

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

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*D. MICAH HESTER*

The current issue of *William James Studies* is dedicated to challenging James's ethics as argued by Robert Talisse and Scott Aikin. The debate began as a conference paper-response for the 2010 Central Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association. It has herein been expanded to include more interlocutors and a reply to them by Talisse/Aikin.

The heart of the debate focuses on whether James's ethics can hold to the pragmatic injunction to remain true to experience. Talisse/Aikin believe that it cannot, and they put forth three challenges. First, they believe that James's reliance on the contention

*To desire x is to take x to be a good*

makes him unable to integrate certain kinds of common morality claims—such as, “it is wrong to steal” or “the desires of a tyrant should not be tolerated.” Second, James's meliorism makes his pluralism untenable in cases where the desires expressed require the suppression of others' desires. And third, James's pluralism is unable to ground a necessary theory of toleration.

Not surprisingly, their respondents do not agree, to greater or lesser degrees, with all aspects of their analysis. Harvey Cormier's response focuses on a concern that Talisse/Aikin have been both too naturalistic and not sufficiently attuned to experience. Richard Gale, on the other hand, argues that while Talisse/Aikin get some stuff right about James's insufficiencies and missteps, ultimately, moral pluralism still passes muster. Ruth Anna Putnam simply takes Talisse/Aikin to have ignored valuable parts of James's work that, had they noted them properly, would undermine or set aside each of their challenges. Finally, as is probably not surprising in such debates, Talisse/Aikin respond to their interlocutors dismissing most of the rebuttals as unsuccessful.

I have purposefully not attempted here to explain anyone's position in detail. The essays to follow are short and clear enough to stand without need for an editor's interpretation. We invite you to read these essays and even to develop responses to any or all of them for submission to this journal. We also invite you to propose to the editors of *William James Studies*

other debates regarding some aspect of James's work or James-related themes that you believe are worthy of consideration.

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