The Role of Temperament in Philosophical Inquiry: A Pragmatic Approach

RH: Temperament in Philosophical Inquiry

BIO: Neil W. Williams is a Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Roehampton, London.

Keywords: William James, Charles S. Peirce, temperament, sentiment, affective states, inquiry, metaphilosophy, epistemology, disagreement.

Abstract

In his *Pragmatism* lectures, William James argued that philosophers’ temperaments partially determine the theories which they find satisfying, and that their influence explained persistent disagreement within the history of philosophy. Crucially, James was not only making a descriptive claim, but also a normative one: temperaments, he thought, could play a legitimate epistemic role in our philosophical inquiries. This paper aims to evaluate and defend this normative claim.

There are three problems for James’s view: (1) that allowing temperaments to play a role within inquiry replaces philosophical disagreement with psychological difference; (2) that including temperaments would allow arbitrary elements to influence the outcome of inquiry; and (3) that such a view assumes an implausible metaphysical picture. Through clarifying the nature of temperaments, and what counts as a satisfactory philosophical theory on a pragmatist account, this paper presents an interpretation of James’s metaphilosophical claims which can provide satisfactory responses to these problems.

1. Introduction: Philosophers as Human Beings

Ludwig Wittgenstein famously said of William James that he was a good philosopher because “he was a real human being.”[1] By James’s own lights he could not have received a better compliment. James consistently emphasised the importance of remembering that philosophers—strange though they might seem in comparison with others—remained human beings “in the secret recesses of their hearts” (*P* 257).[2] Part of what it is to insist that philosophers are human beings is to see them as having personal and emotional attributes which shape their philosophical thought. “Pretend what we may,” James asserts in an early philosophical paper, “the whole man within us is at work when we form our philosophic opinions” (*WB* 77). Included in James’s conception of the “whole man” are the emotional, passional, practical and volitional sides of our nature which are typically prevented from having a legitimate role in philosophical inquiry. Any philosophy worth the name is, according to James, not merely an intellectual product, but an “expression of a man’s intimate character” (*PU* 14).

James’s best-known expression of this thought is presented in his 1907 *Pragmatism* lectures. There he makes some bold metaphilosophical claims concerning the role that individual temperaments play within philosophical inquiry:

> The history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperament . . . Temperament is no conventionally recognized reason, so [the philosopher] urges impersonal reasons only for his conclusions. Yet his temperament really gives him a stronger bias than any of his more strictly objective premises. It loads the evidence for him one way or the other . . . He *trusts* his temperament. (*P* 11)

According to James, differences in what he here calls “temperament” to a large extent drive disagreements within philosophy. Though we might couch our philosophical discussion in objective and impersonal reasons, what really makes us defend one philosophical account rather than another are these temperamental influences. Consciously or not, we trust our temperament to guide us correctly in our philosophical thought, though we feel unable to admit this in professional philosophical contexts. As such, individual temperament remains a determining but unacknowledged factor in our philosophical inquiries.

In these kinds of statements, we can see James making at least two metaphilosophical points, one descriptive and one normative. The basic point is descriptive: that temperaments do necessarily influence our philosophical thought, a fact which an honest account of inquiry must acknowledge regardless of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of that influence. The more radical point is normative: that our temperaments *legitimately* shape philosophical inquiry; that understanding philosophy as necessarily involving personal temperament is unproblematic and perhaps even beneficial. The general purpose of this paper is to evaluate how convincing this second point might be.

As tempting as James’s temperamental metaphilosophy might seem at first glance, when examined in careful detail it appears to give rise to serious problems. The rest of this section presents these problems, by first presenting a pragmatist account of philosophical inquiry (section 1.1) before showing why allowing temperaments to play a role within philosophical inquiry so understood causes three problems (section 1.2). It is these three problems which the rest of the paper will aim to solve. To do so, the paper will first consider in more detail what James takes a satisfactory philosophical theory to look like (section 2), and what exactly temperaments are, distinct from other “passional” influences upon inquiry (section 3). The paper will then consider how James’s commitment to the role of temperaments connects to a wider pragmatist tradition (section 4), before presenting a legitimate role for temperaments on James's account of philosophy (section 5).

1.1 Pragmatist Inquiry

To adequately assess the claim that temperaments have a legitimate role to play within philosophy, we need a clear account of what properly conducted philosophical inquiry looks like. At its most basic, pragmatism understands philosophical inquiry as analogous to scientific inquiry. The "pragmatic maxim", to which the majority of classical pragmatist thinkers subscribe, asserts that to be meaningful, a philosophical concept must have experienceable practical consequences.[3] Once we pragmatically analyse a concept in light of the practical effects which would be observed if it were true, then we can get a better grasp on that concept and perform tests to see if those effects obtain (see *P* 27–28; *ERE* 14).

Though committed to the idea that philosophical inquiry aims for objective truth, pragmatists generally reject notions of truth which are independent of human practice and experience (see Peirce, CP1.578; James, *MT* 61). In this light, Peirce calls for notions of truth and falsity to be defined exclusively in terms of belief and doubt (CP5.416). Pragmatists understand belief as a habit of action (see Peirce, W 3:247; James, *VRE*, 352), and doubt as the interruption of this habit (see Peirce, CP5.510; James, *VRE*, 352). Importantly, we must distinguish "real" doubt from merely entertaining the possibility that a belief is wrong. A real doubt, understood as an interruption of our belief, is accompanied by a genuine state of discomfort characterised by a confusion about how to act. Properly understood, inquiry is the activity which proceeds from the "irritation of doubt" and aims to replace it with a settled "state of belief" (Peirce, W 3:247; see James, *PP* 914).

When we conduct philosophical inquiry, we test our beliefs to see if they can be verified within our experience. An absolutely true belief would be one which would always work in our experience and would never give rise to legitimate doubt (Peirce, W 3:274; James, *MT* 117). Such a belief is "unassailable by doubt" in Peirce's language (CP5.416), and is a belief which "no further experience will ever alter" in James's (*P* 106). Of course, no individual will live long enough or have experience broad enough to confirm the absolute truth of any belief. Truth is, for the pragmatist, not attainable within the experience of any one individual, but is the product of a community of inquiry.[4]

The idea that inquiry must be motivated by real doubt grounds the anti-scepticism of pragmatism. There are some beliefs which we are simply not currently able to doubt. This anti-scepticism does not commit the pragmatist to dogmatism, however. In fact, pragmatists are committed to global fallibilism: every belief is in principle susceptible of being doubted, but only if we encounter an experience which gives us cause for legitimate doubt (see Peirce, CP5.416). Connectedly, pragmatism is also committed to anti-foundationalism. It is impossible to attain a neutral stance in which we somehow "doubt everything" in order to locate an indubitable foundation for our knowledge. The only place we can begin philosophical inquiry is from a state of mind laden with "an immense mass of cognition already formed" and with the "prejudices" which we already have (Peirce, CP5.416; see W 2:212). The combination of anti-scepticism, anti-foundationalism, and fallibilism produces a particular picture of philosophical inquiry best summed up by Peirce's metaphor of walking on a bog. The best we can say of at any point of philosophical inquiry is "this ground seems to hold for the present" (CP5.589).

This is a very brief account of pragmatist inquiry, but it is sufficient for the purposes of this paper. The key question is: what legitimate role can individual temperaments play in philosophical inquiry understood in this way?[5]

1.2 The Three Problems

In this section, I will introduce what I consider to be the three largest problems which James's temperamental metaphilosophy faces. These problems emerge from an apparent incompatibility between two of James's commitments: that subjective temperaments determine the philosophical theories we find satisfying, and that philosophy should be understood as an inquiry which can reach objective conclusions. As a consequence, James can avoid these problems by simply dropping one or the other commitment, and some prominent interpretations of James do just this.[6] The aim of this paper is to defend an interpretation in which both commitments are maintained, and the success of this attempt must be measured by how well these three concerns are answered.

The first problem is that by including temperamental differences into our account of philosophical inquiry, we will prevent inquiry from proceeding. This would commit what Peirce called the "unpardonable offence" of blocking the road of inquiry (CP1.135). If our philosophical disagreements are grounded in conceptual, logical, or empirical disagreements, then we can plausibly expect that further inquiry will rationally resolve them. If, however, philosophical disagreements are grounded in subjective temperamental differences, then it would seem that no amount of discussion or inquiry could rationally resolve these disagreements. In short, philosophical disagreements are reduced to psychological differences. This point is put forcibly in a recent paper by Scott Aikin and Robert Talisse. Aikin and Talisse interpret James's strategy in *Pragmatism* as attempting to settle philosophical disagreements by revealing them to be based on temperamental differences. As psychological temperaments merely express subjective attitudes rather than "judgements about the world," then the opinions of philosophers are insulated from criticism, and so disagreements are—in a sense—resolved. However, the resolution is illusionary. By re-describing first-order philosophical disagreements in terms of temperamental differences, James has in fact abandoned "the very idea of a philosophical disagreement."[7] We can call this the *blocked inquiry* problem.

