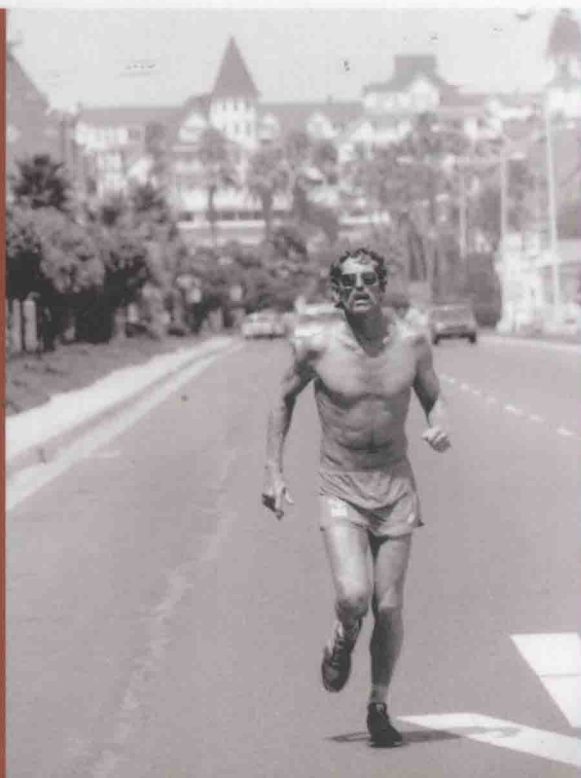


# Pragmatism and the Philosophy of Sport



*Edited by* Richard Lally,  
Douglas Anderson, and John Kaag

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# Introduction: Pragmatism and the Seasoned Practitioner

Richard Lally, Lock Haven University

## I. PRAGMATISM: GETTING TO KNOW THE COURSE

As many historians and commentators have pointed out, pragmatism began in the interactions among the participants of the “Metaphysical Club,” an informal philosophy group, in Cambridge, MA in the 1870s. Among these participants were Charles Sanders Peirce and William James, who have come to be identified as the founders of the pragmatic movement. Peirce first identified the idea of pragmatic meaning in his 1876 essay “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” and James first used the word “pragmatism” in technical fashion in a talk he gave to Berkeley’s Philosophical Union in 1898. As a method of inquiry and a general outlook on the practice of philosophy, pragmatism was then inherited by a number of thinkers including John Dewey and F.C.S. Schiller. Dewey brought pragmatism forward into the twentieth century and, most recently, there has been a linguistic version of pragmatism introduced by Richard Rorty that goes by the popular name of “neo-pragmatism.” Meanwhile, a number of thinkers who were politically marginalized with the ascent of Anglo-American philosophy in American universities carried on the classical pragmatic tradition. Among these were most notably John E. Smith of Yale University and John J. McDermott of Texas A & M University. Our present work relating pragmatism and the philosophy of sport draws heavily on the classical pragmatic tradition and, to a lesser extent, on some themes from the neo-pragmatic movement. I do not believe that pragmatism provides any one sort of answer to questions regarding sport and movement, but I do believe it is a useful idea for conducting inquiries into the meanings, practices, cultural uses, and truths of sport and movement. I therefore begin with an overview of the importance of pragmatism for our immediate purposes.

The experiences an individual undergoes during training and competition shape her worldview in a fashion that is unique. Rigorous aspects of endurance sport, for example, lend a raw-boned feel to daily life that is outside normal experience. This unusual quality, and the power it has to mold an individual, deserves a more detailed examination than it has

received up to this point. This connection between athletic practice and experience and philosophical outlook is one of the themes at the core of this work. To get at this connection, I will employ pragmatism and James's radical empiricism as guides to our method. As Christopher Hookway maintains,

Pragmatism is a form of empiricism that employs a much richer understanding of experience than is familiar from the work of Hume and from twentieth-century logical empiricists. We can see this clearly in William James's radical empiricism.<sup>1</sup>

This approach involves a thick and phenomenological description of lived experience of the sort provided by writers such as Henry Bugbee and George Sheehan. It also requires a search for meaning in the midst of human practices, a pragmatic feature of inquiry central to both James and Dewey.

