CHAPTER 6

James: Self and God

But life, life as such, he protested inwardly—it was not enough. How could one be content with the namelessness of mere energy, with the less than individuality of a power, that for all its mysterious divineness, was yet unconscious, beneath good and evil?

—Aldous Huxley
Eyeless in Gaza

Nothing is more reasonable than to suppose that if there be anything personal at the bottom of things, the way we behave to it must affect the way it behaves to us.

—F. C. S. Schiller
“Axioms as Postulates”

The general hypothesis governing this essay is that a plausible belief in personal immortality depends upon a self open to continuing existence beyond the spatial and temporal parameters of what is usually referred to as the “present life.” A key step in the direction of supporting this hypothesis has been taken through the establishment of a field-self that participates in and is constituted by a range of fields, some of which can be designated “wider” in relation to the identifying “center” of the individual self. Following James, I have described these wider fields in terms of a superhuman consciousness or consciousnesses, delaying till now a more detailed specification of such wider consciousnesses. This brings us, of course, into the thorny and to some extent impossible question of “God.” However tentative and minimalist a philosophy of God may emerge, there is no avoiding some consideration of this question, inasmuch as I wish to argue that the possibility of an immortal self depends upon the graciousness of God.

For many—if not most—believers in personal immortality, it is sufficient to believe in a divine promise of eternal life, avoiding any and all unsettling difficulties or questions by taking refuge in the “mystery” of God. To some degree, of course, all God-believers must take refuge in mystery. But in an essay in philosophical theology, it is incumbent upon me, as a minimum, to indicate a view of God that is reasonably consistent with my controlling
metaphysical assumptions, as well as with the view of the self already presented.

In this effort to construct a God-hypothesis, I will continue to utilize James’s ideas and approach without claiming to present James’s definitive doctrine of God. Rather, I would like to suggest what might be more accurately described as a “Jamesian” God. In doing so, I will draw directly on James where I deem him useful, explicating points that may be only implicit in his expressed doctrine and extrapolating a view of God from a view of reality and experience fundamentally consistent but not totally identical with that of James. While I may incidentally allude to some of the difficulties and technical problems attached to James’s doctrine of God, I will for the most part bypass them in an attempt to construct a God-hypothesis that allows for and is supportive of a belief in personal immortality.

Historically, all doctrines of God have emerged from and been bound up with a particular view of reality having profound implications for the way in which life ought to be lived. Thus, as one commentator has correctly noted:

For James, the mere question as to whether to believe in God has momentous practical bearings, regardless of whether the believer is a practicing Christian, Jew, or whatever. This is necessarily so because the question of God is not just a question about the existence of another being; it is a question concerning the nature of the universe, not only taken as a whole, but taken as its individual parts as well.¹

As noted earlier, I am presupposing metaphysical assumptions significantly different from those of classical philosophy, and any view of God consistent with the metaphysical assumptions of pragmatism will be significantly, though not totally, different from the view of God drawn from the metaphysical assumptions of classical thought. More specifically, as I shall later indicate, a radically processive-relational world such as that presupposed by pragmatism is not congenial to the traditional view of God as immutable, omniscient, and omnipotent.

I am further assuming that all language, including God-language, is historically, culturally, and perspectively conditioned. A crucial corollary of this assumption is the rejection of any simple correspondence or representative view of language; hence, there can be no claim to describe God as he is in himself. All God-language is symbolic in the Tillichian sense of pointing “beyond itself while participating in that to which it points.”² We cannot evaluate our symbols, then, on the basis of some alleged correspondence with “objective reality” but only on their serviceability for human life. This does not mean, however, that what is being suggested is an unqualified subjectivism. The pragmatic perspective rejects both classical objectivism and modern subjectivism³ when the former is understood as claiming that our language represents an object (God) as it is in itself, independently of the
human knower, and the latter is understood as reducing the reality of God to nothing but a projection of the human psyche. 4

James has frequently been misunderstood as presenting a subjectivistic view of God. As Ralph Barton Perry notes, however, James “insisted upon retaining not only the ideality but also the actuality of God—as a conscious power beyond, with which one may come into beneficent contact.” 5 James himself argued, in a letter to Charles A. Strong, that God could be both existent and ideal: “I do not believe it to be healthy minded to nurse the notion that ideals are self-sufficient and require no actualization to make us content. . . . Ideals ought to aim at the transformation of reality—no less!” (LWJ, II:269–70).

Perry points out that James was not “prepared to abandon the objectivity of God,” however much he emphasized the vital, personal, and pragmatic features of religion (TC, II:348). Thus when James says, “I myself believe that the evidence for God lies primarily in inner personal experiences” (P, 56), he is not to be understood as reducing the reality of God to human experience. Nevertheless, he does hold that any claims made about God must be grounded in and ultimately evaluated in terms of human experience. Given the ambiguity in James’s use of “immediate experience” such that not everything in immediate experience is “immediate,” however, the exploration of experience takes us beyond the realm of “pure immediacy.” Throughout this essay I have designated such exploratory activity “extrapolation,” which is neither intuition nor inference, neither immediate awareness nor deduced conclusion, but may incorporate characteristics of both these modes of activity. Remember, extrapolation is a speculative or imaginative endeavor that must proceed from data given in experience, and the extrapolated conclusion must be reasonably consistent with and potentially enriching of the experience from which it began.

While James does not formally speak of extrapolation, I feel that the approach he makes to the God-question is best described as such. “God,” for James, is affirmed by a belief or overbelief, and the obvious question is what these have to do with any extrapolating. I would suggest that just as thinkers within the classical tradition were not content simply to affirm a belief in God but attempted to construct rational arguments for God’s existence, so one making a pragmatic approach must attempt to show the “reasonableness” of God belief by means of extrapolation. Thus, extrapolation would seem to fall somewhere between a blind, emotive faith and an absolutely compelling logical argument. The rejection of rational arguments for the existence of God, therefore, is not to be equated with a radical exclusion of “reason” from the sphere of faith. Reflective believers must attempt to show that faith in God is grounded in experience and that anything we can legitimately say about this God must not be in fundamental conflict with this experience but must have the possibility of expanding and deepening it. Further, faith in God must be demonstrably in harmony with other experi-
ential claims. "The truth of 'God,'" James maintains, "has to run the gauntlet of all our other truths. It is on trial by them and they on trial by it" (P, 56). 6

James is in the broad Kantian tradition that denies the possibility of proving or disproving the existence of God, while leaving the door open for belief or faith in God. It is not that James patronizes or scoffs at efforts to construct absolutely certain arguments for God's existence. Nor does he consider it necessary to "discredit philosophy by laborious criticism of its arguments," since as a matter of history it fails to prove its pretension to be "'objectively' convincing" or universally valid. Philosophers do what all humans do—attempt to find arguments for their convictions, "for indeed it [philosophy] has to find them." In brief, then, the arguments serve to confirm the beliefs of believers but are useless for atheists (VRE, 344).

Of course, James's reasons for rejecting the classical arguments go much deeper than simply noting that they lack universal acceptance. The metaphysics and epistemology to which he is committed exclude the possibility of any absolute proofs, including those relating to God. All arguments for the existence of God—explicitly, the "design argument"—presuppose, assume, or consider self-evident that we live in an essentially ordered world, whereas James views order and disorder as "purely human conventions." Moreover, he contends, "there are in reality infinitely more things 'unadapted' to each other in this world than there are things 'adapted'; infinitely more things with irregular relations than with regular relations between them. But we look for the regular kind of thing exclusively, and ingeniously discover and preserve it in our memory" (VRE, 346n.). Rationalism, then, is just as inadequate when arguing for God and religion as when arguing against them. This is in keeping, of course, with James's contention that the whole of our mental life exceeds that part accounted for by rationalism. "If you have intuitions at all," he tells us, "they come from a deeper level of your nature than the loquacious level which rationalism inhabits" (VRE, 67).

