

***On the importance of a Jamesian pragmatic approach in order to make our
ideas clear***

Contemporary debates in the field of philosophy of religion are largely dominated by the heated discussions and writings of the so-called New Atheists (Dawkins, Dennett, Harris and Hitchens) and their opponents (Haught, McGrath, to name just a few). The polemics, however, tend to overlook an interesting point. Dawkins, Dennett and Harris also talk about spirituality, religiosity et cetera. Yet, it remains very unclear what exactly is meant by these concepts and ideas. What should we understand when Dawkins talks about the ‘quasi-mystical feelings’ of scientists, naturalists and atheists? What does he mean by ‘Einsteinian religion’?

These are questions that seem to beg for an application of Peirce’s pragmatic maxim in order to make these ideas clear. In my lecture, however, I will argue that Peirce’s method, based on realism, will not bring a full solution. On the other hand, a Jamesian approach, which is nominalistic, will shed more light on this problem, in order to disentangle the verbal disputes concerning spirituality, religious and mystical experience. This will not only show the contemporary relevance of a Jamesian approach; it will also raise a new and surprising question in relation to these experiences in the light of naturalism and atheism.

Keywords: religion, religious experience, Peirce and James, contemporary (relevance of) pragmatism.

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