Pulses of mind lay beating and absorbing beside my own little pulse, and together we were a whole, connecting within this wholeness with the myriad differing wholes that each of these people had formed in their lives, were continuously forming in every breath they took, and through this web, these webs, ran a finer beat, as water ran everywhere in the stone city through channels cut or built in rock by men who were able to grade the lift or the fall of the earth.

—Doris Lessing

_Briefing for a Descent into Hell_

But it is not man alone who can be properly said to “connect,” nor is it human powers alone that are the necessary condition of the functioning of Connectives. It is existence cooperating with man that “connects.”

—John Herman Randall, Jr.

_Nature and Historical Experience_

It is my contention that a plausible belief in personal immortality is intimately bound up with a belief in God. More specifically, I will argue that the relation between the person and God must be such that a belief in personal immortality has experiential grounds—not grounds in the sense of offering a compelling necessity to infer immortality, but in the softer sense of being basically consistent with and open to such belief. In keeping, then, with this experiential methodology, there must be some “justifying” evidence for the extrapolated belief in a divine-human relationship. The principal grounds for such extrapolated belief are found in the view of the self that emerges in James’s later writings.

What I wish to do now is try to construct the essential features of what James himself calls the “full self.” In making this attempt, I will draw principally upon material from _The Varieties of Religious Experience, Essays in Radical Empiricism_, and _A Pluralistic Universe_, without dealing with important differences of concern and context among these works. Nor will I deal with inconsistencies, real or alleged, or with a number of technical ques-
tions (particularly in Radical Empiricism), which a close textual and systematic study would demand. I wish simply to indicate that there is a common thrust to these works, as well as to Some Problems of Philosophy and several essays on psychical research and mysticism. This thrust, as we shall see, is toward articulating both the self and reality in terms of overlapping fields of consciousness. An alternative way of describing this is as the temporalization of reality. The stream or process character of consciousness or experience described in The Principles of Psychology is extended to all reality. Thus, as Ralph Barton Perry notes, “Radical empiricism consists essentially in converting to the uses of metaphysics that ‘stream of consciousness’ which was designated originally for psychology” (TC, II:586). One way of viewing the relation between James’s Principles and his later “metaphysical” works is that in the former, immediate personal experience or feeling is viewed psychologically within a dualistic metaphysics; in the latter, this experience becomes the paradigm for all reality as well as the pathway to reality in its depth and “thickness.” In A Pluralistic Universe, James insists that “Bergson is absolutely right in contending that the whole life of activity and change is inwardly impenetrable to conceptual treatment, and that it opens itself only to sympathetic apprehension at the hands of immediate feeling” (PU, 123n.).

EXPERIENCE OF “SOMETHING MORE”
I have already tried to show that even in those sections of The Principles of Psychology where James’s view of the self is most capable of a behavioristic or materialistic interpretation, there is evidence of a self much fuller and richer. I suggested that reading these early texts from a field perspective keeps James’s doctrine open to the more inclusive self. When we turn to the later James, the case is much more compelling for a field view of the self that more clearly and successfully escapes the egoless, epiphenomenal tendencies earlier evidenced. I noted that even in those bedeviling texts in which James seems to identify the self with the body—where the self is “found to consist mainly of the collections of these peculiar motions in the head or between the head and throat”—even here James quickly adds that not for a moment is he suggesting “that this is all it consists of.” A bit later he explicitly concedes “that over and above these there is an obscurer feeling of something more” (PP, I:288, 292).

In exploring this “more,” I hope to show that the processive-relational or field character of James’s “self” becomes increasingly more explicit and central. This is due in great part, I believe, to the fact that James becomes more conscious of and confident about those metaphysical presuppositions that he derived from personal experience. Having flirted with the notion of an egoless self and an epiphenomenal consciousness, in A Pluralistic Universe he speaks in field language, which is much more congenial to a “substantive” view of the self and consciousness that is open to the possibility of personal immortality.
I have already noted that when selves are viewed as transactional centers of activity—as fields—consciousness is not merely an epiphenomenon, nor is it imported from some transempirical realm of being. Consciousness is itself a field continuous with both conscious and nonconscious fields, the distinction between the conscious and nonconscious fields being determined on the basis of range, complexity, and modes of selectivity and initiation. The task remains of phenomenologically describing the specific characteristics of those fields designated “conscious,” but the distinct advantage of such a field approach is that there is no need to go “outside” experience in describing consciousness in order to avoid a materialistic or behavioristic reductionism. Thus, in the final analysis, the scope and complexity of human consciousness can be determined only experientially. Here, however, a crucial distinction must be made: one repeatedly referred to as the distinction between the descriptive or phenomenological and the extrapolative or speculative. It is the same distinction that is at work, as we shall see, when James distinguishes what is religiously experienced from overbeliefs concerning this experience.

I wish to utilize this descriptive-extrapolative distinction in considering the self as it emerges in James’s later writings. The first task will be to describe as faithfully as possible what can be immediately experienced and then to suggest plausible extrapolations from this experience. It must be stressed at the outset, however, that this is a functional distinction, the borders of which are shifting and can vary from time to time as well as from person to person. For example, following James, I will contend that the reality of God is an extrapolation or overbelief, but a mystic would make a stronger experiential claim. The key point here is that if James’s position is legitimate, the need for extrapolation or overbelief may be due only to an accidental, nonpermanent limitation in the development of human consciousness. The possibility that the mystics’ experiential claim is a delusion cannot, of course, be definitely excluded. Given James’s experiential criteria, then, nothing short of immediate experience of the divine would be adequate or completely satisfying. In the present stage of the human condition, however, the most that can be claimed philosophically is that such an experience is a possibility that not only does not conflict with reality as immediately experienced and metaphysically articulated but also is consistent with such experience—indeed, is possibly an enrichment, a deepening and continuation of our narrower quotidian experiences.

While everyone might agree that what is immediately experienced is beyond dispute, it is quite evident that just what it is that is immediately experienced is a matter of great dispute. This is made obvious by the variety of competing, inconsistent, and even contradictory claims of immediate experience. James and a host of twentieth-century phenomenologists have significantly deepened our awareness of how difficult it is to describe with complete fidelity the characteristics of experience. There would be no such difficulty if immediate experience were clear, distinct, and unambiguous in-
stead of being characterized by obscurities, shades, margins, fringes, pen­umbras, and what James has called "the vague and inarticulate"—which returns us to the question of the "more" that accompanies all experiences. "All that is," James tells us, "is experiences, possible or actual. Immediate experience carries a sense of more. . . . The 'more' develops, harmoniously or inharmoniously; and terminates in fulfillment or check." He goes on to say that "the problem is to describe the universe in these terms" (TC II:381).

In his own effort to describe the universe in such terms, James moves non-systematically from the immediately evident "more" that is present as "margin" or "fringe" to such perceptual fields as the visual and auditory; to the "more" that is involved in epistemological-ontological questions such as objective reference, knowing two things together, knowing other minds; to the "more" involved in metaphysical-religious questions such as the "wider self" and overlapping consciousnesses, including divine and human. James's doctrine of the "full self" must include all of these "mores." It is obvious that there is not an equal consensus regarding these diverse "mores"; that is why James, or anyone attempting to construct a doctrine of the self along Jamesian lines, must first establish the general character of this experiential "more" from experiences where the evidence is most widely compelling before considering experiences of "more" that are less universal and more controversial. James's central claim, and the one crucial for the purposes of this essay, is that the structure of our visual fields, for example, is in some respects the same as the structure of mystical experience.

"Our fields of experience," according to James, "have no more definite boundaries than have our fields of view. Both are fringed forever by a more that continuously develops, and that continuously supersedes them as life proceeds" (ERE, 35). Let us follow James as he describes this marginal "more" that accompanies our field of experience. This will serve as the paradigm to be employed later in his consideration of mystical experience.

My talk is merely a description of my present field of experience. That field is an experience of physical things immediately present, of "more" physical things "always there beyond" the margin, of my personal self "there," and of thoughts and feelings belonging to the self, together with "other" thoughts and feelings connected with what I call "your" personal selves. Of these various items some, as fully realized, are "sufficients"; others, the physical things "beyond" and "your" thoughts, come as insufficientsthey connect themselves with the marginal "more." But . . . that marginal "more" is part of the experience under description. No one can use it mystically and say that self-transcendence or epistemological dualism is already involved in the description—that the "more" is a reference beyond the experience. The "more" is more than the vividly presented or felt; the "beyond" is beyond the centre of the field. (TC, II:371)

James's use of the term "mystically" in this text might be misleading if taken as his own understanding of mystical experience. He is here using it,
as it is often used, to convey the introduction of a nonexperiential realm of being. He is opposed to this notion of “mystical” just as he is opposed to introducing a transcendental Ego or substantial Soul to avoid accounting for the experiences just described in behavioristic or epiphenomenalist terms. The “sense of more” that belongs to all the self’s experiences is an indication of relations with a wider reality than is currently in focus. It is the task of metaphysics and religious philosophy, of course, to suggest just what the scope and character of this wider reality is, and we shall later follow James as he describes it in terms of wider fields of consciousness. The only point to be made at this time is that James’s affirmation of a wider reality or wider consciousness or wider self does not involve inferring or postulating a reality or realm of being that is essentially, completely, and permanently discontinuous with the experiential.

