

All is not Vanity: William James versus Ernest Renan

Nem tudo é vaidade: William James versus Ernest Renan

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Abstract: In James' work, there is an explicit reaction against Renan's insincerity and vanity as the dominant moral tone. The way in which James judges Renan in particular, and the Latin spirit in general, is related to an early identification with the German spirit through his Protestant background. Within this framework, we will see that through Carlyle's figure, James opposes the objective moral of work to Renan's interior gnostic sensitivity. Since there exists an overt link between Carlyle and Calvinism, the component of Protestant ethics in James' proposal becomes manifest. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to show that *strenuous mood*, as a characteristic of courage and manhood, has a Protestant tone.

Keywords: Carlyle. Ethics. Protestantism. Renan. Strenuous mood.

Resumo: Na obra de James, há uma reação explícita contra a falsidade e a vaidade como o tom moral dominante. O modo como James julga Renan em particular, e o espírito latino em geral, está relacionado a uma identificação inicial com o espírito germânico através de um contexto protestante. Dentro dessa estrutura, nós veremos que por meio da figura de Carlyle, James opõe-se à moral objetiva da obra para com a sensibilidade gnóstica interior de Renan. Visto que há uma conexão óbvia entre Carlyle e o Calvinismo, o componente da ética protestante na proposta de James torna-se manifesta. Consequentemente, o propósito deste artigo é mostrar que o humor extenuante, como uma característica de coragem e virilidade, possui um tom protestante.

Palavras-chave: Carlyle. Ética. Humor extenuante. Protestantismo. Renan.

1 Introduction

Our purpose is to reveal through different papers the various components that constitute the concept of *strenuous mood*,¹ which is a key to understanding the

1 Richard Shusterman at the beginning of his paper, 2012, p. 433-454, gives some detail of the *Strenuous mood* concept from a conceptual point of view. It omits, however, a fundamental text from James to understand this notion, namely: *The energies of Man*. This omission can be saved by reading the article by Patrick K. Dooley, 2001, p. 18-28. For an approach to the cultural field where it emerges see SPEZIALE, 1980-1981, and COLELLA, 2016. On the subject of virility see: TOWNSEND, 1996. On the economic-energetic language of Neurasthenia and its relation to moral vigor see: LUTZ, 1991.

heroic aspect of William James's ethics. In Europe in the 19th century, different intellectuals opposed the already well-established cultural tendencies that focus on the group, a set of reflections tending to highlight individuals and exceptional attitudes giving shape to what today is known as the heroic Victorian criticism of mass society. In the United States, the reflection about men and exceptional attitudes takes its own shape towards the end of this century, mainly influenced by the energetic language of the entropy theory and by a Darwinian biological model with touches of Zola's naturalism. Reflections on vigor, struggle, commitment, manhood and strong attitudes are common in the United States and seem to respond to a need to deal with the mediocrity and relaxation of the civilized bourgeois life of the time. By using his skill as a psychologist, James takes part in this debate without abandoning moral exhortation. Hereafter, some of the components of strenuous mood will be highlighted, evidencing it as a key concept of James's ethical proposal by showing his moral opposition to Ernest Renan and the strategic way in which he uses Thomas Carlyle to present his own position in which objective vigor opposes futile sentimentality.

2 The path of the objective attitude

In a letter to Salter W. M. from Florence on October 6, 1892— at the time James was spending five months with his family in Europe—he says about Renan's death: "So wizard Renan is no longer among us!"² In relation to the great French intellectual, in different sections of James' writings we come across a complex treatment of recognition and criticism: a considerable respect for his artistic qualities, but a strong rejection of his moral attitude. What James finds harmful in Renan—and also partly in the Latin spirit—defines his own seriousness.

The queer thing was that he so slowly worked his way to his natural mental attitude of irony and persiflage, on a basis of moral and religious material. He levitated at last to his true level of superficiality, emancipating himself from layer after layer of the inhibitions into which he was born, and finally using the old moral and religious vocabulary to produce merely musical and poetic effects. That moral and religious ideals, seriously taken, involve certain refusals and renunciations of freedom, Renan seemed at last entirely to forget. On the whole, his sweetness and mere literary coquetry leave a displeasing impression, and the only way to handle him is not to take him heavily or seriously. The worst is, he was a prig in his ideals [...].³

The attitude of "irony" and "persiflage" opposes the moral and religious ideals that always involve "prohibition" and "renouncement." It is noteworthy that, although these may be the dominant notes of some traditional religions, it is not so easy to assert the same of morality. Complete systems in moral matters do not presuppose these traits, or otherwise propose an economy of pleasures rather than

