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Jeremy Dunham^a

^a University of Sheffield

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ARTICLE

IDEALISM, PRAGMATISM, AND THE WILL TO BELIEVE: CHARLES RENOUVIER AND WILLIAM JAMES

Jeremy Dunham

This article investigates the history of the relation between idealism and pragmatism by examining the importance of the French idealist Charles Renouvier for the development of William James's 'Will to Believe'. By focusing on French idealism, we obtain a broader understanding of the kinds of idealism on offer in the nineteenth century. First, I show that Renouvier's unique methodological idealism led to distinctively pragmatist doctrines and that his theory of certitude and its connection to freedom is worthy of reconsideration. Second, I argue that the technical vocabulary and main structure of the argument from the 'Will to Believe' depend upon Renouvier's idealist theory of knowledge and psychology of belief, and that taking account of this line of influence is of crucial importance for establishing the correct interpretation of James's work.

KEYWORDS: Renouvier; James; idealism; pragmatism; belief

During the nineteenth century, the French philosopher Charles Renouvier (1815–1903) developed an original, systematic, and all-encompassing idealist philosophy. Although he became one of France's most influential and original thinkers, today, he is remembered principally for his influence on William James. James's colourful announcement of his conversion to a belief in free will, which he credits to reading Renouvier's *Traité de psychologie rationnelle*, is frequently cited in histories of his thought and pragmatism more generally.¹ Beyond this, however, little has been written in English on Renouvier's philosophy.² This article has two main aims. First,

¹For a list of such references, see Viney ('James on Free Will', 29). Cf. Menand (*The Metaphysical Club*, 218–19)

²Warren Schmaus has written a pair of excellent articles on Renouvier's philosophy of science ('Renouvier and the Method of Hypothesis'; 'Science and the Social Contract'). These are the first notable articles on his philosophy since Hodgson's ('M. Renouvier's Philosophy –

I argue that despite the neglect of Renouvier's work, there is much of great importance to be found in his oeuvre. I reveal this by focusing on Renouvier's *idealism*, and I show how his development of an *idealist* philosophy led to certain doctrines now commonly attributed to *pragmatism*. While this demonstrates that Renouvier had a greater historical role in the development of nineteenth-century philosophy than generally appreciated, I also show that his highly original theory of free will and its connection to his theory of knowledge is worthy of reconsideration. Second, I argue that by focusing solely on Renouvier's influence for James's theory of free will, scholars have missed what was most important about Renouvier's work for James. One negative consequence of focusing on the theory of freedom *alone* is that it appears that James greatly overemphasized Renouvier's importance for his thought. James was already strongly inclined to believe in freedom; Renouvier merely reaffirmed it. However, what is vital for James about Renouvier's theory of free will is not the affirmation of its existence, but rather the way Renouvier connects it to his theory of knowledge and psychology of belief. Consequently, I argue that it is not in the 'Dilemma of Determinism' that we should look to understand the full scope of Renouvier's influence, but rather in the 'Will to Believe' and its cognate works. The debate over the correct interpretation of this article has been lively since its first publication. The recent fruitful exchange between Cheryl Misak and Alexander Klein³ proves that this debate shows no signs of quietening down. Misak has argued that to correctly interpret the 'Will to Believe', we should pay attention to its genesis and early reception. I agree with Misak and argue that by understanding Renouvier's technical vocabulary, which James draws from to formulate his argument, and by examining how earlier versions of his argument were interpreted by Renouvier himself, we can gain much clarity regarding James's intentions. However, my conclusion will be that when we do, we end up with a reading closer to Klein's than Misak's.

This article proceeds in three stages. First, I identify what is unique about Renouvier's idealism to make clear how James could adhere to Renouvierian idealism while rejecting absolute idealism. Second, I argue that Renouvier's idealism and theory of 'certitude' lead to key proto-pragmatist doctrines and show how this is linked to his radical and contemporarily valuable theory of freedom. Third, I argue that understanding Renouvier's psychological theory of the 'whole man' and its connection to his theory

Logic'; 'M. Renouvier's Philosophy – Psychology'). More has been published in French, but little enough for the preface of Turlot's (*Le personnalisme critique de Charles Renouvier*) to be called '*L'injuste oubli d'une grande œuvre*'. The best books on Renouvier include Fedi ('Le problème de la connaissance dans'), Séailles (*La Philosophie de Charles Renouvier*), and Verneaux (*L'idéalisme de Renouvier*).

³See Misak (*The American Pragmatists* and 'Klein on James on the Will') and Klein ('Science, Religion, and the Will').

of certitude is crucial for understanding how Renouvier's philosophy influenced the 'Will to Believe' and for clarifying the article's argument.

1. RENOUVIER'S IDEALISM AND THE POINT OF VIEW OF KNOWLEDGE

Throughout James's philosophical career, he regarded the choice between Hegel and Renouvier as the most important philosophical decision one can make (see WWJ.I.64). In his review of Renouvier's *Les Principes de la nature*, he expressed the point forcefully:

As Bonaparte said that the Europe of the future would have to be either Republican or Cossack, so ... the present reviewer feels like saying that philosophy of the future will have to be either that of Renouvier or of Hegel. They represent the radical extremes, and what lies between them need hardly count.
(WWJ.XVII.441)

In the dedication of James's posthumous *Some Problems of Philosophy*, he claims that without Renouvier's influence in the seventies, he would have never freed himself from the 'monistic superstition' (WWJ.VII.3). Although Perry (*Thought and Character of William James*) has written that Renouvier was a crucial figure for James's *rejection* of idealism, Renouvier was an idealist himself. He encouraged James's rejection of one form of idealism: *absolute* idealism. However, James successfully escapes absolute idealism, not by giving up on idealism *tout court*, but by developing a system that preserves Renouvier's methodological idealism. Despite the fact that as James's philosophy developed he found much to disagree with in Renouvier's system, the methodological core to the latter's philosophy, which Renouvier himself labelled 'idealist', is recognizable in James's very last works. The recent literature on James and Renouvier has been concerned with showing that Renouvier's influence was not as great as James suggests. Feinstein (*Becoming William James*) claims that James's belief in free will was already confirmed by the time of the supposed 'radical transformation'; Viney ('James on Free Will') argues that the theory of free will owes more to Jules Lequyer; and, Girel ('A Chronicle of Pragmatism in France Before 1907') points out the crucial differences between the two philosophers' metaphysics. While numerous differences between their philosophies do exist, it is the underlying idealist methodology and theory of knowledge that is the most important aspect of Renouvier's influence on James. James stuck very closely to the Renouvierean method and theory of knowledge throughout his life, even if he developed from it, at times, some significantly different results. It is this method that we must examine if we want to understand Renouvier's deep and lasting influence on James. Therefore, in order to understand the history of the relation between idealism and pragmatism

during the nineteenth century, it is important to identify the distinctive characters of the forms of idealism that were available.⁴