The reality of “something more” in our immediate experience is evidence of that continuity that characterizes the self. We have already noted James’s contention that the felt experience of one’s own continuity is the most intimate grasp of that continuity that is characteristic of reality or the world. Again, this is a variation on James’s processive or temporalistic metaphysics. Perry calls continuity “one of the master keys to the understanding of James’ thought. It is the dominant feature of his last metaphysics” (TC, I:524). This is another instance of a feature that James first delineates psychologically and phenomenologically and later comes to utilize metaphysically. A metaphysical expression of continuity is found in the first and third “field” suppositions, which were presented earlier: “(1) ‘Fields’ that ‘develop’ under the categories of continuity with each other,” and “(3) All the fields commonly supposed are incomplete and point to a complement beyond their own content. The final content . . . is that of a plurality of fields, more or less elective to each other, but still continuous in various ways” (TC, II:365).

A processive or “growing” world, like a processive or growing self, must involve continuity. This continuity, however, is neither the abstract continuum of mathematics nor the permanent, unchanging substantial principle of an earlier metaphysics. Dynamic continuity involves an overlapping of fields and an appropriation or inheritance of past fields by present ones. This is not to suggest that everything is continuous with or immediately related to everything else. There are discontinuities as well as continuities, and there are diverse modes of both. The way in which a self is continuous with its own experiences is not identical with the way in which it is continuous with another’s experiences. The distinctive continuity whereby the self appropriates to itself its previous fields of experience is what in part, at least, constitutes the self’s individuality. But since there is no self-continuity that does not simultaneously involve continuity with other fields (air breathed, objects known, persons encountered), we have a world of radically plural individuals without atomistic or isolating individuation. The crucial aspect of this question for my purposes is whether there is a sense in which the divine and human consciousnesses can be continuous.
CONSCIOUSNESS AS SELF-COMPOUNDING

In order to arrive at some understanding of how James, in his later writings, saw the relation between the divine and human fields of consciousness, we must follow him—however briefly and superficially—as he considers a question with which he had wrestled for many years: the question of whether “states of consciousness, so called, can separate and combine themselves freely, and keep their own identity unchanged while forming parts of simultaneous fields of experience of wider scope” (PU, 83). In The Principles of Psychology, he had apparently answered in the negative when he rejected the “mind-stuff” or “mind-dust” theory: that is, the theory that our higher mental states are composed of smaller states. James insisted there that each psychic state was a unit—novel, unique, and individual—and not a collection of primordial atoms of sensation that remained unchanged in themselves while entering into various combinations. For example, according to the “mind-stuff” theory, the taste of lemonade would be simply the atomistic sensations of water, lemon, and sugar conjoined. According to James, however, the taste of lemonade is new and unique, and does not contain the atomistic sensations of water, lemon, and sugar. In spite of James’s statement in his Presidential Address to the American Psychological Association in 1894 that in the interest of harmony he was giving up his principle that mental states cannot compound (EP, 88), it would be more accurate to say that he came slowly to modify it. 8

In The Principles of Psychology, as previously noted, James was allegedly adhering to a methodological dualism. Hence, though each thought or mental state was unique, two minds could know a common object. In Essays in Radical Empiricism, James claims to surrender the dualism between thoughts and things, contending that reality is composed of pure experiences which in themselves are neither mental nor physical but can become either, depending on the context or relational functions. For example, the pure experience “pen” is in itself neither mental nor physical, belongs to neither your mind nor my mind. But since it is the “same” pen that is known and is written with, and the “same” pen that you and I know, it would appear that “an identical part can help to constitute two fields.” This doctrine, of course, is in conflict with the position of The Principles of Psychology, which denies that mental states can have “parts.” It was B. H. Bode and Dickinson Miller who, according to James, picked up the contradiction, and their objections led James to keep notes—totaling several hundred pages over two and a half years, in which he continually struggled with the problems involved. In a 1905 note, he asks, “How can two fields be units if they contain this common part?” And he immediately adds, “We must overhaul the whole business of connection, confluence and the like, and do it radically” (TC, II:750). James ends these notes during his writing of the Hibbert Lectures, which were delivered several months later and subsequently published as A Pluralistic Universe. It is in this work that James advances his
radical overhaul of the character of confluent consciousness and allied questions.

This “radical overhaul” was actually a somewhat more consistent and explicit articulation of insights and concerns that had been present in some form in James’s earliest reflections. “He was simply reaffirming,” Bruce Kuklick quite correctly notes, “the primacy of the concrete and immediate over the abstract and the derived” and, we might add, the pervasiveness of processes and relations that an acute attention to the concrete brings to awareness. Recall that one of the advantages of employing a field model of reality is that it enables us to be more faithful to the “concrete.” It is interesting to note that in his reflections on the “Miller-Bode Objections,” James wonders whether he might not be guilty of that “sin of abstraction” with which he had so often charged others. In A Pluralistic Universe, he comes to realize that “the difficulty of seeing how states of consciousness can compound themselves . . . is the general conceptualist difficulty of any one thing being the same with many things, either at once or in succession, for the abstract concepts of oneness and manyness must needs exclude each other” (PU, 127). This “conceptualist difficulty” is bound up with the traditional “logic of identity,” which James finally feels compelled to give up “fairly, squarely, and irrevocably” (PU, 96). The central charge against this logic is that it denies the continuous universe, which was a concern of James throughout his reflective life: “That secret of a continuous life which the universe knows by heart and acts on every instant cannot be a contradiction incarnate. If logic says it is one, so much the worse for logic” (PU, 94).

EXPERIENCE OVERFLOWS CONCEPTS

A running theme in James’s thought, which reaches its crescendo in A Pluralistic Universe, is that various modes of rationalism or intellectualism have repeatedly endeavored to substitute clear, distinct, and changeless concepts for the rather murky, messy, and ever changing experiences of ongoing life. James, noting that “framing abstract concepts is one of the sublimest of our human prerogatives,” goes on to find it understandable that earlier thinkers have forgotten that “concepts are only man-made extracts from the temporal flux”; as a result, however, they ended up treating concepts “as a superior type of being, bright, changeless, true, divine, and utterly opposed in nature to the turbid, restless lower world” (PU, 98–99). When we conceptualize, we cut out a section of the flux of experience and fix it in a static form, thereby excluding everything else in experience but that which we have fixed. In contrast, experiences in the real sensible flux of life “compenetrate each other so that it is not easy to know just what is excluded and what is not” (PU, 113). James maintains that intellectualism, after “destroying the immediately given coherence of the phenomenal world,” finds itself unable to realize coherence through its conceptual substitutes and hence must “resort to the absolute for a coherence of a higher type.” May there
not, however, be present in the flux of sensible experience an overlooked rationality? Instead, then, of disintegrating concrete experience through intellectualist criticism and substituting “the pseudo-rationality of the supposed absolute point of view,” the real remedy is to focus more attentively and intelligently upon the immediate flow of experience (PU, 38). Our experience is too rich, too complex, too textured and many-sided to be adequately represented in abstract categories. “Reality, life, experience, concreteness, immediacy, use what word you will, exceeds our logic, overflows and surrounds it” (PU, 96).

Attention must be given here to an ambiguity in this “immediate experience” to which James so frequently refers and from which he wishes to draw so much. Some crucial implications of this ambiguity will appear when we consider James’s claim that we are “part and parcel of a wider self.” Let me begin by suggesting that James came to realize that not everything in immediate experience was “immediate.” I think we must distinguish immediate or concrete experience from “pure immediacy.” The latter would refer only to what is in conscious focus, including the conscious margins; the former would include “virtualities” and “other” relations that may be or may not be brought to consciousness at a later time. Since these are constituents of the concrete experience, we might say that they are experienced subconsciously.

Several of James’s late notes, combined with his views on the subliminal self (to be treated later), support the distinction here suggested. On November 26, 1905, James wonders whether he might be omitting something vital in his effort “to run things by pure immediacy.” For the world to run as it should, “an other than the immediate” seems to be required. He goes on to ask whether it would be possible to “treat this other as equivalent to subconscious dynamic operations between the parts of experience, distinct from the conscious relations which the popular term ‘experience’ connotes” (TC, II:753). Some months later (June 8, 1906), James writes:

The “cosmic omnibus” around about experience, is the “being” of the experiences and what not immediately experienced relations they may stand in. All these facts are virtually experience or matters of later experience, however. . . . Not all that an experience virtually “is” is content of its immediacy. . . . The cosmic omnibus for any given experience would thus seem to be only other correlated experiences. (TC, II:758)11

In exploring any experience, then, it would seem that we are obliged to range much more widely than the realm of “pure immediacy.” This is why such exploration is open-ended and ongoing; why it must involve hypotheses, speculations, and extrapolations if, paradoxically, we are to move more deeply into “immediate experience.”

