



# Varieties of Immediate Experience

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: ON SOME VARIETIES OF IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE – BETWEEN WITTGENSTEIN AND PRAGMATISM <i>Anna Boncompagni &amp; Roberta Dreon</i> .....	5
---	---

### I. VARIETIES OF IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE

---

ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PERCEPTS AND CONCEPTS IN WILLIAM JAMES'S PHILOSOPHY OF EXPERIENCE <i>Michela Bella</i> .....	10
---	----

EXPERIENCE AND GRAMMAR: WITTGENSTEIN AND JAMES ON THE EXPERIENCE OF MEANING <i>Alice Morelli</i> .....	23
---	----

THE CONCEPT OF EXPERIENCE IN HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY AND JAMES' RADICAL EMPIRICISM <i>Andrea Pace Giannotta</i> .....	33
--	----

IMMEDIATE PERCEPTION AND DIRECT EXPERIENCE: IMMEDIACY INDEXICALITY, AND INTELLIGIBILITY <i>Vincent Colapietro</i> .....	43
--	----

IS THERE ANY ROOM FOR IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE? LOOKING FOR AN ANSWER IN DEWEY (AND WITTGENSTEIN) VIA PEIRCE AND JAMES <i>Roberta Dreon</i> .....	59
---	----

IMMEDIACY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD – WITTGENSTEIN, THE PROBLEM OF LIFE AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE "PROBLEMATIC" <i>Luigi Perissinotto</i> .....	74
--	----

WITTGENSTEIN ON FORMS OF LIFE AND THE IMMEDIACY OF HABIT <i>Marilena Andronico</i> .....	85
---	----

IMMEDIACY AND EXPERIENCE IN WITTGENSTEIN'S NOTION OF 'IMPONDERABLE EVIDENCE' <i>Anna Boncompagni</i> .....	94
---	----

IN SEARCH OF LOST BODY: ON PRAGMATISM, EXPERIENCE, AND LANGUAGE <i>Ángel M. Faerna</i> .....	107
---	-----

GESTURES AND EXPRESSIONS: THE OVERFLOW OF IMMEDIATE QUALITIES <i>Barbara Formis</i> .....	120
--	-----

TWO CONCEPTS OF EXPERIENCE: SINGULAR AND GENERAL <i>Giovanni Tuzet</i> .....	132
---	-----

### II. BOOK REVIEWS

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RICHARD SHUSTERMAN (ED.) <i>AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND SOMAESTHETICS. EMBODIED PERSPECTIVES IN PHILOSOPHY, THE ARTS AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES</i> <i>Leszek Koczanowicz</i> .....	146
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**INTRODUCTION:  
ON SOME VARIETIES OF IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE  
– BETWEEN WITTGENSTEIN AND PRAGMATISM<sup>1</sup>**

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Is it still possible to speak of immediate, unreflective experiences after the rejection of the myth of the given, after the pragmatic and semiotic criticism of the concept of non-mediated datum, and after the linguistic turn and the hermeneutic developments of phenomenology in the twentieth century?

Can we honestly and non-dogmatically recognize those aspects of our more or less ordinary experiences where all references come to an end, we plainly understand what is happening or, maybe, it is not a cognitive question at all?

Might it not be the case that a qualitative, pre-scientific or a-scientific dimension is already present here, a dimension that cannot be translated into quantitative terms and which has to do with the significance of experience at multiple levels – from bodily perception to aesthetic and ethic sensibility? Can we reasonably state that some sort of “imponderable evidence” – to quote Anna Boncompagni’s essay – gives us access to the immediate background of our actions and thinking, which is already there prior to any cognitive enterprise or epistemic project?

Classical pragmatism – particularly Peirce’s one, primarily considered in its semiotic aspect, as well as Dewey’s pragmatism, according to which “givens” are “takens” when dealing with the logic of inquiry – has correctly been described as the first source of criticism of the so-called “myth of the given”. On the other hand, it is well known to Wittgenstein’s readers that he understood

philosophy as an eminently grammatical approach to language and that he consequently criticized any appeal to the allegedly experienced character of meaning, conceived as something primarily subjective.

