Some thinkers are wary of metaphors, analogies; they class them with that semi-contemptible form of discourse the French dismiss with the phrase *c'est de la littérature, ça*. Cogency means technicity, and James's uninhibited reveling in metaphor they would ascribe to his "temperamental repugnance to the processes of exact thought." Yet nothing contributes more to the full-blooded human appeal of his lectures than the zesty metaphors with which James flavors them.

At times his metaphors ensnare him, seduce him down pathways of development he might better have avoided. This may be especially true of the energetic, up-and-doing metaphors for which he had a predilection: in life, we are often very like an Alpine climber, staring at a terrifying crevasse, or like a train traveler suddenly confronted by a robber band. Dare, and you will do, shouts James, not from the sidelines, but from the midst of the fray. Your faith, if it has vital heat enough, will create the facts that will provide its verification. The fondness James had for such analogies may partially account for his defenders' tendency to think up other outcome illustrations to argue, misguidedly, I have tried to show, for the soundness of his views. It inveigled James himself, in less alert moments, to imagine that our ardent will could make it true: the world does make sense, since our free moral activity can make a difference in the outcome of cosmic history. Almost, but never quite, he seems to insinuate that our belief, if strong enough, could even make it true that God does exist.
But those misguided uses should not blind us to appreciating the valid appeal these analogies had for James, or lead us to underestimate their “carry-over” value for his central thesis. The inclination to welcome, even to “want,” a universe that both requires and rewards a life lived in the “strenuous” moral mood implies not only optimism and energy but plain “manliness” as well. The further extensions of those analogies—their commendation of the faith which creates the facts of its own verification—he would have been far wiser to avoid. But the warrior’s courage was, for him, very close to the heart of the matter. The fact is that none of his other metaphors for believing, despite their superiority in other respects, can quite convey this need for the “martial” spirit so congenial to the Jamesian heroic universe.

It may seem paradoxical but the metaphor that initially comes closest is a musical one. In “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” he has brought his audience round to exploring the difference between the “strenuous” and the “easy-going” moral moods, and the need for a “God” to lend ultimate support to the “imperatives” proper to that strenuous mood. “Life, to be sure, is even in . . . a world [without God] a genuinely ethical symphony; but it is played in the compass of a couple of poor octaves, and the infinite scale of values fails to open up”; it “lacks the note of infinitude and mystery.” But once believe that “God is there,” says James, and “the infinite perspective opens out. The scale of the symphony is incalculably prolonged. The more imperative ideals now begin to . . . utter the penetrating, shattering, tragically challenging note of appeal,” awakening the “stern joy” that leaps willingly to sacrificing life’s lesser claims in response to the call of this “infinite and mysterious obligation from on high” (MP 212–13). The concomitant result—for eudaemonism is never totally absent from the picture—is that in this more challenging, even shattering universe, we derive from “the
game of existence its keenest possibilities of zest” (MP 213).

The final metaphor I want to examine is drawn from the dynamics of personal friendship; we have noticed it already, since James employs it not once but twice in “The Will to Believe.” He is comparing the critical attitude of a Clifford to the more open attitude of a readiness to “believe.” The situation he proposes is that of a man “who in a company of gentlemen made no advances, asked a warrant for every concession, and believed no one’s word without proof.” Such a man, he submits, “would cut himself off by such churlishness from all the social rewards that a more trusting spirit would earn” (WB 28). James then makes the application to religious faith: shut yourself up in a Clifford-ish “snarling logicality, and try to make the gods extort [your] recognition willy-nilly, or not get [that recognition] at all,” and you might well cut yourself off from your “only opportunity of making the gods’ acquaintance” (WB 28). For we “feel,” and (James implies) rightly feel, “as if the appeal of religion to us were made to our own active good-will, as if evidence might be forever withheld from us unless we met the hypothesis half-way” (WB 28).

