

Fiske Hall Graduate Seminar Paper Award
Henry James Sr.: Nineteenth Century Theologian

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I have often tried to imagine what sort of figure my father might have made, had he been born in a genuinely theological age, ... for he was a religious prophet and genius, if ever prophet and genius there were. He published an intensely positive, radical, and fresh conception of God, and an intensely vital view of our connection with Him.

— William James¹

High praise for Henry James Sr. came only from the few that understood his philosophy and theology. James was more often described as an undisciplined, radical, iconoclastic, new age nabob, or as the poet Ellery Channing imparted, “a little fat, rosy Swedenborgian amateur with the look of a broker, & the brains & heart of a Pascal.” Thoreau, although a visitor to James’s home, barely elevated the discussion, chronicling James as a man who “utters *quasi* philanthropic dogmas in metaphysical dress.” Looking through the inerrant eyes of history, and understanding the enormous social and religious changes that James participated in during the 1830-50s, it is easier to recognize James as the enigmatic genius worthy of his small renaissance. Once credited only for being the father of two of America’s great minds at the turn of the twentieth century, there is now an effort among scholarly circles to reassess James’s work as a theologian and writer. James the theologian was prototypical of much religious thought in America today, as his son’s work as a philosopher was prototypical of much philosophical thought in America today.²

William James is recognized as an accomplished philosopher, becoming the central figure of the American Classical Pragmatism movement. His father, although inspirational of William’s quintessential works, such as *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and *Pragmatism*, is greatly ignored by history, just as he was by many of the intellectual elite of New York and New England during his own time.

Henry James Sr. (1811 – 1882), a theologian, was most known for experimenting with several religious movements of his day. To further befuddle his personal theology, he was a harsh critic of those chosen religions. He was arguably an iconoclast, but was more anti-

1. William James, introduction to *The Literary Remains of the Late Henry James*, (Upper Saddle River: Literature House, 1885; Gregg Press, 1970), 12.

2. Ellery Channing, to Henry David Thoreau, March 5, 1845, *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Walker Harding and Carl Bode (New York: NYUP, 1958); Henry David Thoreau to H.G.O. Blake, January 1, 1859, *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, 537, cited in *The Metaphysical Club*, Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, 2001), 83.

ecclesiastic, anti-dogmatic and pragmatic, believing a personal relationship with God was often limited by church teachings and politics. T. S. Elliott exemplifies those who looked past James's perceived imperspicuousness to describe his work as "indifference to religious dogma" along with an "exceptional awareness of spiritual reality."³

His religious experimentation was in fact somewhat typical for his time, and his contribution to theology and American religion arose from his discussions of the *varieties of religious experiences* people dared during the 1820-50s. James lived in the Northeastern United States during a period when many people were leaving the Calvinism of their fathers and looking for a more spiritual religious experience. James's life story is interwovenly connected to the religious transformation that took place in the Northeast during that time. James's religious search also extended to Europe where he explored the frenetic religious experimentation taking place over there during this same period. This afforded James twice the opportunities to dissert theology with the intellectual elite who participated in the latest spiritual-religious trends.

James was from the Erie Canal region, which saw a multitude of religious movements from James's earliest youth through his days as a controversial inter-continental theologian. To further complete his diverse exploration of Protestant American theology, James was also briefly involved in a religious movement more connected with the Southern United States. This completes James's manifold exposure to nineteenth century religious experimentation that was driven by a genuine heartfelt interest in religion and spirituality. From there consider James's public debates with several key figures in American religion, his fourteen books and numerous articles in magazines like *Nation*, *The Atlantic* and *The Dial*, his self-made millionaire father and his famous sons, and you have the life of Henry James Sr. and the career of a theologian that transcended many future varieties of Protestant and New Age worship, and even Secular-Humanist thought, in America today.

This examination of a unique and diverse theological figure requires a lot of backgrounding on the state of religion during his time period. Some of the religions still exist, and others declined to extinction or were debunked. By defining the religious movements James was directly connected with into five umbrella categories this examination of a "religious profit and genius" in nineteenth century America ties together well.

These five categories are: Calvinism, Evangelicalism & New Light, the Restoration Movement, Transcendentalism and the Harmonian-Utopian Movement. Four of these categories emanated from the Northeast, contemporary to James, with origins only somewhat antecedent to him. The middle category consists of a collection of movements that have deeper historical roots, going back to the early Scottish Enlightenment, or even to the first century Christians to the true believer.

There was so much religious experimentation during James's time that these five categories, though helpful in understanding religion in America in the nineteenth century, do blur together. People were inspired by more than one religious movement at a time, so there are plenty of examples of figures even more historically significant than James that fit into more than one of these categories, concurrently or over time. James worshipped within three of these

3. James G. Mosley, *A Complex Inheritance: The Idea of Self-Transcendence in the Theology of Henry James, Sr., and the Novels of Henry James*, (Sarasota: American Academy of Religion and Scholars Press), 1975.

categories; rejected one when it was forced upon him during a polemical battle in his church; and, had a strong intellectual affection for the other category, despite strong opposition to some of its philosophical ideals.

These five categories are groupings made through an historical lens: in Antebellum America things were more dynamic. Some people moved freely between groups, while others resented such promiscuous affiliations and lack of commitment to a movement they believed in. Sometimes the tendencies to mix or move from one movement to another were *en mass*, other times it was chosen more individually.

