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052158163X - William James and the Metaphysics of Experience

David C. Lamberth

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WILLIAM JAMES AND THE METAPHYSICS OF EXPERIENCE

William James is often considered one of America's most original philosophical minds, while also a foundational thinker for the study of religion. Despite this reputation, he is rarely considered a serious philosopher or religious thinker by contemporary standards. In this new interpretation David Lamberth argues that James's major contribution was to develop a metaphysics of experience integrally related to his pluralistic and social religious ideas. Lamberth systematically interprets James's radically empiricist world-view and argues for an early dating (1895) for his development of this metaphysics. He offers a radically empiricist reading of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and a close analysis of *A Pluralistic Universe*. Concluding, he connects James's ideas about experience, pluralism, and truth to current debates in philosophy, philosophy of religion, and theology, suggesting James's functional, experiential metaphysics as a conceptual aid in bridging the social and interpretive with the immediate and concrete, avoiding radical relativism and uncritical realism.

David C. Lamberth is Assistant Professor of Theology in the Faculty of Divinity of Harvard University

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To my mother and father

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In this book I refer whenever possible to the Harvard University Press edition *The Works of William James*, edited by Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas Skrupskelis, citing the volumes' presentations of manuscripts as well as references to letters and notes in appendices and the apparatus. When referring to other letters or manuscripts, I cite the most accessible published location of the complete item. In a few cases references are made to manuscripts in the Papers of William James at Harvard's Houghton Library.

The *Works* edition is arranged topically rather than chronologically, and a great deal of the material presented therein was never prepared for publication by James, much less topically arranged. In order to advance the historical interests of my argument, I have adopted certain additional conventions regarding citations. If an article or work was published by James in the same form and under the same name as it is presented in the Harvard *Works* edition, I refer to it in my notes by the *Works* volume title alone. For example, I refer to articles in *The Meaning of Truth* simply by that title (with a page number), rather than by article name, even though James previously published many of them serially. On the other hand, in the case of uncollected essays, manuscripts, and notes, and in the specific case of all of the essays that Perry collected posthumously in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, I refer both to the article (or item) title and to the *Works* volume. This allows individuals without the *Works* edition to find many items in other sources (such as the popular *Memories and Studies*). It also preserves access and perhaps even draws attention to both James's own intellectual history and his authorial considerations about publication.

The first reference to a work in the footnotes includes full publication information. All subsequent references are by author and abbreviated title. Full publication information for all works is included in the select bibliography.

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