In 1901, towards the end of his life, Renouvier made it clear that idealism is at the centre of his work:

The doctrine from which I begin at once constitutes the method and establishes the theories of greatest importance, the logic, psychology, and metaphysics united and inseparable. This doctrine is essentially *idealism*, and this name '*idealism*' is the one appropriate for the critique of mental representation and its consequences, exposed in the first of the *Essais de Critique générale*, published at a time [1854] when all philosophy in France, from whatever source it came, depended on contrary principles and formally rejected its own. (Histoire et solution des problèmes métaphysiques: 455)

There are three points to take from this passage. First, Renouvier refers to his 'method' as idealist; second, he refers to this method's consequences, his most important philosophical theories, as idealist; and, third, he states he has been an idealist since the publication of his first mature philosophical work. Indeed, in the 1875 edition of this work, Renouvier says: 'the theories I present and that we will see developed belong incontestably to idealism' (ECG.I.i.25). Although he rejected the claim characteristic of many forms of nineteenth-century idealism – 'the "Many" owe their reality to the "One"'; – he was an idealist insofar as he believed that: (i) our mental ideas are the exemplars of the 'really real'; (ii) reality is exclusively experiential in nature; and (iii) our experience is shaped or organized by the intellect. I shall spend the remainder of this section elucidating the first two characteristics of Renouvier's idealism.⁵

We engage with the proper idealist method, Renouvier believed, by beginning from 'the point of view of knowledge'. He wrote that 'I place myself at the point of view of knowledge (*connaître*), not at the one of being without knowledge' (ECG.I.i.23). The point of view of 'being *without* knowledge' is the position of substance realism. This position, he maintains, regards our phenomena as inadequate, fleeting, or insufficient representations of the

⁴On the different varieties of idealism offered throughout philosophy's history see Dunham, Grant, and Watson (*Idealism*).

⁵Although the first time Renouvier refers to his work as idealist is in the 1875 reissue of the *Premier Essai*, the criteria just outlined (roughly those used by Renouvier to identify his work as idealist (ECG.I.i.25)) sufficiently capture Renouvier's philosophy from the commencement of his neo-critical period (1854). Therefore, although, as a reviewer has suggested, we should be sensitive to the possible reasons for an author to incorrectly reconstruct their intellectual development, there are good reasons to believe that his 1901 account of his philosophy as idealist is accurate. Renouvier had a long intellectual career and I do not claim that his views did not at all change during it. However, in §§1–2 of this article, I am focusing primarily on the views he developed in the two editions of the *Deuxième Essai* (1858 and 1875); the most important texts for the development of James's theory. Others are used if they usefully clarify these texts.

‘really real’, which is either conceivable by a priori reasoning, or, in Kant’s case, beyond the limits of possible knowledge. The point of view of knowledge, on the other hand, is *idealist* or *phenomenist* because it regards the phenomena of our experience as the *really real*. ‘Phenomenism’, he claims, ‘is eminently a doctrine of realities’ (‘Le double sens du mot phénoméisme’, 136). This should start to make clear why Renouvier considers himself an idealist, and what he understands by the term. Renouvier is an idealist because he is a *realist* about our ideas and believes that ideas as we experience them are exemplars of reality. To be a Renouvierean idealist is to assume that reality is knowable and that the only kind of ‘stuff’ we can know is experiential. To posit any kind of non-experiential metaphysical stuff is to place oneself at the point of being *without* knowledge. The paradox of realism, he argues, is that it is a realism that presents us with nothing of the real, since it defends the ontological reality of substances (forever hidden from our cognition but nevertheless its necessary ground), while regarding our experienced phenomena as illusionary representations of these unknowable substances. The real is unknowable, and the knowable is unreal. For Renouvier, the lesson of Humean and Berkeleyan empiricism is that we should reject the ‘idols of ontology’ advanced by realism and return to the point of view of knowledge and its idealist method.

The first methodological consequence of starting from this point of view is that we must adhere to what Renouvier calls ‘the principle of relativity’. This principle states that all knowledge is *relative* insofar as (1) it is relative to a particular subject and (2) the most basic experience is of relation: there is no such thing as relationless experience. It follows that we have no knowledge of *things* except as related to *representations*. He says his ‘first tautology’ is to state that *representation* is ‘that which relates itself to things, separate or composite, in any manner whatsoever, by the way that we consider them’ (ECG.I.i.6). He then claims that since we have no knowledge of *things* except as related to *representations*, we can have no knowledge of *things* except *as representations*:

If I say: ‘the worst *thing* this government has done, is to ...’ [...] or ‘the most beautiful *thing* in the world is a sunrise’ or ‘water, iron, and fire are supremely helpful for human beings’, one will not find that I make hypotheses or create idols. No, I limit myself to signalling more or less complex syntheses of representations that experience gives to us in order to consider anything without recourse to Scholastic definitions.

(ECG.I.i.6)

From the point of view of knowledge, *things are representations*. Once this is admitted, Renouvier believes, we are incontestably at the idealist point of view.

The crucial result of this idealist method, he claims, is that it succeeds in *reconciling* philosophical method with scientific method. Just as in earlier epochs science and philosophy were united by a belief in substances and

transitive causes, idealism reunites them through their common rejection of these idols in favour of functions and laws of phenomena (La question de la certitude VII, 68). The ‘things’ of the phenomenal world that idealism recognizes are not ‘substantial’ individuals, but sequences of phenomena, and their identities are defined by laws that regulate and organize them. Science aims to discover these laws inductively. Although this reconciliation is one of the idealist method’s main aims, it exceeds the natural sciences and provides its support and ground. It is because idealism can provide such support that it advances on positivism. However, to understand exactly how idealism is capable of providing this, we must turn to Renouvier’s theory of ‘certitude’. This theory is crucial for understanding the justification of his move from what he calls ‘subjective’ to ‘modern’ idealism, and it is his most distinctive step towards pragmatism.