James refers to this as a “trivial illustration” (WB 28) to support his argument for assuming a believing attitude in the religious sphere; but it is obviously, for him, something more than that. Just a few pages earlier (WB 22), he begins leading up to the appropriateness of “religious” belief by appealing to our sense that belief would be reasonable when it comes to deciding (a) moral questions and (b) “questions of personal relations.” Whether “you like me or not,” he observes in this latter connection, so often depends on “whether I meet you half-way, am willing to assume that you must like me, and show you trust and expectation.” If either party “stand aloof, and refuse to budge an inch” until he or she “have objective evidence”
that peremptorily proves affection is running in one or other direction, then the odds are that “liking never comes” (WB 23–24), and the rewards of liking and being liked are forever withheld.³

Allow me, for the moment, to prescind from the dominantly eudaemonistic cast of this illustration, as well as from its “will” (as against “willingness”) to believe intentions; allow me, further, to fuse it with the later illustration in which the requirements of human friendship point to those that might govern our friendship with “the gods.”⁴ What then becomes plain is this: James envisages the dynamics of our friendship one with another as substantially parallel to those of our friendship with God.⁵ In neither case is “objective evidence,” of the Cliffordian sort, evidence that would “extort assent,” available to us. But in neither case is the demand for such “objective evidence” an appropriate demand.

The demand for “proof” that “you like me,” antecedent to my proffering any gesture to indicate my readiness to say “I like you,” will (in the terms of the earlier illustration) almost infallibly ensure that “liking never comes” for either of us. It is in the very nature of the case that one of us, at least, show more “trust and expectation” than Clifford would allow us; indeed, it is far more probable that my decision that “I meet you half-way” will be the matching counterpart to my sympathetically divining your corresponding trust, expectation, and readiness to meet me that same “half-way.” If, though (in the terms of the later illustration), one of us “made no advances, asked a warrant for every concession, and believed no one’s word without proof,” showed no “trusting spirit” toward the other, no sign of “active good-will,” then the inception of a friendship relation is a chimeric hope—and, James implies, rightly so! Indeed, it could be argued, the person who would shut himself up in such “snarling logicality” would deservedly, by that very fact, “cut himself off” from the
very possibility of friendship; to “demand,” to insist, that friendship be “extorted” on these terms would be “churlish” at best, and at worst profoundly immoral.

The two appeals James makes to the dynamics of human friendship are, accordingly, perfectly parallel and easily fused—to this point, at least. We shall see in a moment that their application to the dynamics of religious belief is equally parallel. But there is a subtle difference between them, even on the human level.

The first example (aside from its bearing on the “will” to believe) is set in a dominantly eudaemonist key. The demand for “objective evidence,” in this case, precludes an outcome I may dearly “desire,” an outcome James likens to the “promotions, boons, appointments” the general run of mankind hopes for. The stress is on the fact that my untrusting attitude results in my inevitably losing all the rewards, joys, consolations, of friendship; my attitude, accordingly, is both unproductive and unprofitable.

The second illustration sounds a distinctively deontological note. It rings forth, at first, in a typical Jamesian Victorianism: the demand for objective evidence is simple “churlishness,” unbefitting the “company of gentlemen.” Even, James would have admitted, were it to redound to my profit and advantage, were this conceivable as happening in an interpersonal relationship, it would still be vulgar, low, “ungentlemanly.” The proper attitude among cultivated humans requires “our making willing advances,” exacts the exercise of “our sympathetic nature,” the farthest thing from the determination to “extort” affection from the other “willy-nilly,” as it were. Only the “trusting spirit,” James concludes (in the eudaemonistic key again), may expect to “earn” all the “social rewards” that grace the life of “gentlemen” and elude the grasp of the churl.

Again, in this treatment of the interpersonal relationship I have smuggled in expressions James employs in that
other relationship—of man to God—he hopes to illumine. This was meant to emphasize the fact that both illustrations of the interpersonal are substantially interchangeable, correspond to and complement each other, and parallel point for point the man–God “friendship” relation James is focally discussing.

Now I should like to suggest that there is, between these two types of Jamesian illustration—life’s “ethical symphony” and the appropriate overtures of friendship—a set of kinship features that makes them both more exquisitely shaped than perhaps even James imagined for pointing to the dynamics, and appropriateness, of the “believing” attitude. They are, in significant respects, supremely better fitted to that task than illustrations of the Alpinist or truck-driver sort—and this despite the fact that they are, in their own way, outcome cases.