Early in the twentieth century, James noted the inadequacy of philosophical concepts to grasp the full meaning of human experience.<sup>2</sup> A "conceptual map," James asserted, "remains superficial through the abstractness, and false through the discreteness of its elements; and the whole operation, so far from making things appear more rational, becomes the source of gratuitous unintelligibilities. Conceptual knowledge is forever inadequate to the fullness of the reality to be known."<sup>3</sup> To address this concern, he developed his pragmatically oriented radical empiricism, which sought to elicit concepts from the thickness of experience in general by paying direct attention to one's own experience and to the lived experience of others. What some critics of his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* took to be unprofessional scholarship came to serve as an important contribution to the American version of phenomenological inquiry. James's radical empiricism subsequently informed a number of American philosophical projects from W.E. Hocking's *The Meaning of God in Human Experience* to Henry Bugbee's *The Inward Morning*. And, of course, it also brings philosophical importance to earlier work in American thought including Jonathan Edward's "Personal Narrative," Thoreau's *Walden*, and Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

In describing radical empiricism James speaks of how a person has authority when making claims of truth—in our case, claims about sport and its power to cultivate the individual. For James the experiencer is the original knower: The experiencer of such a situation possesses all that the idea contains. He feels the tendency, the obstacle, the will, the strain, the triumph, or the passive giving up, just as he feels the time, the space, the swiftness or intensity, the movement, the weight and color, the pain and pleasure, the complexity, or whatever remaining characters the situation may involve.<sup>4</sup> His brand of pragmatism relied on two types of knowing that are integral elements of radical empiricism—the first being knowledge of acquaintance, and the second, knowledge about. The athlete, we

believe, has a Jamesian knowledge of acquaintance that generates living personal truths, allowing the individual to make claims about the world and the self that have worth. These claims are based on lived experience and form an intimate catalogue of knowledge on which the individual relies for guidance. And while it is possible for the individual to be deceived, or to misinterpret experience, the pragmatists saw this process as the fundamental means by which the individual comes to know the universe and her place in it. What must be avoided in pragmatic inquiries such as this one are individual truth claims that dogmatically resist and stand in opposition to all other testimony. James's second type of knowing guards against such trouble.

Knowledge about, according to James, advocates the validity of a catalogue of knowledge that can be discussed in a shared context larger than one individual's life. Dewey develops this, pushing James's radical empiricism in the direction of what he calls *shared experience*. This allows individual claims that are corrigible to be ratified or rejected through testing. For example, if a runner claims that a personal best can be attained in the marathon by limiting the length of the longest training run to less than fifteen miles, the general community of runners can test that claim. The pragmatic method is public and experimental. As Dewey argues, "An education based upon the pragmatic conception would inevitably turn out persons who were alive to the necessity of continually testing their ideas and beliefs by putting them into practical application, and of revising their beliefs on the basis of the results of such application."<sup>5</sup>

This approach, which combines both knowledge of acquaintance and knowledge about, is appealing because James manages to preserve the worth of both personal experience and the developing beliefs of a tradition. And while knowledge of acquaintance is irrefutable when based only on one individual's testimony, the informed community can reject the claim on the basis of knowledge about. This aspect of pragmatism is of critical importance because it allows individual experience to count, while maintaining the normative authority of the existing tradition.

