

*Dear fellow CPSA panellists: I apologize for the length of this paper. Feel free to skip over section 3.2 as my presentation will focus on the later sections of the paper, primarily 3.3 and 3.4.*

### **Chapter 3: Docility in America: James, Tocqueville, and Individuality**

#### 3.1. Introduction

A particularly persistent democratic vice is docility.<sup>1</sup> In any regime other than democracy, the people's docile obedience is a virtue. Docile subjects wilfully satisfy the preferences of elites, they don't challenge authority, and preoccupy themselves with the pursuit of private desires far from the sphere of political life. It is solely in democratic regimes where active citizen participation is held at a premium as an expression of liberty and equality that docility becomes a vice. But democratic regimes are doubly unique in the sense that while docility poses one of their gravest vices, they also seem uniquely fitted to produce just that. Since Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* it has been a common fear that the egalitarian core of democratic culture perversely functions to unleash a deracinated individualism that threatens to undermine democratic culture itself. "As each class comes closer to the others and mixes with them," Tocqueville observes, "its members become indifferent and almost like strangers among themselves."<sup>2</sup> Democracy's tendency to produce individual withdrawal into self-interest and material advantage leads it gently down the garden path to the toxic combination of a complacent citizenry and centralized state power that Tocqueville called democratic despotism.

William James shared Tocqueville's worries about docility. Complacency, anomie, and the unrelenting "bigness" of American society at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century struck James as forces that were throttling the possibility of democracy itself. Yet despite their shared diagnosis, James provided a radically different response than Tocqueville, or for that matter from almost every other critic of democratic docility since then. While Tocqueville argued that what was needed to contain fragmenting individuality was greater commonality between individuals – most notably, that provided by the foundation of shared Christian *moeurs* – James argued that the problem with docility is not an excess of individuality, but rather a persistent lack of it. The best response to the problem of docility on James's account is not more commonality, whether it is provided by common religious faith, tradition, civilization, language, identity, or enemies, but rather less of it.<sup>3</sup> James worried that all of these attempts to cure democracy of docility could not help but reinforce the vice itself. Between fragmenting self-interest and thick bonds of community, James proposed a pluralistic conception of citizenship that thrives on a careful balance of connection and disconnection that he defined as only "some."

This chapter has two aims. The first is to connect the arguments concerning the paradox of habit I put forward in the previous chapter with the central question of this dissertation: namely, how to empower the agency of democratic citizens without intensifying the power exercised over them in the process.<sup>4</sup> James's critique of American imperialism in the Philippines offers a lens for studying this question because he attempts to put forward a robust defence of the place of imagination and story-telling to shape democratic habits of conviction and constraint. James is only partially successful in this

task, but his own blind spots provide clues for developing this question further in subsequent chapters.

The second aim is more scholastic. Commentators on American political thought either exclude James entirely from the pantheon of ‘political’ thinkers, or limit his contribution to political thought to an assemblage of reminders about the excesses of rationalism in politics.<sup>5</sup> This bias has been challenged in recent years, but I want to stress that James provides a novel perspective of the problems of democracy if we approach him as a political educator. His contribution is not a theoretical framework that can be applied ready-made to the problems of politics, or a set of universal categories for re-ordering our world. Rather, James was a public intellectual who reflected directly on the experience of American democracy at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and wrote to a public whose judgment he sought to educate and moral vocabulary to enrich. It is these lessons in how to re-envision politics and to propose just this re-envisioning as a political act *de rigueur* that I aim to reconstruct here.<sup>6</sup>

James’s own political views, like those of Tocqueville, are notoriously ambiguous and have lead commentators to try to pin him down under an incredible diversity of banners.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I forgo the task of labelling James’s liberalism and instead argue that his remarks on politics, and their many contradictory pronouncements, should be located generally within the Emersonian tradition of democratic individualism.<sup>8</sup> Like Emerson, James defended a vision of free and eccentric individuality as a basic human good. And, also like Emerson, he saw conformity and complacency as pervasive and invidious vices. The inertia of social life necessarily draws people towards conformity and consistency, and yet free individuality is only possible in opposition or “aversion” to this tendency, not in its absence.<sup>9</sup> This paradoxical relationship of need for and aversion from social life in Emerson is translated by James’s into an ambiguous relationship to political institutions. Where Tocqueville’s deemed individuality as a result of democratic culture that may lead to its undoing, James provides a distinctly American view on the issue whereby it is institutions rather than individuality which is the ambiguous element in the formula. Democratic institutions exist to protect “our precious birthright of individualism,” and yet their shaping and governing power, like that of custom and habit itself, is always in danger of strangling the individuality it seeks to protect.<sup>10</sup> The democracy in democratic individualism, then, is always only an indirect and ambiguous good in the service of individuality.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.2 The Tocquevillean Thesis

I want to begin by looking at Tocqueville’s critique of individualism and the contemporary persistence of what I am calling the Tocquevillean thesis: namely, that the best means of combating individual withdrawal and insatiable materialism that lead to a docile citizenry is through reinforcing the bonds of mutuality between individuals through the pursuit of shared values, identity, or ends. It is in comparison with the wide consensus on the Tocquevillean thesis that the originality of James’s position emerges.

#### *3.2.1 Equality, Individualism, and Docility*

*Democracy in America* is a comparative study of the political, cultural and psychological consequences of the “great democratic revolution” sweeping through “all

the Christian universe.”<sup>12</sup> This great democratic revolution is the growing political and social equality of individuals. Tocqueville approaches equality as a disruptive force that bring about democracy through the demise of the fixed order of estates and status that mark aristocratic culture. Whereas aristocracy represent a regime defined by stasis, stability, settled identities, and fixed meanings, equality of conditions functions as corrosive agent that destabilizes and unsettles fixity, making a democratic culture one marked by movement, instability, open identities, and contested meanings. Democratic revolution, then, is primarily a negative phenomenon defined by what it lacks or undermines, rather than what it creates. Tocqueville’s analysis is driven by the question of what political costs and potentials are opened up by democracy’s dissolution of what Claude Lefort has called “markers of certainty.”<sup>13</sup> At its core for Tocqueville, democracy is defined by lack.

Aristocratic institutions of rank and family have the function of binding people together. A system of social hierarchy gives each person a meaningful and rightful place in the social order. To have a fixed post means that one has a stake in the support one’s superiors for protection, and can draw on those below oneself for cooperation. This meaningful order is further entrenched through the structure of the aristocratic family. To bear a noble family name means one has a debt to past generations to uphold, and a promise to future generations to come. History, hierarchy, and prestige, Tocqueville notes, binds persons together around something “outside” of each individual.<sup>14</sup> One’s primary obligations are towards one’s family, one’s nation, one’s sovereign, and towards the order itself, rather than towards one’s private self. The grand vice of aristocratic culture is to succumb to the blind instinct of selfishness, a vice that grows in every man’s heart by nature but which the authority of the moral aristocratic order represses and constrains.

Democratic equality undoes all this. Rather than finding meaning in an external order, each person is given the free choice to live by their own lights and to fix their own expectations and identities. The levelling of status sets loose the free pursuit of individual desires. This dissolution of aristocratic power and privilege is the precondition for the democratic goods of autonomy, rational order, and toleration.<sup>15</sup> Yet, the unencumbered and appetitive aspects of individualism desiccate the sources of virtue that a democratic republic lives off of. Whereas aristocratic order tempered selfish expectations and desires through the authority of its social institutions, equality opens up the promise of upward mobility to all. Aristocratic regimes distribute economic goods according to inheritance. Democracy transforms material goods into commodities available for consumption on the market. Accordingly, individual self-interest finds an outlet in market competition and the pursuit of material advantage. The pursuit of private desires becomes an end in itself, with the perverse effect that goods are possessed without being enjoyed. “What attaches the human heart most keenly” in democratic times “is not the peaceful possession of a precious object, but the imperfectly satisfied desire to possess it and the incessant fear of losing it.”<sup>16</sup>

