

WILLIAM JAMES'S PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY:

EMOTIONS AND BELIEFS

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William James has been a leading thinker of his century, as well as for his contributions to Psychology and Philosophical work. However, it is rare to find studies that trace bridges of communication between the author's developments in both disciplines, as some of them are focused on his contributions to experimental psychology and others in his pragmatist philosophy. In this paper, our overall purpose is to show what could be one of the possible lines of connection between Psychology and Philosophy of William James. We purpose to consider, in particular, to address one of the areas that we believe may serve as an interface between these disciplines, namely, the conception of the human mind that has formulated this author.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1987) James argued that the human mind was made up of three elements: ideas, emotional tendencies and impulsive and inhibitory tendencies. From this framework, we focus on the conception of the emotions that developed this author. Thus, in this paper we want to begin an analysis of the pragmatist conception of emotion. We will show why traditionally held that the Jamesian emotion theory is a physiological theory. While we will not ignore this point, we will defend that the theory of the emotions of James has some elements that allow to interpret it like evaluative theory of the emotions¹. In this sense, we consider that some of the contemporary criticisms this author has received seems to consider only a partial reading of the *James's work*. Once established which is the Jamesian conception of the emotion, we will risk in what way this may relate with the acquisition of beliefs, as conceived by the author. At this point, even though, James says in *The Principles of Psychology* "will" and "belief" are two names for

¹ For a brief introduction to the different kinds of theories about emotion, see the introduction of Calhoun & Solomon (*¿Qué es una emoción? Lecturas clásicas de psicología filosófica*, 1989).

the same psychological phenomenon, we will defend the thesis that for James is no possible to believe in anything that the will dictate to us.

1. The mind

W. James does not address the question of the human mind from a metaphysically point of view, but rather from a psychological and physiological perspective. This approach is new to the philosophical tradition of the nineteenth century because, as a result of the thought of Descartes, many philosophers such as Malebranche, Spinoza, Leibniz, tried to reconcile in the metaphysics context the ontological dualism with the physiological explanations of the mind-body. However, when W. James studies the mind he gets rid of the ontological problem as understood only as a psychological phenomenon (Wozniak, 1995)² and affirms that, as a universally accepted method, the study of psychological phenomena includes or presupposes the study of brain physiology (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1952, p. 3).

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (hereinafter *The varieties*) James summarizes which is his conception of the human mind saying that "A mind is a system of ideas, each with the excitement it arouses, and with tendencies impulsive and inhibitive, which mutually check or reinforce one another" (James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1987, p. 184). That is, the human mind as it, would be made up by three elements:

1. A system of ideas. James uses the term "Idea" as a synonym for abstract idea, pure idea, intellectual idea, thought, reasons or concepts. Each of these terms have similar meanings, but not identical³.

² In this sense says R. B. Perry "Referring to his *Principles of Psychology* as a work that prevented the explanatory theories spiritualist, associationist or other metaphysical hypothesis, James wrote: "In this strictly positivistic point of view is the only trait for which... I claim originality" [translation mine] (Perry, 1973, p. 200).

³ In several James's texts is possible to detect the use of these terms as equivalent because they share the general meaning. This undifferentiated and ambiguous use is explicitly recognized by the author in a footnote quote in *Problems of Philosophy*: "In what follow I shall freely use synonyms for these two terms. 'Idea', 'thought', and 'intellection' are synonymous with 'concept'" (James, *Some*

2. An emotional excitement, understanding by this term the passionate nature, feelings and emotions.

3. Trends, which can be of two types or impulsive/explosive, which are the forces that commits us to go sideways, or obstructive/inhibitory, which are the forces that hold us.

The passionate nature: the emotions

James understands that emotions are linked to the instincts⁴ and both are impossible to isolate from the experience since they are body movements that occur at the same time when an object excites the individual. Despite this strong relationship in the experience in conceptually possible to differentiate them because the instinctive reaction can lead to practical relations with the object, while emotions always lead in the body of the individual (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1952, p. 738). James, from Lange's description of sadness, distinguishes two ways in which emotions end up in the body of the individual:

1. With voluntary movements. Lange argues that sadness has as main feature to paralyze voluntary movements. The sad man is easily recognized by his exterior, for example: he walks slowly, hesitates, drags his feet, drops his arms. The tonicity of his muscles decreases considerably: the neck bends, the head is bended, the face gets longer. With the weakness of the nervous and voluntary muscles apparatus, it occurs a subjective feeling of fatigue and heaviness, the individual feels depressed, dejected.