An example will help to clarify this aspect of Jamesian pragmatism as it relates to this project. I run the trails of State College, Pennsylvania and know some truths of those trails. A corresponding map is only of worth to us if it jibes with the catalogue of perceptual truth that we have created. As a result, we become sources informed well enough to validate an externally generated picture of what has been experienced by others. The beauty of this conception of knowledge is that we need not remain Robinson Crusoe-like solipsists, cut off from all others. There is room at our table for Friday, if he is a seasoned practitioner like myself. I can listen to his testimony and together we can generate a shared version of the truth. In *Democracy in Education*, Dewey makes this point in a more general way. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in



common and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge—a common understanding—like-mindedness, as the sociologists say.<sup>6</sup> We can develop these communally held beliefs through a sharing of individual percepts, which can then be used in conceptual form to validate or reject the assertions of other practitioners. Over time a tradition develops that enriches the practice and allows individual athletes to share their truths with others who have similar experiences. James describes how this process occurs in the following way: “New truth is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions. It marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity.”<sup>7</sup>

However, within this Jamesian conception, it is important to note that as the tradition develops, primary importance is still given to individual experience, regardless of the communal institutions that may be spawned subsequently. In conducting my present investigations, I have given primary importance to the experiences of the individual while being mindful of the final validating authority of the community. This focus on individual testimony within the radically empirical method gives pragmatic examinations a style that is noticeably different from more traditionally analytic philosophy. With this in mind, the next section describes the radically empirical approach to experience and its relevance to this project.

## II. THE STYLE OF A RADICALLY EMPIRICAL STUDY

Radical empiricism is well suited for an examination such as this one because it encourages numerous approaches to the study of experience, including narration and biography. James believed that these personal accounts captured the thickness of experience more effectively than generalized concepts. In compiling *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James utilized biography and firsthand testimony to communicate a greater sense of the whole of experience than would have been possible through the exclusive use of abstract concepts. In doing so, he realized that this approach is open to criticism by those within philosophy more comfortable with traditional logical analysis. In lecture one of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* he addresses this likelihood:

our theory should allow that a book may well be a revelation in spite of errors and passions and deliberate human composition, if only it be a true record of inner experiences of great-souled persons wrestling with the crises of their fate, then the verdict would be more favorable. You see that the existential facts by themselves are insufficient for determining the value; and the best adepts of the higher criticism accordingly never confound the existential with the spiritual problem.<sup>8</sup>

A similar use of descriptive narration in this project should allow us, at times, to get closer to the marrow of the lived experience than would be possible through the removed stance of philosophic analysis. With that in mind, I will attempt to heed what James once told his audience:

The man who knows governments most completely is he who troubles himself least about a definition which shall give their essence. Enjoying an intimate acquaintance with all their particularities in turn, he would naturally regard an abstract conception in which these were unified as a thing more misleading than enlightening. And why may not religion be a conception equally complex?<sup>9</sup>

I take a similar approach in this investigation of pragmatism and sport. Many of the most insightful experts in any given field are those who dwell within the lived practice, be it politics or athletics. Thus, I will look at the particular experiences of individuals who have trained for and competed in sport, as I believe these people are less likely to accept an abstract description of their practices that is without some grounding in lived experience.

### III. PRAGMATIC USES

While it is important to remember the passion that led to the scholarship, it is also necessary to be mindful of the fact that conclusions reached through a pragmatic investigation are tentative. In remaining true to pragmatism and radical empiricism, the conclusions I draw regarding pragmatism and endurance sport must be thought of as temporarily useful. In the future, other investigators will modify the claims made here, expanding and improving on the work of this project. As pragmatic investigators, we must welcome this inevitability. Rather than attempting to construct a philosophic argument that is impervious to outside attack, we must accept the risks of dialectic and the vulnerability that comes with tentative conclusions. Therefore, I will regard certainty within the philosophic process, more as an animating force behind human action than as the outcome of a cleverly constructed argument. Bugbee took a similar approach in writing *The Inward Morning*, and spoke directly to this point when he wrote: "Perhaps the last thing we should demand of an interpretation of certainty is that it show how we are entitled to some credo, once-for-all incontrovertibly."<sup>10</sup> His assertion squares with pragmatism's belief that inquiring is always ongoing, never final.