The second problem concerns the outcome of philosophical inquiry. If we allow temperamental differences to play a role in determining which philosophical theories are found to be satisfying, then we seem to be allowing entirely arbitrary elements to affect the outcome of inquiry. This means that any answer reached will be responsive to subjective preferences rather than just to experience of an independent reality. Indeed, it is exactly these kinds of arbitrary influences which an objective community of inquiry is meant to mitigate on a pragmatist model of inquiry (see Peirce, CP1.178). According to Cheryl Misak's recent interpretation, James maintains the broadly evidentialist model of pragmatist inquiry but extends the notion of evidence so that subjective satisfactions count as evidence in favour of the truth of a philosophical proposition.[8] But of course, it should make no difference to the truth or falsity of some proposition whether or not I am temperamentally inclined to find it satisfying. As such, by letting subjective satisfactions count as evidence for the truth of a philosophical proposition, we are abandoning the notion of objective inquiry. We can call this the *arbitrary inquiry* problem.

The third problem results from taking seriously the suggestion that the subjective feelings of satisfaction which temperaments give rise to might indicate the truth or falsity of some philosophical proposition. According to Gerald E. Myers, allowing subjective states such as temperaments to play an epistemic role in philosophical inquiry is predicated on an "outrageous" and implausible metaphysical claim: "that our subjective natures, feelings, emotions and propensities exist as they do because something in reality harmonizes with them."[9] Myer's worry is that the only way that our subjective natures might have epistemic import is if we assume an implausible pre-established harmony between those subjective natures and reality itself. We can call this the *pre-established harmony* problem.

These are not insignificant problems, and any account of philosophical inquiry which wants to provide a role for individual temperaments will have to answer them satisfactorily. To present a worked-out view of the role which temperaments might play in philosophy, we need to have a clearer sense of what philosophy, as a particular discipline or activity, is (section 2), and a more precise account of what temperaments are (section 3). In the next two sections I shall aim to provide a more detailed account of these terms, before turning to examine what role temperaments might legitimately play in philosophical inquiry (section 5).

2 The Nature of Philosophy

According to the first chapter of James's unfinished textbook, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, any "sweeping view of the world" which aims to provide a general explanation of the "universe at large" counts as a philosophical theory. The methodology of philosophical inquiry is similar to the natural sciences—involving as it does hypothesis generation, observation, discrimination, tracing causal links, generalisation, and classification—but philosophy differs in that the subject matter is less amenable to mathematical and mechanical explanations (*SPP* 14–18). Understood in this way, philosophy is an inquiry into "the cause, the substance, the meaning, and the outcome of all things" (*SPP* 22). In light of this account of philosophy, we can distinguish thinner and thicker notions. In a thinner sense, philosophy is an inquiry into particular questions of metaphysical or normative importance. In the thicker sense, 'a philosophy' is more than a general theory of the universe but is a "*Weltanschauung*" in the sense of being an "intellectualized attitude towards life" (*SPP* 10–11). A philosophical theory (in this thick sense) must be *lived*, which is to say it must be responsive to the world as it is actually experienced by human beings and must guide our behaviour in light of our human purposes and needs. It is in light of this thick concept that James asserts the statement at stake in this paper: that the history of philosophy is to a large extent the clash of opposing temperaments.

A satisfactory philosophical theory thus has two requirements: it must provide an accurate account of reality in general, and it must be able to guide our action in relation to this reality in a way that does justice to our wider human needs, interests, and purposes. Borrowing terminology from Elizabeth Anderson, I will adopt a "dual-justification" reading of James, to capture these two requirements of satisfactory philosophical theories.[10] Though James sometimes conflates these two aspects when discussing philosophical inquiry, at other points he keeps them apart. For instance, in *Pragmatism*, James tells us that the function of philosophy as a discipline should be to "find out what *definite difference* it will make . . . if this world-formula or that world-formula be the *true* one" (*P* 50). Here James is making a distinction between a philosophical theory being true, in the sense of providing an accurate account of reality; and the *meaning* of that truth, in the sense of the practical significance the theory would have if it *were* to be true. Speaking of thick philosophical theories, James tells us that it is in "our concrete attitudes of hope and expectation" that the "real meanings" of our general philosophical theories lie (*P* 55). In the remainder of this section, I will present this "dual-justification" account of philosophical inquiry in more detail, before applying it to delimit the legitimate role which temperaments can play within it (section 5). However, there are some exegetical challenges to interpreting James in this way, and I will return to these in a later section (section 5.3).[11]

The first requirement on any satisfactory theory is that it must "agree" with an independent reality. As James puts it most simply, "Truth is essentially a relation between two things, an idea, on the one hand, and a reality outside of the idea, on the other" (*MT* 91). Occasionally in his *Pragmatism* lectures, James seems to run together the ideas of truth and subjective satisfaction, and this led to James's many and prominent critics rejecting pragmatism as problematically subjectivistic. However, in his 1909 book length reply to these critics, *The Meaning of Truth*, James is clear that relation to an independent reality is a necessary requirement of any satisfactory philosophical theory:

> The pragmatist calls satisfactions indispensable for truth-building, but I have everywhere called them insufficient unless reality be also incidentally led to. If the reality assumed were cancelled from the pragmatist's universe of discourse, he would straightway give the name of falsehoods to the beliefs remaining, in spite of all their satisfactoriness. For him, as for his critic, there can be no truth if there is nothing to be true about. (*MT* 106)

Any idea which "worked" in the sense of being subjectively satisfactory, but which did not actually relate to an objective reality would be an "error" (*MT* 26). Indeed, the very idea of error—and the fallibilism which is a necessary constituent of a pragmatist approach to inquiry—requires an appeal to the ideal standard which reality represents (*MT* 142). As such, the notion of an independent reality, with which any true belief must agree, "lies at the base of the pragmatist definition of truth" (*MT* 117).

We cannot encounter reality anywhere other than within our experience. Thus, to say that reality is "independent" is to say that there are objective features of our experience which are not subject to "our arbitrary control" and which strictly constrain the theories which we can adopt (*MT* 45). In fact, James holds that a theory becomes more satisfactory in direct proportion to the extent to which it accords with this notion of independent reality (*MT* 88). James's pragmatism and his radical empiricism agree that *percepts* are the paradigm marks of the real. Percepts are shared between inquirers, are independent of our opinions about them, and act to "end discussion" in the sense of adjudicating between competing theories. Intellectual and logical principles work in a similar way, and are thus a "co-ordinate realm" of reality for James (*MT* 32). Between these two coercive influences, our "mind . . . is tightly wedged." As James puts it, our "ideas must agree with realities . . . be they facts or be they principles, under penalty of endless inconsistency and frustration" (*P* 101). We also have a store of established intellectual and empirical truths which exert a conservative pressure on theory formation. Any novel theory which did violence to our existing web of beliefs would be rejected until it was re-expressed in a way that minimized disruption (*P* 35–37). Combined, these "threefold realities" act as serious constraints on belief adoption and theory selection (*P* 102).

However, being true in the sense of agreeing with an independent reality is not sufficient for a satisfactory theory, as the following example shows:

> The real world as it is given objectively at this moment is the sum total of all its beings and events now . . . While I talk . . . a sea-gull catches a fish at the mouth of the Amazon, a tree falls in the Adirondack wilderness, a man sneezes in Germany, a horse dies in Tartary, and twins are born in France. What does that *mean*? Does the contemporaneity of these events with one another and with a million others as disjointed, form a rational bond between them, and unite them into anything that *means for us a world*? (*WB* 95–96, emphasis mine)

The answer to James's rhetorical question is *no*. No mere collection of true observable facts will by itself constitute a "rational" philosophical theory, in the sense of presenting a *world* which we can meaningfully inhabit (*WB* 99–100). To present a meaningful philosophical theory, we must select from observable events and relations those which fit together to form a useful account for our given purposes. This approach to philosophy is consistent with James's wider instrumentalism. For James—and for most pragmatists who followed him—no theory is an absolute "transcript of reality." Rather, theories function primarily by organising known facts into patterns which are useful for our practical purposes—offering, as James puts it, a "conceptual short-hand" for us to navigate reality (*P* 33).[12]

James provided several accounts throughout his career of what, besides agreement with reality, is required for a satisfactory philosophical theory. In an early paper, "Reflex Action and Theism," he provides three different conditions which a satisfactory—or what James there calls "rational"—theory must meet. A satisfactory theory must: agree with observable facts; meet intellectual and logical requirements; and give our practical and emotional natures something to "react-on or live for." This last condition is the most vital for our purposes.[13] As well as providing an accurate account of reality, "any view of the universe which shall completely satisfy the mind must obey conditions of the mind's own imposing." Any theory which does not meet all of these conditions will inflict us with a "ceaseless uneasiness" until we formulate the data in a "more congenial way" (*WB* 99–100). That is to say, it will inflict us with *real doubt* and force us to continue inquiry.

All theories are responsive to a given set of purposes, and (thick) philosophical theories aim to orient us towards reality in general. So, on the dual-justification model, the satisfactoriness of a philosophical theory will be assessed by at least two criteria: it must adequately account for observable facts and intellectual principles; and it must organise those facts and principles into a meaningful account of the world for our human purposes, meeting the emotional and practical conditions imposed by our natures. As such, temperaments might play one of two roles within philosophical inquiry: they might count as evidence for the truth of a theory, or they might contribute to the meaningfulness of a theory.

