

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-65547-7 - Henry James and Modern Moral Life  
Robert B. Pippin  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## HENRY JAMES AND MODERN MORAL LIFE

In *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*, Professor Robert Pippin argues that Henry James, in his novels and tales, is engaged in a sophisticated, original exploration of moral understanding and moral motivation. Pippin argues that James takes his bearings from what he understood to be the complex and unprecedented historical situation of modernity and that he was able to do full justice to the ambiguities and confusions unavoidable in such a social world, while avoiding skepticism or a narrow aestheticism.

Professor Pippin presents important new interpretations of *The American Scene*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *Portrait of a Lady*, *The Ambassadors*, *The Golden Bowl*, and several of James's short stories, including *The Beast in the Jungle* and *The Turn of the Screw*, in support of his claim that there is a distinct and philosophically rich Jamesean account of modern moral meaning.

*Henry James and Modern Moral Life* is written by one of the preeminent interpreters of the modern European philosophical tradition and will interest both philosophers and literary critics and theorists. Because Pippin presents his argument without reliance on a particular philosophical or theoretical vocabulary, the book will also engage students and interested readers of Henry James.

Robert B. Pippin is Raymond W. and Martha Hilpert Gruner Distinguished Service Professor in the Committee on Social Thought, the Department of Philosophy, and the College at the University of Chicago. He is the author of several books on the modern philosophical tradition and the nature of European modernity.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-65547-7 - Henry James and Modern Moral Life

Robert B. Pippin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

# HENRY JAMES AND MODERN MORAL LIFE

ROBERT B. PIPPIN

*University of Chicago*



Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-65547-7 - Henry James and Modern Moral Life  
Robert B. Pippin  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa  
<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Robert B. Pippin 2000

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2000  
First paperback edition 2001

Printed in the United States of America

*Typeface* Adobe Garamond 11/14 pt. *System* MagnaType™ [AG]

*A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data is available*

ISBN 0 521 65230 8 hardback  
ISBN 0 521 65547 1 paperback

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-65547-7 - Henry James and Modern Moral Life

Robert B. Pippin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*In memory of François Furet*

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-65547-7 - Henry James and Modern Moral Life  
Robert B. Pippin  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

And there appeared, with its windows glowing, small,  
In the distance, in the frozen reaches, a cabin;  
And we stood before it, amazed at its being there,  
And would have gone forward and opened the door,  
And stepped into the glow and warmed ourselves there,  
But that it was ours by not being ours,  
And should remain empty. That was the idea.

– from “The Idea,” by Mark Strand

## CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> ix
1. Modern Morals	1
2. “A Kind of Morbid Modernity?”	23
3. “Crudities of Mutual Resistance”	54
4. Beasts, Secrets, and Ghosts	89
5. Isabel Archer’s “Beastly Pure Mind”	126
6. The “Strange Logic” of Lambert Strether’s “Double Consciousness”	147
7. Meaning and Morality	171
<i>Texts by Henry James</i>	181
<i>Bibliography</i>	183
<i>Index</i>	187

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Work on this book began several years ago as a result of a stimulating graduate seminar in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. My co-teacher in the seminar was the writer Bette Howland. I am very much indebted to Bette for that seminar, for our many conversations about James, and especially for her encouragement about a book on the themes that I returned to again and again in our discussions.

In the years that followed, I presented versions of Chapters 2 and 3 as public lectures or as colloquia throughout the United States and abroad. I discovered that from Canberra to Colorado to Iowa to Hartford, there were always in the audience, as well as specialists in literature departments, many very dedicated enthusiasts who had, like me, simply been reading and re-reading and thinking about James for years, out of love for the work, and from an intense, almost personal interest in the characters and their fates, and who responded with great generosity and enthusiasm to my somewhat systematic and abstract treatment. Accordingly, I found that discussions after the paper were among the most animated, thoughtful, personal, and, certainly for me, the most helpful of any I have ever experienced. I owe a great debt to those audiences for the questions, criticisms, and comments that I received. This certainly goes as well for the literary critics, many of whom were kind enough not to treat me as an interloper or poacher, and who were often extremely helpful with suggestions and criticisms. It goes just as well for the many interlocutors who had the patience to hear me out, to read drafts of chapters, and to respond and criticize. My thanks especially to John Coetzee, Lorraine Daston, Lisabeth During, Mark Jenkins, Charles Larmore, Glenn Most, Ross Poole, Richard Posner, and Nathan Tarcov.