Looking at this view of American religious history – at these five categories – there are not only individuals, but also entire groups that fit into more than one category. The Free Will Baptists, for example, were both from the Evangelical tradition and the Harmonian or Utopian tradition, and the Universalists or Unitarians (completely separate religions at that time) both fit in the Harmonian and the New Light traditions, yet many became Transcendentalists. This inter-tradition commonality does not diminish the five-category model, but furthers the legitimacy of James’s experimentation between groups during the early nineteenth century.

The foremost religious presence in Northeastern Antebellum America was Calvinism, and this was the first and foremost religion in James’s life. Calvinists first arrived as Puritans, who became Congregationalist. Calvinists were so historically rooted in the area that Congregationalism was established as the “mandatory” Church at the state level in New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts. Then came Presbyterian immigrants, also Calvinist: First the Dutch, the earliest immigrants of New York, and then the English and Ulster Scots who arrived late in the eighteenth century. This Calvinist stronghold survived the Constitutional Convention and the First Amendment, but around the time of James’s birth, the “mandatory” status stronghold was phasing out. Throughout the nineteenth century, Calvinism saw many changes: from within, and through a generation leaving Calvinism for a variety of reasons, mostly approximating wanting a more spiritual experience from religion.⁴

It was during the Ulster Scot (or Scots-Irish) diaspora that the James family first arrived in America. The James’s, like most Scots-Irish, were Presbyterians – the Presbyterianism of Jonathan Edwards and John Witherspoon. The First Presbyterian Church of Albany was James family church. Calvinism defined James’s theology, despite a lifetime, like many of his generation, spent searching for a greater spiritual connection with God.

There are many reasons why James’s story began one generation prior to the open and experimental nineteenth century, when a stricter Calvinism was the common religious practice to follow. James’s father, William (1771 – 1832), was from this Calvinist mold, and was a shining example of why one practiced a strict religion. An immigrant from the Ulster Scot region of Northern Ireland, he was the son of another William James (1736 – 1822), born of Welsh, not Scottish, lineage, despite adopting the Scots-Irish residence, common sense philosophy and Presbyterian faith. He became a dry goods mogul and successful real estate speculator, and a central figure in the development and completion of the Erie Canal.⁵

4. Email from Sharon Yusba Steinberg, Research and Reference Librarian, Connecticut Historical Society Museum: Congregationalist was the mandatory Church in Connecticut until 1818; Received March 18, 2005.

5. There were 200 years of consecutive generations of “Williams” & “Henrys” in the James family.

James's father was the only one in his family to come to America, arriving in New York in 1789, at the age of 18. William James settled in Albany, New York at the earliest stages of the Erie Canal project. A young clerk in a dry goods store just after Robert Fulton's first letter to George Washington supporting the canal, few predicted his success as a wealthy merchant, banker, civil leader, and major canal supporter. The canal doubled the population of Albany between 1820-30, and spawned Rochester, Utica and "the Village of Syracuse," and William James played a part in all of this growth, becoming the second richest man in New York in the process.⁶

On November 2, 1825, the day William James was introduced by his close friend and political ally, Governor DeWitt Clinton, as the keynote speaker at the opening ceremonies of the Erie Canal, his young son Henry James, the fifth of eleven children, was not in attendance. A reckless prep school game left James severely burnt, causing a double amputation above the knee of his right leg. The healing process required four years of bed-rest. The intense pain and extended bed rest from this accident surely played a part in James's deeply theological and philosophical temperament. Both amputation procedures came prior to the days of anesthesia; even with morphine to kill the pain the pubescent James experienced burning, sawing, bleeding and skin pulling. He received the best care possible, and his cork (wooden) leg was crafted by a master craftsman, but nothing would erase the trauma or replace the leg.⁷

However, even prior to the accident, James's philosophical and theological leanings were apparent. His autobiography discussed how introspective he was from his earliest memories. He could "give ecstatic hours to worship or meditation but moments spent in original deed, such as putting a button upon [his] coat or cleansing [his] garden walk of weeds, weigh[ed] very heavily upon [his] shoulders."⁸

No one from William James's family, however, was *just* born into their capacities, for they were developed, by their enterprising, common sense, strict Calvinist father. Prior to the accident, James spent his Sundays in the "family pew," at the First Presbyterian Church, and his weekdays at the Albany Academy. Albany was the seventh or eighth largest city in America during Henry's school years, and the Albany Academy he attended was one of America's top preparatory schools. Joseph Henry (1797 – 1878), one of America's early preeminent physicists, was a tutor and friend to James, despite being fourteen years older. Herman Melville (1819 – 1891) was another famous Albany Academy graduate. Oddly, there is no evidence that James

6. During the period when James arrived in America, about 5,000 Irish immigrants were Arriving per year, about two-thirds of which were Ulster Scots; Albany was the center of the trade route for upstate New York and Vermont from NYC; In 1791, the first survey related to the Erie Canal was done, and in that same year Robert Fulton completed his Treatise on the canal and wrote President Washington in support of the project; William James was the majority partner in a partnership that owned and developed the Village of Syracuse.