2 JAMES, 1920, p. 326.

3 Idem, p. 326.

renouncement. James knows them, yet, maintains that moral will acquires its highest performance when linked to a religious ideal that demands sacrifice. In his essay on ethics written one year earlier, he says that infinite demand leads to “*strenuous mood*” penetrated by a “tragic urgency.” Throughout history, he adds, we find on the one hand antagonism between Puritanism, the energy attitude, and the ethics of the infinite and, on the other, the careless temper, the genial moods, the ethics of prudence, and the satisfaction of the merely finite.⁴ The attitude of irony and persiflage as well as the attitude of careless and easy going temper are opposed, in different ways, to the ethical mood that defines James’s thinking and personality. In his *Manuscript Lectures* (1880-1881), he states: “Religion means: not everything is vanity,”⁵ and about twenty years later, in conference two of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, he explains this idea when he analyzes human beings’ attitude towards the universe as a whole:

This sense of the world’s presence, appealing as it does to our peculiar individual temperament, makes us either strenuous or careless, devout or blasphemous, gloomy or exultant, about life at large; and our reaction, involuntary and inarticulate and often half unconscious as it is, is the completest of all our answers to the question, “What is the character of this universe in which we dwell?”⁶

From this perspective, religion is defined by a type of attitude that makes human beings become “solemn, serious, and tender [...] If glad, it must not grin or snicker; if sad, it must not scream or curse.”⁷ The opposite of this seriousness and solemnity towards the whole world that is qualified as religious is exemplified by the attitude, *who cares? All is vanity*. Two authors are relevant here: Voltaire and Renan. In his old age, the former confesses to a friend: “I get a hundred pike-thrusts, I return two hundred, and I laugh. [...] I can look upon the world as a farce even when it becomes as tragic as it sometimes does, all comes out even at the end of the day, and all comes out still more even when all the days are over.”⁸ But the one who defines vanity as an attitude more clearly is Renan, who asserts:

There are many chances that the world may be nothing but a fairy pantomime of which no God has care. We must therefore arrange ourselves so that on neither hypothesis we shall be completely wrong. We must listen to the superior voices, but in such a way that if the second hypothesis were true we should not have been too completely duped. If in effect the world be not a serious thing, it is the dogmatic people who will be the shallow ones, and the worldly minded whom the theologians now call frivolous will be those who are really

4 JAMES, 2009, p. 252.

5 JAMES, 1988, p. 177.

6 JAMES, 1917, p. 36.

7 Idem, p. 39.

8 Ibid., p. 36.

wise. *In utrumque paratus*, then. Be ready for anything—that perhaps is wisdom. Give ourselves up, according to the hour, to confidence, to skepticism, to optimism, to irony, and we may be sure that at certain moments at least we shall be with the truth [...]. Good-humor is a philosophic state of mind; it seems to say to Nature that we take her no more seriously than she takes us. I maintain that one should always talk of philosophy with a smile. We owe it to the Eternal to be virtuous; but we have the right to add to this tribute our irony as a sort of personal reprisal. In this way we return to the right quarter jest for jest; we play the trick that has been played on us. Saint Augustine's phrase: *Lord, if we are deceived, it is by thee!* remains a fine one, well suited to our modern feeling. Only we wish the Eternal to know that if we accept the fraud, we accept it knowingly and willingly. We are resigned in advance to losing the interest on our investments of virtue, but we wish not to appear ridiculous by having counted on them too securely.⁹

James concludes that religion attacks such “chaffing” talk from Renan, favoring “gravity” over “pertness;” “it says *bush* to all vain chatter and smart wit”.¹⁰ As Santayana said, for his former teacher, the first thing to be erased is the cynical attitude, regardless of whether it is true or false.¹¹

The last Renan is the one that James rejects the most. Therefore, his review of the *Dialogues et Fragments Philosophiques* (1876) reveals his rejection of Renan's cynical and arrogant attitude as well as his own position. Anyone who believes that France still remains robust and fertile, he tells us, only has to read this work to realize that it is nothing else than a monument to mental ruin, dandyism and insincerity. The dialogues are simply “priggishness rampant, an indescribable unmanliness of tone compounded of a sort of histrionically sentimental self-conceit, and a nerveless and boneless fear of what will become of the universe if *l'homme vulgaire* is allowed to go on.”¹² The notion of God is replaced by a cold-blooded destiny, and none of the characters in the dialogues fully represent his thought, but just different parts of his brain remaining skeptical in the end.

