Introduction

This book concerns two extraordinary men who shaped twentieth-century philosophy: William James (1842–1910) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951). James is the author of the thousand-page masterpiece, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), a rich blend of philosophy, psychology, and personal reflection that has given us such ideas as "the stream of thought," and the baby's impression of the world "as one great blooming, buzzing confusion" (PP, 462). Ranging from the functions of the brain to multiple personalities, from intellect to will, to our general sense of reality, James's *Principles* is more than the first great psychology text. It contains seeds of pragmatism and phenomenology, and influenced thinkers as diverse as Edmund Husserl, Bertrand Russell, and John Dewey. It is, as Jacques Barzun has written, "an American masterpiece which, quite like Moby Dick, ought to be read from beginning to end at least once by every person professing to be educated."[1]

James's pioneering survey of religious psychology, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), introduced such terms as "the divided self" and "the sick soul," and an account of religion's significance in terms of its "fruits for life." James's religious concerns are also evident in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (1897), *Human Immortality: Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine* (1898), and *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909). James oscillated between thinking that a "study in human nature" such as *Varieties* could contribute to a "Science of Religion" and the belief that religious experience involved an

altogether supernatural domain, somehow inaccessible to science but accessible to the individual human subject.

James made some of his most important philosophical contributions in the last decade of his life, even as he labored unsuccessfully to complete a systematic philosophy. In a burst of writing in 1904–5 (collected in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* [1912]) he set out the metaphysical view most commonly known as "neutral monism," according to which there is one fundamental "stuff" that is neither material nor mental. He also published *Pragmatism* (1907), the definitive statement of a set of views that occur throughout his writings.

Wittgenstein's work is at the center of twentieth-century analytic philosophy in at least three of its phases: logical positivism, "ordinary language philosophy," and contemporary philosophical psychology. His *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) offers a breathtakingly comprehensive and oracular account of language, logic, ethics, aesthetics, and philosophy – in a mere seventy-two pages. Wittgenstein holds that although everyday language is in perfect logical order (TLP, 5.5563), it nevertheless conceals its real form. The task of the book is not only to uncover that form or permeating structure but to argue for its necessity. For at the heart of the *Tractatus* is a transcendental argument: that without eternal, objective, and definite "senses" with perfectly precise relations to one another, language that succeeds in saying something could not exist. From this argument flows Wittgenstein's metaphysics of objects, states of affairs, and logic as representing "the scaffolding of the world" (TLP, 6.124).

Although most of the sentences in the *Tractatus* concern logic and language, Wittgenstein wrote that the point of the book was "an ethical one":

> My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have *not* written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one. My book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from the inside as it were, and I am convinced that this is the ONLY *rigorous* way of drawing those limits. In short, I believe that where *many* others today are just *gassing*, I have managed in my book to put everything firmly into place by being silent about it.[2]

That "silence" took the form in the 1920s of Wittgenstein's devotion to such nonphilosophical activities as gardening, teaching elementary school, and designing a house in Vienna for his sister Margaret.

In 1924, responding to an invitation to return to Cambridge from John Maynard Keynes, Wittgenstein wrote about his interest in philosophy: "I myself no longer have any strong inner drive towards that sort of activity. Everything that I really had to say, I have said, and so the spring has run dry."[3] By the end of the decade, however, the spring had begun to flow again, as Wittgenstein came both to see profound difficulties in the system of the *Tractatus*, and to work out the more "anthropological"[4] approach of his later philosophy. Wittgenstein's posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* introduces an open-ended and human-centered account of language and logic through such notions as "language-game," "forms of life," and "family resemblances." His new philosophy arises, however, as he begins his twenty-year study of James's *Principles of Psychology*.