First, there is in both cases the question of an option; I may decide to make that first sincere, and risky, overture of friendship, or retreat back into my shell. But the same is true in the symphony example: I may on first hearing find Bach or Beethoven too demanding, off-putting, even alienating, and choose to turn the dial to the more accessible comforts of some popular crooner.

The option involved in both cases can, furthermore, be live, forced, and momentous—surely not on the same scale as the God option, but on a certain level of importance, nonetheless. Consider first the friendship example. It can be a live option for me to risk making this friend, no difficulty there. But the situation can be such that this option is also, in all human likelihood, existentially forced; an occasion may have presented itself, with this particular person, which risks being unique, a now-or-never possibility—all the more so since I may sense that a negative response on my part can very well ensure that I may never be able to count on a similar opportunity. And the choice between a friendship and the sterile loneliness of leaving
a certain corner of the heart forever untenanted may be (and in all too many cases is) more momentous than many of us acknowledge.

But the symphony example manifests, in its own way, those same three features. Imagine that some occasion has awakened the realization that I might well develop an interest in the music of Beethoven. Until that moment my musical world has been limited to popular tunes, and I have been quite comfortable in that familiar, relatively undemanding range of enjoyments. An initial exposure to Beethoven has confronted me with musical possibilities that are inviting, but at the same time ominously forbidding. His symphonies attract as richer and broader than the "couple of poor octaves" that nourished me until now; and yet, his intimations of "infinitude and mystery," his "penetrating, shattering, tragically challenging note of appeal" have something unsettling about them. The choice between resting complacently with what I already know and relish and making the strenuous ascent toward the "stern joy" of those stormy musical heights represents a choice between two live alternatives. The option could, in its way, also be existentially forced; I cannot know whether I shall ever in the future be so seriously tempted, find the entry into this difficult world so invitingly paved as now; I cannot be sure, but I can sense it as a strong likelihood that this chance will never come again; the "no" I say now may be a "no" either for my entire lifetime or at least for an important part of it. And I am led uneasily to suspect that something truly significant will be missing from my life if I do say "no." There is a quality of the momentous in my option now.

It is at this point that some defenders of James would inquire whether their ambiguity criterion is satisfied by these two cases. Yes, and no: more importantly no than yes. For while these are, in their own way, outcome cases, they are markedly different from the outcome cases like
that of the Alpinist or the streetcar passenger: they are far more parallel to the weltanschaulich type of question in which, I have contended, James is mainly interested, and to which the most benign interpretation of his essay applies.

The first difference from the usual outcome type of case is this: there are no “facts” of a truly experimental sort that could be appealed to as “verifying” in advance one alternative as preferable. “Hindsight” verification fares slightly better, but even after opting for this friendship, or for an active immersion in Beethoven’s world, what observable facts could I conceivably adduce to “show” another that he or she should choose the same or any similar option? I can plead (in the eudaemonistic key) that “having chosen this option, I have found the quality of my life immensely enhanced”; but then I am asking for “belief” from my opposite number, and for a “believing commitment” to the course I have taken. Nor will a mere “experimental” commitment do the trick. One has to “give” oneself in friendship before friendship can really come to flower; and though it is not so manifest in the symphony example, a similar self-commitment is the very condition for taking Beethoven’s universe seriously enough to reap its “rewards.”

Suppose, though, I couch my appeal in a more deontological register. There are various considerations I could invoke to persuade my interlocutor that the “churlish” self-isolation James finds so humanly unacceptable—so “ungentlemanly”—is something stronger than that: it is a refusal to respond to and honor the personal value embodied in the other, a way of treating the other as just an item of furniture in my depersonalized world, and so it is a subhuman, even anti-human, attitude that is profoundly immoral. But my recalcitrant acquaintance could very well respond that I have begged the question; for his wait-
and-see attitude exactly prevents him from "seeing" such a personal value in the potential friend, and therefore grounds his refusal to expose himself to the only experience that might shake and perhaps eventually reshape that attitude. His form of misanthropy will, indeed, persuade him that the "experience" I claim to have had, both of the (eudaemonist) rewards and the (deontological) value claims of "readiness" toward friendship, along with every human poem and story on the same theme, are merely so many futile records of uncritical credulity and romantic self-delusion. And substantially parallel considerations could apply to my efforts to solicit his making any "willing advances," bringing an "active good-will," to the experience of Beethoven's world.