In the first dialogue, he states that even though the universe is a fatal mechanism, it is also true that there is a final purpose in which we all collaborate by pursuing our own goals, and that the task of the great intellectual who understands the mechanism is

[...] to collaborate in the fraud which lies at the base of things; the finest function of genius is to be the accomplice of God, to connive at the eternal policy, to assist in spreading the traps and nets, to help to deceive individuals for the good of the aggregate, to be the instrument of this grand illusion by

9 Ibid., p. 38.

10 Ibid., p. 38.

11 About this point and the James-Santayana relation see: DEL CASTILLO, 2011.

12 JAMES, 1987, p. 327.

preaching virtue to men, while he knows all the time that they shall draw no profit from it.¹³

In this theology, God's place is occupied by a deity, a mixture of genius of the species and nature in the cold and modern sense of the term, but which, as we see in the second dialogue, has another end in addition to perpetuating itself as a wheel. In James's words, "The *savant*, the philosopher, is what, through all her sidereal systems, Nature is seeking to form."¹⁴ Philosophy is the end of creation, but it is extremely difficult and rare. When it appears, it should occupy the center of the historical scene; however, this is not so. The philosopher used to live off princes' crumbs and now lives off the world's crumbs. But it is good for this to happen. It is right for the superficial and selfish spirits of the time to occupy a central spot. By dedicating themselves to consuming world's banality, they unconsciously collaborate to making the philosopher—who opposes them both in taste and lifestyle—remain locked in his library, where he should be. In the third dialogue, we find an apocalyptic view of the current course of history and terror of the Commune. The only positive aspect that allows us to enjoy Renan, James says, is the image of a "League of Sages" (*league of savants*) who will keep the world in order through fear and may be called gods.

At the end, it seems that the intellectual oligarchy and the commoners shake hands in terror: "Fear, mistrust of time and the persuasive force of what is good, seem to be ingrained in the bones of most of the present generation of Frenchmen [...]."¹⁵ The other texts of the volume, James says, have the same tone, the same virtues, and the same flaws than these, and their only quality is sincerity, which in this case, is not favorable. Renan even boasts of being a stranger in his time, someone who has no hope (*sans espérance*)¹⁶ and who can stand at a futile distance. "The true atheist is a frivolous man" is one of his most quoted statements.

But already in his 'Antichrist,' published after the Commune, he spoke of the summit of wisdom being the persuasion that at bottom all is vanity; and if this book be really half trifling, he would seem practically to have espoused that persuasion—in other words, to have become a frivolous man, or, according to his own definition, an atheist. *Indeed, if one were to seek a single phrase which should define the essence of religion, it would be the phrase: all is not vanity.* The solace and anæsthetic which lies in the conclusion of Ecclesiastes is good for many of us; but M. Renan's ostentatious pretension to an exquisite sort of religious virtue has debarred him from the right to enjoy its comforts.¹⁷

13 Idem, p. 329.

14 Ibid., p. 329.

15 Ibid., p. 330.

16 Ibid., p. 331.

17 Idem, p. 331.

Although decomposition or decay ruin Renan's mind, to James the worst thing is the immense pedantry of the person who witnesses the worst scene from a distance—becoming an accomplice of its suspected artisan—with a sardonic smile. And all this is based on an aristocratic sensitivity! "This cannot be the best of men. The political or spiritual hero will always be the one who, when others crumbled, stood firm till a new order built itself around him [...]."18 The review clearly demands a little more *vigor* when faced with crisis: "[...] must not take it hard if we insist on a little more *courage* in him when the wind begins to blow."19 However, vanity, cynicism and derision are part of the wide gap between Renan and James. The question of virility and vigor is gravitating here, or in other words, the difference is expressed in these terms. The signifiers used are quite clear. On the one hand, we have the "feminine cowardice" of the person who "butterflies" a "pink optimism", and on the other, that who forgets his "emotions" and "complaints" "and gets to work as a man."²⁰

We have noticed two sets of well-defined features both in his *Letters* and in his works. On the one hand, there is the Puritan, energetic, courageous and vigorous attitude; solemn, serious, tender and bravely masculine. On the other hand, there is the feminine cowardice and insincerity of the cynical attitude that in relaxation yields to vanity. These two opposing columns cannot be defined clearly since the features mentioned above are not always present. However, it is quite clear that the general framework of the opposition between vain, affected sentimentality and frank, committed vigor responds to the 19th century debate between the Latin and Germanic spirit.²¹ Although in James's work, such a debate does not appear, we find, however, many comments and additions that place him on the German side. With admiration he comments, for example, on the *mighty powerful construction* of German morality in which life dramas hardly ever have any effect. In his 1882 journey, he states that Americans only lack the German *abdominal depth of temperament*. We have seen how Puritan ethics is considered vigorous and we know that in relation to Renan's death, James speaks about his vanity, superficiality

