

## THE WILL TO BELIEVE IN THIS WORLD: PRAGMATISM AND THE ARTS OF LIVING ON A PRECARIOUS EARTH

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**ABSTRACT.** The patterns of ecological devastation that mark the present unexpectedly enable an ancient and many-storied question to resurface with renewed force: the question of the arts of living — that is, of learning how to live and die well with others on a precarious Earth. Modernity has all but forgotten this question, which has long been buried under the dreams of progress and infinite growth, colonial projects, and the enthroning of technoscience. But what might it mean to reclaim the question of the arts of living today? In this article Martin Savransky reclaims the connection between pragmatism, education, and the arts of living by proposing both that (1) William James's pragmatist philosophy can be read as an ongoing and unfinished experiment in weaving a certain art of living, and (2) James's pragmatism might provide us with uniquely generative elements to begin to experiment with the profoundly educational and ecological challenge of learning to inhabit the Earth otherwise.

**KEY WORDS.** climate change; arts of living; pragmatism; William James; experimentation; ecology

### INTRODUCTION: A GENUINE OPTION

Writing in 2011 for *Yale Environment 360*, an online magazine published at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, the Nobel laureate and popularizer of the term “Anthropocene” Paul Crutzen lamented, alongside his collaborator Christian Schwägerl, that students “in school are still taught that we are living in the Holocene, an era that began roughly 12,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age.”<sup>1</sup> Positing that, for “millennia, humans have behaved as rebels against a superpower we call ‘Nature,’” they argued that the dramatic transformations in geo-ecological patterns and most forms of life brought about by “new technologies, fossil fuels, and fast-growing population” since the middle of the twentieth century — otherwise known as the “Great Acceleration” — have radically altered the role and prospects of humanity on Earth.<sup>2</sup> Through such entrepreneurial prowess, Crutzen and Swägerl's story goes, humans have not only precipitated irreversible processes of anthropogenic climate change: by engaging in practices of massive deforestation and intensive farming, oil extraction and mineralogical mining, soil depletion, and ocean acidification, they have fundamentally altered the biology and geology of the planet as well, turning the “long-held religious and philosophical idea — humans as masters of planet Earth

1. Paul Crutzen and Christian Schwägerl, “Living in the Anthropocene: Toward a New Global Ethos,” *Yale Environment 360*, January 24, 2011, [https://e360.yale.edu/features/living\\_in\\_the\\_anthropocene\\_toward\\_a\\_new\\_global\\_ethos](https://e360.yale.edu/features/living_in_the_anthropocene_toward_a_new_global_ethos).

2. Will Steffen, Wendy Broadgate, Lisa Deutsch, Owen Gaffney, and Cornelia Ludwig, “The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration,” *The Anthropocene Review* 2, no. 1 (2015): 81–98.

— into a stark reality.”<sup>3</sup> With humanity’s new power “to decide what nature is and what it will be” comes, we are told, a new and heightened responsibility:

To accommodate the current Western lifestyle for 9 billion people, we’d need several more planets. With countries worldwide striving to attain the “American Way of Life,” citizens of the West should redefine it — and pioneer a modest, renewable, mindful, and less material lifestyle. That includes, first and foremost, cutting the consumption of industrially produced meat and changing private vehicles to public transport.

It is with a view toward such socio-ecological transitions that Crutzen and Schwägerl hold out the hope that “teaching students that we are living in the Anthropocene, the Age of Men [sic], could be of great help,” for it would simultaneously highlight the immense power of “our” intellect and creativity, as well as inject “some desperately needed eco-optimism into our societies.” Learning to live in the Anthropocene, they propose, means above all remembering that “in this new era, nature is us.”<sup>4</sup>

Crutzen and Shwägerl’s call for a “new global ethos” worthy of an environmentally troubling planet, and their insistence on the importance of students learning what it may mean to live on it, is a testament to the fact that, in the wake of the tangled histories of colonialism, extractivism, and capitalism that have ploughed the world for the last five hundred years, the present has truly acquired the character of what William James, in his famous essay “The Will to Believe” would call a “genuine option”<sup>5</sup> — that is, a problematic whose force demands a *living, momentous, and forced* response. Living, because it belongs to our epoch, because it impregnates the questions concerning which and how lives might go on, or not. Momentous, because responding to it requires that we jump with both feet off the ground of modern modes of living to risk inventing alternative methodologies for living and dying well on an unsafe and unstable Earth. And it is forced because the problematic cannot be dodged — the risks it poses cannot be avoided; there is no standing place outside of the alternatives it creates. Hence the genuine option that haunts our present: the patterns of ecological devastation are such that, whatever the future, the extractive way of life that is the hallmark of the modern West is neither compatible, nor even compossible, with lives worth living and deaths worth living for on this ravaged Earth.<sup>6</sup>

3. Crutzen and Schwägerl, “Living in the Anthropocene.”

4. Ibid.

5. William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Minneapolis, NY: Dover, 1956), 3.

6. And this “whatever the future” matters, for to propose the so-called Anthropocene as a candidate name for a geological “epoch” means simultaneously that, from a geohistorical perspective, its historicity

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And yet, Crutzen and Schwägerl's claim that "nature is us" is a far cry from that of eco-activists who, since their demonstrations outside the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris in 2015, exclaim that "We're not defending Nature. We're Nature defending itself." Indeed, by disguising a modern, Western, and colonial mode of ploughing the world under a universally homogenous figure of "humanity" that is said to be responsible for the great feats of technological invention and planetary domination and is now also the would-be colonial guarantor of a livable future for other peoples "striving to attain the 'American Way of Life,'" Crutzen and Schwägerl's proposal for a "new global ethos" is emblematic of much that is dangerous about such Anthropocene stories. In them, "the epochal sea change that is imagined actually reinstates," to borrow Kathryn Yusoff's words, "the same old story of dominion, articulated through Judeo-Christian stewardship of Empire."<sup>7</sup> Which is to say that the eco-optimist story that they would like to preach to students is already predicated on a redemptive narrative of world salvation for a future coexistence in which the very same colonial, extractive, and capitalist patterns of devastation that made deforestation, intensive farming, and oil extraction viable are actively reinscribed.