I believe the adoption of a Bugbee-like certainty, or a tentative certainty, is necessary when reading the chapters that follow. We need an attitude closer to faith than close-mindedness, a basis for action "rather than arrival at a terminus of endeavor."<sup>11</sup> If we can find the confidence to live with a partial description, that claims only to touch truth, rather than capture it, we may "open ourselves to the meaning of life in the wilder-

ness and be patient of being overtaken in our wandering by that which can make us at home in this condition.”<sup>12</sup>

The radically empirical method employed here is not unique within contemporary philosophic discourses. Other recent trends in philosophy have made it acceptable, even professionally wise, to consider art, literature, music, and sport as viable arenas for philosophic insight.<sup>13</sup> Richard Rorty, as a disciple of James, most notably turns to literature and personal experience as avenues of philosophical inquiry. Stanley Cavell, a non-pragmatist, is also exemplary, having turned some of his philosophical energies to the task of disclosing cultural meaning in Hollywood film. Moreover, Cavell’s work stands in a philosophical tradition in which it is acceptable to present one’s own voice as a valid form of scholarship. Both Rorty and Cavell are familiar with Bugbee’s work and might agree with his assertion that, “In a sense to write your own words, to write your own inner voice, is philosophy. But the discipline most opposed to writing, and to life, is analytic philosophy.”<sup>14</sup> As Ed Mooney points out, and James knew, radical empiricism is not new in the history of philosophy: “since Augustine and Plato, philosophy has been a testament and confession, not just an impersonal report.”<sup>15</sup>

As a radically empirical investigation, this project is an attempt to disclose the features of sport that provide meaning for our personal and cultural lives. It assumes that sport is a dynamic process, not a static institution. It aims at the truth that the poetic aspects of existence offer us, rather than at the fully abstracted world constructed by the pure intellect. Therefore, the chapters that follow “will not be set up like the solution of a puzzle, worked out with all the pieces lying there before the eye. It will be more like the clarification of what we know in our bones.”<sup>16</sup>

#### IV. PRAGMATIC THEMES

Just as James’s radical empiricism informs my method of inquiry, pragmatism informs the content of our descriptions and analyses. Pragmatism is a philosophic theory that differs from traditional philosophy in its rejection of all assertions thought to be absolute or generated independently of human experience. According to James, true ideas “are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we can not.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, once an idea is experienced as true it still must demonstrate its worth as an instrument of action if it is to be valued. James describes the process by which a truth claim evolves from the mere untried hypothesis to a belief that is workable, but provisionally so. In other words, true claims demonstrate their validity by producing their intended effects. As a result, within pragmatism all human undertakings are viewed as attempts to orchestrate the outcomes of our interplay with the universe. The pragmatists believed this was achieved

through an ongoing process of testing that was carried out in the world of action.

This intimate connection between thought, action, and outcome runs against some other traditional depictions of intellectual investigations of the world—namely, idealism, rationalism, or any outlook that takes inquiry to be its own end. The possession of truth, so far from being here an end in itself, is only a preliminary means towards other vital satisfactions. If I am lost in the woods and starved, and find what looks like a cow path, it is of the utmost importance that I should think of a human habitation at the end of it, for if I do so and follow it, I save myself. The true thought is useful here because the house which is its object is useful. The practical value of true ideas is thus primarily derived from the practical importance of their objects to us.<sup>18</sup> Modern philosophy employed a model whose center is the static thinker in search of pure knowledge, untainted by the corrupting forces of the external and changing world. In contrast, the pragmatists saw the inquirer as fully engaged in her environment. The pragmatism developed by Peirce, James, and Dewey required an acceptance of the material world as the sole available and verifiable basis for thought. But it also led toward the assertion of the inseparability of thought and action, raising experience in the physical world and the specific experiences of each human being to a new and remarkable eminence.