Whereas aristocratic institutions functioned as moral ballasts against such unconstrained self-interest, the dissolution of the aristocratic family and class structures set the individual free from any sort of external moral order. The new disappearance of a fixed post within a social hierarchy or place within a family history contracts the individual’s sense of obligation. She becomes increasingly concerned with short-term

goals and less and less concerned with the well-being of others. The final result, Tocqueville argues, is that individualism promotes each citizen to “isolate himself from the mass of those like him” and withdraw into private domestic and market life, “having thus created a little society of his own, he willingly abandons society at large to itself.”<sup>17</sup>

Individualism’s withdrawal from politics goes hand in hand with a denial of responsibility for the affairs of political life. Private individuals have neither an interest nor time for politics. “He who has confined his heart solely to the search for the goods of this world is always in a hurry, for he has only a limited time to find them, take hold of them, and enjoy them.”<sup>18</sup> This abdication of individual judgment gives way to a culture of conformity. Individuals uninterested in participating in public debate and judgment simply conform to dominant ideas and values, and become increasingly inhospitable and hostile towards opinions and beliefs that challenge the status quo. The democratic voice of this conformity is the awesome power of the tyranny of the majority Tocqueville saw in America. Individuals passively submit to the voice of the majority, believing it to be an expression of their own voice. However, the *vox populi* of conformism is one that paradoxically functions only by silencing individual voice. Before it “everyone becomes silent and friends and enemies alike then seem to hitch themselves together to this bandwagon.”<sup>19</sup>

Withdrawal and conformity come together to produce the political phenomenon George Kateb has called docility, “a condition in which people unreluctantly accept being used, and do so because they have been trained to do so.”<sup>20</sup> It is this sort of docility that Tocqueville thought not only undermined the republican virtues, but worse still, suffocate the love of liberty needed to protect democracy from its slide into despotism. A key feature of democratic power Tocqueville observed in *Democracy in America* is that democratic states tend to centralize power. Europe’s aristocratic and monarchic states demonstrate an extreme governmental centralization, as in the reduction of the state to the authority of a sole sovereign. Democratic powers are less centralized at the governmental level, but perversely more centralized at the administrative level. By administrative centralization Tocqueville refers to the centralization of power Michel Foucault would later describe as governmentality: the ubiquitous exercise of power over populations and individuals through new forms of individuating technologies of census and public health, clientalism, and surveillance.<sup>21</sup> To resist this extension of administrative power over private life, democracies require an active participatory citizen body that can keep power accountable. However, what unconstrained self-interest, withdrawal, and conformity all conspire to produce is in fact a welcome embrace of such a creeping expansion of power. Centralized power and docility come together to produce a uniquely democratic form of tyranny Tocqueville calls democratic despotism:

So it is that every day it renders the employment of free will less useful and more rare; it confines the action of the will in a smaller space and little by little steals the very use of free will from each citizen. Equality has prepared men for all these things: it has disposed them to tolerate them and often even to regard them as a benefit.<sup>22</sup>

This is the paradox of democratic culture for Tocqueville: the central good of democratic government is the free expression of free individuality, but this individuality itself becomes so myopically concerned with its own private life that it leaves the democratic culture and institutions that sustains it unprotected to wither and decline.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.2.2. *Governing Mutuality*

The gloominess of Tocqueville's analysis of these pathologies of democratic culture is paired with his optimistic account of how this same culture can bootstrap itself away from such dangers. Civil society provides the bulwark against despotism. American democracy transforms individualism into self interest properly understood through its rich civic network of local associations. These associations give voice to local concerns, in such a public manner that self-interest must be tempered and moderated if a speaker's proposal is to win popular assent. Moreover, a pluralism of civic associations decentralizes the state's administrative power. In multiplying sites of participation associational pluralism functions as a democratic balance of power akin to the aristocratic balance of monarchs and nobles. It is by such means, as Cheryl Welch put it, that Tocqueville sees how the potential sources of democratic despotism turns into an occasion for democratic deliverance.<sup>24</sup>

Democracy, however, is essentially an empty place. Unlike the aristocratic order of power and legitimacy represented in the king's two bodies – one temporal and one divine – democracy represents a disincorporation of power. As Claude Lefort explains, “democratic society is instituted as a society without a body, as a society which undermines the representation of an organic totality.”<sup>25</sup> What can provide the unity and coherence to a democratic community once an external moral order has been swept away? If democratic citizenship is to be reclaimed as an active and common participatory practice, this lack must be managed or supplemented in some way. For Tocqueville, the need to fill this empty center is essential for generating this supposedly redemptive power of participation. He finds the moral supplement to this lack in his pronouncement that America is a Christian country. The *moeurs* of the Christian faith foundationally bind citizens together as partners in self-rule, and tempers the extremes of individual self-interest. “Christianity,” Tocqueville observed, “... reigns without obstacles, on the admission of all; the result... is that everything is certain and fixed in the moral world.” It is because of this pre-political moral foundation that political life can safely be “abandoned to the discussion and attempts of men.”<sup>26</sup> Tocqueville's pluralist and decentered vision of democracy can only transform despotism into deliverance through the supplement of an “external order”, the moral consensus of the Christian nation. The empty void of democratic revolution cannot generate its own habits of citizenship without a supplement akin to aristocracy's “external” moral order. This conjunction of monotheism, territorial contiguity, and shared identity reconstitute the discipline and authority of this external order through the idea of the nation. In defending this extra-political foundation of active citizenship, Tocqueville can leave democracy, as William Connolly remarks, “free to dance lightly on the surface of life only because everything fundamental is fixed below it.”<sup>27</sup> The desire for a self-sufficient citizenry constantly needs to be propped up by the foundations of natural togetherness in something shared.

Tocqueville's answer to the problem of docility – expanding political participation while shoring up the moral consensus of the nation – has been a hugely influential response to the predicaments of democracy. Civic republicans, communitarians, neo-conservatives, liberal nationalists, and radical democrats have all sought means of enjoining a deeper commonality between citizens to combat the dangers of individualism. Yet all of these efforts, like Tocqueville's own, seem to run into the same problem. That is, they seem to further legitimize and justify the creeping administration of everyday life by the state that Tocqueville warned docility itself enables. Every attempt to fill-up or

cover over democracy's foundationless lack is necessarily a failure. There is no natural fit between lack and the fantasy of wholeness in enjoin. Rather, there is a continuous and ongoing attempt to police the boundaries of the nation's fantasy.

It does this in two ways. First, the governance of commonality frequently means the policing of the boundaries of the moral consensus, castigating outsiders as deviants and dangers, enemies of the nation. The denial of the satisfaction of the people's wholeness and self-identity is rationalized as the fault of others. Tocqueville's remarks concerning atheists as representing a "dangerous malady" of the body political are certainly expressive of this exclusive and aggressive fantasy of pre-political commonality.<sup>28</sup> Contemporary examples abound of how the supposed democratic sanctity of the monotheistic nation, the heterosexual family, or the 'tolerant' civilization all function to limit the rights and citizenship of recalcitrant minorities, migrants, and outsiders who seem to undermine these sources of social coherence.

Secondly, the Tocquevillean thesis encourages not only the policing of outsiders, but a considered extension of governmental power within the nation itself. Recall, that the need for commonality was to facilitate the active, virtuous citizenry that could resist the administrative centralization of the state. Reading Tocqueville after Foucault, we should ask whether the insistence on deep commonality can be separated from an extension of administrative power to shape the public and private lives of citizens. When such an idea is combined with the extensive powers of the modern state apparatus, it takes the form of a fine-grained and comprehensive control of individual and collective conduct that Foucault analysed as the government of conduct. The state administers everyday life through an ever growing list of mechanisms and agencies that range from public health, to the administration of public schools, licensing and accreditation, the distribution of services and welfare, establishing standards and ordinances, to the regulation of the economy and banking industry, and so on. This extension of governmental power into almost every aspect of private life in the service of reproducing the identities, values and capabilities of national citizenship seems almost entirely indistinguishable from the paternal power Tocqueville sought commonality as a buttress against. Democratic despotism is precisely a form of oppression that is "absolute, detailed, regular, far-seeing, and mild," that "provides for their security, foresees and secures their needs, facilitates their pleasures, conducts their principal affairs, directs their industry, regulates their estates, divides their inheritances."<sup>29</sup>

Is the Tocquevillean thesis really an appropriate premise for looking for a solution to the dilemmas of multicultural political communities at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries? The criticisms I have raised here are not original, nor do I think they are intractable. I offer them in the spirit of reminders as to the limits of many of our received judgments about the vices and virtues of democratic citizenship. I think these problems enjoin us to entertain alternative approaches to the problem of docility that begin from different premises where they are on offer. It is from this perspective that I propose that democratic theorists turn their attention to William James.