2. With organic involuntary movements. These muscles, particularly those found in the issues of the blood vessels are constricted, so that causes paleness and anemia. The anemia of the skin is detected by the sensations of cold and chills; the sad

Problems of Philosophy, 1987, p. 1007). Because of this ambiguity in the use of concepts W. James has been heavily criticized, however, some philosophers have also seen how enormously enlightening and productive these ambiguities can result. See the Ramon Del Castillo preface to the translation of (James, *Pragmatismo*, 2007, p. 7-8).

⁴ Taking into account the influence that the thought of W. James has received from the work of Darwin, it is easy to understand why this author has linked emotions with instinct. In this sense, says Perry, R: "There were two general influences that led him in that direction. One was Darwin's, who leaned to link emotions with the instincts, and emphasize the biological aspect of emotional expression. The other was the influence of British empiricism, which led him to accentuate the sensorial aspect of the mental content" [translation mine] (Perry, 1973, p. 202).

man hardly gets warm. The anemia of the brain is manifested by intellectual inertia, boredom, a felling of intellectual fatigue, discouragement, displeasure for the work and insomnia (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1952, p. 738-740).

Having shown the difference between instincts and emotions lies in the relationship established with the objects and the body, and having shown what movements can cause emotions, we will focus on the characterization of these. In *The Principles of Psychology* James argues that:

Each emotion is the *resultant* of a sum of elements, and each element is caused by a *physiological process* of a sort already well known. The elements are all organics changes, and each of them is the reflex effect of the exciting object [emphasis added] (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1952, p. 745)

That is, emotions are result of physiological processes through a reflex effect produce organic changes. For this reason, James's work can be found physiological explanations of the emotions of the following type:

An object falls on a sense-organ and is apperceived by the appropriate cortical center; or else the latter, excited in some other way, gives rise to an idea of the same object. Quick as a flash, the reflex currents pass down through their pre-ordained channels, alter the condition of muscle, skin and viscus; and these alterations, apperceived like the original object, in as many specific portions of the cortex, combine with it in consciousness and transform it from an object-simply-apprehended into an object-emotionally-felt. No new principles have to be invoked, nothing is postulated beyond the ordinary reflex circuit, and the topical center (James, *What is an Emotion?*, 1884, p. 203).

The body movement of emotions are explained in this way and led to the consideration of W. James as one of the leading representatives of the physiological theories of emotions. James says that the physiological changes occur when an object excites an individual are constitutive of emotion or, put another way, it is impossible for the author to imagine that is an emotion without the body changes that it generates⁵. In this regard he said:

⁵ James says: "Can one fancy the state of rage and picture no ebullition in the chest, no flushing of the face, no dilatation of the nostrils, no clenching of the teeth, no impulse to vigorous action, but in their stead limp muscles, calm breathing, and a placid face? The present writer, for one, certainly cannot... if I were to become corporeally anæsthetic, I should be excluded from the life of the

*If we fancy some strong emotion, and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feelings of its bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no 'mind-stuff' out of which the emotion can be constituted, and that a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1952, p. 744).*

These constitutive body changes of emotions are conceived by James as preorganized mechanisms (or reflex effects) that all human beings have as an adapted answer to the world. Being prearranged mechanisms arise before the individual has thought about how to react to a particular situation. For example, James says, "If we abruptly see a dark moving form in the woods, our heart stops beating, and we catch our breath instantly and before any articulate idea of danger can arise" (James, *What is an Emotion?*, 1884, p. 196).

As several thinkers have said, conceiving the emotion in this way, to James implies to change the common point of view of his time. This point of view supported the idea that the causal relationship between emotions and bodily changes had the following order: the mental perception of a fact (to see a person) causes a mental condition (joy) and this results in bodily expressions (smile). James argues that this order is wrong because "the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion" (James, *What is an Emotion?*, 1884, p. 189-190). In this James would say that seeing a person (perception of the fact) causes a series of bodily changes such as smiling and being aware of this bodily change, we feel the emotion of joy.