As a result, to the question of what learning to live in the "Anthropocene" might mean, their answer can be safely laid out in advance, as a matter of course, *irrespective of any actual learning*. It can indeed be couched in the language of a "new global ethos" toward which every student — but especially, one suspects, those who they think might otherwise dream of the American Way of Life — must strive. The new ethos they propose would consist in the organization of a "less material lifestyle," accompanied by renewed investments in science and technology — including carbon capture and storage as well as geoengineering, "in order to be prepared for worst-case scenarios" — a restructuring of economies to "grow in different ways than with our current hyper-consumption," and a cultural adaptation capable of sustaining what, after Humboldt, they call "the world organism": a new managerialism that would shift "our mission from crusade to management, so we can steer nature's course symbiotically instead of enslaving the formerly natural world."<sup>8</sup> To their proposal of green growth, technocapitalism, and ecomanagerialism, one would be tempted to reply by gently paraphrasing the question posed by students involved in the recent climate strikes: Why study for a future that is so depressingly similar to the past?<sup>9</sup>

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is not closed, but also that, from an anthropo-historical perspective, its consequences are here to stay. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197–222.

7. Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 27.

8. Crutzen and Schwägerl, "Living in the Anthropocene."

9. This is one of the reasons the politics of generative refusal dramatized by the students' strikes and other such actions deserves to be taken seriously, intensified, and dramatized. See Petra Mikulan, "An Ethics of Refusal: The Insistence of Possibles as a Speculative Pragmatic Challenge to Systemic Racism in Education," in this issue.

Indeed, if the contemporary environmental condition turns the present into a genuine option, if it confronts us once again with the problem of learning how to live, it is not merely because the climatological forecasts of a coming apocalypse might finally encourage the moderns to successfully adapt their extractive ways of life to a brave new world. No new “master of the Earth” would recoil before such ominous signs, or seriously ponder how to live on in an age that bears “his” name. If the present has acquired the character of a genuine option, it is not because it would presage the advent of a deified *Anthropos*, but because it already coincides with what, in his *The Three Ecologies*, Félix Guattari diagnosed as a triple form of devastation: of what we used to call “nature”; but also of the realm of the “social,” the ensemble of relationships and connections that enable collectives to learn how to pose their own questions, to give shape to their own styles of life; and therefore also of the domain of subjectivity, with the experience of grief and desolation that ongoing ecological devastation precipitates, even as the moral injunctions both to accept and exert individual responsibility do not cease to proliferate.<sup>10</sup> It is thus not an “environmental crisis,” but a thorough ecological and civilizational collapse that forces an ancient and many-storied question to resurface unexpectedly with renewed force; a question that, buried under the dreams of progress and the enthroning of technoscience, modernity has all but forgotten. That is, the question of the *arts of life*— of engendering the means by which to learn how to live and die well with others, to give life its style and character, while also cultivating its own immanent values and valuations.

But what might it mean to reclaim the question of the art of living today, in a devastated present? In this essay, I suggest that despite their important warnings about the perils of continuing to live along ecocidal paths, and notwithstanding their calls for the sort of economic, industrial, and agricultural reforms required for a possible ecological transition, this is a question that the climate and earth sciences cannot and should not provide the answer to, and it is certainly one that no dream of a geoengineered world can wish away. No “new global ethos,” laid out in advance, will be worthy of the task that the question itself demands. For amid the generalized devastation, such a question haunts the present without providing any secure footholds, without enabling the technocratic means by which modernity has learned to formulate and solve its problems.<sup>11</sup> To pose the question of the arts of living today — which is to say, to learn to pose it well, without in so doing seeking to dodge the vertiginous risk such a genuine option generates — we desperately need stories other than those of human mastery, consumptive frugality, secular rationality, neocolonial management, earth stewardship, a romantic “return to nature,” or the reparation of would-be

10. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London: Continuum, 2003).

11. Martin Savransky, “Problems All the Way Down,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 38, no. 2 (2021): 3–23. See also Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Heather Anne Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt, eds., *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

harmonious ecosystems.<sup>12</sup> What the question calls for, instead, is a pragmatic wager one might make from the rubble, while we still can: a wager on the chance of snatching a possibility from the claws of catastrophe, of rendering one another capable of telling our stories otherwise, of generatively reweaving threads that may reactivate a will to believe in this world in spite of all.<sup>13</sup>

To believe in this world, in its minor openings as much as in its tragedies, in its achievements as much as in its failures, is not simply to imagine the shape of a better world to come, of a new global ethos to be universally enforced. To reanimate the will to believe in this world is in the first instance to affirm that we are *bound* to this world, for better or ill, to swim or sink. And at the same time, it is to wager that beginnings are possible even amid all endings, that inside and in spite of the ravage the present still harbors possibles that demand to be intensified, that make perceptible the chance of nourishing life otherwise, in ways that nevertheless remain impossible to define in advance. As such, the task it demands, the most essential “that our lives in this world have to perform,”<sup>14</sup> is also the most difficult — an interminable task. One that can only be explored *immanently*, which is to say, *livingly*, experimenting with the possibility of engendering a reorganization “of acquired habits of conduct and tendencies of behavior” that may, just perhaps, precipitate a possible reevaluation of our own values of living and dying. That, indeed, is what James meant by *education*.<sup>15</sup>

What I propose in what follows, therefore, is that to ask what a life worth living might mean today is to engage in an exercise that is at once thoroughly pragmatic, ecological, and educational. It is to consent to an ongoing and unfinished experimentation, inside and in spite of the triple ecological devastation, with transforming one’s mode of being and one’s style of living in the hold of the possibility of learning to inhabit the Earth otherwise. Reclaiming the ancient philosophical question of the art of life, in this essay I seek to activate the pragmatist connection between philosophy, education, and the arts of living in an ecologically devastated present, in order to suggest that James’s pragmatist philosophy can be read as an ongoing and unfinished experiment in weaving a certain art of life. What is more, being itself born of the historical turmoil engendered by political events that signaled the imperialization of America as by the breakdown of the very order of nature and established conceptions of truth that the sciences of the end of the

12. For a powerful pedagogical experiment in “disenchanting secularism” in order to tell other-than-secular, decolonial stories in the teaching of social theory, see Claire Blencowe, “Disenchanting Secularism (or the Cultivation of the Soul) as Pedagogy in Resistance to Populist Racism and Colonial Structures in the Academy,” *British Educational Research Journal* 47, no. 2 (2020): <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3665>.