### 3.3. James on Docility and Acquiescence

James's response to docility is to provide a philosophical basis for action by inventing new categories and narratives for making sense out of our experience.<sup>30</sup> His name for this

basis is pluralism. Before turning to a more thorough account of what James means by pluralism and how contemporary theorists ought to engage it, I outline James's critique of docility and draw attention to its proximity to Tocqueville's critique of individualism. James differs from Tocqueville in an important way, however, in the sense that he does not provide a social-theoretical account of the paradoxes of democratic regimes as such. While Tocqueville approaches the issue of docility from the perspective of the social scientist, James's does so from the soap box of the public intellectual.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, engaging James as a political educator involves an extended conception of what to include as a political writing, requiring that we turn to his occasional public writings in Boston newspapers, his invited lectures to students and social organizations, and his personal letters.

### *3.3.1 Bigness, Consumerism, and Monism*

Apathy and popular complacency, James thought, were regrettable yet understandable responses to the everyday experience of citizens in the final days of America's Gilded Age.<sup>32</sup> The last decades of the American nineteenth century saw the rise of immense class stratification, the transformation of proprietary capitalism into corporate capitalism, revolutions in transportation and the continental consolidation of the United States by the rail network, the sudden explosion in the density and size of major cities, and the nation's turn to imperial expansion in the south Pacific. Democratic citizens could only increasingly feel over-whelmed and helpless in the face of the complexity and scale of political and economic forces that seem to operate behind their backs and above their wills. This sense of powerlessness is what James called in a 1903 letter "the great disease of our country,"

It seems to me that the great disease of our country now is the unwillingness of people to do anything that has no chance of succeeding. The organization of great machines for "slick" success is the discovery of our age; and, with us, the individual, as soon as he realizes that the machine will be irresistible, *acquiesces* silently, instead of making an impotent row. One acquiescence leads to another, until acquiescence itself becomes organized. The impotent row-maker becomes in the eye of public opinion, an ass and a nuisance. We get to live under the organization of corruption, and since all needful functions go on, we next treat reform as a purely literary ideal: We defend our rotten system. Acquiescence becomes active partnership.<sup>33</sup>

Acquiescence is an understandable psychological response to these transformations, but as the last sentence suggests it is also a culpable one. It is "active partnership" in the effacement of free individuality. Individuals make themselves into docile subjects of the institutions and forces that steer social life, compromising themselves in the process. In acquiescence, citizens forfeit their possibility of their own individuality and, therefore, their freedom. James's democratic individualism enjoins persons to find the courage to risk making their row, even if it may be impotent.

James does not provide a social-theoretical account theory of how the transformations in the structures of everyday life compromise human agency. Instead, he focuses on three related democratic predicaments in his reflections on docility. I call the social phenomena that attract James attention predicaments as they are less Weberian ideal-types than they are moving targets for his attempt to articulate an experienced crisis in agency. These three predicaments are bigness, consumerism, and monism. James saw each one as an intractable and perhaps even necessary aspect of modern life. What trouble him about each were their effects on ordinary people. If the waning spirit of

individuality was to be resuscitated, it would mean thinking about how to attenuate the complacent effects of these aspects of modern life, without either rejecting them outright or waiting for radical social reform. James's political question then, to borrow an expression of Charles Taylor's, is that of how citizens might "see-feel" the structures of modern life differently.<sup>34</sup>

The first predicament is the problem of what James called bigness. Bigness refers first of all to the "big" force at work in society – the economy, the state, the military, and the corporations. "I am against bigness and greatness in all their forms," James wrote in an 1899 letter, "and with the invisible molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual." The complexity, scale, and increasingly bureaucratic nature of national political and economic meant that they seemed to float free from the agency and input of lone citizens. Often James would associate scale itself as a fault, writing that "[t]he bigger the unit you deal with, the hollower, the more brutal, the more mendacious is the life displayed."<sup>35</sup> However, what James seems to mean here is not the physical or institutional scale itself modern organizations. He uses the term to evoke the individual experience of feeling over-whelmed by the influence and control of these institutions.<sup>36</sup> Most often, he uses it as shorthand to describe the combination of the three predicaments.

The second predicament is monism, what we might call the ideological superstructure of bigness. Monism is the philosophical temperament that demands unity and order that James identifies with Hegel and Royce. James saw monism as a widespread but ultimately undefeatable philosophical position that satisfied the human longing for belonging and stability in the world. The political danger of monism comes from its tendency towards abstractness: to see and appraise the world in terms of parts and tokens of a greater organic whole. Abstraction erases the concreteness of individuals. Instead, it looks at persons in terms of categories, populations, statistics, and kinds rather than as potentially eccentric and disorderly expression of free individuality. James believed that monism as a philosophy was simply less invigorating than his own pluralism, and not morally wrong. But when combined with the bigness of the modern state apparatus, monism becomes a dangerous ideology and form of power.<sup>37</sup> The conjunction of bigness and monism is reminiscent of Tocqueville's warnings about the alliance of governmental and administrative centralization. What monism and bureaucratic bigness produce is a ubiquitous power that at once both governs the affairs of groups and populations, while at the same time specifying the conduct of individuals through an extensive system of licensing, accreditation and certification.<sup>38</sup> James was actively involved in the movement to resist the state licensing of medical practitioners and university professors as instances of this invidious and freedom destroying administration of everyday life. Vociferously objecting to the requirement that university professors hold PhD's, James asked, "is individuality with us... going to count for nothing unless stamped and licensed and authenticated by some title-giving machine?"<sup>39</sup>

The third predicament is consumerism. James is no critic of capitalism.<sup>40</sup> For the man who defined truth by its "cash value" the legitimacy of the capitalist economy was not in question. What he objects to in consumerism are its psychological effects: the sedative delights of the "pleasure economy" encourage the flight from individuality into mass-produced conformity, and discourages risk-averseness.<sup>41</sup> The economic prosperity of the nation cultivates a passive nation of consumers averse to the strenuous moral mood James champions. Luxury and commercialism promote instead an easy-going moral

mood. This mood is wary of effort and self-interested.<sup>42</sup> It shies away from danger and excitement. James's moral psychology categorizes these moods as 'moral' because they each prefigure different moral attitudes. The moral strenuousness of frontier manliness goes hand in hand with a faith in our ability to enact some change in the world. The moral easy-goingness, by contrast, is connected to the determinist worldview of monism. The easy-going mood does not worry too much about whether or not our wills are efficacious in the world. It is the lazy mood of petty bourgeois respectability and decorum. It has no interest in the strenuous life of energy. The self-centered mood of the easy-going soul flees from the affective intensity of individuality into what James calls vanity. Vanity "is clearly something that permits anesthesia, mere escape from suffering, to be our rule of life".<sup>43</sup>

A docile, complacent, and disengaged citizenry is the natural outgrowth of these forces. Revitalizing citizenship means transforming the moral mood of America from this easy-going complacency to a strenuous one of confidence and conviction. Strenuous citizenship is manly, heroic, risk-taking, and agonistic. It embraces conflict as an occasion for self-discovery rather than fleeing from it. Active citizenship means new habits, but to cultivate such new habits the old habits of docility need to be broken first. The bigness of American life produced habits of acquiescence and self-interest that passively permitted state power to mutate into a new imperial form. James put little faith in the power of big institutions to curb their own excesses.<sup>44</sup> Instead, individuality could survive the dangers of docility if it were buttressed by courageous habits of everyday interaction. James imagined such courageous habits as the "civic genius" of the people,

The nation blest above all nations is she in whom the civic genius of the people does the saving day by day, by acts without external picturesqueness; by speaking, writing, voting reasonably; by smiting corruption swiftly; by good temper between parties; by the people knowing true men when they see them, and preferring them as leaders to rabid partisans or empty quacks. Such nations need no wars to save them.<sup>45</sup>

The challenge James faced, then, was how to shield citizens from the debilitating experience of bigness, and shape new courageous habits without recourse trading off individuality in the process.