James came to be the object of some of Wittgenstein's most deeply reaching criticisms, yet Wittgenstein loved and trusted him from the start. He read James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1912, in his first year as a student of philosophy at Cambridge, when he wrote to Russell: "Whenever I have time now I read James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*. This book does me a *lot* of good."[5] James was one of those very few writers – Tolstoy was another – whose works Wittgenstein could *stand* to reread. At one point after his return to philosophy in the 1930s, James's *Principles of Psychology* was the only book of philosophy visible on Wittgenstein's bookshelves.[6]

Wittgenstein learned from James. One can trace his assimilation of James's distinctions between two types of intentional action, one involving an act of will and the other not; between our normal experience of the words of our language and our experience of a mindlessly repeated word whose "soul has fled"; between a word that has an essential definition and one, like "religion," which connotes "many characters which may alternately be equally important" (VRE, 32). In James's texts, Wittgenstein discovered an acute sense of the "variety" of human experience – religious, secular, emotional, cognitive, receptive, active, extraordinary, ordinary – that was deeply congenial as he worked on what he called his "album" of "remarks" and "sketches" of human life (PI, v).

James and Wittgenstein never met, of course, for James died in America a year before Wittgenstein came to England from his native Austria to study engineering. Yet one might imagine them strolling

along the footpaths of Cambridge, or, better still – given their taste for wildness – in the mountains of New York or New Hampshire where James had summer homes, talking about human psychology, the pluralistic nature of reality, pragmatism, or the forms of human life. However, there would be an anxiety to such conversations because of Wittgenstein's substantial criticisms of *The Principles*; but also because of his concern near the end of his life that he had produced a version of pragmatism, which was a philosophy he abhorred. The genial James would have been a match for the severe Wittgenstein, I believe, but I wonder how much ground he would have yielded in the face of Wittgenstein's criticisms. And in a face-to-face meeting with James, would Wittgenstein have acknowledged with less anxiety his affinities with James's own pragmatism? Would he have been able to teach James the differences between pragmatism and his later philosophy?

This book does not consist of such imaginary conversations, however. It is rooted in discussions of James that did take place – in Wittgenstein's journals and typescripts, and in his published works, especially *Philosophical Investigations*. If, as Stanley Cavell has written, the *Investigations* offers a picture of "our times," our culture,[7] I wish to consider James's prominence in that picture. Seventeen people are mentioned in the *Investigations*, among them Beethoven, Schubert, and Goethe; the Gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Köhler; and the physicist Michael Faraday. Five others are mentioned twice – Lewis Carroll, Moses, and three philosophers: Wittgenstein's Cambridge colleagues Frank Ramsey and Bertrand Russell, and Socrates. The three remaining people named in the *Investigations* are also philosophers: Gottlob Frege and William James, each mentioned four times, with only St. Augustine exceeding them with five citations. Such counting – and merely focusing on the places where Wittgenstein mentions James – may of course be misleading. We will see, for example, that James is more extensively present in the *Investigations* than these explicit citations reveal and that these citations are not fair indicators of what Wittgenstein learned from James. John Passmore, one of the first commentators to assert the importance not only of *The Principles of Psychology* but of *Pragmatism* for understanding the *Philosophical Investigations*, is thus right not only to note the "rare distinction" of Wittgenstein's many references to James, but to observe that Wittgenstein does so in a manner that fails to "bring out the nature

of his relationship to James."[8] The specification of that relationship is a main concern of the following chapters.

Because Wittgenstein and James are typically placed in two distinct traditions of contemporary philosophy, their relationship has not often been taken into account. Wittgenstein commentators tend not to have studied James, and students of James often know little about Wittgenstein.[9] When the relationship is discussed, commentators tend to focus on Wittgenstein's criticisms of James – which are substantial – and to ignore the complicated overlapping views and temperaments of these two great writers. My claim is not simply that James and Wittgenstein share views about specific topics, but that they share a set of commitments: to antifoundationalism, to the description of the concrete details of human life, to the priority of practice over intellect, and to the importance of religion in understanding human life.

