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James and Kant on Empirical Psychology

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1. Introduction

A serious confrontation between Kant and pragmatism should take into account their epistemological reflection on psychology, that is to say on the relation between philosophy and psychology. In this respect, in the *Principles of Psychology* (1890), it is clear James's positivistic attempts to keep separate (*divide et impera!*) empirical psychology and metaphysics. As known, Kant sharply distinguished empirical psychology from rational psychology and metaphysics, and criticized rational psychology as "a science surpassing all powers of human reason", then empirical psychology as not a "natural science proper". There are interesting criticisms made by James particularly about Kant's conception of the Ego as a logical function, meant to criticize Kant's dualistic view (phenomenon/noumenon) and to justify his substitution of the *transcendental Ego* by the *present passing Thought* of the "stream of consciousness".

At a closer reading, James's main interest is in epistemology, and that is the reason why he is in a continuous dialogue with Kant's *First Critique* and overall with post-Kantian idealist interpretations of it.¹ In a nutshell, he tries to give a phenomenal description of the unity of consciousness in order to make the postulation of a noumenal Ego, at least in psychology, a useless element. Moreover, his effort to offer a thoroughly sensational description of the reflective aspect of consciousness is to correct the original sin of *mental atomism* upon which both rationalism and classic empiricism

¹ With the locutions "post-Kantian" or "successors of Kant", James addresses absolute idealists such as T. H. Green, E. and J. Cairds, and also F. H. Bradley and his colleague J. Royce.

psychology rely. Many years later, in more philosophical works, he will be insisting on the anti-intellectualistic or sensible existence of *conjunctive relations* as the way to radically renew empiricism.

My intention is to offer a brief overview of Kant's critiques of psychology, following D. E. Leary's and L. Mecacci's interpretations, and then to focus upon James's interpretation and criticisms of the German philosopher to show the point of the distance between James's empiricism and Kant's transcendentalism. Following James's criticisms of Kantian epistemology, it is possible to understand better his conception of the relation between psychology and philosophy, and therefore the roots of his doctrine of radical empiricism.

2. Kant's critique of empirical psychology

The autonomy of empirical psychology from rational psychology, and therefore from metaphysics, was a result of Kant's criticism. One century later, James is still trying to corroborate the autonomy of psychology as a natural science, and he initially believed a rigorous adhesion to the positivistic standpoint to be the way.² His view has to be framed within the debate about the relationship between psychology and philosophy that was crucial at that time, particularly among empiricists. In fact, as A. Klein (2007) argued, James was in the standard line of several authors sustaining that psychology had to rely upon a set of loaded metaphysical assumptions, but the task of the psychologist was not to explain such pre-suppositions. Metaphysical questions were to be kept out of psychology books as much as possible. The field of philosophy was the proper locus for systematic investigations.

Kant notably sustained the epochal thesis that empirical psychology could never become a natural science, and many historians read the history of psychology of the Eighteenth Century as a reaction to his verdict (Mecacci 2004). His critical reformulation of psychology, instead, took place within the context of the dualistic vision of psychology inherited from Christian Wolff.³ The treatise of Baumgarten on *Metaphysics* (1739) was another very important source of Kant's critique of psychology. Also,

² According to Gerald Myers (1981), James's claim is not a convinced adhesion to such philosophical position; his choice rather expresses the need to define limits and possibilities of the new psychology so as to subtract it to traditional metaphysical infiltrations.

³ According to Wolff, empirical psychology was "the science of what experience teaches us about the soul. [...] it is an inductive science that leads to empirical generalizations about the soul and its activities" (Leary 1982, 19).

empiricist psychologists, such as Johann Nicolas Tetens and his tripartite faculty of psychology, were particularly relevant to his reflection in the field of psychology. His three critiques, notably, reflect the psychological division of the three faculties of knowing, willing, and feeling.

However, according to Leary (1982), Kant first carried on a systematic critique of rational psychology in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781–1787), then he concentrates on empirical psychology to conclude negatively about its possibility to be a natural science. But then, he suggests the adoption of an “anthropological” methodology based on observations of the external sense to redeem a certain version of empirical psychology.