James and Tocqueville share an anxiety about docility, but do they share a solution? Inspired by the political events of *fin-de-siecle* America, James came to see the Tocquevillean thesis' medicine to the problem of docility worse than the original illness itself. Despite their historical proximity, there is no historical evidence to suggest that James read Tocqueville or took his arguments explicitly into consideration in his own writings. What we do have, however, is James's frequent and impassioned responses to his own former student, Governor Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt was only a rising political star when he attracted the attention of James's poison pen. The occasion for James's criticisms of Roosevelt was the snowballing bellicosity of America in the 1890's, beginning with the Venezuela crisis in 1896, amplifying to the Spanish War's conquest of Cuba and Puerto Rico, and ultimately to the suppression of a national liberation movement in the Philippines in 1899. The war on Filipino sovereignty represented the apex of this "torrent of mere empty bigness" overcoming American democracy.<sup>46</sup> The experience of American imperialism was devastating to James and shattered his faith in the unique role of America as a nation that had overcome the barbarism of Europe.<sup>47</sup> It was also the catalyst for the radicalization of James's political views.<sup>48</sup> These historical details aside, what concerns the argument in this chapter is that it was precisely a

Tocquevillean response to docility that Roosevelt celebration of the nation and empire put forward.

### 3.3.2. *Roosevelt's Challenge*

Governor Theodore Roosevelt, President McKinley's most vocal supporter of the American presence in the Philippines, made his famous celebration of America at war entitled 'The Strenuous Life' on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1899. Roosevelt's speech celebrated the expansion of American economic and military influence across the hemisphere as a palliative to the corrupting indolence of America's isolationist history. To inherit the glory and sacrifice of the great men who fought in the Civil War, Americans must not squander their success on navel-gazing commercialism. Rather, Americans ought to follow in the image of Lincoln and Grant and embrace the life of labour and strife as the embodiment of "all that is most American in the American character."<sup>49</sup> Roosevelt argues that this sort of ethos means the courage of refusing to back down to the challenges that America must face as a global power, even if that means occupying and governing foreign peoples. The future greatness of America lays in its military's power to confront such issues of the day. He defends the mutual benefit that the Philippines's occupation will bring to American, the Filipinos, and humanity at large. The congressmen and public intellectuals who stand in the way of such a mandate, Roosevelt argues, are both guilty of treason and evil.

Roosevelt's speech looks to the external order of the nation to regenerate the conviction and confidence that democratic equality erodes. An active, expansive, manly, and constantly moving democracy is framed in opposition to a passive, isolationist, feminized, and static servitude. On the side of docility, Roosevelt includes isolated individuals - the skeptic, the intellectual, the idiot, and the man of commerce - as victims of America's becoming "over-civilized."<sup>50</sup> On the side of the nation, he finds friendship, mutual aid, effort as expressions of the authenticity of "the only national life which is really worth leading."<sup>51</sup> The nation is at once both the highest achievement of lone individuals, and the force that can draw them out of their lives of single-minded materialism. Echoing Tocqueville's own comparison between progressive America and static China, Roosevelt argues that the only the constant motion and expansion of the democratic state can sustain its vitality, less it chose to "rot by inches in ignoble ease within our borders" like the Chinese.<sup>52</sup>

Roosevelt's rhetoric was directed at men like James who hated docility and felt the pull of war as a potential source of freedom and excitement. Consequently, the speech evoked a long response from James. Roosevelt's "abstract war-worship," James wrote, is incoherent and morally irresponsible.<sup>53</sup> The strenuousness of war is in itself not a good. To celebrate strenuousness as an end in itself ignores the fact that wars are to be judged by the ideals for which they are thought. James points out that Roosevelt's rhetoric praise for the glory of Lincoln and Grant cuts both way, as it must equally celebrate the strenuous lives of Jeff Davis and General Lee in the South's war for succession, or even to justify what Roosevelt dismisses as "brigandage" in the Filipino struggle against the United States for self-government.<sup>54</sup> In short, the celebration of war in and of itself is an expression of impetuosity, testifying to an immaturity of Roosevelt. "He is still in the *Sturm und Drang* period of early adolescence," James remarks.<sup>55</sup>

James's response to Roosevelt, however, is not simply a denouncement. James was so troubled by Roosevelt's speech because he basically agreed with him that democratic citizenship is in dire need for conviction but that the negative and fragmenting nature of democratic culture itself drains the sources of such confidence. However, where Roosevelt saw war, adventure, and the nation as uniting values to combat docility, James instead saw Roosevelt's influence as nothing other than a disheartening expression of docility itself. In his celebration of the nation at war, all three predicaments – scale, monism, and commercialism – came crashing together in a presidential decision that “reeked of the infernal adroitness of the great department store, which has reached perfect expertness in the art of killing silently and with no public squealing or commotion the neighboring small concern.”<sup>56</sup> The hubris of bigness that Roosevelt celebrated was at the same time the reason he faced “no public squealing.” In fact, docility shows its true face not simply when citizens passively let events like this come to pass, but rather when they conspires with them through mob mentality that James described of the war's supporters. War, rather than providing some reprieve from docility, provides the most common occasion for the nation to exploit this explosive mix of what George Kateb rightly describes as “mobilized docility” and “aggressive obedience.”<sup>57</sup>

If Roosevelt was empire's most able defender, James counted himself amongst the New England mugwumps whose duty it was to re-steer public opinion against the war, but without engaging in the same manipulative fear-mongering of Roosevelt.<sup>58</sup> Despite the impotence of the lone individual against the bigness of empire, James constantly reminded his readers in the popular magazines and newspapers where he published his public salvos against Roosevelt that “every American has a voice or a pen, and may use it.”<sup>59</sup> Ordinary people must find the courage to speak up for both their own integrity and that of those individuals being slaughtered on the other side of the globe. James sought to summon a manly courage, but one that would not spill over into the blood-thirstiness of Roosevelt's strenuousness. The challenge for James then, was how to hold on to the democratic goods of conviction and confidence without breeding arrogance and violence. What James offered in response to both Tocqueville and Roosevelt is an alternative conception of citizenship that takes the foundationless lack at the heart of democracy not as a liability but an opportunity re-energizing our experience of citizenship.

### 3.4 Pluralizing Citizenship

Thus far, I have argued that for James docility poses a grave threat to democratic individualism in terms of the experience of individual powerlessness occasioned by the concatenation of bigness, monism, and consumerism in American life. These predicaments of democracy are unavoidable elements of the political culture of a liberal capitalist democracy, but the experiential effects they produce promote an acquiescent withdrawal into a private life that leaves political power unaccountable and uncontrolled. As an alternative to docility, I have gestured towards James's vision of active citizenship as something strenuous, agonistic, and adventurous. But I have also argued that the attempt to promote strenuous citizenship through identification with the state and its bellicose projects, as represented by Roosevelt's use of the rhetoric of strenuous, is not a cure to docility, but rather only a second face of docility itself: the manipulated obedience

of citizens whipped up into a frenzy. In an address delivered after his exchange with Roosevelt, James outlines the political equivalents of the strenuous and easy-going moods as the two fundamental parties in any nation, the party of red blood, “the party of animal instinct, jingoism, fun, excitement, bigness” and the party of reflection, “that of reason, forecast, order gained by growth and spiritual methods.”<sup>60</sup> The desire for fun and excitement is always in danger of proceeding in blindness to its human costs, while reason and thoughtfulness grow pale without the vitality of action. The role of the public intellectual in a nation split in to these two camps is not to champion one at the expense of the other. Rather, it is “to blow cold upon the hot excitement, and hot upon the cold motive.”<sup>61</sup> A democratic politics for James need to balance both passion and constraint.