James held that the key to a philosopher was his vision of things, his "mode of feeling the whole push." He wrote: "The books of all the great philosophers are like so many men. Our sense of an essential personal flavor in each one of them, typical but indescribable, is the finest fruit of our own accomplished philosophic education" (P, 24). Wittgenstein agreed with James on the connection between the philosophy and the philosopher. He wrote that work in philosophy is "more like a kind of working on oneself. On one's own conception. On the way one sees things."[10] It was, I shall try to show, for his nuanced and broadminded way of "seeing things" that Wittgenstein admired William James.

In standard English-language accounts of twentieth-century philosophy, the classical American philosophers (Peirce, James, Dewey, Santayana, etc.) are treated tangentially, with the main developments occurring elsewhere: in England and then the United States with the rise of analytic (or "Anglo-American") philosophy; in Austria and again in the United States with the rise of logical positivism; or on "the continent," where phenomenology, existentialism, the Frankfurt School, and postmodernism developed. The depth and importance of Wittgenstein's relationship to James requires, it seems to me, that we adjust our picture of twentieth-century philosophy, just as the recent understanding of the Emerson–Nietzsche connection is changing the way we see nineteenth-century philosophy.[11] There is, I shall argue, a classical American presence in analytic philosophy running

not only through C. I. Lewis, Morton White, W. V. O. Quine, and Hilary Putnam – Americans all – but, a generation earlier, through the work of an Austrian who worked in England and visited America only in the last years of his life.

If this story has two heroes, it also has a subplot: Wittgenstein's troubled relation to pragmatism, the tradition that James (along with Charles Sanders Peirce) is generally supposed to have founded.[12] In the last four years of his life, Wittgenstein twice questioned his own pragmatism: in the account of knowledge called *On Certainty*, and in the preliminary study for the second part of *Investigations* published as *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*. As I shall begin to argue in Chapter 1, James's writings help us appreciate some respects in which Wittgenstein's thought is indeed akin to pragmatism, but they also show that pragmatism is what Wittgenstein calls a "family resemblance" term, with no one feature running through all its instances. Just as there may be a typical Jones family nose or laugh, there are typical pragmatic emphases – on practice, for example, or on the future – but these are no more found in all pragmatisms or pragmatic doctrines than the Jones laugh is found in every last brother, sister, and cousin of the same family. The question I will consider is how closely Wittgenstein is related to the pragmatist family, and particularly to William James.

In James's *Pragmatism* alone, pragmatism is at least five things: a theory of truth, a theory of meaning, a holistic account of knowledge, a method of resolving philosophical disputes, and a human temperament. I consider some similarities between each of these facets of pragmatism and Wittgenstein's philosophy, but two of them are particularly important, for they mark the respects in which Wittgenstein asks himself whether he is a pragmatist. The first of these, the pragmatic account of knowledge, forms the subject of Chapter 1. The second, the pragmatic account of meaning, is the point of departure for Chapter 6.

In the "revival of pragmatism"[13] during the last decades of the twentieth century, two philosophers – Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam – occupy especially prominent positions.[14] Each in his own way embraces a Wittgensteinian philosophy of language and a pragmatic account of knowledge and truth. Rorty, for example, gives a pragmatist slant to the "Wittgensteinian analogy between vocabularies and tools,"[15] holding that for Wittgenstein "all vocabularies, even those which contain the words which we take most seriously, the ones most

essential for our self-descriptions – are human creations, tools for the creation of such other human artifacts as poems, utopian societies, scientific theories, and future generations."[16] Putnam sees Wittgenstein, James, and Husserl among "philosophers in the Neo-Kantian tradition . . . who claim that commonsense tables and chairs and sensations and electrons are *equally real* . . .";[17] and he uses James's humanist slogan that "the trail of the human serpent is over all" to characterize the "program" concerning reality and truth these philosophers share.[18] These powerful contemporary syntheses of Wittgensteinian and pragmatic philosophies, I want to argue, were preceded and prepared for by Wittgenstein's own engagement with a founding pragmatist writer, William James.