LeDoux explains that the James's theory of emotions supposes, on the one hand, that emotions are accompanied by physical responses, and on the other hand, we can perceive these physical responses inside the body (as we see what happens outside the body)⁶. The individual perceives,

*affections, harsh and tender alike, and drag out an existence of merely cognitive or intellectual form" (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1952, p. 744-745).*

⁶ Against those who say that they feel no bodily changes which are raised by an emotion, James says: "The next thing to be noticed is this, that every one of the bodily changes, whatsoever it be, is FELT, acutely or obscurely, the moment it occurs. If the reader has never paid attention to this matter, he will be both interested and astonished to learn how many different local bodily feelings he can detect in himself as

for example, that their hands perspire, their heart rates, their muscles are contracted in certain way, their vision blurs, etc. These physiological responses return to the brain in form of physical sensations and this particular sensory pattern gives each emotion its unique color, that is, every emotion triggers some physiological responses in the body, such as, the smile and rapid heart rate, these responses go to the brain in form of internal sensory patterns and whenever the individual perceives these patterns feels the emotion (LeDoux, 1999, p. 49-50).

James specifies that emotions are responses that occur before the formation of the articulated ideas, allow us to perceive situations as positive or negative, for it says:

Conceive yourself, if possible, suddenly stripped of all the emotion with which your world now inspired you, and try to imagine it as it exists purely by itself, without your favorable or unfavorable, hopeful or apprehensive comment. It will be almost impossible for you to realize such a condition of negativity and deadness. No one portion of the universe would then have importance beyond another; and the whole collection of its things and series of its events would be without significance, character, expression, or perspective (James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1987, p. 140-141).

That is, the emotion allows to appraise (favorably or unfavorably) external stimuli. So James says that emotions changes our way of seeing the objects, "the passion of love is the most familiar and extreme example of this fact... Yet it transforms the value of the creature loved as utterly as the sunrise transforms Mont Blanc from a corpse-like gray to a rosy enchantment" (James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1987, p. 141). Based on this point we argue that the Jamesian theory of emotion can be described also as an evaluative theory of emotion. These theories argue, in general, when we feel fear, aversion or rejection for an object or a particular person, these emotions are indicating what the appraisal (negative in this case) that we give. However, the evaluative theories of emotions are several

*characteristic of his various emotional mood. It would be perhaps too much to expect him to arrest the tide of any strong gust of passion for the sake of any such curious analysis as this; but he can observe more tranquil states, and that may be assumed here to be true of the greater which is shown to be true of the less" [emphasis added] (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1952, p. 743-744).*

because the term "evaluation" was understood in different ways. This concept can be interpreted as "perceived of value", i.e., the emotions were considered as analogous perceptions, in some sense to, the true sensory perceptions. This analogy was supported by the fact that both phenomena are constituted by and object in its origin and an internal construction that the brain makes the object⁷. If this argument is correct and the theory of James indeed may be considered also as an evaluative theory of emotions as "perceptions of value", then it is possible to argue that James's theory may account for one of the most common objections that were done, namely, that did not take into account that a cognitive understanding of the average situation between stimulus perception and emotion. This objection holds that:

Based on experimental studies,... A state of physiological excitement and a consciousness and interpretation of the situation itself are crucial for the emotion. The fact that we suddenly see a man with a gun in a dark alley, it can induce physiological excitement (as in the theory of James), but the experience of fear depends on a cognitive interpretation of the implications of the situations [translation mine] (Calhoun & Solomon, 1989, p. 28).

If James's theory is an evaluation theory of external objects, it is necessary to accept that some kind of cognitive interpretation (even if not an articulated thought) that enables the qualification of objects as favorable, unfavorable, dangerous, harmless, threatening, nice, etc. therefore we consider that the objection referred to, would not take place.