18 Ibid., p. 332.

19 Ibid., p. 330. Italics added by the author.

20 What divided James from Santayana is complex. It is linked to the ideal of life that each one holds and, for that reason, not to be treated here, but we find between that which divides them something that is of the utmost importance to enrich the already mentioned signifiers. "Santayana introduces himself to James's class at Harvard in 1883 and his first impression is that James considers him too weak for philosophy. The first thing he asks is, Are you sure you're interested in philosophy? Do you really want to dedicate yourself to philosophy? [...] Santayana must have had a hard time. "I still have the broken gesture [...] I must have seemed weak and not promising," he told to James's secretary, Daniel Cory. "Santayana," commented Cory, "always suspected that this professor of 'brave masculinity' perceived some deficiency in him and from that very moment he did not cease to feel uncomfortable and not wanted." It seems that Santayana (reader of Petrarch and lover of the Classics in general, asking from this perspective about the "good," "excellent" and "beautiful" human existence—Latin in a Protestant world—with another emotional and sexual structure) does not fit in the virility of the strenuous mood. See DEL CASTILLO, 2011, p. 294.

21 See ELIAS, 2001.

and cynicism as well as the French intellectuals' of his time who have generally fallen into a "bitter decay." He says the same about Florence in October, the year of Renan's death (1892). In a letter, he writes that "Germany is good but Switzerland is better", so good—he continues—that it is indescribable; their healthiness is beyond words: "the roads, the mountains, the customs, the institutions, the people."

Not a breath of art, poetry, esthetics, morbidity, or *suggestions!* It is all there, solid meat and drink for the sick body and soul, ready to be turned to, and do you infallible good when the nervous and gas-lit side of life has had too much play. What a see-saw life is, between the elemental things and the others! We must have both; but aspiration for aspiration, I think that of the over-cultured and exquisite person for the insipidity of health is the more pathetic. *After the suggestiveness, decay and over-refinement of Florence this winter, I shall be hungry enough for the eternal elements to be had in Schweiz.*²²

Though he inclines towards the ascetic Protestant lifestyle of those countries, Florence annoys him with its note of exuberance and sensuality he considers "decadent." To understand James's rejection of Florence, we have to assume and understand his personal preference for Protestant solemnity, purity, and sanity, or else his appraisals sound absolutely arbitrary. In another letter written in October, he says that although Florence is "delicious," he has an "organic protest" against certain things there. He feels that the air is lacking outside as if he were breathing in a closed environment. "The general *debility*; which pervades all ways and institutions, the worn-out faces, etc., etc."²³ In March 1893, he wrote to Henry—with whom he argues all the time on the opposite views they both have on these places—that his tourist gaze allows him to enjoy Italy while among those who have been living there for a while, "the *sweet decay* breathed in for six months has produced a sort of physiological craving for a change to *robuster* air." He keeps saying that although Italy has fulfilled its role very well, there are times when "the Florentine debility becomes really hateful to one" and ends up congratulating Henry for choosing the *strongest milieu*.²⁴ In June of the same year while in the United States, he complains: "There is a strange *thinness* and *femininity* hovering all over America, so different from the stoutness and masculinity of land and air and everything in Switzerland and England [...]."²⁵ We have emphasized these appreciations between the German and Latin cultures because their characterizations partly respond to the 19th century debate on Culture versus Civilization.

In the French vocabulary of the 18th century, the concepts of 'culture' and 'civilization' "belong to the same semantic field and reflect the same fundamental conceptions,"²⁶ although with reference to the individual and the collective

22 JAMES, 1920, p. 328. Italics added by the author.

23 Idem, p. 330. Italics added by the author.

24 Ibid., p. 342. Italics added by the author.

25 Ibid., p. 342. Italics added by the author.

26 CUCHE, 1992, p. 12.

respectively. The concept of civilization becomes dominant in France because the philosophers of Enlightenment support a government based on knowledge and reason. The term *Kultur* appears in Germany in the 17th as the transposition of the French term, although it evolves in a very different way and quickly becomes a sign of distinction and opposition to the “French civilization.” French manners were a model for the German court, and many bourgeois intellectuals opposed the so-called “spiritual” values to “courtly” values.