13. Martin Savransky, *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds: Politics of the Pluriverse* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

14. James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*, 58.

15. William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: And to Students on Some of Life’s Ideals* (London: Longmans, Green, 1907), 29.

nineteenth century radically upended and problematized, the specific contours of a pragmatist art of living might provide us today with some uniquely generative elements to rediscover the will to believe in this world in spite of all. What it might enable, in other words, is the task of beginning to explore the profoundly educational and ecological possibility of learning to live our way into another mode of thinking, of experimenting with what learning to live and die well with others might demand today, on this planet we precariously inhabit with others while we still can. After all, the “really vital question for us all,” James wrote in his *Pragmatism* lectures, “is, What is this world going to be? What is life to make of itself? The center of gravity of philosophy must therefore alter its place. The earth of things, long thrown into shadow by the glories of the upper ether, must resume its rights.”<sup>16</sup>

#### AN APPRENTICESHIP IN LIVING AND DYING: ORALITY, SOCIALITY, PHILOSOPHIA

The question of how to live is an ancient philosophical concern. Yet the extent of the present devastation is such that anyone would be forgiven for thinking that today, philosophy — long enthralled by the glories of the upper ether — might well be the last place from which to draw vital sustenance, from which to engender a reeducation of our collective modes of earthly habitation, or an experimental revaluation of the values we have learned to hold dear. What has modern philosophy — steeped in its linguistic games, in its categorical imperatives, in its arm-chair appeals to reason — ever done for *living*, or for the possibility of learning to live otherwise? Indeed, it is perhaps no coincidence that Michel Foucault would decide to characterize as “Cartesian” the moment when modernity came to disqualify the experimental care one would take for oneself, for the art of giving life its own singular form, in the name of a pursuit of knowledge to which both subject and life would need to be subjected.<sup>17</sup> Nor is it any wonder that, becoming the heir to this moment, the modern West worries about its own crisis of trust today.<sup>18</sup> What is more, concerned as they are with the policy imperative of eschewing philosophical problematization in order to forge consensus on “solutions” and “policy,” discussions of “environmental pragmatism” only compound the devastation of the imagination.<sup>19</sup> To be sure, it will not be philosophy’s modern appeals to universal principles, to the rationality of communicative action, or to abstract theories of justice that will now enable the earth of things to resume its rights, to intensify the possibility of experimenting with living and dying as an art to be cultivated otherwise.

16. William James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 62.

17. Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982* (New York: Picador, 2005). See also Monica Greco and Martin Savransky, “Foucault’s Subjectivities,” in *After Foucault: Culture, Theory and Criticism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Lisa Downing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

18. Savransky, *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds*.

19. Andrew Light and Eric Katz, eds., *Environmental Pragmatism* (London: Routledge, 1996).

And yet, it is nevertheless worth recalling that, long before it became the professional affair of specialized academics devoted to theoretical questions of knowledge, being, or morality — indeed, long before writing became its medium *par excellence* — philosophy was above all an exercise of the spirit: a lived practice, requiring effort and training, devoted to nothing less than the transformation of one's life, of one's entire mode of being, by which one could learn to live and think according to the norm of wisdom.<sup>20</sup> Pierre Hadot famously showed that in Hellenistic and Roman times the practice of philosophy — etymologically, let us recall, the love of wisdom — implied a rupture with *bios*, with daily life, constituting the philosopher as a decidedly strange creature “whose behaviour, without being inspired by religion, nonetheless completely breaks with the customs and habits of most mortals.”<sup>21</sup> And yet, if the philosophers were strange, and were even portrayed by others “as bizarre, if not dangerous characters,” it is precisely because their rupture did not, for all that, constitute an absolute escape, an abandonment of the world and life into which they were inevitably thrown and which they sought to transform. Indeed, the philosopher was also, at one and the same time, bound to “live this life every day, in this world in which he feels himself a stranger and in which others perceive him to be one as well.” And it is precisely in this daily life, Hadot perceptively argued, “that he must seek to attain that way of life which is utterly foreign to the everyday world.”<sup>22</sup>

In this way, to philosophize, which is to say to develop an art of living within and despite the life to which one was bound, implied an ongoing effort to submit one's life to a radical metamorphosis. Which is why it is not enough to attempt to characterize each divergent school of ancient philosophy — whether Epicurean, Sceptic, Stoic, Cynic, and so on — according to the specific way in which it defined its own ideal of wisdom, the transcendent state toward which it aimed. Indeed, it is telling that we retain the name “school” for different modes of practicing philosophy. For the fact is that the philosophical life was a fundamentally *liminal* life, one lived in the hold of the very possibility of *learning* to think and make life otherwise.<sup>23</sup> Thus, what above all characterized the different philosophical schools of antiquity was the very practical means, the specific exercises and demands, through which each contended with the tension between the life in which the philosopher inevitably finds themselves and the *style* of living toward which they strive — even when the rupture was never total, even when one is given over to the fact that learning to live, cultivating an art of life, is always ever an interminable task. “The result,” writes Hadot, is that each school of philosophy

20. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995); Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997); and Michael Chase, Stephen Clark, and Michael McGhee, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

21. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 57.

22. *Ibid.*, 58.

