

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

All Graduate Plan B and other Reports

Graduate Studies

12-2018

Two Cases of Intellectual Continuity Between Mental Philosophy and Psychology: William James and Charles Grandison Finney

Zachary Zschaechner
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/gradreports>



Part of the [History of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Zschaechner, Zachary, "Two Cases of Intellectual Continuity Between Mental Philosophy and Psychology: William James and Charles Grandison Finney" (2018). *All Graduate Plan B and other Reports*. 1340.
<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/gradreports/1340>

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Plan B and other Reports by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



TWO CASES OF INTELLECTUAL CONTINUITY BETWEEN MENTAL PHILOSOPHY
AND PSYCHOLOGY: WILLIAM JAMES AND CHARLES GRANDISON FINNEY

by

Zachary K. Zschaechner

A plan-B thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

History

Approved:

Norm Jones, Ph.D.
Major Professor

Kyle Bulthuis, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Ravi Gupta, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Laurens H. Smith, Ph.D.
Interim Vice President for Research and
Interim Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2018

The history of American psychology was once dominated by a narrative that emphasized the unprecedented nature of psychology at the expense of its relation to mental philosophy. Contrary to this narrative, this discussion offers two cases of intellectual continuity between 19th century Protestant mental philosophy and the new psychology as it emerged in the United States in the last quarter of the 19th century.

Mental philosophy dominated academic study of the mind in antebellum Protestant colleges. It was a study of human nature based heavily in the writings of Scottish common sense philosophy. Scottish common sense continued to be influential in several circles late into the 19th century, but after the Civil War, there was a rapid turn in American universities to the work of other British and continental European scientists and philosophers. The 1880s also saw the advent of dedicated laboratories and psychology departments in American universities, whereas mental philosophy traditionally had been taught by professors of philosophy and divinity.

An example of the most influential characterization of this intellectual turn can be found in E. G. Boring's *The History of Experimental Psychology* (1929). It is widely considered the first substantial work on the history of psychology, and it stood as the authoritative text in the field for most of the 20th century.¹ According to the narrative found in Boring's text, William James is the beginning of the story in the US: "James began psychology in America with his

¹ For a concise overview of the influence of E. G. Boring and J. McKeen Cattell, see Alfred H. Fuchs, "Contributions of American Mental Philosophers to Psychology in the United States," *History of Psychology*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (2000): 3-19. See also Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr., *A Brief History of Modern Psychology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), xv; in his primer to the history of psychology, Benjamin offers the following remark about Boring's text: "One of the sad ironies of the history of psychology is that the first book on the history of psychology to become quite popular was authored by a psychologist named Boring. He published his book in 1929, revised it in 1950, and for nearly forty years it was considered the authoritative treatment of the history of psychology—required reading for most doctoral students in psychology."

recognition of the significance of the new experimental physiological psychology of Germany. He was not by temperament an experimentalist himself, but he believed in experimentalism; he introduced it to America, and he put upon this new psychology the seal of America by emphasizing the functional meaning of mind.”² In addition to the importance put on James, the text is significant for the fact that it completely leaves out American mental philosophy. Boring’s emphasis on the importance of scientific experiment and omission of mental philosophy typify the prevailing historical understanding of psychology during the 20th century.

It is no small issue, then, that many of James’s own writings provide a strong basis for undermining this narrative. Despite his foundational role, several of James’s definitive later writings display substantial commitments definitive of mental philosophy. He also used both mental philosophy and psychology to defend religious belief and practice. In doing so, James located himself in a tradition definitive of 19th century Protestant mental philosophy. Despite his enthusiasm for science and experiment, James represents a clear instance of a transitional figure between the two fields, and his works are examples of mental philosophy’s continued influence after psychology emerged.

This essay also considers a converse counterpoint to the dominant narrative. Despite the tendency of the traditional narrative to elevate the role of experiment in psychology, psychological experimentation in the US preceded both James and Germany. In fact, it finds significant precedent in Protestant religious practice. Revival preaching was, in large part, a matter of social psychological experimentalism. As the paradigmatic figure of 19th century revivalism, Charles Grandison Finney, is illustrative of this fact. Specifically, Finney regularly

² E. G. Boring, *The History of Experimental Psychology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1950), 505.

experimented with his preaching methods in order to optimize the conversion rate of his audience. This fact is all the more noteworthy when one considers the scale of the impact of revivalism's impact. Just as the advent of psychology did not signal the end of mental philosophy, neither did it coincide with the start of experiment-based study of the human mind.

Importantly, this essay finds precedent in the contributions of a number of historians of psychology. Over the last century, there have been many critical responses to the prevailing narrative of discontinuity. These scholars have worked to include earlier intellectual trends, especially American mental philosophy, into the history of American psychology. The two earliest accounts are Jay Wharton Fay's *American Psychology before William James* (1939) and A. A. Roback's *A History of American Psychology* (1952). With one significant exception, mental philosophy received limited discussion by historians of psychology until the 2000s. Over the next decade, the issue received new attention in multiple articles published in the journal, *History of Psychology*.³ As a result of these efforts, contributions on the impact of mental philosophy now regularly appear in anthologies, and several recent comprehensive accounts have incorporated these insights into their narratives.⁴

³ See Rand Evans, "The Origins of American Academic Psychology," in *Explorations in the History of Psychology in the United States*, ed. J. Brozek (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1984).

⁴ See Jay Wharton Fay, *American Psychology before William James* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966)—the original was published in 1929—and A. A. Roback, *History of American Psychology* (New York: Library Publishers, 1952). Additionally, over the last two decades, a number of articles, book chapters, and several full length works on the history of psychology have incorporated overviews of antebellum mental philosophy. See, for example, Ludy T. Benjamin, *A Brief History of Modern Psychology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 13-18; Fuchs, "Mental Philosophers," 3-19, Wade E. Pickren and Alexandra Rutherford, *A History of Modern Psychology in Context* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010), 71-93, and C. James Goodwin, "United States," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Psychology: Global Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 571-573. For a critical assessment of the relationship between more recent and earlier historians, see Benjamin J. Lovett, "The New

An examination of this literature reveals several foci. Following Fay and Roback's lead, historians of psychology have emphasized the substantial degree to which antebellum mental philosophy textbooks, such as Thomas Upham's *Elements of Mental Philosophy*, overlap topically with late-19th century psychology textbooks. Fay and Roback's accounts also go even further in the past, introducing studies of the mind by 18th century figures like Samuel Johnson. In both early and more recent scholarship, the acute empiricism that undergirded American mental philosophy also features prominently, as does the broad conception of science that thrived in American Protestant universities. Recent scholars have also emphasized the lasting impact of Scottish common sense thinking on other late-19th century Protestants who were noted supporters of the new psychology, especially figures like George Trumbull Ladd and James McCosh.⁵ In addition to mental philosophy's Protestant context, several scholars have pointed to other overtly religious precedents to psychology, such as the movements of spiritualism and mesmerism, and how they anticipated future trends in psychology.⁶ In keeping with these efforts, this essay offers James as an example of a leading proponent of psychology within a Protestant milieu shaped by Scottish common sense. And in the preaching of Finney, it offers a case of an overtly religious practice that anticipated future formalized patterns of psychology as an academic discipline.

History of Psychology: A Review and Critique," *History of Psychology*, Vol. 9 no. 1 (2006): 17-37.

⁵ For focused discussions of James McCosh, see Bryan N. Maier, "The Role of James McCosh in God's Exile from Psychology," *History of Psychology*, Vol. 7 no. 4 (2004): 323-339 and Elissa N. Rodkey, "Last of the Mohicans? James McCosh and Psychology "Old" and "New"," *History of Psychology*, Vol. 14, no. 4 (2011): 335-355.

⁶ Pickren, *Psychology in Context*, 76-80. For a focused discussion of mesmerism, see David Schmit, "Re-Envisioning Antebellum American Psychology: The Dissemination of Mesmerism, 1836-1854," *History of Psychology*, Vol. 8, no. 4 (2005): 403-434.