As to what concerns the first step, that is his critique of rational psychology, Kant clearly maintains that rational analysis cannot acknowledge the nature of the thinking subject. This power is not given to human reason. As well known, only cognitive powers of sensibility and understanding, working together, can produce *a priori* synthetic knowledge. In the first chapter of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, Kant addresses the “Paralogisms of Pure Reason”. These are inferential errors committed by rationalists in the psychology field. Kant seems to be partially sympathetic with these authors, since he is convinced that these errors are not merely due to inaccuracy but rather are “inevitable, grounded in the transcendental confusion” that he succeeded in identifying (J. Wuerth 2010, 210). Rather, it is the nature of human reason that is guilty of such illusions.

If more than the *cogito* were the ground of our pure rational cognition of thinking beings in general; if we also made use of observations about the play of our thoughts and the natural laws of the thinking self created from them: then an empirical psychology arise, which would be a species of the *physiology* of inner sense, which would perhaps explain the appearances of inner sense, but could never serve to reveal such properties as do not belong to possible experience at all (as properties of the simple), nor could it serve to teach *apodictically* about thinking beings in general something touching on their nature; thus it would be no *rational* psychology.

Now since the proposition *I think* (taken problematically) contains the form of every judgment of understanding whatever and accompanies all categories as their vehicle, it is clear that the conclusions from this can contain a merely transcendental use of the understanding, which excludes every admixture of experience; and of whose progress, after what we have shown above, we can at the start form no advantageous concept. Thus we will follow it through all the pred-

ications of the pure doctrine of the soul with a critical eye.

Kant 1998, B 405–6

Rationalists are deceived by the concept “I think”, which is, according to Kant, the only subject matter of rationalist psychology. From this proposition, they draw false conclusions about the nature of the soul, namely that it is substance, simple as to its quality, numerically identical, and in relation to possible objects in space. The confusion is mainly due to an undue shift from the exposition of thought as a logical function to a metaphysical determination of the object of thought. From the *unity of consciousness* it is possible to infer the validity of the categories, but not any metaphysical attributes of the subject of consciousness. In his *Deduction* of categories, Kant distinguished two types of self-consciousness. Through “empirical apperception” or “inner sense”, we can know ourselves as existing phenomena, that is to say being aware of our mental states. The “original or pure apperception” is, instead, the pure consciousness of ourselves as thinking subjects. Since, as Wuerth underlines, concepts become determinate only in their connection with sensible intuition, mere consciousness is “devoid of all empirical predicates, completely indeterminate, and thus inadequate for knowledge” (Wuerth 2010, 216). As is well known, Kant distinguished consciousness from empirical cognition or experience. In brief, without mixture with experience, the study of the transcendental “I think” cannot produce further knowledge. But since experience can never provide a solid basis for a purely rational psychology, Kant seems to conclude that psychology can only be an empirical science. The study of our soul has to proceed “under the guidance of experience”, and our investigation should not overcome “the limits within which a content can be provided for them by possible inner experience” (Leary 1982, 22).

Leary mentions two other important references to psychology by Kant. The first one is in the preface of his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786). There, Kant was considering the possibility of a scientific psychology but concluded that this was not possible.

Therefore, the empirical doctrine of the soul can never become anything more than an historical doctrine of nature, and, as such, a natural doctrine of inner sense which is as systematic as possible, that is, a natural description of the soul, but never a science of the soul, nor even, indeed, an experimental psychological doctrine.

Kant 2004, 7

In his view, natural sciences should be based upon natural metaphysics. For so-called *proper* science to be demonstrative, it needs to be founded on

pure principles, not empirical ones. The problem with empirical data of psychology was that they seemed not to have “*spatial dimensions*” and, therefore, it was not possible to relate them rationalistically. It could not even be really experimental according to Kant. As provided by experience, the data of psychology could not rely upon mathematics for the construction of scientific concepts and could only be a descriptive doctrine of the phenomena of our soul. Psychology is inductive and, since it has no a priori elements, can never produce certain knowledge. Another critique of psychology can be found in Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798). This text is now on the wave of current reading in Kant’s ethics.⁴ However, he seems to be claiming here that empirical psychology could serve a more useful role by disregarding its classic method of internal observation and focusing upon behavioral and relational attitudes of human beings, in a systematic way. Kant was suggesting developing empirical psychology upon a different methodology and with different goals. According to Mecacci, only by making psychology a *science of human conduct*, and not a sort of psychophysics or physiological psychology, it was possible for Kant to foresee a serious psychological inquiry.