I have already cited James to the effect that the "evidence for God lies primarily in inner personal experiences" (P, 56). 7 It is important, however, to indicate the character of that evidence so as to avoid any interpretation that would lead to a claim that experience, even mystical experience, "proves" the existence of God. I have also called attention to James's contention that a range and variety of experiences suggest a "sense of reality" present to human consciousness that is deeper and more general than any reality revealed by the special and particular senses (VRE, 55, 58–59). Among such experiences are distinctively religious experiences within which, for those who have them, the objects of their belief are present in "the form of quasi-sensible realities directly apprehended" rather than in "the form of mere conceptions which their intellect accepts as true" (VRE, 59). The most heightened form of such experiences are those reported by mystics, but respectful as James is of mystical experience, he explicitly denies that it can
be employed to draw conclusions binding upon all reflective and reasonable persons. For the individual who has the experience, it is sufficient. If the mystic can live by it, and his or her life manifests fruitful consequences flowing from it, no one has a right to denigrate this experience. At the same time, the mystic is not entitled to claim that others, lacking such experiences, must accept the mystic’s interpretation (VRE, 336): “Mystical states indeed wield no authority due simply to their being mystical states. But the higher ones among them point in directions to which the religious sentiments even of non-mystical men incline. They tell of the supremacy of the ideal, of vastness, of union, of safety, and of rest. They offer us hypotheses, which we may voluntarily ignore, but which we as thinkers cannot possibly upset” (VRE, 339).

I wish to suggest that it is the richness of the experience of those who get singled out as mystics and the “germ of mysticism” in all of us that serve as the ground and stimulus for extrapolating the reality of God. It is the task of philosophical extrapolation to winnow out those features of mystical experience that offer the greatest possibilities for human life. This is, of course, a never ending process whose conclusions will always be tentative and in need of further development and refinement. It means a continuing evaluation of the fruits of our own experiences as well as those of others. While we cannot avoid employing “some sort of a standard of theological probability of our own whenever we assume to estimate the fruits of other men’s religion, yet this very standard has been begotten out of the drift of common life” (VRE, 265). Elsewhere, James noted that the “gold-dust” of religious experiences must be extricated from the “quartz-sand” (“superstitions and wild-growing over-beliefs of all sorts”). Yet he cautions against trying to short-circuit this process of extrication, for the historical results of such short-circuiting are “thin inferior abstractions” such as “the hollow unreal god of scholastic theology, or the unintelligible pantheistic monster” of Absolute Idealism (PU, 142-43). Philosophy has the task of eliminating through comparison the “local and accidental” features that inevitably accompany all “spontaneous religious constructions.” Historic incrustations can be removed from both dogma and worship; by utilizing “the results of natural science, philosophy can also eliminate doctrines that are now known to be scientifically absurd or incongruous”; and “sifting out in this way unworthy formulations, she [philosophy] can leave a residuum of conceptions that at least are possible. With these she can deal as hypotheses, testing them in all the manners, whether negative or positive, by which hypotheses are ever tested” (VRE, 359).

Now it must be made clear that in calling for extricating, sifting out, and refining our God-reflections, James is not suggesting—even as an ideal—that we should strive to formulate one definition of God to which all humans ought to subscribe. Nowhere is James’s pluralism more in evidence than in his denial “that the lives of all men should show identical religious elements.” He insists:
The divine can mean no single quality, it must mean a group of qualities, by being champions of which in alternation, different men may all find worthy missions. Each attitude being a syllable in human nature’s total message, it takes the whole of us to spell the meaning out completely. . . . We must frankly recognize the fact that we live in partial systems, and that the parts are not interchangeable in the spiritual life. (VRE, 384)8

The field model employed throughout this essay is, I believe, eminently congenial to this pluralistic view of the divine. It involves diverse and overlapping fields, thereby allowing for various modes of mutual participation no one of which exhausts any field, wide or narrow. The divine life, understood as the widest field, enriches and is enriched by the variety of fields with which it is related. Thus, the plurality of religions may not be a necessary evil to be endured until the one true religion is formed; rather this plurality may be the necessary and only means by which the richness of the divine life can be lived and communicated. Needless to say, this does not diminish the need for and importance of abolishing those features of particular religions that lead to destructive relations with those belonging to other communities. The point being advanced, however, is that plurality in religion is no more destructive in itself than is plurality in art, literature, or music.9

A variation on James’s doctrine that the evidence for God is found in our inner experience is that belief in God is a response to inner needs: our belief in God “is not due to our logic, but to our emotional wants” (TC, I:493). It would seem that there are at least five distinct kinds of needs—logical, moral, esthetic, practical, and religious.10 Ideally, perhaps, a fully realized personal life should incorporate all of these, but one that does so is a very rare phenomenon; the more usual situation is that there is a decided difference, at least as to which is primary, in needs among individuals. In his essay “Is Life Worth Living?” James argues that science is a response to a need every bit as much as morality or religion is. Without claiming to know the ultimate origin of such needs, James nevertheless insists that there is hardly a scientific law or fact “which was not first sought after . . . to gratify an inner need.” He goes on to say, “The inner need of believing that this world of nature is a sign of something more spiritual and eternal than itself is just as strong and authoritative in those who feel it, as the inner need of uniform laws of causation ever can be in a professionally scientific head” (WB, 51).

While James never claims that the need for God is sufficient to establish God’s existence, he does maintain that such a need at least suggests the possibility of such a reality, for “if needs of ours outrun the visible universe, why may not that be a sign that an invisible universe is there?” (WB, 51). Further, James contends that the only determination we can make concerning the nature of God depends upon the kind of beings we are. In an early essay, “Reflex Action and Theism,” James argues for a correlation between God and the human mind. He first notes that many writers were currently arguing that the doctrine of reflex action had given “the coup de grâce to the
superstition of a God," while in an earlier time "reflex action and all other harmonies between the organism and the world were held to prove God." Sidestepping the issue of proof or disproof, James limits himself to showing that a God, whether existent or not, is at all events the kind of being which, if he did exist, would form the most adequate possible object for minds framed like our own to conceive as lying at the root of the universe. My thesis . . . is this: that some outward reality of a nature defined as God's nature must be defined, is the only ultimate object that is at the same time rational and possible for the human mind's contemplation. Anything short of God is not rational, anything more than God is not possible, if the human mind be in truth the triadic structure of impression, reflection, and reaction which we at the outset allowed. (WB, 93)

Though James in his later writings refines his view of the human mind, he continues to the end to speak of God only in terms of human needs. In The Varieties of Religious Experience, he states: "The gods we stand by are the gods we need and can use, the gods whose demands on us are reinforcements of our demands on ourselves and on one another" (VRE, 266). Further, as we change, so will our conceptions of God, for "when we cease to admire or approve what the definition of a deity implies, we end by deeming that deity incredible" (VRE, 264–65).

In a later section I will develop more fully this point of the relation between human change and change in conceptions of God, and perhaps in God himself. For the moment, let me say a word about an obvious objection to James's tying our faith in God to our concrete needs: is he not, one might ask, simply reflecting the historical and cultural conditions of the Victorian age in which he lived? While a description of the psychological needs of James and his brother and sister Victorians would more often than not involve a need for some kind of reality beyond the ordinary, how can we be sure that at a later time such needs will not be nonexistent?

The first part of the response to the objection, of course, is that neither James nor anyone else can "be sure" that these needs will always be present. But if a situation should emerge (as it already has emerged for some) in which such needs generally are not present, then there would no longer be even a question of the existence or nonexistence of God. This, however, would only confirm James's view that faith in God is inseparably bound up with concrete, specific human needs. The abstract possibility of the disappearance of such needs would not be, for James, the decisive issue. While conceding, of course, that all conceptions, including those of science, are historically and culturally conditioned, James does not accept that this entails a passive skepticism or a destructive relativism. There are good grounds, though never absolutely certain ones, for believing that certain features of the human condition will continue to exist in some form as long as humans exist. James would contend that the history of religions indicates something of those features, however vaguely and inadequately. Further, he believes, and can supply "justifying
reasons" for his belief, that religious needs and the efforts to satisfy them have profoundly enriched and deepened human life. It is possible that these needs and efforts will disappear in the future, but if they do—James would confidently hold—the result will be a radically diminished human situation. It might be argued, analogously, that we cannot be absolutely certain that in a future world the long-standing, so far universal, and pervasive need for art in its various forms will not also disappear. Is it possible for anyone to positively conceive of such a world as other than radically impoverished?

Whatever difficulties attach to religious claims, James is insistent upon the important difference they introduce into the world. The difference, of course, is most significant in the modes of living to which they give rise which, were they fundamentally the same as those brought forth by naturalism, would be rendered worthless.

The whole defense of religious faith hinges upon action. If the action required or inspired by the religious hypothesis is in no way different from that dictated by the naturalistic hypothesis, then religious faith is a pure superfluity, better pruned away, and controversy about its legitimacy is a piece of idle trifling, unworthy of serious minds. I myself believe, of course, that the religious hypothesis gives to the world an expression which specifically determines our reactions, and makes them in a large part unlike what they may be on a purely naturalistic scheme of belief. (WB, 32n.)