Nonetheless, it is equally known that James and Dewey tirelessly emphasized the qualitative, aesthetic and unreflective aspects of our experiences, which are significant for what they do directly on us, without being further deferred to other things (see Roberta Dreon’s paper). Wittgenstein all too frequently evokes those situations in which there is no need to speak and think any further, situations in which we are simply “to look at” what is happening as something “complete” in itself, dissolving its apparently problematic character – as Luigi Perissinotto explains in his essay.

The point is that the appeal to immediacy is far from unambiguous and can serve very different goals, as Vincent Colapietro highlights in his paper: the range of possibilities extends from the typically modern philosophical aim of establishing a secure foundation for our knowledge to the post-metaphysical acknowledgment that our experience of the world, including its bodily anchorage (to which Ángel Faerna directs our attention), is prior to the formulation of any radical doubt.

The articles collected in this issue of the journal share a basic downplaying of any epistemological claim for immediacy in favour of a more existential or anthropological understanding of the concept. They explore this subject by engaging with a variety of aspects and touching upon different nuances of the term: from the overlap between the concepts of immediate and direct experience to the distinction between the epistemological and existential interpretation of certainty; from the opposition between qualitative and quantitative experience to their intertwinement and mutual shaping; from an understanding of immediately experienced meanings in terms of gestures (as pointed out by Barbara Formis) to language-acquired habits which have “become nature to us” (as highlighted by Marilena Andronico); from the immediacy of competency, ability and the likes to the immediacy of

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<sup>1</sup> Although this introduction has been a joint effort, Roberta Dreon wrote the first section of the preface while Anna Boncompagni wrote the second part of the text.

novelty (as noted by Giovanni Tuzet). This issue of *Pragmatism Today* represents the third step in the ongoing research on Wittgenstein and the Pragmatists conducted by a group of scholars mainly based in Italy and originally brought together by Rosa Maria Calcaterra (University of Roma Tre) and Luigi Perissinotto (University of Venice Ca' Foscari) in 2015. The previous stages of the research focused on habits, norms, and forms of life and on psychologism. The papers resulting from them were respectively published in *Paradigmi* (issue XXXIV (3), 2016) and the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* (issue IX (1), 2017). Most of the papers published in this issue of *Pragmatism Today* were presented at a conference held at the University of Florence in September 2017, which also saw the participation of members of the research unit "Qualitative Ontology and Technology (Qua-Onto-Tech)", coordinated by Roberta Lanfredini, thus leading the research to address phenomenological topics. Additionally, we welcome and strongly appreciate the collaboration of Vincent Colapietro, Ángel Manuel Faerna, and Barbara Formis, who have joined us in the present phase of the project. We are also very grateful to *Pragmatism Today* and, more specifically, to Alexander Kremer for hosting this part of our collaborative inquiry and for giving us the chance to make it accessible to a wider audience.

The three papers that open this issue retrace some central topics in the traditions that we are examining. **Michela Bella** offers an analysis of James' conception of experience as a way to approach the difference between percepts and concepts, that is between the immediate and the mediated. James' radical empiricism, she points out, can be usefully interpreted as 'a theory of experience based on a theory of relations', so that the thesis of relations being themselves experienced comes to play a key role. It is in the dialectic between the knower and the known, interpreted as a relation between parts of experience, that the difference between percepts and concepts emerges. Such a view

also helps to better contextualize Wittgenstein's criticism of James, centred on the latter's use of introspection in his treatment of concepts. **Alice Morelli's** contribution is focused on James and Wittgenstein, and more specifically on what she calls "the experiential account of meaning" that Wittgenstein attributes to James. After describing James' approach as it emerges in the *Principles of Psychology*, she introduces Wittgenstein's reservations about it, and clarifies that Wittgenstein's aim is not to deny that there are experiential elements in meaning, but rather to oppose the tendency to *ground* meaning in experience. In her conclusion, Morelli also points in the direction of a Wittgenstein-inspired but at the same time broadly pragmatist notion of meaning as socially embedded and enacted, thus showing the contemporary relevance of these reflections. **Andrea Pace Giannotta** instead investigates the concept of experience by drawing a comparison between James' radical empiricism and Edmund Husserl's genetic phenomenology. This allows him to go beyond the apparent contrast between James' later thought, characterized by a strong anti-dualism, and Husserl's approach, focused instead on the dual dimension of intentionality. Giannotta points out that even in Husserl's genetic phenomenology the flow of primal impressions is conceived of as a fundamental dimension of experience that precedes the duality between subject and object. In his view, this conception, by anchoring experience in the embodied subject, can also complement the Jamesian perspective in the direction of concreteness, against certain metaphysical interpretations.