3. William James’s criticisms of Kant

These glimpses at Kant’s main works are important to understand James’s main references to Kant in relation to his psychology. In his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), James was really trying to make psychology a natural science and, in this view, he obviously makes several critical references to Kant’s transcendentalism.⁵

We should notice that the key-term “transcendentalism” is rather ambivalent in Kant’s *First Critique*. Kant offers two seminal definitions to clarify its specific meaning. The first definition is in the *Introduction* to the second edition of the *Critique*,⁶ where he refers to “our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible *a priori*” (Kant 1998, B 25).

⁴ For further reading about recent interpretations of Kant’s *Anthropology* see Sussman (2015).

⁵ “The peculiarity of our experiences, that they not only are but are known, which their ‘conscious’ quality is invoked to explain, is better explained by their relations—these relations themselves being experiences—to oneanother” (James 1976, 14).

⁶ In the second edition, Kant makes relevant changes to his definition of transcendentalism in the introduction to the first edition. His modifications gave birth to different interpretations (cf. Cohen (1885), Heidegger (1929), Hinske (1970)). However, scholars have underlined that in both versions Kant stresses the connection between *transcendental* and *a priori* knowledge, without identifying the two.

The second definition is in a way corrective of the possible misunderstandings connected to the first definition, and it is in his *Introduction* to the section on *Transcendental Logic*. There, Kant paradigmatically observes that: “not every *a priori* cognition must be called transcendental, but only that by means of which we cognize that and how certain representations (intuitions or concepts) are applied entirely *a priori*, or are possible (i.e., the possibility of cognition or its use *a priori*)” (Kant 1998, B 80–1). As is known, Kant pretended the transcendental philosophy, as the system of the transcendental modes of cognition, to be the only *scientific* knowledge.

In his 1892 brief article *A Plea for Psychology as a ‘Natural Science’*, James sustains the necessity of a neat separation between the areas of investigation of psychology and philosophy and, on this occasion, he clarified the principal intent of his masterpiece, which was to treat “Psychology *like* a natural science, to help her to become one” (James 1983, 270). His effort was really due to the fact that he did not consider psychology as a natural science yet; rather, he considered her present methodological condition similar to that of physics before Galileo or chemistry before Lavoisier. Natural science psychology has to consider its assumptions as merely provisional and always passible by further revision. It has to renounce any search for ultimate solutions and to assume rather uncritically common sense data, which are the existence of a *physical world*, the existence of *mental states* and the fact that they *know* other things.

The uncritical assumption of data in science was harshly criticized by Peirce, but, as evident, that was a crucial point for James to distinguish the attitude of the psychologist from that of the philosopher. Both the psychologist and the philosopher are *Erkenntnistheoretikers*, but there is a great difference. The psychologist does not investigate the general function of knowledge; he is, rather, interested in particular knowledge.

Kant is implicitly mentioned a few pages later when James is considering the two varieties of the *psychologist’s fallacy*. This is when the psychologist confounds “*his own standpoint with that of the mental fact* about which he is making his report” (James 1981 a, 195). This trick is partially due to the misleading influence of language—in this respect, James maintains that ordinary language carries on an atomistic metaphysics. In fact, since the psychologist must name some cognitive state as the thought of a certain object, he is easily induced to suppose that the thought under examination knows the object in the same way in which the psychologist knows it. The attribution of further or different knowledge, that of the psychologist himself, to the cognitive state observed is a common fallacy

which to James is guilty of having introduced very puzzling questions in science, such as the question of presentative or representative perception, and the question of nominalism and conceptualism.

However, there is a second variety of the psychologist's fallacy which is "*the assumption that the mental state studied must be conscious of itself as the psychologist is conscious of it*" (James 1981 a, 195). This peculiar fallacy is the core of James's critique of the post-Kantian interpretations of consciousness.⁷ Kant's disapproval of empirical psychology was also a consequence of methodological limits, or what James addresses as possible fallacies of the psychologists. The accuracy of the psychologists in their reports about mental life was very poor and vitiated from the very beginning.

4. James's consciousness of self

Moving from the new picture of the *stream of thought* that James depicts in chapter nine, the descriptive hypothesis of the consciousness of Self is exposed in chapter ten, and necessarily confronts the classical spiritualist, associationist, and transcendentalist theories of personal identity. James is well aware that his naturalistic account of the Self is in balance with all these schools, but also that what he is proposing is something very different.