7. The game was almost too ridiculous to describe: A ball was attached to a balloon, with the string attaching these objects soaked in turpentine. The string was then lit on fire. The balloon raised the object up, and as the string and/or balloon caught on fire, causing the ball to fall to be kicked by the boys. On the day of the accident, the ball, with flaming string attached, was kicked into a barn. James, who had some turpentine on his pants, ran in to put out the small fire in the barn, and his pants caught fire burning his legs.

8. Henry James, Sr. "An autobiography," in *The James Family: Including Selections from the Writings of Henry James, Senior, William, Henry & Alice James*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 22.

and Melville ever met, despite their being closer in age than James and Henry, and despite James's and Melville's fathers being business associates in Albany.

James went on to Union College, a proper Presbyterian institution in near-by Schenectady, New York. James's father was a major benefactor of Union College, which had mixed consequences for the collegiate James. He lived with the College president during his time there, and was able to graduate in two years despite some academic setbacks; but it also kept James under his father's watchful Calvinist eye, which became a disapproving eye towards the "free-thinking" son. James also briefly attended Princeton Theological Seminary, like his older half-brother William; however, a lot transpired in James's life between graduating from Union College in 1830 and beginning Princeton in 1835.

William James died only two years after his son Henry graduated from Union College. The death of the patriarch had many consequences. His children had a lot of unresolved feelings about their father who loved them and provided for them, but who was also so strict that resentment arose toward the deceased father and his religion. The Calvinistic control of the father over his children's virtue extended beyond his death through a will so controlling that it was disputed by seven of his children. Henry and his oldest brother William were given the least amounts due to their heretical thoughts and their more open resistance to strict Calvinism, with young Henry receiving the smallest inheritance.⁹

Other consequences of the father's death were even more personal and emotional for the empathic and theological Henry James, and right after his father's death he had the first of two (major adult) spiritual crises. This crisis led to three years of despair in upstate New York, during what James called the "Dark Years." The Dark Years saw James drinking and gambling in the "Burned-Over District" ("BOD"), during peak of the "Second Great Awakening" ("Awakening"). This period, and the BOD in particular, were known for evangelical style religion, religious conversion, as well as many other aspects of spirituality and religious experimentation.

James ended the Dark Years, befitting to being in the BOD during the Awakening, by having a conversion. Many people, famous and anonymous, illiterate and highly educated alike, were apart of the Awakening; James's conversion came through spending some time with some of the more upscale people involved in the temperance movement in Buffalo, New York. "This gave me a casual respite to some extent from my vice, and the shame and horror it breeds got such a chance to come out and take hold of my conscience, that after much struggle and vicissitudes, I was cured," James said as he converted back to the Presbyterianism of his father, which brought him to the Princeton Theological Seminary. Princeton did not escape the evangelicalism of the Awakening; it was, in fact, divided by it.¹⁰

9. Ironically, since Henry was given such a small stipend, the morality clauses did not apply to him, which allowed him to drink and gamble during the dark years and receive his \$1,250 per year with no possible penalty. Alfred Habegger, *The Father: A Life of Henry James, Sr.* (New York: Farrar Straus, 1994) 137-42.

10. Habegger, 119, citing Letters from James to his Brother, Robert "Bob" James; People of all social and intellectual backgrounds participated in the Second Great Awakening movements, from revivalism to the temperance movement to the even more experimental movements (Noyes, for example, who's Perfectionists experimented with "free-love," was a Yale Divinity School graduate).

The evangelicalism in the South was different than the evangelicalism in the BOD, because the Baptists and Methodists had less established churches, so the “farmer-preacher” played a bigger role in the Cumberland Gap region than it did in the Northeast. However, the promise of a more spiritual connection to God was evocative at any latitude; this same promise was also threatening, especially to an established church that did not promise it. James denies having a connection to evangelicalism, despite having the same announced goal (and despite having his first adult conversion in the arms of the BOD); maybe it was his respect for traditional Calvinism. His aversion to evangelical movements, though puzzling, was consistent. This proved true when he came face-to-face with the “New Light” movement while at Princeton.

The New Light Movement was when members of the established churches wanted the spiritual experience that people worshipping in a more evangelical style were claiming. It was known as the “New School” movement in Presbyterianism. New Light theology virtually split-in-half many religions in America, such as the Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists, over evangelicalism during the 1830-50s. Evangelicalism existed in America as a popular style of religion since before the Revolution. By the start of the nineteenth century, America was already in its *Second* Great Awakening, and evangelicalism had found its post-Enlightenment home in the American frontier, spilling west out of the BOD through the Erie Canal and South through the Cumberland Gap. The Awakening, frontier pioneering, and evangelicalism, took place from before James’s birth, through his time at the Princeton Theological Seminary, and beyond, interrupted only by the Civil War.

The Princeton Theological Seminary, shortly after James’s arrival, became embroiled in the New School schism. The James Family’s Presbyterianism of the 1810-20s was the Presbyterianism of Jonathan Edwards, who in 1741 delivered “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Edwards was the third president of Princeton briefly in the late 1750s, and his theology still had great influence on the institution during James’s brief time there; this represented Old School Presbyterianism. The Presbyterian Church literally split in 1837; however, Princeton was affected a year earlier, in 1836, when the New School faculty left to found the Union Theological Seminary. With all that was happening around him, and with news that his father’s will had been overturned and that he would be receiving more money, James took the first of several trips to England, as well as his one trip to Ireland, in the Summer of 1837.¹¹

While in England James rested, reposed and read, still grieving his father, contemplating the division at Princeton, and figuring out what to do with his life. His father was so wealthy that he was now “leisured for life,” as he put it. Now that he was truly of the leisure class, he knew to continue following his theological pursuits, with the help of first class accommodations, servants and letters of introduction to the intellectual and cultural elite of Europe and New England.