These same characteristics of process and relation that I have repeatedly stressed become more explicit as James realizes how much “staticality” has remained in his articulation of experience. As late as September of 1906, he
asks: “May not my whole trouble be due to the fact that I am still treating what is really a living dynamic situation by logical and stastical categories?” He goes on to say that he ought to have the courage to postulate activity, to introduce agents—in short, to “vivify the mechanism of change!” (TC, II:760). But more than a year later (February 1908) he still wonders whether part of the difficulty is due to “a retention of staticality in the notion of ‘that’ and ‘is.’” This is the period, however, during which James is writing what will later be published as A Pluralistic Universe, and so he has seen the necessity for surrendering logic if we are to enter into the depth and thickness of living experience. He now realizes that the problem is to state without paradox the intuitive or live constitution of the active life. This can be done “only by approximation, awakening sympathy with it rather than assuming logically to define it; for logic makes all things static.” It is the processive-pluralistic-relational character of the universe that James is now stressing: “Be the universe as much of a unit as you like, plurality has once for all broken out within it.” What the universe effectively manifests are “centres of reference and action . . . and these centres disperse each other’s rays.” Thus, James tells us, no living “it is a stark numerical unit. They all radiate and coruscate in many directions; and the manyness is due to the plurality round them.” What all this adds up to is that “neither the world nor things are finished, but in process; and that process means more’s that are continuous yet novel. This last involves the whole paradox of an it whose modes are alternate and exclusive of each other, the same and not-same interpenetrating” (TC, II:763–64).

CON AND EX
When we come to focus more directly on self-compounding consciousness, we shall see that this involves “the same and not-same interpenetrating.” First, however, it is necessary to consider an allied question, which takes the form of a series of what might be designated con (co) and ex problems—how individual realities can be both with and without each other. The most crucial of these problems for my purposes is how human persons can be con God and ex God; both continuous and discontinuous with God; both present to and absent from God.

James’s approach, of course, is to give a hypothetical or speculative response to this question after having shown the con and ex characteristics of all concrete experiences. On intellectualist grounds, he says, this is impossible: “The intellectualist statement is that esse and sentiri are the same, a state of mind is what it is realized as. If M is realized as con a, then it is con a, and to be identical with its own self must always be con a; whatever else it may be con with, it can never be ex a. That M must permanently carry a along with it” (TC, II:763). But as we have already seen and will further see, “the immediate experience of life solves the problems which so baffle our conceptual intelligence” (PU, 116). We have also already seen and will further see
that given the processive-relational or field character of experience, every "bit of experience" is con and ex other bits. Further, since these fields are continually shifting, gaining, and losing, other fields that were ex will become con and vice versa.13

Using Bergsonian language, James describes this processive-relational world as "an endosmosis or conflux of the same with the different: they compenetrate and telescope" (PU, 114). In such a telescopic and endosmotic world "there is no reason why A might not be co- and ex–B, i.e., continuous in any direction with something else." This would be a universe in which nothing "is absolutely cut off from anything else, and nothing is absolutely solidaire" (TC, II:762).14 This is a dynamically continuous world rather than one of discontinuous "plural solipsisms" (TC, II:757). The experiences constituting this world change in such fashion that there is a continuous overlap of the earlier and the later. The view that emerges is never an absolutely novel creation following a complete annihilation; rather, "there is partial decay and partial growth, and all the while a nucleus of relative constancy from which what decays drops off, and which takes into itself whatever is grafted on, until at length something wholly different has taken place." The universe is continuous, then, without being one throughout. "Its members interdigitate with their next neighbors in manifold directions, and there are no clean cuts between them anywhere" (PU, 115).15 While logical distinctions are insulators, "in life distinct things can and do commune together every moment" (PU, 116).16 The logically distinct experiences diffuse, and connections are made; for this reason, reality cannot be penned in; "its structure is to spread, and affect" (TC, II:762).17 Unlike our concepts, our concrete pulses of experience are not pent in by definite limits. "You feel none of them as inwardly simple, and no two as wholly without confluence where they touch." Interrelatedness, then, is essentially characteristic of all realities. "The gist of the matter is always the same—something ever goes indissolubly with something else. You cannot separate the same from its other, except by abandoning the real altogether and taking to the conceptual system" (PU, 127, 128).

In the light of all this, James contends that the old objection against the self-compounding of states of consciousness—that it was impossible for purely logical reasons—"is unfounded in principle." I think that James might have more accurately said, "unfounded in fact or concrete experience," for he never does explain, nor does he claim to, how states of consciousness can be compounded. As early as 1895, to the question as to whether we can account for complex facts "being–known–together," he responded: "The general nature of it we can probably never account for, or tell how such a unity in manyness can be, for it seems to be the ultimate essence of experience, and anything less than it apparently cannot be at all" (EP, 78).18 If we cannot explain, at least by means of concepts, the unity in diversity that characterizes all experiences, we can point and describe, how-
ever inadequately. Again the distinction of James lies in his having brought
so brilliantly to our awareness the details of the flux of experience. When we
focus on the concrete, we become aware of the overlapping complex of
fields peculiar to the tiniest bit of experience as well as to the largest. “Every
smallest state of consciousness, concretely taken, overflows its own defini-
tion. Only concepts are self-identical; only ‘reason’ deals with closed equa-
tions; nature is but a name for excess; every point in her opens out and runs
into the more” (PU, 129). As for mental facts compounding themselves,
James maintains that in spite of what he said in his Principles of Psychology,
they “can . . . if you take them concretely and livingly, as possessed of vari-
ous functions. They can count variously, figure in different constellations,
without ceasing to be ‘themselves’” (TC, II:765).

It is clear that if we are to speak of the self as the “passing Thought,” as
James did earlier, we must understand this “passing Thought” in terms of
James’s later metaphysics of experience. By doing so, we are presented with
a self immeasurably richer than an epiphenomenalist or behavioristic self.
The self is always the self of the “passing moment,” but we have seen that
every passing moment radiates outward and consists of numerous and di-
verse overlapping fields, many if not most of which are not in conscious
focus. “There are countless co’s that are immediately undiscerned as such,
unanalyzed.” These include the continual co of our organic sensations, the
sense of the immediate past, of outlying space, of the background of in-
terest, and the like: “All these are so ready to be distinctively experienced,
that we deem them experienced subconsciously all the while.” James then asks
us to “suppose that total conflux, possible or actual, is really the ‘bottom’
fact, suppose it actual ‘subconsciously,’—then the problem is that of the
conditions of insulation” (TC, II:757). This, as James notes, is the problem
of his 1897 Ingersoll lecture, published as Human Immortality—the problem
of individual human consciousnesses being immersed in a wider con-
sciousness of which they are only sporadically aware.

Before turning to that problem, we can conclude this section by present-
ing again that text which, along with another cited earlier, constitutes
perhaps the most succinct and significant statement by James as to the char-
acter of the self. This text can serve as a summation of what has just pre-
ceded, and as an anticipation and experiential ground for the more spec-
culative and extrapolative considerations to follow.

My present field of consciousness is a centre surrounded by a fringe that
shades insensibly into a subconscious more. I use three separate terms here to
describe this fact; but I might as well use three-hundred, for the fact is all
shades and no boundaries. Which part of it properly is in my consciousness,
which out? If I name what is out, it already has come in. The centre works in
one way while the margins work in another, and presently overpower the
centre and are central themselves. What we conceptually identify ourselves
with and say we are thinking of at any time is the centre; but our full self is the
whole field, with all those indefinitely radiating subconscious possibilities of increase that we can only feel without conceiving, and can hardly begin to analyze. The collective and disruptive ways of being coexist here, for each part functions distinctly, makes connexion with its own peculiar region in the still wider rest of experience and tends to draw us into that line, and yet the whole is somehow felt as one pulse of our life,—not conceived so, but felt so. (PU, 130)

WIDER CONSCIOUSNESS
The ground we have just covered, which led us to James's description of the "full self," can profitably be explored—or reexplored—by focusing our attention more directly on the reality, or at least the possibility, of a wider consciousness with which individual human consciousnesses are in touch by way of their subconscious or subliminal selves. As Perry has noted, "The idea of consciousness 'beyond the margin' or 'below the threshold' was a metaphysical hypothesis of the first importance. This hypothesis afforded an experimental approach to religion, and constituted the only hopeful possibility of giving scientific support to supernaturalistic faith" (TC, II:160). In a letter to Bergson, James himself expressed the view "that the indispensable hypothesis in a philosophy of pure experience is that of many kinds of other experience than ours, that the question of [co-conscious synthesis] (its conditions, etc.) becomes a most urgent question" (TC, II:610).

Tentatively, we might distinguish four groups of experiential data or experiential claims, varying in degrees of immediacy and acceptance, which are involved in the extrapolation of a wider self or wider consciousness. The first group would be made up of those fields of experience that include but are not restricted to the fields of our special senses (auditory, visual, tactile). These were described in the previous section, and I stressed their constitution as processes and relations having centers and margins or fringes in a continually shifting relationship. They, of course, have the highest degree of immediacy and acceptability. The second group would consist of the subconscious or unconscious evidenced in psychotherapeutic situations and articulated in psychological theories. Here the immediacy would be less compelling, but the successful results, real or believed, consequent upon presupposing unconscious factors have led to a fairly widespread acceptability. The third group would include all those experiential claims or phenomena that are referred to as psychical or parapsychological. James, as is well known, was most interested in and sympathetic to these experiential claims; for many years he supported and to a limited degree participated in psychical research. Nevertheless, one year before his death, after noting in the "Final Impressions of a Psychical Researcher" that he had been in touch with psychical research literature for twenty-five years, he confessed: "Yet I am theoretically no 'further' than I was at the beginning" (MS, 175).