23. Or, in Hadot's words, it was life lived according to a “zetetic” method, “one that seeks” (*ibid.*, 63).

has its corresponding fundamental inner attitude — for example, tension for the Stoics or relaxation for the Epicureans — and its own manner of speaking, such as the Stoic use of percussive dialectic or the abundant rhetoric of the Academicians. But above all every school practices exercises designed to ensure spiritual progress toward the ideal state of wisdom, exercises of reason that will be, for the soul, analogous to the athlete's training or to the application of a medical cure.<sup>24</sup>

These exercises included everything from research, thorough investigation, reading, and listening, to remembrance of good things, the accomplishment of duties, and vigilance. Chief among them, Hadot suggests, were self-control and meditation, which took different forms in each philosophical school. In broad terms, however, "self-control" involved a practice of paying attention to oneself and the concrete situation one is in, one that "involves an effort of will, thus faith in moral freedom and the possibility of self-improvement,"<sup>25</sup> and which in turn enabled a distinct responsiveness to what each situation would demand "as if they were questions asked of us all of a sudden."<sup>26</sup> The practices of meditation, by contrast, concerned a "rational, imaginative or intuitive exercise" thanks to which "the vision of the world of the person who strives for spiritual progress will be completely transformed." And it is transformed precisely by a meditative exercise which, far from endowing those who meditate with a sense of mastery over the cosmos they inhabit, would situate the philosopher, by an exercise of the imagination, in a world "in which human things appear of little importance in the immensity of space and time."<sup>27</sup> As such, meditation enabled the philosopher to learn to prepare themselves for the moment when unexpected and even dramatic events occur. Which is why, as far as ancient philosophy was concerned, learning to live well, to turn one's life into a work of art, was indissociable from the task of learning to *die* well, inextricably weaving together the art of living with the art of dying — of learning to displace the question of *whether* one may live or die, and what may enable one to survive, in order to approach, with renewed lucidity and freedom, the question of *how* to live *and* die, thereby revaluing the values of living and dying in and as the practice of doing so *otherwise*. Hence Hadot's decision not to refer to these ascetic exercises as intellectual, or even as ethical, but rather to risk calling them "spiritual": intensifying the manner in which such philosophical practices implicate the whole of existence, giving way to "a transformation of our vision of the world, and to a metamorphosis of our personality."<sup>28</sup>

Once upon a time, therefore, philosophy constituted a veritable apprenticeship in living and dying, in the revaluation of the values of life and death, self and world, according to an ideal mode of living toward which one strove. To call

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24. *Ibid.*, 59.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, 85.

27. *Ibid.*, 59.

28. *Ibid.*, 82.



it an apprenticeship is to suggest that if such exercises were spiritual, such philosophical spirituality was indissociable from a certain educational practice, such that the aim of ancient philosophies was always to become “more a living voice than writing and still more a life than a voice.”<sup>29</sup> For indeed, such spiritual exercises were intended to create *new habits*, and the teaching and training was aimed not at the development of the student’s intelligence or knowledge, but at the transformation of every aspect of their being and their style of living — harnessing their will and their intellect, their passions and their sensibility, as well as their imagination, with a view to a metamorphosis of their entire mode of existence.

This is why Hadot would never cease insisting that in order to understand the works of the philosophers of antiquity, one had to attend to the concrete, pragmatic conditions of their articulation. For even in their written form such works bear the traces of the fundamental orality of *philosophia*: they were often dictated to a scribe, intended to be read aloud, and as such avoided the strictures of written systematicity that became characteristic of modern philosophy while retaining all the hesitations, errant ruminations, as well as the musical rhythms of philosophical meditation.<sup>30</sup> “In matters of philosophical teaching,” Hadot insisted, “writing is only an aid to memory, a last resort that will never replace the living word.”<sup>31</sup> To insist on the orality of philosophy is also of course to affirm, inside and despite its radical break with everyday life, philosophy’s profound *sociality*. In other words, if philosophers stood apart, it is not because they were alone, but because they strove to become *a part* of something else, of a way of being assembled otherwise, capable of transforming their relationship to one another as much as to themselves. Here again, works of philosophy in antiquity were intimately connected to the task of learning and to the very activity of teaching, dramatizing the fact that a “true education is always oral because only spoken word makes dialogue possible, that is, it makes it possible for the disciple to discover the truth himself amid the interplay of questions and answers and also for the master to adapt his teaching to the needs of the disciple.”<sup>32</sup>

Which is to say that if philosophy is an apprenticeship in living and dying otherwise, it is one that cannot but be performed in the company of others. Like “an indefatigable horsefly,” Hadot writes, “Socrates harassed his interlocutors with

29. Pierre Hadot, “Préface,” in *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* [Dictionary of Ancient Philosophers], ed. Richard Goulet (Paris: CNRS, 1989), 12.

30. For this reason, reclaiming the orality of philosophy is never simply a matter of opposing its written form. Speaking and writing can well constitute arts in and of themselves, and therefore the question concerns the possibility of enabling philosophical texts not only to state something but to *resound* in their own singular way, to craft their own styles of conceptual invention, to cultivate their own modes of dramatization, by which reasons, arguments, and propositions may become *felt* rather than merely recognized, by which the philosopher becomes not only creator of the work but its own creature as well.

31. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 62.

32. *Ibid.*

questions which put *themselves* into question, forcing them to pay attention to and take care of themselves."<sup>33</sup> Hence the importance of the ancient exercise of dialogue. For if the art of living has always concerned education, if it has always involved an exercise of learning to live and die well with others while reevaluating the immanent values of living and dying, such an exercise has never been reducible to a matter of teaching a new moral code, a new "global ethos" that everyone would be required to adopt. There is teaching and learning, but the art of life is not one that can be taught by exhorting disciples to simply mimic their teachers.<sup>34</sup> Only those who consent to letting themselves be transformed by the questions of others, only those who accept letting themselves be put into question by others, could in turn become capable of working upon themselves so as to undergo a metamorphosis of their own souls, so as to live a life that is distinctly their own.