A further feature of these two examples is this: they are far more appropriate for illustrating the "pre-intervention" of the passional side of our nature for which James, in his most alert thinking, was arguing. For the kind of option being called for is one which the purely "theoretical" man could never be brought to make on coldly evidential grounds. To stay with that example for the moment: the decision to risk a friendship calls for, not some objective survey of facts—"he smiled at me" or "his handshake was warm and firm"—but a sympathetic weighing of facts which amounts to a receptive appreciation of those facts as signs: "that was the sincere smile of a good man" or "one can trust a man who shakes hands like that." To arrive at such interpretations of "facts," readiness and general trustfulness, a dropping of the skeptical guard, a willingness to go "half-way"—all the phrases James applies to our gaining the friendship of "the gods"—must "go before" or, more exactly, interfuse with, our intellectual appreciation of what we have experienced. Even more exactly, perhaps, our "experience" itself will be the resultant not only of what the potential friend has said or
done, but of how the passional side of our nature influences our interpretation of what our friend’s sayings, doings, even silences are to import for us.

It should be noted, in justice to Clifford and Miller, that one can, in such cases, be totally uncritical, credulous to the point where ardor of heart induces softness of head. One can, on the one hand, so “wish,” so yield to the need and desire, to make a friend and enjoy the rewards of friendship that the “will to believe” short-circuits one’s questions about whether this person is the sort of person of whom one should want, can realistically hope, to make a friend. The immoderate “will” to believe can easily deprive us of sound judgment, making us dupes for the other’s cynical manipulations. Or, on the other hand, the “will to believe” can bring on that anxious, spastic kind of “over-trying” that snuffs out the possibility of a serious relationship the moment the other divines its presence. But objections of this sort only serve to bring out another vital difference between these two cases and the cases Ducasse and Davis propose. The energetic, muscular “will” to believe does not even occur to the mind when dealing with friendship or the sympathetic entry into a world of art. When dealing with the “churl” in his misanthropic self-enclosure, James occasionally speaks as though the “will” to believe could “create its own verification” even in such cases. But his more alert language betrays the fact that he is truly dealing with an “openness,” a “readiness,” toward assuming a “believing spirit.” Indeed, one has only to conjure up the scenario of the voluntarist’s “making” a friend or “enjoying” Beethoven by the same sheer effort of will that goes into leaping an Alpine gorge, and the notion is worthy of Molière. All this would appear to argue, once again, that James was largely correct in eventually repudiating the “will” to believe, and might have been better advised to speak consistently of a “willingness” or “readiness” to believe from the very outset. No
“will” to make a friend ever succeeded in “creating the facts” serving as its own verification. But no friendship was ever joined without some willingness to believe.

When it comes to friendship, then, the will to believe differs from the willingness to believe, and the crucial difference is a matter of developed “judgment.” But underlying the judgment is, among other things, a respect, even a reverence, for the other. It refuses to extort, but invites and holds itself in readiness to welcome and respond to, the other’s free self-disclosure. Once that self-disclosure is granted, though, it is seen as laying a claim on reciprocal disclosure, a claim that demands new respect. Only out of such respect can the “rewards” of friendship spring; again, the deontological and the eudaemonistic go hand in hand. But the manner, timing, and pace of growing response is always a matter of judgment, sensitivity.