The analysis of the stream of thought is a study of the mind from "within" in which James remains loyal to what he calls the empirical method of investigation. In fact, he critically observes that, in a majority of works of psychology, the empirical method is rather abandoned. In these works, the descriptions of thinking begin with sensations as the simplest mental facts and proceed to the synthetic construction of higher and more complex mental states. The originality of James's description of thinking lies in his radically empirical description of consciousness, when he states that the psychologist has to be philosophically naïve and take into account the concrete fact that some thinking goes on in personal consciousnesses.⁸ In this view, "thinking" is used for every form of con-

⁷ "On the one hand, 'the [act of] observation itself alters and distorts the state of the object [i. e., the mental phenomenon] observed'; on the other, 'still less does another thinking subject submit to our investigations in such a way as to be conformable to our purposes'" (Leary 1982, 23).

⁸ The analysis of the stream of thought is the result of a complex theoretical picture that holds together James's interest in experimental psychology, his romantic education, and a certain philosophical interpretation of Darwinism derived from C. Wright and C. S. Peirce's pragmatic maxim.

consciousness and should be taken as the expression which is most simple and free from assumption. Starting his analysis of the five characteristics of consciousness, James again distinguishes inward-direct awareness of the mental state itself from outward-relational awareness of the mental state by the psychologist. As said before, this difference of perspective can be misleading as to the definition of the content of mental states. The fourth aspect of the *stream of thought*, that is the fact that our thoughts are cognitive, or possess the function of knowing, is a core aspect of James's analysis, but probably the most puzzling one from a psychological point of view. It is not a case that, according to his intention to keep separate psychology and philosophy, it will be expunged from the *Briefer Course* (1892). However, natural sciences have to abandon any idealistic perspective, and rather assume a point of view that is the least possibly influenced by metaphysical presuppositions. This is not to be confused with a trivial position in philosophy; James is well aware of the unavoidable connection between epistemology and metaphysics. His attempt to make science relies upon what he considers a less pregnant metaphysical view, which may be in a way very close to Peirce's contempt about the backward status of metaphysics. They both express the necessity for the bond between science and metaphysics to be remolded according to a new naturalistic paradigm. In this view, it is important for the new psychology to substitute mere verbal solutions with more careful understanding of physiological and intersubjective dispositions. The shift from *a priori* foundation to more uncertain and multiple hypothetical reasons is pivotal.

The distinction of the notion of realities and its proper collocation in the world come as a consequence of the confrontation with the experiences of others. For James, we all believe in the existence of realities outside our thought because of actual perceptive judgments of *sameness*. The fact that one judges several thoughts as having the same object, and no one produces or possesses that object, reveals the cognitive function of our mind. Such a reflective awareness is not primitive since the mere vague consciousness of objects comes first. However, according to James, many philosophers influenced by Kant supposed the cognitive function of thought to depend upon the reflective consciousness of the *self*.

Many philosophers, however, hold that the reflective consciousness of the self is essential to the cognitive function of thought. They hold that a thought, in order to know a thing at all, must expressly distinguish between the thing and its own self. This is a perfectly wanton assumption, and not the faintest shadow of reason exists for suppos-

ing it true. As well might I contend that I cannot dream without dreaming that I dream, swear without swearing that I swear, deny without denying that I deny, as maintain that I cannot know without knowing that I know. I may have either acquaintance-with, or knowledge-about, an object O without thinking about my self at all.

James 1981 a, 264–5

In other words, these authors seem to maintain that, whereas we are not able to distinguish between the thing and the *self*, our thought does not know a thing at all. The affirmation that one cannot know without knowing that one knows is to James perfectly absurd. Rather, he asserts that it is not necessary that our thought be able to discriminate between its objects and itself. In psychology, the natural acquisition of knowledge is a gradual process which is characterized also by knowledge of acquaintance with other objects. Accordingly, one can have either acquaintance with or knowledge about an object without thinking about his/her self at all. The only requirements for the function of knowing are that some Self is thinking an object, and that that object exists. Additional thoughts, such as the existence of the “I” and the proved knowledge of the object are welcomed as broader levels of knowledge but are not necessary to know. Therefore, these philosophers—following Kant—seem to be guilty of the peculiar psychologist’s fallacy mentioned above.