I cannot therefore help appreciate Hadot's will to risk the disconcertment that the association between philosophy and spirituality generates, while resisting the temptation of a more consensual connection with a certain notion of "ethics" that, despite the best efforts of some of his contemporaries — Foucault included — is yet to succeed in dispelling the categorical terms of order with which modern philosophy has infused it.<sup>35</sup> To risk affirming the spirituality of philosophy, by contrast, is to dramatize the fact that the will to live and die otherwise belongs to a question that upends and outruns any stable "ethos," any new moral code capable of holding forms of living under the strictures of an abstract and general mode of evaluation.<sup>36</sup> It belongs, that is, to the question — at once aesthetic, social, political, and cosmological — of what life might make of itself, of what the world may become capable of, when one endeavors to learn ways of inhabiting it otherwise. Which is why today, now that the Earth is beginning to rumble in the wake of environmental ravage, of the collapse of forms of sociality and the poisoning of modes of subjectivity, we may need to extend and reactivate the disconcertment on which Hadot insisted. We may need to add that, when it is the collective modes of *earthly* habitation that are in question, when the sociality of philosophy demands that one learns to let oneself be transformed by the questions of human and other-than-human others, such spiritual exercises are also, fundamentally, *planetary* experiments, engendering a metamorphosis of habits that might perhaps make perceptible a possible transformation of our habitats, a metamorphosis of our modes of earthly habitation still to be experienced on this rumbling Earth.<sup>37</sup>

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33. *Ibid.*, 89.

34. "These philosophers provide examples of how a life can be lived, but to imitate their example, in parallel to the arts, is to live a life that is distinctly our own." See Alexander Nehamas, "Is Living an Art that Can Be Taught?," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 40 (2015): 81–91.

35. I borrow the expression "terms of order" from Cedric J. Robinson, *The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

36. A point well made by Alexander Nehamas in *The Art of Living*.

37. Savransky, *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds*.

Connecting the art of life with an experiment in planetary exercises today is all the more important because, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari once claimed (relaying James), we have so many reasons not to believe in the world: “we have lost the world, worse than a fiancée or a god.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, what is at stake is truly a process of relearning a lost art. One that, ever since medieval scholasticism drew a stark distinction between *theologia* and *philosophia*, depleted philosophy of its belief in the world, of its implication in the task of subtending other forms of togetherness, of crafting methodologies for living and dying otherwise. For even when “in the modern age, philosophy regained its autonomy, it still retained features inherited from this medieval conception. In particular it maintained its purely theoretical character, which even evolved in the direction of a more and more thorough systematization. Not until Nietzsche, Bergson, and existentialism,” Hadot wrote, “does philosophy consciously return to being a concrete attitude, a way of life and of seeing the world.”<sup>39</sup> In what follows, I want to suggest that the name of William James ought to be added to this list. For indeed, whenever James is concerned, pragmatism is nothing if not the name for an art of living and dying with others on a fragile Earth.

#### LEARNING TO LIVE ON A PRECARIOUS EARTH: PRAGMATISM AND THE ART OF LIFE

The proposal that pragmatism might constitute nothing less than an art of life may initially seem baffling. After all, the received wisdom would have us believe that pragmatism constitutes, in the first instance, a philosophical method for settling otherwise interminable metaphysical disputes. As the editors of a collection on environmental pragmatism put it in the introduction to a volume that has now become something of a linchpin for certain debates around the relationship between pragmatism and ecophilosophy, “the fruits of this philosophical enterprise must be directed towards the practical resolution of environmental problems — environmental ethics cannot remain mired in long-running theoretic debates in an attempt to achieve philosophical certainty.”<sup>40</sup> It is this temperamental impatience with philosophical speculation, its thoroughly empiricist attention to and affection for facts and consequences, its relentless insistence in asking of every idea and every concept that it submits to the question “What difference will you make?,” that has also delivered us a distorted image of pragmatism as nothing more than the name for a quirky theory of truth that evades and rejects epistemological questions of correspondence in order to affirm, with a shrug of the shoulders, that truth equals the cash-value an idea is capable of generating, or indeed that “truth

38. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (New York: Verso, 1994), 75.

39. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 107–108.

40. Andrew Light and Eric Katz, “Environmental Pragmatism and Environmental Ethics,” in *Environmental Pragmatism*, ed. Andrew Light and Eric Katz (London: Routledge, 1996), 1–2.

in our ideas means their power to 'work'.<sup>41</sup> As such, nothing would seem further from the *ars vitae* of the philosophies of antiquity — nothing, indeed, would seem further from any ideal of *wisdom* — than this thoroughly anarchist, muddled, and inelegant philosophy of consequences.

Yet no matter how widespread this image of pragmatism has become, the fact is that such a rendering is itself the product of a habit of treating philosophies as so many theoretical systems of abstraction, divorced from the practical conditions and constraints that generate problems which call the philosopher into existence and turn her into their means. As such, it is itself a testament to the very modern impoverishment of philosophy, a testament to the fading of its concern with the question of learning how to live and die well. For indeed, it is not just that James never managed to write a systematic philosophical treatise, or that his was a fundamentally *public* philosophy, subtended largely by means of lectures delivered to a variety of audiences and in the presence of manifold others.<sup>42</sup> Such abstract accounts of pragmatism also tragically neglect the fact that, much like those who wonder how to go on living in this devastated present we inhabit while we still can, James's pragmatism too was born of an ecological collapse of sorts, one that undoubtedly implicated his own subjectivity but also extended far beyond it. Much, of course, has been made of James's own melancholic period. But the psychologization of philosophy that tends to follow from such focus on his personal experience neglects the fact that at stake was a sociopolitical and cosmological collapse as well. The social and political collapse was brought about by the experience of witnessing the United States' role in the Spanish-American War, the American annexation of the Philippines, and the American reactions to the Dreyfus affair, all of which James saw with distress as presaging the end of the adventurous spirit he associated with America, and the beginning of a new, corporate and military empire.<sup>43</sup> The cosmological collapse was engendered by the "breakdown" of the very scientific order of nature that the end of the nineteenth century "brought about in the older notions of scientific truth." As James described the latter in a rich passage:

"God geometrizes," it used to be said; and it was believed that Euclid's elements literally reproduced his geometrizing. There is an eternal and unchangeable 'reason'; and its voice was supposed to reverberate in *Barabra* and *Celarent*. So also the 'laws of nature,' physical and chemical, so of natural history classifications — all were supposed to be exact and exclusive

41. James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth*, 34.

42. For some rare cases where the style of James's philosophy becomes an explicit matter of philosophic concern, see George Cotkin, *William James, Public Philosopher* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); and Sarin Marchetti, "Style and/as Philosophy in William James," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 39 (2014): 339–352.