This depiction of the individual as an agent of action immersed within the universe also generates an undercurrent of optimism regarding the individual's potential for self-determination. The source for this optimism is not difficult to locate. Peirce, James, and Dewey constructed a philosophic outlook with an innate openness that welcomed divergent contributions. It is, as James routinely pointed out, an inherently pluralistic philosophy. It presents so many points of difference, both from the common sense and from the idealism that have made our philosophic language, that it is almost as difficult to state it as it is to think it out clearly, and if it is ever to grow into a respectable system, it will have to be built up by the contributions of many cooperating minds.<sup>19</sup>

As a result of the pluralistic nature of pragmatism, a playing field that allows thinkers who would otherwise be unwelcome to contribute has opened. To quote James once again on this aspect of pragmatism:

it lies in the midst of our theories, like a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable chambers open out of it. In one you may find a man writing an atheistic volume; in the next some one on his knees praying for faith and strength; in the third a chemist investigating a body's properties. In a fourth a system of idealistic metaphysics is being excogitated; in a fifth the impossibility of metaphysics is being shown. But they all own the corridor, and all must pass through it if they want a practicable way of getting into or out of their respective rooms.<sup>20</sup>

While many consider pragmatism to be the American contribution to philosophy, it is difficult to describe with exactness what the movement itself stood for or how it is understood today. This ambiguity can probably be accredited to the variety of meanings its founders assigned to what are widely accepted to be the central tenets of pragmatism. Peirce, James, and Dewey each had somewhat different understandings of what the thrust of the new movement was to be. In a letter to F. C. S. Schiller, Peirce attempted to address the definitional confusion in the following way: "I would let it grow and then say it is what a certain group of thinkers who seem to understand one another think, and thus make it the name of a natural class in the Natural History fashion."<sup>21</sup> Within this natural class of pragmatism, several key themes can be identified that have particular relevance to sport. Three that will have significance for me are addressed in the next section. They are: faith in the experimental method, the acceptance of risk, and the power of the human will.

#### V. FAITH IN THE EXPERIMENTAL METHOD

One of the hallmarks of both the pragmatic school of philosophy and the radically empirical understanding of experience is a reliance on the experimental method for the production of workable truth. Within this philosophic system, beliefs and concepts are generated through our interactions with the universe. In keeping with the model of radical empiricism, these beliefs are then returned at a later time to the flow of experience where they will be tested by a new investigation. In his essay "The Bearings of Pragmatism Upon Education," Dewey describes this key characteristic of pragmatism:

The *experimental* habit of mind, that which regards ideas and principles as tentative methods of solving problems and organizing data, is very recent. An education based upon the pragmatic conception would inevitably turn out persons who were alive to the necessity of continually testing their ideas and beliefs by putting them into practical application, and of revising their beliefs on the basis of the results of such application.<sup>22</sup>

When assessing the relationship between the experimental method, the radically empirical approach, and pragmatism, it is worth noting that James called his empiricism *radical* because he believed it corrected the mistakes made by traditional empiricism, which attempted to better understand reality by dividing experiences into a series of categories. This arbitrary division of experience, initially undertaken in an attempt to better comprehend human experience as a whole, eventually degenerated into skepticism regarding the validity of philosophic inquiry. In describing how radical empiricism corrected the mistake that led James's

predecessors down the dead end road toward metaphysical skepticism, Ellen Kappy Suckiel points out that

in thinking of experience in terms of discrete, atomistic units, the classical empiricists missed the most important fact about it, namely, that experience is the immediate flux of life. It is a continuous stream each part having no distinct boundaries, each leading to and compenetrating the next. . . . It is this postulation of the reality of relations which distinguishes James's empiricism as *radical*, and which, he maintains, enables him to succeed where other philosophies have failed.<sup>23</sup>

Through radical empiricism, James claims that truth is understandable when we view life as a flowing process rather than as a set of distinct events or units. As a result, the conjunctive moments of experience, which stand between more memorable events, are "as real as the terms united by them."<sup>24</sup> This appreciation for the totality of experience provides "the foundation for his claim that truth is understandable solely by reference to intra-experiential and ultimately pragmatic tests."<sup>25</sup>