It is worth noting that different types of inquiry will give different weight to the two justificatory criteria outlined here. This is one of the main ways in which philosophical inquiry differs from scientific inquiry. Science primarily aims to produce "true phenomenal descriptions" of empirical reality and is properly motivated by "theoretical curiosity" rather than concrete human interest (*MT* 53). For these reasons, natural science does not need to concern itself with whether or not its theories are consistent with the general human interests which drive philosophical theorising. Nonetheless, scientific theories still aim to present theories which are responsive to a narrower set of interests and purposes, and so our subjective natures might still have a role to play in theory selection. For instance, given a choice between two scientific theories which satisfied all available evidence, James suggests that we would be justified in choosing the one which was simpler or more elegant for "subjective" or aesthetic reasons (*P* 104).

A second difference between philosophical and scientific theories is also relevant here. Scientific inquiry, according to James, always aims to "terminate in definite percepts," or direct experiences, which can be observed and verified by other inquirers (*MT* 31). This means that there is less confusion and disagreement within natural science. Philosophical theories, on the other hand, often have no associated percepts which can act to adjudicate discussion, and so discussions end up as "fighting with the air" because "they have no practical issue" (*MT* 31). This is, in fact, one of the primary aims of James's pragmatic method; to present a model of philosophical inquiry which is analogous to scientific inquiry by identifying the sensational and practical consequences which would be experienced were our ideas to be true (*P* 31). As (thick) philosophical theory selection is responsive to a wider range of human needs and purposes, and less in touch with empirical experience, we should expect to see subjective factors play more of a role in philosophical theory selection than in scientific. Nonetheless, philosophical theories have to account for (or at least not conflict with) our established understandings of empirical reality, as well as our intellectual principles and logical rules.

3 The Nature of Temperaments

To properly evaluate James's general claim that temperaments have a legitimate role to play in philosophical inquiry, we need first need to know what temperaments *are*. However, despite his extensive work in psychology, James does not at any point provide a definition of this term, using the term 'temperament' in a broad and colloquial sense. Nor is James consistent in his vocabulary, seemingly using "emotional constitution" (*WB* 75), "mental instincts" (*WB* 78), "sentiments" (*WB* 119) and other synonyms interchangeably with 'temperament'. In this section, I will examine James's various statements about temperament, in order to develop a broad definition for use in the rest of the paper (section 3.1). I will then turn to outlining the role which such temperaments play in James's account of philosophy (section 3.2), and subsequently to assessing the legitimacy of this role (section 5).

3.1 Towards a Definition of Temperaments

The first thing to note about temperaments is that they are persistent *dispositions* of our nature. We do not use the word 'temperament' to denote fleeting characteristics, but stable tendencies to think, act, and feel in certain ways across a range of contexts. Exactly *how* persistent temperamental dispositions are on James's account is unclear. In the *Varieties*, for instance, James introduces the distinction between the "healthy-minded" or optimistic temperament, and that of the "sick soul" (*VRE* 110). Interestingly, James holds that whilst some are born with the healthy-minded temperament, this attitude can also be systematically cultivated through the adoption of certain behaviours (*VRE* 80–81, 85). Similarly, some people with an optimistic temper in youth might develop a more melancholic disposition over their lifetime (*VRE* 127–29). This suggests, then, that a person's temperament might be susceptible to change over time and may even be susceptible to some measure of deliberate alteration.[14]

Secondly, temperaments are dispositions which play an important role in *determining* our emotions and behaviour. To describe someone as melancholic whilst admitting that they never feel or express sadness would be contradictory. James, of course, goes further than this by arguing that temperaments also determine our cognitive states. “Temperaments,” James tells us in *Pragmatism*, “with their cravings and refusals do determine men in their philosophies, and always will” (*P* 24).[15] It is clear that what is doing the determination on James’s account of temperament is primarily *affective*. This is the third aspect of temperament to be emphasized. It is our temperamentally grounded “cravings and refusals” (*P* 24), our “likes and dislikes” (*ERE* 141), and our feelings of “ease, peace and rest” (*WB* 57) which are the factors which contribute to our finding one philosophical theory or another satisfying. This affective nature of temperaments is emphasised by the fact that James sometimes uses the phrase “emotional constitution” as synonymous with “personal temperament” (*WB* 75). Temperaments, then, appear to be relatively stable dispositions towards a certain range of affective responses, describing an established pattern in our emotional or passional lives.

The fourth characteristic of temperaments is their *generality*. It is at least conceivable that we can present taxonomies of temperaments which aim to describe general “types of mental make-up” (*P* 13). We need not agree with any particular taxonomy of temperaments to accept that identifying general types of human nature is in principle plausible. James himself presents no consistent taxonomy of human temperament. Often, he is content to use the traditional language of the humours to describe temperamental differences, speaking casually of melancholic, phlegmatic, and sanguine temperaments (see, for instance, *PP* 543; *TT* 122, 166). At other times, he creates new temperamental distinctions to make particular philosophical points, as he does when distinguishing between “tough” and “tender” minded philosophers (*P* 13), “cynical” and “sympathetic” temperaments (*PU* 15–16), or “aristocratic” and “vulgarian” temperaments (*PP* 993). Consistent with his broader instrumentalism, James is happy to abandon any particular distinctions when they cease to serve his theoretical purposes, admitting that such temperamental classifications are “monstrously over-simplified” abstractions when applied to particular individuals (*P* 11).

Fifthly, these affective dispositions are *deep* features of our personality. Temperamental dispositions ground a range of personality traits and behaviours, and track across multiple contexts. Though James is keen to emphasize the role that temperaments play within philosophy, part of the significance of his claim comes from the fact that their influence is not confined to philosophical theorising. Temperaments make themselves felt across our daily experiences and interactions. Exactly what James takes the boundary between *temperament* and *character* to be is unclear. James holds the following claims: that our temperament informs the philosophy we adopt (*P* 11); the philosophy we adopt is a vital part of our personality (*P* 9); and that our philosophy is an *expression* of our character (*PU* 14). These claims are not necessarily incompatible, but their mutual assertion shows that James was not interested in distinguishing these notions carefully. In the *Varieties*, James refers to “healthy-mindedness” both as a temperament *and* as a “type of character,” seemingly treating these as synonymous (*VRE* 95, 110). Perhaps more helpfully, James suggests that temperament—as a kind of affectively grounded tendency to see things in a certain way—acts like the “water of crystallization in which the individual’s character is set” (*VRE* 110). Later, James suggests that differences between individual characters emerge from “our *differing susceptibilities of emotional excitement*” (*VRE* 212). We can understand this to mean that temperamental dispositions are the unchosen affective constitution of an individual, upon which a more developed character comes to be formed.

This *unchosen* aspect of temperament is our sixth feature. James never clarifies the exact origin of our temperamental dispositions. However, in the *Principles*, James suggests that there are only two possible origins for our “emotional and instinctive tendences”: adaption to direct empirical experience, or the alteration of our brain structure by some indirect means. This latter category includes “molecular accidents before birth,” or the indirect effects of early experience on the “unstable and intricate brain tissue.” According to the James of the *Principles*, all of our aesthetic, moral, and intellectual preferences are of this second “house-born” or innate kind (*PP* 1225). Some innate affective dispositions are shared across the majority of the human race, and these ground our *a priori* judgements in areas such as mathematics, logic, and classification (*PP* 1237ff). Individual variations upon this store of innate mental tendencies will represent particular sensitivities to intellectual, aesthetic, or moral experiences, or might represent a novel emotional disposition (*PP* 1264–66). As individual variations of aesthetic and emotional constitution, temperaments must fall into this latter category. The important thing to note here is that, whilst they *may* be subject to some alteration in light of experience, temperaments do not *result* from direct experience. Elsewhere, James refers to the passional dispositions with which we engage with the world as “gifts” which are “almost always non-logical and beyond our control” (*VRE* 128). For this reason, elsewhere James refers to them as “mental instincts” which ground our “dumb convictions” (*WB* 77).[16]

Temperaments, then, are central to our personality, and to some extent determine our feelings, behaviours, and (according to James) beliefs. One way of thinking about this centrality is to say that temperaments *mediate* our experience of the world. A choleric person will not always be angry, but their quickness to anger will reliably shape their experience of the world, partially determining which features of experience they attend to as relevant over others, and how they assess the salience of this experience. For this reason, James consistently chooses visual metaphors to describe philosophical attitudes and temperaments. “The one thing that has *counted* so far in philosophy,” James tells us, is given individual’s "strong temperamental *vision*" —their tendency to "*see* things" in their own way, and to be "dissatisfied with different ways of *seeing* them" (*P* 13, emphasis mine).

With all of this said, we can offer a tentative definition of temperament. Temperaments are deep and general dispositions of an individual's affective nature, which are in some sense given or unchosen, and which mediate that individual's experience and in part determine their behaviour. This is not a complete definition, but it is a sufficient definition for the purposes of assessing the role which such dispositions might legitimately play in our philosophical inquiries.

3.2 The Role of Temperaments in Philosophical Inquiry

With this definition in hand, we can turn to examining the precise role that temperament plays in James's account of philosophical inquiry. First, a caveat. As we have seen, James himself was not interested in making careful distinctions between different types of affective influence upon inquiry. In what follows, I will draw on both James's explicit discussions of temperament and on his discussion of the role of affective influences more generally. However, I suggest that we understand temperament as a *species* of affective influence, distinguished from the general class in virtue of the features outlined in the previous section, and I will relate back to these features when relevant.

Throughout his career, James appeals to affective features of our mental life to explain why different people find different philosophical theories satisfying. This is clearest when James describes the difference between his own empiricism and Absolute Idealism. If we assume that the empirical and intellectual evidence is equally supported by the two theories, then the additional element which determines the theory we adopt is affective or, as James puts it, "aesthetic" (*ERE* 142). The idealist is possessed with a "sentimental" disposition which prefers the idea of an intimate and completely comprehensible universe, the materialist is possessed with an “active” disposition which prefers the idea of a world in which reality is independent of our thought. James is sure that such deep-seated “likes and dislikes *must* be amoung the ultimate factors” of the absolutist’s philosophy, as they are his own, though his opponent will not admit it (*ERE* 141). “The strife of these two kinds of mental temper,” James asserts, “will always be seen in philosophy” (*WB* 76).[17]

James asserts a similar point when assessing the free-will debate in “Dilemma of Determinism.” There James argues that neither empirical nor intellectual evidence is sufficient to conclusively decide between a deterministic and indeterministic worldview.[18] What fills the “gap” between the available empirical and intellectual evidence on the one hand, and the conviction with which proponents hold their preferred philosophical theory on the other, is what James here calls “different faiths or . . . postulates of rationality.” By this James means subjective (“not objective, not external”) dispositions to find the world more “rational” under one philosophical theory rather than another. At bottom, James tells us, “what makes us monists or pluralists, determinists or indeterminists, is . . . always some sentiment like this” (*WB* 119). It is clear that ‘sentiment’ here refers to a stable disposition of affective response—so a temperament—rather than a fleeting passional state.

As we have seen, when James calls a theory ‘rational’, he means that it satisfies available empirical and intellectual evidence *and* presents us with a meaningful account of the world which is responsive to our human purposes (section 2). However, there is no immediate givenness to the rationality of a theory. In the “Sentiment of Rationality,” James argues that we can only recognize the rationality of our theory through fallible “subjective marks.” One of the clearest of these is that we do not actively experience a theory as *ir*rational. Irrationality is experienced when our thought or action encounters serious impediment, and we are thrown into a state of “puzzle and perplexity” marked by “distress.” The removal of this state—and the return to a “fluency” of thought and action—is marked by “a strong feeling of ease, peace and rest” (*WB* 57). Essentially, this is a reiteration of Peirce’s notion that inquiry is initiated by a feeling of doubt and ends with a return of stable habits of thought and action (section 1.1). However, according to James, different people will feel this sense of “ease, peace and rest” in different contexts. This is why it is “almost certain” that when assessing the satisfactoriness of a philosophical theory, “personal temperament will . . . make itself felt” (*WB* 75).[19]

If we understand philosophy in the thick sense described above (section 2), then James’s general descriptive claim—that “temperaments with their cravings and refusals do determine men in their philosophies” —is almost trivially true (*P* 24). If one of the goals of a satisfactory philosophical theory is to present an account of reality which is responsive to our human needs, goals, and purposes, then our temperaments, which partially determine our individual needs, goals, and purposes, will also partially determine the philosophical theories which we find satisfying. We prefer theories which present an account of reality that fit well with our temperamental inclinations, and we dislike those which would be out of kilter with our temperamental needs. The “instinctive human reactions of satisfaction or dislike” with which we react to philosophical theories result from our temperamental dispositions (*P* 24–25). Temperamental differences also explain the *conviction* with which philosophical theories are held even when empirical and intellectual evidence is inconclusive, and so the persistence of disagreement within philosophy (see *WB* 119; *P* 13). However, the normative question, concerning whether or not allowing such a role to temperaments is consistent with a commitment to objective philosophical inquiry, is still open. I turn now to situating James’s account within a wider pragmatist tradition concerning affective influences on inquiry (section 4) before exploring how James develops this tradition in a more individualistic way (section 5).

4 Collective Dispositions

The cash value of having this more defined notion of temperament is that we can interpret James's position in light of a wider pragmatist tradition. Rather than marking a break from accounts of objective inquiry which other pragmatists are committed to, the inclusion of deep, affective, unchosen, and pre-reflective dispositions is in fact an established feature of such accounts. In this section, I will present three important roles that such dispositions are recognised as playing within objective accounts of pragmatist inquiry, by drawing from the pragmatism of Charles S. Peirce, as well as more recent work from Christopher Hookway.

Firstly, as mentioned in an earlier section (section 1.1), the pragmatist account of what constitutes a legitimate line of philosophical inquiry involves reference to mediating affective states, most notably doubt (Peirce, W 3:247–48; see CP5.510). Inquiry is properly conducted until the feeling of doubt is removed and replaced by a "feeling of believing" indicating the presence of a new habit of action (Peirce, W 3:247). As we have seen, James presents a similar view in his "Sentiment of Rationality" paper, with the addition that these feelings of doubt and satisfaction will be influenced by temperamental differences (§3.2). As Hookway states, affective judgements such as doubt "guide both our decision that some proposition should be made an object of investigation and our subsequent reflection that it has passed sufficient tests and can now be firmly accepted."[20] Affective dispositions will thus make themselves felt at the beginning and end of philosophical inquiry.

Secondly, Peirce holds that our pre-reflective affective dispositions can be a legitimate source of plausible hypotheses. Peirce calls the process of reasoning by which we generate hypotheses "abduction" (CP5.171). In his Harvard lectures on pragmatism, Peirce considers the surprising fact that our capacity to generate fertile hypotheses far outstrips what mere chance would predict. This capacity to generate likely hypotheses is explained in terms of a human "instinct" or pre-rational "insight" into the "general elements of Nature"

(CP5.173). Elsewhere in Peirce this is called “a natural instinct for truth” (CP7.220), which operates pre-reflectively, “below the surface of consciousness” (CP7.45). Peirce’s assertion that we have an instinct for truth might seem to run afoul of the *pre-established harmony* problem, but he offers an evolutionary story to explain why we have developed this affective instinct. Our mind has evolved a preconscious instinct towards truth because our cognitive powers have formed “under the influence” of the very universe that we aim to understand (CP7.39–46, see CP6.10; CP7.508; CP5.604; CP6.477).

This abductive instinct, along with our “natural dispositions to doubt and certainty,” are included in a collective store of epistemic instincts and acritical inferences which Peirce calls *logica utens*.[21] Our *logica utens* represents a pre-theoretical, fallible, and affectively grounded sense of what counts as good or bad reasoning (see CP2.186). These affective instincts for reasoning give rise to certain kinds of acritical judgements, inferences, and beliefs which we do not (and cannot legitimately) doubt, and which form the foundation of many of our epistemic practices. As Hookway puts the point, “The inquiring self is commanded by a stable system of emotional attitudes, by fundamental values which govern instinctive responses which guide his or her reasoning and inquiries.”[22]

Peirce understands instincts as pre-reflective habits, and the affective instincts which govern our reasoning are no exception. It can be difficult, however, to determine which dispositions result from inheritance, and which result from training and experience, and so Peirce calls both “instincts” (CP2.170). The distinction which Peirce typically sets up is between deliberate, self-controlled reasoning, and instinctive or pre-reflective dispositions. Instinctive dispositions can be altered, but typically over the experience of generations rather than through conscious assessment (CP1.648). The judgments which arise from affective dispositions can be overridden by individual reason in particular cases, but only when there is a sufficient weight of countervailing evidence (CP6.522). Through practice an individual will get better at applying these affective dispositions to particular types of situation, but this will result from the "severe training" of experience rather than through the deliberate application of reasoning (CP2.3). According to Hookway, when Peirce makes the claim that our epistemic and logical evaluations are grounded in affective dispositions, he is suggesting that they are not "subject to rational self-control."[23] That over which we cannot exercise control is also "not subject to normative laws," according to Peirce (CP2.204), and so our *logica utens*, as a pre-reflective store of affectively grounded dispositions, are not themselves available to rational evaluation.[24] It is a consequence of pragmatism's anti-foundationalism that we have to trust the evaluative judgements which such affective instincts give rise to, unless we have good reason to doubt them.

The third role that these affective and instinctual dispositions play is to guide our inquiries, giving us a "habitual sensitivity to subtle features of the situation" which critical reflection and explicit rule following cannot provide.[25] Hookway uses the example of an experienced walker navigating dangerous mountain territory to explain this point. As the walker makes her way across the dangerous territory, she makes instinctive and affective judgements about which actions make her feel anxious or confident. The walker is "trusting her habits of judgement," which involves trusting "the testimony of her own affective nature" as a "reliable instrument" for judging the riskiness of the situation.[26] Of course, in this example the walker's affective dispositions will primarily result from personal experience. In the case of the *logica utens*, however, our pre-reflective epistemic instincts are inherited as the result of "an inchoate mass of experience collected over many generations."[27] Hookway's (and Peirce's) aim here is not to dispense with the idea that conscious reflection has a central role in philosophical inquiry. Nor is it to reject the idea that we can, and at times should, embark on explicit and reflective deliberations about our inherited epistemic instincts. The point is merely that philosophical inquiry is “a complex interplay of intellectual reflection and trusting acquiescence in habitual judgments and sentimental responses.”[28]

Thus, there are three legitimate roles which deep-seated, mediating, unchosen and affective dispositions are generally recognised to play within pragmatist inquiry: they ground our sense of what is or is not a legitimate start and end to inquiry; they generate potentially plausible hypotheses; and they provide pre-reflective evaluative judgments and sensitivities which we trust to help us navigate inquiry. However, it is worth noting that the trustworthiness of these affective dispositions is generally the result of two features. Firstly, these affective dispositions represent a *common* store of beliefs, instincts, and inferences, in the sense that all or most people would agree with them. Secondly, these instincts emerge through concrete relations with an independent reality—either through biological evolution or through generations of a community’s experience (CP1.633). As such, we can determine which dispositions are genuinely communal and evolutionarily selected, and which are merely individual prejudice, by examining whether or not such dispositions are in fact relatively universal within or across cultures.[29]

A metaphilosophy which gives an important role to instinctive affective dispositions such as these does not fall foul of the three problems which we started with, precisely due to these qualities. It does not entail the *blocked inquiry* problem, because such instincts are shared across the community of inquiry, and so will not produce irreconcilable clashes which prevent further reasoned discussion. It does not entail the *arbitrary inquiry* problem, because such instincts are formed in response to an external environment. And it does not entail the *pre-established harmony* problem because Peirce has a plausible naturalistic story for how our affective dispositions connect to reality. However, James includes in his account of inquiry temperamental dispositions which are *not* common in this sense. Whereas some affective dispositions will likely be shared across the community of inquirers, others will show variation across the community, as a result of temperamental differences (*WB* 75). For our purposes, this is the major difference between James and Peirce. Though more psychologically plausible, it is this admission which potentially opens James's account to the three problems identified. Therefore, we need to provide additional reasons for why we could trust such *individual* temperamental dispositions to have any legitimate epistemic role within inquiry.

5 Individual Temperaments

In the previous section, we saw that affective dispositions which are shared across a community of inquiry are recognised as a legitimate part of objective pragmatist inquiry. In this section, I will consider the role which temperaments—as individual variations in affective dispositions—might play.

At this point, it will be useful to introduce the distinction between the *context of discovery* and the *context of justification*. James might be able to admit a non-controversial role for temperaments if he limited their influence to the context of discovery, which is to say to generating possible hypotheses for inquiry, rather than playing a role in *justifying* these hypotheses. Though James does not present his account in light of this distinction, there are passages in which he shows himself to be aware of it. For instance, he often suggests that the "personal tone" of each mind can produce novel hypotheses, but that the satisfactoriness of these hypotheses is only determined through their "agreement with outward relations" (*WB* 186). Clearly, then, personal temperaments *do* play an important role within the context of discovery. And so long as this is the *only* role they play, then their inclusion into philosophical inquiry will be relatively innocuous. This would be one easy way out of the three problems which we started with. However, such an account would not be sufficient to explain a key phenomenon which James is interested in explaining: the persistence of strongly held disagreements within philosophical inquiry. Philosophical disagreements are persistent because inquirers hold competing theories with a conviction that suggests temperaments are not isolated to hypothesis generation alone. We hold our pet philosophies to be satisfying in a deeper sense. This suggests that a full explication of James's account of philosophical inquiry will also have to give temperamental dispositions a legitimate role within the context of justification.

The dual-justification view which I presented earlier in this paper suggests a straightforward account of the justificatory role which temperaments might legitimately play. Philosophical theories aim to provide an account which is responsive to empirical and intellectual evidence, *and* which is meaningful to our human needs and purposes. As such, temperaments can play a legitimate justificatory role in assessing the meaningfulness of a philosophical theory, whilst isolating that role from assessing the evidence for or against the truth of the theory. Assessing truth concerns evaluating the intellectual and empirical evidence for and against a theory. Once all the evidence is in, there might be several theories which are equally satisfactory at explaining that evidence, but which differ in pragmatic meaning. Evaluating the options at this stage is where temperamental differences will make themselves felt. If one theory explains all the evidence and also presents a worldview against which the preferences of our temperamental natures rebel, and another explains all the evidence and presents a worldview within which our temperamental natures would be satisfied, then temperament will and should choose in favour of the latter.[30]

The dual-justification model would thus solve two of the three problems with which we started. It would solve the *arbitrary inquiry* problem by rejecting the idea that temperamental judgements and other subjective elements count as evidence for the *truth* of a theory, though these elements might count towards the *satisfactoriness* of a theory. And it would solve the *pre-established harmony* problem by rejecting the idea that our temperamental natures need to have a mysterious and prior connection with reality as it really is. This solution has the additional benefit of connecting with James's wider *oeuvre*. It would in effect make the selection of our philosophical theories in such cases a will to believe choice: when empirical and intellectual evidence is not sufficient to settle a choice between two beliefs, and we cannot avoid adopting one of the options, then our "passional natures," including temperaments, can legitimately make the choice (*WB* 20).

Though I believe that something like the dual-justification model is the best interpretation of James's position on the role of temperaments, it provokes three doubts which must be resolved before reaching a settled conclusion. In the remainder of the section, I shall address these doubts in turn. The first is that this response does not do justice to James's frequent suggestions that temperaments help to guide us during the course of our inquiries (section 5.1). Secondly, it does not solve the *blocked inquiry* problem (section 5.2). Finally, we need to provide an account of what happens when temperamental inclinations conflict with intellectual or empirical evidence (section 5.3).

5.1 Temperaments as Guiding Inquiry

As we have seen above (section 4), we have to trust our affectively grounded dispositions to guide us in philosophical inquiry. A justified philosophical theory is one which is the product of "responsible, well-executed inquiry," and such an inquiry will involve the legitimate influence of our shared affective dispositions.[31] However, James wants to provide a role for *individual* affective dispositions, or temperaments. A philosophical inquirer "*trusts* his temperament" to guide inquiry, rather than just those dispositions shared by other members of the community (*P* 11). This would seem to open James to the *arbitrary inquiry* problem, as these individual and a-rational dispositions are permitted to shape the outcome of inquiry. There are two key senses in which James suggests that temperaments guide inquiry: they provide us with sensitivity to evidence; and they provide inquirers with a sense of conviction. I will consider each in turn to argue that James's use of temperaments does not result in his position falling to either the *arbitrary inquiry* or the *pre-established harmony* problem.

The first sense in which temperaments guide philosophical inquiry is through giving inquirers a sensitivity to certain kinds of evidence. In "Absolutism and Empiricism," for instance, James tells us that "all philosophies are hypotheses, to which all of our faculties, emotional as well as logical, help us." These "emotional faculties" may well be just as "prophetic and anticipatory of the truth" as our other faculties (*ERE* 143). James is not just suggesting that our affective faculties are just as likely to give rise to plausible hypotheses as our logical faculties. Our temperaments also give us a sense of the *salience* of different pieces of evidence. In *Pragmatism* James does not suggest that temperaments *provide* evidence for philosophical theories, but he does suggest that a person's temperament "loads the evidence" one way or another (*P* 11). Temperaments influence the ways in which we assess evidence in light of the aims of philosophical inquiry.

To make this point a little clearer, we can consider James's position on the epistemic importance of passion. According to James, an ideal inquirer is not one who is *disinterested.* The best inquirer, because the most "sensitive observer" is the person who has an "eager interest" in the hypotheses which is being investigated (*WB* 26). Passionate interest in a topic improves our sensitivity to it because it focuses the mind on the object of thought, and prevents our attention from wandering (*PP*, 989–90). In a good inquirer, this passionate interest is balanced by "an equally keen nervousness" that their hypothesis will be shown to be false (*WB* 26). This balance of passionate interest and nervousness makes an inquirer particularly attentive to the evidence which bears both for and against their pet hypothesis. Of course, passions can be short-lived and temporary, and so of little epistemic use unless they can be grounded in stable dispositions. Temperaments represent such stable affective dispositions: they provide us with a reliable affective interest in a particular range of hypotheses, and so make us particularly suited to inquire into those hypotheses.

A second sense in which James suggests that temperaments guide inquiry is through providing a sense of conviction about our temperamentally grounded hypotheses. When we adopt and investigate philosophical hypotheses which accord with our temperamental inclinations, they are accompanied by a sense of relative certainty: "It *can't* be that, we feel; it *must* be this" (*MT* 139). *Vice versa*, when confronted with a philosophical account which deviates from our temperamental inclinations, we feel that it must be "out of key with the world's character" (*P* 11). This sense of conviction can be useful for asserting and investigating novel or risky hypotheses. James frequently emphasizes the epistemic riskiness of asserting philosophical hypotheses in advance of evidence (*WB* 32). Such hypotheses are very vulnerable to being shown to be incorrect in light of subsequent evidence. Nonetheless, without inquirers occasionally asserting and testing such risky ideas inquiry would never progress. Thus, James asserts, a good inquirer requires the intellectual virtue of courage (*WB* 76). Temperaments provide us with enough affective conviction to ground that courage in the face of epistemic risk. Of course, too much confidence can lead to dogmatism and bias, and a good inquirer must also be willing to reject even their pet hypotheses when experience consistently contradicts them (*WB* 185).

The idea that our temperamental dispositions might be "prophetic" or "anticipatory" of the truth seems to entail the *pre-established harmony* problem. But James is quite clear that such "hints" are highly fallible and subject to rejection in light of subsequent evidence. Consider, for instance, the following quote:

> every philosopher, or man of science either, whose initiative counts for anything . . . has taken his stand on a sort of dumb conviction that the truth must lie in one direction rather than another, and a sort of preliminary

> assurance that his notion can be made to work . . . These mental instincts in different men are the spontaneous variations upon which the intellectual struggle for existence is based. The fittest conceptions survive, and with them the names of their champions shining into all futurity. (*WB* 77–78)

Temperaments provide us with a sense that truth lies in a particular direction, and they provide us with a sense that our hypotheses can be made to work. Nonetheless, not all “dumb convictions” turn out to be correct. Some of our intuitions *do* guide us successfully within inquiry, and we can retrospectively call the temperaments which grounded them “prophetic.” Others will prove unhelpful and unsuccessful when put to the test, and will subsequently be rejected by “nature” (*WB* 78). Either way, though, it is the long run of testing our beliefs against experience within a community of inquiry which determines their validity.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing what James *has not* said. Accepting that temperaments might play a role in guiding our philosophical inquiries does not require that we allow that temperamental satisfactions count as evidence for the truth or falsity of the hypotheses we are considering. This means that James does not fall foul of the *arbitrary inquiry* problem. Though some subjective elements are acknowledged as necessary and useful for individual inquirers, the truth or falsity of any hypothesis will ultimately be determined through experiential verification and within a temperamentally diverse community of inquiry. One problem remains, however: if the subjective differences between inquirers prevent conversation and co-operation, then such a community inquiry will be impossible. It is to this problem we now turn.

5.2 The Blocked Inquiry Problem

We cannot avoid having temperamental dispositions. And, in a subject matter as vital as philosophy, it is unlikely that we can completely prevent such temperaments from influencing our theory selection. If we accept that neutrality is impossible, we face a choice between being honest about the influence of our temperamental inclinations and continuing to allow them to operate covertly in the background of our philosophical discussion and inquiries. James suggest that we adopt the former, holding that there is a "certain insincerity" in philosophical discussions which fail to mention temperaments (*P* 11). Refusing to admit their role removes them from criticism and makes their operation unassessed.

But should we worry that the admission that we hold a philosophical theory for temperamental rather than (solely) evidential grounds effectively halt discussion? James, at least, does not think so. More often than not, James introduces a temperamental diagnosis of philosophical disagreement as a precursor to more honest philosophical discussion. Talking about the affective dispositions of his Absolutist opponents, for instance, James says the following: "I feel sure that likes and dislikes must be among the ultimate factors of their philosophy as well as mine. Would they but admit it! How sweetly we then could hold converse together!" (*ERE* 141). Here James is asserting that philosophical conversation would be *improved* rather than halted by his opponent's admission that affective dispositions shape how satisfactory they find their philosophical theory.

James offers us two reasons for why this might be the case. Firstly, admitting that our temperaments influence how convincing we find our pet theories can make us less dogmatic. As we have seen, one of the benefits of temperamental dispositions is that they ground a sense of conviction in our hypotheses (section 5.1). However, such conviction can easily cross over into dogmatism if it is not tempered with an awareness of its subjective source. Because our pet theories satisfy intellectual and empirical requirements, and satisfy the unacknowledged subjective requirements imposed by our temperament, they will from our perspective appear completely satisfying and rational (in James's technical sense). Alternate theories will by the same token appear straightforwardly irrational. James typically criticises the Absolutist for making this mistake: because they refuse to admit that affective influences play a role in the satisfactoriness of a theory, they confuse their temperamentally grounded satisfaction for the objective certainty of logical proof.[32] The gap between the available evidence and our conviction is bridged by temperamentally grounded satisfaction (as well as other passional influences), and recognising this fact will allow us to see that our pet theories are still hypotheses which require verification through further philosophical inquiry. It will also mean that we will be more likely to accept alternate hypotheses—even those which do not cohere with our temperamental dispositions—as potentially viable alternatives. As such, philosophical inquiry is helped rather than hindered by the admission of temperamental dispositions.

The second reason is that James thinks that gaining sensitivity to others' feelings is an epistemic asset. We would be "much the better," James claims, for gaining an understanding of our philosophical opponent's affective states, but this would require an honest expression of the role they play in theoretical satisfactoriness (*ERE* 142). If James is right, and passion allows us to become sensitive to a range of evidence, then gaining access to more diverse array of feelings would only be a benefit to an individual inquirer. We could come to understand those who differ from us more clearly, and become more sympathetic to their ideas, if we could gain an understanding of their affective states. Of course, it is unlikely that we can literally gain the feelings of our philosophical opponents in the full sense of feeling them as our own. This is especially true if we think of the relevant feelings as the result of stable temperamental dispositions which we cannot readily alter, and which are diametrically opposed to those with whom we disagree. But we can certainly come to sympathise more with others' temperaments, and so come to a better understanding of our interlocuters' positions. Knowing not only the intellectual positions of our philosophical interlocutors but also their temperamental natures will help us to interpret their philosophical positions—

which might by themselves seem odd or perverse—in light of this temperamental background.

Much of the plausibility of the above will hinge on what we see the goal of philosophical discussion to be. When faced with a philosopher who disagrees with our own philosophical view, we might think that the goal is to *persuade* or *refute* the other person. If we admit that some of the motivations grounding philosophical theories are temperamental, that goal becomes much less achievable. However, this is not all we do when we embark on philosophical discussion. We might also: examine the internal consistency of different theories; illuminate surprising consequences or problems for theories; discuss how theories might respond coherently to certain problems or observed phenomena; examine the validity of arguments; chart the practical applications of theories; generate new hypotheses; create new concepts; and so on. None of these activities would be hindered by including a range of philosophical temperaments into inquiry. Indeed, most would be improved by the inclusion of a diverse range of temperamental sensitivities.

In places, James admits that when intellectual and empirical evidence is *prima facie* equal, but temperamental dispositions differ, then there will be intractable disagreement at a given moment in inquiry (see *WB* 75, 89). But unless we have a narrow understanding of the goals of philosophical discourse, this fact will not by itself block inquiry in the long run. New evidence or new inconsistencies might come to light through discussion or investigation which confirm or refute existing positions (*VRE* 359). Alternatively—and this is James's expressed aim in *Pragmatism* and in *A Pluralistic Universe*—new theories might emerge which satisfy a wider range of temperamental dispositions as well as available evidence (*P* 32). Either way, James is confident that inquiry will continue, and that in the long run of philosophical inquiry we will plausibly reach consensus. It is worth remembering that, on the pragmatist model of inquiry, no one individual *now* will have access to a perfectly satisfying philosophical theory. A truly satisfying answer to a question of large philosophical scope will only be verified within “the experience of the entire human race” (*WB* 87).

5.3 Temperaments and Evidence

I have argued that on a dual-justification reading of James, a satisfactory theory must be responsive to two things: it must agree with an empirical and intellectual reality independent of our theories; and it must present an account of that reality which is satisfying to our affectively grounded needs, interests, and purposes. This way of presenting things might make it seem that these two justificatory criteria are in competition. However, James saw them as mutually supportive and even practically “indistinguishable” within lived experience. Without our affective natures we would be unable to pick out salient features of our experience, and would be presented with a mere “collection of things . . . without significance, expression, or perspective” (*VRE* 127). On the other hand, any idea which satisfied the needs of our affective natures, but which did not relate us to anything real, would be mere “wayward fancies, Utopias, fictions, or mistakes” (*ERE* 32). Experience lacking either feature would be “pathological” (*VRE* 127), just as a theory which did justice *only* to independent reality or to our affective natures would be unsatisfactory.

Nonetheless, a dual-justification account does suggest the question: what happens when we cannot satisfy both justificatory criteria? James is actually quite consistent on this point. In “Will to Believe,” he argues that we may allow “passional” considerations to determine our beliefs only when intellectual and empirical evidence is inconclusive (*WB* 15). In *Varieties*, James suggests that any general theories which conflict with established scientific evidence must be rejected, no matter how personally satisfying they may be (*VRE* 359). In *Pragmatism*, he tells his audience that no theory which fails to adequately account for observable facts or logical principles will ever be satisfactory (*P* 102). And in *The*

Meaning of Truth, James frequently asserts that the satisfactoriness of a belief necessitates that it takes account of independent reality (*MT* 106, 112). Of course, all empirical and intellectual evidence requires interpretation, and we will interpret and weigh evidence in light of our temperamental biases and inclinations (*WB* 23). Nonetheless, when clear empirical or intellectual evidence contradicts our temperamentally preferred theories, it is our temperamentally grounded satisfaction which must yield.

This means that James is at least in principle open to the possibility that satisfying both justificatory criteria is not possible. As such, the dual-justification model allows five possible end results of any particular inquiry:

(1) The ideal end point is when both justificatory requirements are adequately satisfied, and we have a fully satisfactory philosophical theory.

(2) It is at least in principle possible that we could reach a sceptical position in which no theory would satisfy either requirement.

(3) We might reach a theory which satisfied the intellectual and empirical criteria, but which fails to satisfy any of our temperamental natures. This would be a nihilistic position: we would have an empirically accurate theory, but that theory would be meaningless for all human purposes.[33]

(4) We might reach a theory which explained all of the intellectual and empirical evidence, whilst satisfying the practical requirements of only a limited range of temperaments. A "partial sect" of people would be satisfied, whilst the rest were doomed to "ceaseless uneasiness" (*WB* 100).

(5) Finally, it is possible that more than one theory satisfies the intellectual and empirical criteria, whilst each satisfying a different temperamental type. In such a world, we would be forced to accept to permanent disagreement.

So, we can see that the dual-justification account does leave open the possibility that philosophical differences *are* permanent as a result of psychological differences (as the *blocked inquiry* problem contends), but that this possibility only occurs if both theories adequately account for all the available intellectual and empirical evidence, and there is no further available theory which would satisfy both sets of temperament. Ultimately, we may well exist in a world which is not constituted so as to satisfy our individual or our collective temperamental demands. So much the worse for us if so. However, before all the options are exhausted, inquiry should aim for the first—ideal—end point, in which both justificatory criteria are satisfied.

As I mentioned in a previous section (section 2), reading James as holding a dual-justification account is not without its interpretative challenges. For one, James often suggests that 'true belief' and 'satisfactory belief' are co-extensive terms. Though what is "temporarily satisfactory is often false," in the long run of inquiry, "the true and the satisfactory do mean the same thing" (*MT* 54, see *MT* 89). Here James—similarly to other pragmatists—is using the word 'true' to denote a theory which would be shown to satisfactory in the long run of inquiry. An absolutely true belief, for the pragmatist, is nothing but a belief which would never face a genuine doubt when tested in experience (section 1.1). This conflation of 'true' and 'satisfactory' creates a possible problem for my reading. If truth and satisfactoriness are the same, then by contributing to the satisfactoriness of a theory, temperaments would also contribute to the truth of that theory. Indeed, if by 'evidence' we mean *reasons indicating the truth of p*, and by 'truth' the pragmatist means *would be found satisfactory in the long run of inquiry*, then temperamental satisfactions will count as evidence for the truth of a philosophical theory. Once again, it seems that James's view is susceptible to the *arbitrary inquiry* problem. However, we should not be confused. This is not the same as saying that temperamental satisfactions count as evidence in the sense of indicating that our theories agree with reality, or that they count as reasons for thinking that *p is the case*. And, as we have seen, empirical and intellectual evidence trumps temperamental satisfactions when the two conflict.

This is one of the strengths of the dual-justification account: it helps us keep the empirical and intellectual aspects of theory justification—which can legitimately count as evidence that our theories agree with reality—separate from the affective aspects—which can legitimately contribute to the satisfactoriness of a theory. Once temperaments are properly isolated from evidence in this way, we can see that temperaments are *not* arbitrary influences on philosophical inquiry, even though they *do* affect what counts as a satisfactory end to that inquiry. As our temperamental needs count amongst the human purposes which thick philosophical theories are responsive to, then they are not arbitrary in the sense of being irrelevant to the goals of philosophical inquiry. Neither are temperaments arbitrary in the sense of being merely individual feelings. Temperaments represent general *types* of human nature (section 3.1). As such, any philosophical theory which failed to satisfy a particular *temperament* would always remain unsatisfactory to a wide swathe of the community of inquiry, rather than merely to a particular individual.

The dual-justification reading of James is not uncontentious, and other plausible accounts of his metaphilosophy are available. Throughout the paper I have drawn upon what I take to be sufficient textual evidence to support this reading. However, my primary aim in this paper is to provide an objective account of pragmatist inquiry which provides a legitimate role to temperaments. Even if James himself would not endorse the dual-justification reading, I submit that this is the best way to preserve the spirit of his position whilst avoiding the three problems identified at the beginning of the paper. Those who are unsympathetic to the dual-justification reading will find that the solutions I have offered to the *pre-established harmony* problem and the *blocked inquiry* problem are available to any reading of James's metaphilosophy which does sufficient justice to the epistemic role which James gives to independent reality. The real benefit of the dual-justification theory can be seen when solving the *arbitrary inquiry* problem, as it allows us to clearly separate evidential influences on theory selection from affective influences. Though every pragmatist will admit that in any particular inquiry the evaluations of our affective nature are difficult to disentangle from our assessment of the evidence, the benefit of this way of stating the matter is that we can more clearly identify the legitimate role of temperaments, and so notice when they have overstepped their epistemic bounds.

6 Conclusion

The starting concern of this paper was that James's assertion that temperaments have a legitimate role to play within philosophical inquiry was inconsistent with the objectivity of that inquiry. We are now in a position to offer an account of the role which individual temperaments might legitimately play within philosophical inquiry. For a philosophical theory to be satisfying, on James's account, it must both account for the available empirical and intellectual evidence; and it must provide an account which is conducive to our broader human interests, aims, and purposes. Whereas intellectual and empirical evidence determines the first criterion, temperamental dispositions will have a role to play in determining the second (section 2). Moreover, temperamental dispositions can help guide us in philosophical inquiry, helping us generate novel hypotheses, attend to salient evidence, and present our positions with the necessary degree of conviction (section 5.1). Pragmatist inquiry is committed to affective dispositions playing a role in inquiry, and James deviates from this tradition only by allowing for individual differences in temperaments (section 4). None of these roles allow temperaments to determine the truth or falsity of a philosophical theory, and James is clear that when temperamental inclinations conflict with empirical or intellectual evidence, then it is the testimony of our temperament which must be rejected (section 5.3). So, James's account of inquiry need not fall victim to the *arbitrary inquiry* problem. In addition, the temperamental dispositions by which the satisfactoriness of any theory is to be ultimately assessed are not those of individual inquirers, but the general temperaments shared across human experience in the long run of inquiry. This minimizes the arbitrariness of any influence.

The anti-foundationalism of pragmatist inquiry accepts that no temperament-neutral stance can be adopted (section 1.1). Nonetheless, allowing that temperaments play a role in our philosophical inquiries need not result in the stultification of philosophical discussion. Only in rare cases in which intellectual and empirical evidence is entirely equal between two options will disagreement hinge solely on temperamental differences. Even in those cases, helpful philosophical discussion between holders of different theories can continue (section 5.2). Openly admitting that temperaments influence our philosophical theories enables us to take responsibility for those temperamental inclinations, and see them as fallible, rather than removing them from assessment. Nor does admitting the role of temperament remove philosophical disagreement. We still aim for consensus by attempting to verify our theories in our own experience and the experience of others (section 5.3). As such, James's account of inquiry does not fall foul of the *blocked inquiry* problem. Finally, because James is committed to a broadly Darwinian approach to inquiry in which our temperaments have either resulted from successful past experience (section 4) or are tested within experience (section 5.1), there is no need to assume an implausible *pre-established harmony* account. In summary, close textual analysis shows that James's temperamental metaphilosophy has the resources to answer the three key problems which beset it, and as such we can conclude that such a position is far more plausible than it at first seemed.[34]

Bibliography

Works of William James are abbreviated as follows:

ECR	*Essays, Comments, and Reviews.* In WWJ 17.
ERE	*Essays in Radical Empiricism.* In WWJ 3.
ML	*Manuscript Lectures.* In WWJ 19.
MT	*The Meaning of Truth.* In WWJ 2.
P	*Pragmatism.* In WWJ 1.
PP	*The Principles of Psychology*. In WWJ 8-10.
PU	*Pluralistic Universe*. In WWJ 4.
SPP	*Some Problems of Philosophy*. In WWJ 7.
TT	*Talks to Teachers on Psychology*. In WWJ 9.
VRE	*Varieties of Religious Experience.* In WWJ 15.
WB	*The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. In WWJ 6.

Other Referenced Texts

Aikin, Scott F., and Robert B. Talisse. *Pragmatism, Pluralism and the Nature of Philosophy*. New York and London: Routledge, 2018.

Anderson, Elizabeth S. “Knowledge, Human Interests, and Objectivity in Feminist Epistemology.” *Philosophical Topics* 23 (1995): 27–58.

Atkins, Richard. *Peirce and the Conduct of Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Gale, Richard. *The Divided Self of William James*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Goodman, Russell B. *Wittgenstein and William James*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Hookway, Christopher. *Truth, Rationality and Pragmatism: Themes from Peirce*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

James, William. *The Works of William James*. 19 vols. Edited by Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers and Ignas K. Skrupskelis. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975–1988. [WWJ]

Misak, Cheryl. *The American Pragmatists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Myers, Gerald E. *William James: His Life and Thought*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986.

Peirce, Charles S. *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. 8 vols. Edited by Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss and Arthur W. Burks. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931–1960. [CP]

———. *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*. 8 vols. Edited by Max H. Fisch, Edward C. Moore, Christian J. W. Klosel, Nathan Houser *et al.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982–2009. [W]

Phillips, D. C. "Was William James Telling the Truth After All?" *The Monist* 67 (1984): 419–34.

Pietarinen, Ahti-Veikko. "Cultivating Habits of Reason: Peirce and the Logica Utens versus Logica Docens Distinction." *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 22 (2005): 357–72.

Rorty, Richard. *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Thayer, Horace Standish. "Introduction." In *The Meaning of Truth*, edited by Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis, xi–xlvi. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975.

———. "On William James on Truth." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 13 (1977): 3–19.

Williams, Neil W. "Kidnapping an Ugly Child: Is William James a Pragmaticist ?" *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 26 (2018): 154–75.

---

[1] Quoted in Goodman, *Wittgenstein and William James*, 37.

[2] All abbreviations of James's works refer to the *Works* edition of his writings. They will follow this pattern: Abbreviation, page number.

[3] See for instance Peirce, W 3:266, and James, *P* 30.

Where possible, references to Peirce will refer to the *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition* [W]. Otherwise, references will be to *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* [CP]. Citations from W are by volume and page number. Citations from CP are by volume and paragraph number (separated by a period rather than a colon).

[4] Peirce, W 2:239; see Misak, *American Pragmatists*, 60.

[5] In this section, I have presented James and Peirce as in broad agreement regarding the core tenets of pragmatism, and as united in advocating an objective account of philosophical inquiry. This is not an uncontentious reading of James, and I have argued for it elsewhere. See Williams, "Kidnapping an Ugly Child."

[6] Richard Rorty is an influential example of such an interpreter. For Rorty, James abandons notions of objective truth as the ideal limit of inquiry in favour of the notion of solidary or community-wide acceptance. Philosophy, on this account, is typically interested in dissolving rather than solving philosophical debates (see Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, 22–23, 128).

[7] Aikin and Talisse, *Pragmatism, Pluralism, and the Nature of Philosophy,* 139–41.

[8] Misak, *The American Pragmatists*, 63–65.

[9] Myers, *William James,* 461.

---

[10] Anderson, “Knowledge, Human Interest, and Objectivity.” In setting out her “dual justification” account, Anderson distinguishes between the *normative* and *evidential* tracks of theoretical justification. The normative track of theoretical justification defines what counts as meaningful or significant in relation to a given context or set of interests. The evidential track determines whether existing facts meet the criteria set by the normative track (“Knowledge, Human Interest, and Objectivity,” 53–61). This is close to the distinction I am attributing to James, save that James includes more phenomena than Anderson into the normative dimension of inquiry. When talking of normative justification, Anderson primarily speaks of explicit moral and political value judgments, whereas for James the non-evidential aspect of inquiry includes aesthetic and temperamental factors which are often affective and pre-conscious.

[11] I am not the first to suggest a dual-justification reading of James. H. S. Thayer has presented a similar account in several places, distinguishing “cognitive truth” from “pragmatic truth” (e.g. Thayer, “Introduction”; “On William James on Truth”). By ‘cognitive truth’, Thayer means a statement’s bare agreement with reality, such that the statement or belief “agrees” or “corresponds” with the reality it “describes” or is “about” (Thayer, “Introduction,” xxviii). Understood in this way, cognitive truth is a necessary but not sufficient condition for pragmatic truth (“Introduction,” xxix). ‘Pragmatic truth’ describes a belief which is cognitively true, *and* which concretely *works* in the sense of satisfying some actual need or purpose (“Introduction,” xxxviii). Thayer is contrasting—along with James in places—truth as an *abstract* relation between an idea and its object, and truth as a concrete working relation between an idea and its object in which verification is experienced by an actual inquirer or community of inquirers (see, e.g. Thayer, “On William James on Truth,” 56; and James *MT* 110–11). Thayer’s distinction is slightly different from the one I am drawing in this paper. I am drawing a distinction between the justificatory requirements

---

imposed by reality, on the one hand, and those imposed by our subjective needs, natures, and purposes, on the other. In this sense, my position is slightly closer to that of Richard Gale's, who explicitly holds a dual-justification account. According to Gale, James holds that there are "two different ways to justify believing a proposition: the *epistemic way*, based on empirical evidence and proof; and the *pragmatic* way based on the desirable consequences that accrue to the believer of the proposition. The former is directed towards establishing the truth of the proposition, the latter, to establishing the desirability of believing that the proposition is true" (Gale, *Divided Self*, 94–95). However, Gale subsequently denies that James holds this dual-justification view, arguing that his *sole* criterion for justifying belief is desire-satisfaction, rather than any epistemic considerations (Gale, *Divided Self*, 127–28). On my reading, James maintains a dual-justification account, in which both "epistemic" and "pragmatic" features are required for fully satisfactory beliefs.

[12] It is important for the purposes of this paper to emphasise that instrumentalism about philosophical theories (that our theories are responsive to our purposes in a given context) is not necessarily incompatible with realism about philosophical theories (that our theories are responsive to a reality independent of our purposes). See Phillips, "Was William James Telling the Truth," for an articulation of how James can hold both instrumentalism and realism.

[13] James expresses a multi-faceted notion of rationality throughout his career, though he never articulates precisely the same conditions twice. In his final articulation, James proposes four criteria which a theory must meet to be counted rational: intellectual, aesthetic, moral and practical (*PU* 54–55).

[14] Even if our temperamental dispositions themselves *are* inflexible, the contextual expressions of those temperaments are not. Temperamental dispositions are sufficiently general that they can ground a range of responses within a particular context, and so we can

---

assess and alter our particular temperamental responses. Similarly, having a temperament does not prevent us from assessing and rejecting its influence in particular circumstances. So, though I might be temperamentally disposed towards pessimism, for instance, this would not prevent any particular philosophical theory of mine from being criticized as too pessimistic.

[15] Exactly how determined we are by our temperaments is left open. Certainly, James is opposed to most forms of biological or metaphysical determinism, and it is unlikely that he would defend a strongly determinist interpretation of this statement (see, *WB* 114–40).

[16] On the whole, James is suspicious of attempts to ground temperament in biology alone. He rejects, for instance, the study of phrenology and its attempt to ground individual temperament differences in skull shape, as unscientific (e.g. *ERC* 308–9; *ML* 42). However, James is not himself above speculating on the temperamental dispositions which distinguish certain "races"—for instance, the "mercurial" temperament which he suggests is common to the "Latin and Celtic races" (*PP* 1144).

[17] Indeed, similar descriptions of these "mental tempers" are found in James's distinction in *Pragmatism* between the "tough-minded" and the "tender-minded" temperaments, who tend to prefer empiricist and idealistic theories respectively (*P* 13).

[18] James states his case a little too strongly in his "Dilemma of Determinism" paper. There he says that "facts practically have *hardly anything to do with* making us either determinists or indeterminists" (*WB* 119).

[19] This is a position which James holds until the end of his life. When discussing a similar point in *A Pluralistic Universe*, for instance, James argues that though each philosopher's aim is to provide a rational account of the universe, "Different men find their minds more at home in very different fragments of the world," and so express and defend very different theories (*PU* 10).

[20] Hookway, *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism*, 261.

---

[21] Hookway, *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism*, 248.

[22] Hookway, *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism*, 241. Hookway interprets the terms "instinct," "sentiment" and "common sense" as relatively synonymous for Peirce, as contrasted with "deliberate self-controlled reasoning," and holds that the *logica utens* is the store of "habits of inference" or "habits of sentimentally finding inferences 'fine'" (*Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism*, 224—28). See Pietarinen "Cultivating Habits of Reason" for a detailed examination of Peirce's *logica utens*.

[23] Hookway, *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism*, 240.

[24] See Pietarinen, "Cultivating Habits of Reason," 359.

[25] Hookway, *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism*, 261.

[26] Hookway, *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism*, 259–60.

[27] Hookway, *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism*, 236; see Peirce, CP1.654.

[28] Hookway, *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism*, 260.

[29] See Atkins, *Peirce and the Conduct of Life*, 75.

[30] For example, in *The Meaning of Truth* James argues that "of two competing views of the universe which in all other respects are equal" the view which satisfies a vital human need "will be favored by sane men for the simple reason that it makes the world seem more rational" (*MT* 9; see *WB* 66).

[31] Hookway, *Truth Rationality, and Pragmatism*, 246.

[32] See, for instance, his criticism of McTaggart on these grounds (*MT* 141).

[33] James presents determinism as such an account. He argues in "The Dilemma of Determinism" that belief in determinism leads to pessimism and fatalism. Though it fits well with empirical evidence, determinism is antithetical to the moral and practical requirements imposed by our subjective natures. In response, James presents an account of free-will which attempts to meet both the empirical and the subjective requirements.

---

[34] I am indebted to Amber Donovan, Richard Healey, Katharine Jenkins, Tom O’Shea, Joe Saunders, Robert Simpson, Robert Stern, and two anonymous referees for the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* for their helpful discussions and feedback on earlier versions of this paper. I would also like to thank the audiences of the “Temperament in Philosophy” conference, held at Roehampton University, the University of Helsinki’s “Third European Pragmatism” conference, and the University of Nottingham’s departmental seminar.