43. On this, see the excellent article by Deborah J. Coon, "'One Moment in the World's Salvation': Anarchism and the Radicalization of William James," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 1 (1996): 70–99. See also Alexander Livingston, *Damn Great Empires: William James and the Politics of Pragmatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

duplicates of pre-human archetypes buried in the structure of things, to which the spark of divinity hidden in our intellect enables us to penetrate. The anatomy of the world is logical, and its logic is that of a university professor, it was thought. Up to about 1850 almost everyone believed that that sciences expressed truths that were exact copies of a definite code of non-human realities. But the enormously rapid multiplication of theories in these latter days has well-nigh upset the notion of any one of them being a more literally objective kind of thing than another. There are so many geometries, so many logics, so many physical and chemical hypotheses, so many classifications, each one of them good for so much and yet not good for everything, that the notion that even the truest formula may be a human device and not a literal transcript has dawned upon us.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, despite what the all-too-popular image would have us assume, it is not simply out of some capricious instrumentalism, out of some philistine disdain for the philosophical glories of the upper ether, that one asks of every idea and of every concept that it consent, that it submit itself — its very meaning, value, and truth — to the question “What difference will you make?” To borrow James’s words again, “the philosophy which is so important in each of us is not a technical matter; it is our more or less dumb sense of *what life honestly and deeply means*. It is only partly got from books; it is our individual way of just seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos.”<sup>45</sup> Unsuspectedly, pragmatism bears a peculiar relationship to the tragic, where the relationship between success and failure, gains and losses, chaos and cosmos, is not one of opposition but of multiple *appositions*, turbulent transitions, ongoing and unfinished variations.<sup>46</sup> Which is to say that if such a question is asked, it is because pragmatism is above all a *response* to a foundering world, to a present in turmoil, in which the established foundations and certainties in light of which individual and collective lives were lived have begun to tremble, the dreams of untrammelled progress have been shattered, and one is confronted, once again, with the question of learning how to think and live otherwise, with the immanent imperative to reanimate the will to believe in a world that suddenly makes itself felt in all its tragic fragility: neither doomed nor certain to be saved, but permanently “in the making,” awaiting “part of its complexion from the future.”<sup>47</sup>

James made evident in the opening of *the Many and The One* — the manuscript of the would-be systematic treatise that he never managed to finish — that he too believed, not unlike the bizarre philosophers of antiquity, that philosophy “is a queer pursuit” that, whether trivial or sublime, “is as indestructible a human function as art is.”<sup>48</sup> And yet, born in the wake of breakdown, in response to a world

44. James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth*, 206.

45. *Ibid.*, 9.

46. For a generative conception of tragedy in a postcolonial world, see David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). For an excellent paper on the sense of tragedy in education, see Nicholas C. Burbules, “The Tragic Sense of Education,” *Teachers College Record* 91, no. 4 (1990): 469–479.

47. James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth*, 123.

48. William James, *Manuscript Essays and Notes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 3.

that has lost its bearings and is unlikely ever to get them back, the pragmatist art of life differs dramatically from the ancient modes of apprenticeship discussed above. For indeed, the philosophers of antiquity trusted that the truth had been given in the master's words, and each philosophical school thought of itself in possession of an ideal of wisdom specified in advance, which required an exegetical exercise aimed at illuminating enclosed truths by virtue of the practice of learning to live in accordance with them.<sup>49</sup>

It is for this reason that, as far as ancient philosophies were concerned, the notions of a "way of life" and an "art of living" can be read somewhat interchangeably: the apprentice's art consisted of learning to live her way toward the (ever-receding) horizon of wisdom. By contrast, the question of learning to live in the wake of a world that has collapsed, and of rediscovering the will to believe in this world in spite of all, is not one that the postulation of a general philosophical ideal, defined in advance, can resolve. For the philosopher is thoroughly implicated in the debacle, and as such, "when he ventures to say which course of action is the best, [the philosopher] is on no so essentially different level from the common man."<sup>50</sup> With pragmatism, therefore, the apprenticeship becomes radical indeed, a groundless education, a veritable art that implicates its apprentice not simply in a *process* of learning to become worthy of the truths laid out in the master's words, but in the *problem* — at once educational, existential, aesthetic, and ecological — of learning, of living, of engendering its own methods to live.<sup>51</sup> What is life to make of itself? There is no preexisting model to be merely imitated, no ethical rules capable of securing the process in advance. In the wake of a trembling world, the task of philosophy for James is not to legislate how others should live. Living — which is to say crafting always singular and multiple ways of living and dying well — must always be invented anew. As such, rather than laying down universal rules, a transcendental moral code that everyone is exhorted to follow, the center of gravity of philosophy must alter its place: it must learn to immanently "swell the current of being, add character to it." After all,

philosophies are intimate parts of the universe, they express something of its own thought of itself. A philosophy may indeed be a most momentous reaction of the universe upon itself. It may, as I said, possess and handle itself differently in consequence of us philosophers, with our theories, being here; it may trust itself or mistrust itself the more, and by doing the one or the other, deserve more the trust or the mistrust. What mistrusts itself deserves mistrust.<sup>52</sup>

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49. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 74.

50. James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*, 214.

51. On this groundless notion of apprenticeship, see Martin Savransky, *The Adventure of Relevance: An Ethics of Social Inquiry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 218. On generative problematization in education, see Hans Schildermans, "On Problematic Situations and Problematizations: Study Practices and the Pragmatics of a World To-Be-Made," in this issue.