The five contributions that follow tackle more directly the theoretical core and the methodological aspects of the theme under discussion. The focus of Vincent **Colapietro's** paper is on immediate experience as opposed to the artificial skeptical doubt that calls the very existence of the world into question. Both the classical pragmatists and Wittgenstein, he observes, oppose the usual move of traditional philosophy, which

detaches itself from ordinary life, as this were the only means for “true” philosophizing and for true critique. This opposition results in an appeal to the immediacy of the relationship between human beings and the world, that is, the immediacy of human beings’ inhabiting the world not as knowers, but as agents in an arena of action, where “action” is to be understood in a broad sense that encompasses both experience and language. In a similar spirit, **Roberta Dreon** articulates a deflationary pragmatist perspective on immediate experience by focusing mainly on Dewey, who in her view developed a novel approach to this issue as a result of his way of dissolving a tension between the young Peirce’s take on the mediated nature of human cognition and the later James’ views on immediate experience. Dewey’s solution hinges on a rich conception of experience as something strictly connected with human life, in such a way that language and cognition themselves are understood as parts of experience, and hence not in opposition to it. The later Wittgenstein interestingly turns out to be broadly in agreement with such a view. This is confirmed, from a methodological point of view, by **Luigi Perissinotto**, who draws attention to Wittgenstein’s use of the word “problematic” and observes that the aim of philosophy for him is precisely the disappearance of what is problematic in life. One form that this disappearance can take, Perissinotto argues, has to do with the capacity to acknowledge that what immediately appears incomplete is not something waiting to be completed (typically, by a sort of theory). In this sense, Wittgenstein’s philosophical method, centred on renouncing theory, is an appeal to immediacy: it is an appeal to see things as they are, by resisting the temptation to fill-in the gaps via theoretical moves. Fully in accordance with this claim, **Marilena Andronico** takes as her starting point Wittgenstein’s insistence on the fact that forms of life are a “given” that has to be accepted, a “given” which, in her interpretation, crucially includes linguistic habits and the following of rules. These broadly cultural and acquired habits, she observes, have an

intrinsically normative aspect, but nevertheless remain immediate. Their being part of the immediate given means that they play the role of irreducible elements within a certain kind of grammatical inquiry, defining its very domain. In this way, Andronico suggests, a grammatical investigation remains compatible with a form of naturalism, yet differs from an approach (like James’, in Wittgenstein’s perception) that relies solely on experience. Another paper primarily dealing with Wittgenstein is **Anna Boncompagni**’s one, whose focus is on the apparently elusive notion of ‘imponderable evidence’ that Wittgenstein uses to describe our understanding of others’ feelings and emotions, as well as our aesthetic judgments. In these contexts, she observes, we are often guided by a form of immediate and qualitative evidence that remains unmeasurable, ungraspable, and almost impossible to put into words. In imponderable evidence, Boncompagni argues, immediacy and experience are interwoven: in order to clarify this point, she turns to Dewey’s conception of ‘qualitative thought’, which shows surprising affinities with the Wittgensteinian perspective. Both thinkers, she concludes, help highlight the importance for philosophy of a fuller consideration of the qualitative dimension of human existence.

The three papers that conclude our issue deal with more specific traits of immediate experience, which prove to be particularly salient. **Ángel Faerna** is interested in highlighting the epistemological significance of the body. In contrast with the traditional neglect of the body, he notes that according to the later Wittgenstein (as also underlined by neuropsychiatrist Oliver Sacks) we normally have a non-discursive, immediate awareness of our having a body. Moreover, as the pragmatists also help us realize, this somatic awareness is crucially practical, as it has to do with the potentialities of the active body within the situation in which it is embedded. In spite of some short-sighted interpretations of bodily awareness, which all too hastily conflate it with either the privateness of mental states or

