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**The American Republic:  
William James on Political Leadership**

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Since Plato's *Republic*, philosophers have outlined their expectations for political leaders and have offered judgments on the actions and decisions made by political leaders in their given context. It turns out that the American philosopher, William James, does not differ from this philosophical tradition. Although it has been assumed by professional philosophers—and even scholars of William James's work—that James has no political philosophy, we now have a wave of books reconstructing James's political philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Within this wave, Trygve Throntveit's *William James and the Quest for an Ethical Republic* serves as the most exhaustive and in-depth exploration of James's version of Plato's *Republic*.

Plato's *Republic* becomes helpful background for understanding Throntveit's argument for two reasons. First, the notion of an "ethical republic" does place James's thinking closer to Plato's political philosophy than any other reconstruction of James to this point. Second, like Plato's indebtedness to the system of Greek gods and goddesses, Throntveit begins his book by outlining the role of religion in James's political philosophy. The first chapter is "The Ethical Origins of James's Pragmatism," which

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<sup>1</sup> See the following: Kennan Ferguson, *William James: Politics in the Pluriverse*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007); Alexander Livingston's *Damn Great Empires! William James and the Politics of Pragmatism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Evan Thomas, *The War Lovers: Roosevelt, Lodge, Hearst, and the Rush to Empire, 1898*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 2011).

claims William's father—Henry James, Sr.—and his religious convictions as the backdrop for William's unique moral reasoning. The second chapter, "Religion and the Refinement of James's Pragmatism," demonstrates how James's political philosophy cannot and should not be divorced from his religious reasoning. Our claim is not that Throntveit turns William James into a Platonist—when it comes to James's political philosophy—but, rather, that more than any other scholar of James's work Throntveit succeeds in connecting James's political philosophy with a philosophical tradition that begins with Plato's *Republic*: borrowing from moral and religious reasoning to lay bear one's expectations for politics and political leaders, and using moral and religious reasoning to make strong judgments either for or against actual political leaders in office.

Turning now specifically to Throntveit's treatment of James's political philosophy, we defend the following claims. First, Throntveit's successfully argues for the Jamesean understanding of and the virtues required for an "ethical republic" (sections 1 & 2). Second, Throntveit's research offers fruitful ways for thinking about how James used his own moral reasoning to make strong judgments against actual political leaders during his time (sections 3 & 4). Third, but not discussed by Throntveit, James misapplies his own moral reasoning when he privately champions the assassination of President William McKinley (also section 4). Fourth, also not discussed by Throntveit, James switches from critic to cheerleader of Roosevelt's presidency in a way that seems unnecessary (also section 4). We conclude by simply raising the question of whether James actually provides a good model for the relationship between philosophical critic and political leader, and what of Throntveit's book can be applied to 21<sup>st</sup> century American society.

## §1. What Is an Ethical Republic?

The quest for an “ethical republic” includes certain expectations for both citizens and political leaders on the terms of moral and religious reasoning. For our purposes, we focus on the relation between James’s moral reasoning and the quest for an “ethical republic.” In his reconstruction of James’s political philosophy, found in chapters entitled “The Ethical Republic” and “Citizen James,” Trygve Throntveit emphasizes the meaning of the phrase “ethical republic” as well as particular virtues required for both citizens and political leaders.<sup>2</sup>

According to Throntveit, there are three features of an “ethical republic.” First, an “ethical republic” requires ideals: “Ethics, for James, is the process of deciding which of these free yet imperative moral ideas—or better *ideals*, given their prospective nature—should be channeled into action...and how.”<sup>3</sup> The “ethical,” in “ethical republic,” means that ideals—as “prospective” propositions—must be identified and then strategized in terms of action. James does not neglect the need for ideals in order to favor action but, instead, thinks that ideals are necessary for knowing *what* actions and *how* to implement those actions.

Second, the key words for understanding an “ethical republic” are freedom, constraints, and responsibilities. Throntveit writes: “James’s trope of an ‘ethical republic’ suggests not only the *freedom* but the *constraints* and *responsibilities* of moral life.”<sup>4</sup> By

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<sup>2</sup> We use the phrases, “political leaders” and “political leadership,” in line with the scholarship found in Leadership Studies most recently represented by the very helpful volume *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*, ed. R. A. W. Rhodes & Paul t’ Hart, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Trygve V.R. Throntveit, *William James and the Quest for an Ethical Republic*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 92; henceforth, this title will be cited as QER.

<sup>4</sup> QER, 91; emphasis added.

“freedom,” Throntveit means the “persistent ‘free play of parts’ in the world.”<sup>5</sup> Politics can be considered “good” when and only when the “parts”—aka citizens—have the ability to be free and playful in their own moral reasoning. For James, the “goodness” of politics becomes dependent upon and determined by individual citizens developing their own conceptions of the “good” and the “right.” Throntveit clarifies this point: “Moral ideas, in James’s view, are mentally generated, freely entertained, freely pursued or rejected conceptions of the good—a species of the ‘ideal and inward relations’ of consciousness he first described in *The Principles of Psychology*.”<sup>6</sup> Politics cannot force upon citizens conceptions of the “good” or the “right,” and political freedom involves allowing citizens to choose what suits their own interests and purposes in terms of moral reasoning—both from traditional moral theories and freely generating novel modes of moral reasoning. According to Throntveit, however, James maintains the close relationship between freedom and obligation: “Thus it is not [only] our freedom that James affirms..., but our obligations to a universe [as well].”<sup>7</sup> If Throntveit is right about this (and we think he is), then it firmly puts James into the Kantian and deontological tradition of moral reasoning—which always keeps freedom and obligation closely tied together. While Throntveit seems to allow for a soft version of reading James in the deontological tradition,<sup>8</sup> he helpfully articulates a key difference between James and Kant

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<sup>5</sup> QER, 98.

<sup>6</sup> QER, 87.

<sup>7</sup> QER, 85.

<sup>8</sup> We mean this only in regards to keeping freedom and obligation tied closely together. There are times when Throntveit makes it sound like James dismisses Kant’s deontological reasoning wholesale—such as, “James denigrated Kant as a purveyor of ‘ponderous artificialities’ whose transcendental morality ignored the countless concrete situations in which equally good wills clashed” (QER, 88).

on the nature of obligations: “James argued that all obligations correspond to concrete, personal demands that certain circumstances obtain over others; contrary to Kantian formulas, there can be no obligation to abstract principles divorced from specific consequences.”<sup>9</sup> James keeps freedom and obligation closely tied together, and he understands the nature of obligations in terms of the “personal demands” placed onto us by the “certain circumstances” of others.