At this point, James makes clear which shall be the proper use of the term “object” in psychology. This is a very important clarification; for James the object of our thought is exactly “all that the thought thinks” and “as the thought thinks it” (James 1981 a, 266). This means that it may correspond also to very complex and symbolic thinking that are, however, thought as a unique object. As evident, the object is closely connected to the act of knowledge and the relational context in which it is thought. This position is in evident contrast with Kant’s conception of “manifold” and with ordinary associationist psychology, as James’s consequent description of Self-consciousness shall also be. He disagrees with the contention that the thought is made up of the same parts of which its object is made so that the thought would keep together separate ideas. This empiricist view is open to easy attacks, in particular from those who contend that, without a unifying agency such as the Ego, no one thought comes out from a “bundle” of separate ideas. On that basis, the Kantian monitum is not under discussion; there is no doubt that if things “are not thought with each other, things are not thought in relation at all”. But the point that James makes here, and again with particular care in chapters x and xx,

is the mistaken starting point of both empiricists and transcendentalists. They move from the same starting hypothesis that our stream of subjective life is made of discrete elements, that is the Kantian “manifold”, but, in the end, they respectively draw different conclusions. The associationists claim that there can be single knowledge from a manifold of discrete elements, whereas the rationalists do not accept such a conclusion and are obliged to introduce a further hypothesis, that of the necessary synthesizing activity of an Ego. However, James seems here to be claiming a more radically empirical premise: the coexistence of a manifold of ideas is a myth, and we can only think of things related in unique pulses of subjective life.

James focuses on the issue of personal identity and on pure Ego. There is a distinction to make here between the definition that James has given of the Spiritual Self, concretely taken as part of the empirical self, and his discussion on the Ego as the principle of personal unity (Leary 1990, 110). He turns first to the *feeling of self identity*, that is the experience that I recognize myself as the same through time. The sense of our personal identity is just a perceptual judgment based upon a certain continuity experienced among phenomena.

The consciousness of personal sameness thus corresponds to the feeling of continuity between thoughts that are suffused with warmth and intimacy. This consciousness can be considered either as a *feeling or subjective phenomenon* or as a *truth or objective deliverance*. In the first case, it is a *judgment of sameness* which should not be taken in the sense of a *subjective synthesis*, which is the Kantian synthetic apperception, as distinguished from the *objective synthesis* or analytic apperception. The sense of personal identity is not the Kantian essential form of thought, according to which thought should be able to think all his thinking together as a prerequisite to any analytic apperception; rather, for James, perception plays a fundamental role. The sense of sameness of my successive selves is perceived and predicated by my thought of them. The distance from Kant here is that “[t]hought not only thinks them both, but thinks that they are identical” (James 1981 a, 215). It is not a logical necessity, but an actual perception, and that is the reason why even if the psychologist might prove the judgment of sameness to be wrong and contests that *real identity* between thoughts is a *fact*, still the *personal identity* would exist as a *feeling*.

As a matter of fact, James’s unity of the Self is *generic* and far from any metaphysical or absolute unity. The coexistence of unity and plural-

ity from the different points of view is another recurrent argument by James, an aspect of his dynamic attempt to avoid absolutistic or monolithic outcomes. So, the different selves are pervaded by a distinct feeling of warmth. Their *generic* unity thus coexists with generic differences which are just as real as the unity. Such a dynamic, uncertain, and pluralistic description of personal identity is verified by the cases of mental pathology that James has investigated with particular care in chapter VIII, and definitely contrasted with substantial and strong views of the *self* (cf. Bordogna 2010). Moreover, it seems to be in the line of Hume and Herbart's description of the self as an aggregate of separate facts. The classic empirical psychology, however, has overlooked *more subtle aspects* of consciousness which if taken into account would allow James to give a phenomenal description of the unity of consciousness, or the fact of the belonging-together of thoughts, avoiding the idealistic-absolutistic outcomes of both spiritualism and empiricism, and at the same time meeting common-sense main demands of the unity of the self. James agrees that the unity of the selves remains a mere potentiality until a real center or owner comes and acts. The lack of a *medium* is, indeed, the greatest difficulty of the associationism description of self-identity. As James has shown in chapter VI about the autonomous compounding of consciousness, in fact, it is not clear the reason why and how successive individual thoughts and feelings should "integrate" themselves together on their own account.