Drawing upon recent scholarship in American religious history, the discussion will offer general overviews of Scottish common sense and mental philosophy. Drawing upon Boring's work, it will also offer a brief overview of the emergence of psychology with an emphasis on the impact Germany had on the US. With this background, the focus will turn to two of James's essays from *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (WB) as well as a brief discussion of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (VRE). Their significance within James's collected writings and their late publication make them strong points for building an argument for including mental philosophy in psychology's history. Both works represent several decades of James's more persistent intellectual commitments. And in the case of the essays in WB, several are comprised of multiple speeches or previous essays which James had the opportunity to reflectively assemble and republish. What emerges is a continued reliance on theoretical commitments definitive of common sense and mental philosophy.

My discussion of Charles Grandison Finney will rely primarily on Ted A. Smith's account of Finney's preaching method and theory in *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice*. Smith's text is useful in its concision and its topical arrangement of the features of Finney's theology and preaching. When considering Finney's definitive theoretical commitments as well as his preaching style, Smith relates each topic to primary sources such as Finney's *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. He also relates Finney's central commitments and practices to their broader social and cultural setting. The result is a streamlined account of Finney's career and the diverse set of practices that were definitive of new measures revival preaching. It is clear from Smith's exposition that Finney actively experimented on the human mind, relying upon both theory and quantifiable means of verifying his theology.

Mental Philosophy

Mental philosophy was a broad, interdisciplinary academic field. It was a product of Scottish common sense philosophy, which in turn proved to be a pervasive influence on American intellectual life from the Revolutionary period onward. A variety of 17th and 18th century Scottish Enlightenment figures feature prominently in the development of the common sense tradition, including Frances Hutcheson and Thomas Reid.⁷

One of the defining features of common sense theorists was to conceive of the mind as an object that operates according to natural law. Especially in the cases of later figures like Thomas Reid, much of their effort has been characterized as an attempt to counter challenges to traditional philosophical assumptions, such as David Hume's skeptical critique of Lockean understandings of cognition.⁸ In virtue of the mind's persistent, lawful, and verifiable features, commonly referred to as "faculties," it was thought possible to deduce certain conclusions about morality and knowledge. These faculties included a wide array of psychological topics, such as memory, consciousness, the will, the emotions, and perception.⁹

One faculty of the mind central to Scottish common sense ethical theory was the "moral sense." The definitive tendency was to use the moral sense to provide a basis for grounding

⁷ See Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 93-113, for an overview of the process of its initial rejection, gradual 18th century acceptance, and then rapid 19th century acceptance. See pp. 233-252 for its merger with theology..

⁸ For discussions of Scottish common sense as reactionary and conservative, see Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 45-56, and Noll, *America's God*, 94-95, 106-113. As Howe and Noll describe, Scottish common sense, it was in large part a reaction to figures like Hobbes and Hume who undercut traditional ethics and epistemology.

⁹ For general overviews of Scottish common sense's place in the history of modern philosophy, see Bruce Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 10-16 and Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 27-31.

traditional moral, religious, and communal values.¹⁰ There were two types of “moral sense” that emerged from Scotland. The first, known as “sentimentalism,” referred to an emotional response of the mind. For sentimentalists such as Hutcheson, the moral sense was a passive emotional response of approval towards other benevolent emotions.¹¹ The second conception proposed by “rational intuitionists” like Reid provided an alternative formulation of the moral sense. Rather than an emotional response, for Reid the moral sense was a faculty that enacted rational judgments regarding moral principles. Reid believed the mind, by the moral sense, identifies such moral truths similarly to how material objects are identified by the other senses.¹² In either case, what emerges are faculties that react predictably to morally significant inputs.

Reid is also significant for the fact that he has come to be representative of Scottish realism. In contrast to the Lockean view that the mind only directly perceives ideas of objects, Reid defended an understanding of perception where objects themselves are observed directly. As formulated by figures like Reid, the mind also knows certain “self-evident” truths with certainty, such as the existence of an external world and the reliability of memory. On the basis of these perceptive faculties and basic, inherently known truths, it was thought that a foundation for knowledge could be built.¹³ These theoretical commitments in turn played a central part to the academic discipline of mental philosophy in the American context.

¹⁰ See Noll, *America's God*, 106-113 for an overview of Hutcheson and pp. 233-238 for an general overview of common sense. See Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 27-31 for an overview of common sense epistemology and pp. 45-63 regarding common sense ethics.

¹¹ Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 45-46. Some form of sentimentalism enjoyed the support of a wide variety of proponents, including David Hume, Adam Smith, Thomas Burnet, the Earl of Shaftesbury, and Francis Hutcheson.

¹² Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 46-49.

¹³ For general overviews of Scottish common sense's place in the history of modern philosophy, see Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 27-31, 45-63; Bruce Kuklick, *The*

On account of the confidence in the power and reliability of the perceptive faculties that common sense fostered, what has come to be known as Baconianism developed in Protestant universities. Baconianism entailed an acutely empirical approach to all branches of knowledge, from biblical criticism to biology. One of the guiding assumptions for much of the 19th century was that all branches of knowledge could be categorized and related in terms of basic observations along with the help of limited rational deduction. Such a conviction undergirded a conception of science significantly broader than most modern understandings, one defined by a healthy optimism in the possibility of the convergence of all branches of knowledge.¹⁴

Consequently, American mental philosophy maintained the interdisciplinary nature of Scotland. As Daniel Walker Howe explains in his overview of antebellum ethical philosophy at Harvard, 19th century study of the mind continued to be bound up with broader moral concerns. As Howe notes of Levi Hedge's influential textbook on the subject, *The Elements of Logic*, "logic meant the whole study of human reasoning, and much of his book dealt with epistemology

Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 10-16; and Noll, *America's God*, 233-238.

¹⁴ See Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 44-48 and Noll, *America's God*, 236-237.

One illustrative example of Baconianism is one of Harvard's most prolific philosophers of the 19th century, Francis Bowen (1811-1890). He represented Harvard's cutting philosophical edge, eventually adapting continental German philosophy to his Scottish commitments during the third quarter of the 19th century. Consider the following synopsis in his introduction *Lowell Lectures: On the Application of Metaphysical and Ethical Science to the Evidences of Religion* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1849), x: "I have endeavoured to show, that the fundamental doctrines of religion rest upon the same basis which supports all science, and that they cannot be denied without rejecting also the familiar truths which we adopt almost unconsciously, and upon which we depend for the conduct of life and the regulation of our ordinary concerns." On display is a significantly broader understanding of the nature of science and the relationship of different branches of knowledge. The text as a whole is complex example of mental philosophical apologetics.

and cognitive psychology.”¹⁵ Consequently, depending on the emphasis of a discussion, both mental philosophers and contemporary scholarship have referred to the practice by a variety of additional names including moral philosophy and mental science.

By the end of the first quarter of the 19th century, mental philosophy provided the main theoretical basis for definitive theological claims of Christianity. Scholarship has led to the conclusion that mental philosophy came to be a definitive feature of 19th century American Protestantism across the entirety of the Protestant theological spectrum.¹⁶ Importantly, principles of mental philosophy were frequently used by leading Protestant intellectuals in defense of Christianity in the face of increasing skepticism, materialism, and criticism from other sects. As Noll notes of 19th century American Protestant theologians, “In divinity, a rigorous empiricism resting on facts of consciousness and facts from the Bible became the standard for justifying belief in God, revelation, and the Trinity.”¹⁷ One could add to this list other central issues such as the unitarian conception of God and the existence of the soul, among others.¹⁸

¹⁵ Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 33. Hedge wrote the definitive mental philosophy textbook used at Harvard during the 19th century.