According to Throntveit, freedom also involves constraints. Claiming that constraints are both “physical and social,” Throntveit elaborates further: “as with all ideas, there are limits to what the will can do with them [ideas]. The hypothetical goods that moral ideas represent cannot always be realized. Crucially, however, the will’s freedom is preserved under these constraints.”<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, freedom always comes with constraints because there is a limited set of possibilities within politics. On the other hand, we should not feel constrained in relation to the inherited ideas and theories of what works within politics. On this point, Throntveit writes: “a society in which all individuals were free from inherited constraints would be nearly limitless in its moral potential.”<sup>11</sup> While we do have constraints in terms of what can “be realized,” we should not see these constraints in terms of inherited traditions and ways-of-doing-politics.

Freedom also entails responsibilities. Echoing arguments found in both Jewish philosophy and Transcendentalism,<sup>12</sup> Throntveit interprets James’s moral reasoning in this way:

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<sup>9</sup> QER, 92.

<sup>10</sup> QER, 91.

<sup>11</sup> QER, 131.

[U]niquely, [James's] moral ideas weld freedom to responsibility. The programs of action they suggest have an imperative cast; they are not [merely] hypotheses about what could be, but about what ought to be, and what we ought to do. If that "ought" exists already, the imperative is to keep attending to and enjoying it. But since morality has no basis in a static external order, the "higher, more penetrating" moral ideas typically present themselves as "probable causes of future experience, factors to which the environment and the lessons it has so far taught us must learn to bend."<sup>13</sup>

We point out how this argument echoes both American Transcendentalism and the Jewish philosophical tradition as a subtle way to challenge Throntveit's use of the word "uniquely" in this passage. Connecting freedom with responsibility, in the ways that James does, is not unique to James. Our guess is that James learned this connection through personally knowing Ralph Waldo Emerson and reading his essays.<sup>14</sup>

The third feature of an "ethical republic," within a Jamesean framework, concerns the role of the intellect. Arguing that an "ethical republic" requires also an "intellectual republic," Throntveit claims: "loyalty to an 'intellectual republic' that respected and protected individual autonomy in public as well as private life—an arrangement demanding from each member as much concern for others as for him or herself."<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, Throntveit observes that an initial implication of this feature of the "ethical republic" is that it distinguishes from James's republicanism from the American Republican Party as it has to be known and understood over time: "James's moral philosophy does not...mesh well with the individualistic, small-government, free-market,

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<sup>12</sup> On the connection between freedom and responsibility in American transcendentalism and Jewish Philosophy, see Jacob L. Goodson's *Strength of Mind: Courage, Hope, Freedom, Knowledge*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Press, 2018), chapter 3.

<sup>13</sup> QER, 91-92; quoting James's "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life."

<sup>14</sup> In his wonderful biography of James, Robert Richardson writes: "In July 1871, James acquired two volumes of Emerson's writings" (Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism*, [Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006], 125); "[b]y 1873, James found himself not only accepting Emerson's outlook but, to some extent, living it himself" (Richardson, *William James*, 154).

<sup>15</sup> QER, 109.

libertarian, constitutional-originalist, or socially conservative ideologies associated with the United States' Republican Party at various points from the late nineteenth century through the early twenty-first [century]."<sup>16</sup> Throntveit clarifies and elaborates on this observation: although James is a "self-described 'individualist', he also considered expansive, equal, and effective freedoms for all people, regardless of economic achievements, social station, or political favor, to be fundamentals of societal health."<sup>17</sup> Political leaders *ensure, equalize, and expand* freedom, intellectual growth, and openness; citizens *enjoy* the freedom, intellectual growth, and openness that political leaders make possible. This Jamesean point strikes us as resembling Isaiah Berlin's distinction between "*freedom from*" and "*freedom for*": from a Jamesean perspective, political leaders are obligated to make possible a "*freedom from*" constraints for citizens whereas citizens are responsible for their own versions of "*freedom for*"—freedom for excelling, flourishing, and thoughtfulness.<sup>18</sup>

What are the obligations or responsibilities of citizens, however, to the life of the mind (if any)? Is James thinking strictly in top-down ways about how the government

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<sup>16</sup> QER, 109-110.

<sup>17</sup> QER, 110.

<sup>18</sup> The famous passage from Isaiah Berlin's "Two Concepts of Liberty" is: "The 'positive' sense of the word 'liberty' derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious persons, which are my own, not by causes which affect me...from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer—deciding, bit being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realizing them.... I wish, above all, to be conscious of myself as thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by reference to my own ideas and purposes. I feel free to the degree that I believe this to be true, and [I feel] enslaved to the degree that I am made to realize that it is not" (Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy, [New York: Oxford University Press, 2002], 178).

protects and respects “individual autonomy in public as well as private life”? How can citizens keep political leaders accountable in terms of ensuring that the American republic is an “intellectual republic”?

## **§2. Virtues Required for Citizens and Political Leaders**

Throntveit claims that there are three virtues required for life together in the “ethical republic,” but he ends up defending four virtues: experimentalism, historical wisdom, empathy, and courage. Initially, courage does not make the list of required virtues. However, Throntveit concludes both “The Ethical Republic” and “Citizen James” with fascinating accounts and defenses of courage as a moral virtue. We explain each in the order that Throntveit presents them.

Experimentalism is not usually considered a virtue, but Throntveit makes the case that it is. Experimentalism relates to nurturing one’s moral imagination: “James believed exerting one’s moral imagination in novel directions could realize goods habitually ignored, or suggest goods conceivable only in contexts of regret and failure.”<sup>19</sup> Without the virtue of experimentalism, we would not be able to “realize goods habitually ignored” by us. Experimentalism allows us to be novel but to do so in ways that are virtuous, not vicious. Because of this, Throntveit argues, “[e]thical experimentation causes conflict, but it also spurs moral discourse and tests, refines, or displaces conventional means of maximizing freedom.”<sup>20</sup> Experimentalism “causes conflict” because some people refuse or reject novelty, but this conflict becomes worth it because the virtue of experimentalism maximizes freedom within an “ethical republic.”

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<sup>19</sup> QER, 102.

<sup>20</sup> QER, 102.