2. MODERN IDEALISM AND PROTO-PRAGMATISM

Renouvier’s idealist ‘principle of relativity’ is established in the first of his *Essais de Critique générale*. However, his new theory of ‘certitude’ is his most original philosophical contribution and vital for understanding how he draws certain ‘pragmatist’ doctrines from idealism. He develops this theory from his idealist foundation in the *Deuxième Essai*, the *Traité de psychologie rationnelle*. In this section, I show how the theory is developed as an alternative to the dogmatism of Victor Cousin’s eclecticist school, and then how it is connected to Renouvier’s theory of freedom. Although his theory does differ from James’s, it deserves consideration on its own terms as a radical voluntarist alternative to the tried and tested theories discussed in contemporary philosophy. Renouvier supports his theory of freedom by arguing that reason is dependent on it. Recently, Haji (*Reason’s Debt to Freedom*) has also argued that *practical* reason presupposes freedom. As such arguments are under consideration today, it gives us good reason to investigate this historical predecessor. However, Renouvier’s version is more radical than Haji’s since he regards *all* reason as fundamentally *practical* reason, and, consequently, reason *tout court* presupposes freedom. While in this section I present the connection between certitude and freedom, in §3, I build on this by showing how this is related to his psychological description of the complete human being as passional, volitional, and intellectual, and argue that understanding this is essential for a full understanding of James’s ‘Will to Believe’.

Pragmatism is considered to be a thoroughly American philosophy because it arose in circumstances historically specific to America – the aftermath of the Civil War. As Louis Menand tells us, the trauma suffered by the generation that lived through the war was such that it seemed ‘not just a failure of democracy, but a failure of culture, a failure of ideas’. The war ‘swept away the slave civilization of the South, but it swept away almost

the whole intellectual culture of the North along with it'. The lesson was that certainty or absolutist philosophies lead to violence. In this context, the pragmatists developed an alternative intellectual vision 'a kind of scepticism that helped people cope with life in a heterogeneous, industrialized, mass-market society' (*The Metaphysical Club*, x, xii). Recently, Misak has shown that the claim that this historical shift led to pragmatism as a *sceptical* vision is philosophically indefensible (*The American Pragmatists*). In fact, Hilary Putnam has argued that one of the most fundamental characteristics of classical American pragmatism is its success in combining *anti-scepticism* with fallibilism. That it is possible to unite these doctrines, he suggests, is the unique insight of the school (*Words and Life*, 152). Nonetheless, this is an insight developed in the 1850s by Renouvier in France and his formulation of it plays a crucial role in the 'Will to Believe'. This does then have an effect on the characterization of pragmatism as America's home-grown philosophy, since the historical circumstances that led to Renouvier's proto-pragmatism were not those of the American Civil War, but rather the philosophical responses to the French Revolution. I shall now show how this context led Renouvier to the development of his new theory of certitude and freedom.

Between 1830 and 1848, France's philosophical education was dominated by the all-encompassing influence of Victor Cousin (1792–1867): the philosopher of the restoration. As Goldstein writes: 'the entire organization of philosophy teaching in France, within the confines of the public education system, had been put into Cousin's hands' and '[t]eachers of philosophy were Cousin's "philosophical regiment"'. They were, in truth, under his supervision from the time of their secondary and higher education, and then throughout their professional careers' ('Official Philosophies' in France, 262). Cousin's educational system was a well-defined architectonic and each level taught a particular part of the body of philosophical knowledge designed and dictated with the aims of national unity and stability clearly in mind. He believed that the consequences of the empiricist and materialist philosophies of the eighteenth century had been disastrous. The 'age of criticism and destructions' had 'let loose tempests'. The aim of the nineteenth, he claimed, should be 'intelligent restorations' (*Lectures on the True*, 31). Such restorations would bring together the ideals of the French revolution, freedom and equality, with a belief in principles essential for the stability of the nation, such as immutable principles of truth, beauty, and goodness.

The central thesis of Cousin's philosophy is that there is an 'impersonal' universal and absolute reason that precedes the existence of any created being and would continue to exist even if all were annihilated. The proposition ' $2 + 2 = 4$ ' is a universal and necessary truth. We would treat as mad any individual who truly refused to believe it. With this proposition belong innumerable similar propositions that we immediately recognize as possessing universality and necessity. Empiricism's failure is that it cannot account for such undeniable truths. Nevertheless, Cousin is certain that even the principle of causality is necessary, universal, and immediately

recognized in consciousness.⁶ Contra Hume, Cousin claims that in our very first perception of one ball making contact with a second, we are immediately aware of the universal and necessary truth that every effect has a cause. As induction could never arrive at necessity, a single perception of A causing B must bring with it the hallmark of universality and necessity: ‘Our reason immediately attains absolute truth, *almost without personal intervention on our part*’ (*Lectures on the True*, 71). However, such absolute, universal, and necessary truths cannot be grounded in our subjectivity; rather, they must be grounded in a being as absolute, universal, and necessary as they are: God. The recognition of these truths is *impersonal* because they have God as their ground.

With this context in place, we can return to Renouvier. Logue has labelled Renouvier’s philosophy a ‘philosophy of combat’ (*Charles Renouvier*, 33).⁷ One of the major combats he was engaged in was with Cousin and his school. For this reason, and for what Cousin would have deemed as his ‘dangerous’ political beliefs and associations, he was marginalized from the French philosophical scene for much of his life, and he developed his philosophical system during the 1850s mainly in isolation.⁸ Furthermore, until late in the nineteenth century, the importance of the Kantian revolution was not widely understood in France. Again, this was largely due to Cousin’s verdict. He argued that Kant’s restriction of ‘universal principles’ to the ‘impressions of sensibility’ made objective knowledge solely dependent on the individual subject, and when combined with the unknowability of external objects, this led to the worst excesses of scepticism (*Lectures on the True*, 77). Renouvier, however, attempted to defend a form of Kantian ‘neo-criticism’, and this was further reason for his work to be ignored. However, in 1867, the year of Cousin’s death, Félix Ravaisson, a rebellious student of Cousin’s, published a report on nineteenth-century philosophy which favourably reviewed Renouvier’s work and was disdainful of the direction Cousin had taken French philosophy. This led many philosophers to take interest in Renouvier’s work and it was around this time that James discovered it (see WJC.IV.342).

The establishment of the Third Republic in the 1870s also acted as a catalyst for intellectuals to turn to Renouvier. The sudden relevance of his strictly republican anti-imperialist neo-criticism led him to publish a new weekly review: *La Critique philosophique*. The first issue opened with a helpful summary of his ‘neo-critical’ position which served to dispel the

⁶Cousin relies on an epistemology allied to Reid’s ‘common-sense judgment’ which, as Manns and Madden state, is a judgement that is ‘universal, self-evident or evident, necessary and require[s] no discursive defense’ (‘Victor Cousin’, 570).