¹⁶ Importantly, the last fifty years of American religious historical scholarship has yielded a consensus that Scottish common sense philosophy, and therefore Baconianism and mental philosophy, were definitive of 19th century American Protestantism across the entirety of the Protestant theological spectrum. Whether Congregational, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodists, Anglican, Unitarian, evangelical or traditional, American Protestant preachers and theologians drew upon a common source of Scottish common sense concepts. It was also common between both American preachers and theologians, two groups that would become increasingly separate and distinct by the century’s end. For an account of Unitarian appropriation of Scottish common sense philosophy, see Howe, *Unitarian Conscience* and Kuklick, *Rise of American Philosophy*; for Presbyterian emphasis, see Theodore D. Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977); for Finney, see Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); for multiple-denominations with a Congregationalist emphasis, see Noll, *America’s God*.

¹⁷ Noll, *America’s God*, 235.

¹⁸ For figures from multiple denominations, see Noll, *America’s God*, 234-237; for Princetonians, see Bozeman, *Age of Science*, 3-31; for Unitarians see Kuklick, *Rise of American*

One example from the first part of the 19th century is the prolific Unitarian preacher, William Ellery Channing (1780 –1842). For example, in “Evidences of Christianity II,” Channing repeatedly references the ostensibly observable features of human nature to defend Christianity.¹⁹ Notably, these features include the common psychological needs of typical religious adherents, such as the belief in miracles. Just as Scottish commonsense theorists sought to legitimize the basic powers of the human mind, Channing cites the existence of the human capacity of wonder as the basis for the legitimacy of belief in miracles:

In surveying the human mind, we discover a principle which singularly fits it to be wrought upon and benefited by miraculous agency, and which might therefore lead us to expect such interposition. I refer to that principle of our nature by which we become in a measure insensible or indifferent to what is familiar, but are roused to attention and deep interest by what is singular, strange, supernatural. This principle of wonder is an important part of our constitution; and that God should employ it in the work of our education is what reason might anticipate. I see, then, a foundation for miracles in the human mind; and when I consider that the mind is God’s noblest work, I ought to look to this as the interpreter of his designs. We are plainly so constituted that the order of nature, the more it is fixed, excites us the less. Our interest is blunted by its ceaseless uniformity. On the contrary, departures from this order powerfully stir the soul, break up its old and slumbering habits of thought, turn with a new solicitude to the Almighty Interposer, and prepare it to receive with awe the communications of his will.²⁰

Philosophy, 28-38 and Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 35-43. This tradition includes figures from all denominations and periods of the 19th century, such as Timothy Dwight, Nathaniel William Taylor, Charles Grandison Finney, David Tappan, William Ellery Channing, Levi Hedge, Francis Bowen, James Walker, John Winthrop, Samuel Stanhope Smith, Archibald Alexander, and Charles Hodge. See William Ellery Channing, “Unitarian Christianity,” in *The Works of William E Channing, D. D. With an Introduction, New and Complete Edition, Rearranged* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1880), 367-384.

¹⁹ See William Ellery Channing, “Evidences of Christianity II,” in *The Works of William E Channing, D. D. With an Introduction, New and Complete Edition, Rearranged* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1880), 204-213. His writings are interesting in the tensions they represent between the egalitarianism that Scottish common sense fostered and the elitism inherent in traditional mainline Protestantism. Further, he espouses a strong distrust from the modern need for scientific regularities to explain the entirety of reality, whereas Scottish common sense theorists clearly embrace natural law.

²⁰ Channing, “Evidences II,” 213.

This excerpt from Channing's writings is worth citing at length for several reasons. The piece is evidence of the difficulty of reconciling the modern embrace of observable law and regularity with traditional religious belief. He clearly embodies the turn to the mind as law-abiding object by mental philosophy, citing a persistent feature of the human mind as the basis of his theological claim, all the while pushing back against the need for law to the extent that it rules out miracles. Importantly, the argument takes very seriously some conception of the typical religious person as fundamental when making the argument. The interest or boredom of the religious human mind are taken as serious indicators of matters of fact. In short, the existence of human wonder as a mental state points to the legitimacy of belief in miracles, insofar as they are the natural, even rationally-expected objects for human wonder to respond to. This is significant because, as will be seen below, his argument anticipates James's apologetic reasoning both in form and substance. James makes very similar appeals in his defense of religious belief, and this, over half a century later. Further, Channing was primarily a minister, and not a Harvard academic, whereas James was a medical doctor by training, and found his home in Harvard's philosophy department. And yet one will find deep commonalities both in their tone and their mode of argumentation.

It is also worthwhile to address mental philosophy curriculum in Protestant universities. Several late-18th century figures are credited for the introduction of common sense to the university system. From the Revolutionary period through the first quarter of the 19th century, mental philosophy was usually taught as a lecture series by a university president or endowed chair.²¹ As Bozeman describes in his discussion of the case of Princeton, these early lecturers

²¹ John Witherspoon, signer of the Declaration of Independence and President of the College of New Jersey from 1768-1794, Timothy Dwight, President of Yale from 1795-1817,

relied heavily on Scottish texts: “To men like Archibald Alexander...the writings of Reid and Stewart were second nature. Alexander’s course in ‘mental science’ at the seminary was virtually a transcript of their thought embellished with more specifically theological concerns. Orthodox zeal for ‘the incomparable Dr. Reid’ knew few bounds and showed no signs of diminishing before 1860.”²²

Though lectures and primary sources continued to be important, during the first quarter of the 19th century, textbooks also came to play a central role. It was common practice well into the mid-19th century for philosophy professors to systematize principles of mental philosophy from their lectures and Scottish primary sources into textbooks in order to provide streamlined instruction.²³ While American psychology has represented a significantly narrow field of study, mental philosophy maintained the breadth of Scottish interests. The most famous and widely-used textbook, *Elements of Intellectual Philosophy*, was first published by Thomas Upham of Bowdoin College in 1827. During his lifetime, Upham published several texts based upon the original work, including an extensive two volume set that continued to be published into the second half of the 19th century. The objective is clearly a religious one as he makes clear in the introductory chapter. In justifying the “science” of mental philosophy, Upham points to the theological motive for such study, noting that the sciences point to God’s existence, and that the

David Tappan, Hollis Chair at Harvard from 1792-1803, and Archibald Alexander, the founding professor of Princeton Seminary, are among notable early lecturers on the topic.

²² Bozeman *Age of Science*, 38.

²³ Bozeman, *Age of Science*, 28. For an overview of the denominational colleges, see Donald G. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War, with Particular Reference to the Religious Influences Bearing Upon the College Movement* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1965). For comments on their religious purpose see pp. 55-56. For an overview of different American Christian groups’ expansion along the frontier, see William Warren Sweet’s *Religion on the American Frontier* series. Much of the growth of the American college system was driven by the goal of training the next generations of Protestant clergy, and so much of what became standard education was shaped by this motive.

study of the mind is the most important: “But it must be added, that of all things created, whether in the heavens above or in the earth beneath, the human mind is that principle, which evinces the most wonderful construction, which discloses the most astonishing movements.”²⁴

His text serves as a helpful illustration of the diverse set of topics that made up mental philosophy. The chapters move back and forth between philosophical and psychological topics, as well as other fields. The second chapter is dedicated to philosophical discussion of “Primary Truths,” or those beliefs thought to be intrinsic to the mind. These include the beliefs of personal existence and personal identity, the existence of the external world, and the reliability of memory.²⁵ Though one would be unable to find histories of famous experiments or overviews of laboratory method, there is no shortage of overtly psychological topics. Among these are perception—under which he includes smell, taste, hearing, touch, and sight—attention, dreaming, and memory.²⁶ The text dedicates entire chapters to each topic, under which are numerous subtopics; each is highly ordered, and the result is a highly taxonomized account of psychological topics.²⁷

²⁴ Thomas C. Upham, *Intellectual Philosophy: Designed As a Textbook* (Portland, ME: William Hyde, 1827), 19. Further, in his discussion of the will and the conscience, the text also takes space to discuss the Divine Agency; see p. 347.