No introduction to the philosophies of James and Wittgenstein would be adequate without at least some acknowledgment of the extraordinarily substantial and interesting lives they led. It seems that there is a new biography of the fascinating William James every few years; and the classic works on his life include Ralph Barton Perry's *The Thought and Character of William James*, Henry James's *Notes of a Son and Brother*, Gay Wilson Allen's *William James*, and Jacques Barzun's *A Stroll with William James*.[19] Ray Monk's *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, is a compelling and thorough account of Wittgenstein's life and work. There are finely wrought treatments of his life by Norman Malcolm and Brian McGuinness, several collections of memoirs, and even a film by Derek Jarman (Wittgenstein [1993]).

Both philosophers came from extraordinary families. The James family was presided over by William's father, Henry James, Sr., a disciple of Fourier and Swedenborg; a friend of Emerson, Horace Greeley, Thomas Carlyle, and John Stuart Mill;[20] and an author of such books (published at his own expense) as *The Nature of Evil* and *Moralism and Christianity*.[21] The elder James's life of leisure and study, and the many trips he took to Europe with his young family, were financed by the wealth accumulated by his father William, an Irish immigrant who made a fortune building Albany and the Erie Canal.[22] The family also included William's brilliant and tragically short-lived sister Alice, and, above all, his younger brother, the novelist Henry James, Jr.

Wittgenstein's musically oriented family, far wealthier than the merely very comfortable Jameses, was at the center of Viennese culture. The family's place in Vienna was established by Ludwig's father, Karl, who amassed one of the great fortunes of the Austro-Hungarian

empire in the steel industry. Ludwig's mother, Leopoldine Kalmus, nurtured the family's musical interests: Brahms, Mahler, and Bruno Walter regularly attended musical evenings in the palatial Wittgenstein home.[23] One of Ludwig's brothers, Hans, was a child prodigy on the piano and violin,[24] and another, Paul, was a brilliant pianist, for whom Ravel composed the "Concerto in D Major, for left hand."[25]

Whereas James was the dominant (even, it has been argued, dominating)[26] oldest brother, Ludwig was the youngest child, growing up in the reflected light of his brilliant older siblings. He did not play a musical instrument until he learned the clarinet as part of his training as a schoolteacher in the twenties. He was considered a bit dull, if unfailingly polite. Unlike several rebellious older brothers, Ludwig was obedient to his father's wishes that he study engineering. At the Realschule in Linz, where he spent his fourteenth through seventeenth years, he was a poor student, receiving mostly Cs and Ds, with an occasional B in English and natural history. His only two As were in religious studies.[27] Five years later, however, he felt competent enough to draw up a plan for a book on philosophy, to travel to Jena to discuss it with the logician Gottlob Frege, and then to Cambridge, where he was encouraged to continue in philosophy by the co-author of *Principia Mathematica*, Bertrand Russell.

James and Wittgenstein were personal opposites. Wittgenstein was a loner who gave away his money, never married, and was "difficult" even for his friends;[28] whereas James was a popular lecturer and public figure who drew crowds, with a large circle of friends with whom he corresponded in a vast output of letters. James's marriage to Alice Gibbens in 1879 brought a stability to his life that it had formerly lacked. Yet both men were "sick souls" in the sense coined by William James, people for whom radical evil "gets its innings" in the world, yet who achieve some form of redemption. Both had their personal crises, their periods of paralysis and self-hatred, and, as James wrote, their "days when the weather seems all whispering with peace, hours when the goodness and beauty of existence enfold us like a dry warm climate, or chime through us as if our inner ears were subtly ringing with the world's security" (VRE, 252). Both men managed to record or express such experiences in their philosophical work: in James's *Varieties*, and *The Principles of Psychology*, for example; in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and his "Lecture on Ethics," where he mentions his own

experiences of "absolute safety" – the feeling of being safe "*whatever* happens" (LE, 42).