James dropped-out of Princeton and did not face the Old School-New School polemics. When the Presbyterian schism forced him to choose sides, he chose neither. Despite his troubles

11. James spent time with his old friend and tutor, Joseph Henry, while on this trip. He had funded Henry’s early departure to Europe on a book buying tour. During this trip, James brought a Negro manservant from Albany to be his aid. This made quite the scene when he visited County, Cavan, Ireland, where many had never seen a black person before. The unpaved roads of Ireland limited James’s stay, despite having a servant, due to his cork leg.

with Calvinism, he did believe in evil, and in God the Creator. He showed a Calvinistic fear of a possible “angry God,” and a pragmatic skepticism toward evangelicals who promised spiritual connections to God that he had not obtained. Thus he never got caught-up with evangelicalism, including New School Presbyterianism. He believed evangelical spirituality was offered too easily, and that there was an “evasion of the orthodox difficulty attempted by what is called the New-[S]chool Divinity.” He had plenty of harsh words for the New School and the BOD evangelicals, calling their work an “ecclesiastical perversion of the gospel [that] debarred inquirers from the help [the gospel] otherwise ... gladly offered.” He had those feelings when he left Princeton and the BOD for repose in England, where he more fully developed his adamant anti-ecclesiastical perspective of theology. There he learned about Presbyterian reforms that dated back to the Scottish Enlightenment, when Britain’s Protestantism was divided by latitudinarianism in much the same as Antebellum Protestantism was divided by evangelicalism and New Light theology.¹²

Due to his physical condition, James spent a great deal of time in his room reading and meditating, even when on his grand adventures abroad. His reading during this first trip to London led him to the work of a protestant reformer named Robert Sandeman. This led to a brief but public exploration of “Sandemanianism.” Back in America this continued with a short-lived worship under the banner of “Primitive Christianity,” for which James was lesser known. Both of these religions merged into the “Restoration Movement” shortly after he moved on to the next stage of his spiritual-theological search.

James’s exploration of the earliest stages of the Restoration Movement, or in James’s case, an Anglo-American synthesis of that movement, is worthy of examination, not just his Sandemanianism. It began, however, with Sandeman (1718 – 1771), and his former leader John Glas (1695 – 1773). Sandeman, who was a Glassite, believed that Christ’s kingdom is completely spiritual. Glas was born around the time the last latitudinarian was hung for heresy in Scotland, so he and his fellow Scots were very serious in their debate over pastoral authority and the separation of church and state. Glas was one of the first “Congregationalists” to leave the official Church of Scotland. The Glassites developed a theology that went deeper than the anti-clerical position: Glas believed that in the Old Testament the Church appeared much like a state, but in the New Testament the Church was a purely spiritual entity.¹³

It took going to Europe and learning about anti-clerical reform within the Presbyterian Church that dated back over 100 years for James to recognize that he did in fact seek a religion more spiritual than he experienced through filling a “family pew” at the First Presbyterian church, like his father intended. James was well known as a Sandemanian, and explored Sandeman’s theology throughout his several trips to England. The historical anti-clerical foundation of Sandemanianism set the stage for James’s theology, which was anti-ecclesiastical by the time of his first writings in 1846, and rabidly anti-ecclesiastical by the mid-1850s. This

12. Henry James, Sr., *The Nature of Evil*, (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1855), 249, 251.

13. Michael Haykin, “Andrew Miller and the Sandemanians” available from <http://www.the-highway.com/sandeman_Haykin.html>, accessed 31 Mar. 2005 citing: December 1967, address of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

anti-ecclesiasticism would coalesce with Calvinistic dualism and the search for non-evangelical spirituality to become the foundation of his theology.

Sandemanianism revealed the meaning of James's anti-ecclesiasticism: that the Church is a purely spiritual entity. His initial espial into Sandemanianism sheds a lot of light on how James attempted to discover true Christianity, through means other than creating and serving a church. This, like many other aspects of Protestant Christianity, was paradoxical. This was not the only paradox this *religious prophet and genius* encountered during his lifelong theological peregrination.

James returned to America to formally dropout of Princeton and immediately plan his next trip to England. On his second trip James brought with him a letter of introduction from his old Albany Academy friend, Joseph Henry, to Henry's friend and associate Michael Faraday, a celebrated electromagnetic physicist. Faraday was a brilliant and important physicist, and noted Sandemanian; James too was noted for his Sandemanianism. As such, history tried to say that Faraday played a major role in James's life. They actually had just brief but cordial visits. The story is important, however, to show the amount of effort James put into exploring his religious quests. It also shows that this leisure class seeker was the same precocious James that had a tutor fourteen years his senior as a child, and that even though that tutor went on to become famous, was still a friend who helped James on his search.¹⁴

James still considered himself a Sandemanian Calvinist when he returned to Albany on his maiden steamship voyage, speeding home from England to further his religious quest. Back in Albany James worshipped with the Scottish Baptists, under the banner of Primitive Christianity. This was a key but strangely shrouded stage in his continued exploration of anti-ecclesiastical religious worship.