Committed as James was to modern science and Darwinism, he nevertheless was unsympathetic to the antireligious conclusions that many were drawing from them. He saw the human community, if devoid of religion, as faced with a deenergizing anxiety bordering on despair, which could be confronted at best only with a kind of stoic resignation:

For naturalism, fed on recent cosmological speculations, mankind is in a position similar to that of a set of people living on a frozen lake, surrounded by cliffs over which there is no escape, yet knowing that little by little the ice is melting, and the inevitable day drawing near when the last film of it will disappear, and to be drowned ignominiously will be the human creature's portion. The merrier the skating, the warmer and more sparkling the sun by day, and the ruddier the bonfires at night, the more poignant the sadness which one must take in the meaning of the total situation. (VRE, 120)

Religious experiences must ultimately be judged on the basis of "that element or quality in them which we can meet nowhere else" (VRE, 44). If the universal message of religion were to be expressed in a single phrase it would be: "All is not vanity in this Universe, whatever the appearances may suggest" (VRE, 38–39). The empiricist may well sneer at this "as being empty through its universality." We may be unable to meet the empiricist's demand that we "cash it by its concrete filling ... for nothing can well be harder." James goes on to say, however, that "as a practical fact its meaning is so distinct that when used as a premiss in a life, a whole character may be
imparted to the life by it. It, like so many universal concepts, is a truth of orientation, serving not to define an end, but to determine a direction" (TC, I:503; also TC, II:448).

It would be a grave misunderstanding of James's position to view it as restricting the implications of religion to human experience with no consequences for the larger world. When the world is interpreted religiously, it is not the “materialistic world over again, with an altered expression”; it must be a differently constituted world such that “different events can be expected in it, different conduct must be required” (VRE, 408). Hence, James considers the view of Absolute Idealism—“refined supernaturalism”—incredible because it claims that the existence of God in no way alters the complexion of any of the concrete particulars of experience (VRE, 411). A God who would make no difference in such experiences or who would make a difference only at the end of the world would be meaningless and merely verbal. Insofar, however, as our conceptions of God “do involve such definite experiences, God means something for us, and may be real” (CER, 425).

When asked where the differences due to God's existence are in fact to be found, James confesses that he has “no hypothesis to offer beyond what the phenomenon of ‘prayerful communion’ . . . immediately suggests.” Here he refers again to that “wider world of being” and the subliminal self that were discussed in the last chapter. God can be viewed as the symbol for those “transmundane energies” that seem to produce immediate effects in the natural world with which our experience is continuous (VRE, 411-12). James notes that petitional prayer is only one mode of prayer and a narrow one at that. Prayer in the “wider sense as meaning every kind of inward communion or conversation with the power recognized as divine” remains untouched by scientific criticism and “is the very soul and essence of religion.” James concedes that if nothing is transacted through such prayer, “if the world is in no whit different for its having taken place,” then religion is the delusion that “materialists and atheists have always said it was” (VRE, 365-67).14

Religion, then, stands or falls “by the persuasion that effects of some sort genuinely do occur” (VRE, 367). According to James, the instinctive belief of mankind is that “God is real since he produces real effects.” Hence, “we and God have business with each other; and in opening ourselves to his influence our deepest destiny is fulfilled. The universe, at those parts of it which our personal being constitutes, takes a turn for the worse or for the better in proportion as each of us fulfills or evades God’s demands” (VRE, 406-7). Inasmuch as it produces real effects, James feels that we are not philosophically justified in designating the “unseen or mystical world unreal.” Communion with this world results in work being done upon our finite personalities that turns us into new human beings, and consequences in the way of conduct ensue in the “natural world upon our regenerative change” (VRE, 406).
Faith in God, therefore, cannot be restricted to a claim about and effects upon the individual believer or even upon human experience. Only when faith says something about reality, such as “God’s existence is the guarantee of an ideal order that shall be permanently preserved,” does faith “get wholly free from the first immediate subjective experience, and bring a real hypothesis into play.” James contends that a good scientific hypothesis, in order to be sufficiently prolific, must include properties other “than those of the phenomenon it is immediately invoked to explain.” For this reason, “God, meaning only what enters into the religious man’s experience of union, falls short of being an hypothesis of this more useful order. He needs to enter into wider cosmic relations in order to justify the subject’s absolute confidence and peace” (VRE, 407).

Before attempting to spell out a bit more fully the characteristics of a Jamesian God, I would like to touch briefly upon a complex and sensitive issue: the question of whether religion supplies something more than morality. The radical question of life, for James, is “whether this be at bottom a moral or an unmoral universe” (WB, 84). James, of course, opts for its being a moral universe, and its being so does not depend on there being a God:

Yet though faith in God does not constitute the difference between morality and no morality, it does make a difference between moralities. A solely humanistic morality does not have the potential for energizing human beings to their fullest: “In a merely human world without a God, the appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulating power” (WB, 160). According to James, it is the difference between the easygoing and the strenuous mood that makes the deepest practical difference in the moral life of humans (WB, 159). Unfortunately, he weakens his case by implying that the strenuous mood is found only among religious believers, leaving himself open to the objection “that neither James nor anybody else has ever offered empirical evidence for the assertion that unbelievers lead less active or strenuous lives than believers.” James admits that “the capacity for the strenuous mood probably lies slumbering in every man,” but he goes on to suggest that without belief in God this capacity will remain unfulfilled (WB, 160–61). In my opinion, his case would have been stronger had he made a weaker claim: that is, that the overwhelming number of those who have manifested and are manifesting the strenuous mood are energized by a religious belief involving either God or a God-surrogate such as art, science, or posterity. More speculatively, and as an expression of faith, he could then
have argued that these surrogates are not likely, in the long run, to continue to energize any substantial segment of the human community unless they are related directly or indirectly to a reality more encompassing and enduring than that manifest by the quotidian world.

James expresses the inadequacy of any naturalistic or humanistic ideal strikingly, if a bit harshly, in the following passage:

Many of us... would openly laugh at the very idea of the strenuous mood being awakened in us by those claims of remote posterity which constitute the last appeal of the religion of humanity. We do not love these men of the future keenly enough; and we love them less the more we hear of their evolutionized perfection, their high average longevity and education, their freedom from war and crime, their relative immunity from pain and zymotic disease, and all their other negative superiorities. This is all too finite, we say; we see too well the vacuum beyond. It lacks the note of infinitude and mystery, and may all be dealt with in the don't-care mood. (WB, 160)

I will touch upon this theme of posterity-immortality in a later section, but we must first consider the kind of God which, on Jamesian terms, would be adequate to energize humans to their fullest potential.

Recall my controlling metaphysical assumption that all realities are structured after the fashion of a "field" and, further, that fields are processive-relational realities; hence, the divine field, like all fields, is continually changing in its relations to other fields. This in no way suggests that the character and mode of this change is identical with those of any or all the fields designated nondivine. At the same time, however different the divine reality is from human reality, it cannot be totally different. The grounds for extrapolating the distinct character of the divine field must be found in the human field. Following James, I would insist that any God in which we can properly believe must be a God we can live with, and "live" must be understood actively rather than passively. In keeping with the pragmatic perspective, any speculative or extrapolative expression of God will be evaluated in terms of its enhancement, enrichment, and stimulation of human life—actual or potential. Hence, a God who leaves nothing significant for human beings to do, who absorbs human individuality, who trivializes human freedom, is neither consistent with James's metaphysical assumptions nor worthy of human belief and effort.

If one takes seriously the development of human consciousness and experience, one cannot remain content with the view of God that served an earlier moment of human history. As James puts it, perhaps a bit too simply:

What with science, idealism, and democracy, our own imagination has grown to need a God of an entirely different temperament from that Being interested exclusively in dealing out personal favors, with whom our ancestors were so contented. Smitten as we are with the vision of social righteousness, a God indifferent to everything but adulation, and full of partiality for his individual favorites, lacks an essential element of largeness; and even the best professional
sainthood of former centuries, pent in as it is to such a conception, seems to us curiously shallow and unedifying. (VRE, 277)

Now neither James nor I in any way deny that indispensable insights concerning the divine have been realized in earlier moments of human experience, and continue to orient and energize us. Consider, for instance, the long, rich, and varied tradition concerning the priority of the “eternal.” Of course, it is not possible to affirm the radical processive character of reality, and the pervasive feature of time and the metaphysical dualism between the temporal and the eternal. Still, what is needed is not a simplistic substitution of a nonnuanced temporal for a static eternal; rather, a way must be found or created to deepen our grasp of both the temporal and eternal such that both will be enriched. “A nameless unheimlichkeit,” James maintains, “comes over us at the thought of there being nothing eternal in our final purposes, in the objects of our loves and aspirations which are our deepest energies” (WB, 71).