²⁵ See Chapter II in Upham, *Intellectual Philosophy*, 20-31.

²⁶ See Chapters III, XV, XVIII, and XXII respectively in Upham, *Intellectual Philosophy*, 31-53, 211-226, 250-264, 311-337.

²⁷ Interestingly, the text also goes well beyond either philosophy or psychology, addressing issues such as education and the nature of human language. See Chapters XXXIII and XII, respectively. Additionally, Upham discusses rhetoric, the nature of human prejudice, and belief of testimony See Chapters XXI, XXXI, and XXXII, respectively. The nature and use of human language is discussed in relation to issues such as “national character,” as well as brief comments on the study of the classical languages in chapter XII. Upham’s later publications become increasingly more elaborate and detailed outlines of these issues in philosophy and psychology.

Mental philosophy was a substantially broad study of the mind rooted in Scottish common sense philosophy. As understood by 19th century common sense theorists, all of reality, including the mind, could be observed and categorized by the methods and terms common sense provided. Early-19th century mental philosophy textbooks provided highly schematized accounts of the mind, which were then taught to university students within a predominantly religious university culture.

The New Psychology

Scottish common sense experienced a substantial decline in popularity after the Civil War. There were dramatic intellectual shifts in the study of the mind that signaled the emergence of psychology as a distinct field in the US. Among the most notable were increased acceptance in American universities of continental European philosophy. Starting in the middle decades of the 19th century, liberal American Protestants became more willing to integrate Kantian and Hegelian commitments into their philosophy, in large part due to the influence of one of Scottish common sense's most prolific British advocates, Sir William Hamilton. It was into such a philosophical context that the new psychology arose in American universities in the 1880s.²⁸

In addition to changes in philosophical commitments, German emphasis on experimental method was a major cause of the rise of experimental psychology in America. This fact plays a central part of the narrative given in Boring's text.²⁹ Perhaps the most important figure in this turn is Wilhelm Wundt. Wundt was the inheritor of a number of important trends. One was psychophysics, the attempt to mathematically describe the relationship of mental phenomena in

²⁸ See Kuklick, *Rise of American Philosophy*, 16-21, regarding the mid-century influence of Sir William Hamilton.

²⁹ In order to set the stage for later discussion, Boring both provides a useful guide and a reference point, as the text provides the emphasis on German experiment.

relation to physical stimuli. The principal figure of this movement was Gustave Theodor Fechner (1801-1887) whose *Elemente der Psychophysik* was the groundbreaking contribution in this field. Fechner in turn drew upon earlier work by both Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841), who tried to assign mathematical values to the covarying intensity of an experience, and Ernst Henrich Weber (1795-1878), who developed the concept of the “just-noticeable difference, or jnd,” the smallest change in the magnitude of a stimulus that could be noticed by a subject.³⁰

Wundt also drew upon increasingly advanced studies in physiology, especially those by Hermann von Helmholtz. As characterized by Boring, Helmholtz adopted a stringent empiricism and an idealistic approach to describing objective reality, construing the world in terms of subjective experience. Wundt took these insights and developed a systematic approach to psychological testing defined by its emphasis on recorded introspective reports and systematization of such reports within a laboratory setting. Wundt is also credited for establishing the first dedicated experimental psychology lab in Leipzig in 1879.³¹

As Boring describes in *The History of Experimental Psychology*, Wundt’s lab played an important role in the rise of experimental psychology in the United States: “From about 1888 to 1895 a wave of laboratory-founding swept over America, lagging only a little in phase behind a similar wave in Germany. Americans were going to Germany, mostly to Wundt at Leipzig, and coming back filled with enthusiasm for making American psychology secure in experimentalism.”³² Among Wundt’s students were the most prominent early American

³⁰ Pickren, *Psychology in Context*, 45-46.

³¹ For an concise overview of the history of German psychology, including psychophysics, physiology, philosophy and Wundt, see Pickren, *Psychology in Context*, 42-56. For an overview of psychophysics see Boring, *Experimental Psychology*, 275-303; for an overview of Helmholtz see pp. 304-313; for an overview of Wundt see pp. 316-344.

³² Boring, *Experimental Psychology*, 505.

psychologist including G. Stanley Hall, James McKeen Cattell, and Edward Bradford Titchener, who in turn taught Boring at Cornell. Hall and Cattell both served as Presidents of the American Psychological Association. Hall established the first experimental lab in the US at Johns Hopkins, and Cattell founded psychological laboratories at the University of Pennsylvania and then Columbia University.³³ American psychology quickly departed Wundt's emphasis on introspection in favor of analysis of the functional roles of mental states. However, experimentation, accompanied by systematic measurement, became a defining component of psychology as a distinct field in late-19th century America.

Boring's *The History of Experimental Psychology* has been a very successful description of this intellectual turn. The structure of the text reflects his acceptance of a discontinuous relationship between psychology and mental philosophy. In both the 1929 and 1950 editions, Boring starts the history of American psychology with William James, making no mention of Protestant mental philosophy.³⁴ This fact is compounded by the fact that a substantial amount of his text is an overview of the history of philosophy, and therefore largely speculative, non-experimental speculation on the mind. Despite his inclusion of a section on Scottish common sense philosophy, Boring still found no place for American mental philosophy in his history of psychology.³⁵

During a 1929 speech he delivered to the International Congress of Psychology, Cattell publicly stated what Boring's text implied: "A history of psychology in America prior to the last fifty years would be as short as a book on snakes in Ireland since the time of St. Patrick. In so far

³³ C. James, Goodwin, "United States," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Psychology: Global Perspectives*, ed. David B. Baker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 573.

³⁴ For discussion of James, see Boring, *Experimental Psychology*, 505-517.

³⁵ See Chapter 11 in Boring, *Experimental Psychology*.

as psychologists are concerned, America then was like Heaven, for there was not a damned soul there.”³⁶ After dismissively mentioning the field of mental philosophy along with a few American intellectuals, he said of psychology’s origins,³⁷ “There was no science of psychology in America fifty years ago; it may be that there was no organized science of psychology in the world prior to 1879. In that year Wilhelm Wundt established at Leipzig the first laboratory, [Théodule-Armand] Ribot published his “La Psychologie allemande contemporaine,” Francis Galton his “Psychometric Experiments,” William James the first chapter of a work on psychology. In so far as psychology dates from 1879, this congress celebrates the jubilee of our science.”³⁸

Cattell’s speech gets at the crux of the issue for the early psychologists they represent. The intentional omission of mental philosophy is clearly tied to the issue of psychology’s status as a science. For early figures in the field, mental philosophy did not count as a science, and was consequently left aside. Given that mental philosophy had significant theological and religious ties both in its American context and in Scotland, this seems a likely source for the prejudice that they exhibited, as well as the need to emphasize psychology’s use of experimental method. The resulting picture from figures like Cattell and Boring is an understanding of American

³⁶ J. McKeen Cattell, “Psychology in America,” *Science*, New Series, Vol. 70, No. 1815 (Oct. 11, 1929): 336.

³⁷ Cattell, “Psychology in America,” 336. Cattell was aware of the sorts of precedents that historians might draw connections from psychology to: “Jonathan Edwards, the theologian, and Benjamin Franklin, the practical man, were our most typical representatives. In our colleges mental and moral philosophy was indeed taught, mostly Scotch, the importation of which was not prohibited in those days. Noah Porter, President of Yale from 1871 to 1886, gave us the most elaborate text-book; James McCosh, President at Princeton from 1866 to 1888, performed the greatest service by sheltering physiological psychology and organic evolution under the cloak of Presbyterian orthodoxy.”

³⁸ Cattell, “Psychology in America,” 336.

psychology as a science that starts in the late-19th century with William James, followed by rapid acceptance of German experimental method.