It is important to note that radical empiricism does not reject the use of conceptual categories, only the assertion that they are fixed and complete. To reiterate, James believed that concepts were useful in distinguishing various elements within the flow of unified experience but were too narrow to capture the full thickness of experience. James does not deny that there are objective realities within experience that concepts help us to better understand and explain. However, he asserts that, "what it *means* for beliefs to be objective, and what it means for beliefs to correspond to reality, are concepts that are themselves explicable solely by reference to the flux of experience."<sup>26</sup>

In establishing the experimental method's importance within the pragmatic tradition, it is important to note that beginning with Peirce, and then continuing through James and Dewey, the testing of hypotheses through daily living served as the basis for the production of truth claims. It was Peirce who claimed, "a conception, that is, the rational purport of a word or other expression, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing on the conduct of life."<sup>27</sup> By this he meant that the meaning and worth of an idea, expression, or object is manifested through the results that it produces in our lives. As a result, the truth of any idea is never known until it is tested under live fire to determine its consequences. A new theory remains only our best guess until it proves its worth through practice. Therefore, any hypothesis must be tested to determine its validity, and even then, if it proves efficacious, it can be said to represent only our best stab at the truth to that point.

Peirce's attempt to define "hard" helps demonstrate what the pragmatists had in mind. How is it, he asked, that humans know that an object is hard? After all, hardness or softness seem to be abstract descriptions grounded in nothing more than an individual's perception. While we all

understand what the term “hard” means, how is it that we know an object has such a quality in the first place? According to Peirce, we will not find the answer at the end of a lengthy epistemological theorem or stipulation. We would be better served by relying on the observable outcome when the object is used. If the object scratches another object, it is said to be harder. If the object is scratched, we can feel safe in labeling it “softer.” To quote Peirce directly, “there is absolutely no difference between a hard thing and a soft thing so long as they are not brought to the test.”<sup>28</sup> It is therefore the testing that establishes the meaning and worth of the conception.

This crucial step is of central importance in the experimental method, and therefore, in pragmatism. A hypothesis is generated based on an investigator’s current understanding of the situation, and then that hypothesis is tested to assess its accuracy. The ratification or rejection of the conception cannot take place without the testing. And the testing itself requires action—an exchange between investigator and environment—which, in turn, leads to an outcome that supports or fails to support the original hypothesis. Even when a hypothesis is ratified as noted, the possibility for future revision, or even outright rejection, exists.

John E. Smith, in commenting on the pragmatic reliance on the experimental method, refers to this phenomenon as the “dynamizing of predicates.”<sup>29</sup> The hardness or softness of an object becomes more than a lifeless description of an inanimate object. These qualities can only be assigned when the object is set in motion within the flow of common experience. Once we are willing to expose our hypotheses to the harsh light of testing, we may earn a workable level of certainty in the outcome that is produced. To cite Dewey once again:

A merely mental coherence without experimental verification does not enable us to get beyond the realm of hypothesis. If a notion or a theory makes pretense of corresponding to reality or to the facts, this pretense cannot be put to the test and confirmed or refuted except by causing it to pass over into the realm of action and by testing the results which it yields in the form of concrete observable facts to which this notion or theory leads. If, in acting upon this notion, we are brought to the fact which it implies or which it demands, then this notion is true.<sup>30</sup>

A fundamental element for the experimental method, and consequently pragmatism, is thus a life lived in action, when great weight is given to the choices we make in pursuit of an intended outcome. It is through these choices of action that the individual is able to test and verify her ideas and the ideas of others. Lived experience then becomes the catalyst for an ever-growing catalogue of knowledge.

For the reasons stated previously, the experimental method of pragmatism is doubly important for the project at hand. On the one hand, it is the method we employ. We will engage in a radically empirical look at

the experiences of movement and sport. From these we will draw concepts, meanings, and beliefs concerning the importance of sport. The tests of our results will be found in how well our ideas fit the experiences of others—past, present, and future.