While not pretending to do it here, I wish to stress that the traditional attribute of the eternity of God must be accounted for within any viable pragmatic-processive philosophy of God. It is quite evident that a God who could possibly cease to be would be radically inadequate with reference to that human need for the “eternal.” This kind of “temporal” God would render impossible that trust and confidence which has characterized the relation of the human to the divine in the deepest and richest moments of religious experience. Indeed, with such a God it would be frivolous to speak of “salvation,” for a God who cannot save himself can hardly save others. Thus the only kind of God who would meet a profound human need and in whom humans can believe must be one who is eternal or everlasting.

It does not follow, however, that God must be eternally or everlasting the same. Divine love, for example, is eternal, but its eternality does not exclude its expansion and enrichment. For these, however, God needs other beings who do not share his eternality but who come to be as a consequence—in part, at least—of the ever growing divine love. This touches upon the essential relational character of God, which is particularly important for any personal immortality extrapolations. But before considering this feature, I must explore James’s “pluralistic pantheism.”

PLURALISTIC PANTHEISM
There would appear to be three general versions of God and the world, with numerous variations. The oldest and most persistent, of course, views God as eternal and self-sufficient. In the West, at least, this has taken two forms—traditional theism in which God creates the world ex nihilo, and post-Kantian absolutism in which God or the Absolute is the fully realized, all-knowing ground of the world. A second view, greatly influenced by the growing evidence that all reality is evolving, speculates that God is evolving or
emerging out of the eternal world processes. While this view has attracted a few sophisticated philosophers, for obvious reasons it has not been attractive to those with explicit religious concerns. The third general view, also greatly influenced by evolutionary theories and modern and contemporary science, extrapolates a God as coeternal but not identical with a plurality of processes that are in part constituted by and constitute the divine. Since the relation between God and these world processes is ever changing, God also is ever changing. The divine change, however, does not exclude such eternal aims as love, harmony, and unity. These aims, it is important to note, cannot be realized by God alone but depend in part for their realization upon the cooperative endeavor of at least some of the processes coexisting with God. The most systematically developed mode of this third general view is found in those process theologies whose dominant influence is Alfred North Whitehead. It should be evident, and I hope will become more so, that a Jamesian philosophy of God is also a variant of this view.

It is in his *Pluralistic Universe* that the metaphysical ground for James's version of God is most explicitly developed. This work was originally delivered as a series of lectures at Manchester College, Oxford, in 1907. While the principal target of the lectures was the philosophical absolutism that dominated late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century philosophy, Richard Bernstein quite correctly notes that James gives us "nothing less than a critique of Western philosophic thought" (*PU*, xxiv). Some of the more specific and semitechnical criticisms are somewhat dated, inasmuch as the "Absolute" is no longer at the center of the philosophical stage; nevertheless, a brief review of James's arguments is useful for my purposes because they orient us in relation to the crucial elements that must be incorporated into the Jamesian philosophy of God, elements that I hold indispensable for a viable belief in personal immortality.

As a recent insightful commentator has noted, "Intimacy was the principle of order in James's hierarchy of universes from 1904 on." 17 Nowhere is the importance and centrality of "intimacy" more evident than in *A Pluralistic Universe*. 18 James first distinguishes materialistic from spiritualistic philosophies, giving short shrift to the former because it defines the world in such a way as to leave the human "as a sort of outside passenger or alien" (*PU*, 16). He then differentiates two species of spiritualism—dualistic theism and monistic pantheism. While not denying all intimacy to dualistic theism, James maintains that a "higher reach of intimacy" is suggested by pantheistic idealism insofar as it makes "us entitatively one with God" (*PU*, 16). He faults dualistic theism because, picturing God and his creation as entities distinct from each other, [it] still leaves the human subject outside of the deepest reality in the universe. God is from eternity complete, it says, and sufficient unto himself; he throws off the world by a free act and as an extraneous substance, and he throws off man as a third substance, extraneous to both the world and himself.* (PU*, 16–17)
Such a view renders us foreigners—outsiders, as it were—in relation to God. What James finds lacking here is the "strictly social relation" of reciprocity, since while God's action can affect us, "he can never be affected by our reaction" (PU, 17). The "theological machinery" of our ancestors is no longer serviceable for a human imagination formed by "the vaster vistas which scientific evolutionism has opened and the rising tide of social democratic ideals." The "older monarchical theism" has been rendered obsolete; "the place of the divine in the world must be more organic and intimate" (PU, 18).

As always for James, any speculative claim must be evaluated in terms of its consequences for concrete living. Thus the pragmatic "difference between living against a background of foreignness and one of intimacy means the difference between a general habit of wariness and one of trust." James suggests that this is really a social difference, "for after all, the common socius of us all is the great universe whose children we are." If we are materialistic, "we must be suspicious of this socius, cautious, tense, on guard. If spiritualistic, we may give way, embrace, and keep no ultimate fear" (PU, 19). Insofar, then, as the spiritualistic interpretations of reality give our life and actions a depth and richness absent in materialism, he opts for the former. By the same token, he rejects dualistic theism in favor of the "pantheistic field of vision, the vision of God as the indwelling divine rather than the external creator, and of human life as part and parcel of that deep reality" (PU, 19).

James is convinced that only "some kind of an immanent or pantheistic deity working in things rather than above them" is congenial to our contemporary imagination (P, 39). But that is not the full story, for the brand of pantheism current at the time was monistic or absolutistic pantheism, features of which clashed at least as strongly with specific needs and James's metaphysical principles as did dualistic theism. "As such, the absolute neither acts nor suffers, nor loves, nor hates; it has no needs, desires or aspirations, no failures or successes, friends or enemies, victories or defeats" (PU, 27). Quite obviously, an Absolute or a God so devoid of all the characteristics that James discovers in life and experience could only be viewed by him as the acme of irrelevance. While the "Absolute Mind" as the substitute for God is allegedly the "rational presupposition of all particulars of fact . . . it remains supremely indifferent to what the particular facts in our world actually are." James compares the Absolute to the "sick lion in Esop's fable, all footprints lead into his den, but nulla vestigia retrorsum." The Absolute then maintains no connection with the concreteness of life, and while we are assured that all is eternally well with him, he leaves us to be saved by our own temporal devices (P, 40).

It is significant, I believe, that while James in his later works is critical of the Absolute for doing nothing to aid our salvation, in an early essay, "Reflex Action and Theism" (1881), he was critical of the Calvinistic God for
doing everything: “A God who gives so little scope to love, a predestination which takes from endeavor all its zest with all its fruit, are irrational conceptions, because they say to our most cherished powers, There is no object for you” (WB, 100). Yet there is no inconsistency between these texts, nor is there any essential shift in James’s doctrine. Early and late he affirmed a religious need for a power greater than the natural: “Man is too helpless against the cosmic forces, unless there be a wider Ally” (TC, II:383). Similarly, at all stages of his thought he resisted any view that deprived individual human action of significance and efficacy. It is clear, therefore, that the only God consistent with James’s long-standing concerns is one who is available to humans in their struggles but who also depends upon human initiative and creativity in order to realize the divine aims.

Those same long-standing concerns led James to reject absolutistic monism in favor of pluralism. A decade before writing A Pluralistic Universe, he suggested that “the difference between monism and pluralism is perhaps the most pregnant of all the differences in philosophy” (WB, 5). Hence it is not surprising to find him maintaining in the later work that pluralism, in exorcizing the absolute, exorcizes the great de-realizer of the only life we are at home in, and thus redeems the nature of reality from essential foreignness. Every end, reason, motive, object of desire or aversion, ground of sorrow or joy that we feel is in the world of finite multifariousness for only in that world does anything really happen, only there do events come to pass. (PU, 28)

While affirming a pluralistic mode of pantheism, therefore, James rejects that absolutistic brand which, “reared upon pure logic,” spurns the dust of concrete life. As he states in an oft-cited text: “The prince of darkness may be a gentleman, as we are told he is, but whatever the God of earth and heaven is, he can surely be no gentleman. His menial services are needed in the dust of our human trials, even more than his dignity is needed in the empyrean” (P, 39–40).