⁷For a list of Renouvier’s opponents, see ‘A propos du dernier ouvrage de M. Paul Janet’, 370–1).

⁸This is in spite of the fact that the *Académie* recognized his earlier work as of merit. His entry to the 1839 competition on ‘Cartesianism’ received a *mention honorable*.

misreading of critical philosophy prevalent throughout the French philosophical community:

Criticism is not, as its name might make us think, and as several thinkers do, a negative philosophy ... criticism takes its name from what it is to judge, to choose, to pronounce, to decide ... and not from this corrupt sense of the French word *critiquer*, which expresses depreciation and blame without principles.

Criticism is the opposite of what we call scepticism. It has been purposely confused with scepticism by a school of philosophers who are interested in making us believe that their teaching cannot be contested without placing everything into doubt, that their demonstrations cannot be impugned without renouncing reason, nor their philosophy attacked without destroying all of philosophy.

Criticism is the opposite of scepticism, for to be sceptical is to believe nothing, according to the vulgar sense of this word. But criticism only systematically destroys metaphysicians' so-called *rationalist* doctrines because they are poorly founded upon pure theoretical reason. The respectable part of the rationalist theses that some of them defend will be secured by reasons of a practical or moral order; the only sure and truly conclusive reasons of this kind.

(Ce que c'est que le criticisme: 1)

Renouvier presents criticism as the middle ground that avoids the excesses of both scepticism and dogmatism. In addition to referring to his work as 'idealism', 'phenomenism', and 'neo-criticism', towards the end of his life, he called it 'personalism'. This nomenclature emphasizes one of the most important elements of his *neo-criticism*, which should be understood as *critical personalism*. To highlight exactly what is at stake for the critical personalist, it is important to recall Cousin's theory of impersonal reason, as this is the example *par excellence* of what *personalism* opposes. It seems clear to me that the quote above refers to Cousin's school. Cousin believed that spontaneous intuition provides us with access to immediately apprehensible truths, impossible to doubt. In contrast, Renouvier argues that scepticism's great lesson is that there are no truths of this kind. The idea of 'impersonal reason' as an unflickering light that reveals itself infallibly is repudiated because all beliefs have been questioned during philosophy's history. The external world, causality, and even the principle of contradiction have found opposition. We search in vain for the principle accepted universally. The rationalist demand for infallibility leads only to scepticism. Therefore, to escape scepticism, we must avoid the dogmatist rationalism that will always return us to it. Renouvier then argues for a theory of 'certitude' which recognizes that we hold no beliefs absolutely free from doubt. The importance of this move, as I explain below, is that it returns the *responsibility* of knowledge to the individual person. He writes: 'Certitude, however it is formed, and whatever it may be, and thus even if it could be

made purely abstract, is individual like the work by which it is constituted. It is therefore relative, no longer only to the human understanding, to its constitution, but to man as individual and to his work' ('Du Principe de relativité', 3).

With the important 'anti-Cousinianism' of Renouvier's theory of certitude explained, we can move on to the essential connection between it and his theory of freedom. If certitude is the individual's work, it is a work that requires freedom. Consequently, Renouvier made free will the foundation of his system. The alternative of 'blind necessity' would make the deliberation and reflection essential for the development of knowledge acquisition an illusion. Deliberation and reflection end only through free choice. The search for knowledge ends not *necessarily* but because we *judge* that the evidence is sufficient to support our belief. It is an act of will. Renouvier sees himself as following Kant in believing that 'responsibility' and 'duty' are the 'true motives for the free affirmation of free will' ('La question de la certitude VIII', 86). Faced with two alternatives, I am *obligated* to judge and weigh them, and to ensure that my impulsions do not lead me blindly. If we deny freedom, scepticism necessarily follows. Since, if we believe ourselves necessarily directed in our affirmations of belief, there is no possible criterion for correct judgement. Our belief that our beliefs are justified would be necessarily determined. However, just as we are necessarily determined to believe that we are justified in believing *p*, so our opponent is necessarily determined to believe that she is justified in believing $\sim p$. The partisan of necessity must simply regard it as inevitable that most of humanity is 'doomed to the damnation of illusion and falsehood' while a small number are 'elected for science and truth' (ECG.II.ii.92). We may be members of the elected few. Nonetheless, we must recognize that our opponent's sure state of mind differs in no identifiable way from our own.⁹

Renouvier expounds this argument in a section of the *Deuxième Essai on le vertige mental*, that is, self-perpetuating mental errancy. *Le vertige mental* characterizes the state of mind of sleepwalkers, the religious, and the insane. The cause of such mental errancy is the spontaneous affirmation of passional representations. This could mean we believe we saw what we *hoped* or *desired* to see, rather than what we did see, and the effects of the passions overcame our intellectual judgement. This is particularly apparent in religious matters, where passional beliefs have been impressed on individuals since infancy. We contract well-entrenched habits of belief through environment and imitation of our parents and elders. For Renouvier, this illustrates Pascal's insight that '[i]t is sufficient to lie a little at first; we are in good faith later' (ECG.II.i.287). As these beliefs are directed by hope and fear, once they have advanced from speculative imaginations to deep tendencies

⁹Renouvier's argument here is heavily indebted to Jules Lequyer. There is disagreement over the extent of this debt; compare Logue (*Charles Renouvier*, 31) and Viney ('James on Free Will', 29).

of belief, they are difficult to overcome. However, this is the uncritical affirmation of passional representations and therefore a case of self-perpetuating mental errancy (cf. ECG.II.i.301). This is paralleled in dreaming where, for the most part, we simply affirm mental appearances without questioning and add 'judgments of reality' to the 'series of imagination and memory' (ECG.II.i.288). The hypnotist has acquired the skill of *directing* this mental errancy by convincing the hypnotized to believe without questioning in much the same way as we do in most dreams and religious beliefs. In all cases, we are not properly exercising our ability *to doubt*, that is, our ability to weigh alternatives. He writes that 'the vice of the insane is to affirm and act under *le vertige* (with an unreflective will ...), and to conform to appearances that he has not learned to reduce to their appropriate value' (ECG.II.i.296). However, if we believe in the doctrine of necessity, we cannot escape endless self-perpetuating mental errancy, since if our representations are all necessarily determined by their predecessors, there is no act of reflective will. Preceding events have determined whether we believe, rather than our active judgements. There is no distinction in kind between the affirmations of dreams, the beliefs of the insane, and our most advanced scientific reasonings. What this means, therefore, is that without freedom, the very concept of 'errancy' loses any value: 'all is errancy, and there is no longer errancy' (ECG.II.i.297). The argument's conclusion is that while we cannot conclusively demonstrate the existence of freedom, it is only with freedom admitted that we can account for either good judgement *or* errancy. Renouvier's defence of free will comes from practical not theoretical reason: 'It is a moral affirmation that is necessary for us' (ECG.II.ii.78). We *could* choose scepticism, or we *could* choose the dogmatism that will ultimately lead us back to scepticism, but if we want a ground for science and morality, we must *willingly choose* freedom. Although he admits there is no 'natural light' criterion for truth from the perspective of freedom, just as there is not from the perspective of necessity, it does not harm the former position in the way it does the latter. This is because freedom – and this is the most crucial point –, by recognizing possible alternatives and doubt, *enables the critical method*:

This method is sustained reflection, constant research, healthy critique, the elimination of harmful passions, the satisfaction of just instincts, the observed equilibrium between knowledge, which often eludes us, and the will ready to suppose or feign knowledge; it is ... the wise exercise of freedom. With that, we do not always avoid error, but we always could, which is the great and moral point ... Each of us is responsible for our opinions as we are for our moral acts; or rather opinion itself is or must be a moral act. We make error and truth in ourselves, we are put, after free examination, into contradiction or agreement with the external realities the affirmation of which does not impose itself necessarily on consciousness. Are we in the wrong? We could be in the right at the same moment; knowing how to doubt is to examine. We could at least be in the moral right, if the doubt is untenable and if it is necessary to pronounce, because morality eminently resides in the intention

and in this employment of forces that consciousness judges the most legitimate at each instant.

(ECG.II.ii.95–6)

As the practically grounded belief in freedom has become inextricably intertwined with our theoretical beliefs, Renouvier insists that practical reason must take primacy. He grounds his theory of knowledge by borrowing Kant's idea of the 'practical postulate'. For Kant, the postulates of pure practical reason were indemonstrable yet necessary conditions for a finite being to obey the moral law. Renouvier's crucial move is to extend the idea of pragmatic belief to all theoretical knowledge. In fact, we could reject the claim that morality is possible yet still bound by 'postulates' in order to engage in theoretical reason. Take the example of the external world. Descartes's evil demon scenario shows that we cannot know for certain whether an external world exists and the matter is *theoretically undecidable*, since we cannot step outside of our own representations to verify it.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is *subjectively necessary* that whoever wishes to engage in the pursuit of science or even defend its possibility must believe in it. Therefore, even though this necessity is *only subjective*, it is still *rational*. Even the principle of contradiction is a 'postulate' because it can be doubted (*Le Personnalisme*, 19–23). Yet, Renouvier *believes* that science and philosophy are impossible without it and thus he is bound to the principle of contradiction by subjective necessity. As Verneaux (*L'idéalisme de Renouvier*) notes, there is a negative and a positive element to this shift from Kantian criticism to neo-criticism. The negative is that theoretical reason is *reduced* to postulates, but the positive is that it allows us to move beyond the circle of our representations and dispense with the unknowable thing-in-itself. In contrast to the idealism of the absolutists based on theoretical reason, Renouvier believes that his idealism is philosophy brought down to earth and *humanized* (ECG.II.ii.82). However, although he is avowedly an idealist, he claims that there is no doctrine from which he is further removed than the 'subjective idealism' that reduces reality to the perceptions of one's own ego. He claims that his 'modern' idealist method is the 'method of reality', as it is the only way to escape this position. Nonetheless, he says,

the species of idealism that we call absolutely subjective is of serious methodological interest: It has this particular double character, instructive for the logical question of certitude and belief, since its thesis is perfectly inadmissible but at the same time logically irrefutable. No objective representation can be anything more than *subjectively objective*... The affirmation of the external world's reality is therefore a belief and a moral postulate. (*Le Personnalisme*, 24)

¹⁰For Renouvier, Arnauld's famous 'Cartesian circle' critique proves Descartes's failure to get beyond this scenario via theoretical reason.

As the foundation of all knowledge, 'freedom' is the most fundamental postulate. However, four further postulates rest upon it, all of which are essential for knowledge. Together, these primary postulates form the 'first order of certitude' (ECG.II.ii.21–50). Their order is unimportant as all are posited simultaneously. First, we affirm the 'reality of consciousness': personal identity (the centralized unity of an indefinite series of phenomena, most of which are not currently present to consciousness) and the intellect's rules and functions. However, Renouvier believes that it is impossible to affirm the reality of the subjective without simultaneously affirming the objective. The second postulate, then, is the affirmation that the external world corresponds to our objective phenomena. The third is that there exist in this external world individual beings ruled by laws and characterized by functions analogous to our own. The fourth is the affirmation of the 'natural rectitude of the human faculties' that we exercise in our scientific investigations. This postulate could be called the 'postulate of the categories' because the mind's veridicity is inseparable from the application of its categories to the external world. An example of an intellectual principle tied up with this postulate is the principle of contradiction: the foundation of logic. Such a principle *can be doubted*, and consequently our affirmation of it is free. However, 'nothing could subsist in our thoughts ... if we must put this principle in question' ('La question de la certitude VIII', 89). The principle's use is justified by its effects. Nothing prevents us from imagining the world to be quite irreconcilable with our natural forms of thought. Nonetheless, to do so would be to consider it beyond the point of view of knowledge and thus make scientific investigation impossible. We can now see why Renouvier regards the four postulates of the primary order of certitude as inextricably linked. Despite all the sceptical scenarios that could tempt us to doubt these affirmations, the possibility of scientific investigation depends on the belief that the external world exists and that we can know it because our mental world is characterized by functions and laws which enable rational judgement, and that the individual beings themselves exist and are developed according to analogous functions and laws.

The reduction of the certainties of theoretical reason to 'postulates' means that for Renouvier, practical reason is not merely primary, it is the only 'Reason' worthy of the name:

practical reason must pose its own ground which will be, in fact, the ground of all real reason, for reason does not break itself into two: reason is, according to our understanding, nothing other than man, and man is never anything but practical man.

(ECG.II.ii.78)

This reduction leads to a new theory of certitude according to which certitude is belief, but not certainty. Belief means faith or possibility of doubt (ECS. II.3) and belief, faith, and postulate 'are terms which should always go together' (ECG.II.ii.20). Nevertheless, this theory does not reduce truth

merely to subjective opinion, rather, he insists, it is only once we recognize that all certitude is ‘belief’ in this sense that any kind of certitude is possible at all. As I show in the following section, Renouvier’s ‘modest’ conception of belief is one of the keys to understanding the main argument in James’s ‘Will to Believe’.

