unabated. Taking over the task from Lalande of supplying the report on philosophy in France for the *Philosophical Review* in 1908, Le Roy wrote that the pope's condemnation had attacked a system that no one had ever held and that the condemnation should not have any great effect. "In the first place," he said,

> the encyclical singularly misrepresents the opinions which it reproves. In the second, it builds a system that has never been professed by anyone, and it is only this system that it has itself created which is condemned. Accordingly, the pretended "Modernists" may be saddened by the tone which it was believed necessary to adopt in addressing them; but it neither disturbs them, nor causes them to rebel, nor checks their labors. And they do not even feel that it is at all difficult to reconcile the continuation of their work with their resolution to observe obedience to the full and legitimate extent required by their Catholicism.[5]

Despite Le Roy's bold words for his American audience, his estimate of the effect on French thinkers was overly optimistic. Judging by the discussions of pragmatism in French journals from 1909 to 1914, the very topic of pragmatism in relation to religion almost completely disappeared. A handful of books during those years, while they did attack pragmatism's approach to religion, added almost nothing to the level of debate.

5. Édouard Le Roy, "Philosophy in France (1907)," *Philosophical Review* 17 (May 1908): 315.

With attention swinging away from religion, other topics came into clearer view. In 1909 James's *Principles of Psychology* was translated into French, as was Schiller's *Studies in Humanism*. In 1910 and 1911 translations of James's *A Pluralistic Universe* and *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* appeared. From 1909 to 1914, a few authors wrote books defending recognizably pragmatic views on the mind, knowledge, science, and truth, but not on religion. Notable among them are works by Maurice Pradines in 1909, Pierre Bovet in 1910, Émile Boutroux in 1911, and Théodore Flournoy in 1911. I will next take a brief look at the French reaction to pragmatism's claims about the nature of the mind and knowledge, and its views on science and reality.

SCIENCE, REALITY, AND TRUTH

Since James did not publish his most explicit and careful views on philosophy of science until *Pragmatism* in 1907, initially only three broad themes in his earlier work penetrated French thought. First, he clearly rejected materialism and any sort of determinism in favor of empiricism and free will. Second, his "will-to-believe" doctrine implied that the achievement of scientific knowledge requires some amount of faith in hypotheses. Third, he seemed to be a conventionalist, holding that scientific theories about unobservable natural processes are true not because they correctly depict those processes, but because they lead to successful prediction and control of observable phenomena.

Although these three themes are interrelated, one can begin with the issue of free will, because James always credited Renouvier with inspiring his conviction that belief in free will is not unreasonable. "The power to sustain a thought as long as desired," as James often expressed it, seems to be sufficient empirical evidence for voluntary control over some higher mental processes. He argued that while science may have good justification for predicating some deterministic laws of nature, not all reality is regulated by strict and immutable laws. Therefore, he concluded, indeterminism ought to be the default philosophical position until science

can show that all phenomena can be fully explained deterministically. This was a safe bet for James, since he was also persuaded by Peirce that empirical science, by its very nature, could never establish complete determinism. In James's view, humans live in an "open universe" where genuine possibility is just as real as the predetermination into which it is thoroughly mixed. This openness of reality is what permits the human will to partially decide the course of the future, because humans can partially control the emergence of genuinely new and unpredictable realities. Among the most important of these new realities are novel thoughts and creative imaginings.

In France, several thinkers besides Renouvier had already become comfortable with indeterminism: Boutroux, Le Roy, Poincaré, and Bergson, all of whom for a wide variety of reasons were questioning the absolute reign of determinism in science. Interestingly, in the late 1860s and early 1870s Peirce seems to have been the first of these figures to raise the most fundamental objections to scientific determinism. However, as already mentioned, his work was not explored in detail in France until after World War I. James knew something of Peirce's conclusions, and when he heard similar conclusions in France supporting indeterminism, he was very impressed and held up these common views as evidence that science would have to respect free will.

For James, but not necessarily for French thinkers, this victory of free will over science was a triumph for morality and religion, since he believed that religion is grounded in a moral view of the world and that morality is grounded in freedom. The French philosophers who came closest to James here were Boutroux and Le Roy. Among French critics, some were not impressed by this attempted defense of morality and religion, holding instead to the view that there is no need to fear divine providence and predestination. Another criticism raised—one also heard in America—was that the mere feeling of freedom could not possibly support any metaphysical conclusions about the truth of determinism, since our consciousness could be systematically deceived in this matter.