There are two words that will allow to define this opposition of the two systems of values: everything that originates in the authentic and contributes to the intellectual and spiritual enrichment will be considered as belonging to the culture; On the other hand, everything that is nothing more than bright appearance, lightness, superficial refinement, belongs to civilization, just as depth opposes superficiality.²⁷

Understood in these terms, culture marks the eighteenth-century German intellectual bourgeoisie whose sincerity opposes the French refinement of the court. In the 19th century, it becomes the stamp of the German nation: “sincerity, depth, spirituality, will be considered, from this moment, as specifically German.”²⁸ Is this not close to what James says about Switzerland and Germany, the centers of the Protestant world? Does James not claim some sort of sincerity, depth and spirituality against Renan’s cynical refinement?

In *The dilemma of Determinism*, James tells us that it is not easy to escape from pessimism, and that one of the ways to do so is to explain all evil as apparent: “[...] bleach the devil, disinfect the universe.”²⁹ This subjectivist attitude, which is also known as Gnosticism, states that evil is not really evil, but an opportunity for our sensitivity to acquire a deeper knowledge of the world. Perhaps the last purpose of the world is the enrichment of our subjective consciousness, and for this to happen, there must be contrasts. According to this perspective: “Life is a long feast of the tree of knowledge,”³⁰ and it would be better in this case, James asserts, to adopt a dramatic point of view: “[...] to treat the whole as a great play without end that the spirit of Universe, in the attempt to realize its own content, tries and represents eternally for itself.”³¹ Let us remember the magic pantomime we have just mentioned. This attitude, although it has every right to exist and presents itself as an alternative to pessimism, leads to “the most corrupt curiosity.”³²

Once dismissed the notion that certain duties are good in themselves, and that we are here to do them, no matter how we feel about them; once we consecrate the opposite notion that

27 *Idem*, p. 15.

28 *Ibid.*, p 15.

29 JAMES, 2009, p. 208.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

31 *Ibid.*, p 211.

32 *Ibid.*, p 212.

our performances and our violations of duty are for a common purpose, the attainment of subjective knowledge and feeling, and that the deepening of these is the chief end of our lives,— and at what point on the downward slope are we to stop?³³

In practical terms, this leads to sentimentality or unlimited sensuality, a current that leads one to seek to experience everything, James concludes. To his judgement, we find nothing else in the romantic school of Paris. Both Renan and Zola, though with different sensitivities, cultivate an aesthetic that has nothing to say when the hour of restlessness comes: “[...] under the pages of both there sounds incessantly the hoarse bass of *vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas*, which the reader may hear, whenever he will, between the lines.”³⁴ Zola is attributed his own, but to our purpose, what he says about Renan is quite revealing: He “[...] plays the coquette between the craven *unmanliness* of his *Philosophic Dialogues* and the *butterfly optimism* of his *Souvenirs de Jeunesse*.”³⁵ Renan’s insincere and unmanly attitude seems to incarnate, at least in part, the decadence attributed to the Latin spirit by Germanic criticism, and although it is evident that, in general terms, James’s character and ethical proposal are contrary to this attitude, in the text *The dilemma of Determinism*, his virile proposal becomes concrete in the figure of Thomas Carlyle.

In a very illuminating essay—somewhat forgotten nowadays—Josiah Royce (1855-1916) points, among other things, to what he considers the foundation of James’s moral proposal, where what James calls the philosophy of objective behavior is roughly clear. This proposal—that is, as “one awakens from some feverish dream, full of bad lights and noises, to find one’s self bathed in the sacred coolness and quiet of the air of the night”³⁶—has, according to Royce’s description, three main characteristics: first, the need to escape from sloth: “And sloth at any level of our development remains one of the most treacherous and mortal enemies of moral will;” secondly, the need to “avoid the dangers in which Hamlet’s type souls fall a prey. That is, they discourage the spirit that reflectively divides the inner self and that leaves it divided [...] the divided self is indeed, unless it can heal its deadly wound, by fitting action, a lost soul;” and thirdly, he emphasizes courage, not exterior courage, but that which “fits us to meet our true spiritual enemies—the courage that arises anew from despair and that undertakes, despite tribulations, to overcome the world—such courage is one of the central treasures of the moral life.”³⁷

Although one may wonder whether the characteristics Royce lists are indeed the most important from James’s ethics, they are certainly well defined features that show the connection between James and Carlyle. In *The Dilemma of Determinism*, he opposes Romantic subjectivism and Renan’s feminine cowardice to the objective attitude he adheres to by using Carlyle’s thought as an example in a lecture given to *Harvard Divinity Students*, published in the *Unitarian Review* of September 1884.