Absolutistic pantheism is repugnant to James, therefore, because it trivializes the change, struggle, and pain that characterize our daily living, rendering them surface appearances of the eternally unchanging ground of reality. In notes for his 1903–1904 seminar, “A Pluralistic Description of the World,” James commented, “The essence of my system is that there is really growth.” He added that for him “the world exists only once, in one edition, and then just as it seems.” For the philosophies in vogue at the time, on the other hand, there was a completed eternal edition devoid of growth and “an inferior, side-show, temporal edition, in which things seem illusorily to be achieving and growing into that perfection which really preexists. . . . Transcendentalism has two editions of the universe—the Absolute being the edition de luxe” (TC, II:384).

In maintaining that there is only one universe, however, James is not af-
firming a naturalistic reductionism. He is persuaded by mystical phenomena and religious experience “that our normal experience is only a fraction” of experience (TC, II:384). Phenomena such as “new ranges of life succeeding on our most despairing moments” would never have been inferred by reason, since “they are discontinuous with the ‘natural’ experiences they succeed upon and invert their values.” Creation widens to the view of those undergoing religious experience, leading to the suggestion that “our natural experience, our strictly moralistic and prudential experience, may be only a fragment of real human experience” (PU, 138). This indispensability and irreplaceability of religious experiences, and the inadequacy of “reason,” has been previously noted and cannot be overemphasized. In his 1906 address to the Unitarian Club of San Francisco, James points out the ambiguity of “facts”: while there are both moral and physical facts supporting the righteousness, order, and beauty of reality, there are also “contrary facts in abundance,” and the “rational” conclusion reached will depend on which facts have been singled out. Indeed, if the decision is left to “reason” alone, James is of the opinion that it would be bad news for religion:

If your reason tries to be impartial, if she resorts to statistical comparison and asks which class of facts tip the balance, and which way tends the drift, she must, it seems to me, conclude for irreligion, unless you give her some more specific religious experiences to go by, for the last word everywhere, according to naturalistic science, is the word of Death, the death sentence passed by Nature on plant and beast, and man and tribe, and earth and sun and everything that she has made.20

Returning to the question of monism versus pluralism, it must first be noted that James rejects both in their absolute modes. The world is both one and many—“one just so far as its parts hang together by any definite connexion” and “many just so far as any definite connexion fails to obtain” (P, 76). The pluralism James affirms, therefore, rejects both a world that is already completely or essentially unified and one that is totally chaotic. Pluralism has no need of that dogmatic rigoristic temper displayed by those who maintain that “absolute unity brooks no degrees.” All James’s pluralism asks is that one grant “some separation among things, some free play of parts, some real novelty or chance, however minute.” Given this, “she is amply satisfied and will allow you any amount, however great, of real union” (P, 78).

Radical empiricism and pluralism, according to James, stand for the legitimacy of some. James here touches upon “the great question as to whether ‘external’ relations can exist” (PU, 40–41). The dominant view of the absolutism he is criticizing is that they could not. The doctrine of internal relations holding that everything is essentially included in and essentially related to everything else, leading inevitably to the Absolute as the only truly real
being, is the doctrine James challenges. The technical aspects of this controversy need not concern us; for my purposes, the importance of this question is that in affirming external relations, James is allowing for a plurality of real beings and excluding any all-inclusive being. This in no way compromises James's metaphysical relationalism, since all realities are relational but are not related to all other realities with the same degree of immediacy and intimacy. What is posited is a "strung-along" rather than an "all-at-once" universe. It is James's contention that "radical empiricism . . . holding to the each-form and making of God only one of the eaches, affords the higher degree of intimacy" (PU, 26).

This view, however, has an important and controversial implication: it limits the reality of God. "If there be a God, he is no absolute all-experencer, but simply the experencer of widest actual conscious span" (MT, 72). This brings us, of course, to James's doctrine of God as finite.

GOD AS FINITE
While James is willing to jettison the Absolute, he is not willing to dispense with God or a higher consciousness.

But if we drop the absolute out of the world, must we then conclude that the world contains nothing better in the way of consciousness than our own consciousness? Is our whole instinctive belief in higher presences, our persistent inner turning towards divine companionship to count for nothing? Is it but the pathetic illusion of beings with incorrigibly social and imaginative minds? (PU, 63)

James contends that even if it should prove probable that the Absolute does not exist, it will not in any way follow "that a God like that of David, Isaiah, or Jesus may not exist" (PU, 54). He finds no logical impediment to believing in "superhuman beings without identifying them with the absolute." The only thing that the God of the Old and of the New Testament has in common with the Absolute is "that they are all three greater than man" (PU, 63-64).

In the previous section, I touched upon James's affirmation of the reality of "external relations." Put very simply, this doctrine maintains that not all real relations are included in the essence of a being. For example, to say that the "book is on the table" does not seem to imply that the book is implicated or involved in the inner structure of the table or vice versa. For the absolutist this appearance of the externality of relations would result in a chaotic world of unconnected or unrelated and unrelatable realities. Hence, there must be an all-inclusive mind in which all appearances of externality are overcome, and this alone guarantees the rationality of reality. James, of course, never claims to be able to disprove the reality of the Absolute but he does find the arguments in favor of it unconvincing and, more important, the notion of an Absolute as seriously undermining the reality and authenticity of experi-
ence. He finds both absolutism and pluralism to be hypotheses and the latter to be the more plausible one: "What pluralists say is that a universe really connected loosely, after the pattern of our daily experience, is possible, and that for certain reasons it is the hypothesis to be preferred" (PU, 39). There is no ground for even suspecting the existence of a reality other than "that distributed and strung-along and flowing sort of reality which we finite beings swim in" (PU, 97). Since the "absolute is not forced on our belief by logic," its rival, the "strung-along unfinished world in time," may exist just as it seems, not in the shape of an all but rather as a set of eaches (PU, 62).

The crucial implication of all this, of course, is that any God consistent with metaphysical pluralism must be finite. Whereas absolutism maintains that God is fully divine only in the form of totality, pluralism is "willing to believe that there may ultimately never be an all-form at all, that the substance of reality may never get totally collected, that some of it may remain outside of the largest combination of it ever made" (PU, 20). Thus while we are, for James, "internal parts of God and not external creations," God is himself a "part" rather than the Absolute when conceived pluralistically.

The divine functions, then, can be taken as not wholly dissimilar to our own functions. All realities, including the divine reality, have an environment. Since this means that God is in time and working out a history just as we are, "he escapes from the foreignness from all that is human, of the static timeless perfect absolute" (PU, 143-44). Pluralism, pragmatically interpreted, simply means that everything, however vast or inclusive, has some sort of genuinely "external" environment. While things are "with" one another in many ways, there is no reality that includes or dominates everything.

Hence,

"ever not quite" has to be said of the best attempts anywhere in the universe at attaining all-inclusiveness. The pluralistic world is thus more like a federal republic than like an empire or kingdom. However much may be collected, however much may report itself as present at any effective centre of consciousness or action, something else is self-governed and absent and unreduced to unity. (PU, 145)²²

James contends that it is precisely the claim that the absolute has absolutely nothing outside of itself that gives rise to those irrationalities and puzzles from which the finite God remains free. He goes on to say that the finite God "may conceivably have almost nothing outside of himself." He may indeed have already triumphed over and absorbed "all but the minutest fraction of the universe," but however small that fraction outside him, it reduces God to a "relative being, and in principle the universe is saved from all the irrationalities incidental to absolutism" (PU, 61). Thus, whether in theology or philosophy, the line of least resistance is to affirm "that there is a God, but that he is finite, either in power or knowledge, or in both at once" (PU, 141). Such a God, according to James, is quite compatible with re-
religious experience, which cannot “be cited as unequivocally supporting the infinitist belief.” The only unequivocal testimony of religious experience “is that we experience union with something larger than ourselves and in that union find our greatest peace.” James insists that the practical needs of religious experience are adequately met by this belief in a power at once larger than and continuous with it (VRE, 413). We are incurably and inseparably rooted in the temporal and finite point of view (PU, 23). Exhortations such as those of Emerson to “lift mine eye up” to the style of the Absolute which is the one true way are fruitless. “I am,” James tells us, “finite once for all, and all the categories of my sympathy are knit up with the finite world as such, and with things that have a history” (PU, 27).