In my own chapter, I will look to see what others have already learned in their own experiments of self-cultivation by way of the practices of endurance sport. As Peirce often insisted, a full inquiry requires a community of inquirers who, over time, work together to build a tradition of meanings and beliefs. In “Grounds of Validity of the Laws of Logic” Peirce addresses this balanced relationship between the individual inquirer and the sanctioning community:

For he who recognizes the logical necessity of complete self-identification of one’s own interests with those of the community, and its potential existence in man, even if he has it not himself, will perceive that only the inferences of that man who has it are logical, and so views his own inferences as being valid only so far as they would be accepted by that man. But so far as he has this belief, he becomes identified with that man. And that ideal perfection of knowledge by which we have seen that reality is constituted must thus belong to a community in which this identification is complete.<sup>31</sup>

Dewey made the same point in arguing that human knowing required a focus on “shared experience” through which a community could develop shared meanings and beliefs. In taking both radical empiricism and the experimental method seriously, the pragmatists worked with the regulative hope that humans could act creatively as individual, free-willed agents. The whole notion of self-cultivation requires such a regulative hope.

On the other hand, the theme of pragmatism’s experimentalism will play a constitutive role in the content of this book as a whole. That is to say, I believe that the practices of athletics and sport are inherently experimental. These are practices in which participants establish aims, both specific and general, and employ methods for achieving them. Lived success and failure mark the *truth* and *falsity* of the methods and perhaps, occasionally, of the aims themselves. Thus it is that the initial pragmatic theme of experimentalism plays a dual role in what follows.

## VI. THE ACCEPTANCE OF RISK

Along with focusing on the experimental method, the pragmatists emphasized the importance of individual conduct. As Dewey points out, “James calls . . . for human life to be a continual process of re-experimenting and re-creating.”<sup>32</sup> Individuals were to be held responsible for their actions and the resultant outcomes. People were thought, at least in part, to be architects capable of shaping both their own high achievements and



ignominious failures. This non-deterministic depiction requires the individual to “go at life wholeheartedly,” actively engaging the universe in a wrestling match for improvement and momentary stability despite the risks such behavior creates. The original pragmatic attitude, though short of a return to Hellenic fate, is about the gambling nature of human endeavor. This means it is also about a willingness to countenance the possibility of failure, loss, and losing. Pragmatism is no doubt also about how to deal with such an environment, how to find ways of stacking the cultural deck in favor of stability.

The constant struggle to attain a sense of equilibrium in the face of an aggressive universe generates innumerable possible outcomes. The element of risk, which guarantees uncertainty for the individual, demands an energetic response. Within the pragmatic conception, ugliness, evil, failure, and destruction are as important to the overall functioning of the cosmos as happiness, safety, and success. The participant in the cosmic game must be constantly fortified against the forces that can intrude upon a hard-won, temporary peace. Pragmatism calls on us to engage the universe with wholehearted energy, fully committed to the undertaking, even if unsure of the outcome. To desire a more endowed relationship with the universe is to engage in wishful fantasy.

James knew that an artificial Chautauqua-like land o’ plenty, where all threats to well-being have been eliminated, where risk is removed, where the possibility of failure is replaced by endless days of lukewarm serenity, will never hold our attention over the long haul. As a risk taker, man is a creature that needs from time to time to exist apart from guaranteed security and reinforcement. Occasionally, we need our hard work, fidelity, and best intentions to be met with undeserved failure. The gambler, the athlete, and the cultivated individual must be familiar with the acidity of the tough-luck loss. Without these experiences, future victories can never fully ripen.

James stresses the important cultivating power of risk while reflecting back on a week he spent at the Assembly Grounds on the shores of Lake Chautauqua.

I went in curiosity for a day. I stayed for a week, held spell-bound by the charm and ease of everything, by the middle-class paradise, without a sin, without a victim, without a blot, without a tear. And yet what was my own astonishment, on emerging into the dark and wicked world again, to catch myself quite unexpectedly and involuntarily saying: “Ouf! What a relief! . . . Let me take my chances again in the big outside worldly wilderness with all its sins and sufferings. There are the heights and depths, the precipices and the steep ideals, the gleams of the awful and the infinite; and there is more hope and help a thousand times than in the dead level and quintessence of every mediocrity.”<sup>33</sup>