The Restoration Movement was contemporary with the Awakening, and became one of the most successful movements of the period. The Restoration Movement, known mostly for its founding faiths, the Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ, was significant in the history of Protestantism in America. The Restoration Movement did not believe in naming a Church after its human leader, and accordingly, churches within this movement came to be known independently as "Christian Churches." At that time it was common to be a "Calvinist," "Lutheran" or "Wesleyan," so Church of Christ and Disciple of Christ members fought being known as "Stonians" and "Campbellites," respectively. Believing the Apostles started their church, not Barton Stone or Alexander Campbell, Restoration Movement members believed they should be called "Christians." Members of the Restoration faiths believe that through a literal reading of the Bible they worship the way the Apostles worshipped. Glassites, Sandemanians and Scottish Baptists all folded into the Restoration Movement not long after James drifted from Sandemanianism, which was about the same time he left the Scottish Baptist Church in Albany.¹⁵

In addition to the theological connection to Sandemanianism and the Scottish Baptists sect in Albany, James was also connected to the greater Restoration Movement through his Scots-Irish heritage. Glas and Sandeman were Scots, and the Southern-based American Restoration

14. For more on the brief relationship between James and Faraday, see Habegger, *The Father*, 176-78.

15. Michael Hines, "Theological Underpinnings" available from < http://www.christianchronicler.com/History2/theological_underpinnings.html>, accessed 29 Mar. 2005.

Movement was also started by Scottish immigrants who rejected Presbyterian. They based their theology in the Scottish common sense principals espoused by John Witherspoon, a staple of Northeastern Presbyterians. The common sense philosophy would greatly influence Pragmatism. James's son is credited for defining Pragmatism, but James's generation played a large role in developing it; the religious change that James's generation was known for, too, was a source of pragmatic thought.¹⁶

James's involvement in the Restoration Movement, like New School-Evangelicalism discussed above, is enigmatic apropos James's continued search for a more spiritual and authentic religion. This question may never be answered, because James, mysteriously, did not discuss this stage of his religiosity in his scant autobiographical effort. Based on future events, one might conclude that James just needed to be in a more stimulating intellectual environment than Albany provided, with any religion. Based on his writings, and the actions of other ex-Calvinists of his generation, the Restoration Movement was in the direction James was searching. James's anti-ecclesiastical doctrines, like those of the Sandemanians, matched that of the Primitive Christianity he explored in Albany. For whatever reasons, James put Albany, the Scottish Baptists, and his tangential connection to the Restoration Movement behind him, and moved to New York City, where many exciting, life-changing things happened in just a brief time.

It was in New York that James became intimately acquainted with a movement more associated with New England: "Transcendentalism." This movement is closely associated with Ralph Waldo Emerson, and James's association with this movement came through meeting Emerson in New York. James was neither a New Englander nor a Transcendentalist, but through a fondness for Emerson and other Transcendentalists, James subtly emulated the Transcendentalists and the "Brahmin-caste," all the way to his Concord retirement home next door to Dr. Agassiz, at the time his son's celebrated chair at Harvard.

Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. coined the term Brahmin-caste for those who, like himself, Emerson, Bronson Alcott and Margaret Fuller, were descended from a line of New England Congregationalist ministers. James would never be a New Englander like a Holmes, Emerson or Henry Adams, but as an elite theological thinker from the leisure class seen as an immigrant's son by the New England elite, an argument can be made that James harbored a secret desire to be thought of like a Boston Brahmin. James and Holmes led somewhat parallel lives through leaving their fathers' Calvinism and exploring new theologies. Oliver Wendell Holmes became a freethinking Unitarian, poet, and medical doctor instead of following the Edwardsian Congregationalism of his father, Abiel Holmes. Their eldest sons also led somewhat parallel lives, defining American Pragmatism together in the late-nineteenth century.¹⁷

Transcendentalism was a New England movement made-up of mostly former-Unitarians; these Unitarians were mostly former-Calvinists. James had a lot in common with the Transcendentalists, and nothing in common; sort of like his thirty-year relationship with Emerson, where they had a lot in common and nothing in common. For example, the final

16. Peter W. Williams, *America's Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-First Century*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 228; Emerson's *Self-Reliance* is often cited as an example of pre-William Jamesian American Pragmatism.

17. F.O. Matthiessen. *The James Family*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947). 3.

category, Harmonianism, shows James's desire for community while Emerson was known for his radical individualism. They would never agree on communitarianism versus individualism, but they shared an intellectual kinship and a love between two great men.

James wed in New York City while he still lived in Albany. His new bride, Mary Robertson Walsh, who was from the City, followed him to Albany then back to New York City. They stayed married until 1882, the year they both died, and Mary followed James on dozens of moves and expeditions during their forty-two years together.