Continuity between Mental Philosophy and Psychology

While the narrative above emphasizes psychology's independence, there are many reasons to understand the shift in American Universities from mental philosophy to psychology as essentially gradual and continuous. Despite the centrality of James to their narrative, James provides one of its clearest counterpoints. A cursory reading of James reveals a deep familiarity and preoccupation with the insights of Fechner, Helmholtz, and Wundt. And yet, his late-19th and early-20th century works on religious belief provide clear cases of intellectual continuity between mental philosophy and psychology.

In general, James's writings display clear marks of the impact of Scottish common sense. Further, when one turns to James's apologetic use of psychology, it becomes clear that late into his life, James continued to hold distinctly Scottish common sense commitments in tandem with his commitment to psychology. As a result he used both the concepts of mental philosophy and psychology as bases for apologetic argument. An examination of James's writing reveals an active attempt to reconcile and synthesize the old with the new.

William James and Religious Belief

This discussion of James will focus on two selections from WB and VRE. The chapters of WB are comprised of spliced articles and public talks that James gave in the two decades leading up to its 1896 publication. Some chapters themselves are comprised of multiple articles and lectures.³⁹ The book's namesake chapter is a lecture in which James defends religious belief,

³⁹ William James, "The Sentiment of Rationality" in *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, ed. with an introduction by John, J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 317n4.

given the fact that evidence might be inconclusive for either theism or agnosticism. The reality of the circumscription of human knowledge and the need to act based upon the stakes play central roles in the chapter and the entirety of the text, as does a prominent emphasis on highly naturalistic, biological accounts of the mind. The discussion that follows focuses on the chapters, “The Sentiment of Rationality” and “Reflex Action and Theism.” The discussion will catalog James’s general common sense commitments as they appear as well as his participation in mental philosophical apologetics.

WB: “The Sentiment of Rationality”

James premises “The Sentiment of Rationality” with the claim that as a matter of psychological fact, humans do not try to assess the rationality of their beliefs unless provoked by external stimuli, such as evidence that poses a threat to their current worldview. As a matter of necessity, a person’s consciousness is pushed out of a state of “equilibrium” by such evidence, and must carry out a process of reconciliation between this new data and their body of beliefs. The “sentiment of rationality” is an emotion that arises once a person readjusts and makes the system logically coherent again. A person can “recognize its rationality as he recognizes everything else, by certain subjective marks with which it affects him.”⁴⁰ The sentiment of rationality includes “A strong feeling of ease, peace, rest”⁴¹ and a “feeling of the sufficiency of the present moment...this absence of all need to explain it, account for it, or justify it.”⁴² Thus, for James, rationality is bound up with and made known by an emotional state. Rationality goes beyond logic and judgment to include proper feelings in relation to such judgments.

⁴⁰ James, “Sentiment of Rationality,” 317.

⁴¹ James, “Sentiment of Rationality,” 317.

⁴² James, “Sentiment of Rationality,” 318.

Importantly, the concept of the sentiment of rationality is a clear representation of the impact of Scottish common sense on James's thought. In claiming that rational judgments are confirmed by co-occurring emotions, James continued a use of common sense definitive of Unitarian ethical thought at Harvard, James's immediate environment for most of his life. It was common in Harvard's adaptation of common sense for theorists to explain ethical reasoning and action by conjoining the two types of moral sense as typified by Hutcheson and Reid. Following Reid, antebellum Harvard Unitarians were decidedly in the rational intuitionist camp. From William Ellery Channing to Henry Ware, there was a solid acceptance of moral objectivity, as well as the rational nature of moral judgments.⁴³ However, early-19th century Harvard Unitarians also relied on Hutchesonian principles to explain how the human mind brings itself to action once it has determined a right course of action. Consequently, 19th century Unitarians also nodded to sentimentalists like Hutcheson by incorporating motivating emotions, or "sentiments" into their moral theory. These sentiments were "emotional regard for a rational principle" that included "the love of truth, the love of beauty, the love of virtue, and the love of God," which sentiments were thought to "reinforce and strengthen moral perception."⁴⁴ Their reliance on common sense resulted in a moral psychology where rational ethical judgment is accompanied and aided by a corresponding emotion. In the "Sentiment of Rationality," James clearly continued this Harvard Unitarian tradition by taking Harvard common sense ethics and applying it to knowledge more generally. He put emotions and rational judgments together, characterizing the sentiment of rationality as a rationality-confirming emotion.

⁴³ See Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 49-56, for discussion of figures including Henry Ware and Levi Frisbie on objective morality, William Ellery Channing on morality, and James Walker and Edward Tyrell Channing on the moral sense.

⁴⁴ Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 62.

According to the discussion, there are four defining characteristics of beliefs that elicit the sentiment of rationality. The fourth and final component bears striking evidence of the impact of Scottish common sense. For James, belief systems that elicit the sentiment of rationality affirm and reinforce fundamental human values and capacities. James states that “For a philosophy to succeed on a universal scale it must define the future congruously with our spontaneous powers.”⁴⁵ Human freedom of the will, hoping for future well-being, positive evaluations of both life and emotions, and working towards “eternal” ends are implicitly cited as being such powers.⁴⁶ This is in contrast to worldviews that marginalize what is most fundamental to being human, focusing on the insignificance of life in the cosmos.⁴⁷ James contends that such belief systems cannot of their very nature be rational for humans to hold, for the reality described by these systems prescribes humans no courses of action. For James, worldviews like materialism “[deny] reality to the objects of almost all the impulses which we most cherish.”⁴⁸ Thus, one sign of human rationality is being in the possession of a set of beliefs that validate humanity’s most basic values as well as the human capacity to understand the world and act in it.

Importantly, in arguing this way, James moves from speculation about the human mind to a conclusion about religious belief. The conclusion is that religious belief is therefore more rational insofar as it validates what is most fundamental to human nature. Among other issues, James discusses his view that the framework of Christianity offers a place for actions such as repenting and having religious faith. Further, whether or not his assessment of the human mind is correct, in keeping with his psychological commitments, he repeatedly describes such actions not

⁴⁵ James, “Sentiment of Rationality,” 328.

⁴⁶ James, “Sentiment of Rationality,” 328-329.

⁴⁷ James, “Sentiment of Rationality,” 328.

⁴⁸ James, “Sentiment of Rationality,” 329.

only as natural responses to the human condition, but as necessary, deterministic aspects of the human mind.⁴⁹ With the topic of faith, understood as “belief in something concerning which doubt is still theoretically possible,” James describes it as “an essential function” of human beings.⁵⁰ He insists further that it is common of all persons by stipulating that “The necessity of faith as an ingredient in our mental attitude is strongly insisted on by the scientific philosophers of the present day...that the course of nature is uniform.”⁵¹ Whether or not this is the case, James clearly describes a general faith attitude as a basic component of human life, one that is performed out of necessity in keeping with the sort of thing the human mind is. In doing so, he displays his tendency to incorporate a naturalistic discussion typical of psychologists into his discussions and defenses of religion, effectively adapting cutting edge psychology to apologetic purposes.

In closing, “The Sentiment of Rationality” shows how James used psychology apologetically. James moves from observations about human psychology to conclusions in defense of religion, just as Protestants had used mental philosophy before him. The chapter is also a strong indicator that James relied on Scottish common sense commitments well into the late-19th century. While much of his language is deeply biological, neurological, and even deterministic, reflecting tendencies of contemporary psychologists, he merged this conceptual framework with common sense commitments about rationality being grounded in fundamental human capacities. And he did so in such a way that reflected the impact of Harvard’s appropriation of Scottish common sense.

⁴⁹ James, “Sentiment of Rationality,” 331-337.

⁵⁰ James, “Sentiment of Rationality,” 333.

⁵¹ James, “Sentiment of Rationality,” 334.