I am going to label the fourth group of experiences involved in the extrapolation of a wider self "mystical experiences." These are the most important
experiences or experiential claims for my purposes, and I am deliberately distinguishing them more sharply from parapsychological claims than did James. He tended to use the term “mystical” more widely that I will do, but the difference is more functional or methodological than substantive. I would admit that if the parapsychological claims are authentic, then they are evidence of that wider consciousness manifest in mystical experiences if they are authentic. My justification for this distinction is James’s own pragmatic one—the “fruits” that have apparently been forthcoming in one case and absent in the other. Those whom we usually think of as great mystics appear to have brought forth both in their own lives and in those touched by them a deepening, an illumination and enrichment. Such fruits are decidedly less evident in the lives of those usually classed as “psychics” or “spiritualists.” James himself rather reluctantly and sadly concluded that “the spirit-hypothesis exhibits a vacancy, triviality and incoherence of mind painful to think of as the state of the departed” (CER, 438–39).23 I am not suggesting, nor did James, that mystical experiences could be employed to “prove” the existence of God or the immortality of the self. Following James, however, I am maintaining that mystical experiences are the strongest experiential grounds upon which we can base any extrapolation concerning a more encompassing reality.

James was desirous of bringing forth a hypothesis that would cover the phenomena in all of the groups I have roughly delineated. It was his hypothesis, variously expressed, of the “wider self” that he believed did so most successfully—although even in The Varieties of Religious Experience and A Pluralistic Universe, we are given at most a sketch and suggestive hypothesis. Before considering these works, let us look briefly at some of the other texts in which James expresses his views concerning a “wider consciousness.”

To begin with, I would like to note that James’s position on this matter cannot be separated from his long-standing religious belief to the effect that we are engaged in a process not adequately accounted for in traditional restrictive materialistic or naturalistic terms. In one of his talks to teachers, James stated: “No one believes more strongly than I do that what our senses know as ‘this world’ is only one portion of our mind’s total environment and object.”24 And several years earlier, in “Is Life Worth Living?” (1895), he had expressed the view that “whatever else be certain, this at least is certain,—that the world of our present natural knowledge is enveloped in a larger world of some sort of whose residual properties we at present can frame no positive idea” (WB, 50). But even years before these texts were written, James’s general course was set, for whatever the important and specific differences he had with his father, he never wavered in his belief that the world of his father’s religious concerns was the deeper world. James’s “scientific” bent, combined with his religious sensibility, gave rise to what at times appears to be almost a schizophrenia. But he never accepted the conflicts between religion and science as permanent and irresolvable.
James's continuing concern was to show that one could acknowledge the achievements of science without surrendering a religious belief in realities and dimensions of human experience that must ever elude science. Although he never systematically reconciled his scientific and religious proclivities and at times seemed to assume irreconcilable positions, I believe that as his metaphysics slowly took form, a more harmonious relation between science and religion was increasingly suggested. This direction is indicated in Perry's text cited above, but note that he says James's metaphysics offers the "possibility of giving scientific support to supernaturalistic faith" (*TC*, II:160; emphasis added) not scientific proof. Both in our moral life and in our religious life—indeed, even to a degree in our scientific life—James insisted upon the necessity of beliefs or faith commitments, to whatever extent such acts might be reinforced by rational or scientific investigations.

**EXCURSUS: FREEDOM AS POSTULATE AND METAPHYSICAL PRINCIPLE**

A brief look at the phenomenon of "freedom" will serve to illustrate how James's later metaphysics came to lend support to, but not prove, his long-standing beliefs. In an oft-cited text from his 1870 diary, in describing how he pulled back from the brink of self-destruction, he stated: "My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will" (*LWJ*, I:147). Twenty-five years later, in "The Dilemma of Determinism," James expressed this same point: "Our first act of freedom, if we are free, ought in all inward propriety to be to affirm that we are free" (*WB*, 115). Again, in *The Principles of Psychology*, we are told that "freedom's first deed should be to affirm itself." At this time, James has not yet broken free of dualism, at least as a methodological postulate, and thus he can only juxtapose "the great scientific postulate that the world must be one unbroken fact" alongside "a moral postulate about the Universe, the postulate that what ought to be can be" (*PP*, II:1177).

James begins, then, with freedom as a moral postulate or an act of faith, and there is a sense in which it remains so to the end. Any alleged proof or rational demonstration would be inimical to the radical character of freedom. If we are rationally coerced to affirm freedom, then we are deprived of a significant dimension of freedom—the freedom to affirm freedom. Yet while James never denies a faith dimension to human freedom, it becomes less and less a "blind" faith as he grows more confident of his metaphysics. What began as a desperate act of faith and a moral postulate is gradually transformed by being organically incorporated within a metaphysics. A pluralistic-processive-relational world, an "open" and "unfinished universe" characterized by chance and novelty, is one that does not reduce freedom to a subjectivistic or psychological juxtaposition at best and an aberration at worst. As noted earlier, the particular kind of world affirmed by James is one in which there are "original commencements of series of phenomena, whose realization excludes other series which were previously pos-
sible" (CER, 31). In one of his last writings, James insists that the difference between monism and pluralism rests on the reality or unreality of novelty. He goes on to say that “the doctrine of free will” is “that we ourselves may be authors of genuine novelty” (SPP, 75).

James no longer posits dualism, even methodologically, for he no longer thinks in terms of an “objective” determined world that is the concern of science and a “subjective” undetermined world that grounds morality and religion. There is one world, he says, however pluralistic and diverse it may be; and chance, novelty, and self-origination in some sense characterize this world in all its dimensions. A metaphysics of experience that overcomes ontological dualism is, of course, a crucial and indispensable factor in any effort to bring about greater harmony between science and religion. An experience which, in its most immediate and tiniest bits, involves dimensions that escape a mechanistic-materialistic reductionism is open to beliefs in realities “thicker” and more extensive than those portrayed by the customary category of “sense-data.” These realities, while not encompassed or exhausted by the more immediate and sensible experience of the moment, are nevertheless viewed as continuous with these momentary experiences, thereby obviating the necessity to posit a radically discontinuous “other” or “spiritual” world beyond “this world.”

WIDER CONSCIOUSNESS: DIVERSE MANIFESTATIONS
As with “freedom,” James was aware of and affirmed a mode of “wider consciousness” some years before his metaphysics crystallized sufficiently to account for it rather than simply juxtapose it to the physical world. In his early psychical research as well as in Human Immortality, dualism is still presupposed. in The Varieties of Religious Experience, it is implicitly overcome; in Essays in Radical Empiricism, A Pluralistic Universe, and Some Problems of Philosophy, it is formally and explicitly rejected. By considering how James viewed and employed this “wider consciousness,” we can best understand its nature and importance as well as its utility for a belief in personal immortality.

Let us begin with the role assigned a “larger consciousness” in James’s Human Immortality, in which he responds to two objections against personal immortality. The second objection, which is of secondary importance for the question of a “wider consciousness,” might be labeled the “logistical objection”—how could God possibly maintain in existence the billions of people who have existed and who will come to exist? James’s response, in brief, is that we cannot judge God’s capacity in terms of our finite limitations: “God, we can say, has so inexhaustible a capacity for love that his call and need is for a literally endless accumulation of created lives” (HI, 42).

The first objection, and the one directly relevant to our present concern, is that if “thought is a function of the brain,” consciousness cannot survive the brain’s dissolution. James accepts the postulate of thought as a function of
the brain, but he suggests that there are two different kinds of function, both of which are possible but only one of which excludes personal immortality. First, there is the "productive function," whereby the brain would produce consciousness as the electric current produces light or the teakettle produces steam. If this is the function of the brain, then of course consciousness can have no reality apart from the brain. But there is another possibility: namely, the "transmissive function" by which the brain serves merely to transmit consciousness whose source is located outside the brain, as a stained-glass window transmits light (HI, 10–14). Obviously, if consciousness is only transmitted rather than produced by the brain, there is no necessity for consciousness to cease to exist when the brain does. "The sphere of being that supplied the consciousness would still be intact; and in that more real world with which, even whilst here, it was continuous, the consciousness might, in ways unknown to us, continue still" (HI, 18).

According to James, both production and transmission are hypotheses polemically on a par, for "in strict science, we can only write down the bare fact of concomitance." But considered in a wider way, the transmission theory has "positive superiorities." To begin with, it is not necessary to generate consciousness anew in a vast number of places; "it exists already, behind the scenes, coeval with the world." Further there is a whole class of experiences better accounted for by the transmission theory: "such phenomena, namely, as religious conversions, providential leadings in answer to prayer, instantaneous healings, premonitions, apparitions at the time of death, clairvoyant visions or impressions, and the whole range of mediumistic capacities." The production theory has a hard time explaining how such phenomena can be produced by our sense organs, whereas for the transmission theory, "they don't have to be 'produced.'" Instead, "they exist ready-made in the transcendental world, and all that is needed is an abnormal lowering of the brain-threshold to let them through" (HI, 20–27).