Actually, common-sense seems to press in the direction of the *substantial identity* of Thought, and both the Metaphysical Soul and Transcendental Ego would be but attempts to satisfy this need of common-sense. Nonetheless, James proposes a different hypothesis, respect to any ever self-same and changeless principle, to explain the very same appearance that a certain possession of our thoughts never lacks. The union of our present and past selves would be a matter of *inheritance* but without implying any substantial or transcendental identity. In this view, the title of self-identity would be inherited by successive passing Thoughts as his legal representatives, and such description seems also to reflect the transmission which actually occurs in consciousness.

The mechanism of adoption of the last self by the immediately following one is the basis of the appropriation of most of the remoter constituents of the self, and this process does not necessarily indicate the identity of the possessors. To corroborate his position, James refers to the analogy that Kant makes between mental states and elastic balls as an

argument to respond to the third paralogism (Kant 1998, A 363–4). For James, it was important that Kant conceived the possibility of a process in which one mental substance communicates all its states to another with this second doing so to a third in such a way that all memories are being transferred. Thus, the last such substance would have a sense that it had been aware of all the previous states and memories as its own even though there would have been no constant identical thing given.

At this point, James's description of self-identity in terms of phenomenal relations which clearly develop in the process of thinking seems to leave no room for the activity of transcendent agencies of any sort. The only point that remains quite open to objection is the *act of appropriation*, for things just are themselves, they neither appropriate nor disown themselves. So if the present judging Thought is the agent which chooses which appropriations are its own, it is never an object to itself. Now, since the present moment of consciousness does not know anything *about* itself until it is gone, but it may feel its own immediate existence, James accurately claims that it appropriates its acquisitions to *that* it feels as the core of "the most intimately felt *part of its present Object, the body, and the central adjustments, which accompany the act of thinking, in the head*" (James 1981 a, 324). The real nucleus of personal identity is these primary reactions in their concrete present existence.

The conclusion of this intense description is that the psychological facts of consciousness can be fully expressed by the functions of *cognition* and *appropriation* of feelings, and thus there is no need to suppose a non-phenomenal Thinker behind the passing Thought. As also more contemporary studies in psychology have shown, our life proceeds through continuous remands between experiencing and reflecting upon experiences' processes (cf. Juan Balbi 2004). The distinction between *I* and *Me* which James claims as the facts of personality are "names of *emphasis*" (James 1981 a, 323). And in this view, all contrasts and distinction resulting from the free and forceful activity of the human mind in the field of objective knowledge (here/there; now/then; this/that; I/thou) are to be referred as such to our body, or better to what is the perceptive sense of our corporeal existence. What James is claiming is that the matrix of our personal identity is sensorial and emotional. It does not stem abruptly from a reflective act of our thought, but depends upon some direct perceptions of our embodied life.

The sense of my bodily existence, however obscurely recognized as such, *may* then be the absolute original of my conscious selfhood, the

fundamental perception that *I am*. All appropriations *may* be made to it, *by* a Thought not at the moment immediately cognized by itself. Whether these are not only logical possibilities but actual facts is something not yet dogmatically decided in the text.

James 1981 a, 323

At last, James addresses some specific critiques to the three schools—substantialism, associationism, and transcendentalism—which have produced most of the literature on the consciousness of self. In the section on *The Transcendentalist Theory*, James actually considers more at length some aspects of Kant's conception of the transcendental Ego to verify if that theory can illuminate critical points of his description of personality as implying the empirical person (Me) and the judging Thought (I). And more importantly, the succession of judging Thoughts is continuously renewed and able to recognize them as continuous in time. In particular, he focuses upon the very famous §§16–17; §25 of the *Doctrine of Elements*, and *The Paralogisms of Pure Reason* almost repeating what he has sketchily conveyed so far.

5. Conclusions

As is evident, James is confronting not only Kant but also his successors. Being aware of the difference between Kant's transcendentalism and the various declensions of absolute idealism, James harshly criticizes the excessively conceptual-abstract approach to reality that was mostly performed by the so-called "successors of Kant" or "post-Kantian idealists". At the basis of their misconception, however, James recognizes an overemphasized reading of Kant's definition of sensation as blind, and their introduction of the Absolute Mind to exercise the synthetic logical function of knowledge. As we have shown, James's main critiques to transcendentalism address its epistemological structure. In the new psychology, there is no need to introduce non-explicative agents to secure its scientific settlement. The idealistic sin is to complicate reality in a way that turns out to not be useful to explain it. This is evident not only in James's critique of Kant's transcendental system, but also with respect to post-Kantian interpretations.