3. THE WILL TO BELIEVE

Renouvier’s theory of belief had corollaries that would not appeal to all pragmatists. Although James told Peirce that the whole of ‘The Will to Believe’ was ‘cribbed’ from Renouvier (WJC.IIX.324), Peirce told James that ‘I thought your *Will to Believe* article was a very exaggerated utterance, such as injures a serious man very much’ (WJC.XII.171). Even if it was an exaggerated utterance of James’s to say the piece was *entirely* cribbed from Renouvier, the latter’s work was undeniably vital for the formulation of its argument.¹¹ It should, therefore, be taken into account to establish the work’s correct interpretation. In this final section, I argue that a Renouvierian reading blocks two interpretations. The first maintains that the scope of ‘will to believe’ cases is limited to moral and theological questions.¹² The second, presented recently by Misak (*The American Pragmatists* and ‘Klein on James on the Will to Believe’), claims James suggests that ‘if belief in God makes me happier, I have a duty to believe’. Misak’s concern is that James has stretched the idea of evidence to that which satisfies the believer by making her happy or comfortable (*The American Pragmatists*, 63). As Sprigge (*James and Bradley*) put it, James suggests that we should believe those views that make us feel psychologically healthier. Both see this as an abandonment of the goal of truth *qua* truth. The interpretation I argue the Renouvierian reading supports is the ‘reconciliationist’ one recently defended by Klein (‘Science, Religion, and the Will to Believe’). According to this view, James aims to show that belief in the ‘religious hypothesis’ is not inconsistent with a certain scientific worldview. This worldview, I argue, is the one described by Renouvier. At no point is James suggesting that we give up on the goal of truth *qua* truth. Misak has proposed that we look at the argument’s ‘genesis’ and the way it was received by his contemporaries to obtain a fuller understanding of James’s intentions and that by doing so, we find evidence to support her reading.

¹¹James is probably right that he was the first to notice a class of truths that ‘cannot become true till our faith has made them so’ (WWJ.VI.80). James’s examples are the mountain-climber and the desired friend and he introduces these to readers of the *Critique Philosophique* in 1878 (see WWJ.V.23–31). However, I agree with Klein that these examples are not central to the argument and that they can mislead the reader with regard to the paper’s main aim.

¹²See Ayer (*The Origins of Pragmatism*) and Hollinger (‘James, Clifford, and the Scientific Conscience’). Perry (*Thought and Character of William James*) mistakenly reads *both* Renouvier and James as holding this view.

In this section, I show that studying Renouvier's relation to James provides us with insights into both the argument's genesis and its early (French) reception. As Renouvier was responsible for much of the paper's technical vocabulary, we should expect him to be in a good position to understand the argument. However, we find that this examination lends support to the reconciliationist reading rather than the prudentialist one.

At the beginning of the 'Will to Believe', James says that it is 'an essay in justification of faith, a defence of our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced' (WWJ.VI.13). The reconciliationist reading demands we take the comma in this sentence seriously. The essay is firstly a justification of faith, and only once this justification has been accepted can we move to the defence of our right to a believing attitude in religious matters. As Jackman ('Prudential Arguments, Naturalized Epistemology', 1) has shown, the 'Will to Believe' has both 'descriptive' and 'normative' parts. It is the descriptive part which is used to justify faith. It does this by following the Renouvierean point that no beliefs are completely free from faith.

James claims that contrary to William Clifford, we possess no beliefs free from some intellectual room for doubt. This characteristic of belief is compounded by the fact that many beliefs, such as those in 'molecules' and 'the conservation of energy', depend on faith in the expert knowledge of others, and since even the experts' beliefs are not free from an element of faith, our faith is faith in another person's faith. James understands faith as 'belief in something concerning which doubt is theoretically possible' (WWJ.VI.76). As Renouvier has shown, it is possible to doubt all beliefs. Even trust in scientific truth and objectivity is dependent on faith in experiment and study in contrast to the sceptic's doubt. While it is well known that the article is an attack on Clifford's 'evidentialism', understanding how the underlying Renouvierism is an attack on Cousin is also illuminating. Central to Cousin's 'impersonalism' is the idea that indubitable truths are immediately revealed to us *almost without personal intervention on our part* by the natural light of reason. Renouvier showed that such impersonalism is implausible and any claim that we know we know *for certain* returns us to dogmatist theory of the natural light. The bite of this point is that the 'natural light' theory is resolutely anti-empiricist. To be an empiricist means to shun such dogmatism, but to do so, we must recognize that there are no certitudes free from an element of faith. Faith goes hand in hand with empiricism; certainty, rather than certitude, goes hand in hand with dogmatism.

One of James's essential points is that it may be appropriate, in some circumstances, to let our passional nature decide when our intellect has not been coerced. The worry critics have is that if our passional nature takes the dominant role in the justification of belief, we may end up justified in believing p , even though p is false, merely because it satisfies our passional nature. However, to understand what James means by 'passional', we must

recognize that he is borrowing Renouvier's vocabulary. In the 'Sentiment of Rationality', James wrote: 'Pretend what we may, the whole man within us is at work when we form our philosophic opinions. Intellect, will, taste, and passion co-operate just as they do in practical affairs' (WWJ.VI.77). In Renouvier's *Deuxième Essai*, he develops a psychological theory of the 'whole man' as composed of three general inseparable elements: passion, intellect, and will. Every conscious judgement involves all three. If there were merely 'pure intellect', there would be no 'activity' and, he argues, as there is no passivity without activity, there would be no power whatsoever. There would be a 'pure identity' between 'perceiver and perceived', the 'intelligent and the intelligible'. There could be no right or wrong, let alone good or bad: 'All is indifferent before the pure intellect' (ECG.II.i.146). The 'pure will' would be 'blind' and therefore equally valueless. It would know and desire nothing and be driven by pure chance. Both intellect and will are required to compare phenomena and this is the essential condition for the acquisition of truth. However, intellect and will together are not enough to compose a complete human because passion is required for goodness and morality. Passion is distinct from sensibility because it characterizes the attachment or desire we have for certain sensible states:

An animal necessarily pursues ends; it is necessary that phenomena are classified for it as favourable or contrary to these ends, and that, with or without consciousness, a manifestation is produced and the attachment it has for certain states, and the appetite or repulsion it has for certain others. (ECG.II.i.143)

The preference for certain states is passional not volitional. Passion alone is concerned with 'ends'. Therefore, it plays a central role in Renouvier's theory of the human. It unites the elements of human nature; it is 'like a centre of human phenomena, a link for all our objective laws, the accomplishment of man':