Leadership theorists, James Kouzes and Barry Posner, provide language that can be used to explain the necessity of experimentalism for political leaders. In *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner argue that there are five practices of exemplary leadership: (1) model the way, (2) inspire a shared vision, (3) enable others to act, (4) encourage the heart, and (5) challenge the process. This final leadership practice, challenge the process, seems to be the correlate within leadership studies for Jamesean experimentalism. For Kouzes and Posner, “the work of leaders is change. And all change requires that leaders actively seek ways to make things better, to grow, innovate, and improve.”<sup>21</sup> This is a similar call to action that James asks of political leaders. James applies virtues to political leaders in ways that they do not apply to citizens. Each member of society has a separate, though equally important role, in ensuring the American republic is virtuous. While experimentalism is not typically considered to be a virtue, in the instance of positive leadership change, Kouzes and Posner maintain that it should be. Challenging the process does come with its limits, and this practice follows similar guidelines to Jamesean experimentalism. Indeed, challenge the process can be defined as searching for opportunities, experimenting, and taking risks. According to Kouzes and Posner, leaders must encourage initiative in themselves and in others. When creating an environment in which leaders and followers feel comfortable looking for change, leaders must also keep in mind the strength that comes from experiences—or, as we discuss later on, the virtue of historical wisdom. According to Kouzes and Posner, “Learning happens when people feel comfortable in talking about both successes and

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<sup>21</sup> James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*. Fourth Edition, (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007), 164.

failures.”<sup>22</sup> Through searching for opportunities, leaders might be able to seize the initiative and look outward for innovative ways to improve. In addition to being proactive, leaders must “constantly invite and create new initiatives.”<sup>23</sup> For James this is the exercise of imaginative morality.

In a previously published essay, one of us (Goodson) made the case that Jamesian experimentalism requires two virtues: humility and patience. In order to clarify and contribute to Throntveit’s account of James’s political philosophy, we seek to apply these two virtues to political leaders in relation to how they understand the virtue of experimentalism.<sup>24</sup> In relation to experimentalism, Goodson defines these virtues in these terms: “we need to display humility concerning how much we determine the world, and we need to practice patience regarding what we can know about the world.”<sup>25</sup> It does not require much of an inference to apply this to the question of political leadership: political leaders ought “to display humility concerning how much [they] determine the world” through experimentalism, policy-making, and rhetoric, and they “need to practice patience regarding what [they] can know about the world” in relation to the citizens whom they serve.

The second virtue defended and explained by Throntveit is what he calls historical wisdom, and it relates directly to balancing the virtue of experimentalism. In order to avoid the potential chaos of experimentalism, Throntveit argues, “historical awareness

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<sup>22</sup> Kouzes & Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 200.

<sup>23</sup> Kouzes & Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: Fourth edition*, 183.

<sup>24</sup> Goodson is grateful to Dr. Cheryl Rude for her suggestion about how his use of the virtues of humility and patience apply within Leadership Studies—a suggestion she made in 2015 when she introduced Goodson for the Hall of Fame Lecture at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas.

<sup>25</sup> Jacob L. Goodson, “Experience, Reason, and the Virtues: On William James’s Reinstatement of the Vague,” in *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 31 (3): 243.

of...practical needs and contingent factors driving it in the past...suppl[ies] wisdom to discipline innovation without discouraging it in the present.”<sup>26</sup> While Throntveit does not directly make this connection, we argue that the use of historical wisdom becomes necessary for the virtue of experimentalism.<sup>27</sup> Throntveit says, “over generations, societies perform ‘an experiment of the most searching kind’.”<sup>28</sup> The leadership theorists, Kouzes and Posner, also use the language of “experimentation” when discussing what can be learned from the past: “That’s what experimentation is all about... there’s a lot of trial and error involved in testing new concepts, new methods, and new practices.”<sup>29</sup> For James, as well as for Kouzes and Posner, the two virtues of experimentalism and historical wisdom do not work alone.

Experimentalism makes novelty possible while historical wisdom keeps society grounded in customs, norms, and traditions. We are reminded of James’s famous argument about the significance of habits: “habit is thus the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent.”<sup>30</sup> Historical wisdom plays this role within an “ethical republic.” Throntveit continues to define historical wisdom in relation to experimentalism: “Thus, while moral innovators are crucial to social development, history and the society it shapes provide resources from which all experimenters draw,

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<sup>26</sup> QER, 103.

<sup>27</sup> In *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner make a similar claim when they use the language of “learning from experience” (Kouzes & Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: Fourth edition*, 199-200). In order for the leadership practice challenge the process to properly be fulfilled, the leader must take into account the learned lessons that has been gathered from previous experiences, whether that be personal experience, or that of another.

<sup>28</sup> QER, 103.

<sup>29</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 199.

<sup>30</sup> William James, *Principles of Psychology: Two Volumes*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), 1.121.

and impose constraints under which they operate.”<sup>31</sup> Historical wisdom creates boundaries, guides, and indeed provides leadership within an “ethical republic.”<sup>32</sup>

By making the argument that experimentalism and historical wisdom belong as virtues, Throntveit throws James’s moral reasoning into a complex debate about the relationship between freedom and virtue. Some philosophers argue that freedom, itself, is a virtue—which means that freedom can be practiced in virtuous or vicious ways. Other philosophers argue that freedom is a condition for virtue or for establishing the virtues. Throntveit flips the script: on his interpretation of James’s moral reasoning, the virtue of experimentalism becomes a condition for freedom. Then, based upon what we learned in the previous section, freedom leads to responsibility. We can diagram James’s moral reasoning in this way<sup>33</sup>:

The Virtue of Experimentalism + Historical Awareness → Freedom → Responsibility

As a virtue, experimentalism becomes a necessary condition for the type of freedom James envisions within an “ethical republic.” Notice the claim is not that experimentalism serves as a condition for freedom in general; rather it serves as a condition for the type of freedom sought after within an “ethical republic.”

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<sup>31</sup> QER, 104.

<sup>32</sup> The author claims that James’s essay, “Great Men and their Environment,” can be read as James’s description of a model for “historical wisdom.” It seems quite appropriate, then, that Barbara Kellerman includes James’s “Great Men and their Environment” in her “source book” on political leadership; see Kellerman (editor), *Political Leadership: A Source Book*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), chapter 3. We are grateful to Dr. Cheryl Rude for pointing us in the direction of Kellerman’s work as we researched the present essay.

<sup>33</sup> The following is our formulation; Throntveit’s formulation might look like this: The Virtue of Experimentalism → Freedom → Responsibility.