In describing our relation to this larger consciousness, James speaks of "the continuity of our consciousness with a mother-sea" (HI, 27). In his preface to the second edition of the book, James notes that this led some critics to accuse him of allowing only for the continued existence of the larger consciousness, our finite persons having expired with the brain. In reply, he maintained that the transmission theory allows one to "conceive the mental world behind the veil in as individualistic a form as one pleases." If one takes the extreme individualistic view, then one's "finite mundane consciousness would be an abstract from one's larger, truer personality, the latter having even now some sort of reality behind the scenes" (HI, vi–vii).

In spite of James's explicit support of the possibility of personal immortality in this essay, I think this support should be received with some caution. It is true, as Perry noted, that "the transmission theory was clearly an anticipation of the hypothesis developed in his later metaphysics and philosophy of religion, in which the mystical and similar experiences were in-
terpreted as an overflow of superhuman mentality through a lowering of the normal threshold" (*TC*, II:133). Nevertheless, much in this theory as it is presented in *Human Immortality* is in conflict with what I believe are the richer and more fruitful features of James's metaphysics. It is clear, for example, that James places his theory against the background of a dualistic reality, as is evidenced in his asking us to "suppose . . . that the whole universe of material things—the furniture of earth and choir of heaven—should turn out to be a mere surface-veil of phenomena, hiding and keeping back the world of genuine realities" (*HI*, 15). This sounds frightfully close to that rationalistic world with which the experiential James never ceased to struggle. Further, it is a world essentially static and peopled by human beings who are passive transmitters of a higher reality. This would seem to hold whether that "higher reality" is understood in a pantheistic or individualistic sense. In the latter case, persons would be reduced to instruments gathering experiences and memories for some "larger, truer personality" whose real world is elsewhere. Absent in all of this are those real continuities and real individual agents that James at his best did so much to illuminate. Whether it is possible to extrapolate a plausible mode of personal immortality depends on whether an experiential self fashioned along Jamesian lines can affirm the richness and significance of our personal lives "here and now" while remaining open to a continuing existence.

I would like to consider next an essay written some six months before James died—"A Suggestion about Mysticism" (*EP*, 157–65). Based on several experiences that took place after 1905, this essay presents, perhaps in its sharpest form, both the experiential and ambiguous character of this wider consciousness with which James had been concerned for so many years.27

In each of three experiences, James tells us, there was a very sudden and incomprehensible enlargement of the conscious field, accompanied by "a curious sense of cognition of real fact." Each experience lasted less than two minutes, and in each instance it "broke in abruptly upon a perfectly commonplace situation."

What happened each time was that I seemed all at once to be reminded of a past experience; and this reminiscence, ere I could conceive or name it distinctly, developed into something further that belonged with it, this in turn into something further still, and so on, until the process faded out, leaving me amazed at the sudden vision of increasing ranges of distant fact of which I could give no articulate account. The mode of consciousness was perceptual, not conceptual—the field expanding so fast that there seemed no time for conception or identification to get in its work . . . . The feeling—I won't call it belief—that I had had a sudden opening, had seen through a window, as it were, distant realities that incomprehensibly belonged with my own life, was so acute that I cannot shake it off to-day. (*EP*, 159–60)

What suggestion or hypothesis does James offer to account for these and other "mystical" experiences? To grasp his hypothesis, it is first necessary to
describe what he means by "field of consciousness" as well as the "threshold" metaphor he employs.

The field is composed at all times of a mass of present sensation, in a cloud of memories, emotions, concepts, etc. Yet these ingredients, which have to be named separately, are not separate, as the conscious field contains them. Its form is that of a much-at-once, in the unity of which the sensations, memories, concepts, impulses etc., coalesce and are dissolved. The present field as a whole came continuously out of its predecessor and will melt into its successor continuously again, one sensation-mass passing into another sensation-mass giving the character of a gradually changing present to the experience, while the memories and concepts carry time-coefficients which place whatever is present in a temporal perspective more or less vast. (EP, 158)

Now it is important, here, to distinguish the succeeding masses of sensation from the memories, concepts, and conational states that also enter into the "field of consciousness." We do not know how far we are "marginally" conscious of these latter constituents; in any event there is no definite boundary "between what is central and what is marginal in consciousness," nor does the margin itself have a definite boundary. Let us imagine the field of consciousness in the form of a wave or inverted "U" with a horizontal line designated the "threshold" running through it. The closed end of the wave above the threshold is "ordinary consciousness," and the open-ended segment below the threshold is marginal or transmarginal consciousness or subconsciousness. Just as the slightest movement of the eye will bring into the field of vision objects that had always been there, so, James hypothesizes,

a movement of the threshold downwards will similarly bring a mass of subconscious memories, conceptions, emotional feelings, and perceptions of relation, etc., into view all at once; and . . . if this enlargement of the nimbus that surrounds the sensational present is vast enough, while no one of the items it contains attracts our attention singly, we shall have the conditions fulfilled for a kind of consciousness in all essential respects like that termed mystical. It will be transient, if the change of the threshold is transient. It will be of reality, enlargement, and illumination, possibly rapturously so. It will be of unification, for the present coalesces in it with ranges of the remote quite out of its reach under ordinary circumstances; and the sense of relation will be greatly enhanced. (EP, 159)

James concludes by noting, as he did in describing his own experiences, that the form is intuitive or perceptual, not conceptual. All of this leads to the "suggestion . . . that states of mystical intuition may be only very sudden and great extensions of the ordinary 'field of consciousness.'"

This is, of course, a most ambiguous suggestion as regards the "wider consciousness," which is apparently realized in mystical experiences. D. C. Mathur, concerned to stress the "naturalistic" currents in James's thought, interprets it as apparently "giving a 'naturalistic' description of 'mystical
I believe this is a possible interpretation which is not as at variance with James’s treatment of mystical states in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* as Mathur suggests it is. Even in those texts in which James is drawing out “religious” or “super-naturalistic” possibilities, he never denies that the phenomena, as such, cannot “prove” the reality of any consciousness beyond the human. As we shall see, the affirmation of such reality or realities is an extrapolation or overbelief, which must involve not only the bare phenomena of “mystical states” but also other human needs and experiences.

The *Varieties* was written some years before James underwent the experiences just described. Thus, while this work is a treasure trove of descriptions of personal experiences, they are, with one notable exception, presented by James secondhand; from the enjoyment of mystical experiences, he tells us, he was almost entirely excluded by his own constitution. But it is the mass and universality of experiences variously called religious, mystical, psychical, or hallucinatory that impressed James and that he chided science for ignoring. The bulk of the *Varieties* consists of descriptions of experiences that James feels have not been adequately accounted for in the usual scientific language. Having presented these experiences, he attempts to distill from them shared characteristics and then suggest how they might be accounted for in both psychological and religious terms, which, while distinct, are not necessarily opposed.

There is a plethora of human experiences—philosophical, religious, psychological—that testify, correctly or incorrectly, to the “reality of the unseen.” Their range and multiplicity lead James to suggest that “it is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call ‘something there,’ more deep and more general than any of the special and particular ‘senses’ by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed” (*VRE*, 55). For many of those in the religious sphere, the objects of their belief are presented to them “in the form of quasi-sensible realities directly apprehended.” For those who have them, such experiences are as convincing “as any direct sensible experiences can be” and usually “much more convincing than the results established by mere logic ever are” (*VRE*, 59, 66).

In his phenomenological consideration of “conversion,” James describes it as involving “forces seemingly outside of the conscious individual that bring redemption to his life.” Psychology and religion are in agreement on the reality of such forces while disagreeing as to their ultimate locus. For psychology they are “subconscious” and do not “transcend the individual’s personality”; religion, at least Christianity, “insists that they are direct supernatural operations of the Deity” (*VRE*, 174). James will eventually endeavor to incorporate both these perspectives, and the medium by which he will do so is the self regarded as a “field of consciousness.” Again, James describes how our mental fields continually succeed each other and how their centers and margins are ever shifting. Further, “some fields are narrow fields and some are wide fields.” We rejoice when our fields of consciousness
are wide, for “we then see masses of truth together, and often get glimpses
of relations which we divine rather than see.” On the other hand, when we
are drowsy or ill or fatigued “our fields may narrow almost to a point”
(VRE, 188–89).