Again we see how James is concerned to safeguard the reality and significance of concrete human experience. Things would be different if we were merely readers of the cosmic novel, “but we are not the readers but the very personages of the world-drama” (PU, 27). And it is because James also believes that God is one, though not the only one, of the personages in this drama that he refuses to excuse him from the limitations and the obstacles that confront all the participants. An omniscient and omnipotent God would, of course, escape all this, but the existence of such a God would imply that the battles that seem so real and important to us are but surface events in relation to the “really real.” On the contrary, James tells us, “the facts of struggle seem too deeply characteristic of the whole frame of things for me not to suspect that hindrance and experiment go all the way through” (TC, II:379). Elsewhere, he asserts:

God himself, in short, may draw vital strength and increase of very being from our fidelity. For my own part, I do not know what the sweat and blood and tragedy of this life mean, if they mean anything short of this. If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success, it is no better than a game of private theatricals from which one may withdraw at will. But it feels like a real fight—as if there were something really wild in the universe which we, with all our idealities and faithfulnesses, are needed to redeem. (WB, 55)

It is evident, then, that only a finite God can help us and be in real need of our help. He must be sufficiently powerful to be able to help us and be worthy of our trust and confidence, but he cannot be so powerful as to find our efforts unnecessary, thereby trivializing them and robbing them of meaning and significance.23 Something of this is captured by Perry: “Thus pluralism means a finite God, who evokes a passionate allegiance because he is in some measure hampered by circumstances, and dependent on the aid of others; or because, the evil of the world being external to him, he may be loved without reserve” (TC, II:211–12).

From James’s perspective, one of the key fruits of the notion of God as finite or having an environment other than himself is that it avoids the clas-
sical paradox of how there can be evil in a world created by an infinitely good and all-powerful God. In the final analysis, perhaps, evil is a mystery to be lived with rather than a problem to be solved, whether on James's terms or those of anyone else. Still, we are not entitled to use the mystery of evil as an excuse for not reflecting upon it and attempting, at least, to remove the more egregious contradictions. The resolutions of both absolute idealism and classical theism are unacceptable to James, the former because it denies the reality of evil, and the latter because it involves a dualism rife with the difficulties that we have been detailing. Whatever the shortcomings of James's approach to evil, one thing is clear—evil is real and is incapable of being overcome simply by being subsumed within a higher mind. In his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James faults the attitude of “healthy-mindedness” because it fails to recognize the evil facts that make up a genuine portion of reality (*VRE*, 136). Elsewhere he states: “Whatever Indian mystics may say about overcoming the bonds of good and evil, for us there is no higher synthesis in which the contradiction merges.” He goes on to say that we should “admit that, whilst some parts are good, others are bad, and being bad ought not to have been . . . possibly might not have been” (*TC*, I:638).

This last raises, of course, the thorny metaphysical issue of the origin of evil and suggests a kind of Manichaean account whereby evil originates outside God. While James does little more than hint at such an account, it is consistent with his pluralism. Evil would not need to be essential if we scrap the monistic view and “allow the world to have existed from its origin in a pluralistic form, as an aggregate or collection of higher and lower things and principles.” From such a perspective, evil “might be and may always have been, an independent portion that had no rational or absolute right to live with the rest, and which we might conceivably hope to see got rid of at last” (*VRE*, 113).24 James contends that popular or practical theism has not been upset with a “universe composed of many original principles”; it has only insisted that God be the supreme principle—in which case “God is not necessarily responsible for the existence of evil; he would only be responsible if it were not finally overcome” (*VRE*, 112).

In the final analysis it is evil as a practical, not a speculative, problem that concerns pluralistic metaphysics. “Not why evil should exist at all, but how we can lessen the actual amount of it, is the sole question we need there consider” (*PU*, 60). This concern for the lessening of evil seems to have been paramount in James's mind from his earliest years. In a letter to Thomas Ward in 1868, he wrote: “If we can only bring ourselves to accept evil as an ultimated inscrutable fact, the way may be open towards a great practical reform on earth, as our aims will be clearly defined, and our energies concentrated” (*TC*, I:161).

Thus, it is James's contention that in the religious life of ordinary people, God is not the name of the whole of things. Rather, he is a “superhuman
person who calls us to cooperate in his purposes, and who furthers ours if they are worthy. He works in an external environment, has limits, and has enemies." All of this leads James to assert: "I believe that the only God worthy of the name must be finite" (PU, 60).

One final word concerning the classical and continuing problem of reconciling divine omnipotence with divine goodness. There have been in the past and are in the present some sophisticated and intellectually respectable efforts at such reconciliation, but, following James, I think that they are and will continue to be fatally flawed and unpersuasive. No complex arguments or modes of reasoning are needed to indicate why, for many at least, it is literally incredible to suggest that there is a morally good being who has the power to alleviate the pain and suffering of millions of innocent human beings but for reasons known only to himself freely chooses not to do so. Two texts, one from a modern novel and the other from a contemporary theological work, succinctly and sharply delineate the incredibility of such a being.

1. How much reverence can you have for a Supreme Being who finds it necessary to include such phenomena as phlegm and tooth decay in His divine system of creation? What in the world was running through that warped, scatological mind of His when He robbed old people of the power to control their bowel movements?25

A God of absolute power who either causes or deliberately permits everything that happens must take full responsibility for it himself. Nothing can take place unless he wills it. That includes Auschwitz and our devastation of Vietnam. Can a God who willingly tolerates such outrageous suffering be called good? Is he not callously indifferent to both the integrity and the welfare of his creatures? A God like that cannot be worshipped by thinking people today. Any man or woman who has a modicum of human decency is morally superior to him.26

Any attempt to say anything specific about God, after hundreds of years of arguments and efforts, has about it a decided dimension of foolishness. Nevertheless, it is not possible to believe in God without venturing some suggestion concerning the character of that in which one believes. As H. D. Lewis has expressed it, "No one can expect or believe anything without having some idea of what it is that he expects."27 Let me state what, for me, is a minimalist belief concerning the nature of God: that God is a moral person who is at least as good as the very best human being imaginable. I submit that we would judge any human being morally deficient who failed to exercise all the power he or she possessed to alleviate human suffering, and that we therefore cannot expect less of God. The classical response that God has limited his use of power out of respect for human freedom is profoundly unconvincing. Imagine a parent who, wishing to respect the freedom of the child, allows this child to do something that is disastrous for
itself or for another when it is within the power of the parent to prevent it. This is really "unimaginable."

Recall James's contention that "when we cease to admire or approve what the definition of a deity implies, we end by deeming that deity incredible" (VRE, 264–65). Hence, if God does nothing when confronted by the profound suffering of millions of innocent human beings, the only possibility for believing in the moral goodness of that God is that he was unable to do anything. As Clark M. Williamson has expressed it, "God does all that God can possibly do for us." 28 In reviewing Williamson's work, John K. Roth criticizes this statement because he questions whether a God of such limited power "is fully worthy of worship." The alternative Roth suggests, however, is rather astounding: "Certainly men and women do not always do the best they can. The Holocaust and its antecedents in the anti-Judaism of the Christian church, however, may testify that God is not one who always does the best either." 29 Unless I am missing something here, Roth seems to be saying that it is more possible to worship a God who has unlimited power but does not always exercise it in the best way possible. I do not see how such a God could be judged other than morally defective.

We are confronted, then, with two inadequate and not totally satisfying images of the divine: a God who at every moment employs all his limited power, or a God of unlimited power who fails in numerous instances to use this power for what would appear to be very worthwhile ends. Whether able to be worshipped or not, the former is surely a lovable God. As for the latter God, I would not wish to worship him and would find it difficult if not impossible to love him. 30

RELATIONAL SELF—RELATIONAL GOD

I have been describing reality in terms of a plurality of fields, at least some of which are conscious fields. Further, we have seen that the human field of consciousness is related to and thereby in part constituted by a wider field or superhuman consciousness. The following text from Perry succinctly describes James's view of these relational spans of consciousness:

Turning to the problem of unity of the world, he explained such degrees and varieties of unity as the world possesses in terms of experienced relations. To avoid subjectivism, he argued for the "conterminousness" of minds, that is their convergence in or towards the same experiences—defending this view against the skeptic on the one hand and the absolutist on the other. Borrowing Peirce's term, he adopted the "tychistic" theory that the ultimate origins of things are both plural and spontaneous. No philosophy, he said, can really avoid the recognition of a sheer datum at some point. But beings of independent and accidental origin can come into interaction with one another, through a spreading "consciousness of transition." This notion suggests different "spans" of consciousness, and the possibility of a consciousness such as God with a span far exceeding that of man. . . . It eliminates the problem of evil,
and "goes with empiricism, personalism, democracy and freedom." (TC, II:373-74)\textsuperscript{31}

I have been speaking of this wider field of consciousness specifically as "God" or "divine," and have indicated why this reality must be wider and more powerful than the human, but not necessarily all-inclusive or all-powerful. Further, following James, I have insisted on the significance and efficacy of human initiative and activity, thereby rejecting any versions of God that deny or radically diminish this efficacy. Though not referring specifically to James, Ian Barbour has described a view of agency which is completely consistent with that of James.