Empathy is the third virtue defended and explained by Throntveit, and he thinks of empathy as relating to the previous two virtues. He argues, “the virtue of empathy . . . , helps ensure that our strenuous pursuit of the first two virtues redounds to the health of the whole republic.”<sup>34</sup> How do experimentalism and historical wisdom serve all citizens? The virtue of empathy allows and enables this to happen. What is empathy? Throntveit’s answer: empathy is “a basic respect for the moral lives of those least familiar to us, and a genuine interest in the relations they bear to our own moral lives.”<sup>35</sup> Empathy should not be equated with tolerance, according to Throntveit. In fact, Throntveit goes as far as to contrast James’s view of empathy with his (James’s) defense of tolerance. Throntveit argues that empathy ought to be understood as a more suitable virtue—than tolerance is—within an “ethical republic.” Before assessing Throntveit’s contrast between empathy and tolerance, we wish to clarify what James means by tolerance. In “What Makes Life Significant,” James claims:

The first thing to learn in intercourse with others is non-interference with their own peculiar ways of being happy, provided those ways do not assume to interfere by violence with ours. No one has insight into all the ideals. No one should presume to judge them off-hand. The pretension to dogmatize about them in each other is the root of most human injustices and cruelties, and the trait in human character most likely to make the angels weep.<sup>36</sup>

The difference between empathy and tolerance, from a Jamesean perspective, concerns to whom the virtue gets directed. Tolerance is directed to everyone whereas empathy is directed toward “those least familiar to us.” If we allow Throntveit’s contrast between these two virtues, then it would have to be on the terms of saying that tolerance is a

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<sup>34</sup> QER, 104.

<sup>35</sup> QER, 104.

<sup>36</sup> James, “What Makes a Life Significant,” in *The Writings of William James*, 645.

personal virtue while empathy is a political virtue.<sup>37</sup> As a political virtue, empathy requires us (a) to pay attention to “those least familiar to us”<sup>38</sup> and (b) to think through how their moral lives “bear [in relation] to our own moral lives.”<sup>39</sup>

The fourth and final virtue required for an “ethical republic” is courage. Toward the end of his chapter, “The Ethical Republic,” Throntveit argues that courage relates to failure, freedom, and responsibility: “Moral courage lies in exercising the freedom and responsibility of choice despite the possibility and past experience of failure.”<sup>40</sup> Moral courage helps us act despite failures that continue to haunt us. This word “haunt”

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<sup>37</sup> For further reflections on the virtue of tolerance in James’s moral reasoning, see Goodson’s “Horny Hands and Dirty Skin: Courage, Humility, Patience, and Tolerance in William James’s Ethics,” in *William James, Moral Philosophy, and the Ethical Life*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), chapter 6.

<sup>38</sup> Beginning on December 22, 2018 (while completing the present essay), President Donald J. Trump began what would appear to be a never-ending United States government shutdown. The government shut down began when President Trump decided to follow through on his lofty campaign promise: the building of a wall on the southern American-Mexican border. The 2018-2019 shutdown is the longest government shutdown to occur in American history, and many government employees have gone without pay for longer than anyone anticipated. National parks have been trashed due to short staffing, and many government employees who live paycheck-to-paycheck must find other sources of income. Since President Trump claims to being among the wealthiest of American citizens, the 2018-2019 government shutdown becomes an excellent 21<sup>st</sup> century example of the need for empathy as a political virtue. Government employees and citizens who live paycheck-to-paycheck certainly are among the “least familiar” in relation to President Trump. In the conclusion of this essay, we raise the question of whether James’s virtues for political leaders are transferable to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>39</sup> In what we found as the initial response to Throntveit’s work on William James’s political philosophy, Sarin Marchetti summarizes Throntveit’s use of the three virtues of experimentalism, historical wisdom, and empathy with these words: “a citizen of such ethical republic should have, promote, and constantly re-affirm in and through her collaborative conduct: experimentalism, historical wisdom, and empathy. According to Throntveit, these virtues would embody James’s commitment to an experimental individualism aimed at one’s moral improvement which is at the same time mindful of the inter-subjective conditions in which such process of self-constitution necessarily takes place. James invites us to engage and commit to those ideals enriching our ‘personal moral worlds’ that, however, often come from others with their alien conditions and prospects. That is, one person’s experimentations cause tensions and conflicts, and this is precisely what trigger us to explore new or overlooked portions of reality and aspects of our subjectivity in order to find solutions to them...” (Sarin Marchetti, *Ethics and Philosophical Critique in William James*, [New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015], 221).

<sup>40</sup> QER, 106.

becomes significant because courage involves moderating our fears, and the fear of failure worries James in the context of politics.

Furthermore, Throntveit connects courage with the possibility for heroism among citizens.<sup>41</sup> However, Throntveit does not spend much time developing this possibility. About this possibility, we add that James's approach to the virtue of courage leads to "heroism"—like Aristotle's does as well—but is not limited to the soldier or warrior (as Aristotle's is).<sup>42</sup> To use a favorite phrase from the tradition of the liberal virtues, James democratizes the virtue of course and makes it possible for all citizens to become heroes. In this regard, we agree with Throntveit's suggestion concerning how James's understanding of the virtue of courage leads to the possibility for all citizens to become heroes.

At the end of "Citizen James," Throntveit argues that a certain type of courage ought to be cultivated by political leaders in particular:

the "lonely courage" to act not for oneself only...but for a greater good; "civic courage," he [James] called it.... Perhaps no passage in James's writings better encapsulates both the ambiguity and power of his political ideal than this equation of "lonely" with "civic," of "courage" with "saving day by day."<sup>43</sup>

Political leaders need a type of courage that seems "lonely" yet, in reality, serves "civic" purposes. An "ethical republic" counts on this type of courage fostered and performed by political leaders in order to achieve this "saving" of the republic "day by day." Throntveit

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<sup>41</sup> See QER, 106.

<sup>42</sup> Robert O'Connell also connects courage and heroism in James's moral reasoning: "the warrior's courage was, for him [James], very close to the heart of the matter. The fact is that none of his other metaphors...convey[s] this need for the 'martial' spirit so congenial to the Jamesian heroic universe" (Robert J. O'Connell, *William James and the Courage to Believe*, [New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1984], 108).

<sup>43</sup> QER, 137.

concludes his discussion on courage for political leaders by contrasting this “day by day” salvation with the tendency of political leaders to wage war. Throntveit says that, for James, the daily acts of saving the republic ultimately *reduces conflict* and *realizes “the ethical republic”* without the “‘need of wars to save them’.”<sup>44</sup> How can a political leader reduce conflict and realize the republic? These two goals can be accomplished—not by some grand gesture (like war)—but through daily acts of civic, lonely courage.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout his writings, William James offers additional nuggets establishing conceptual standards for political leaders.<sup>46</sup> From *The Principles of Psychology*, from the early part of James’s career, Throntveit finds the need for an “heroic mind” for political leaders: “James appeal[s] to...the ‘heroic mind’: the ‘pure inward willingness to face the world’ that characterizes ‘the masters and lords of life’.”<sup>47</sup> We interpret this phrase, “the masters...of life,” to refer to political leaders. To have an “heroic mind,” as a political leader, means to have the volition “to face the world.” Given the analysis concerning courage, it seems reasonable to say that the “inward”-ness aspect required for “fac[ing] the world” relates to the loneliness aspect of courage.

From the “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” basically mid-career for James, Throntveit finds a connection between freedom and sacrifice. Throntveit claims,

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<sup>44</sup> QER, 137.

<sup>45</sup> As scholars who live, think, and write in Kansas, we cannot help but remember this quotation from President Eisenhower concerning the importance of the “day by day” within politics: “Now I realize that on any particular decision a very great amount of heat can be generated. But I do say this: life is not made up of just one decision here, or another one there. It is the total of the decisions that you make in your daily lives with respect to politics.... Government has to do that same thing. It is only in the mass that finally philosophy really emerges” (Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Remarks at Luncheon Meeting of the Republican National Committee and the Republican National Finance Committee,” [February 17, 1955]).

<sup>46</sup> We say additional because the material on the virtues in the previous section obviously set up standards for political leaders as well.

<sup>47</sup> QER, 94.

“Sacrifice—or at least [a] willingness to risk it—is thus the price of fullest freedom in the ethical republic.”<sup>48</sup> This seems to be the next logical step, certainly more intensified, following the connection between freedom and responsibility. Not only do political leaders—as citizens do as well—have to be responsible with their freedom but also they—unlike citizens—have to be sacrificial with their freedom. Political leaders might have to sacrifice what is best for them or decisions that benefit them in both the short and long runs. These sacrifices can be understood as an act of their own freedom, but these sacrifices also protect the freedom of citizens in the “ethical republic.” Political leaders need to be willing to be sacrificial, to make sacrifices, in the name of freedom.

The final nugget that lends itself to a conceptual standard for political leaders that Throntveit finds in James’s writings comes in James’s later writings: the quest for the “ethical republic” requires its leaders to quest for “unity.” We find this claim odd, given that James over-emphasizes both pluralism and tolerance. However, Throntveit defends this notion—that political leaders have an obligation to quest for “unity”—by making two interrelated claims. First, through an interpretation of James’s “One and the Many” (Lecture 4 in *Pragmatism*) that implements Richard Gale’s “divided self” interpretation of James in order to argue that James affirms both pluralism (“the many”) and the quest for unity (“the one”). Second, and still implementing Gale’s notion of James as a thinker with a “divided self,” James seeks to affirm “freedom” for citizens and the quest for “unity” for political leaders. Throntveit suggests that this dual affirmation matches with Gale’s distinction between the democratic-mystical James—this would be the James that defends “freedom”—and the Promethean-“have it all” James—which is the James that

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<sup>48</sup> QER, 96.

thinks a quest for unity is both possible and obligatory for political leaders. Throntveit makes an interesting and unexpected move: he takes his case concerning the quest for unity among political leaders and offers it as a Jamesean case for globalization. He writes, “James denied any sharp division between national and international affairs, and described politics as the global field of our eternal moral struggle for freedom through unity.”<sup>49</sup> While we do not find Throntveit’s claims persuasive in regards to James’s mandating a quest for unity among political leaders, we agree that it seems a worthwhile endeavor to continue to interpret and tease out Gale’s notion of James’s “divided self” in different philosophical arenas—which Throntveit achieves in relation to James’s political philosophy.

In sum: James’s expectations for political leaders involve the need for a “heroic mind,” the willingness to sacrifice their own freedom and self-interests, and the quest for unity—both nationally and internationally.

### **§3. The Vices of Political Leaders**

According to Throntveit, James also gives us a sense of the vices that political leaders ought to avoid. Unsurprisingly, they tend to match up with the expectations discussed in the previous paragraphs. We find five vices mentioned in Throntveit’s book: egoistic interests, a lack of empathy, recklessness, self-indulgence, and social complacency. Going along with the need for a “heroic mind,” James identifies “social complacency” as a political vice; going along with his view of the willingness to sacrifice one’s freedom and self-interests, James identifies “self-indulgence” as a political vice. Bringing both of these vices together, Throntveit writes: “James viewed both self-

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<sup>49</sup> QER, 120.

indulgence and social complacency as enemies of truth.”<sup>50</sup> “Egoistic interests” is another vice that violates the willingness to sacrifice one’s own freedom and self-interests: James that the “egoistic interests” of political leaders ought to be reigned in “as a precondition for achieving” democracy.<sup>51</sup> The other two vices, a lack of empathy and recklessness, relate to the imperialist policies and practices James was witnessing during his time. According to Throntveit, imperialism violates both virtues of courage and empathy: conquering other countries is a form of recklessness,<sup>52</sup> which also “demonstrates a total lack of empathy,”<sup>53</sup> toward citizens of other countries. The details of these two vices will come out through our explanations of James’s judgments against Cleveland, McKinley, Roosevelt, and Taft.

#### **§4. James’s Judgments against Cleveland, McKinley, Roosevelt, and Taft**

The order of which we describe James’s judgments against these political leaders goes from the simple to the complex. We begin with the former “Governor” of the Philippines and Secretary of War at the time James critiqued his political leadership, William Howard Taft—who, also, eventually became the President of the United States (from 1909 – 1913). Taft receives a rather straightforward criticism from the philosopher at Harvard. According to Throntveit, “James decried a particular, idolatrous conception of bigness.”<sup>54</sup> James had a problem with “bigness as power,” which showed neither

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<sup>50</sup> QER, 104.

<sup>51</sup> See QER, 110.

<sup>52</sup> See QER, 136-138.

<sup>53</sup> QER, 116.

<sup>54</sup> QER, 118.

“social purpose” nor “responsibility.”<sup>55</sup> This is the Jamesean indictment against “William Howard Taft, Secretary of War and formerly U.S.-appointed Governor of the Philippines, for simplistically equating control with success and success with righteousness, to the detriment of Filipino and American freedoms.”<sup>56</sup> Throntveit continues,

Taft and congressional allies refused to set a date for Philippine independence, arguing that generations were needed to train the Filipinos in self-government and insisting that anarchy would ensue if the process were shortened...; they assumed, in other words, that self-government, good government, and American government constituted a single closed set, their perfect overlap evinced by the United States’ control of and supposed benevolence toward the islands.<sup>57</sup>

In response, James made his own recommendation: “[James] thought his government too deeply involved to abandon the Philippines immediately. Instead, Taft and Congress should set a timeline long enough to permit significant achievement but short enough for Filipinos to envision its end.”<sup>58</sup> The treatment of the Philippines provides a prime example of James’s judgment against American imperialism: imperialism displays the vices of a lack of empathy and recklessness.