Shortly after moving to New York City, James and Mary had their first son, William, in 1842, and Henry Jr. in 1843. Shortly after Williams birth, James went to the New York Hall Society Library and saw William Green, a mystic, and Emerson, engaged in a discussion on the socialist utopian theories of Charles Fourier. Emerson made quite an impression on James at this first meeting, and James went straight home and penned a letter to Emerson that evening that showed his admiration and respect: "I listened to your address this evening, and as my bosom glowed with many a true word that fell from your lips & felt ere longed fully assured that before me I behold man who in very truth was seeking the realities of things." The affectionate letter had the desired effect, and the two men met the next day, where they talked for hours. During that stay in New York, Emerson visited James's Washington Square home when William James was just two-months-old, and in a famous scene from the intellectual history of Antebellum America, Emerson gave his blessing to the future philosopher.¹⁸

Charles Fourier, the utopian socialist Emerson had discussed that first meeting had an even greater effect on James, despite their never meeting. Followers of Fourier were Fourierist or Associationist. Fourierism was a major movement, and though many today have not heard of Associationism, there were Fourierist communities all over the Northeast, especially in the BOD. James, however, typical of his style, learned of Fourierism in New York City, France and England, despite the plethora of Fourierist in the BOD of his native Western New York.

Communitarianism in the BOD goes back to the 1680s with groups like the Shakers. During the Age of Fourier, the 1830-40s, the BOD was home to several radical Christian sects that experimented with "Utopian" or "Harmonian" communitarian living: The Rappites settled in the BOD in 1805; Mormonism found its birth there in 1828; John Humphrey Noyes (1811 – 1886) started the Perfectionist movement in Oneida, New York, in 1837; and many Fourierist communities thrived there as well.

There are many sects in the Communitarian Movement that James did not associate with, for James was a Fourierist. Like many Fourierist, he combined Fourier's social theories with the spiritual religious theories of Emmanuel Swedenborg. This marriage of thought enticed a lot of

18. They actually entered into a civil union, in New York City, on July 28, 1840, performed by Mayor Isaac L. Varian. James was a big name, especially in New York, so the society pages covered the newlyweds' arrival at the Astor House. He understood, and even exerted, his social and economic class throughout all of his travels, traveling with servants and staying at the nicest residences (e.g. He summered next door to one of Queen Victoria's garden homes); The James newlyweds departed from a brief residency at the Astor House, and this may explain Henry James, Jr.'s misreporting of living at the Astor House when he and older brother William were born; Emerson had lost his 5-year old child just one month before visiting the baby William James; Habegger, p 184.

intellectuals to the Swedenborg-Fourier branch of the Harmonian movement, and it is this movement – the Swedenborgian-Fourierism – that James was most strongly associated with.¹⁹

Emerson studied the theology of Swedenborg; however, there is no indication that James and Emerson spoke of Swedenborg during that first meeting in New York. James, on the other hand, began his study of Swedenborg during his stay in New York, through reading an article written by Dr. James Garth Wilkinson in a British publication James came across in the City. Shortly after the birth of his second son, James moved the family back to England, late in 1843, where he met Wilkinson, as well as others who shared an interest in Swedenborgianism.

James, who showed a propensity for continental travel, introduced his family to the concept: He sold the house in Washington Square, gathered the family and staff, and headed back to England. In England, James was once again equipped with a letter of introduction, but this time from Emerson to Thomas Carlyle, a celebrated intellectual and historian known for his German Idealism expertise. Carlyle introduced Kant and Fichte to the best and brightest of both Britain and America. It was at Carlyle's home that James met Wilkinson; there he also met the likes of John Stuart Mill, Arthur Helps and Alfred Tennyson. He said "Mr. Mill was the most sincere man I ever met," but it was Wilkinson and Carlyle with whom James became lifelong friends.²⁰

James's introduction to Swedenborg was particularly timely because at that same time, during the stay in England, James underwent another spiritual crisis; this time it was explained to him in Swedenborgian terms as a "vastation." This was the other major spiritual crisis of James adult life. This time, as a father, husband and a more advanced Christian, he did not fall into any *Dark Years*, instead he just fell into a trance-like depression while sitting at dinner with his family. Considering what James went through as a child, and how much time he spent in meditation, and considering that he experienced depression before during the Dark Years, this vastation must have truly been a deep, shamanic, spiritual experience. Shortly afterwards James was introduced to the concept of a vastation, which pointed him once again to Swedenborg's spiritualist theories.

In the process of coming out of this vastation, James reflected on Sandeman and Swedenborg and developed a personal theology based in Christian selflessness. Swedenborgian spiritual selflessness was a leading topic of conversation among spiritual seekers, and it was from this conversation that Swedenborg became associated with the doctrines of Fourier. "In his earlier years, ... when Mr. James's ideas were being settled by the reading of Swedenborg, he also became interested in the socialistic fermentations then so rife, and in particular the writings of Fourier," is how William James described this period; it also described the melding of Fourier and Swedenborg that was going on throughout the modern liberal circles of Europe and America in the early 1840s. It was this Fourierism and Swedenborgianism pairing that defined James's theology well past the decline in Fourierism seen by the end of that same decade.²¹

19. Other prominent Swedenborgians include William Blake, Robert and Elisabeth Barrett Browning, Andrew Carnegie, Benjamin Franklin, Carl Jung, Immanuel Kant, Henry Thoreau and Ezra Pound.

20. Dr. Wilkinson would have such an influence on James that he named his third son Wilkinson (commonly known as "Wilkie").