the foundationalism of the “myth of the given”, Faerna urges us to fully acknowledge its role in knowledge. **Barbara Formis’** contribution is close to this perspective in her emphasizing the importance of gestures and asking what the relationship between gestures and meaning is. Making use of John Dewey’s criticism of Darwinism, she highlights that a merely naturalistic approach risks overlooking that there is something more to a gesture than a simple organic discharge; yet, Formis also denies that gestures can be transformed into a formalized and logical form. By drawing from the later Wittgenstein, she finds a middle path between these two extremes, one that fully acknowledges the intertwinement between the biological and the social, and ultimately explains gestures as performed acts that carry an immediate quality and are characterized by an “overflow”, or a sort of “possibility of meaning”. Finally, **Giovanni Tuzet** distinguishes between two concepts of experience, the “singular” (“having an experience”) and the “general” (“having experience” or “being experienced”). After illustrating some insights of the classical pragmatists in the light of this distinction, he examines how some philosophers who are somewhat close to the pragmatists – Wittgenstein, Quine, and McDowell – dealt with experience, noting that they tended to privilege either one or the other aspect. Finally, he applies his distinction to the field of the philosophy of law, and reinterprets the dialectic between “stories” and “background generalizations” in the scholarship on the topic of evidence as a dialectic between the singular and the general concepts of experience, showing how this contributes to a better understanding of such problems.



## **I. VARIETIES OF IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE**

## ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PERCEPTS AND CONCEPTS IN WILLIAM JAMES'S PHILOSOPHY OF EXPERIENCE

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**ABSTRACT:** William James addresses the issue of the immediacy of experience from different angles and at different stages of his work. The topic looms at the centre of his reflection, mainly affecting the passage from a psychological analysis of the continuity of consciousness to a mature philosophical elaboration of the continuity of experience. Through a theoretical reconstruction of James's 'philosophy of experience,' at the crossroad between psychology and philosophy, this article aims to shed light on James's reinterpretation of perception within a naturalistic and pragmatic conception of knowledge that he developed by analogy to natural cognitive processes. His naturalistic and radically empirical conception of experience, moreover, corroborates the idea of the profound logical and epistemological influence of Darwinism in James's psychology and philosophy, specifically as to the new metaphysical framework provided by Darwin's theory of evolution.

**Keywords:** William James; pure experience; percepts/concepts; darwinism; ontology

William James addresses the issue of the immediacy of experience from different angles and at different stages of his work, at first within a psychological framework and then, later, from a more philosophical perspective. Indeed, from whatever angle he approaches it, the topic looms at the centre of his thought; its centrality is especially evident if one reads the evolution of his reflection in terms of the passage from a psychological analysis of the continuity of consciousness to the attempt to extend the same continuity to experience (Perry 1935, vol. 2, 583ff; Seigfried 1990, 351ff). From this standpoint, it is essential to understand what is meant by continuity and therefore to pay attention to the perceptual dimension, that is, to concrete, sensible, immediate experience. James combined his notion of experience as synthetic and empirically unitary, with a pluralistic metaphysics. His formulation of radical empiricism thus emerges as a critique of the epistemological and metaphysical assumptions of

classical empiricism as well as that of extreme or absolute rationalism, which he called 'vicious intellectualism'.

When considering James's conception of experience and immediacy, the doctrine of the 'pure experience' soon makes its entrance. As is well known, it was formulated publicly in the *Essays in Radical Empiricism* ('Does 'Consciousness' Exist?' July 1904; 'The Thing and Its Relations', November 1904) but, as can be seen from his notes and correspondence, James spent much more time on this hypothesis because of the cogent objections from Miller and Bode to which he had to reply (James 1988, 65-129). In some articles and essays it is clear how he was trying to elaborate a philosophy of pure experience, in which 'pure experience' was both a metaphysical hypothesis and a methodological principle. In this article, I would like to highlight briefly the central role that this theme – the relationship between immediate and mediated, which in the author's terminology is the relation between percepts and concepts – plays in the Jamesian philosophy of experience. In my view, this reconstruction helps to shed light on the naturalistic and pragmatic conception of knowledge that he developed by analogy to natural cognitive processes. Moreover, I contend that his naturalistic and radically empirical conception of experience helps to corroborate the idea of the profound logical and epistemological influence of Darwinism in James's psychology and ontology. Finally, I would like to consider, in the light of this broader ontological picture, the central passages where the question of the immediacy of experience is raised, and to examine its main contemporary epistemological outcomes.