So far we have argued that James said that the mind is a system of ideas with emotive trends and impulsive and

⁷ Is possible to find some arguments in favor of the consideration of the Jamesian theory of emotions as an evaluative theory, meanwhile, appraised perceptions of external objects. From the posing of A. Damasio (*En busca de Spinoza. Neurobiología de la emoción y los sentimientos.*, 2006), arguments in favor of the analogy of emotions as perceptions of value because the theory of the emotions of James meets the three criteria suggested by Damasio: a) the perceptions of value the perceived object is internal, it is the collecting body, b) perceptions of value besides having a real object at the origin (the body) have a emotionally competent object (the external object that initiated the body changes) and c) perceptions of value not only the actual object can alter the brain, but the latter may act directly on the real object, modifying or altering it.

inhibitory tendencies. In turn, we have shown that James conceives emotions as preorganized physiological mechanism that allow the body to give adapted responses according to the environments and its objects, and we have specified that these physiological responses are at the same time *evaluations* because these responses can value external objects. We have also shown what kind of physiological explanation James gives of these mental phenomena. It said so far it would be possible to do a materialistic reading (reductionist) of theory of the mind and Jamesian emotions, since we have only mentioned phenomena that ultimately refer to natural processes and atomistic; let's remember, for example, James explains the thrill of sadness through the reflex circuits of the nervous system and physiological responses of the muscles, skin and viscera. However, we believe that this would be a misreading it would ignore an important dimension to the author, a region that does not fall within the natural explanation⁸. James says:

There are forces within us that naturalism with its legal and factual virtues never takes into account possibilities that insufflate forces [*take our breath away*] possibilities of another kind of happiness and power, possibilities that arise when we put aside our will and letting something higher work for us [*letting something higher work for us*], forces that seem to reveal a wider world than physics and philistine ethics can ever imagine... These experiments show that our natural experience, our experience strictly moral and prudential, it is only a fragment of human experience. These experiences mitigate the designs of nature and open unknown possibilities and prospects [translation mine] (*A Pluralistic Universe*, Lecture VII, quoted by Del Castillo, November 2006, p. 72).

In the line of reasoning that we are developing, R. Perry says that:

⁸ In *Pragmatism* is possible to find additional arguments in favor of a non-reductionist reading of James. In these lectures, James argues against two extreme tendencies in the history of philosophy: crude empiricism and rationalism, and gives reasons for his pragmatic method, which turns out to be a mediation between both tendencies. The crude empiricism is characterized by the author as a stand materialist (reductionist), scientist, leaving aside the romantic spontaneity and courage, where ideals become mere inert products of physiology. James says that in this materialistic world just a "rough spirit" can it encounters at home, but a pragmatic spirit will be more comfortable in a pluralistic universe (James, *Pragmatism*, 1987, p. 492-493).

James had a hypothesis in which vindicated a "dramatic likelihood" that "there is a continuum of cosmic consciousness in which our individuality builds only occidental fences, and where our diverse minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir" [translation mine] (Perry, 1973, p. 212).

Taking into account these quotes its necessary relocates the emotional trends and, in general, everything said so far on the mind of the individual within a larger region that, for James, escapes to the legal and factual explanations. James refers to this region with the unorthodox concepts of "subliminal consciousness", "subconscious region" or "extraliminal region", concepts that the pragmatist uses such as in *The Principles Psychology* and *The Varieties* (Perry, 1973, p. 265). In *The Varieties* he says that the discovery of this region was one of the most important steps given by psychology (In the year 1886) because of him we know that exists a field in which the ordinary consciousness (with their feelings, thoughts and memories) finds itself in an extraliminal consciousness (James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1987, p. 215). The author argues that, thanks to this region, the individual may have experiences of voices, visions, premonitions, hallucinations, revelations, etc. James says, the subliminal region:

Is the abode of everything that is latent and the reservoir of everything that passes unrecorded or unobserved. It contains, for example, such things as all our momentarily inactive memories, and it harbors the springs of all our obscurely motive passion, impulses, likes, dislikes, and prejudices. Our intuition, hypotheses, fancies, superstitions, persuasions, convictions, and in general all our non-rational operations, come from it. It is source of our dreams, and apparently they may return to it. In it arise whatever mystical experiences we may have (James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1987, p. 433).