James maintains that “the most important fact which this ‘field’ formula
commemorates is the indetermination of the margin.” Since “ordinary psy-
chology” is not able adequately to account for this margin, James holds that
the discovery, “first made in 1886,” of the subconscious (or the subliminal
self) is the most important step forward in psychology since he began study-
ing it. The claim made, initially by Frederick Myers, is that, “in certain
subjects at least, there is not only the consciousness of the ordinary field,
with its usual centre and margin, but an addition thereto in the shape of a set
of memories, thoughts, and feelings which are extra-marginal and outside
of the primary consciousness altogether, but yet must be classed as con-
scious facts of some sort, able to reveal their presence by unmistakable
signs” (VRE, 190). A self so constituted, of course, is subject to incursions
from what might be called an unknown, open-ended source. While this
source may be the more hidden aspects of one’s own personality, it may also
be a reality actively present to the individual field but having a life extending
far beyond it. That is a question which, as already noted, cannot be set-
tled—if it can be “settled” at all—solely on the basis of the reality of a
subconscious or subliminal self. In a note, James states: “It is thus ‘scientific’
to interpret all otherwise unaccountable invasive alterations of conscious-
ness as results of the tension of subliminal memories reaching the bursting-
point. But candor obliges me to confess that there are occasional bursts into
consciousness of results of which it is not easy to demonstrate any pro-
longed subconscious incubation” (VRE, 192n.).

Throughout the Varieties, James wishes to describe the self in such fashion
as not to foreclose its continuity with a “higher reality,” yet at the same time
not to confuse a possibility with a certainty. Just as in Human Immortality he
endeavored to show that viewing thought as a function of the brain did not
exclude the possibility of personal immortality, so here he insists that the
reference of a phenomenon to a subliminal self does not altogether “exclude
the notion of the direct presence of the Deity”: “It is logically conceivable
that if there be higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch us, the psy-
chological condition of their doing so might be our possession of a sub-
conscious region which alone should yield access to them. . . . If there be
higher powers able to impress us, they may get access to us only through the
subliminal door” (VRE, 197–98).

If the reality of the subconscious or subliminal self does not foreclose the
possibility of a divine reality, neither does the existence of mystical states
guarantee such reality. “The fact is that the mystical feeling of enlargement,
union, and emancipation has no specific intellectual content whatever of its
own.” While such states wield no authority “due simply to their being mys-
tical states,” they do overthrow “the pretension of non-mystical states to be the sole and ultimate dictators of what we may believe.” That is why “it must always remain an open question whether mystical states may not possibly be . . . superior points of view, windows through which the mind looks out upon a more extensive and inclusive world” (VRE, 337–39).

Before considering the “wider self” as it is apparently manifest in religious experience, let me briefly focus on an allied notion as presented in a key metaphysical essay, “The Experience of Activity.” James tells us that when discussing the ultimate character of our activity experiences, we should remember “that each of them is but a portion of a wider world, one link in the vast chain of processes of experience out of which history is made.” Every particular process, then, is part of a larger process in the same way, as I earlier suggested, that every particular field is encompassed by a larger field. “Each partial process, to him who lives through it, defines itself by its origin and goal; but to an observer with a wider mind-span who should live outside of it, the goal would appear but as a provisional halting-place, and the subjectively felt activity would be seen to continue into objective activities that led far beyond.” James goes on to say that we become habituated to defining activity experiences by their relation to something more. Thus there arises a question as to what kind of and whose activity it is. While we think we are doing one thing, we may in reality be doing something quite different, something of which we are unaware. “For instance, you think you are but drinking this glass; but you are really creating the liver-cirrhosis that will end your days” (ERE, 87–88).

Eventually the question “Whose is the real activity?” is tantamount to the question “What will be the actual results?” According to James, this is merely a version of the old dispute between materialism (“elementary short-span actions summing themselves ‘blindly’”) and teleology (“far foreseen ideals coming with effort into act”). James distinguishes three philosophical accounts of the ultimate ground or real agent or agents of activity: a “consciousness of wider time-span than ours,” “ideas,” and “nerve-cells.” The pragmatic difference in meaning is vastly different and significant, reducing, as just indicated, to materialism or teleology. While James is not claiming to prove which is the correct account, his sympathies clearly rest with the hypothesis of teleology and a wider thinker. “Naively we believe, and humanly and dramatically we like to believe, that activities both of wider and narrower span are at work in life together, that both are real, and that the long-span tendencies yoke the others in their service, encouraging them in the right direction; and damping them when they tend in other ways.” Just how this steering of small tendencies by large ones is accomplished remains a question to be pondered by metaphysical thinkers “for many years to come” (ERE, 90–91). While James will not reach a solution to this question, in A Pluralistic Universe—written some four years later—there is a sense in which he is more confident, as we shall shortly see, of his belief that we can
retain our individuality and agency even if we are encompassed by, or co-conscious and confluent with a larger consciousness. That James was already reaching toward such a view in his earlier essay, however, is clearly indicated in the description given there of the pragmatic meaning of a wider thinker:

If we assume a wider thinker, it is evident that his purposes envelope mine. I am really lecturing for him; and altho I cannot surely know to what end, yet if I take him religiously, I can trust it to be a good end, and willingly connive. I can be happy in thinking that my activity transmits his impulse, and that his ends prolong my own. So long as I take him religiously, in short, he does not de-realize my activities. He tends rather to corroborate the reality of them, so long as I believe both them and him to be good. (ERE, 89)

“PART AND PARCEL OF A WIDER SELF”

Let me return now to A Pluralistic Universe, in which, combined with The Varieties of Religious Experience, we find some of the richest texts for the construction of a field model of the self. It is, as has been repeatedly underlined, James’s field-self that most adequately accounts for flowing, concrete experience while remaining open to those dimensions of reality affirmed by speculative and faith activity. We earlier saw that after establishing the reality of self-compounding consciousnesses—overlapping consciousnesses—James reached the conclusion that since our states or fields of consciousness overlap both successively and simultaneously, the “full self” is nothing less than the “whole field.” But here we enter upon a key speculative or extrapolative path, one that leads to the heart of any effort to construct a model of the self open to personal immortality. “Every bit of us at every moment is part and parcel of a wider self, it quivers along various radii like the wind-rose on a compass, and the actual in it is continuously one with possibles not yet in our present sight” (PU, 131). This text, combined with the earlier cited “full self” one, while not necessarily in essential conflict with the presentation of the self in The Principles of Psychology, is nevertheless significantly beyond it.

We earlier saw that a materialistic interpretation of James’s doctrine of self seemed plausible, particularly if such statements as the following were taken in isolation: “The ‘Self of selves,’ when carefully examined, is found to consist mainly of the collection of these peculiar motions in the head or between the head and the throat” (PP, I:288). I suggested that even texts such as this one are better understood when placed within a field model of the self and that the later James would bear out such a reading; the same is true of those difficult “body-texts” in which James appeared to identify the individualized self with the body. A particularly unsettling one—“The world experienced (otherwise called the ‘field of consciousness’) comes at all times with our body as its centre, centre of vision, centre of action, centre of interest” (ERE, 86n.)—was presented in a long note in “The Experience of Activity,” and I think it interesting that a note to the “part and parcel of a wider self”
text should both clarify that text and support the field-self doctrine being suggested:

The conscious self of the moment, the central self, is probably determined to this privileged position by its functional connexion with the body's imminent or present acts. It is the present acting self. Tho the more that surrounds it may be "subconscious" to us, yet if in its "collective capacity" it also exerts an active function, it may be conscious in a wider way, conscious, as it were, over heads. (PU, 131n.)

Again we are confronted with that ambiguous, vague, and elusive "more" that we have been feverishly pursuing through the labyrinth of consciousness. Let us assault it again, this time from James's description of religious experience. This experience, he says, despite a multitude of diverse expressions, has a common nucleus with two parts or stages: a felt uneasiness and a solution or salvation through removal of this uneasiness. The uneasiness takes the form of a sense of wrongness, and insofar as the individual suffers from and criticizes this wrongness, he is already beyond it and possibly in touch with something higher. The religious person, then, is aware of comprising a wrong part and—at least in germinal form—a better part. When the solution or salvific stage is reached, the person identifies his real being with the germinal higher part of himself: "He becomes conscious that this higher part is conterminous and continuous with a more of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of him, and which he can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board of and save himself when all his lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck" (VRE, 400). Several years later, in A Pluralistic Universe, James repeats this description in very similar terms:

The believer finds that the tenderer parts of his personal life are continuous with a more of the same quality which is operative in the universe outside of him and which he can keep in touch with, and in a fashion get on board and save himself, when all his lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck. In a word, the believer is continuous, to his own consciousness, at any rate, with a wider self from which saving experiences flow in. (PU, 139)

To this point, James has given a vivid description of the way in which numerous individuals have experienced profound personal transformation. The obvious question, of course, is whether their experiential claims are simply projections of their own subjective psyches or whether indeed they are manifestations of the touch of a higher power. In short, is this "more" merely their own notion, or does it really exist? and if so, in what shape? and is it also active? Here speculative and theoretic categories in all religions come into play, as well as significant divergencies of interpretation. That the "more" really exists and acts is widely agreed upon, whereas there are great differences as regards its shape (personal god, gods, nature, Being) and the mode of "union" with it. James now wades in with his own hypothesis, which he hopes will be acceptable to science while remaining open to the
claims of religious experience. The mediating term, James feels, might be the *subconscious self*, which has become an acceptable psychological entity. Prescinding from any religious considerations, "there is actually and literally more life in our total soul than we are at any time aware of" (VRE, 402). In a text from Frederick Myers, which James now makes his own, this depth dimension of the human self is succinctly and convincingly expressed:

> Each of us is in reality an abiding psychical entity far more extensive than he knows—an individuality which can never express itself completely through any corporeal manifestation. The Self manifests through the organism; but there is always some part of the Self unmanifested; and always, as it seems, some power of organic expression held in abeyance or reserve. (VRE, 403)³⁷

Given the reality, then, of a self whose life and reality extend far beyond what its state of consciousness may be at a particular moment, James is now equipped to fashion his mediating hypothesis: "Whatever it may be on its farther side, the 'more' with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected is on its hither side the subconscious continuation of our conscious life." What James appears to be saying is that in the first instance the "higher" power experienced in the religious life is "primarily the higher faculties of our hidden mind." Hence, "the sense of union with the power beyond us is a sense of something not merely apparently, but literally true" (VRE, 403). Without reference to any overbeliefs, according to James, we can posit as a fact "that the conscious person is continuous with a wider self through which saving experiences come." This gives us a "positive content of religious experience which . . . is literally and objectively true as far as it goes" (VRE, 405). Of course, the qualification "as far as it goes" is James's mediating phrase, for it obligates the psychologists to take religious experience seriously on his terms, while not closing off the "farther side" of the "more" from reflective living, speculation, and overbelief.

A fuller treatment of this "farther side of the 'more'" and the extrapolations and overbeliefs relating to it must await our later consideration of "God" as fashioned along Jamesian lines. We must here, however, follow James as he suggests the plausibility of the continuity of our individual human consciousness with some superhuman consciousness or consciousnesses. Having established as a "certain fact" that smaller, more accessible portions of our mind can self-compound, James contends that we must consider as a legitimate hypothesis "the speculative assumption of a similar but wider compounding in remoter regions." Inasmuch as mental facts function both singly and together, "we finite minds may simultaneously be co-conscious with one another in a superhuman intelligence" (PU, 132). Further, in describing the makeup of the "full self" with its shifting margins, we see that we are at every moment co-conscious with our own momentary margin. Is it not possible, then, that "we ourselves form the margin of some really central self in things which is co-conscious with the whole of us? May
not you and I be confluent in a higher consciousness and confluously active there, tho we know it not?" (PU, 131).

James was aware of the fact that this was an area in which one must dare to hypothesize in the wildest and most imaginative fashion if one hoped to realize even a glimmer of illumination concerning its character. Analogies and hypotheses suggested by and consistent with the smaller versions of our experience—not strict formal logical deduction—are the only tools available for some understanding of that vast region of reality with which we are in "ordinary" experience only marginally related. This is why the views of the psychophysicist Gustave Fechner were attractive to James and why he devoted an entire chapter in *A Pluralistic Universe* to an exposition of those views.

Fechner posited a hierarchy of overlapping souls or consciousnesses from God down through an earth-soul to unobservable subconscious states. The aspect of Fechner's hypothesis with which James is most concerned, and the one most relevant to the world of overlapping fields suggested throughout this essay, "is the belief that the more inclusive forms of consciousness are in part constituted by the more limited forms" without being "the mere sum of the more limited forms." There might, then, be a wider field with purposes and forms which are unable to be known by our narrower fields. Thus, while we are closed against its world, that world might be open to us. That larger world might be a great reservoir, pooling and preserving human memories, and when the threshold lowers in exceptional individuals, information not available to ordinary consciousness may leak in (PU, 78, 135).

One can immediately see the attractiveness of this hypothesis for anyone attempting to suggest the plausibility of personal immortality. If we are here and now constituted in part by and partly constituting a consciousness of immeasurably wider, perhaps everlasting, life, then a postdeath continuing relation with such a consciousness cannot be immediately and with certainty ruled out. We may, unknown to us, be already living "within" this larger life, and certain of those fields now constituting the individual self may already be playing a role in and in a sense constituting this larger life. Hence, when some of the fields or relations now constituting personal selves dissolve, it is possible that other presently constituting fields might be continued in existence through the activity of this larger self. The description James gives of Fechner's view of our relation to the earth's soul is along such lines:

Fechner likens our individual persons on the earth unto so many sense-organs of the earth's soul. We add to its perceptive life so long as our own life lasts. It absorbs our perceptions, just as they occur, into its larger sphere of knowledge, and combines them with other data there. When one of us dies, it is as if an eye of the world were closed, for all perceptive contributions from that particular quarter cease. But the memories and conceptual relations that have
spun themselves round the perceptions of that person remain in the larger earth-life as distinct as ever, and form new relations and grow and develop throughout all the future, in the same way in which our own distinct objects of thought, once stored in memory, form new relations and develop throughout our whole finite life. (PU, 79)

In a fascinating, if somewhat obscure, passage at the end of his short essay "How Two Minds Can Know One Thing," James maintains that the character of "pure experience" is such that "speculations like Fechner's of an Earth-soul, of wider spans of consciousness enveloping narrow ones throughout the cosmos are . . . philosophically quite in order." These words immediately follow a passage that appears almost whimsical, given the context in which James introduces it. It emerges within the context of his effort to show that a pure experience—"pen," for example—is in itself neither physical nor mental but becomes one or the other depending on the context or relations into which it enters. I have already expressed my difficulties with this doctrine and with James's conclusion that "pure experiences . . . are, in themselves considered, so many little absolutes." Immediately following this conclusion is a passage as elusive as it is tantalizingly attractive for my purposes:

A pure experience can be postulated with any amount whatever of span or field. If it exert the retrospective and appropriate function on any other piece of experience, the latter thereby enters into its own conscious stream. And in this operation time intervals make no essential difference. After sleeping, my retrospection is as perfect as it is between two successive waking moments of my time. Accordingly, if millions of years later, a similarly retrospective experience should anyhow come to birth, my present thought would form a genuine portion of its long-span conscious life. "Form a portion," I say, but not in the sense that the two things can be entitively or substantively one—they cannot, for they are numerically discrete facts—but only in the sense that the functions of my present thought, its knowledge, its purpose, its content and "consciousness," in short, being inherited, would be continued practically unchanged. (ERE, 66–67)

James goes on to insist that if we are to accept the hypothesis of wider spans of consciousness enveloping narrower ones, the functional and entitative points of view must be distinguished. He apparently wishes to avoid a static notion of identity between the wider and narrower, which is what would follow if the minor consciousnesses were treated "as a kind of standing material of which the wider ones consist" (ERE, 67).

"CONTINUUM OF COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS"
In his later writings and with increasing confidence, James expressed the view, already present in his earliest reflective experiences, that we are not alone in the universe, that we are not the highest conscious beings: "I firmly disbelieve, myself, that our human experience is the highest form of experi-
ence extant in the universe" (P, 143). There are many worlds of consciousness of which our present consciousness is only one, and these other worlds must contain experiences that have meaning for our life. While, for the most part, our world is insulated from these other worlds, they do “become continuous at certain points, and higher energies filter in” (VRE, 408). James felt, then, that the evidence was strongly moving us “towards the belief in some form of superhuman life with which we may be in the universe as dogs and cats are in our libraries, seeing and hearing the conversation, but having no inkling of the meaning of it all” (PU, 140). Thus, despite his doubt and uneasiness concerning the various “psychic” claims, he tells us in “Final Impressions of a Psychical Researcher” that from his experience “one fixed conclusion dogmatically emerges”:

We with our lives are like islands in the sea, or like trees in the forest. . . . There is a continuum of cosmic consciousness, against which our individuality builds but accidental fences, and into which our several minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir. Our “normal” consciousness is circumscribed for adaptation to our external earthly environment, but the fence is weak in spots, and fitful influences from beyond leak in showing the otherwise unverifiable connection. Not only psychic research, but metaphysical philosophy, and speculative biology are led in their own ways to look with favor on some such “panpsychic” view of the universe as this. (MS, 204)

This passage, of course, is reminiscent of the transmission theory encountered in Human Immortality, reprising as it does the “mother-sea” metaphor. The crucial difference, however, is the metaphysical framework within which the metaphor is now suggested. To begin with, the dualism presupposed in Human Immortality is no longer operative in a metaphysics of experience that differentiates physical and mental on the basis of functions and relations rather than ultimately different modes of being. In his discussion of Fechner, James notes that for his own purposes, Fechner’s most important condition was “that the constitution of the world is identical throughout” (PU, 72). Needless to say, as indicated by the title A Pluralistic Universe, James does not mean “identical” in any monistic sense, either materialistic or idealistic. But how can reality be “identical throughout” and pluralistic at the same time? Only, I believe, if we recognize that the multiplicity of experiences constituting reality are “fields” or processive-relational complexes, constituting and constituted by other fields, continually changing and shifting and transacting in various modes of exchange. We have followed James in his later writings as he described this world of “fields within fields within fields . . .” in terms of continuous and overlapping conscious fields characterized by co-constitution, self-compounding, narrower enveloped within wider. If we remember that all fields are “centers of activity,” we also avoid the danger attached to the transmission theory, as presented in Human Immortality, of making human fields the merely passive instruments of a larger consciousness or consciousnesses. Continuous transaction is a determining
characteristic of all fields, wider and narrower, higher and lower, which enter into the constitution of reality.\textsuperscript{43} In a review essay James wrote in 1903, just such a field metaphysics is expressed rather strikingly:

The only fully complete concrete data are, however, the successive moments of our own several histories taken with their subjective personal aspect, as well as with their “objective” deliverance or “context.” After the analogy of these moments of experiences must all complete reality be conceived. Radical empiricism thus leads to the assumption of a collectivism of personal lives (which may be of any grade of complication, and superhuman or infrahuman as well as human), variously cognitive of each other, variously conative and impulsive, genuinely evolving and changing by effort and trial, and by their interaction and cumulative achievements making up the world. (CER, 443–44)\textsuperscript{44}

FIELD-SELF AS “SUBSTANTIVE-SELF”

Before shifting our focus to the “wider self” extrapolated as “God,” I would like to indicate the propriety of designating the field-self we have been describing as a “substantive-self.” Recall that the central purpose of my concern with the “self” is to show that it is possible to construct a model of the self which, while faithful to the flow of experience, is nevertheless open to a continuing existence after the cessation of some of the particular spatio-temporal fields by which it is presently constituted. I believe that the more fully developed doctrine of the self suggested here avoids both the classical Soul Substance theory and the classical empiricist or phenomenist one. The former posits a permanent principle ontologically different from and underlying or “behind” the experienced appearances or phenomena. The latter identifies the self as a “bundle” of discrete appearances or phenomena streaming into and immediately out of existence.

We have already noted that James’s doctrine of the self as the passing or perishing Thought undoubtedly lends itself to a phenomenistic interpretation. When, however, this “passing Thought” is seen as related to or continuous with or enveloped by a “more”—that is, a wider self or consciousness—at every moment, however brief, of its existence, a phenomenistic interpretation is ruled out. At the same time the experiential character of the “passing Thought” is retained, and there is no relapse into a substantialist perspective positing a shadow principle “behind” our experiences. To say, however, that there is nothing “behind” our experienced activities is not to say that these activities, as we are at any moment aware of them, exhaust the full reality of the self. For example, Freud’s “unconscious” is not “behind” or “underneath” consciousness; rather it is an alleged present-acting process “outside” the present margin of consciousness. The self at any moment, as has been repeatedly claimed, is constituted by a variety of fields or relational processes, most of which are not in “focus” but are on or “beyond” the margin or fringe of consciousness. Some can be brought within focus; others can be dis-
covered only indirectly, as in the case of cells or organs. Mystics claim that a self or consciousness of which we are ordinarily unaware has come into focus—moved from the margin, or beyond, of consciousness to the center.

James maintained in his *Principles of Psychology* that he could dispense with the Soul Substance theory because his theory of the “passing Thought” accounted for such features of the self as unity, identity, continuity—which had traditionally been the justification for positing the reality of the “soul.” But James never held that the notion of “substance” was a totally empty or useless one, for in his earliest and last writings he insisted that the category of substance expressed an indispensable feature not only of the self but of reality. “To say that phenomena inhere in a Substance,” he tells us, in the *Principles*, “is at bottom only to record one’s protest against the notion that the bare existence of the phenomena is the total truth. A phenomenon would not itself be, we insist, unless there were something *more* than the phenomenon” (*PP*, II:328). But even earlier, in an unpublished essay written probably around 1874, James affirms the utility of “substance.” This essay, “Against Nihilism,” was a critique of Chauncey Wright’s positivism, which reduced the world “to an assemblage of particular phenomena having no ulterior connections—ideal, substantial or dynamic.” According to Perry, James viewed such positivism as a “sort of philosophical ‘nihilism,’ affirming that beyond the particular phenomena there is ‘nothing’” (*TC*, I:524). The central criticism of “nihilism” and the primary justification for the category of substance is that the former denies “continuity,” while the latter recognizes it. The test of substantial reality, according to James, is “dynamic connection with other existences.” Which is to say that “a thing only has being at all as it enters in some way into the being of other things, or constitutes part of a universe or organism. . . . As to their *being*, things are continuous, and so far as this is what people mean when they affirm a substance, substance must be held to exist.” James is aware that something more than this is usually meant, such as “an other and a primordial *thing* on a plane behind that of the phenomena, but numerically additional to them.” But James insists that all he means by “substance” is the “unity which comes from the phenomena being continuous with each other” (*TC*, I:525).45

The emphasis upon continuity, as we have already seen, did not diminish but intensified as James’s metaphysics matured. While “substance” does not become a central term in his metaphysical writings it is significant that in his last work, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, he touches again upon the theme of “Against Nihilism”:

> What difference in practical experience is it supposed to make that we have each a personal substantial principle? This difference, that we can remember and appropriate our past, calling it “mine.” What difference that in this book there is a substantial principle? This, that certain optical and tactile sensations cling permanently together in a cluster. The fact that *certain perceptual experiences do seem to belong together* is thus all that the word substance means. (*SPP*, 66)
James then goes on to “inquire whether instead of being a principle, the ‘oneness’ affirmed may not merely be a name like ‘substance,’ descriptive of the fact that certain specific and verifiable connections are found among the parts of the experiential flux” (SPP, 66).

In keeping with the pragmatic evaluation of all concepts, then, the designation of the self or reality as “substantive” is important only insofar as it keeps us aware of or avoids closing us off from important dimensions of experience. This is why in any Jamesian consideration of personal immortality, it is important to insist on the substantive character of the self while rejecting the traditional Soul Substance theory. We have earlier seen that in his critique of the soul theory, James rejects the argument that the soul is of practical importance because its alleged simplicity and substantiality are the grounds for inferring immortality. In a passage already cited, James on “practical” grounds rejects this argument:

The Soul, however, when closely scrutinized, guarantees no immortality of a sort we care for. The enjoyment of the atom-like simplicity of their substance in saecula saeculorum would not to most people seem a consummation devoutly to be wished. The substance must give rise to a stream of consciousness continuous with the present stream, in order to arouse our hope, but of this the persistence of substance per se offers no guarantee. (PP, I:330)

It is, of course, this “stream of consciousness continuous with the present stream” that has been stressed in the doctrine of a flowing field-self, and it is this characteristic that is the experiential ground for any pragmatic extrapolation of personal immortality.

In The Principles of Psychology, James is polemically engaged with the rationalists and hence concerned to underline the limitations of a substance view of the self. In the essay “The Sentiment of Rationality,” however, he chides the antishubstantalist empiricists for failing to recognize an extremely important function of “Substance”: namely, to fulfill the “demands of expectancy.” Consider “the notion of immortality. . . . What is this but a way of saying that the determination of expectancy is the essential factor of rationality?” He agrees with Mill and the other empiricists that nothing is, or need be, added to the description of past sensational facts by positing an inexperienced substratum. “But with regard to the facts yet to come the case is different. It does not follow that if substance may be dropped from our conception of the irrecoverably past, it need be an equally empty complication to our notions of the future.” James is insisting here that “desire to have expectancy defined” is so deep and central to human life “that no philosophy will definitively triumph which in an emphatic manner denies the possibility of gratifying this need” (WB, 69–70). He does not develop this point further in this essay, but it is clear here and elsewhere that belief in personal immortality is one—though by no means the only—expression of this expectancy. In an example not given by James, we might suggest that any one
who struggles for the realization or fulfillment of a future goal or purpose—achieving a degree, writing a book, painting a picture—manifests such expectancy. Every person so engaged firmly believes that however much he or she may change in the interim and however long the interim, the person who experiences the realization will be “substantively” the same as the person who initiated the process or processes that led to it.46

A comparison of the soul theory with the substantive field-self theory reveals obvious similarities and significant differences. Both claim to account for unity, continuity, identity, endurance, individuality, and interiority. The substantive-self, however, unlike the soul, is not a principle in itself; it is not a nonempirical principle belonging to an ontologically different order of being; and it has no reality-in-itself apart from its constituting fields. The implications for immortality are again similar but different. While personal immortality is possible for both, it is a “positive” possibility for the soul. The most that can be claimed for the substantive-self is that it has a “negative” possibility; that is, it does not positively exclude the possibility. Since the soul is allegedly simple, it is “naturally” incorruptible; and though it could be annihilated by God, we can logically and rationally infer its immortality. Since the substantive-self is an ever changing field dependent for its reality at every moment upon the fields that constitute it, there is no logical necessity for it to continue upon the cessation of those constituting fields most evident to our experience. Inasmuch as one of its here-and-now constituting relations is with a wider field or consciousness, however, the possibility cannot be ruled out that this wider field will maintain the human self after the cessation of other constituting fields. It is not legitimate to logically infer such continuing existence, because such existence depends upon the unknown purposes of this wider consciousness, which may or may not include the continuing existence of those narrower fields that are now constitutive with it. If there are other experiential grounds, however, for believing that these narrower fields, along with their ideals, purposes, strivings and the like, are included within the purposes of the wider consciousness, then the substantive field-self as herein described presents no logical or experiential obstacle to the realization of such purposes.