Next, Grover Cleveland—who served two terms as President of the United States though not consecutively (1885 – 1889 & 1893 – 1897). About James’s critique of Cleveland, Throntveit writes:

Invoking the Monroe Doctrine to assert the police authority of the United States in all such matters of hemispheric concern, President Grover Cleveland’s administration hinted at military action if Britain rejected the verdict of a U.S. commission.... James publicly excoriated Cleveland...for betraying the deliberative principle upon which the republic was founded.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See QER, 118.

<sup>56</sup> QER, 118.

<sup>57</sup> QER, 118.

<sup>58</sup> QER, 118-119.

<sup>59</sup> QER, 114.

The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 concerns the autonomy of the Western Hemisphere in relation to Europe and gives the United States the task of showing no tolerance toward “bad actors” as political leaders in the Western Hemisphere. In other words: on December 2, 1823, James Monroe basically signed a blank check for the United States to intervene into any country in the Western Hemisphere under the guise of concern for corruption in those countries. Grover Cleveland deposited this check in relation to Venezuela.<sup>60</sup> Presidential historian, Henry F. Graff, narrates the situation in this way:

Cleveland’s interference in the Venezuelan boundary dispute was his most controversial foreign policy decision. Britain, which had amassed holdings in British Guiana since the early nineteenth century, laid claim to the Orinoco River—and thus a vast interior trading region reaching into Venezuela. When Venezuela asked the United States to arbitrate the dispute, Cleveland eagerly accepted. The British balked at U.S. involvement, leading Cleveland to write a “twenty-inch gun” missive in which he threatened Britain with war. To force the point, he sent U.S. naval vessels to confront British warships near Venezuela. Amidst a wave of war hysteria in America, Britain agreed to accept arbitration. Historians debate Cleveland’s motivations here as well as the outcome of the episode. What is not in dispute is Cleveland’s responsibility for bringing the Monroe Doctrine back to life as the basis of U.S. foreign policy in the hemisphere.<sup>61</sup>

By claiming that he betrayed “the deliberative principle upon which the republic was founded,” Cleveland seems to have violated James’s standards for the quest for unity at the international level. James believed that it was not necessary for the United States to become involved, an insight which led to James’s anger and his argument that Cleveland’s motivations were not for the greater good of the country. As Graff points out,

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<sup>60</sup> The James biographer, Robert Richardson, puts it this way: “Cleveland’s belligerent invocation of the Monroe Doctrine was received with wild approval by Congress and by most of the newspapers. James was appalled by the sudden threat of war and by the swift upwelling of jingoistic nationalism and Anglophobia. . . . James felt embarrassed by his nation. . . . James could quickly be stirred; usually he calmed down just as quickly, but not this time. His opposition to Venezuela affair ran deep. He wrote to [a] . . . friend, ‘Cleveland in my opinion by his explicit allusion to was has committed the biggest political crime I have ever seen. . . .’” (Richardson, *William James*, 358).

<sup>61</sup> Henry F. Graff, “Grover Cleveland: Foreign Affairs,” on University of Virginia’s Miller Center website: <https://millercenter.org/president/cleveland/foreign-affairs> (accessed December 18, 2018).

“Cleveland’s motivations” remain unclear so it would be too much to say—on James’s standards—that Cleveland acted through his “egoistic interests” or with “self-indulgence.” Responding to a boundary dispute does not reflect “social complacency,” and defending the Venezuelans from the British should not be put under the category of a “lack of empathy.” James might think, however, that sending “U.S. naval vessels to confront British warships near Venezuela” constitutes recklessness. Might Cleveland’s instantaneous reaction to Britain be considered egoistic, attempting to preserve the president’s own dignity? James certainly thought this was so. The final judgment seems to be that Cleveland refuses to participate in the quest for unity at the international level. In James’s own words: “We have written ourselves squarely down as a people dangerous to the peace of the world, more dangerous than anything since France under Napoleon.”<sup>62</sup>

James’s critiques and engagements with both William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt are complex but in very different ways. We choose to treat James’s critiques of McKinley prior to Roosevelt’s because Roosevelt was one of James’s undergraduate students at Harvard, which adds a layer not present in James’s judgments against McKinley.<sup>63</sup> We wish to warn readers at this junction that James’s judgments against McKinley end in a somber, troubling way.

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<sup>62</sup> James, “Letter to the Honorable Samuel W. McCall on the Venezuelan Crisis,” (1895); quoted in QER, 114.

<sup>63</sup> According to biographer of James, Robert Richardson, James did not have *all* negative judgments against President McKinley: “Soon after the ‘great honor’ of the Gifford Lectures, classes began again at Harvard, on February 14. The following day the battleship *Maine* blew up and sank in the Havana Harbor while moored to a buoy assigned it by the Havana port authorities. The American papers and public leaped to the view that the explosion was external. James followed events closely, noting that the evidence for a hostile attack was ‘of the very slimmest’. On April 19 the U.S. Congress passed a resolution calling for the liberation of Cuba from Spain and pledging American withdrawal once Cuba was free. Two days later President McKinley sent an ultimatum to Spain, which replied by declaring war. James was at first not...opposed. He even thought intervention might be a good thing. America *should* help Cuba throw off colonial rule” (Richardson, *William James*, 372).

Replacing Cleveland, William McKinley's presidency took place from 1897 – 1901. Throntveit does not include all of the details of James's criticisms of McKinley, but we begin with Throntveit's account and then add onto it. Throntveit writes:

As U.S. Foreign Policy grew increasingly assertive under the administration of... William McKinley, James grew increasingly frustrated, not only with expansionist policies he opposed as unwise or unjust, but with the proliferating view that territorial expansion was by its nature a political good that any advanced, healthy nation should seek.<sup>64</sup>

We connect Throntveit's use of the vices "unjust" and "unwise" with James's recommendation that political leaders avoid recklessness and develop empathy. The word "unjust" seems to correlate with the virtue of empathy, which means that another name for a "lack of empathy" might be the vice of injustice. The word "unwise" seems to correlate with recklessness because James thinks of recklessness as an extreme in relation to courage but also an extreme in relation to wisdom.

Throntveit explicitly connects James's critique of McKinley with the virtues outlined earlier in this essay. He claims that McKinley violated the virtues of experimentalism and historical wisdom:

The United States' annexation of the Phillipines, and the ensuing war against Emilio Aguinaldo's independence movement, came to represent for James the total inversion of ethical republicanism in American politics. The virtues of the republic were nowhere on display. The adventure, he argued, was more aimless than experimental, undertaken with the 'vague hope' that some ill-defined 'success' would follow mere 'motion and action' [a violation of virtue #1]. Similarly, there was no 'wisdom'...to the government's course, which demonstrated almost total ignorance and contempt for the lessons of the past [a violation of virtue #2].<sup>65</sup>

We have placed in brackets the corresponding virtues violated by President McKinley and his administration. While imagining new possibilities and acting on new ideas are necessary for a republic to flourish, there is no room for recklessness. According to

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<sup>64</sup> QER, 115.