“Reflex Action and Theism”

James’s emphasis on the relationship of human action to rationality is a theme that continues in another chapter of WB, “Reflex Action and Theism.” The chapter is a reprinting of an 1881 talk James gave to the Unitarian Minister’s Union.⁵² It is aimed towards defending religious belief against skeptical arguments, especially those that overemphasize scientific verification as a necessary component of rational human belief. The starting point for the discussion is a psychological conception of human behavior known as the “reflex arc,” which James describes as “one of the fundamental conclusions to which the entire drift of modern physiological investigation sweeps us.”⁵³

The reflex arc was a deeply biological and evolutionary conception of human action defined as follows: “It means that the acts we perform are always the result of outward discharges from the nervous centres, and that these outward discharges are themselves the result of impressions from the external world, carried in along one or another of our sensory nerves.”⁵⁴ What follows in the chapter is an understanding of the reflex arc as a psychological concept comprised of three parts: 1) perception; 2) consciousness, which contains the will; and 3) outward human action. Consciousness and the will exist only as a “middle ground” for 1) perception and 3) the outward action as a response; “All action is thus *re*-action upon the outer world.”⁵⁵

⁵² William James, “Reflex Action and Theism” in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 90n1.

⁵³ Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 92.

⁵⁴ James, *Will to Believe*, 91.

⁵⁵ James, *Will to Believe*, 92.

The tactic of the essay is to show that the content of the concept of the reflex arc, a concept held by contemporary psychologists, leads to the conclusion that belief in the existence of God is the most rational stance a person can have. The argument starts with an overview of the operations of the reflex arc as follows. Consciousness naturally tries to categorize the objects presented to it by perception. This is in order to better allow a person to perform some outward behavior or other in response to these sensory inputs. Taking an evolutionary and biological view of the person as adaptive organism, James states that the mind must react to the world as a matter of neurological necessity. Perception offers information about the world, consciousness categorizes it, and necessary human reactions follow.⁵⁶

James stipulates further that during the course of life, the mind naturally develops more general, universal concepts. Ultimately, the conscious part of the mind constructs and contemplates the concept of reality as a whole: “And then the object that confronts us, that knocks on our mental door and asks to be let in...is just this whole universe itself and its essence.”⁵⁷ The crux of the issue comes down to the question of how the acting part of the mind is to react after consciousness has constructed and contemplated the overwhelming nature of the sum total of reality. As characterized by James, all overarching world views, both religious and philosophical, are in large part views on how to respond to the sum total of reality.⁵⁸

Echoing “The Sentiment of Rationality,” James’s next step is to point out how different interpretations of ultimate reality yield radically different courses of action. To James, Calvinism and predestination, as well as materialism and agnosticism, offer nothing to the acting part of the person to do in light of such views of the universe. On materialism or agnosticism, James

⁵⁶ James, *Will to Believe*, 95-96, 98.

⁵⁷ James, *Will to Believe*, 98.

⁵⁸ James, *Will to Believe*, 98-99.

contends there is no prescription for human action in reaction to the sum total of reality. There simply is a universe, and it demands nothing from persons. In the case of a materialistic universe in which there is no God, or the case of agnosticism where the knowledge of such a being is called into question, the human being cannot react to the concept, “the universe”: “Materialism and agnosticism, even were they true, could never gain universal and popular acceptance; for they both, alike, give a solution of things which is irrational to the practical third of our nature, and in which we can never volitionally feel at home.”⁵⁹ Contrary to this, the concept of the universe is completely different for the theist: “Now theism always stands ready with the most practically rational solution it is possible to conceive. Not an energy of our active nature to which it does not authoritatively appeal, not an emotion of which it does not normally and naturally release the springs. At a single stroke, it changes the dead blank *it* of the world into a living *thou*, with whom the whole man may have dealings.”⁶⁰ Theism at least serves as the basis of a view of reality in which humans can react to the universe as to a person, rather than the purely descriptive accounts of inanimate matter that concern materialism. The conclusion James is working towards on account of the reflex arc is that humans must be theists in order to be optimally rational, insofar as rationality depends on the outwards reactions of humans to their environment: “Our volitional nature must then, until the end of time, exert a constant pressure upon the other departments of the mind to induce them to function to theistic conclusions.”⁶¹

This chapter is noteworthy in that James offers a psychological analysis that addresses the substantially deterministic neurophysiology definitive of psychology, and shows how it points to the rationality of belief in God. Without belief in God, there is no way the active part of

⁵⁹ James, *Will to Believe*, 100-101.

⁶⁰ James, *Will to Believe*, 101.

⁶¹ James, *Will to Believe*, 101.

the 3-part reflex arc model can rationally respond in action to “the universe” as the ultimate concept. Whether James’s premises or the reflex arc as a concept are correct, he moves from ve premises about psychology to apologetic conclusions about religious belief. This chapter serves as further evidence of James’s participation in the mental philosophical tradition of apologetics, adapting even highly naturalistic speculation to such a cause.

The Varieties of Religious Experience

James’s insight into religious belief was recognized during his lifetime. One indicator is the fact that James was appointed to give the Gifford Lectures from 1901-1902 at the University of Edinburgh. The lecture series was published in 1902 as *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (VRE). The main project was to analyze a number of acute case studies of psychological experiences, and then draw general conclusions about the nature of religious experience in general.⁶²

Though it is clear that VRE has non-normative, descriptive goals, it is also clear that James’s apologetic inclinations are just under the surface. In Lecture I, he immediately takes up issues of neurophysiology in relation to religious belief. James rejects attempts by modern scholars to discount religious experience on account of its causal relation to some neurotic brain state. James refers to this practice as “medical materialism.”⁶³ His tact is twofold. First, he simply grants the point that religious experiences are tied to specific brain states, even neurotic ones. Second, he points out that, as a matter of fact all mental states are determined by some brain state or other. Whether it is abstract mathematical theorizing, anger, etc.—all mental states

⁶² See Lecture II, “Circumscription of the Topic” in William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, with an introduction by Wayne Proudfoot (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2004), 35-56, for an overview of the scope of his study. The original *Varieties* was published in 1902.

⁶³ James, *The Varieties*, 24.

are just as much determined by some brain state, whether or not they are neurotic in nature.⁶⁴

James's third and most important step is to conclude that assessing the value of mental states, such as those accompanying religious experiences of various sorts, cannot be judged based upon their neural origins. Instead, mental states, religious or otherwise, can only be assessed based upon whether or not they prove beneficial in some way.⁶⁵ Assessing the value of religious experience based upon their outcomes serves as a legitimizing criterion for religious experience in general, and represents an indicator of his pragmatic commitments.

The final chapter, Lecture XX, is also worth taking note of in closing. This chapter revisits a number of topics and themes that defined the study. Granting the importance of the diversity and divergence of various religions, he concludes the following about religion in general:

It consists of two parts:

1. An uneasiness; and
2. Its solution.
 1. The uneasiness, reduced to its simplest terms, is a sense that there is *something wrong about us as we naturally stand*.
 2. The solution is a sense that *we are saved from the wrongness* by making proper connexion with the higher powers.⁶⁶

Importantly, he reiterates a reoccurring theme of the biological necessity of such a religious impulse. Of religious experiences, he says that "we are obliged, on account of their extraordinary influence upon action and endurance, to class them amongst the most important biological functions of mankind."⁶⁷ However one might assess James's descriptions, he again

⁶⁴ James, *The Varieties*, 22-26. This is a point that James discusses at length in later lectures. For instance, in Lectures VI and VII, James concludes that mental neuroses such as melancholia are the most religiously insightful and useful. See James, *The Varieties*, 124-150.

⁶⁵ James, *The Varieties*, 26-28.

⁶⁶ James, *The Varieties*, 435.

⁶⁷ James, *The Varieties*, 434.

offers a defense of the role of religion in human life based upon highly naturalistic descriptions of human psychology. James defends religion by defending its fundamental, even biological, place in human life.

