

**ON VITAL RESERVES: THE  
ENERGIES OF  
MEN. THE GOSPEL OF  
RELAXATION; PP. 3-76**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649019465

On Vital Reserves: The Energies of Men. The Gospel of Relaxation; pp. 3-76 by William James

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**WILLIAM JAMES**

**ON VITAL RESERVES: THE  
ENERGIES OF  
MEN. THE GOSPEL OF  
RELAXATION; PP. 3-76**



# ON VITAL RESERVES

THE ENERGIES OF  
MEN. THE GOSPEL  
OF RELAXATION

BY  
WILLIAM JAMES



NEW YORK  
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY



BY WILLIAM JAMES

- The Principles of Psychology.** 2 vols. 8vo. \$5.00. Edd. net. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1890.
- Psychology: Brief Course.** 12mo. \$1.00 Edd. net. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1892.
- The Varieties of Religious Experience.** \$3.20 net. New York: Longmans, Green, & Co. 1902.
- The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy.** 12mo. \$2.00. New York: Longmans, Green, & Co. 1897.
- Is Life Worth Living?** 18mo. 50 cents net. Philadelphia: S. B. Weston, 1305 Arch Street. 1893.
- Human Immortality: Two supposed Objections to the Doctrine.** 16mo. \$1.00. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. 1898.
- Pragmatism.** \$1.25 net. New York: Longmans, Green, & Co. 1907.
- The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to Pragmatism.** \$1.25 net. New York: Longmans, Green, & Co. 1909.
- A Pluralistic Universe.** \$1.50 net. New York: Longmans, Green, & Co. 1909.
- Memories and Studies.** \$1.75 net. New York: Longmans, Green, & Co. 1911.
- Some Problems of Philosophy.** \$1.25 net. New York: Longmans, Green, & Co. 1911.
- Essays in Radical Empiricism.** \$1.25 net. New York: Longmans, Green, & Co. 1912.
- Talks to Teachers on Psychology: and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals.** 18mo. \$1.50 Edd. net. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1899.
- On Some of Life's Ideals.** "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" and "What Makes a Life Significant." Reprinted from *Talks to Teachers*. 16mo. 50 cents net. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1912.
- Habit.** Reprinted from *The Principles of Psychology*. 16mo. 50 cents net. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1914.
- On Vital Reserves.** "The Energies of Men," from *Memories and Studies* and "The Gospel of Relaxation" from *Talks to Teachers*. 50 cents net. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1916.
- The Literary Remains of Henry James.** Edited, with an introduction, by WILLIAM JAMES. With Portrait. Crown 8vo. \$2.00. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. 1893.

Copyright, 1911, by Henry James, Jr.  
 Copyright, 1899, 1900, by William James



**THE ENERGIES OF MEN**

Men. Lib.  
Hardman  
2-4-49  
539271

## THE ENERGIES OF MEN<sup>1</sup>

EVERYONE knows what it is to start a piece of work, either intellectual or muscular, feeling stale — or *oold*, as an Adirondack guide once put it to me. And everybody knows what it is to “warm up” to his job. The process of warming up gets particularly striking in the phenomenon known as “second wind.” On usual occasions we make a practice of stopping an occupation as soon as we meet the first effective layer (so to call it) of fatigue. We have then walked, played, or worked “enough,” so we desist. That amount of

<sup>1</sup> This was the title originally given to the Presidential Address delivered before the American Philosophical Association at Columbia University, December 28, 1906, and published as there delivered in the *Philosophical Review* for January, 1907. The address was later published, after slight alteration, in the *American Magazine* for October, 1907, under the title “The Powers of Men.” The more popular form is here reprinted under the title which the author himself preferred. From “*Memories and Studies*,” Longmans, Green & Co., 1911.



fatigue is an efficacious obstruction on this side of which our usual life is cast. But if an unusual necessity forces us to press onward, a surprising thing occurs. The fatigue gets worse up to a certain critical point, when gradually or suddenly it passes away, and we are fresher than before. We have evidently tapped a level of new energy masked until then by the fatigue-obstacle usually obeyed. There may be layer after layer of this experience. A third and a fourth "wind" may supervene. Mental activity shows the phenomenon as well as physical, and in exceptional cases we may find, beyond the very extremity of fatigue-distress, amounts of ease and power that we never dreamed ourselves to own, — sources of strength habitually not taxed at all, because habitually we never push through the obstruction, never pass those early critical points.

For many years I have mused on the phenomenon of second wind, trying to find a physiological theory. It is evident that

our organism has stored-up reserves of energy that are ordinarily not called upon, but that may be called upon: deeper and deeper strata of combustible or explosible material, discontinuously arranged, but ready for use by anyone who probes so deep, and repairing themselves by rest as well as do the superficial strata. Most of us continue living unnecessarily near our surface. Our energy-budget is like our nutritive budget. Physiologists say that a man is in "nutritive equilibrium" when day after day he neither gains nor loses weight. But the odd thing is that this condition may obtain on astonishingly different amounts of food. Take a man in nutritive equilibrium, and systematically increase or lessen his rations. In the first case he will begin to gain weight, in the second case to lose it. The change will be greatest on the first day, less on the second, less still on the third; and so on till he has gained all that he will gain, or lost all that he will lose, on that altered diet. He is now in nutritive equilibrium again,

but with a new weight; and this neither lessens nor increases because his various combustion-processes have adjusted themselves to the changed dietary. He gets rid, in one way or another, of just as much N, C, H, etc., as he takes in *per diem*.

Just so one can be in what I might call "efficiency-equilibrium" (neither gaining nor losing power when once the equilibrium is reached) on astonishingly different quantities of work, no matter in what direction the work may be measured. It may be physical work, intellectual work, moral work, or spiritual work.

Of course there are limits: the trees don't grow into the sky. But the plain fact remains that men the world over possess amounts of resource which only very exceptional individuals push to their extremes of use. But the very same individual, pushing his energies to their extreme, may in a vast number of cases keep the pace up day after day, and find no "reaction" of a bad sort, so long as decent hygienic conditions are