James champions what he calls pluralism as a way of steering a path between the atomistic withdrawal of the consumer and the bellicose monism of national belonging. James’s use of the term pluralism shares some elective affinities with the more familiar use of the term by political scientists, but is importantly deeper and richer than its familiar variants.<sup>62</sup> The first familiar sense of pluralism is interest-group pluralism. This is the view that state power can be constrained and held accountable through a polyarchical arrangement that distributes power across a variety of economic and civil-society groups. As developed by Laski and others, interest-group pluralism shares an important intellectual debt to James, and James himself describes his own vision of pluralism as “conceived after a *social* analogy as a pluralism of independent powers.”<sup>63</sup> However, James does not place the state, even a decentered one, at the centre of his pluralistic universe. The second sense of pluralism is value-pluralism. This is the view that there exists a plurality of human values that lack any ultimate harmony and are bound to come into conflict. James is certainly a value pluralist in this sense. “There is hardly a good,” he writes in ‘The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life’, “which we can imagine except as competing for the possession of the same bit of space and time with some other imagined good.”<sup>64</sup> He recognizes the plurality and discord of values, although he does not think the plurality of values is any deep way unique within the abundant plurality of the universe, one that contains a plurality of spaces, times, experiences, judgments, and groups. The plurality of values is only stands out in the sense that, like religion, it provides a particularly trying site of disagreement amongst people.<sup>65</sup> James’ deep pluralism, by contrast with each of these usages, is a critical metaphysics that stresses the open, unfinished quality of the universe, and values that pluralism as an occasion for human action and flourishing. Deep pluralism it is a normative and descriptive approach to the world that provides new categories and concepts for interpreting our experiences of the world.

In this section I provide an account of this deep pluralism and argue that it may serve as a better ground than the monism of the nation for inflecting citizenship in the direction of the careful balance of passion and constraint.

### 3.4.1 *From Publics to Plurality*

Docility represents democracy’s crisis of confidence. Because citizens don’t believe that they can make any change in the face of the bigness of the modern world, they withdraw into the anesthesia of vanity and conformity. To find the confidence to act, citizens need to experience a world that meets their efforts half way. Sheldon Wolin captured this connection between confidence and democracy when he wrote that it is

precisely because action involves intervention into existing affairs, that it is always sorely in need to “a perspective of tantalizing possibilities.”<sup>66</sup> Contemporary democrats often argue that the first thing needed to generate this confidence is a protected space of equality, a public sphere, where participation can occur without the demands of state and economy influencing outcomes. Laws, as Hannah Arendt memorably put it, ought to function like the city walls that encircle and protect a space of equality and action free from distortion and the demands of necessity.<sup>67</sup> But as critics of deliberative democracy have often pointed out, talk of such a public sphere often puts the cart before the horse. A free space of equal participation is not an alternative to the distorting forces of contemporary politics. Rather, it is precisely a goal to aim towards.<sup>68</sup> If we are to act here and now, without appeal to a mythic public sphere of equals, how can we find the powers to make a change in this world?

James’s skepticism of institutions pushes him towards a “second order” contribution to this problem.<sup>69</sup> He acknowledges that contemporary citizens experience their world as something foreign and unwelcoming. But experience is not a raw feel. How we experience the world is subject to how we narrate it, how our ideas and feelings help us make sense out of our experience of things. What is needed is a new language for redescribing experience that stresses the world’s receptivity to action. “If we survey the field of history and ask what features of all great periods of revival, of expansion of the human mind, display in common we shall find,” James wagers, “I think, simply this: that each and all of them said to the human being, ‘The inmost nature of reality is congenial to powers that you possess.’”<sup>70</sup> James finds this potential intimacy between agents and their world in a pluralistic universe.

James introduces the notion of pluralism in his 1903 lectures at Oxford entitled, *A Pluralistic Universe*. There he argued that both mechanical empiricism and Hegelian absolutism provide inappropriate metaphysics for human action because they both fail the practical test of solving the very human problem of how to feel at home in the world. Pluralism, or what he alternatively calls “humanism,” is the only metaphysics that can be pragmatically justified on the grounds that it accords with intimacy of experience. A pluralistic universe is one where “[w]hat really exists is not things made but things in the making.”<sup>71</sup> It is a universe that is not exhausted by the laws of nature or competition, nor reducible to the play of self-interests or any other essential force. Unlike the clean ‘slick’ machine of bigness or the determined world and orderly world of monism, a pluralistic universe is “a turbid, muddled, gothic sort of an affair, without a sweeping outline and with pictorial nobility.”<sup>72</sup> It trades off this aesthetic ideal of closedness and wholeness to embrace the place of chance, indeterminism, and freedom in the order of things.

At the centre of this metaphysics stands the inexhaustibility of chance. Chance is not a positive attribute of this universe, but rather something negative. It indicates a disconnection and spontaneity, of not being “controlled, secured, or necessitated by other things in advance of its won actual presence.”<sup>73</sup> In such a universe with chance, however small, ultimate order is impossible. Action cannot be closed out. There is always room for something new to happen, and no reason why your own action may not play a central role in such changes.

James viewed the task of philosophy not as the final justification of this metaphysics, but rather as something therapeutic.<sup>74</sup> The aim of his lectures on pluralism, as with the rest of his writings, was to assemble reminders to his readers about this

basically open, unfinished quality of experience. This philosophical therapy is an aid to democracy in two senses. In the first sense, it seeks to break the spell of docility. The world is not a finished whole, no matter how small you feel or how bad the odds might seem. Because no force can close out chance forever, there is always room to act. And secondly, it provides a response to the problem of lack. James agrees with Tocqueville that the modern world has lost its final foundations. But precisely because of this, any attempt to refound democracy, to find some external order or fixed thing to compensate for the lack is itself always going to be a failure. Every attempt to speak for the whole, to find an “all-form,” always leaves something out. There is always a negativity, a chance, that escapes every claim to speak on behalf of the lack, whether it be through a shared faith or nation. The pluralist perspective argues that,

[T]here may never be an all-form at all, that the substance of reality may never get totally collected, that some of it may remain outside of the largest combination of it ever made, and that a distributive form of reality, the *each*-form, is logically as acceptable and empirically as probable as the all-form commonly acquiesced in as so obviously the self-evident thing<sup>75</sup>

The each-form is a reminder, a surplus, that exceeds and escapes all the community’s claims to closure. It is nothing less than acquiescence to deny the possibility of one’s own action, and the realization that it only takes faith in one’s own powers to make a change in the order of things. Between the dialectic of lack and unity James’s proposes this pluralistic onto-story that is neither impossible nor ultimately refutable as a more inspiring and hospitable basis for democratic action.

### 3.4.2. *Conviction and Constraint*

A pluralistic universe, as I put this point in chapter 2, is one where the self can safely engage in the play of home and holiday. In his psychology, it was the flexible membrane of habits mediating between self and world that allowed James to reconcile both integrity and provisionality. In politics again, it is habits of citizenship that allow citizens to be at home in this pluralistic universe. James is no moralist. He consistently resists the moralistic drift to define an exclusive list of ideals worthy of conviction.<sup>76</sup> His pluralistic metaphysics prefigures a certain moral sensibility, but neither defines it nor commands it.<sup>77</sup> As he says of its prefiguring power, “I must *point*, point to the mere *that* of life, and you by inner sympathy must fill out the *what* for yourself.”<sup>78</sup> James as a philosopher and public intellectual points to the *that* of a pluralist, unfinished universe. It is up to you to take up that vision and find your own way in it. How does a pluralistic universe help us find our way?

These two conflicting political imperatives of the public intellectual – blowing hot on cold, and cold on hot – translate into two seemingly contradictory habits of citizenship. Conviction undisciplined by mutual respect leads to the impulsive will of Roosevelt’s imperialism. Mutual respect uninspired by conviction can only inspire docility and the obstructed will of the abuliac.<sup>79</sup> What James proposes is a vision of engaged citizenship that holds both moments together – conviction and mutual respect – in a way that brings out the best of each. Joshua Miller objects that this democratic temperament of James’s involves a psychological dissonance that would be trying if not impossible for most citizens.<sup>80</sup> Respect and conviction, Miller argues, spring from different sources. This dissonance is a familiar one as it is at the heart of the paradox of habit James wrestled with in his psychology. Freedom means action and adventure as

opposed to the dull humdrum of habit and convention, but this freedom is only possible when shaped and cultivated through the assemblage of habits. Similarly, conviction is a force that propels agents out into the world, but it must be tempered by habits of mutual respect towards others.