In this sense, to be faithful to the conception of mind of W. James is necessary to resize he region of consciousness in relation to the subliminal region. This region will allow James to explain of conversions (which may be religious or not, for example, may be a falling out of love) (James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1987, p. 165-166). According to James, this region is where are produced the subconscious maturation of the decisions that intrude into consciousness when an individual evaluates that his forces are not enough to leave the state of upset and chooses to abandon

themselves. Just then, the subconscious forces take the lead and get the unification that the individual aspires. One of the many examples of subconscious maturation which James makes reference is the following one:

You know how it is when try to recollect a forgotten name. Usually you help the recall by working for it... But sometimes this effort fails: you feel then as if the harder you tried the less hope there would be, as though the name were *jammed*, and pressure in its direction only kept it all the more from rising. And then the opposite expedient often succeeds. Give up the effort entirely; think of sometimes altogether different, and in half an hour the lost name comes sauntering into your mind, as Emerson says, as carelessly as if it had never been invited (James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1987, p. 191).

Taking into account that the conception of the mind of James implies not only the ideas, emotive trends and inhibitory and driving trends but also the subconscious region, next we will consider in what way this philosophy is related to the acquisition of beliefs.

2. The Beliefs.

In *The Principles of Psychology*, James says that a belief is an emotional reaction over an object (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1952, p. 661). In what sense a belief is an emotional reaction? Recalling that emotional reactions are characterized by this author as reflex adaptive responses that the organism produces whenever an object exists it (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1952, p. 745), and taking into account the main objective of this paper, we argue that the conceptual bridge that James proposes between the belief and emotional reactions may be based that both are understood as responses of the individual to act functionally in their environment. In this sense, this section, it is necessary to show what the conception of the acquisition of belief that James holds.

The pragmatist says the beliefs can be acquired in a similar way to the emotions, it is clear that for James the emotional reactions may be reproduced performing voluntary external movements for emotional tendencies that the individual

wants to activate⁹. If the beliefs can be acquired in a similar manner to the emotions, then we must ask whether beliefs can be acquired at will. James holds:

Truly enough, a man cannot believe at will abruptly... But *gradually* our will can lead us to the same results by a very simple method: *we need only in cold blood ACT as if the thing in question were real, and keep acting as if it were real, and it will infallibly end by growing into such a connection with our life that it will become real.* It will become so knit with habit and emotion that our interests in it will be those which characterize belief (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1952, p. 661).

According to this quotation beliefs can be acquired according to the will of the individual if he acts as if it already was part of their belief system, because the act in this way facilitates the incorporation of the belief to the emotional and daily life. Both *The Principle of Psychology* (1952) and *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1987) James exposes several cases of beliefs that are acquired in a *voluntary* way, for example, who intends to believe in God and makes certain daily sacrifices, ends up believing in his existence¹⁰. Thus, the will, as a psychological phenomenon,

⁹ For example, James poses that: *"Whistling to keep up courage is no mere figure of speech. On the other hand, sit all day in a moping posture, sigh, and reply to everything with a dismal voice, and your melancholy lingers. There is no more valuable precept in moral education than this, as all who have experience know: if we wish to conquer undesirable emotional tendencies in ourselves, we must assiduously, and in the first instance cold-bloodedly, go through the outward movements of those contrary dispositions which we prefer to cultivate. The reward of persistency will infallibly come, in the fading out of the sullenness or depression... Smooth the brow, brighten the eye, contract the dorsal rather..., pass the genial compliment, and your heart must be frigid indeed if it does not gradually thaw!"* (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1952, p. 751-752). That is, to reproduce external body movements corresponding to an emotion it may result in the individual desired emotion.

¹⁰ In *The Will to Believe* (1897) James offers another kind of example that seems to expand the reach of the voluntary acquisition of beliefs, it also holds that an individual can make another person acquires a belief: *"How many women's hearts are vanquished by the mere sanguine insistence of some man that they must love him! He will not consent to the hypothesis that they cannot. The desire for a certain kind of truth here brings about that special truth's existence; and so it is in innumerable cases of other sorts"* (James, *The Will to Believe*, 1897, p. 24). In this case, even James, the insistence of the lover ends up generating in the heart of the beloved the corresponding feeling and beliefs. At this point include a restriction that James sets for the voluntary

takes a different meaning in the acquiring beliefs process because it is not only limited to the acceptance or rejection of what the understanding presents, but takes a greater role as basis for the acquisition of all our convictions.