The selections from WB and VRE showcase James's assumptions and commitments that were also definitive of mental philosophy. James is a clear point of evidence in favor of intellectual continuity between mental philosophy and psychology. Though James lived at the cutting edge of scientific advance, especially with regards to the realm of biology, he continued to be thoroughly enmeshed in an intellectual context shaped by Harvard Unitarianism. He carried common sense into the early-20th century along with his commitment to psychology, and he adapted substantially naturalistic psychological insights along with mental philosophy as the bases of religious apologetics.⁶⁸

Charles Grandison Finney and Experimentation

As illustrated by Cattell and Boring above, in addition to James's contributions, the shift in focus to scientific experimentation plays a crucial role in the story of psychology's emergence. As indicated in Boring's description, the laboratory founding spurred on by studying with Wundt is a central part of the narrative of discontinuity. However, the next discussion coincides with work that indicates that significant precedents to the field of psychology lay within overtly religious social movements. Several scholars have suggested that important components of psychology's emergence are located outside of the halls of academia.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Discussing James in this light is a complimentary piece of evidence to recent work in the history of psychology. Two of James's contemporaries played similar roles within different academic institutions. George Trumbull Ladd and James McCosh are two such examples at Yale and Princeton respectively. James provides a complimentary Harvard Unitarian example of late-19th century Protestants who held onto both mental philosophy while engaging the new psychology.

⁶⁹ See footnote 5 above.

Following suit, the following overview makes clear that psychological experimentation played a fundamental role in Finney's preaching during the early 19th century, anticipating psychology's experimental turn. Specifically, Finney regularly experimented on large groups of people with the form of his preaching in order to optimize the conversion rate of his audiences. These conversions in turn provided a quantifiable basis for assessing and verifying the theoretical basis for his preaching, which was rooted in contemporary science and philosophy, including Scottish mental philosophy.⁷⁰

Finney became a preacher during the period known as the Second Great Awakening. As Ted A. Smith notes in *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice*, though numerous preachers participated in the movement, Finney emerged as its main representative, and his impact was lasting: "When Finney started preaching in the 1820s, his style seemed so different that some people did not even recognize it as preaching. By the time of his death in 1875, the new measures style had become the invisible instinct of most white Protestant preachers."⁷¹ These "new measures" were the varied, attention-getting preaching methods that came to define revivalism.

Before discussing his preaching methods, it is important to take note of Finney's account of conversion in terms of substantially scientific, even Baconian and empiricist, human

⁷⁰ This discussion draws primarily upon Ted A. Smith's account of Finney's new measures preaching. When expostulating Finney's methods and theories, Smith's account draws in detail upon Finney's Lectures on Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) with extensive citation and provides a good introduction and systematization of the work while providing an overview of Finney's career and how his theory was enacted. What follows is a distillation of some of the key points of Smith's account of Finney. It will reference page numbers from both *The New Measures* and *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* when needed.

⁷¹ Smith, *New Measures*, 9. For a biographical overview of Finney's life, see Keith Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

psychology typical of mental philosophy. Famously, in *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (1835), Finney said that “Religion is the work of man.”⁷² As Smith points out, this attitude is especially striking when contrasted with the Calvinism that defined the Presbyterian and Congregational circles that he was affiliated with, wherein conversion was an act by the divine agency: “Finney rejected both the absence of any connection between means and effects and the presence of a bond established only by special divine action. He argued instead for a bond like the one found between everyday causes and effects.”⁷³ Religious conversion, then, was largely a discussion of the human mind for Finney.

As Smith discusses, Finney drew upon several different approaches to the mind including mental philosophy, which resulted in a well-defined taxonomy of the mind. The most important components of the person for purposes of conversion were the will, the emotions, and the capacity of attention. On Finney’s view, emotions are involuntary and independent from the will; it is not possible to for the will to make the mind feel or have a certain emotion one way or another towards an object. However, like Hutcheson, Finney believed that certain objects could elicit predictable emotions, and that the spiritual world also worked predictably:⁷⁴

When a person attended to an idea, Finney taught, corresponding feelings arose “by the very laws of mind”—and, he hastened to add, with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit worked in that space where mind and truth were in “warm contact,” “pouring home” the exhortation of the preacher, until the mind would finally yield. The Spirit worked reliably and predictably, so that attending to hell always brought feelings of revulsion and attending to God always produced feelings of sweetness.... Thus securing a sinner’s attention to the right object became a crucial precondition for the work of the Holy Spirit. It became the main purpose of preaching and the real aim of all the new measures. If the preacher could only get a person to attend to the right things, those right things would stir

⁷² Smith, *New Measures* 52; Finney, *Lectures on Revivals*, 9.

⁷³ Smith, *New Measures*, 54. See also Noll, *America’s God*, 236.

⁷⁴ Smith, *New Measures*, 78-81.

up right feelings, and those right feelings would then move a person to make a free decision to be saved.⁷⁵

Finney drew upon a theoretical model of the mind and the work of God which yielded an ordered, repeatable model of conversion. The key was the capacity for the mind to pay attention to an object. However, getting and keeping the attention of an audience was no small task in Finney's social context. Smith's text emphasizes the fact that the new measures emerged along with a variety of new forms of entertainment and the disestablishment of religion.⁷⁶ The result was a situation in early and mid-19th century American society where "preachers had to compete as peers with politicians, writers, actors, show-people, and the ever-pressing concerns of making and spending money. All jostled to attract the scarce good of public *attention*, a single currency negotiable in exchange for all of their offerings."⁷⁷ Thus, human psychology was a central concern not just for Protestant academics, but also for the much broader public. It was in this context the revival preachers from the Second Great Awakening onward turned to so-called "new measures" preaching, which emphasized a wide variety of innovative and radical public practices, all with the goal of getting and keep attention. And as Smith would suggest, Charles Grandison Finney was a premier capturer of attention.⁷⁸

In turn, Finney's understanding of conversion and the need for attention necessitated experimentation in preaching measures: "The object of our measures is to gain attention and you must have something new. As sure as the effect of a measure becomes stereotyped, it ceases to gain attention, and then you must try something new."⁷⁹ As Smith describes it, "Measures

⁷⁵ Smith, *New Measures*, 79-80.

⁷⁶ Smith, *New Measures*, 75.

⁷⁷ Smith, *New Measures*, 76. My emphasis.

⁷⁸ Smith, *New Measures*, 75-78.

⁷⁹ Smith, *New Measures*, 74; Finney, *Lectures on Revivals*, 181.

needed to be effective. Finney said in order to be effective, they had to attract attention. To attract attention, they had to be novel. And to stay novel, they had to keep changing.”⁸⁰ Thus, Finney actively experimented throughout his career to see what preaching methods were in fact attention-getting and novel. Novelty in preaching methods was the rule for successful preaching.

Among such attention-getting measures were extemporaneous preaching,⁸¹ inflected or emotional voices, and anecdotes and parables.⁸² More peripherally, Finney also relied upon his own celebrity and made use of the reputation of his personality.⁸³ Further, Finney used public controversy to stay in the headlines so as to maintain attention. Finney’s church in New York was the focal point of much controversy based upon a number of factors including Finney’s liberal justification of measures towards the end of conversion,⁸⁴ his admittance of women as speakers, and open seating in the Chatham Garden theater church for black and white congregants.⁸⁵ And in keeping with mental philosophers and businessmen alike, Finney also put a great deal of consideration into attention-influencing environmental features such as the cleanliness of the church space, as well as the orientation of the seating.⁸⁶

Importantly, with regards to the issue of experimentation, Smith notes that Finney realized that the novelty of the new measures would wear off. People would eventually become desensitized to yelling, crying, or hearing the same old stories. In order to combat this Finney urged caution. Preachers must use the measures they employ frugally so that their novelty wears off as slowly as possible. When the novelty of an individual measure did eventually wear off,

⁸⁰ Smith, *New Measures*, 74.

⁸¹ Smith, *New Measures*, 60-64.

⁸² Smith, *New Measures*, 230-239.

⁸³ Smith, *New Measures*, 208-216.

⁸⁴ Smith, *New Measures*, 85-90.

⁸⁵ Smith, *New Measures*, 83-85.