James wagers that a pluralistic universe is one where the seemingly contradictory demands of conviction and constraint find mutual support. What informs this civic courage is a notion of “some” connection with others. “[E]ach part of the world is in some way connected, in some other ways not connected with its other parts.”<sup>81</sup> It is pluralism’s commitment to this some that James points us towards, and asks us to consider the *what*, or better, the *how* of living it, for ourselves. Where there is some connection with others and the world, acts produce effects.

Conviction and constraint, or mutual respect, constitute the minimal constraints necessary to allow this pluralism to persist as a home fit for equals, but rather than canceling each other out as Miller suggests, the two demands are held together in a productive tension. The conviction James’s pluralism inspires, as opposed to the imperial confidence of Roosevelt’s appeal to the nation, is one that finds place for the inevitability of loss. Precisely because there is always only some connection, there is no view from nowhere and no grounds to speak for the whole. Because “no single point of view can take in the whole scene” in a pluralistic universe, then there may always be something left to be learned from the perspective of another.<sup>82</sup> Misunderstanding, conflict, and partiality are inevitable in a pluralistic universe. It is on the basis of this unavoidable loss that mutual respect is demanded of us. The disconnections that define us make difference not a failure but a resource to draw on, as people with whom we are connected with in some way yet disconnected in others will see shared problems and questions differently, and bring a new and much needed perspective to bear on them. “Even prisons and sick-rooms,” as James puts this point with great pith, “have their special revelations.”<sup>83</sup> Conviction requires respect for others if our values and judgments are going to be responsive ones that help us make sense out of this world. A pluralistic universe prefigures a lively citizenry precisely in so far as it keeps alive the dynamic tension between these two forces: conviction and constraint.

### 3.5 Democratic Imaginings

If individuality and democratic citizenship have a future it will not be found in the policing powers of the nation state. Rather, it will be due to the ability of individuals to draw inspiration from this pluralistic universe to cultivate habits of confidence and respect. James was a man of faith but no naive optimist. His diagnosis of American democracy is melancholic at best. He acknowledges that “it is no small thing to inoculate seventy millions of people with new standards.”<sup>84</sup> What would be needed to resuscitate the mortifying body of American democracy would be nothing but the injection of new habits. But habits are not the sort of thing that can be legislated or willed into existence. The paradoxes and contradictions James wrestles with in his attempt to both diagnosis docility, and yet proposes newer habits as a remedy, are indicative of the paradoxes of habit more generally.

We should not look to James, as we might to Tocqueville, for concrete political proposals. The closest James came to such an institutional response to these issues was

his proposal to sublimate of the war instinct through the conscription of America's youth into the nation's mines, trains, and kitchens as a public service campaign he rather regretfully described as a "war against nature."<sup>85</sup> Instead, James should be read by political theorists, as Joshua Miller puts this point, "for the elegance of his prose, his genius and generous spirit, and his insights into the possibilities and paradoxes of American democratic political consciousness."<sup>86</sup> But this said, James still does have a lesson to teach. At the center of democratic praxis, James places *imagination*. As a public intellectual he dares his audiences to re-imagine their universe as a pluralistic one, and ask themselves how they can make sense out of themselves and their practices from this new perspective. In this sense, James's politicization of imagination – even at the deepest level of ontology and the nature of the universe – is a democratic practice.

The transformation of habits is something that must come from within, and it is this power of introspective imagining that James appeals to. After all, the external and collective acts of deliberation and participation celebrated by contemporary democrats are often only really advocated as a catalyst to the internal and reflective practice of imagination where persuasion takes place.<sup>87</sup> To this end, James lectures often take less the form of a sustained argument than they are instances of storytelling. Against the monistic story of empire, powerlessness, and determinism the Gilded Age told itself, James's came up with a counter-story, an onto-story. Storytelling is itself a democratic form of communication, as Iris Marion Young argues, where it can serve to inspire imagination by revealing experiences and foster understanding with others with very different experiences or assumptions, rather than shared premises and values.<sup>88</sup> Storytelling and imagination come together when they serve to provide an opportunity to train our capacity for what Hannah Arendt called "visiting" the perspectives of others to sharpen our own critical judgment.<sup>89</sup> James's democratic response to the problem of docility then is his ability to provoke to critically provoke the enlarged mentality of his fellow citizens so as to empower them to transform themselves.

James held no misconception that the conformist and thoughtless character of everyday life, any more than habit, could be overcome definitively, but instead he thought conformism might be used against itself for democratic ends. Social reform, James once told an audience, must begin from the acknowledgement that "invention and imitation, taken together, form... the entire warp and woof of human life, in so far as it is social".<sup>90</sup> Individuals imitate one another. It is this fact that makes the docility of America such a difficult habit to break. What are needed, then, are new examples to imitate. The example, to quote Arendt again, "is the particular that contains, or is supposed to contain, a concept or general rule."<sup>91</sup> It was examples of civic courage, rather than a philosophical exposition of the concept, that punctuate James's moral and political writings. James sometimes held up the ascetic life of saints as an example of strenuousness that holds together both conviction and constraint. In the *Varieties of Religious Experience*, he writes that the saintly life of voluntarily accepted poverty, so very unlike the vain commercialism of most middle class Americans, is an example of strenuous living "without the need of crushing weaker people."<sup>92</sup> America, however, need not wait for its saints to redeem it. James is always appealing to his Harvard audience to dare to become such saints themselves. "Become the imitable thing," he enjoins them, "and you may then discharge your minds of all responsibility for the imitation. The laws of social nature will take care of that result."<sup>93</sup> Elite guidance, popular imagining, and the docile imitation of

active lives may all conspire to keep power to account and sustain a lively, agonistic citizenry.

On this note, I end with James's own most evocative example of democratic citizenship. James finds his exemplar of democratic sainthood in Robert Gould Shaw. Like the rest of James's idols of strenuousness, Shaw was a war hero. James delivered an oration in his praise in front of the Boston Opera House in 1897 on the occasion of the unveiling of Shaw's statue. In this oration he praises the strenuous life of Shaw, but less the strenuousness that he brought to the battlefields of the Civil War than the moral courage he exemplified as a leader. Shaw was a colonel in the Massachusetts's 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment, the Union's so-called black regiment. The 54<sup>th</sup> was the first regiment of black soldiers to fight for the Union during the war. Shaw was shot through the heart and killed fighting alongside his men at the battle of Fort Wagner. Although the 54<sup>th</sup> never captured Fort Wagner and suffered astounding losses in the battle, their valor on the battlefield was widely acclaimed. Shaw's life at the front lines is at first glance a perfect example of Roosevelt's ideal of strenuousness. But what James finds so remarkable about Shaw is not his military courage. The bellicose nature of human beings makes this kind of courage all too easy. What James praises are the "unselfish public deeds" that sprung from Shaw's "more lonely courage."<sup>94</sup>

Before his involvement with the 54<sup>th</sup>, Shaw was Captain of the Massachusetts 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment. The 2<sup>nd</sup> was a revered unit already tested in battle and Shaw was already on the path to promotion and recognition within it. When Shaw was invited to lead the experiment of the 54<sup>th</sup> he had to choose between the successes and standing that his present career promised or the loneliness, ridicule, and possible failure he faced fighting shoulder to shoulder with African-American soldiers. While he had endured some of the most gory and devastating violence of the civil war by this point, in terms of social standing "he had till then been walking socially on the sunny side of life." Shaw drew on a different kind of courage to break with social expectation and make the risky decision to lead the 54<sup>th</sup>. What led him, James argues, was his commitment to the tenets of a pluralistic faith where each individual has a story to tell. In an instance of great rhetoric, James subverts the imperialist's own rhetoric to describe this pluralistic faith as "our American religion.... the faith that a man requires no master to take care of him, and that common people can work out their salvation well enough together if left free to try."<sup>95</sup> It was slavery's affront to this faith that gave Shaw the confidence to withstand his own loneliness and doubts about the soldiers under his command to lead the 54<sup>th</sup> into battle.

Against Roosevelt, James argues it is this lesser kind of courage that sustains the nation. Strenuousness is a political good because it draws citizens from their myopic concern with private interests and makes them willing to put them aside, and even sacrifice them, in service to the democratic system that sustains their individuality. It is only where the strenuousness is drawn out by the tentativeness and uncertainty of things – their unfinished and unfinishable quality of democratic lack – that it becomes a democratic form of respect.

The habits Shaw displays are examples of the sublime mix of respect and courage a pluralistic universe demands of us all. Shaw was a hero who sacrificed his life for the principles of justice, but perhaps more importantly he was an exemplar of a more quotidian minor hero who had the integrity to break with convention and do the right thing when it mattered. The success of American democracy relies on both, but it is only

through balancing of the former by the latter that any hope for democracy resides. What America needs, then, is not new laws nor monuments, but rather new habits of both courage and self-constraint. This courage is needed because “democracy is still upon its trial.” James concludes his oration by underscoring this fact to his audience. Democratic courage depends on the fragile combination of two habits carried over into public life, “habits so homely that they lend themselves to no rhetorical expression, yet habits more precious, perhaps, than any that the human race has gained.” These are the habits of respect for those with whom we disagree, and the habit of conviction in the pursuit of justice. It was by breaking with the first habit that “the slave States nearly wrecked our Nation” and by holding to the second that “the free States save her life.”<sup>96</sup>

### 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter argues that William James’ critique of docility provides a novel and attractive model of democratic social criticism. In contrast to Tocqueville and Roosevelt, James provides an account of democratic participation that does not lament the lack of commonality and mutuality in the empty space of a democratic regime, but rather embraces it as a positive resource of democratic individualism. Against the fantasy of the nation that drives the Tocquevillean thesis – the claim that the individuality of democratic culture is self destructive and requires that democracy be grounded in some prior unity or commonality – James turns to a minimalist and pluralist vision of democratic citizenship that emphasizes the bicameral habits of conviction and constraint. Avoiding both the disciplinary powers of the state, and the inflammatory rhetoric of empire, James offers a model of democratic politics that is premised on imagination and inspiration. I provide a case study of this democratic storytelling with James’s example of the Robert Gould Shaw’s civic courage.

James hopes examples like Shaw and his invitation to find faith in a pluralistic universe may empower an active but responsive form of democratic citizenship. Yet James is the first to remind us that there are only may be’s and not must be’s in a pluralistic universe. The destiny of such a universe “hangs on an *if*, or on a lot of *ifs*.”<sup>97</sup> But these *if*’s might be a lot more insurmountable than James often makes them out to be. As a public intellectual James spoke to a specific audience, but too often the fact that this was only one audience amongst a plurality of possible others seems to fade away. He was a Harvard dandy who wrote and spoke for wealthy students who often went on to become influential actors on the American national stage. For this audience, James’s imaginative message must have been a breath of fresh air. But much more than fresh air would be needed to raise up most Americans from the dire working conditions, racial acrimony, and gender subjugation that held them in docility. James found an exemplary instance of civic courage in Shaw that he hoped his audience could connect to. But aren’t the black soldiers who fought and died for a Union that never quite accepted them too instances of a courage worthy of praise? Is imagination enough to make them too what DuBois calls “a coworker in the kingdom of culture”?<sup>98</sup> In other words, James, much like the contemporary advocates of a democratic ethos criticized in chapter 1, is too sanguine about the nature of power in the production and reproduction of docile citizens, and not critical enough of the power and privilege that his own political strategies rely on. The politics of making and breaking habits will have to give a central place to the power of

imagination and an ethos of moderately alienated citizenship that James so articulately evokes, but will need to combine this with a more critical attention to power and the limits of individual action. I turn to this issue now in the next two chapters.

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<sup>1</sup> On docility as a democratic vice see Alex Zakaras, *Individualism and Mass Democracy: Mill, Emerson, and the Burdens of Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18. The analysis of docility developed in this chapter is deeply indebted to Zakaras' analysis, as well as the important contributions of Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), Kateb's 'Individualism, Communitarianism, and Docility' in George Kateb, *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), and Dana Villa, *Public Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008)

<sup>2</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 483

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Dumm has also argued that individual withdrawal, or loneliness, ought to be considered a democratic resource. Dumm does not connect this argument to James's political writings, but does draw inspiration from Emerson, Thoreau and DuBois, all fellow travellers of James's brand of individualism. See Thomas Dumm, *Loneliness as a Way of Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008)

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion of Foucault's "paradox of the relations of capacity and power" in Chapter 1.

<sup>5</sup> The locus classicus for these rejections is Bruce Kuklick's account of James as simply apolitical. See Bruce Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). Part of this skepticism is due to the fact that it has primarily been intellectual historians who have done the most work to track James's views on politics. Because of their scholarly interest on the social and intellectual distance of James's politics from the present, historians like Robert Westbrook are struck by the seeming "strangeness" of James's social and political thought. See Robert Westbrook, "Our Kinsman, William James," in *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Hope* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005)

<sup>6</sup> In this sense, James's social and political thought meets Sheldon Wolin definition of an 'epic' political theory: epic in its magnitude to include the whole political world, in its effort to devise new cognitive and normative standards, in its intentions to address public concern, in its critical task, in its prioritization of problems-in-the-world instead of problems-in-theory. Sheldon Wolin, "Political Theory as Vocation," *American Political Science Review* 63, no. 4 (1969)

<sup>7</sup> Deborah Coon provides a persuasive case that James's politics should properly be described as "anarchist individualism". George Cotkin, who book is still the most comprehensive treatment of James's politics, also suggests that James should be considered an anarchist pluralist. See Deborah J. Coon, "'One Moment of the World's Salvation': Anarchism and the Radicalization of William James," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 1 (1996) and George Cotkin, *William James, Public Philosopher* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). By contrast, Cornel West reads James as an libertarian, while Colin Koopman argues that James's politics is better described in the Foucaultian language of a concern for "practices of freedom" or "ethics". Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) and Colin Koopman, "William James' Politics of Personal Freedom," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 19, no. 2 (2005)

<sup>8</sup> Kateb and Miller both acknowledge this affinity but do not develop the point in any detail. See Kateb, *Inner Ocean*, 246, Joshua I. Miller, *Democratic Temperament: The Legacy of William James* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 131n.86.

<sup>9</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Essays & Poems* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 261

<sup>10</sup> In Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, vol. II (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935), 316

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<sup>11</sup> This indirect value of democracy is poetically expressed by Walt Whitman: "For it is not that democracy is of exhaustive account, in itself. Perhaps, indeed, it is, (like Nature) of no account in itself. It is that, as we see, it is the best, perhaps only, fit and full means, formulator, general caller-forth, trainer, for the million, not for grand material personality only, but for immortal souls." Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," in *Poetry and Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1996), 971-972. Miller and Lacey's depiction on James as a democratic overlook the centrality of individuality to this political thought. Robert Lacey starts his study of James's politics from his self-description in *Pragmatism* of the social and participatory character of pragmatic inquiry as "so very democratic" and accordingly proceeds to interpret James's ethics, politics, and psychology as providing the ideological groundwork of a robust participatory democracy. However, if we read James not as a theorist of inquiry first and foremost, but rather as an engaged and reflective commentator on American democracy, we see that his support for democracy is always only tepid in comparison to his enthusiasm for American individuality. See Robert J. Lacey, *American Pragmatism and Democratic Faith* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008)

<sup>12</sup> de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 3, 6

<sup>13</sup> Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 19

<sup>14</sup> de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 483

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 9

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 506

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 482

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 512

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 243

<sup>20</sup> Kateb, *Inner Ocean*, 222

<sup>21</sup> de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 82-3; Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College De France 1977-78*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

<sup>22</sup> de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 663

<sup>23</sup> I owe this formulation of Tocqueville's paradox to Cheryl Welch, *De Tocqueville* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 78

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, 18. On the doctrine of the king's two bodies see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study of Medieval Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957)

<sup>26</sup> de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 279

<sup>27</sup> William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 169

<sup>28</sup> de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 509

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 663

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<sup>30</sup> Coon, "'One Moment of the World's Salvation,'" 94

<sup>31</sup> On Tocqueville as social scientist see Jon Elster, *Alexis De Tocqueville: The First Social Scientist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). On James as public intellectual see Cotkin, *William James, Public Philosopher*.