21. William James, *Literary Remains*, 26.

Charles Fourier (1772 – 1837), created a socialist movement years before Marx. No one, including Fourier, predicted the scope of his social reform. As a commercial businessman in Paris, surviving after the French Revolution, Fourier had a revelation. Aghast at the cost of an apple at a restaurant in Paris, Fourier felt there had to be a better economic and social system, so he fashioned a unique scheme of communal living, and, surprisingly, almost started an intercontinental economic and cultural revolution in the process.

Fourier was not quite correct, however, in asserting that his apple was one of the four most famous apples in the course of history: “Two both famous because of the disasters they caused, those of Adam and of Paris, and two by services rendered to mankind, Newton’s and my own.” Despite not living up to his self-proclaimed historical equivalency to Adam or Sir Isaac Newton, Fourier started a phenomenon. Utopian societies took off in France, England and America. Emerson remarked to Carlyle in an 1840 letter: “We are all a little wild here with number-less projects of social reform. Not a reading man that has a draft of a new community in his waistcoat pocket.”²²

In America, Associationist surrounded James: America’s biggest Phalanx (the term for a planned Fourierist-socialist community) was nearby in western New York, and the BOD was filled with them (See Appendix). James also knew George Ripley, a Transcendentalist friend of Emerson and Carlyle, who started *Brook Farm*, out side of Boston, first as an educational commune in 1841, then affiliating with Fourier in 1844.²³

James returned to Albany in 1845. By mid-1846, James was so deeply immersed in Fourierism that he explored the possibility of starting an Associationist journal with the Reverend George Bush. He chose instead to stay with the mix of Swedenborg with Fourier, and to bring his version of this synthesis to a wider audience through a Fourierist periodical called *The Harbinger*. The editor, Parke Godwin, was a friend of James from Princeton; a fellow Seminary dropout.²⁴

Godwin was not James’s only contact at *The Harbinger*. Also involved was Horace Greeley, a popularizer of the communitarian ideas of Fourier; also famous for coining the phrase “Go West Young Man;” and a well known, and prosperous newspaper publisher. His *New York Tribune* was the flagship of a print-media empire, and that is what brought *The Harbinger* from

22. Carl Guarneri. *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), 15-16; 13.

23. Appendix, Mark Holloway, *Utopian Communities In America, 1680 – 1880*, (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1966), 14-15; Brook Farm residents included many of the big names in the Concord scene: Fuller, Hawthorne and Alcott to name a few. This lists of guests is more extensive, including Emerson, Thoreau and Theodore Parker. Henry Sr. and Greeley were both brought to Brook Farm by Wm. Howard Channing, a Unitarian Preacher from Boston who preached for a time in New York. In 1847 Channing’s work lead to the founding of The Religious Union of Associationists in Boston, after the dissolution of Brook Farm. Channing was a Swedenborgian.

24. He was not, however, the first to merge Fourier and Swedenborg – though he the leading American advocate of the late 1840s. As early as 1839, French Swedenborgians expressed cautious interest in Fourier, and in the early 1840s, the *London Phalanx* had praised Swedenborg. New Churchmen most stressed the differences; Wilkinson, complained that no provision had been made for the New Church in Harmony; This esoteric battle between the rival camps of disciples spilled over into America – James’s writings cannot be understood unless looked at in this context.” Brock, PhD dissertation, (Loyola University Chicago, 1996), www.billbrock.net, accessed 17 Mar. 2005.

Brook Farm, outside of Boston, to New York City. James was added to *The Harbinger's* editorial board at the time of the move in late 1846, and he began actively writing in 1847.²⁵

Demonstrating his Awakening-Evangelical roots (that he never claimed), he was quite the zealot for the spiritual wonders of his blend of Swedenborg and Fourier:

The purpose of the work is to show the accord of Swedenborg and Fourier in respect to the great hope of social regeneration. ... It will do immense service, if we mistake not, to both the classes of readers to whom [our previous column] especially addressed, Swedenborgians and Associationists, by exhibiting to the one the scientific basis of their faith, and to the other the spiritual grounds of their science. ... If I address you ... it is with a view of giving you the outlines of the social system, which the genius of Fourier has discovered and constituted, and showing you that this system alone furnishes a clear and positive method of realizing the kingdom of God upon earth, or that new church which Swedenborg has proclaimed, and which is indicated in the revelation of John.²⁶

All of his writings in *The Harbinger* had this tone, largely because this is how people wrote in newspapers in the 1840s. It also, however, showed the evangelical side of James. The Swedenborg-Fourierists felt like they were discovering a new age of consciousness, coining the phrase in the process.

Despite the collective enthusiasm, Fourierism only lasted about a decade in America. There were several factors that worked to the detriment of the Associationist movement. One was the growth of mysticism. The mystical tendencies of some Fourierists later in the movement divided the membership. Mysticism came from two sources, generally. First, was Europe, where much of America's religious and spiritual experimentation came from. Contributing early on were William Blake (1757 – 1827) and Frans Mesmer (1734 – 1815), both Swedenborgians who directly contributed to the mystical practices of Swedenborg-Fourierists. The other big source of mysticism was the BOD itself, with its spiritualists and mystical tradition. The Shakers, the BOD's first residents, were "Shaking Quakers," who had spiritualist practices. Just after the Age of Fourier came the Fox Sisters, better known as the "Rochester Rappers," who in 1855 had a paranormal religious experience and caused a rash of mysticism that, along with the Civil War, put an end to the Awakening right on the heels of Fourierism's cessation.

