Self, God and Immortality

Fontinell, Eugene

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If one of the central claims of this essay is valid, then I must acknowledge a debt to everyone with whom I have been related in any way, since who we are as individual persons is inseparable from a multiplicity and diversity of relations, past and present. Of course, not all the relations that enter into the constitution of our selves are equally important. Hence I owe a special debt to a number of friends who, over the years, directly and indirectly, consciously and unconsciously, have in varying degrees contributed to the formation of whatever reflective life I may possess.

My oldest professional debt is to the late Robert Pollock, who introduced me to William James and American philosophy many years ago at Fordham University. Whether teaching medieval, modern, or American philosophy, Pollock possessed a genius for orienting his students to the living features of thinkers within these periods. My own efforts to teach James have benefited from the questioning and criticisms of my students at Queens College, City University of New York. Over many years and in different ways, my colleagues in the Philosophy Department have been responsible, often unknowingly, for my thinking and rethinking many of the issues with which this work is concerned.

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writings (The Writings of William James, New York: Random House, 1967), which appeared almost a decade before the first volumes of the superb Harvard University Press edition of James's works. Second, both through his essays and personal communications over the years, I have been led to ever new appreciation of the range and subtlety of James's thought. Finally, McDermott's criticisms of my views, even when they were in conflict with his own, were always constructive and aimed at helping me give these views their strongest articulation—with never an attempt to turn them toward his own concerns.

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