<sup>32</sup> Docility is my term, not James. His use of complacency, however, denotes the same phenomenon.

<sup>33</sup> W.J. to Josephine Lowell, Dec 6, 1903, in Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 10: July 1902-March 1905 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 339

<sup>34</sup> Charles Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals," in *Philosophical Papers: Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

<sup>35</sup> W.J. to Sarah Wyman Whitman, June 7, 1899 in Perry, *Thought and Character*, 315-316

<sup>36</sup> I owe this way of putting this point to Colin Koopman. Private correspondence.

<sup>37</sup> James memorably expressed his antipathy towards this elective affinity in a letter to Elizabeth Glendowner Evans dated February 15, 1901, "Damn great empires! – including that of the Absolute. You see how much crime it necessarily has to involve." Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 9: July 1899-1901 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 422

<sup>38</sup> On modern power as bi-polar, exercised both over the abstract population and concrete individual bodies, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), part five

<sup>39</sup> William James, "The Ph.D. Octopus," in *Writings 1902-1910*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1118

<sup>40</sup> To say this however is not to say that he is an unblinking champion of it either. For the claim that James's radical pluralism unwittingly provides the ideological framework for the corporate transformation of the economy in the American 19<sup>th</sup> century see James Livingston, *Pragmatism, Feminism, and Democracy: Rethinking the Politics of American History* (New York: Routledge 2001). For a criticism of Livingston's argument see Westbrook, "Our Kinsman, William James," .

<sup>41</sup> William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," in *Writings 1902-1910*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1287

<sup>42</sup> William James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," in *The Will to Believe* (New York: Dover, 1956), 211

<sup>43</sup> William James, "The Sentiment of Rationality," in *The Will to Believe* (New York: Dover, 1956), 86

<sup>44</sup> However, as Flathman correctly notes, James did argue for some basic institutional devices like the separation of powers at the national level and the division of authority between review boards and oversight committees in the debates on medical licensing he was involved in. Richard Flathman, "The Bases, Limits, and Values of Pluralism: An Engagement with William James," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149, no. 2 (2005): 184

<sup>45</sup> William James, "Robert Gould Shaw," in *Essays in Religion and Morality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 73

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<sup>46</sup> William James, "The Philippine Tangle," in *Essays, Comments, and Reviews* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 157

<sup>47</sup> Robert Beisner, *Twelve against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists 1898-1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968)

<sup>48</sup> On James's political turn see Frank Lentricchia, "On the Ideologies of Poetic Modernism, 1890-1913: The Example of William James," in *Reconstructing American Literary History*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); Coon, "One Moment of the World's Salvation',"

<sup>49</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life: Speech to the Hamilton Club, Chicago, April 10, 1899," in *Letters and Speeches*, ed. Louis Auchincloss (New York: Library of America, 2004), 755

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 758

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 757). See de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 438-39

<sup>53</sup> William James, "Governor Roosevelt's Oration," in *Essays, Comments, and Reviews* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 163

<sup>54</sup> Roosevelt, "Strenuous Life," 764

<sup>55</sup> James, "Roosevelt's Oration," 163

<sup>56</sup> Philipines Tangle, 156

<sup>57</sup> Kateb, *Inner Ocean*, 227

<sup>58</sup> On the mugwumps see Beisner, *Twelve against Empire*

<sup>59</sup> James, "The Philippine Tangle," 158

<sup>60</sup> Address to Graduate School at Harvard, Jan. 9<sup>th</sup>, 1902 in Perry, *Thought and Character*, 299

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 298

<sup>62</sup> On the historical and conceptual connections between James's pluralism and the discourse of pluralism in political science see Avigail Eisenberg, *Reconstructing Political Pluralism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), David Schlosberg, "Reconstructing the Pluralist Universe," *Political Research Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (1998)

<sup>63</sup> William James, "Some Problems of Philosophy," in *Writings 1902-1910*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (New York: Library of America, 1987), 960. On Laski's debt and divergence from James see Kennan Ferguson, *William James: Politics in the Pluriverse* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), chapter 2.

<sup>64</sup> James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," 202

<sup>65</sup> See Flathman, "The Bases, Limits, and Values of Pluralism: An Engagement with William James," 165-166

<sup>66</sup> Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, expanded ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 20

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<sup>67</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 186-7. Taken to the extreme this prioritization on securing the space of politics, rather than action and contestation itself, has led much recent literature in democracy theory away from a concern with concrete struggles and into the controlled environment of the focus group and the mini-public. On this trend see Simone Chambers, "Rhetoric and the Public Sphere: Has Deliberative Democracy Abandoned Mass Society?," *Political Theory* 37, no. 3 (2009)

<sup>68</sup> James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, vol. 1: Democracy and Civic Freedom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

<sup>69</sup> Andrew F. Smith, "William James and the Politics of Moral Conflict," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 40, no. 1 (2004): 142

<sup>70</sup> James, "Sentiment," 86

<sup>71</sup> William James, "A Pluralistic Universe," in *Writings 1902-1910*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (New York: Library of America, 1987), 751

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 650

<sup>73</sup> William James, "The Dilemma of Determinism," in *The Will to Believe* (New York: Dover, 1956), 154

<sup>74</sup> Flathman, "The Bases, Limits, and Values of Pluralism: An Engagement with William James," 171

<sup>75</sup> James, "A Pluralistic Universe," 645

<sup>76</sup> But this is not to say that James's pluralism accommodates all ideals. As pluralistic, it acknowledges the persistent conflict amongst values and prohibits exclusive ideals that fail to abide by the terms of fair play and agonistic respect that allows this conflict to sustain itself as a non-antagonistic one. On James and the limits of toleration see Smith, "William James and the Politics of Moral Conflict," .

<sup>77</sup> In this sense, James pluralism is an instance of what some democratic theorists call a 'weak' ontology. See Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: On the Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000)

<sup>78</sup> James, "A Pluralistic Universe," 762

<sup>79</sup> On abulia and the explosive will see Chapter 2

<sup>80</sup> Miller, *Democratic Temperament*, 92

<sup>81</sup> James, "A Pluralistic Universe," 666

<sup>82</sup> James, "Dilemma," 177

<sup>83</sup> William James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," in *Writings 1878-1899*, ed. Gerald E. Myers (New York: Library of America, 1992), 860

<sup>84</sup> William James, "The Gospel of Relaxation," in *Writings 1878-1899*, ed. Gerald E. Myers (New York: Library of America, 1992), 834

<sup>85</sup> See James, "Moral Equivalent," John Dewey's judgment of James's proposal for a war on nature capture the basically elitist bias of the whole enterprise: "The idea that most people need any substitute for fighting for life, or that they have to have life made artificially hard for them in order to keep up their battling nerve could have come only from a man who was brought up on aristocrat and who had lived a

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sheltered existence. I think [James] had no real intimation of that the 'labour problem' has always been for the great mass of people a much harder fight than any war; in fact one reason people are so ready to fight [in wars] is the fact that it is so much easier than their ordinary existence." J.D. to Scudder Klyce, 29 May 1915, cited in Westbrook, "Our Kinsman, William James," 59 .

<sup>86</sup> Miller, *Democratic Temperament*, 119

<sup>87</sup> Robert E. Goodin, "Democratic Deliberation Within," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 29, no. 1 (2000). Sheldon Wolin argues that imagination is at the heart of the theorist's contribution to politics. Through imagination the theorist represents an aesthetic seeing of the world in its "corrected fullness" in a manner that is meant to help guide political thought and action. See Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Part One, Chapter one

<sup>88</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 71

<sup>89</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 43

<sup>90</sup> James, "Gospel," 832

<sup>91</sup> Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 4384

<sup>92</sup> William James, "The Varieties of Religious Experience " in *Writings 1902-1910*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (New York: Library of America, 1987), 333

<sup>93</sup> James, "Gospel," 832

<sup>94</sup> James, "Shaw," 67, 72

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 67, 66

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 74, *ibid*, *ibid*

<sup>97</sup> James, "Some Problems of Philosophy," 1099

<sup>98</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, "The Souls of Black Folks," in *Writings*, ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: Library of America, 1986), 365