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-65547-7 - Henry James and Modern Moral Life  
 Robert B. Pippin  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

### *Acknowledgments*

In the course of writing these chapters, I received for the second time in my career a generous grant from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. This *Stipendium*, together with equally generous sabbatical and leave from the University of Chicago and some additional assistance from the Earhart Foundation, allowed me to take up residence with my wife and children for a year's stay in Tübingen, Germany. The grant was given primarily to enable me to continue work on a large project about Hegel's theory of freedom, something I had been working on, on and off, for more than ten years, and that I was able to bring close to completion in Germany. The Jamesean prospect, however, of being an American living in Europe and being able to steal some time away from German philosophy to complete a draft of a book on literature, was too tempting a situation and too romantic an image to resist. Since this would also give me an excuse to re-read *The Ambassadors* during stays in Paris, *The Wings of the Dove* in Venice, *The Golden Bowl* in London, and so forth, I seized the opportunity, and completed the penultimate draft of the manuscript during our first few months in the lovely university town of Tübingen and on several sojourns in Europe. I am grateful to the Humboldt Foundation, to the University of Chicago, to the Dean of its Social Sciences Division, Richard Saller, and to the Earhart Foundation, and grateful for the extraordinary hospitality of my Tübingen hosts for their support and generosity. Manfred Frank and Veronique Zanetti, Toni and Uta Koch, Otfried and Evelyn Höffe, and Axel and Gerlinde Markert were all especially kind and helpful to me and my family, and we shall always remain thankful for their *Gastfreundlichkeit*.

I also owe special debts to the friends who were generous enough to read the completed manuscript and offer detailed comments and extensive criticism and questions. I profited immensely from correspondence and conversation with Fred Olafson, Jay Bernstein, Stanley Rosen, and Dan Brudney, and am much in their debt. I doubt that I have answered their criticisms, but their comments were deeply appreciated, and they certainly prompted many an alteration and attempts at revision. I am just as indebted to the referees for Cambridge University Press, two of whom, Richard Eldridge and David Bromwich, later made their identities known to me. It was extraordinarily kind of all the referees, and especially these latter two, to write such full, detailed, and thoughtful remarks. I hope that in the final draft I managed to do some justice to their concerns. My thanks also to Terry Moore of Cambridge University Press for his support



Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-65547-7 - Henry James and Modern Moral Life  
Robert B. Pippin  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

### *Acknowledgments*

of this project and for his wise counsel about this and many other matters, and to the manuscript editor, Ronald Cohen, for a most judicious and helpful job.

I thank my colleague Mark Strand for permission to reprint from his poem “The Idea” and Donald Justice for permission to reprint “Henry James at the Pacific.” A somewhat different version of sections from Chapters 2 and 3 was recently published by the University of Chicago Press in a Festschrift for my colleague David Grene, and I thank the Press and Todd Breyfogle for their cooperation.

Finally, this book is dedicated to the memory of François Furet. François was the co-chair of the Committee on Social Thought when I moved to Chicago in 1992, so I came to owe him all sorts of special personal debts for his thoughtfulness, persuasiveness, and patience during a difficult period of transition. I also quickly realized what extraordinary good fortune it was for me to be able to get to know and learn from one of the twentieth century’s greatest historians and wisest interlocutors. James’s International Theme was often François’s theme, as were both James’s worries about modernity – concerns most visible in the land of modernity’s future, America – as well as James’s hopes and qualified optimism. Completing this book in memory of him was one small way for me to continue imagining how all those conversations about such themes might have continued.