God's relation to other agents seems to require a social or interpersonal analogy in which a plurality of centers of initiative are present. The biblical model of Father, after all, allowed for the presence of many agents, rather than concentrating on the divine agent alone. . . . In the process model more than one agent may influence a given event, so that both God's action and that of other agents can be represented.\textsuperscript{32}

There is, of course, a much wider consensus concerning the relational character of the human self than there is concerning the claim that one of those constituting relations, indeed the central one, is the relation to a superhuman consciousness designated "God." The most that I have claimed throughout this essay is that the field-self, which is widely manifest in the diverse modes of experience and reasonably confirmed by a number of intellectual disciplines, is open to a relation to a field that can be called divine. Recall just how the self as field is characterized by such openness: as a "field," the boundary of the self is open, indefinite, and continually shifting such that other fields are continually leaking in and leaking out. There is, however, sufficient stability and difference in the rates of shifting among selves and all other fields to allow us to speak of individual fields. The individuality of all fields, but preeminently self-fields, is relational, hence relative in the sense that inasmuch as its constituting fields are continually changing, so is the individual. Further, individual entities, including selves, are characterized by being, and can exist only so long as they are, centers of activity. Since these centers are constituted by their transactions with other centers, they are interdependent. The most crucial question, for my purposes, is whether the human self has, as one of its constituting relations and transactions, a relation to a wider and more powerful consciousness, which consciousness is able to maintain its constituting relation to the self even in the absence of other relations that may now also partially constitute it. The possibility of personal immortality, as I have repeatedly insisted, depends upon the reality of such a relation.

What is needed, of course, is a model of an emergent self that is consistent with the best philosophical and scientific evidence concerning the self and, as a minimum, does not exclude the possibility of such a superhuman con-
stituting relation. Such a model would have to be constructed along the following lines. The human self emerges from fields designated "physical," but this self is neither identical with nor reducible to the physical fields from which it emerges and on which it presently depends. The grounds for this claim would, of course, be the fact that the self performs activities that are really different from the distinguishing activities of physical fields. While we may be unable to answer why such a distinct field emerges or even to describe precisely how or exactly when it emerges, there would appear to be rather compelling evidence that such a self does emerge. There are both "subjective" and "objective" data in support of this contention. Subjectively, there is the felt awareness of identity, continuity, freedom, and the like. Objectively, we are able to describe behavior that is neither identical with nor reducible to the behavior of other entities, such as plants, animals, cells, or atoms.

An "emerged" self has access to and is able to act upon, participate in, and transform other real fields, including self-fields, in a distinctive fashion. Thus the individual self is a more encompassing field than those from which it emerged and which are still involved in its constitution. Further, this self is able to participate in fields more encompassing than itself, such as linguistic, cultural, and social fields; and it does so in a manner not available to its own subfields when they are isolated from it. It would seem legitimate to suggest that the self now takes on characteristics of those wider fields so as to give it a reality "beyond" the fields from which it has emerged and upon which it still depends. All of this seems phenomenologically verifiable, quite apart from the question of the divine field. If so, this becomes the experiential ground which, when combined with religious experience, allows for extrapolating the reality of God.

Assuming this extrapolation along the lines previously described, it may be useful here to underline a few key aspects of the relation between the divine and the human fields. In keeping with the metaphysical pluralism discussed earlier, I wish to stress that while all things are connected, they are not all connected to all others with a relation of immediacy. Hence, though God is connected to all things, and though his connections of immediacy are the greatest in existence, even God is not connected immediately to all things. More, there are degrees of immediacy even between God and those beings with whom he is immediately related.

Suppose we characterize the human on the basis of its immediacy to the divine. There would be a wide range and difference in the degree of this immediacy even within the human species, a species distinguished as such on the basis of the potential of its individual members for a relation of immediacy with God. Both individually and collectively, however, human beings would have to strive, whether consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, to realize and increase this relation. The mystical might serve as the paradigm of the relation of immediacy between the divine and the
human, but it would be neither the exclusive nor the complete mode of immediacy. The long and arduous evolutionary and historical process would seem almost frivolous if the highest mode possible of immediacy between God and the world had already been or is now realized in the experience of even one mystic. Hence, this relation of immediacy must be a growing one, and its realizations both past and present cannot be restricted to explicit mystical or religious experiences. Great poets, scientists, artists, composers, statesmen—indeed all truly great human beings, whether publicly recognized or not—can be viewed as manifesting modes of immediate relations to a wider and richer reality. Quite obviously not everyone is led to articulate this relationship explicitly, and even among those who do, it will be variously described. Some might express the experience of a reality “beyond” that of their narrowly “personal” reality in terms of poetry, painting, music, nature, or science. A few have, of course, described it in terms of a personal being, traditionally referred to as God.

It is this personal relationship between the individual and that wider, superhuman consciousness designated “God” that is the necessary presupposition for any belief in personal immortality. Unless belief in a personal God is possible and plausible, there is no point in even considering the possibility of a belief in personal immortality. Whatever difficulties James had with traditional theism, he never seemed to surrender that personalistic character of God that was so essential to it. Negative evidence for this can be found in James’s lecture notes for a course called “The Philosophy of Evolution,” given some half-dozen times in the years 1879–96. Much of the course was taken up with criticizing Herbert Spencer’s “evolutionism,” in particular rejecting its claim that the “unknowable” could serve as a suitable object for religious faith. Not so, according to James: “Mere existence commands no reverence whatever, or any other emotion until its quality is specified. Neither does mere cosmic ‘power,’ unless it ‘makes for’ something which can claim kinship from our sympathies.” He concludes that we might as well “speak of being irreverent to Space or disrespectful of the Equator” (TC, I:486).

A more positive expression of theism’s God as personal is found in “Refractive Action and Theism.” The two essential features of theism are that “God be conceived as the deepest power in the universe” and that he be conceived “under the form of a mental personality.” James goes on to say that “God’s personality is to be regarded, like any other personality, as something lying outside of my own and other than me.” Finally, whatever the differences between the divine and human personalities, they “both have purposes for which they care, and each can hear the other’s call” (WB, 97–98). Elsewhere, James notes that our religions represent the “more perfect and eternal aspect of the universe . . . as having a personal form.” He goes on to say that if we are religious, “the universe is no longer a mere It to us, but a Thou,” and hence we are able to have any relation with it that we are able to have with another person (WB, 31).
In his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James contends that religious individuals see their personal concerns as the grounds on which they encounter and are encountered by God (*VRE*, 387). Hence, “the pivot round which the religious life . . . revolves, is the interest of the individual in his private personal destiny” (*VRE*, 387). This personal God witnessed to by religious experience is contrasted with the God recognized by science. The latter is a “God of universal laws exclusively, a God who does a wholesale, not a retail business. He cannot accommodate his processes to the convenience of individuals” (*VRE*, 390). That God was explicitly affirmed by Albert Einstein when he said that he believed “in Spinoza’s God who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with the fates and actions of human beings.”