<sup>65</sup> QER, 115.

James, McKinley displayed both aimlessness and recklessness—violating the virtue of experimentalism. Secondly, James seems frustrated at the lack of historical wisdom in this situation—arguing that McKinley needed to be more astute and recognize that the war against Emilio Aguinaldo might have been viewed as a repetition of European history and the need for conquest and mastery over “uncivilized peoples.” Again, James points us toward the insight concerning the delicate balance that exists between the virtues of experimentalism and historical wisdom.

Going beyond the details provided by Throntveit, it becomes important to discuss James’s response to McKinley’s assassination. McKinley was shot on September 6<sup>th</sup>, which led to his death on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1901. Presidential historian, Lewis L. Gould, sets the stage for us:

McKinley...was on the road...on the morning of September 6, 1901. Impeccably dressed in a boiled white shirt with a starched collar and cuffs, pin-striped trousers, a black frock coat, and a black satin necktie, he was off to Buffalo, New York, where he gave a speech at the Pan-American Exposition. That afternoon, he attended a public reception at the exposition's Temple of Music. Standing at the head of a moving line of greeters, McKinley shook hands and smiled, enjoying the adulation and the public contact.

At seven minutes past four o’clock, as McKinley reached for another hand to shake, two sharp cracks broke the hum of human voices. Leon F. Czolgosz, age twenty-eight, a Detroit resident of Polish heritage and an unemployed mill worker of anarchist sentiments, had fired a concealed .32 Iver Johnson revolver point blank into the President’s chest. McKinley doubled over and fell backward into the arms of his Secret Service escorts. As he lay bleeding from his wounds, he managed to tell his guards not to hurt his assailant. Then he turned to his private secretary and said: “My wife, be careful, Cortelyou, how you tell her—oh, be careful.” Rushed to a nearby hospital by ambulance, McKinley’s doctors predicted a recovery. Gangrene had set in around the bullet wounds, however, and he died on September 14, 1901, just six months after his second inauguration.

Czolgosz admitted the shooting. He had taken aim at the President because he believed him to have been the “enemy of the people, the good working people.” Czolgosz expressed no remorse for his actions and died in the electric chair on October 29, 1901.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Lewis L. Gould, “William McKinley: Death of a President,” on University of Virginia’s Miller Center website: <https://millercenter.org/president/mckinley/death-of-the-president> (accessed December 18, 2018).

It seems that Czolgosz assassinated McKinley out of frustration in regards to his re-election: he shot McKinley only “six months after his second inauguration.”

Further background to James’s response to McKinley’s assassination is that James called himself an “anarchist” in certain letters but, to our knowledge, never publicly declared his anarchism.<sup>67</sup> In a private letter to Katherine Sands Godkin, written on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1902, James writes: “Czolgosz has been our great deliverer! You’ve no idea how it lightens the atmosphere to have that type... gone! I mean the McK [McKinley] type!”<sup>68</sup> Three exclamation marks from a philosopher are significant! James genuinely and truly felt ecstatic at the assassination of a President of the United States—at least, *this* President of the United States.

What should James scholars make of James’s celebration of a political leader being assassinated? Do James’s concerns about and critiques of McKinley’s presidency justify assassination as a rational and workable solution? Has James’s anarchism tempted him to go from virtue to vice in making judgments about the death of a political leader?

The Professor of Government and scholar of William James’s work, Alexander Livingston, attempts to make sense of James’s words to Katherine Godkin. In a book that has one of the best titles of any book on James, *Damn Great Empires! William James and the Politics of Pragmatism*, Livingston states that James deeply resented the re-election of McKinley by the American people. For instance, in a different letter, James wrote: “The election has not only given the policy of William McKinley the endorsement (he prayed his God for) but it has endorsed...this new state—the old Republic [only] in

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<sup>67</sup> For a report on the scholarship on this question, see Livingston’s *Damn Great Empires!* 8-11.

<sup>68</sup> James, *The Correspondence of William James: Volume 10, 1902 – March 1905*, ed. Ignas K. Skrupskelis & Elizabeth M. Berkeley, (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 7.

name—but [now] essentially an Empire in substance.”<sup>69</sup> Readers can sense resentment in the parenthetical claim that McKinley’s prayers were answered, as well as James shifting the American Republic to the American Empire. McKinley makes this shift happen, and James resents McKinley for it. From resentment to contempt: Livingston also argues that James had “special contempt for the imperialists’ hubris of presuming themselves authorized to uplift their ‘new-caught, sullen peoples’ to the standards of American civilization.”<sup>70</sup> James felt contempt especially toward McKinley because he narrated his imperialist policies and practices in moral terms: “McKinley’s philanthropic mandate to civilize foreign peoples dovetailed elegantly with a robust vision of informal or free-trade imperialism.”<sup>71</sup> Contempt usually involves directing one’s feelings toward someone with lower status, so how can James feel contempt toward a President of the United States? It seems the answer lies precisely in James’s critique of McKinley: McKinley might have “higher status,” in terms of his presidential office, but morally he fails the American Republic and the presidential office. Therefore, contempt is exactly what James feels toward him because he is undeserving of the office—yet, he gets re-elected for a second term. Because of these feelings of contempt and resentment, James celebrates McKinley’s assassination at the hands of an anarchist.

Do these feelings of contempt and resentment justify James’s celebration of McKinley’s assassination? Sometimes, we reward such feelings: there is little doubt that Donald J. Trump’s feelings of contempt and resentment toward Barack Obama motivated

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<sup>69</sup> James, *The Correspondence of William James: Volume 9, July 1899 – 1901*, ed. Ignas K. Skrupskelis & Elizabeth M. Berkeley, (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 367-368; quoted in Livingston, *Damn Great Empires!* 59.

<sup>70</sup> Livingston, *Damn Great Empires!* 157.

<sup>71</sup> Livingston, *Damn Great Empires!* 158.

voters in November 2016. We know that Trump felt this way, evidenced by his “birther” conspiracy about Obama: resentment stemming from Trump’s own racism, and contempt coming in the form of trying to smear Obama as someone undeserving of the office because of his (Barack Obama’s) father’s country of origin (Kenya). However, these feelings should not be rewarded; furthermore, they do not justify celebrating the assassination of a political leader. James scholars need to say that James was in the wrong in his letter to Katherine Godkin because it violates James’s own standards of being a virtuous citizen.