⁸⁶ Smith, *New Measures*, 81-82.

Finney thought that the next step was to switch measures. Eventually, after enough time, preachers could return to previously non-novel, dull measures, as their congregants would eventually become re-sensitized due to lack of presentation with the certain type of measure.⁸⁷

Of equal importance is the fact that the success of the measures was in turn measurable. For Finney and the revivalists he represents, all preaching was a means to the end of conversion. This was the single output that revivalist preachers hoped to produce by their preaching. Successful preaching got and kept people's attention so that they could achieve the proper emotional response to the gospel and convert. And this conversion was verifiable, at least in theory. One of Finney's preaching measures was the "anxious seat." This consisted in a place in the venue where the sermon was being given where a person considering conversion could sit as they made their decision. Finney urged convertees to come to the front and sit.⁸⁸

Thus, the anxious bench allowed conversion to be an observable way of measuring the success of preaching. One could tell if they were preaching well when people were coming forward and converting publicly. Conversely, one could tell that one's measures were becoming dull, boring, and commonplace insofar as people were not doing so. Upon such an observation, the preacher could then experiment with his measures in order to find what preaching style more effectively converted the audience. It is clear that Finney experimented on large samples of people, and he did so several decades prior to psychology's turn to experiment.

Concluding Remarks

This essay has offered two examples of intellectual continuity between mental philosophy and psychology. Both James and Finney justify the contemporary move to include

⁸⁷ Smith, *New Measures*, 96-101.

⁸⁸ Smith, *New Measures*, 66, 80, 127-136.

mental philosophy as a significant part of the history of psychology. James's thought was clearly continuous with mental philosophy, despite his status as psychology's origin in America. Finney clearly brought an experimental approach to his religious psychology, anticipating the shift to laboratory experimentation in the late-19th century. Both of these cases find consonance with the last two decades of revisionist scholarship in the field.

There are a number of issues worth taking note of in closing. Regarding William James, this essay suggests the viability of a significant future project in situating William James in relation to Scottish common sense. His thought clearly indicates that he internalized common sense sensibilities and assumptions, yet there has not been much in the way of a sustained effort to analyze James's intellectual commitments in relation to Scottish common sense. The benefits of focusing on this aspect of James are that it could help reconcile some of the paradoxical features of his thought. One of the main ones is his embrace of highly naturalistic scientific study and defense of religious belief. The simultaneous emphasis on the mind as scientific object and the tendency to use it to ground traditional human values is a centerpiece in the history of Scottish common sense, and it seems that James relied upon an intellectual framework substantially determined by this practice, even as he embraced Darwin, psychology, and physiology.

Importantly, it seems that Finney's methods invite further discussion of revival preaching in relation to American psychology's turn to experiment, as well as its quick transition from introspection to functionalism. Functionalism, the school of psychology that came to dominate early American psychology, emphasized analysis of the mind in terms of visible inputs and outputs, much as James described the mind in "Reflex Action and Theism." Much of the process of conversion and Finney's preaching emphasized a substantial introspective component and a

defined theoretical construct of the mind.⁸⁹ But Finney also analyzed the religious mind in terms of how humans responded visibly to their environment within the broader revival movement. Broad psychological experiment at a popular level, and any relation between them and the turn to functionalism could be worth addressing further.

The discussion in this essay offers evidence that complicates historical interpretations of progress or decline in matters of Protestant intellectual thought.⁹⁰ The popular nature of 19th century revival preaching has been characterized in terms of intellectual regression when compared to American Protestantism's Puritan past.⁹¹ The fact that Finney shows that the experimental impulse existed in Protestantism well before psychology was a discrete field would suggest that revivalism was at least not a complete regression from mainline Protestantism. Likewise, if experimentalism does represent genuine progress, Cattell and Boring would be obligated to grant such an appraisal to American Protestant mental philosophy in relation to their field.

Finally, an examination of the literature discussed here reveals that American religious scholars and revisionist historians of psychology have been working on converging projects, both of which emphasize intellectual continuity. In the case of American religious history, scholarship from the last half-century has helped to identify a unifying basis for understanding Protestant intellectual life. Protestantism in general drew upon Scottish common sense, despite sectarian differences. Further, due to the impact of Scottish common sense, the relationship

⁸⁹ See Smith, *New Measures*, 132.

⁹⁰ See the Smith, *New Measures*, 12, for a discussion of this issue.

⁹¹ See Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1966), 67, and Daniel Calhoun, *The Intelligence of a People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 262. Both scholars point to the turn of preaching to emphasizing conversions as a negative turn tied to a decline in Protestant intellectual life.

between theology and science has been shown to have been one defined by continuity for much of the 19th century. The broad conception of science inherent in Baconianism has also been identified as a topic of importance by historians of psychology. In their revisionary response, historians of psychology have focused on how the longstanding empiricism inherent in Scottish common sense served as a natural bridge between mental philosophy and the new field of psychology. The convergence of these two sets of scholars is a significant development, especially given the fact that an examination of their bibliographies reveals that the two camps are not in dialogue.

Bibliography

- Benjamin, Jr., Ludy T. *A Brief History of Modern Psychology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Bozeman, Theodore Dwight. *Protestants in an Age of Science. The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum Religious Thought*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977.
- Boring, Edwin G. *The History of Experimental Psychology*, 2nd ed. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1950.
- Bowen, Francis. *Lowell Lectures: On the Application of Metaphysical and Ethical Science to the Evidences of Religion*. Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1849.
- Calhoun, Daniel. *The Intelligence of a People*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.
- Cattell, J. McKeen. "Psychology in America." *Science*, New Series, Vol. 70, No. 1815 (Oct. 11, 1929): 335-347.
- Channing, William Ellery. "Evidences of Christianity II." In *The Works of William E Channing, D. D.* With an Introduction, New and Complete Edition, Rearranged. Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1880.
- Charles Grandison Finney. *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. Edited by William G. McLoughlin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960.
- Fay, Jay Wharton. *American Psychology before William James*. New York: Octagon Books, 1966.
- Fuchs, Alfred H. "Contributions of American Mental Philosophers to Psychology in the United States." *History of Psychology* 3, no. 1 (2000): 3-19.
- Goodwin, C. James. "United States." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Psychology: Global Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Hardman, Keith. *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987.
- Hofstadter, Richard Hofstadter. *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. New York: Knopf, 1966.
- Howe, Daniel Walker. *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970.
- James, William. "The Sentiment of Rationality." In *The Writings of William James: A*

- Comprehensive Edition*. Edited with an introduction by John J. McDermott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.
- . “Reflex Action and Theism.” In *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. Edited by Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, Ignas K. Skrupskelis. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- . *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. With an introduction by Wayne Proudfoot. New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2004.
- Kuklick, Bruce. *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Maier, Bryan N. “The Role of James McCosh in God’s Exile from Psychology.” *History of Psychology*, Vol. 7 no. 4 (2004): 323-339.
- May, Henry F. *The Enlightenment in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Noll, Mark A. *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- . *The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983.
- Pickren, Wade E. and Rutherford, Alexandra. *A History of Modern Psychology in Context*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010.
- Roback, A. A. *History of American Psychology*. New York: Library Publishers, 1952.
- Rodkey, Elissa N. “Last of the Mohicans? James McCosh and Psychology “Old” and “New”.” *History of Psychology*, Vol. 14, no. 4 (2011): 335-355.
- Schmit, David. “Re-Envisioning Antebellum American Psychology: The Dissemination of Mesmerism, 1836-1854.” *History of Psychology*, Vol. 8, no. 4 (2005): 403-434.
- Smith, Ted A. *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Sweet, William Warren. *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1850, Vol. III: The Congregationalists*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939.
- Tewksbury, Donald G. *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War, with Particular Reference to the Religious Influences Bearing Upon the College Movement*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1965.
- Upham, Thomas C. *Intellectual Philosophy: Designed As a Textbook*. Portland, ME:

William Hyde, 1827.