If Wittgenstein sought in his early work to put the important things in their proper place by being silent about them, he came in his later writing to sketch a great canvas of human life, including our religious forms of life. On his later understanding of meaning, these religious forms – forms that include not just words, but pictures and practices – have meaning because they have a use, a role to play in human life. James sought to find a proper place for religion in the modern world also; and he came to find in human experience and practice a great part of its significance. Sometimes he envisioned a "science of religions" (which would have been anathema to Wittgenstein); but he also promoted a version of pragmatism that would be no more hostile to religion than to science, that would be "willing to take anything, to follow either logic or the senses and to count the humblest and most personal experiences . . . if they have practical consequences. She will take a God who lives in the very dirt of private fact . . ." (P, 44). This is the pragmatism that chimes with Wittgenstein's philosophy, both early and late.

Wittgenstein became a *reader* of James. If Wittgenstein was one of the truly original philosophers of our time, as I believe, then he was no one's "disciple" or slavish follower. Yet there were some writers whom he felt to be deeply right in their approach to philosophy – in their character as philosophers, one might say – whose books he continued to have on his shelves, and to read. One of these was St. Augustine, the first (and most-often) mentioned person in the *Investigations*. Wittgenstein's friend Maurice Drury once mentioned to Wittgenstein that G. E. Moore opened his lectures by saying that he would speak on all the topics required of a professor of philosophy at Cambridge except the philosophy of religion. In response,

> Wittgenstein immediately asked me if I had available a copy of St. Augustine's *Confessions*. I handed him my Loeb edition. He must have known his way about the book thoroughly for he found the passage he wanted in a few seconds. . . . "And woe to those who say nothing concerning thee just because the chatterboxes talk a lot of nonsense. . . ." He went on to say that he considered St. Augustine's *Confessions* as possibly the "most serious book ever written."[29]

Wittgenstein read James as seriously and devotedly as he read St. Augustine, for he found in James a philosophical writer who

ranged widely and humanely over religion and psychology, language, meaning, and our very being in the world – without being "a chatterbox." Wittgenstein read certain works of James as he read the *Confessions* – again and again, not without criticism, but with deep appreciation and a sense of intellectual equality. A. C. Jackson, one of Wittgenstein's pupils, reported that "Wittgenstein very frequently referred to James in his lectures, even making on one occasion – to everybody's astonishment – a precise reference to a page number!"[30]

The astonishment carries considerable cultural weight, reflecting the view, still prevailing in professional philosophy (and particularly in England), that James's time has passed, that there is no more gold to mine in those hills. James was (and is) considered crude, unsophisticated, unprofessional, and grossly "American." Yet Jackson's notes from Wittgenstein's 1946–7 lectures show that William James's name occurs frequently. This is also the time when Wittgenstein was preparing the typescript called *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology Vol. 1*, where James is mentioned more than any other person (nine times). It is in these *Remarks* that, after considering the uses to which religious pictures are put, Wittgenstein asks himself whether he is a pragmatist.

And so I find myself circling back to pragmatism, a subject mostly unnamed in Wittgenstein's work – certainly less-often named than William James, and never in conjunction with a reference to James. From everything Wittgenstein says about James – much of it quite critical, some of it admiring – one would have no grounds for concluding that James is a pragmatist! Yet broad pragmatist themes run through James's work from start to finish, including the works Wittgenstein read with such care: *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and *The Principles of Psychology*. The term "pragmatism" has always been used loosely – indeed it was designed that way by James. In the midst of the contemporary "revival of pragmatism" we may be apt to see pragmatism everywhere and so, in pragmatist terms, to secure less and less cash value in saying so. So I think that Stanley Cavell is right to ask what use it is to call Wittgenstein a pragmatist.[31] I reply that its use may be to direct our attention to questions Wittgenstein raised, and to features of his work that give rise to these questions. These questions will, in turn, lead us back to Wittgenstein's long engagement – lasting almost forty years – with the writings of William James.