Another problem Fourierism faced was a free love scandal. Fourier was French, and his societal master plan included considerations for consortium in the Phalanx-based communities. Fourierism expressly allowed promiscuous sexual behavior, and other groups, like Noyes's Perfectionist, mandated polyamory, including group sexual activities. James jumped into this issue early with his Swedenborg-Fourierist writings: advocating these practices in 1847 in *The*

25. *The Harbinger* was an established paper, which had been contributed to by some of the leading intellectuals of New England. It was founded by George Ripley, a famous transcendentalist, who left the comforts of Concord and started Brook Farm in 1841; *The Harbinger* went from being published by Brook Farm, to being published by the National Association of Associationists. *The Harbinger's* credo was: "All Things, At the Present Day, Stand Provided and Prepared, and Await the Light."

26. Henry James Sr. "Fourier and Swedenborg," *Harbinger* 6.17 (26 Feb. 1848): 132.

Harbinger, then translating and publishing a pro-free love book entitled *Love in the Phalanstery*, in 1848. He later reversed his pro-free-love position, in his 1852 *Lectures & Miscellanies*, and his 1853 *Love, Marriage & Divorce*. This position was more in line with his Christian beliefs, and offered a modicum of respect for his wife, Mary.²⁷

The third major struggle of the Associationists was the financial hardships of various communities. Fourierist and other communitarian efforts of the 1840s required a lot of work: People had to work hard regardless of the type of community they joined. Maybe there were inflated expectations in the Harmonian communities: James's tone in *The Harbinger* displayed the potential for hyperbole, imbuing members with high expectation. These communities were the equivalent of small businesses, where failures are common. The typical Phalanxes only lasted a span of a few years. Regular commercial towns and cities were the alternative living choice, which was the final factor in the demise of Communitarianism. James, Greeley and their cronies had the best of intentions in community building through Fourierism; however William James, the Father, DeWitt Clinton and their cronies offered a better plan for community building. America chose its path by the late 1840s, and America chose to build communities and towns, not communes.

It is hard to say that the Communitarian movement ever completely died out. Greeley Colorado was founded in 1871 as the Union Colony, by Nathan Meeker, one of Horace Greeley's editors at the *New York Tribune*. Utopian communes then saw a renaissance less than one hundred years later during the 1960s. There are communes in existence today.²⁸

The story of James the theologian has been told many times in many ways, generally describing a three-pronged theological search involving Sandemanianism, Swedenborgianism and Fourierism. James theological search needed to be defined more broadly than that. James lived in a time of spiritual exploration, and his inquiries had several stops, through at least the five categories discussed, with more than one perustration into some categories. Further, James's Calvinism should never be ignored, despite his and his entire generation's attempt to find something more fulfilling. The connections to James's Sandemanianism and the independent Christian Churches of today have not been discussed, despite the connection to Sandemanianism and the Scottish Baptists. Also consider the recurring themes of Scottish, Scots-Irish, common sense and Presbyterianism should be examined more fully as well. Similitude with these Scottish rudiments led to the success of generations of Jameses from William of Albany's wealth through the acclaim of Professor William James, and beyond.

James was more than just the middle generation between two more exalted generations of Jameses. James was a prolific writer and lecturer, actively writing in *The Harbinger* for two years, and further contributing to America's new popular intellectual magazines such as *The North American Review* and the *Atlantic Monthly*. James's books were all theological, discussing the wide range of the theological and social issues heretofore discussed. His first book, *What Constitutes the State*, published in 1846, and his last book *Society – the Redeemed*

27. Fourier's writings on sexual reform were subverting the Associationists' movement. James fueled the fire by anonymously translating Victor Hennequin's *Love in the Phalanstery*, which went on sale in the fall of 1848. The book praised and detailed the most liberal free love practices of Fourierism. Greeley denounced it as "promiscuity."

28. "History of Greeley," <http://www.greeleycvb.com/history.html>, accessed 19 Mar. 2005.

Form of Man, published in 1879 both focused his most central theme – community. Other books, such as the rabble-rousing 1856, *The Church of Christ not an Ecclesiasticism*, was about the need for the Swedenborgian Church to be more spiritual and less ecclesiastical, another core theme – his theology

James was a probing and enthusiastic theologian unafraid of religious exploration. Because of his searching, his relentless survivor's spirit and the wild frontier times he lived in, James prototypically explored the ideals and philosophies behind modern Protestant Christianity, the spiritualist traditions of new age religiosity, as well as fittingly being the father of the father of American Pragmatism. The early nineteenth century was a period of ideas in transition. Henry James Sr. was a religious reformer who was not afraid to see ideas in transition. He was a man of his age in the age of reform, and a prototypical religious figure.

*A visitor at the home of Tolstoy reports that the Count has one short shelf of precious books, and among them are the volumes of the elder Henry James. With a gesture of pleasure, Tolstoy pointed out the volumes, saying that this Henry James is the most suggestive writer that America has produced.*²⁹

29. Frederic Harold Young, *The Philosophy of Henry James, Sr.* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1951) 1, citing Edwin Markham, "Distinguished American Family," *Cosmopolitan*, Vol. L (Dec. 1910), 145.

Map of these Communities:

