In the preface to *The Will to Believe* James described his "philosophical attitude" as a "radical empiricism," empiricism because he regarded all claims concerning matters of fact as hypotheses subject to revision in the light of subsequent experience, and radical because he extended this empirical attitude to metaphysical hypotheses. Specifically, "unlike so much of the halfway empiricism that is current under the name of positivism or agnosticism or scientific naturalism, it does not dogmatically affirm monism as something with which all experience has got to square. The difference between monism and pluralism is perhaps the most pregnant of all the differences in philosophy" (*WB*, 5; emphasis added). Although he uses the expression "radical empiricism," this view is not yet the doctrine that he later advocated as radical empiricism. Yet he was already a pluralist in more than one sense.

In this essay I am interested in the kind of pluralism that James intended to foster in "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" and "What Makes a Life Significant," but not only in those essays. He characterized this pluralism in the preface to *Talks to Teachers* as follows. "The truth is too great for any one actual mind, even though that mind be dubbed 'the Absolute,' to know the whole of it. The facts and worths of life need many cognizers to take them in. There is no point of view absolutely public and universal. Private and incommunicable perceptions always remain over, and the worst of it is that those who look for them never know where" (*TT*, 4; emphasis in the original). This view coheres with fallibilism. If one is keenly aware that one's own point of view is limited, one should be prepared to learn from others, to have one's perspective widened, or even radically changed, by listening to them. Conversely, if one is
Some of life's ideals

prepared to alter one's beliefs in the light of experience, that experience should include what one hears from others. These are not logical entailments, but what reasonableness requires. However, to recognize that our deepest moral convictions may be overthrown by later experience is not to warn us against acting on them—on the contrary, moral progress depends on persons who heroically risk life and reputation for a "larger ideal whole than [established rules] permit"—it is simply to call upon us to be prepared to modify our own ideals or the manner in which we attempt to realize them if "the cries of the wounded" inform us that we have made a "bad mistake" (WB, 156, 158).

Reflecting on "The Sentiment of Rationality" early in his philosophical career, James found it incredible that "working philosophers would pretend that any philosophy can be, or ever has been, constructed without the help of personal preference, belief and divination" (WB, 77); near the end of his life, he found that philosophical systems are "just so many visions, modes of feeling the whole push, and seeing the whole drift of life, forced on one by one's total character and experience, and on the whole preferred—there is no other truthful word— as one's best working attitude" (PU, 14–15). This, then, is one sense in which James's philosophy is pluralistic; by arguing that one's philosophy can be no more than a "vision... forced on one by one's total character," he legitimizes a plurality of world-views each of which balances in one way or another our needs for the explanatory and unifying power of classifications, for appreciation of the multiplicity of particulars in all their diversity, and for making sense of our practical impulses. But this Jamesian pluralism is not an "anything goes" subjectivism. James points to the views of Spinoza and Hume as two examples of philosophies that fail to have adherents because, so he says, they ignore one or the other of these needs completely.

However, when James wrote that the most consequential difference in philosophy is that between monism and pluralism, he had in mind not the plurality of philosophies embraced by persons of different temperaments but a particular metaphysical view embraced by him, namely, the view that pluralism is "the permanent form of the world... the crudity of experience remains an eternal element thereof. There is no possible point of view from which the world can appear an absolutely single fact. Real possibilities, real indetermina-
tion, real ends, real evil, real crises, catastrophes, and escapes; a real God, and a real moral life, just as common sense conceives these things, may remain in empiricism as conceptions which that philosophy gives up the attempt either to ‘overcome’ or to reinterpret in monistic form” (WB, 6–7). For James, belief in real possibilities—belief both in our ability to make choices that are not determined by events that occurred before we existed and in a future whose shape depends at least to some extent on these choices—was an indispensable prerequisite of psychological well-being. Moreover, James could not understand how one could be motivated to act for good even at great cost to oneself, unless one believed that there are real goods and real evils. And he did not believe that there would be real goods and real evils in a deterministic world. I cannot pursue this metaphysical issue here.

Neither can I discuss James’s attempt to reconcile his claim (in “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life”) that “nothing can be good or right except so far as some consciousness feels it to be good or thinks it to be right . . .” (WB, 147) with his view, just mentioned, that there are real goods and real evils. He takes it that an objective moral order results from the fact that we make claims upon one another and are able to recognize these claims. He holds that a world consisting of but “two loving souls” doomed to extinction would “have as thorough a moral constitution as any possible world” (WB, 150; emphasis added). One hears here echoes of Kant, but there is a difference. For Kant, a preexisting morality requires that we make the ends of others our own; for James morality presupposes that we have done that and are continually doing so. Only then will we seek resolution when claims or ideals conflict, only then can one speak of a point of view that transcends that of any one thinker. James did not think that he had to refute the moral skeptic (although he responds to moral skepticism elsewhere), and this is not the place to ask whether his, or indeed anyone’s, position is an adequate answer.

What is of interest here is that we cannot in this world satisfy all claims, and that gives rise to what James calls the “casuistic” question. The upshot of his lengthy discussion of the casuistic question is this: “In the casuistic scale, therefore, those ideals must be written highest which prevail at the least cost, or by whose realization the least possible number of other ideals are destroyed” (WB, 155;
emphasis in the original). One must, qua philosopher, seek an inclusiveness that will do justice to some extent even to the ideals that are destroyed. What those ever more inclusive ideals are can be determined only through social experiments, judged "by actually finding, after their making, how much more outcry or how much appeasement comes about" (WB, 157).

James is a consequentialist: the empirical consequences of actions or of policies are what ultimately determines the rightness or wrongness of those actions or policies and guides subsequent choices. But James, though he greatly admired John Stuart Mill, is not a hedonist, nor any other kind of reductive utilitarian. While acknowledging that many of our ideals are connected more or less remotely with bodily pains and pleasures, he maintains that many others, especially the higher ones, have other sources. "The elementary forces in ethics are probably as plural as those of physics are. The various ideals have no common character apart from the fact that they are ideals" (WB, 153). Once again, James is a pluralist.4

I shall not pursue this topic here. For I am, in this essay, interested not in James as an ethical theorist but in James as a moralist and public philosopher. Of course, that distinction must not be taken too seriously. Even in his most theoretical writings on ethics – in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" or in the Principles of Psychology – the voice of the moralist is heard. In the former, implicitly, he advocates the strenuous moral life as well as, explicitly, the pursuit of ever more inclusive ideals. In the latter, having claimed that as one becomes aware that one’s essence is like that of other human beings,5 one will adopt some version or other of a universalizing principle, he illustrates the point with a supposedly irrefutable argument for the admission of women to Harvard Medical School, based on the premise that women are human beings and, therefore, entitled to all the rights of human beings.6

James, the moralist, addressed students who were idealistic, and, especially the women, wondering whether their lives would have, could possibly have, any significance. Being college bred, they were, moreover, inclined to overvalue "culture and refinement," to look down upon, to be "blind" to what might give significance to the lives of the uneducated. James, aware that he too tended to suffer from this blindness, understood it to be not only a moral failing, not
only to impoverish the blind themselves, but to provide excuses for United States imperialism and generally to constitute a basis for antidemocratic tendencies.

In "What Makes a Life Significant" James concluded after much reflection on various kinds of lives – the sheltered, refined, and cultured life at Chautauqua; the exposed, daring lives of construction workers on high scaffolds; the dullness of the lives of day laborers that might yet be redeemed if chosen in the name of some ideal – that no single factor can "redeem life from insignificance. Culture and refinement alone are not enough to do so. Ideal aspirations are not enough, when uncombined with pluck and will. But neither are pluck and will, dogged endurance and insensibility to danger enough, when taken alone. There must be some sort of fusion, some chemical combination among these principles, for a life objectively and thoroughly significant to result" (TT, 165).

Let us begin with culture and refinement. Not only are they not sufficient to make a life significant, one may wonder whether they are, strictly speaking, necessary. On the one hand, unless one is completely downtrodden (by poverty, illness, an implacable foe, or depression), one will seek to add some beauty, some adornment, to one's abode or one's person; one will celebrate certain events (births, comings of age, harvests, etc.) in a narrower or wider community. On the other hand, sometimes when life is intensely significant and precarious (climbing Mount Everest, plotting to assassinate a dictator), one gives no thought to these "frills." In the coves of squatters in North Carolina, James claimed not to find "a single element of artificial grace to make up for the loss of nature's beauty"; yet he came to understand that the ugliness they had created was for them "a symbol redolent with moral memories and sang a very paean of duty, struggle, and success" (TT, 134). That may have sentimentalized what was, after all, a very hard and minimal existence; it also leaves out what may well have been present: efforts to make the cabin "beautiful" (say, with a picture torn from a magazine) and the consolations of a simple faith.

Literature, both imaginative and otherwise, art, and music broaden one's vision, deepen one's understanding, enliven one's imagination. Science has not only changed our lives, it has changed our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. High culture is not merely an enjoyable addition to lives that would otherwise be drab, however
“significant”; it alters those lives, it increases their significance by broadening and enriching the ideals that animate them. But one would suffer from the blindness James wanted to cure, if one denied that lives untouched by high culture may be significant.

I have considered the relevance of culture and refinement to the significance of a life from the standpoint of the individual who lives that life. James addressed the same question from a social perspective when he spoke to a group of alumnae of women’s colleges about “The Social Value of the College-Bred.” In that essay he introduced Americans to the term “intellectual” as a term of pride, to the idea of an educated class with its own class consciousness. “In our democracy,” he wrote, “where everything else is shifting, we alumni and alumnae of the colleges are the only permanent presence that corresponds to the aristocracy in the older countries. We have continuous traditions, as they have; our motto, too, is noblesse oblige; and, unlike them, we stand for ideal interests solely, for we have no corporate selfishness and wield no powers of corruption” (ECR, 110). We intellectuals are to guide the human ship through “gales of passion” and “currents of interest” toward truth and justice. We are to be the social critics, the molders of public opinion, and we are to do this in a disinterested manner. James understood a liberal education to be a study of the various ways in which human beings have sought perfection, “and when we see how diverse the types of excellence may be, how various the tests, how flexible the adaptations, we gain a richer sense of what the terms better and worse may signify. Our critical sensibilities grow both more acute and less fanatical” (ECR, 108). For James, tolerance for a great variety of ideals is itself a governing ideal. The inclusive ideal that we are to seek is not to be achieved by fashioning a society in which all think alike, but rather by finding through sensitivity and mutual respect a way of harmonizing a variety of ideals. One thinks of the grand symphonies of the late nineteenth century, say Bruckner’s, rather than the singing in unison of the National Anthem.

A college education, James believed, helps one to recognize goodness when one encounters it. Of course, one could not be an intelligent voter, nor one who influences public opinion in a beneficial direction, if one were not able to recognize goodness, whatever goodness may be relevant, in a candidate. But the point is not merely political. Educators worry about role models, or more often about
the lack of role models for certain groups (women who want to go into science or politics, inner-city youths who want to go to college, and so on). We do not speak very often of role models in connection with being a decent human being; James, I am convinced, would have done so. He realized also that most of us know only a few good human beings, that we come to meet varieties of goodness in literature and biographies that we might never encounter otherwise; hence, once again, the relevance of culture.

But, one might ask, do we need role models for being decent human beings? Here culture and refinement make contact with another necessary condition of the significant life, "pluck and will," that is, with character. When one confronts a significant moral choice, James wrote, what is at issue is not so much what one shall now choose to do as what kind of person one "shall now resolve to become" (PP, 1:277). That requires not only the ability to picture to oneself vividly what one is about to do and its immediate consequences for oneself and others, but also the ability to visualize the kind of person one will be, will have become, if one pursues this path rather than that, commits oneself to this ideal and not that one. Role models, positive and negative, real or fictional, help in this task. Nevertheless, "culture and refinement" are of secondary significance only. "The solid meaning of life is always the same eternal thing - the marriage, namely, of some unhabitual ideal, however special, with some fidelity, courage, and endurance; with some man's or woman's pain" (TT, 166).

While one will unhesitatingly agree with James when he says that there is nothing so despicable as a person who professes many lofty ideals but fails to do anything to bring them about, there is more to character than pluck and will. There is, in fact, an intimate connection between character and ideals. "Character" is a rather flexible term. Is one's shyness, for example, a part of one's character? Surely, it is relevant to what kind of life's work one will choose for oneself. To be sure, one may be required to make a heroic effort to speak up in defense of victims of injustice in spite of one's terror, but one is not required to become a trial lawyer or a politician if one finds addressing strangers painful. Different people are able to hear the cries of different wounded, different characters find different causes appealing, different talents and weaknesses lead their possessors to adopt different projects, different long-range commitments result
Some of life’s ideals

from different passions. Having a certain type of character, or becoming that type, may itself be one’s ideal. For James, being a person who has “pluck and will,” who leads the morally strenuous life, who succumbs neither to “a nerveless sentimentality” nor a “sensualism without bounds” is such an ideal (WB, 132).

For the sake of this ideal, James believed in and defended the pluralism of real possibilities; for the sake of this ideal, he advises, “Keep the faculty of effort alive in you by a little gratuitous exercise every day” (TT, 52). Here it is important to note not only the emphasis on effort but also the word “little.” James was as opposed to the inability of Americans to relax as he was to any tendency to pamper oneself. Both, he thought, were a danger to the individual and to the nation.

However, the ideal of (moral) heroism is a secondary ideal; whether a resolute determination in the face of major obstacles or temptations is really a good thing depends on the first-order ideals it serves. Nothing appears to be easier than being heroic when one’s country is engaged in fighting a war, and persuading oneself that one’s country is right. But this is not the heroism James had in mind, nor was he blind to his country’s faults. Let us, therefore, consider ideals as the third necessary condition of a significant life.

What is an ideal? James emphasizes two features; first, that ideals are “intellectually conceived,” and second, that “there must be novelty in an ideal—novelty at least for him whom the ideal grasps.” But novelty, hence ideals, “are relative to the lives that entertain them” (TT, 163; emphasis in the original).

An ideal is any idea, any project or commitment, that guides one’s life, or a major part thereof. James, we saw, thought one might have ideals without having the will to try to realize them; but for the sake of simplicity, I shall understand having an ideal to include being motivated by it at least to some extent. Not every passing desire is an ideal, nor are all our actions guided by our ideals. We sacrifice without even a murmur thousands of passing desires to our more lasting projects, and even the most interesting life is shot full of routine activities and habitual actions. Finally, even when actions require thought, such as driving a car or writing a check, the thought may not be related to any ideal. James calls an ideal an intellectual fact to make two points: that one is aware of having the ideal, and that having that ideal is part of one’s self-conception. James, for
instance, was aware of himself as, among other things, a mugwump. Ideals may be quite inarticulate commitments—to clear a cove—or well articulated long-range goals—James’s commitment to a world without war.

In “The Moral Equivalent of War” James proposes a national conscription for a war against nature. Ignoring our modern sensibilities that cringe at the idea of a war against nature, I want to note that the essay attempts to meet two problems: that we are pugnacious and love glory, and that certain virtues fostered in war are needed for national survival. The moral equivalent, the conscript army against nature, will satisfy the longing for a fight fairly fought and won, and it will instill such virtues as courage, persistence, and putting the collective interest above one’s own. It will also, James said, teach the gilded youth the realities of a life of hard physical labor. James himself was ever and anon struck by the fact that the physical labor of others provided the foundation on which a life of the mind, such as his, rested. He appreciated the unsung heroism of the laboring masses (see, e.g., TT, 154–5), but that raises the question of what benefits working class youths were to derive from this sort of national service. Perhaps, by its mingling of classes, it was to make for less blindness and more tolerance all around; perhaps rich and poor alike would come to understand, as he wrote elsewhere, that “no outward changes of condition in life can keep the nightingale of its eternal meaning from singing in all sorts of different men’s hearts. . . . If the poor and the rich could look at each other in this way, sub species æternitatis, how gentle would grow their disputes? what tolerance and good humor, what willingness to live and let live, would come into the world!” (TT, 167).

But here—at the end of “What Makes a Life Significant”—James has been carried away by his own eloquence, carried away, I believe, because he genuinely believes in tolerance. There is, however, a difference between letting others live their lives as long as they don’t interfere with one’s own, or coming to mutually agreed upon compromises when conflicts loom, and tolerating oppression. James saw this clearly in the case of the U.S. occupation of the Philippines. What was wrong was precisely that the United States did not let the Filipinos live as they wished, and James objected repeatedly and vociferously.

The second feature of an ideal, according to James, is that it con-
Some of life’s ideals

tains novelty. This raises a host of problems, none of which are adequately addressed by James. We must ask why ideals must contain novelty, if indeed they do. We must ask how an ideal contains novelty. We shall discover that in order to answer these questions we need to consider more carefully what is meant by a significant life. In the end I shall conclude that it is not clear how an ideal contains novelty, that some ideals, nevertheless, seem rather obviously devoid of novelty, and that lives animated by the latter ideals might nonetheless be significant.

Why must an ideal contain novelty? One’s first thought might be this. While one person’s boring routine may be another’s exciting variety, whenever one feels that one’s life consists of nothing but ever the same old thing, what pulls one out of this malaise is finding some new interest, project, or commitment. That leads to the further thought that a significant life cannot be a life consisting of nothing but routines. Whether one imagines spending eight hours a day at an assembly line, performing the same motion over and over again, or one imagines being confined to one’s bed by a lengthy illness, what strikes one has horrifying is the sheer boredom of such a life. Surely, one wants to say, a significant life cannot be so boring, it must contain some novelty. But real novelty, not the vicarious novelty that might come through reading books, would seem to require that one’s life be animated by some ideal that brings the novelty with it. But we have now shifted from the thought that one needs a new idea (new ideal) to redeem a boring life to the quite different idea that each ideal must contain novelty.

What does that mean? It cannot mean that a life animated by an ideal cannot be a life of extraordinary regularity. The life of a religious contemplative, though following a set daily, weekly, and annual pattern and devoid of external novelty, is a life suffused by an inner significance as few more active lives are. Moreover, the inner life of prayer, study, and reflection, a life of intense mental activity, may be full of its own kind of novelty. But the ideal itself is not novel, and those who embrace it may well resist novelty not only in their rituals but in the circumstances of their lives and in the society of which they are a part. That would worry James because it would be an obstacle to humanity’s progress toward more and more inclusive ideals. One need only think of resistance to peace between Israel and the Palestinians by certain types of orthodox Jews and
their Islamic counterparts. But, clearly, one may be deeply religious and yet actively promote peace and other forms of social progress; conversely, resistance to social change is not confined to those with strong religious commitments. In any case, James recognized that one cannot tell from the outward form of a life whether or not it is animated by an idea; even the hard, impoverished, and hopeless lives of day laborers may, for all we know, be animated by ideals, for example, by the ideal of providing for one's family. But are these novel ideals, or do they contain novelty in some other sense?

An ideal may contain novelty in at least these two ways. First, an ideal may be of such a kind that a person living in pursuit of it will inevitably encounter novelty, although the ideal itself is not novel. I am thinking of the ideals that animate explorers and experimentalists, people who want to add to their own and to humanity's knowledge by deliberately seeking new experiences, whether by going to new places or by producing new conditions in a laboratory. More generally, the search for knowledge is an ideal that has novelty built into its very core. Perhaps this is why Peirce thought that it was the only ideal one could pursue no matter what; from which he concluded that "the rule of ethics will be to adhere to the only possible absolute aim, and to hope that it will prove attainable" (Peirce 1931–60, 5.136).

Of course, James would have objected, rightly, that one's adherence to the growth of knowledge can be as conservative, as much an obstacle to social progress, as clinging to a long-established social order or inherited values. Moreover, I believe that James would have objected to the very idea of an absolute aim, for that implies a kind of infallibility. Thus I disagree with Edward H. Madden, who has argued that James has one fundamental moral commitment—maximizing need satisfaction—and that this commitment is "as absolute as the commitment of any other moral philosopher" (WB, xxxiii). I believe that any ascription to James of so specific an absolute commitment is ultimately misleading, for it ignores James's antireductionism and his pluralism. In contrast, his own formula, "There is but one unconditional commandment, which is that we should seek incessantly, with fear and trembling, so to vote and to act as to bring about the very largest total universe of good which we can see" (WB, 158), is compatible with his antireductionism—the good is left unspecified—and with his pluralism, for we do not all see now the same largest total
universe of good. James seeks the more inclusive ideals \(\textit{ideals}\) (note the plural!), but any formulation that speaks of maximizing satisfactions (or minimizing pain) ignores the fact that for James there is no common measure by which one might compare ideals.

One’s ideal may contain novelty in a second sense; one may envisage changing the world, changing the way the world would go without one’s intervention. Often this is what James had in mind. The squatters in the mountains of North Carolina are changing the face of the particular cove they have chosen to clear. The anarchist Swift writes about the misery of the unemployed in an effort to bring about a more just world. James reads excerpts from Swift’s writings to his audience of complacent gentlefolk to open their eyes to a kind of evil that need not persist and to the shallowness of a Leibnizian optimism \(\{P, 21-2\}\).

It is not always easy to tell, however, whether another person’s ideal promotes or resists change. In 1894 and again in 1898, James opposed bills that would have criminalized the practice of medicine by anyone who did not have a degree from a reputable medical school or had not passed an examination. In a letter to the Transcript James explained his opposition as based on three grounds: it would interfere with the liberty of citizens to choose their healers; it would not guarantee more effective treatment; it would tend “to obstruct the progress of therapeutic knowledge” \(\{ECR, 145\}\).\(^4\) Four years later, testifying before the Massachusetts State Legislature, he argued in words that must by now sound familiar, “Our State needs the assistance of every type of mind, academic and non-academic, of which she possesses specimens. There are none too many of them, for to no one of them can the whole of truth be revealed. Each is necessarily partly perceptive and partly blind. Even the very best type is partly blind. There are methods which it cannot bring itself to use” \(\{ECR, 60\}\). Though from the point of view of orthodox practitioners James resisted change, for which he was roundly condemned, his own rationale was exactly the opposite; he saw himself as defending progress.

Matters are even less clear when we turn to the novelty in the cove-cultivator’s ideal. The cove-cultivator wants to change the face of the earth; the advocate of national parks wants to keep it unchanged. Their ideals may collide concerning a particular piece of real estate. The cultivator wants to change the face of the land; the
conservator wants to change the course of human endeavor, divert it from dominating nature toward leaving nature alone. Whose ideal contains novelty?

What I have tried to suggest with these examples is simply that it is quite unclear what "containing novelty" means, though one is also tempted to say that there are ideals that do not contain novelty in any obvious sense. Finally, it will not do to say that while there may be ideals that do not contain novelty, the lives that those ideals animate are not significant. To say so would, I think, simply betray the blindness that James was eager to combat.

This, however, reveals an ambiguity in the phrase "making a life significant." When James asks whether the life of a day laborer, a worker in the subways, or the Austrian peasant women whom he sees on market days might be significant, he gives two types of answer. He says both that they deserve monuments because our whole civilized life rests on their backs, depends on their toil, and that we do not build them monuments because they endure drudgery, hardship, and even danger not for any lofty ideal but for the bare necessities and most modest of luxuries (some tobacco, beer, or coffee). He seems to suggest that the lives of those whose labor supports our "culture and refinement" are significant from our point of view, that is, to us, but not from theirs, that is, to them. But who, after all, denies that their lives are significant? Not they, for all that we can know, but we, because we despise the ideals that animate these toilers.

The point of "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" is precisely that we are blind to what makes other lives significant to those who live them. While we might think that cultivating a cove in North Carolina has significance also on a larger scale – that it might be comparable to raising chickens and cows, collecting eggs and churning butter so that on market day one can come to the city to supply it with food – that is not the point James wants to make. For his next example is taken from Stevenson's description of boys with bull's-eye lanterns. Having lit the lantern hidden under one's coat was a source of the sort of excitement of which James writes that wherever it is, "there life becomes genuinely significant" (TT, 134). From an external, adult point of view, one is tempted to object that the boys enjoy this particular pleasure only in the fall, that even in that season it takes up a small part of their day, that surely what is
of long-range significance to their lives is what they learn in the schoolroom. But that would be to miss the point; the boys go to school, do their chores, eat their meals, and so forth, all for the sake of that time with the lantern. That is their animating ideal. Their state of mind is best understood by comparing it, as James does, to that of someone who has fallen in love. And just as the lover discovers ever new features in the beloved, so one discovers ever new features in an ideal to which one commits oneself, however "familiar" or "old" that ideal may be.

The boys' ideals are fleeting and divorced from the rest of their daily activities, but that is not essential. Intellectuals can most easily imagine ideals similar to their own, ideals that fill large parts of each day and shape years of one's life. Both kinds of ideals may be utterly opaque to outsiders, who may indeed, as James said in the preface to *Talks*, not even know where to look for the significance in these alien lives. In fact, one might be blind to the ideals that make another's life significant to that other in two distinct ways. One may not know what the ideal is — as a stranger would not know that the boy is carrying a lit lantern under his tightly buttoned coat — and substitute for that unknown ideal some contemptible ideal of one's own devising, or one may know what the ideal is but consider it contemptible. James falls victim to one or the other form of this blindness when he explains why we do not build monuments to laborers.

Yet James recovers, he remembers that ideals (and their novelty!) are relative to the lives they animate. Thus keeping out of the gutter is not an ideal for us (we are not conscious of it as an aim, nor would the attempt or the experience be novel), but "for many of our brethren it is the most legitimately engrossing of all ideals" (163). Still, one is tempted to wonder how that can be an ideal. James seems to think once again of the day laborers whom he had mentioned earlier in the essay. Then he had suggested that some of them might be animated by ideals, both the simple one of supporting a wife and child (to keep them out of the gutter?) and more complex ones — seeing it as a religious duty, or engaging in it temporarily to enlarge one's sympathetic understanding of different lives — but he also thought the more usual laborer's life was barren and ignoble because it was not animated by any "ideal inner springs" (*TT*, 162). I believe that James allows us to witness his own continual struggle against
being blind to the possible values of nonintellectual lives. He shares our inability to know where to look for "the private and uncommunicable perceptions," that is, moral perceptions, perceptions of duties and ideals, that animate those leading lives very different from our own (TT, 4).

Finally, let us consider what makes a life significant to an onlooker, or to humanity, or at any rate to some other people. When James wants to build monuments to workers in the subway, he has that sense of significance in mind. Here I want to say, just in passing, that lives may be significant in this sense even though those who live these lives may be wracked by self-doubt, and even though the significance of their lives is not appreciated by their contemporaries. Every starving artist illustrates the second point; and that lack of recognition is one, though not the only, source of self-doubt.

When James insisted that an ideal must contain novelty, he may have taken this external point of view. A life has significance for humanity if it is for the most part (not exclusively; moral holidays are not only permitted, they are important) animated by an ideal that will change the world. James was a child of his time, imbued with a belief in progress that is perhaps impossible for us. New inventions, new conceptions in the arts and sciences seemed, on the whole, to make human lives better. In particular, James treasured novelty in social arrangements that would allow more diverse ideals, hence more individuals, to flourish. Because intolerance of one kind or another, a blindness to the value of lives different from our own, continues to be a major obstacle to human flourishing. James's unflagging devotion to the ideals of plurality and tolerance is as relevant and as inspiring as it was a century ago. James's epistemological pluralism, his understanding that there is no point of view from which the whole truth can be grasped, supports the demand for a moral pluralism, for there is also no point of view from which the whole moral truth can be grasped, no ideal that includes all others. Indeed moral progress consists largely in the extinction of ideals of domination and exclusion by ideals of equality and inclusion.

James's belief in progress was dealt a serious blow by the American occupation of the Philippines, though not a fatal one. James argued forcefully and frequently against American imperialism, as in this letter to the Boston Evening Transcript.
Some of life's ideals

Here was a people toward whom we felt no ill will. . . . Here was a leader who . . . appears as an exceptionally fine specimen of the patriot and national hero. . . . Here were the precious beginnings of an indigenous national life. . . . Yet we are now openly engaged in crushing out the sacredest thing in this great human world – the attempt of a people long enslaved to attain to the possession of itself, to organize its laws and government, to be free to follow its internal destinies according to its own ideals. . . . We are destroying the lives of these islanders by the thousand. . . . We are destroying down to the roots every germ of a healthy national life in these unfortunate people and we are surely helping to destroy for one generation at least their faith in God and man.

James knew that the justification offered for the imperialist policy was the old cant of the "white man's burden," and continued, "Could there be a more damning indictment of that whole bloated idol termed 'modern civilization' than this amounts to? Civilization is then the big, hollow, resounding, corrupting, sophisticating, confusing torrent of mere brutal momentum and irrationality that brings forth fruits like this!" (ECR, 154-8).

An ideal that makes the life it animates significant from the social point of view must "contain novelty" in the quite straightforward sense of envisaging a social order that differs from the existing one in being more inclusive, in leaving room for more individuals to have more freedom to pursue their own destinies as they see fit, provided they accord that same freedom to everyone else. But not all ideals are social, and in the case of personal ideals it is neither descriptively nor normatively correct that they must contain novelty. The enormously important social ideal of tolerance that has inspired all the writings of James I have considered here entails, I believe, tolerance for personal ideals even if they lack novelty.

I have spoken of tolerance because that is the term James used. But what is at stake here is more than tolerance, it is a form of respect. Once one is aware of the ideal that makes another's life significant, one does not merely tolerate it, one respects it, and that is why one seeks to include that ideal in one's own.

NOTES

1 Radical empiricism, as developed in the essays in ERE, adds to the radical demand that metaphysical theses be treated as hypotheses the assen-
tion that the objects of experience stand in relations that are themselves experienced. Here the latter, technical doctrine and with it the notion of pure experience will be ignored except to mention in passing that radical empiricism is not only a more radical empiricism but also a more radical pluralism than that advocated/defended in the essays in *The Will to Believe* and in the two essays from *Talks*. For pure experience is not a general stuff of experience, rather "there are as many stuffs as there are 'natures' in the things experienced" (*ERE*, 14). In other words, his ontology is more appropriately seen as a neutral pluralism rather than a neutral monism.

2 In 1870 James recovered from a mental crisis by convincing himself that free will need not be an illusion and deciding, according to his diary, to "assume for the present — until next year — that it is no illusion. My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will" (quoted in Lewis 1991, 204).

3 The arguments for this position are spelled out in "The Dilemma of Determinism" (*WB*, 114–40). Here I shall simply take note of it.

4 I have discussed James's ethical theory at length in Putnam 1990.

5 "They agree with us in having the same Heavenly Father, in not being consulted about their birth, in not being themselves to thank or blame for their natural gifts, in having the same desires and pains and pleasures, in short in a host of fundamental relations" (*PP*, 2:1266).

6 "A gentlemen told me that he had a conclusive argument for opening the Harvard Medical School to women. It was this: Are not women human? — which major premise of course had to be granted. Then are they not entitled to all the rights of humanity? My friend said that he had never met anyone who could successfully meet this reasoning" (*PP*, 2:1266n). Perhaps the most impressive example of James's ability to weave his sociopolitical concerns into even quite abstract arguments is his reading from the writings of an anarchist journalist during the first lecture on pragmatism (see *P*, chapter 1). Those readings described in horrifying detail the sufferings of the unemployed.

7 In a similar vein, James wrote, "Education, enlarging as it does our horizon and perspective, is a means of multiplying our ideals, of bringing new ones into view" (*TT*, 163).

8 One of the causes James had embraced was that of the French Jew Alfred Dreyfus, who had been unjustly convicted of treason. Those who fought for and finally won Dreyfus's pardon and exoneration were known as *les intellectuels*.

9 Agnes Heller, in the preface to her *A Philosophy of Morals*, argues that all "original" moral philosophers have had a particular model of the good person in mind. Her own model is that of her father (*Heller* 1990).
Some of life’s ideals

10 [A political independent, first, someone who had left the Republican Party in spite of its abolitionist credentials when it became thoroughly corrupt, and later an antiimperialist.] Describing his oration at the unveiling of the monument of Robert Gould Shaw, colonel of the black 54th Massachusetts regiment, James wrote to his brother Henry, “I brought in some mugwumpery at the end, but it was very difficult to manage it” (Corresp., 3:9).

11 He wrote to his brother Henry, “[W]hen one sees the great West one also feels how insignificant in the great mass of manually working humanity the handful of people are who live for the refinements” (Corresp., 3:39).

12 James was, however, in favor of a bill that would prevent those who had not passed a state examination from referring to themselves as physicians or using “doctor” before or “M.D.” after their names, because people have a right to know “who is regular and who is irregular” (ECR, 149).

13 Of course, this last comment leads us back to what James calls the “casuistic question,” the search for ever more inclusive ideals. It raises the problem of conflicting ideals, and, finally, the question of what one is to do about those who embrace intolerance as an ideal. This is not the place to pursue these vitally important questions.