In the philosophical literature such positions has received significant criticism, because whether if possible acquire beliefs as the will dictates, then the cases of self deception are clear examples of the paradoxical that these position may be. In these cases the people "cannot believe" something despite the strong evidence in favor of that belief and rationalize their behavior by hiding their real reasons. For example, in the case of a wife who discovers that her husband reliably deceive her and despite this, she still relies on the fidelity of her husband because she argues that the husband did not "really" wanted to cheat on her, but he was "forced to do that". Thus, the deceived woman finds a reason that justifies the husband conduct and she continues to believe in his faithfulness.

Due to the importance that James gave to the will in the acquisition of beliefs, some critics argued that his position was foolish because from his texts is possible to infer that this author defends the following thesis: "it is possible to arbitrarily believe in anything, regardless of whether the beliefs is true or false" and that "to believe in it, the belief becomes true", i.e. critics argued that the Jamesian beliefs acquisition process was a self-indulgence exercise. Faced with these accusations, James wrote a letter:

I cry out to heaven to tell me what maddening root have eaten my "main contemporary" to be so blind to the meaning of the printed text. Or simple are we not able to clearly state what we mean? [translation mine] (letter of August 12, 1904 to Hobhouse, quoted by Perry, 1973, p. 221)

Since this is a letter to a friend, James does not develop any argument to answer his objector. However, he makes clear

acquisition of beliefs. According to the psychological theory which this author adds the passionate and volitional nature that beats in the root of our convictions as beliefs that are presented as options to be acquired must be "living options". Because James's says about "Pascal wager" that: *"It is evident that unless there be some pre-existing tendency to believe in masses and holy water, the option offered to the will by Pascal is not a living option"* (James, *The Will to Believe*, 1897, p. 6).

that it is not a good way to interpret his philosophical texts. In this paper, we will show what the arguments are, presented in an unsystematic way in James's work, which provide a philosophical justification for the assertion of the letter quoted above. Despite the importance the will acquired in the acquisition of beliefs, in *Pragmatism* (1987) the author presents what are the reasons why it should not believe in anything. James says:

Yet in the choice of these man-made formulas we can not be capricious with impunity any more than we can be capricious on the common-sense practical level. We must find a theory that will *work*; and that means something extremely difficult; for our theory must mediate between all previous truths and certain new experiences. It must derange common sense and previous belief as little as possible, and it must lead to some sensible terminus or other that can be verified exactly (James, *Pragmatism*, 1987, p. 580-581).

That is, the beliefs acquired voluntarily must respect the following three restrictions:

- a) adopting beliefs that *work* in the world or, in others words, that they help to achieve satisfactory modes of action, taking into account the prior knowledge and new experiences;
- b) not to adopt beliefs that require major restructuring of the knowledge already acquired, and
- c) adopt beliefs that can be verified in experience.

Especially at the first imposed restriction on the acquisition of beliefs, we believe it is clear that the conceptual bridge establish between beliefs and emotions is based on two phenomena are (and must be) functional to the individual's environment. James says in *The Principles of Psychology* that the reasoning are adaptive responses to the environment, i.e. the individual reasons considering the fact in which they want to work successfully, with the aim that the chances of failure are reduced. In this sense, James hold both *Pragmatism* and in his last work *Some Problems of Philosophy* that the adopted beliefs by an individual cannot have an arbitrary content because at stake is their ability to perform successful actions or satisfactory to themselves.

Hence, James highlights the functional role that has the ideas¹¹:

Now however beautiful or otherwise worthy of stationary contemplation the substantive part of a concept may be, the more important part of its significance may naturally be held to be the *consequences to which it leads*. These may lie either in the way if making us think, or in the way of making us act. Whoever has a clear idea of these knows effectively what the concept what the concept practically signifies, whether its substantive content be interesting in its own right or not (James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, 1987, p. 1013).