33 Ibid., p 212.

34 Ibid., p. 214.

35 Ibid., p. 214.

36 Ibid., p. 218.

37 ROYCE, 1912, p. 29.

However, the assumption that behavior deserves our ultimate acknowledgement instead of sensitivity, can be found in an intense letter from June 8th, 1866.³⁸ There, James tries to encourage his friend Thomas W. Ward who suffered from melancholy, “your melancholy tone about yourself.” In this letter, we find his concern about the relation between human beings’ worldview and their mental and moral state, some thoughts about the oscillation of consciousness towards optimism and pessimism, and ideas that advance concepts of the sick and healthy soul.³⁹ What is relevant in this case is that concerns such as melancholy, mood changes and the “fragmentary condition” of the cosmos—which caught the attention of philosophical tradition, and therefore, received varied answers—appear in James as a demand linked to *willpower* in an attempt to respond to such concerns almost twenty years before the cited essay:

I think we ought to be independent of our moods, look on them as external, for they come to us unbidden, and feel if possible neither elated nor depressed, but keep our eyes upon our work and, if we have done the best we could in that given condition, be satisfied.⁴⁰

Young James seems already convinced of what he will assert much later: that the only escape from the depth of *vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas* is practical. This is the most important concept Carlyle taught us, James says in the essay: “Hang your sensibilities! Stop your sniveling complaints, and your equally sniveling raptures! Leave off your general emotional tomfoolery, and get to WORK like men!”⁴¹ By paying attention to behavior and not to sensitivity, we break with subjectivism. The key lies in the tasks to be fulfilled and the changes to promote regardless of the emotions they entail: “No matter how we succeed in doing these outward duties [...] No matter how we feel; if we are only faithful in the outward act and refuse to do wrong, the world will in so far be safe, and we quit of our debt toward it.”⁴² The philosophy of objective behavior is also characterized as “chaste and sane and strong.”⁴³

In the preliminary study of his translation of Carlyle’s work on heroes, Borges (1899-1986) tells us: “No one has felt like him that this world is unreal (unreal like nightmares, and atrocious). From this general phantasm, rescues one thing, work, not its result, well understood, is mere vanity, mere image, but its execution.”⁴⁴ In *The Dilemma of Determinism*, James claims: “[...] our responsibility ends with the performance of that duty, and the burden of the rest we may lay on higher powers.”⁴⁵

38 JAMES, 1920, p. 78.

39 Ibid., p. 76.

40 Ibid., p. 78.

41 JAMES, 2009, p. 215.

42 Ibid., p. 215.

43 Ibid., p. 215.

44 BORGES, 1956, p. 22.

45 JAMES, 2009, p. 215.

Carlyle's figure is recurrent in James's work, who adheres to the heroic vision of history,⁴⁶ but as one of the constituents of *strenuous mood* opposed to Renan's banal refinement. From these links we can see two related elements. On the one hand, there is a large dose of ascetic Protestant work, and on the other, part of the typical characteristics attributed to the Germanic spirit. Carlyle himself "[...] in 1870 acclaimed the victory of the 'patient, noble, profound, solid and pious Germany' on the 'boastful, vainglorious, gesticulating, quarrelsome, restless, hypersensitive France'."⁴⁷

Within this general inclination toward the Germanic, James seems to accept the Protestant asceticism of work as his own, breaking from the subjective sentimental drift. But what is the nature of that asceticism? What role does it play in Carlyle's intellectual proposal? Max Weber (1864-1920) claims that Catholicism—as in Classical Antiquity—lacks an expression such as the German word "profession" (*beruf*) whose religious connotation is clear when used in its full meaning. Weber states that this word's specific meaning appears for the first time in the Lutheran translation of the Bible. Although its meaning is not faithful to the original version, it belongs to the "spirit of the one who translated it."⁴⁸ Where it said, "persevere in your work," we find, "persevere in your profession."⁴⁹ The adoption of this current meaning was not to be expected in Protestants' everyday language, whereas in the past, no signs of it appeared in the Protestant sacred or profane literature, except for a German mystic who exerted a great influence on Luther:

In any case, what was absolutely new was that the most honorable content of one's own moral behavior consisted precisely in conscience of duty. In the performance of professional work in the world. That was the inescapable sequel of the sacred sense, so to speak, of the work and what led to the ethical-religious concept of profession: concept that translates the dogma extended to all the Protestant creeds, opposite to the interpretation that the ethics of the Catholicism divulged of the evangelical norms in *praecepta* and *consilia* that preaches that the only way to live in the life that satisfies God is to accept—not the overcoming of earthly morality through the mediation of monastic asceticism but—the observation in the world of the duties that are imposed to each one for the position in life and that therefore comes to become for him in profession.⁵⁰