52. William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 317.

Pragmatism, in other words, is an art of living and dying with others in a tremorous cosmos, on a precarious Earth whose history, James wrote paraphrasing Gustav Fechner, “develops from within,” like that of a “wonderful egg which the sun’s heat, like that of a mother-hen, has stimulated to its cycles of evolutionary change.”<sup>53</sup> To suggest that the history of the Earth develops from within deserves to be read as an ecologically pluralistic gesture *avant la lettre*,<sup>54</sup> for what it makes resonate is the possibility of resisting the temptation to speak of the Earth as an already-constituted system, surrendering too early to a oneness which it lacks.<sup>55</sup> Instead, it enables us to relate to the Earth as an always fragile and precarious composition in the making after all: the name for an ongoing and unfinished adventure of geohistorical events, more-than-human activities, critical experiences, revolutionary shifts, at all times “subject to addition and liable to loss.”<sup>56</sup>

And if life, our human and other-than-human lives, are so many “bundles of habits,” it is also the case that, on an Earth whose history develops precipitously from within, “[l]ife is in the transitions as much as in the terms connected; often, indeed, it seems to be there more emphatically, as if our spurts and sallies forward were the real firing-line of the battle, were like the thin line of flame advancing across the dry autumnal field which the farmer proceeds to burn.”<sup>57</sup> Which is why, beyond self-control and meditation, the fundamental — and fundamentally groundless — exercise of the pragmatist art of life amounts to sustaining the most radical form of *experimentation* with living and dying on Earth otherwise. For as James told the teachers, “our virtues are habits as much as our vices,” and “[n]ew habits *can* be launched,” new habitats might yet be recomposed, “on condition of there being new stimuli and new excitements.”<sup>58</sup> Of course, on such a turbulent Earth as the one we still inhabit, “life abounds in these, and sometimes they are such critical and revolutionary experiences that they change a man’s scale of values and systems of ideas.”<sup>59</sup> In this sense, the aim of education would therefore be none other than intensifying, of giving generative expression to, new events and excitements, so as to engender in the course of its ongoing experimentation the cultivation of a collective intelligence by which

53. *Ibid.*, 158.

54. In this sense, there is a very generative connection to be explored between James’s pluralistic Earth and Bruno Latour’s rendering of Lovelock’s Gaia. See Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017). For an insightful engagement with Latour’s rendering of Gaia and its implications for education, see Stefano Oliverio, “Reconstructing Pragmatism in the New Climate Regime: Education after the Intrusion of Gaia,” in this issue.

55. See by contrast the eco-monism of those who argue that the Anthropocene forces us to conceive of the Earth as a unitary system. Clive Hamilton, *Defiant Earth: The Fate of Humans in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

56. James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth*, 82.

57. William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Minneola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 45.

58. James, *Talks to Teachers*, 64, 76–77.

59. *Ibid.*, 77.

we might transform our habits of conduct and our tendencies of behavior, by which we might precipitate an immanent revaluation of our values of living and dying.<sup>60</sup>

Which is why to those Anthropocene stories of world-salvation that, in blindly enthroning a figure of homogenous humanity, call for a new global ethos to which every student must conform, James poses a stark warning: “*Don’t preach too much to your pupils or abound in good talk in the abstract.*”<sup>61</sup> The art of living can only be learned *livingly*, in the immanent movement of experimentation through which our own modes of living and dying with others become methods and objects of a radical revaluation.

Such an *ars vita* provides no guarantees. It offers neither narratives of redemption, nor promises of salvation. If the history of the Earth remains in the making and any attempt to give a general philosophical definition of it “so that no one’s business is left out, so that no one lies outside the door saying ‘Where do I come in?’ is sure in advance to fail,”<sup>62</sup> one cannot but grope experimentally in the dark. What is more, there is no way of telling, in advance, “how much more outcry or how much appeasement comes about.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the pragmatist art of life is born not of the fantasy of human mastery and colonial management but of the trust in an experimental practice of sociality that endures and exceeds the established terms of order as well as their collapse. As such, it cannot continue to dodge the fact that, while *moments* of world salvation are not impossible, these are moments only, and on a precarious Earth there will be “real losses and real losers, and no total preservation of all that was.”<sup>64</sup>

No art of living without an art of dying. After all, the art of survival is never to have lived. And by posing the question as one of *whether or not* one will live, as a matter of the imperative preservation of a world that has brought an end to so many others, the abstract concern with survival risks stifling the immanent experimentation that the question of how to live and die well with others might otherwise be capable of engendering. So many others have already perished, so many losses make up our worlds, that no art of living today can be cultivated without “this acceptance of loss as unatoned for, even tho the lost element might be oneself.”<sup>65</sup> That said, to conjoin irredeemable loss with the

60. Martin Savransky, “The Bat Revolt in Values: A Parable for Living in Academic Ruins,” *Social Text* 37, no. 2 (2019): 135–146. See also the wonderfully pragmatic book by Thierry Drumm, *Tricher: Fabrications d’Intelligence Collective à l’École* [On Cheating: Fabrications of Collective Intelligence in School] (Liège, Belgium: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2019).

61. James, *Talks to Teachers*, 71 (emphasis in original).

62. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 32.

63. James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*, 207.

64. James, *Pragmatism and the Meaning of Truth*, 142.

65. *Ibid.*



imperative for experimentation is neither an exercise in futility nor a surrender to resignation. By contrast, a pragmatist art of dying would, at the very least, require simultaneously rejecting both the cruel optimism of Anthropocene stories and the eco-nihilism of those for whom the end of the world — which is to say, of certain extractive modes of living that have ploughed the world — amounts to the end of everything as such.<sup>66</sup> Whenever pragmatism is concerned, accepting loss, assenting to the fact that “shipwreck in detail, or even on the whole, is among the open possibilities,”<sup>67</sup> means learning to risk the consequences while trusting that one and many “afters” to the end of the world may be possible in spite of all; that an Earth on which to live and die otherwise could still, perhaps, be composed.

