

# William james

Science



William James, an American psychologist and philosopher was born on January 11, 1842 at the Astor House in New York City. His father James Sr. is described as an independently wealthy and notoriously eccentric Swedenborgian theologian well acquainted with the literary and intellectual elites of his day. (wikipedia, 2011, p. 1) The James family were remarkable epistolary of talents. His brother became a prominent novelist and his sister publicly published a diary. James was a very ill child, who had various amounts of sickness both physical and psychological all growing up and eventually until his death.

He attended Harvard Medical School in 1864 and the following year, went on a scientific expedition on the Amazon River. Soon after he fell sick and traveled to Germany in search of a cure and stayed until November 1868. His self diagnosed "soul-sickness" was cured in 1872. James went on to earn his M. D. in June 1872, although he would never practice medicine. In the same year James began to teach at Harvard University. In his spare time James read philosophy and began to see a link between it and physiology. To James the two seemed to converge in psychology. (Morris, Maisto, 2010, p. 6) He published his first textbook, *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890. He married Alice Gibbons in 1878. William James studied and taught biology, medicine, and psychology but was more interested in the scientific study of the human mind. James' acquaintances Herman Helmholtz of Germany and Pierre Janet of France implemented courses of scientific psychology at Harvard in the 1875-76 school year. (Shultz, 2004, p. 179). James and associates created the lively group known as The Metaphysical Club in 1872.

Some of James' students included Boris Sidis, Theodore Roosevelt, W. E. B. Dubois, Walter Lipmann, Mary Culkins, Ralph Barton Perry, G. Stanley Hall, Horace Kallen, and George Santayana. William James retired from Harvard University in 1907. James published *Pragmatism, Pluralistic Universe and The Meaning Of The Truth*. During his last years he became ill again but this time with cardiac pain. James worked on a philosophy text (unfinished but posthumously published as *Some Problems In Philosophy*).

The following year James sailed to Europe to partake in experimental treatments that proved to be unsuccessful. He returned home and finally succumbed to his illness on August 26, 1910 at his home in Chocorua, NH. He was buried at Cambridge Cemetery in Cambridge, MA, in the family plot. (wikipedia, 2011, p. 3) James despite his constant illnesses lived a very prestigious life, he lived out his passions and researched his curiosities. He was one of the strongest proponents of Pragmatism in philosophy and functionalism in psychology.

James founded the American Society for Psychical Research. He always challenged his colleagues and students not to let a narrow mindset prevent and honest appraisal of those. (wikipedia, 2001, p. 3) James was found to be the 14th most eminent psychologist of the 20th Century. (Haggblom, 2002, vol. , 6, No. 2, 139-45) Pragmatism is defined by James as " truths emerge from facts, but they dip forward into fact again and add to them; which facts again create or reveal new truth (the word is indifferent) and so on indefinitely. The 'facts' themselves meanwhile are not true. They simply are.

Truth is the function of the beliefs that start and terminate among them. " (Mounce, 1997). " The Will To Believe" a philosophy of pragmatism and a famous lecture of 1897 by James defended the right to violate the principle of evidentialism to justify hypothesis' venturing. This theory justifies religious beliefs by using results of his hypothetical venturing to prove support the hypothesis' truth. " My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will. " (XXX, 1909, p. 177) James simply asserted that his will was a free two-stage decision process that separates chance, from choice.

The Philosophy of Religion was taken very seriously by James he interpreted religious experiences according to his pragmatic conclusions. He claimed that when studying Religion the main topic should be just that, Religion because everything else is just a descendent of Religion. James also said that only a Psychologist can accurately interpret Religious experiences because have the best insight of the human mind. in 1884 William James published an article " What Is An Emotion? " (psychclassics, 1884, p. 188-205) he conceived of an emotion in terms according to a sequence of events.

This article was very important not only because of his remarkable response to the question but also because there were no psychology journals, yet. James felt that emotions were often accompanied by bodily responses. For example If you were to run from a vicious dog, your body will respond to your emotion of fear by heart rate increase, because you ran your body will sweat and/or ache you may also be out of breathe. Basically your body goes through physiological upheaval. Now love has a totally different physiological signature, the parasympathetic nervous system.