In spite of James’s assertion that “religion . . . is a monumental chapter in the history of human egotism” (*VRE*, 387), it would be grossly misleading to understand his stress on the individual and personal dimension of religious experience in terms of an atomistic individualism or an isolating egoism. The whole drift of James’s relational metaphysics, as we have repeatedly seen, goes against such a narrowing and empty individualism. Less than a year before his death, he wrote a letter to his friend and fellow-pragmatist, F. C. S. Schiller, chiding him for failing to adequately recognize the social dimension of the human situation:

> It seems to me really fantastically formal to ignore that much of the truth that is already established, namely, that men do think in social situations. . . . I simply assume the social situation, and I am sorry that . . . you balk at it so much. It is not assumed merely tactically, for those are the terms in which I genuinely think the matter. (*TC*, II:510)

James’s language has undoubtedly at times been misleading, and his fervent desire to affirm the reality of the individual perhaps led him to fail to emphasize sufficiently those social relations that were so stressed by Karl Marx and John Dewey. The charge that James was a supporter of “rugged individualism,” however, is simply without merit. He explicitly called for philosophers of all stripes to join in combatting “the practical, conventionally thinking man, to whom . . . nothing has true seriousness but personal interests” (*CER*, 24–25). Henry Levinson is right on the mark when he contends that James “did not pit the personal and the private against the social experience—on James’ grounds both individuals and their religions were inevitably social. James pits the sociality of persuasion—the sociality of friends and compatriots—against the sociality of coercion—the sociality of sovereigns and subjects” (*RIWJ*, 132). One might add that by the same token, James pits the individuality of persons (the individuality that is constructed and developed by transactions with other persons) against the individuality of egotism (the individuality that isolates and impoverishes itself by turning toward that imaginary unrelational center which is in truth “nothing”).
The self as essentially social or relational is a doctrine that has appeared in many forms in contemporary thought—not only in pragmatism but also in Marxism, existentialism, and phenomenology, as well as in certain psychologies, sociologies, and anthropologies. Ralph Harper gives an existentialist version strikingly similar to that of James. "No one," he tells us, "can become a 'true self' without the encouragement of others. Identity depends on presence, on being singled out." Harper adds that "to be a person is to look for a person, first to confirm one's own reality and identity and next to set up a relationship of mutual fulfillment." In the Principles, James suggests that "a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize and carry an image of him in their mind" (PP, I:281–82). He later claims that of all our more potential selves, the potential social self is the most interesting, in virtue of "its connection with our moral and religious life." When I act contrary to the wishes and judgments of my friends or family or "set," and thereby experience a diminution of my actual social self, I am strengthened by the thought that there are "other and better possible social judges." Even if I have no hope of realizing the ideal social self during my lifetime or expectation that future generations will know anything about me, I am still called to pursue an ideal social self—one "that is at least worthy of approving recognition by the highest possible judging companion, if such companion there be." James adds that "this self is the true, the intimate, the ultimate, the permanent Me which I seek. This judge is God, the Absolute Mind, the 'Great Companion'" This accounts for the impulse to pray, which is a "necessary consequence of the fact that whilst the innermost of the empirical selves of a man is a Self of the social sort, yet it can find its only adequate Socius in an ideal world" (PP, I:300–301).

Needless to say, James is only claiming here to give a phenomenological or psychological description of distinctive human experience. It is interesting to note that Dewey recognizes this same phenomenon: "One no sooner establishes his private and subjective self than he demands it be recognized and acknowledged by others, even if he has to invent an imaginary audience or an Absolute Self to satisfy the demand." Of course, where Dewey will remain or become convinced that this higher self is merely "imaginary," or at least not "real" in any sense which might be called "objective," James insisted on the right to believe that this higher self—God—has a reality not reducible to human or "natural" reality.

Concerning the possibility and plausibility of any belief in personal immortality, then, it is inseparably bound up with our belief in a "Great Companion" who cares for us and will bring to realization that in us which is worthy of realization. In a late essay, James makes an observation about those who are beset with a secondary personality; I believe that it can be applied, properly qualified, to all human beings: "What they want in the awful drift of their being out of its customary self, is any principle of steadfastness to hold on to. We ought to assure them and reassure them that we
will stand by them, and recognize the true self in them to the end” (CER, 508–9). Is not something very like this what we ask of God, whom alone we believe to be capable and desirous of recognizing our true selves and keeping them from sinking into that abyss of nothingness from which they have emerged and which remains a continuing threat to the integrity and the very reality of our lives? I must explore this crucial point later; for the moment I wish simply to emphasize our radical dependence upon God for any hope of a life that does not, in spite of our greatest efforts and the efforts of our human lovers, dissolve into a nothingness ultimately indistinguishable from a life that has never been.

It is this individual and personal relationship with God that has always been at the center of any belief in a continuing life. According to R. H. Charles, “Jeremiah was the first to conceive religion as the Communion of the individual soul with God . . . . Thus through Jeremiah the foundation of a true individualism was laid, and the law of individual retribution proclaimed. The further development of these ideas led inevitably to the conception of a blessed life beyond the grave.” I have been suggesting throughout this section that because we can believe we are here and now in part constituted by and in transactional relation with God, we can believe and hope that God will maintain and continue this constituting relation even after other relations that now make up our being have been terminated. It would seem to be a life-sustaining relation such as this of which Luke joyfully tells us: “Now he is God, not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all men are in fact alive.”

The key to life, present or future, would seem to be “love.” Essential to any love worthy of the name would seem to be a care, concern, and desire that the one loved realize to the fullest his or her aims and ideals insofar as this realization brings enrichment and enhancement of life not only to the beloved but also to the others with whom the beloved is life-related. Whereas God’s life is essentially love, endeavoring at every moment to enable those loved by him to realize their life potential, all nondivine beings—humans in particular—can fall short of their love for God and those toward whom God’s love is directed. This, of course, is saying neither more nor less than that loving God is inseparable from loving those whom God loves. One cannot truly love God unless one loves those who are loved by God, since not to do so would be in essential conflict with the aims and desires of the beloved.

As for belief in personal immortality, it is evident that everything comes down to the possibility of there being a loving God capable of sustaining a relationship of value that has come into being within the creative process. That we are invited to participate in this process and are promised a share in its fruits would seem to be at the center of Christian faith. We cannot, of course, know or feel guaranteed that we will personally share in eternal life, but by the same token, we cannot exclude the possibility that our mode of
sharing will be personal. In the final analysis, perhaps, our love and trust in the divine must be such that we here and now accept whatever mode of sharing is possible for God without in any way lessening our dedication to those goals, values, and ideals that enhance life. Our primary focus must be on contributing to the realization of the very best features of the creative process and thereby to an enrichment of both human and divine life. In such endeavors, we must be willing to act in spite of our ignorance as to the precise form the ultimate fruits of our actions will take. In the final analysis, Christians and many others believe that they live and move and achieve their being within a process richer and more encompassing than can be known, one suffused with a mystery of promise and vitality.

CODA BY WAY OF AN OBJECTION

A formidable objection to a central claim of this chapter—and indeed to the entire essay—must be acknowledged, though I have no fully satisfying response to it. I have advanced as plausible and believable a God whose power is limited as regards the evils of experience, yet who is powerful enough to save us from complete annihilation. The obvious objection is that, on the face of it, more power would seem necessary to overcome the absoluteness of death than to overcome most earthly evils. Both the immediate and the reflective response to this objection can only be that we are here confronted with an irreducible and insuperable mystery.

Every reflection upon God must at some point take refuge in “mystery,” but much depends on where the mystery is located. The traditional view, positing an omnipotent God, must say that it is a mystery why such an all-good God does not use his power to alleviate suffering and obviate death. My view, positing a good but finite God, must say that it is mystery how God’s power is insufficient to protect us from suffering and death but sufficient to save us from total annihilation. That God does not protect us from suffering and death is a matter of indubitable experience; that he may save us from annihilation is a matter of faith. On this there is no significant disagreement. What is in dispute is the kind of God who is credible. The traditional God, in possession of an eternally fulfilled and self-sufficient life, desires out of his goodness to share this life with his creatures and freely opts to do so by submitting them to suffering and death. A God understood along the lines suggested in this essay would be one whose ever developing life, characterized by an intrinsic desire and need to share this life, slowly and processively brings forth diverse and distinct expressions of the divine life. At a particular stage in this process there is realized a mode of life that is closely but still immeasurably distant from the center of the divine life. God, desiring a more intimate union with those individual bearers of this mode of life, chooses to bring this union about in the only way possible by submitting himself and them to the transformative experiences of suffering and death. Thus, in a life process that is everlastingly bringing forth new
and richer modes of life by means of transformation of itself, death may be a necessary characteristic, both in the divine and nondivine modes of the process. If death, proportional to the mode of life, is the only means by which new life can come forth, whether in God or his creatures, then the goodness of God is in no way compromised by the suffering and death which these creatures must endure and which in some way are shared by God himself. This does not remove the mystery, but it does relocate it to the center of the divine life itself.