The pragmatist art of life is thus born not only of the collapse of established orders but of the attempt to learn from a certain sociality of collapse, which seeks to snatch a possible from the claws of catastrophe so as to work toward the possibility of being assembled otherwise, of composing a world “conceived after a *social* analogy, as a pluralism of independent powers. It will succeed just in proportion as more of these work for its success. If none work, it will fail.”<sup>68</sup> Which is why, more than any other *school*, the pragmatist art of life cannot but be performed in common, from the interstices of the uncommon grounds of the divergent and more-than-human multiplicity of our many lives and deaths.<sup>69</sup> This is another reason why no answer to the question of what makes life worth living, or what makes death worth living for, can be provided in general, couched in the terms of abstract rules valid, in principle, for everyone. For to seek to cultivate an art of life from and through the sociality of collapse, to ask what might make life worth living and a death worth living for on this Earth we inhabit while we still can, requires that one risk exposing one’s values, one’s reasons to live and die, to the presence of others, with the trust of a held-out hand.

And such a question must be posed, as indeed James posed it, even and especially in the presence of those whose ending has already come or is now upon them, to those to whom reflection on or the witnessing of sheer devastation has led them to *Weltschmerz*, to a distrust of life and world. James posed it in the presence of “the whole army of suicides,” one “whose roll-call, like the famous evening

66. On the notion of “cruel optimism,” see Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). See also Martin Savransky, “Counter-Apocalyptic Beginnings: Cosmoecology for the End of the World,” *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society* 4, no. 1 (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1080/25729861.2021.1914423>.

67. James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*, 207.

68. William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 228–229.

69. Martin Savransky, “The Pluralistic Problematic: William James and the Pragmatics of the Pluriverse,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 38, no. 2 (2019): <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276419848030>. See also Isabelle Stengers, *Réactiver le Sens Commun: Lecture de Whitehead en temps de débâcle* [Reactivating Common Sense: Reading Whitehead in Times of Debacle] (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de Penser en Rond, 2020).

gun of the British army, follows the sun round the world and never terminates." For indeed, "we too," said James to his audience of Christians and agnostics, "as we sit here in our comfort, must 'ponder these things' also, for we are of one substance with these suicides, and their life is the life we share. The plainest intellectual integrity, — nay, more, the simplest manliness and honor, forbid us to forget their case."<sup>70</sup> It is by consenting to letting himself be transformed by the presence of others, by accepting the manner in which these endangered others, human and more, put ourselves into question, that James's pragmatism seeks to affect a metamorphosis of our lives, to reignite our will to believe in the world in spite of all. What is the world going to be? What is life to make of itself? One may indeed "surrender to the nightmare view" of the world and complete the view with one's own suicide. In that case, pessimism, "completed by your act, is true beyond a doubt, so far as your world goes. Your mistrust of life has removed whatever worth your own enduring existence might have given to it." But suppose, he writes, "however thickly evils crowd upon you, that your unconquerable subjectivity proves to be their match, and that you find a more wonderful joy than any passive pleasure can bring in trusting ever in the larger whole. Have you not made life worth living on those terms? What sort of a thing would life really be, with your qualities ready for a tussle with it, if it only brought fair weather and gave these higher faculties of yours no scope?"<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, on this precarious Earth, the fate of our lives and of our worlds hangs on a "perhaps," and it "is only by risking our persons from one hour to another that we live at all. And often enough our faith beforehand in an uncertified result is *the only thing that makes the result come true*."<sup>72</sup> Once again, there are no guarantees. This is genuine experimentation in unsafe operating space.<sup>73</sup> Responding to the genuine option that characterizes the present, the pragmatist art truly is an *art of living dangerously* indeed, not unlike the kind that Nietzsche had dreamed of.<sup>74</sup> For the devastation remains ongoing and unfinished, and no amount of abstract ideals and general plans, no dreams of human progress, geoengineering, and green growth, will cover us from the risks we run in being part of this world.<sup>75</sup> But perhaps, just perhaps, enabling the Earth to resume its rights, learning to give to the sociality of our ecological collapse the power to have us collectively experimenting, immanently, with how to reweave our stories, with how to live and die together

70. James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*, 37.

71. *Ibid.*, 60.

72. *Ibid.*, 59.

73. See the brilliantly speculative book by Stephanie Wakefield, *Anthropocene Back Loop: Experimentation in Unsafe Operating Space* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2020).

74. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage, 1974), 288.

75. Martin Savransky, "After Progress: Notes for an Ecology of Perhaps," *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization* 21, no. 1 (2021): 267–281; and Martin Savransky, "Ecological Uncivilisation: Precarious World-Making after Progress," *Sociological Review* 70, no. 2 (2022): 367–384.

otherwise, may itself constitute a critical and revolutionary experience in its own right. Perhaps believing in this world, in its openings and its tragedies, may engender a reorganization of our habits and habitats; perhaps it may enable us to learn how to generatively make lives worth living and deaths worth living for in the ongoing and unfinished history of this precarious Earth.

At the end of the day, no philosophical maxims apply, save for this, perhaps: "Be not afraid of life."<sup>76</sup> Be not afraid, even if — even *when* — it is life that will kill you. It is only by living, by experimenting with life, that the universe might come to trust itself the more, and therefore endow those who inhabit it with tools to "not only guide us over the map of life, but [to] *revalue* life by their use."<sup>77</sup> This indeed is the reason why pragmatism must ask of ideas that they tell us what difference they are liable to make. For the pragmatist apprenticeship in living involves nothing less than an ongoing and unfinished experimentation, with our habits and our habitats, in the hold of the possibility of living a life worthy of worlds to be composed otherwise. And on an Earth that remains fragile and precarious, at every turn brushing against its bygone and possible ends, our very modes of living and dying, the kinds of ideas we create, the stories we tell, may well become active factors in the recomposition of this world's precarious fate. In this way, far from a technical matter, the pragmatic question turns out to be an existential test. What it confronts us with amid the devastation, what it asks us to risk in the wake of ecological breakdown, is a demanding and experimental question: Does the world, with our exercises and ideas, with our modes of living and dying, with our actions and additions, "*rise or fall in value?* Are the additions *worthy or unworthy?*"<sup>78</sup>

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76. James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*, 62.

77. James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, 71.

78. James, *Pragmatism and the Meaning of Truth*, 122–123.