Without passion, we could say that the elements of human nature would be disunited, the understanding frozen, the will indistinct and mechanical; phenomena, that logic alone would connect, would not affect consciousness except as these images, these phantoms that Democritus imagined traversing the thought of the dead. But, in presence of feeling, logic is living and the will is manifested by struggle. It is according to the diverse movements of passion in us that we appreciate the relative nature of goods, and that, by consequence, the good itself is revealed to us; it is the kind of contentment or pain it puts in our hearts when we judge the moral value of our determinations with the most certainty, and if, from all the proposed goods, we have chosen the most fecund, the most durable, the most suitable for life, the most conformable to order. (ECG.II.i.150)

Importantly, we attribute passional qualities such as 'goodness' and 'beauty' to truth and consequently, truth becomes an object of desire and falsity an object of aversion (ECG.II.i.163). Desire and aversion are 'names for the

attractive or repulsive passion: in presence of an end represented as possible' (ECG.II.i.169). The crucial point is that it is our very passional nature that is interested in and desires truth. The intellect alone would be indifferent to truth. It is passion that leads us to search for truth in those matters that interest us, those matters with which we establish a 'live connection'. That James's understanding of the passional follows Renouvier's is made clear when he claims that the evidentialist's belief we must 'shun error!' is passional, that is, it is an *aversion* to error, just as 'believe truth!' is a *desire* for truth. Our individual passional nature will be characterized by the way we balance these two claims or ends. A balance must be found since the attempt to 'shun error!' at all costs is prohibited by the 'theory of certitude' which shows that there are no beliefs beyond doubt. For both philosophers, the passional always plays a determinate role in our decisions.¹³ The intellect without the passional is indifferent; but, nonetheless, the passional without the intellect is blind. Furthermore, both factors are powerless without the will's intervention. The intellect can never be entirely coerced and the passional always plays a role, but the will makes the final decision. Although we feel passionately compelled to believe in the external world, to doubt it remains an *option*, the will may suspend belief.

Renouvier does not think that we can believe whatever we want or simply what would make us happy. The move from impersonalism to personalism was important because it makes the individual *responsible* for knowledge. Just as there is no judgement uninfluenced by the passions, the same follows for the intellect. We must ensure that our hypotheses are intelligibly defined, that they conform to our experientially confirmed beliefs, and that they do not deviate from the point of view of knowledge. Although individuals constitute truth, this truth must undergo continuous verification and the assent of others. Accordingly, there is a social conventionalist aspect to Renouvier's work that interacts with his emphasis on the individual *person*. This is made especially clear in his pluralistic classification of the sciences. He argues that individual sciences are each demarcated by the series of individual and often undemonstrated postulates essential for their operation. These postulates are agreed upon by the consensus of the scientific practitioners. They cannot be investigated by the particular science itself because they are the condition of its operation (ECS.II.24). 'Each particular science is a construction raised on a convenient choice of hypotheses. And one can, by having respect for the practical realities, observe that nothing in the world is better or otherwise grounded, and that it suffices' ('Les problèmes de l'esthétique contemporaine', 109). This does not mean that these basic hypotheses are completely arbitrary and groundless. They remain in use only insofar as the conclusions drawn from them practically justify their postulation. Those that are not justified in this way will disappear as

¹³Elsewhere, James identifies the individual balance of the desire for uniformity versus knowledge of particulars as characteristic of the passional (WWJ.VI.57–89).

the science advances ‘like a badly understood scaffolding’ (ECG.II.ii.142). We should combine the minimum of faith with the maximum of results. Philosophy or ‘general critique’ plays a meta-level role for Renouvier since it has the job of scrutinizing and understanding both these hypotheses and the way they demarcate and signify the relationships between the individual sciences. It is responsible for understanding how the individual sciences work together to form a rational coherent framework. James shared this conventionalist and pluralistic view of the demarcation of the sciences and even attempted to cement the status of psychology as a natural science based on these principles.¹⁴ In his ‘Plea’, he wrote:

If, therefore, psychology is ever to conform to the type of the other natural sciences, it must also renounce certain ultimate solutions, and place itself on the usual common-sense basis by uncritically begging such data as the existence of a physical world, of states of mind, and of the fact that these latter take cognizance of other things. What the ‘physical world’ may be in itself, how ‘states of mind’ can exist at all, and exactly what ‘taking cognizance’ may imply, are inevitable further questions; but they are questions of the kind for which general philosophy, not natural science, is held responsible.
(WWJ.XIII.13; cf. WWJ.XIII.274–5)

This shows how for both Renouvier and James, will, passion, and intellect cooperate in scientific method just as they do in the cases of ordinary rational belief. Therefore, between the primary postulates and the wildest scientific hypothesis, there is no difference in kind, as long as (i) the hypothesis is rational; (ii) it could cohere with our well-founded beliefs; and (iii) it is in principle verifiable and has not been falsified. As Schmaus points out (‘Renouvier and the Method of Hypothesis’, 132 and ‘Science and the Social Contract in Renouvier’, 73), the fallibilism and more liberal approach to hypotheses usually attributed to Henri Poincaré and Pierre Duhem was developed by Renouvier at a time when they were ‘in their cradles’ (‘A Chronicle of Pragmatism in France before 1907’, 133). For Renouvier, we suggest hypotheses to direct scientific research and these are generally formed passionately on the basis of analogies with previously known laws (‘Schmaus, Renouvier and the Method of Hypothesis’, 140). He claims that the role of hypotheses is to ‘establish systematic experience, or prepare it, to pose questions for it and open up new ways of thinking, and therefore serve the progress of positive knowledge; we attribute to it the merit of linking facts in place of unknown laws’ (ECG.II.ii.157). In effect, hypotheses coordinate phenomena for memory, and, to a certain degree, reason. Through induction and progressive verification, these hypotheses, if successful, will approach certitude and their creator will be called a

¹⁴WWJ.VIII.6. On James’s scientific methodology and how it was a major point of disagreement between James and Peirce, see Klein (‘Divide et Impera!’).