Those terms, so often applied in aesthetics, hint again at the kinship between this and James’s “symphonic” illustration. Few catch-phrases have been accorded more delusory force than the notorious de gustibus non est disputandum. “I know what I like,” says the tourist, contemptuously turning his back on the Mona Lisa: my “taste” is what it is, and has the same droit de cité as anyone else’s! But varieties of this kind of spontaneous, untutored “taste” are much like the varieties of temperament, native endowment, and inborn passional nature that James invites us precisely to evaluate. That they are various does not eo ipso warrant the conclusion that they are all on the same footing; indeed, it raises the very question whether they can be. Can it really be that they all cling just as closely to the “temperament” of great art? Scarcely; and immediately various avenues present themselves toward the expansion, refinement, cultivation of spontaneous taste. The “education” of artistic taste imposes, in its way, the same task of personal development, the same “attention,” series of “efforts,” “hours of work”—in a word,
much the same resolute asceticism—as James prescribes for that refinement of our inborn endowment which results in the man of moral “character” and concomitant soundness of moral judgment. Plato’s “musical man” is not merely born; a certain native endowment may be necessary to him, but then he must actively consent to “become” the fully musical man for which his native gifts initially fit him. Only then is his developed taste, his ripened “judgment” about matters musical, to be trusted. Only a man comparably musical, furthermore, will be capable of appreciating the soundness of that judgment—and even then only if he consents to allow a measure of receptive sympathy, sensitivity, and willingness to “run before,” or, better, interfuse with, his critical activity. A new-found world of music, like a potential friend, invites us to meet it “half-way.” And—what is too little attended to—not only do both sorts of invitation promise enjoyments as yet unexperienced, they lay certain claims on us, make demands—on our “willing suspension of unbelief,” our readiness to lend a patient, respectful, and receptive ear, to go into it, heart and soul.

And so, James rightly insists, does the “moral universe.” In any of the weltanschaulich issues that absorb his central interest, or, rather, in that connected web of issues that all come down, for him, to the single question of whether or not we live in a moral universe, it is not cold “fact,” or any assemblage of “facts,” that ever closes the debate for one side or the other; it is always a question of how we “experience” the very same facts as others experience, how we weigh them, what importance we accord them. Ducasse was persuaded that the evils of our world made the God-hypothesis, for him, a dead option. For James, he admits, those evils took on a different “weight”; but he then too readily dismisses the difference as a matter of “temperament.”

But there was, I have tried to argue, more than tem-
perament, impulse, or instinct at work, both in James's personal development and in his most alert thinking. One does not expect an adult to attach so much weight to a headache or toothache as a child will, and even children are some more namby-pamby about such matters than others. But how much weight should the adult attach to the cancers, injustices, cruelties, and catastrophes, the whole array of evils Ducasse chooses to denominate "gratuitous"? Individual evaluations will differ. But can James truly be faulted for pointing out that the meaning and importance we attach to the obstacles, resistances, even horrors, of our common experience, will depend in significant measure on our fiber, resilience, courage—in short, our developed capacity for the moral life lived in the strenuous mood? How much "right" we accord the universe to lay such austere claims upon us depends, in crucial measure, on the reverence—what Dewey calls the "natural piety"—we choose to bring to our "experience" of that universe. And the Jamesian decision to believe in our universe as "moral," in our lives with all their admixture of torment and gladness as "worth living," and when all is said, to believe in God as Infinite Claimant, is in the last resort less a matter for "debate" than a question of "judgment."

Only a person experienced in genuine friendship, in its demands as well as its rewards, is equipped to avoid both the uncritical credulity and churlish standoffishness that preclude friendship's ever happening. Only the musical man will bring to hearing a new symphony not only the eagerness to enjoy, but the suitable respect for a work of art and the chastity of demand that goes with developed musical judgment. And if there is any merit to the generous understanding I have tried to elicit from his thought, James's most fundamental contention comes down to saying something quite parallel about weltanschaulich questions. If we do indeed inhabit a moral universe, it is in the very nature of the case that only a person of developed
moral sensitivity, sympathy, and “judgment” will be sufficiently attuned to discern that truth. Only such a person will have the requisite readiness and willingness to “experience” that side of the great human option as more rewarding than its opposite, and, even more than that, the side on which life enlists our loyalties, not despite, but even because of, its sometimes “shattering demands.”

But there is risk in wagering on this side of the great human option; fearful risk. The crevasse may be too broad for leaping, and the robbers destined to inherit the earth. Not one to solve the mystery of evil by blinking it away, James stared it straight in the eye, and guessed at the dread possibilities he saw there. We bet against those possibilities in the coin of our entire selves. “It is only by risking our persons from one hour to another that we live at all,” and the Alpinist must display the “wisdom and courage” to “believe” he can make the leap (LWL 59). If life is really a “fight,” and with all its “sweat and blood and tragedy” it certainly “feels like a real fight” (LWL 61), then Wordsworth’s lines are apposite: we need “the virtue to exist by faith / As soldiers live by courage” (LWL 60).

It is striking to observe how often James links faith with courage, and how regularly that linkage summons up the martial metaphor. Three times in his popular lectures he appeals to the Alpinist’s quandary, and the linkage is evoked each time; the same thing occurs with the scenario of the robber band. Predicaments like these, he never tires of reminding us, put a premium not only on optimism, energy, and decisiveness, but also, and especially, on courage. “[R]ecklessness may be a vice in soldiers,” he admits, but it does not follow that “courage ought never to be preached to them”: the “courage weighted with responsibility—such courage as the Nelsons and Washingtons never failed to show.”

This, he contends, is the kind of courage he has been
preaching in all his commendations of faith; for when all is said, James sees faith as “in fact the same moral quality which we call courage in practical affairs” (SR 90); or, to quote his friend William Salter, “as the essence of courage is to stake one’s life on a possibility, so the essence of faith is to believe that the possibility exists” (LWL 62).

But faith need not always come garbed in martial dress. Hence, the appropriateness of the friendship metaphor: it points up the readiness and willingness that go into the formation of many of our over-beliefs—a readiness and willingness that quite suffice under the calm skies of most of our days. The symphonic metaphor, especially when surging toward its “penetrating, shattering, tragically challenging” climax, transports us from cloudless skies into the swirling dark of life’s stormiest moments.

But the Alpinist faces his terrible decision at the very eye of the storm, and the robber band confronts us with life at its most menacing. Moments like these may be rarer, but when they come they assault us with gales of hostile fact which threaten to rip into tatters every optimistic over-belief that flew so bravely through our fair weather days. Did James have such moments consciously in mind when he wrote of the need for a threatened over-belief to stiffen on occasion into a “strong inclination,” a “parti pris,” a positive “resolve”? Perhaps not consciously; and yet, the case he has made for belief, when stripped of its flaws and taken at the top of its strength, entitles our making that connection, and warrants our speaking of a genuine “will” to believe, after all. For the Jamesian universe, if we accept it, is “earnest infinitely.” Shot through with ambiguities, it plays us down to our bottom card. That bottom card, to win, must show naked manly courage.

Rather than indulge our want and weakness by conceding us the right to believe, the Jamesian universe imperiously summons us to grow up, until strong enough and
self-forgetful, we bravely decide to trust in, and resolutely collaborate with, its often inscrutable ways. Only the most curious definition of terms would warrant our labeling that response “wishful thinking.”

NOTES

1. The phrase is Perry’s, from TC II 680.
2. Perhaps I should apologize for the term, but the Greek word for the sort of “courage” I mean is, after all, ἀνδρεία. It was the typical soldier’s virtue, and James’s fondness for military metaphors is a matter of record. I am afraid that “personliness” will not quite do here.
3. James goes on to speak of the “desire” to know one is liked, of the “promotions, boons, appointments” that come to him who believes he can attain them, and so acts that his belief “creates its own verification.” He is, again, working in the context of an outcome situation, where “will,” as against “right” or “readiness” to believe, may in instances “create its own verification.” I am taking the liberty here of shifting the thrust of his illustration, applying it to the “right” or “readiness” to believe, but with the encouragement (or warrant?) accorded by the analogous interpersonal illustration he uses only slightly further on in this same essay. My purpose at this stage has become more philosophical than scholarly.
4. Again, in hopes of bringing forward the fullest merit of James’s argument (a philosophical question) I am giving it the most benign interpretation that his text will bear.
5. This raises the question, in my mind at least, whether James can so readily dispense with a “personal” God as his earlier characterization of “religion” might seem to imply: cf. WB 25–26.
6. See note 3, above.
7. See notes 3 and 4, above, on my purpose in this.