From James's perspective, it was never a question of proving indeterminism to be true, but rather of where the philosophical burden of proof should rest. Viewed in this way, his claim that some type of "will-to-believe" is needed even in science, as it is needed in ordinary human situations, served to support his position. In his essay "The Will to Believe," first published in 1896, James says that some beliefs, if necessary for successful action, should be held even if empirical support is lacking. This way of expressing the role of the will-to-believe separates beliefs grounded on faith from those grounded on need. However, by the end of that essay, and in related works, James went further by implying that the scientific method requires that scientists place some confidence in a hypothesis in order to gather evidence for or against it. On this second and stronger view, moral beliefs are on a level with scientific beliefs, as they both arise from faith. Therefore, since determinism itself is grounded in faith, it cannot be considered the prima facie more reasonable position.

Unfortunately, James's 1897 book *The Will to Believe and Other Essays* was not translated for publication in France until 1916. This meant that French critics had no precise Jamesian formulation to target. As a result, they attacked any number of positions that they called "will to believe," despite the best efforts of Lalande and others to explain James. The commonest complaints were that James's pragmatism authorized faith in free will and indeterminism by simply following "common sense" or obeying one's desires. Making matters worse, James's most thorough discussion of indeterminism did not appear until *A Pluralistic Universe*, published in 1909, a year before his death; it was not translated until 1911, when French interest in James was already waning.

With regard to James's scientific conventionalism, matters are somewhat better. French philosophers quite clearly understood how and why James viewed scientific theories and laws as only conventionally true. James explicitly described the purpose of scientific theories as devoted to organizing and directing empirical phenomena. He was unwilling to go as far toward realism as did Peirce, who used pragmatism to defend a robust scientific realism

against positivism. Contrariwise, British pragmatist Schiller denied that external reality had any determinate form or lawfulness until human beings interacted with it, forcing it to respond. James ended up somewhere between these two positions, never having clearly formulated his vision of the natural world's organization. Impressed by the conventional nature of geometric systems, and confident that a priori deductive systems had finally lost their command over science, he was willing to sound distinctly positivistic with regard to science.

James's positivistic pragmatism did not regard scientific theories as conventional in the sense of arbitrary. Despite several French critics who viewed pragmatism's turn away from rationalism as an approval of irrationalism, James never believed that any and all scientific theories were equally justifiable. If anything, his pragmatism described an empirical way rationally to prefer some theories over others, even if no theory could ever be proven perfectly correct in some correspondence sense of correctness. James's view largely coincided with Poincaré's, by whom he was considerably influenced, since both thinkers held that objectivity is reached when nature decides which hypotheses better predict observed phenomena. It must be said, however, that James was never as deep a thinker about philosophy of science as Peirce, Poincaré, or Duhem. It would be pointless to ask James about serious complications, such as whether all observations are equally important for confirming theories, or whether a theory can explain all actual observations if sufficiently flexible. A few of James's French critics did in fact raise these difficulties; not surprisingly they obtained no satisfaction from his writings.

These difficulties for James's view of science infected the French understanding of his realism and naturalism as well. Critics found plenty of evidence that James could not be a serious realist. After all, they collectively claimed, he denied that the human mind could obtain firm and objective truths about reality, and held that belief must be limited to the realm of the experienceable. When his rejection of simple scientific realism is added to these complaints, his

critics had little trouble proving to their satisfaction that he had sent pragmatism into subjectivism and some kind of antirealism.

Critics varied widely on what sort of antirealism should characterize James. Idealism? Probably not, as neither Kantian nor Hegelian rationalism fit him. Perhaps subjective idealism, then, although even his harshest critics did not accuse him of intentionally trying to defend solipsism. Very few critics realized the nature of James's radical empiricism until around 1910, when enough of his later writings began to be available in France. From 1911 to 1914 a handful of commentators began to realize that James's radical empiricism—the idea that experience *is* nature viewed from a particular perspective—was as important to his philosophy as his pragmatism. Of course, the precise relationship between his radical empiricism and his pragmatism is still debated among James scholars to this day.

It is at this point—on the eve of World War I, when perceptive critics in France really began to appreciate the complexity of James's final conclusions about truth and reality—that this discussion must conclude. Its conclusion is pessimistic: only when French interest in American pragmatism fell into steep decline due to the impact of rival philosophies and the horrors of war did a full appreciation of the whole of James's philosophy become possible. It would not be until the 1950s that any considerable understanding of James, Dewey, and Peirce would awaken in France.