'genius'. We proceed by way of induction and hypothesis', Renouvier tells us, 'because there is no other route' (ECG.I.ii.363). Consequently, '[h]ypothesis has its place in the Physicist's method necessarily. It is therefore justified' (ECG.II.ii.156). Nevertheless, although progressive scientific verification approaches certitude, even the highest degree of certitude does not equate to infallibility. There must always be an element of faith. This is why James tells us that 'the only escape from faith is mental nullity' (WWJ.VI.78). If faith is inescapable, its necessity in all our reasonings (whether in relation to the primary postulates, the postulates of the individual sciences, or in the development of scientific hypotheses) forms its justification. The scene is set for James's defence of 'our right to believe in religious matters'. Accepting that our decision regarding the religious hypothesis is one that is live, forced, and momentous, our hypothesis will not be inconsistent with our empiricist and scientific thinking if we choose to believe it (with the proviso that belief is understood in the Renouvierean sense). Its hypothetical nature shares much in common with the hypotheses that direct scientific practice, except with the major difference that it may not be until the day we die when we shall discover (or not) whether the hypothesis has been verified. It too is a practical postulate, and the acceptability of its postulation is dependent on its success and necessity in relation to our moral practices.¹⁵

That this is how we should read James's argument seems to be confirmed by Renouvier's reading of James's early version from his 1878 'Quelques considérations sur la méthode subjective' (WWJ.V.23–31 and 331–8). In Renouvier's commentary on the article, he clearly aligns his critical philosophy with James's 'subjectivist method', which Renouvier calls 'the philosophy of practical reason and moral law' ('La question de la certitude IX', 18). James's merit, Renouvier argues, is that he identified the subjectivist method's 'healthy' application. In contrast, Rousseau and Pascal have exemplified its 'unhealthy' application. When Rousseau was overwhelmed by fear of damnation, he made himself a test. He would throw a stone at a tree, and if he hit it, this would be a sign of salvation, if he missed, one of damnation. This is an unhealthy use of the subjectivist method, since he made a purely passional connection deprived of any meaningful connection to reason. If he could believe he was saved, he would feel psychologically healthier, and thus he created arbitrary conditions to support this belief. It is, Renouvier suggests, similar to the sort of superstitious signs of good luck that gamblers seek, even though they have no connection whatsoever to their bets. What Pascal failed to see, is that his own 'wager' was also 'purely passional'. Although Pascal considered the wager to be necessary and forced, this is only because he had grown up embedded within a Catholic society and developed deeply entrenched habits of belief that made the wager for or against

¹⁵James believes that our moral practices will be significantly different if we affirm a belief in the religious hypothesis to how they would be if we reject it (WWJ.VI.32). Renouvier agrees because he believes that the moral order and virtuous human development depend upon it.

Catholicism *appear* necessary. The passionate habits are examples of *le vertige mental* discussed in §2; catholic superstitions that do not withstand rational investigation. The ‘unhealthy’ subjectivist method is, for Renouvier, exemplified just as much by the superstitions inherent in Pascal’s wager as in the arbitrary connection made by Rousseau. He believes it is the merit of James’s argument that it represents the ‘healthy’ version of the subjectivist method. Both Pascal and Rousseau were led by the passionate to create their hypotheses without the coherent intervention of reason, yet James, Renouvier believes, is not guilty of this same intellectual irresponsibility. Contrary to Misak and Sprigge, for Renouvier, the very merit of James’s subjectivism is the way that it *avoids* Rousseau’s and Pascal’s prudentialism.

In James’s ‘Will to Believe’, the motive of the reconciliation project was to show the scientific-minded empiricists in his lecture’s audience that a belief in the religious hypothesis *need not* be inconsistent with their theoretical practices. Renouvier’s motive for the project was different. He argued that our religious hypotheses *must not* be inconsistent with our scientific reasoning. Even if religious hypotheses can be postulated on the basis of his theory of certitude, only certain hypotheses are open to consideration and they must be submitted to ‘a most severe critique’ (ECS.II.296). The intellect must always play a role and we are only justified in believing in hypotheses that are not logically contradictory. Belief in an all-encompassing pantheist God, or a Catholic God of infinite power is not justified because, Renouvier argues, such a God would contradict reason and depend on the theory of substance which can only be postulated on the basis of ‘the point of view of being without knowledge’. It is the job of philosophy as ‘general critique’ to examine and understand the demarcations and relationships between logic, natural philosophy, and morality. While there are clear differences among the three, they are all dominated by general critique’s fundamental methodological rules. For Renouvier, therefore, the reconciliation thesis is developed alongside a radical critique of certain forms of Christian theology.

The issue Renouvier believes is at stake with ‘the religious hypothesis’ is the existence of the true moral order, that is, the reality and the supremacy of the ‘Good’. After full philosophical reflection, he suggests, it is the supremacy of the moral order that should be named God (ECG.II.ii.260). The affirmation of this hypothesis is passionate, but unlike Rousseau and Pascal’s hypotheses, not inconsistent with reason and can even be reconciled with it. For Renouvier, this is the religious hypothesis of which James is justifying the affirmation. We do not adopt it simply because it makes us feel better, rather it is a hypothesis we can put to the test. Whether we choose to live in accordance with it or not is a forced decision and one that will have a great effect on the way we live our lives. As James says, we act in accordance with our hypothetical assumptions. If the assumption is false, the effects will ‘undeceive’ before long. Although Renouvier and James’s motivations differed, the spirit of their arguments converged. In the ‘Will to Believe’, James argues that the passionate does have a place in our

decisions when the intellect has not been coerced, but this is because there are no cases where the intellect is entirely coerced and free from passional influence. The wise exercise of freedom comes from acquiring the virtuous ability to appropriately balance these necessary elements of judgement. This is the main lesson of Renouvier's theory of certitude and one that underlies James's argument in the 'Will to Believe'.

CONCLUSION

Absolute idealism was not the only form of nineteenth-century idealism available. To understand the relationship between pragmatism and idealism, therefore, the importance of French idealism should also be recognized. I have shown that Renouvier's idealist methodology played a crucial role for the development of James's pragmatism and its 'distinct view'. I have also argued that understanding the Renouvierean context presents these distinctive elements of James's thought in a philosophically respectable light. Turlot (*Le Personnalisme critique de Charles Renouvier*) wrote that Renouvier has become a 'dead' philosopher and André Canivez tells us that the philosopher's 'immense production' now sleeps in libraries under a thick sheet of dust ('Aspects de la philosophie française', 443). If we dust off Renouvier's immense production and attempt to bring him back to life, we find not only a valuable theory of freedom that enables the establishment of a critical system of philosophy but also the idealist inspiration for a pragmatist lineage that emphasizes fallibilism, anti-scepticism, and the primacy of practical reason without giving up on the pursuit of truth *qua* truth.¹⁶

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Abbreviations

ECG: Renouvier, C.B. *Essai de Critique générale*, 1912. Cited by *Essai* and volume number.

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