Because of McKinley’s assassination, Theodore Roosevelt became President of the United States in 1901. Roosevelt was an undergraduate student at Harvard from the years 1876 – 1880. In addition to doing well on Harvard’s boxing team, he flourished in his courses on philosophy and rhetoric. His philosophy professors included George Santayana, Josiah Royce, and—yes—William James. James followed Roosevelt’s political career and critiqued decisions he made as both the Police Commissioner of NYC and the Governor of New York.<sup>72</sup> James also witnessed Roosevelt rise to the highest office in the land—inheriting the position as McKinley’s Vice-President and then receiving affirmation from the American people in the presidential election of 1904.

As the New York City Police Commissioner, Roosevelt made the mistake—in James’s judgment—of branding “all those who opposed the administration’s stance” as “betrayers” and “enemies.”<sup>73</sup> James critiqued Roosevelt’s rhetoric as immoral because it

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<sup>72</sup> In the *Harvard Crimson*, James wrote these strong words against his former student: “May I express a hope that in this university, if no where else on the continent, we shall be patriotic enough not to remain passive whilst the destinies of our country are being settled by surprise” (James, ECR, 153).

<sup>73</sup> See QER, 115.

unnecessarily squashes the power of opposition. As a political leader, Roosevelt failed the quest for unity.

Borrowing phrasing from his teacher, Roosevelt gave a speech called “The Strenuous Life” as the Governor of New York. In response to this speech, James published a letter in a newspaper claiming that Roosevelt perverted the virtues necessary for “the strenuous life.” In his speech, Roosevelt critiqued anti-imperialism stances by American citizens and defended war “as its own sufficient cause.”<sup>74</sup> Because of Roosevelt’s defense of imperialism, James rendered the judgment that Roosevelt promoted the vices of a lack of empathy and recklessness. Because he defended war “as its own sufficient cause,” James interpreted this instead as using war for Roosevelt’s own “egoistic interests.” James sought to distance his own phrase, “the strenuous life,” from Roosevelt’s use of the phrase.

The complexity in the relationship between James and Roosevelt does not stop with their differences over the phrase, “the strenuous life.” James mounted critique after critique of Roosevelt as President of the United States.<sup>75</sup> After Roosevelt left the presidential office, however, James wrote this to him:

I can’t help sending you my congratulations on your well-earned prospect of rest, and of felicitation of your official career. The wavelets disappear, the big tidal changes... are what count. You have changed the level of feeling about public matters in our country.... Your example has brought ethics into politics, and made every man of us feel more bound to every other man and with the country that is ours to serve and save.... You have raised the high water-mark of the national soul and important things will date from you.

You are not faultless[,] but what are faults of manner in such a great account? They are forgotten ere the day is done, and only the substance that stays.

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<sup>74</sup> QER, 116.

<sup>75</sup> Interestingly, sometime during the winter of 1904-1905, William’s brother Henry—the famous novelist—dined one evening in Washington D.C. with Henry Adams and President Roosevelt (see Richardson, *William James*, 457-458).

That your substance will stay long with us, and that you will enter public life again is the hearty wish of your affectionate old teacher and your admiring friend.<sup>76</sup>

In this letter from James to Roosevelt, James hits on most of the points made by Throntveit about the three characteristics James expects from political leaders: exhibiting a “heroic mind,” willingness to sacrifice, and questing for unity. James’s affirmation of Roosevelt’s “heroic mind” is found in the language of “the big tidal changes...are what count.” The claim that Roosevelt “has brought ethics into politics” connects with the willingness to sacrifice because, for James, this type of willingness represents the epitome of what it means to be ethical in a political office. Lastly, the quest for unity is seen in James’s argument that Roosevelt has “made every man of us feel more bound to every other man and with the country that is ours to serve and save.” With these words, James demonstrates that the relation between philosopher and political leader does not have to be determined through negative judgments, alone, but can be one in which the philosopher uses her own standards for political leadership as a way to affirm and compliment a job well-done by a specific president.

Given that he seemingly lacks a “golden mean” stance between two extreme positions when it comes to understanding the presidency—either celebrating an assassination of a president he dislikes or confirming a job well-done to a pro-imperialist former president—does James serve as a good model for the relationship between philosopher and political leader?

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<sup>76</sup> James, *The Correspondence of William James: Volume 12, April 1908 – August 1910*, ed. Ignas K. Skrupskelis & Elizabeth M. Berkeley, (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2004), 168.

## §5. Conclusion

With this last example, it appears that James uses the language of the virtues but lacks the logic of virtue theory—the “golden mean.” Perhaps James, himself, may not be the ideal example of moral purity. Sarin Marchetti disagrees with this “perhaps” statement. Marchetti makes a strong claim about the potential for both James’s biography and philosophy to serve as an ideal example for us today. He writes:

[T]here is virtually no limit in trying to extend and work out in detail [James’s understanding of historical events during his time] to address our most pressing ethical troubles—some of which are, unfortunately and despite a whole century of social and political fights, still with us today.<sup>77</sup>

Is Marchetti right? Does James’s biography and philosophy provide what we need for addressing “our most pressing ethical troubles...today”? If James provides American political leaders and citizens models for an ethical republic, in addition to exemplifying both critiques and praise for U.S. Presidents, what of this—if anything—can be applied to 2019 American society?

We believe that in a state of high uncertainty, corrupt leadership, and government shutdown, perhaps the strongest takeaway is James’s ability to engage political leadership with a critical mindset. While James does appear to lack a “golden mean,” James at least engages with political leaders, attempts to make sense of the world around him, and shows the practicality of using the virtues he thought constituted an ethical society. Because of this, we agree with Marchetti that James provides a model (biography) for addressing “our most pressing ethical troubles...today.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Marchetti, *Ethics and Philosophical Critique in William James*, 245.

<sup>78</sup> Marchetti, *Ethics and Philosophical Critique in William James*, 245.

Additionally, in the words of Throntveit, James's ideals involve (a) promoting "the habits of ethical republicanism among individuals; to educate citizens in the rules of right," (b) coordinating "individuals' efforts to enlarge the sphere of human flourishing," and (c) magnifying "the power of the whole community to achieve moral goals."<sup>79</sup> These are ideals that we think American citizens can and ought to rally behind. Because of this, we agree with Marchetti that James provides the theories (philosophy) for addressing "our most pressing ethical troubles...today."<sup>80</sup> The Jamesean message for American citizens in 2019 is that—by using intellectual and moral judgments in relation to experimentalism, historical wisdom, and empathy—citizens can make better, more critical, and strong judgments about and against those in political leadership today.

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<sup>79</sup> QER, 121.

<sup>80</sup> Marchetti, *Ethics and Philosophical Critique in William James*, 245.