Even to do without a substantial definition of them:

This consideration has led to a method of interpreting concepts to which I shall give the name of *the Pragmatic Rule*... In obeying this rule we neglect the substantive content of the concept, and *follow its function only* [emphasis added] (James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, 1987, p. 1013-1014).

The author's pragmatic interest, already present in his first psychological written took shape throughout his philosophical writings. James was refining even more how to value the new or old beliefs, focusing on its *a posteriori* content, that is, content given by the alignment with the intended porpoise and downplaying the content determination *a priori* of concepts¹².

If the beliefs are evaluated according to the situation and the desires or needs that manage to satisfy, then it is clear that this is a major constraint to the beliefs that are wished to adopt¹³. In this sense A. Faerna says:

¹¹ Remember that the term "idea" is used by James interchangeably with the following terms: *concept, abstract idea, thought, pure idea, reason or intellectual idea*. See p. 2.

¹² One of the obvious consequences of this approach is that the evaluative content of beliefs is determined in relation to the circumstances in which the individual is. This difference between *a priori* and *a posteriori* content of beliefs was taken Ramon Del Castillo, who developed in the field of ethical pluralism W. James. See (Del Castillo, Una serena desesperación. La ética individualista de William James., Nov 2006).

¹³ With the objective of reinforcing the idea that the individual can not adopt any belief they like because they risk to suffer consequences (concrete) undesired I quote James one more time: "*If the probabilities that our partner is a villain are one to two, how to act based on this probability? By treating him as a villain one day, and confiding your money and your secrets to him the next? That would be the worst of all solutions. In all such cases we must act wholly for*

James does NOT invite us to an exercise of self-satisfaction by which we should feel authorized to wallow in our favorite belief. On the contrary, he reminds us that knowledge is a risky business, and sooner or later, for better or for worse, we will suffer in our own flesh the consequences of our own certainties [translation mine] (Faerna, 2005, p. 60).

"The consequences that we will suffer" will be those actions that do not lead to desired ending, such as proposing a theory that is not appropriate to explain some phenomenon, choosing a counterproductive medication for an illness, taking the opposite way to get home, etc. (Del Castillo, 2002, p. 116).

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have shown one possible conceptual bridges between Psychology and Philosophy of William James, based on what the theory of mind developed by this author. In particular we have shown that the mind is conceived as a system of ideas, emotive tendencies and inhibitory and impulsive tendencies. In turn we have highlighted what is the place that James has given to the subliminal region in his own thinking, putting him away from this kind of reductionist materialist philosophical trends. The subliminal region has been understood psychologically as "the source" of all our ideas, assumptions, hypotheses, etc. and as the home of all subconscious maturities.

With the purpose of showing how to build a bridge between the Philosophy and Psychology of W. James, we show what can be the relationship between emotions and beliefs. In this regard, on the one hand, about the emotions we have shown that they were conceived as reactions of the organism to environmental stimuli. These reactions occur

one or the other horn of the dilemma. We must go in for the more probable alternative as if the other one did not exist, and suffer the full penalty if the event belie our faith... We have but this one life in which to take up our attitude towards them, no insurance company is there to cover us, and if we are wrong, our error, even though it be not as great as the old hell-fire theology pretended, may yet be momentous" (James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, 1987, p. 1098-1099). Thus, James restricts the individual to adopt only those beliefs that enable it to achieve satisfactory ways of acting because he knows that the cognitive company does not have an "insurance company" that covers you for damage because of a bad adoption of beliefs.

before the individual may have an articulated idea about the external objects, there are considered as preorganized mechanisms that allow to react quickly and adapted to the environment. We have shown that W. James offers physiological explanations of the emotional reactions, but conceive closely linked with the physiological changes, we have defended in this paper, that James also conceives emotions as appraisable phenomena while allowing them to perceive objects as favorable or unfavorable, positive or negative.

On the other hand, we have shown that beliefs can be acquired as the individual will dictate, although, we have shown that James conceives the acquisition of beliefs respects (or should respect) three conditions, namely that new beliefs are functional to the environment, that do not require major restructuring of the existing belief system and can be verified. Based on the first condition to be met to be acquired beliefs, we argue that the conceptual bridge that can be established between these two phenomena is that both are (or should be) functional for the individual's adaptation to the environment.

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