According to James, Kant also believes in a reality outside the mind, as an empirical realist. The point is that his distinction between phenomenon and noumenon is unnecessary. Moreover, on such account, he has to complexify the mind and makes of reality something that we cannot know,

what James calls “an empty locus”. In the function of knowing, Kant puts the “manifold” of phenomena to be connected within the mind, whereas James puts it in the reality outside to keep a simple image of our thought. According to James, upon where multiplicity is placed, if in thoughts or in objects of reality, depends the more or less difficult explanation of the activity of synthesis exercised by our thought and, therefore, more or less natural description of facts. James is trying to keep simple descriptive hypothesis, simplicity being a scientific quality, and to avoid useless, too elaborated, and rather non-scientific levels of complexity.

As mentioned, James firmly condemns Kant’s notion of our thought as “sort of an elaborate internal machine-shop” (James 1981 a, 344). Our thought is a stream, not a collection of parts. In a dualistic framework, chaotic multiplicity is to be lodged in reality, not in the mind.

The transcendental terminology is not helpful to explain *how* the many are simultaneously known by the one, that is the core of the cognitive capacity. Moreover, he detects a profound ambiguity in the meaning of the terms “transcendental Ego” and “experience” as intended by Kant. In brief, it is not clear if he meant by the Ego an *agent* and by experience an *operation*, or by experience an *event*, and by the Ego a *permanent element* that is part of the experience. In the first case, they would exist before their “collision” and this would mean to James that “Transcendentalism is only Substantialism grown shame-faced, and the Ego only a ‘cheap and nasty’ edition of the soul” (James 1981 a, 345).

Now, the point is psychological and not truly philosophical. James maintains that he can accept the speculative hypothesis of transcendentalism; again, what he is trying to do is to liberate psychology from philosophical infiltrations, to make it a natural science. Transcendentalism does not offer better or more profound insights than the descriptive hypothesis of the “passing Thoughts” that James has exposed. In this view, the Ego does not really explain the synthesizing activity of our thought; it is just the name of a psycho-logical process that psychology has better consider as mere data, not as a definite entity.

The passing Thought hypothesis leads to less strong certainties about the unity of ourselves. Certainty is mainly connected to sensibility. But there seem to be no grounds in transcendentalism to seriously contest such a description. “Thus the identity found by the I in its Me is only a loosely construed thing, an identity ‘on the whole,’ just like that which any outside observer might find in the same assemblage of facts” (James 1981 a, 352).

In modern monistic idealists, James foresees “the ubiquitousness of the ‘psychologist’s fallacy’”. Hegel, the Cairds, and particularly Green made finite Thought potentially the timeless, absolute Ego. But there is no doubt that such a metaphysical organic picture cannot be of any profit for psychological studies. Rather, it goes against James’s insistence on sensible continuity of Thought, and the deeply temporal and anti-essentialist vein of his psychology. Also, post-Kantians’ idealism “seems always lapsing into a regular old-fashioned spiritualistic dualism” (James 1981 a, 348). But, again, making the operation of connection be performed by an agent “whose essence is self-identity and who is out of time” is a very different way to consider the Thought. To James, it is “a cognitive phenomenal event in time”.

In conclusion, James’s *radical empiricism* is deeply connected to all his psychology, and particularly to James’s theory of relations as real in experience. And this makes easier to understand what he is still arguing, many years later in *Pragmatism*, about his anti-Kantianism or rather anti-transcendentalist idealism view. There, he was warning not to confound the humanist conviction that reality has a sensible nucleus, as elaborated by F. C. S. Schiller, with some Kantian conceptions about our relationship with reality.

Superficially this sounds like Kant’s view; but between categories fulminated before nature began, and categories gradually forming themselves in nature’s presence, the whole chasm between rationalism and empiricism yawns. To the genuine ‘Kantianer’ Schiller will always be to Kant as a satyr to Hyperion.

James 1975, 120

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