Although the Reformation cannot be understood without Luther's strong personality and mind, without Calvinism his reformist work would not have lasted. However, Weber states that continuity occurred in the rupture. Therefore, regardless of how superficial the research might be, what becomes explicit is that

46 See JAMES, 2009, p. 293-301.

47 BORGES, 1956, p. 11.

48 WEBER, 1991, p. 41.

49 Idem, p. 42.

50 Ibid., p. 42.

Calvinist religious and work life are fundamentally different from Catholics' and Lutherans'. The point of disagreement lies in the weight of belief in the absolute power of providence, since eternity has already decided who will be saved and who will not. Within Calvinism, the idea that our destiny depends on the decision of an absolutely free God is preponderantly present. Ultimately, there is a creature who is separated from Him by an insurmountable abyss and deserves eternal death unless He decides otherwise:

In his pathetic cruelty, this doctrine had to have above all a special consequence for the spirit of the generation that surrendered to the enormous coherence. The sensation of an unheard of inner solitude on the part of the isolated individual. In the question of eternal salvation, the most decisive of questions for a person of the Reformation era, the human being was condemned to walk alone in his street to fulfill a destiny determined from eternity.⁵¹

The inner emotional movements, and sometimes, the despair caused by the uncertainty of being a sinner and not knowing whether one is doomed to the eternal flames or deserves paradise, no longer possess the "magical" mechanisms of liberation available in the grace of the Catholic sacraments. Confession, for example, cuts the inner undercurrent of guilt and uncertainty with the certainty of God's forgiveness. Repentance and contrition, atonement, hope of grace, and certainty of forgiveness offer a discharge of tension for the believer's life and destiny. At the psychological level, we find the compelling need to verify *certitudo salutis*. In this respect, Calvinists lack the old balm and develop another device to answer the question about their salvation: doubts about whether they are saved or not are taken as lack of faith. With iron faith, they are forced to believe that they are saved as long as they can show concrete actions. Webber shows two different moods in Luther and Calvin, one more focused on the inner self and another on action. In both, we can find:

[...] deep differences in the conditions necessary for salvation, valid for the classification of all practical religiosity at all. The virtuous believer can be sure of his state of grace, whether he is a receiver of a tool of divine Power. In the first case his religious life will be inclined towards an emotional mystical culture, in the second, to an ascetic activity. Luther was closer to the first type, the second belonged to Calvinism.⁵²

From the moment Calvin considers that emotional evidence—however sublime it may be—is capricious and does not count, faith has to be credited for its objective results to serve as a reliable basis for *certitudo salutis*. Subjective drift is opposed to rational and methodical life. Compliance with the coldness of the profession becomes the technical means, not to buy beatitude—or to deserve it—but to free oneself from anguish. Execution demanded at the point of perfection is then a

51 Ibid., p. 61.

52 Ibid., p. 75.

mechanism that silences or represses—according to the frame of appropriation we choose—the existential anxiety of the ultimate end of life itself: “To put it in modern terms, Puritan—asceticism like all rational ascesis—impelled the human being to maintain his ‘constant motivations’ over ‘affections.’ Especially those motivations that this same ascesis had led him “to exercise.”⁵³

Therefore, two paths can ultimately be taken, the subjective or the objective one. American Methodism, for example, whose exalted ecstasies in the conversion crisis are taken as a certainty of holiness, took the subjective path. The objective path, on the other hand, has to do with abandoning the instability typical of all emotional certainty by adopting a mundane-professional life with the shape of a rational ascetic of work fulfillment, which in psychological terms bridges the trust of being saved. In negative terms, professional duty erases the anxiety of not knowing if we are doomed. This excerpt taken from Weber’s classic work accounts for both the origin and the relation between ethics and work in the Protestant world. William James’ religious sensitivity, his Protestant background, and his early advice to overcome melancholy through duty show us an easily identifiable mood. The Protestant attitude of duty at work appears in the article *The Dilemma of Determinism* expressed in Carlyle’s Calvinism.

Finally, it is convenient to give a brief account of this component so that all relations may be properly established. At the beginning of his work on heroes Carlyle says:

For, as I take it. Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain, all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world’s history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these. Too clearly it is a topic we shall do no justice to in this place!⁵⁴

Charles F. Harrold (1897-1948) asserts that Carlyle’s social writings find inspiration in the hope of a “rebirth of the heroic and the spirit of obedience and loyalty.”⁵⁵ Both doctrines of predestination possess a similar logic. Whereas most people are considered dark and insignificant, there are some chosen ones—the great men, the heroes—whose origin is transcendent and who must be followed and obeyed. Obedience is a virtue in so far as it is the obedience to the hero, destined to guide by nature. This is clearly a revival of the idea of the chosen for salvation where Calvinist fatalism of the transcendent operates in a non-dogmatic way. At the same time, we find a strong belief in a natural moral order. “What is Nature [...] Why

53 Ibid., p. 75.

54 CARLYLE, 1956, p. 3.

55 HARROLD, 1936, p. 480.

do not I name it god?”⁵⁶ In turn, speculative questions receive a strong rejection in this vision of the world. Questions such as: How can the moral order of the world, with the density of the eternal, be frustrated by the work of the insignificant and finite human being? receive as a response aversion and condemnation, as if they were something pathological or evil. The writer possesses much of the Calvinist hostility to theological mysteries. Expressed in non-dogmatic terms, he feels hostility towards speculation: “True knowledge for Carlyle was never a logical or demonstrative knowledge”, but a knowledge that arises from the “infiltration into the consciousness of nature and the origin of the laws by which humanity is governed.”⁵⁷ Together with this conception of the Calvinist and anti-enlightened source, we find that the true life, which is morally valuable, is not the inner life, full of research and questions, but the life of objective action, work, struggle, self-denial, and even martyrdom. Carlyle states: “Difficulty, self-denial, martyrdom, death are the seductions that act in the heart of man.”⁵⁸ The illogical ways of the Foreman (*Taskmaster*) who, far from the world, irrationally decides about people’s lives, and demands, in turn, strict obedience had Milton say: “I can go down to hell; but such a God will never have my respect.”⁵⁹ However, as Weber cautions, such a doctrine has proved to be a surprising stimulus for activity and self-forgetfulness.

The belief in a ‘chosen’, pre-determined outcome of human activity, and in man’s obligation to ‘assist’ in that outcome, is a belief which, despite its intellectual difficulties, has stirred the energy of millions. Carlyle’s social gospel of work and self-denial reflects the Calvinist disdain for ‘torturing anxiety’, as seen in Methodism, for example, with its eye forever turned on its own navel. It is labor, therefore, rather than emotional satisfaction or intellectual inquiry, which becomes the heart of Carlyle’s social ideal. Yet, it is labor in a strictly Calvinistic interpretation: labor not for the individual but for ‘the divine’, for the whole. The end would be ‘the moralization of all life’ with worldly callings exalted as the means of spiritual expression, and sometimes, unfortunately, worldly progress employed as the measure of spiritual success. For Carlyle, such labor would become a form of asceticism in reality with no claim of reward, “*all work being essentially worship, a sort of sacrament*”.⁶⁰

In his essay, James contrasts the interior-subjectivist current—with all the characteristics we have reviewed—with Carlyle’s objective attitude and his emphasis on duty and work. The passage from one sensitivity to another can be clearly seen. However, James says very little about the source, nature, reach and meaning of this morality which urges us to abandon sentimental drift and “work like men.” This is awkward even in the light of the extensive and conscientious commentary received by the subjectivist or gnostic attitude. Having used Carlyle to exemplify objective morality involves a certain set of outcomes. We hope to have made the necessary connections to prove the Protestant component of *strenuous mood*.

56 CARLYLE, 1896, p. 171.

57 FROUDE, 1877, p. 52.

58 CARLYLE, 1956, p. 81.

59 APUD WEBER, 1991, p. 59.

60 Harrold, Charles Frederick. *Op. cit.*, p. 482. Italics added by the author.

3 Final Words

In order to fight against melancholy, young James advises us to stand firm in the accomplishment of a task beyond our feelings. Many of his value judgments can be understood from his work and the letters he wrote. He opposes Renan's banal and cynical refinement to Carlyle's seriousness and virility. To Florence's general decadence, he contrasts Switzerland's sanity and sanctity. I hope to have proven that, in general terms, this is value distribution. In the same direction and moving towards the specific—taking into account Royce's words—the courage of *strenuous mood* has a component of Calvinist work ethic, which though evident in Carlyle, does play a role in James as well. This component is found throughout James's work. However, if this statement is too difficult to show, it is expected that at least it remains clear that what is established in *The Dilemma of Determinism* to the very well reconstructed gnostic and subjectivist attitude—which had led to the ruin of the French of the time—is opposed by the objective attitude about which he says very little. We have stressed that this attitude has much of the Protestant work ethic so influential among people of Calvinist descent. Work, which at the time of the Reformation was the right way to deal with the desperate uncertainty of salvation, is now, at the end of the Century's crisis the device that faces the onslaught of *vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas*.

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