### Notes for a philosophy of 'pure' experience

James's philosophical reflection on immediate experience emerges from his philosophy of radical empiricism. The first definition of his philosophical doctrine can be found in the preface to *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (1897), a volume in which the author collects together a series of

articles already published in different places. He intends to shed light on their characteristic 'philosophical attitude' which James already calls 'radical empiricism'. In this definition, he refers to the empirical philosophy, since the 'certainties' reached in the 'matters of fact' remain subject to change, that is, hypotheses open to future experiential verifications. The radicalism of this philosophical attitude concerns an antidogmatic tension between monism and pluralism, which James asserts at various places to be the most significant predicament in philosophy. Later, in the preface to *The Meaning of Truth* (1909), a text in which James finds himself having to answer a series of objections and misunderstandings raised by his pragmatic conception of truth, he returns to the definition of radical empiricism:

Radical empiricism consists first of a postulate, next of a statement of fact, and finally of a generalized conclusion. The postulate is that the only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience. [Things of an unexperienceable nature may exist ad libitum, but they form no part of the material for philosophic debate.] The statement of fact is that the relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct particular experience, neither more so nor less so, than the things themselves. The generalized conclusion is that therefore the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience. The directly apprehended universe needs, in short, no extraneous trans-empirical connective support, but possesses in its own right a concatenated or continuous structure (James 1975b, 6-7).

The philosophical framework within which James carries out his mature research and interests is precisely a philosophy of experience, which elsewhere he will also define as a 'philosophy of pure experience'. The basic postulate is that only things that can be experienced can be the subject of philosophical discourses *strictu sensu*, which then marks the methodological parameters within which radical empiricism needs to remain. However, the heart of the doctrine is the declaration of the fact that the relations between things must also be directly

experienceable. In this sense, we can read James's radical empiricism as a theory of experience based on a theory of relations. Indeed, it strongly depends on the reality (experience) of relations and it is therefore on this point that the consistency of a radically empirical theory of experience and its attempt to distinguish itself, on the one hand, from idealism and, on the other, from empiricism, is at stake<sup>1</sup>.

For James, the 'great obstacle' to radical empiricism, and thus to a philosophy of pure experience, is the idea cultivated by rationalism, but ultimately also shared by empiricism, that immediate experience is absolutely disconnected. The claim that already emerged in his psychological writings of the experienceability of relations makes it possible not to rely on transcendent principles of explanation. The unity of the world is not to be achieved through the operation of a superior unifying action, what James calls an 'extraneous trans-empirical connective support'; but it is the very structure of the 'immediate experience' of reality that possesses 'a concatenated or continuous structure' (James 1975b, 7). In other words, it is necessary to recognize the reality (actuality) of conjunctive and disjunctive relations and of a pure or immediate experience in which relations are immediately experienced in sensation. Relations are *real* in their immediacy but not in their specific constitution. They are therefore perceived but not yet classified or defined. It is a process that requires the occurrence of other successive experiences for our apprehension of the universe to move from being something to act upon to something known.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Seigfried's reading of 'relations' in James (Seigfried 1973).

**Radicalized empiricism:  
the interconnection of psychology and philosophy**

It is no coincidence that the thesis that relations are part of the experience itself stems from another thesis James introduces in his *Principles of Psychology*, namely, that there are 'feelings of relation':

there is no conjunction or a preposition, and hardly an adverbial phrase, syntactic form, or inflection of voice, in human speech, that does not express some shading or other of relation which we at some moment actually feel to exist between the larger objects of our thought. [...] We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue* or a feeling of *cold*. (James 1981, 238)

This passage was particularly inspiring for Ludwig Wittgenstein, who was a critical reader of James. According to Russell Goodman (2002) and Richard Gale (1999), *The Principles of Psychology* was among James's works a genuine "intellectual companion" for Wittgenstein<sup>2</sup>. However, because of the lack of introspective attention and the difficulty of confronting ephemeral phenomena, many psychologists and philosophers have been led to ignore what James calls the 'transitive' parts of consciousness, in other words, those parts that move at a relatively faster speed than the parts that he defines 'substantive'. By 'transitive' James intends all the feelings of relation and tendency, the internal connections and the direction of our thoughts, which we often express discursively with the various prepositions and which in the brain would correspond to the phases of passage between two peaks of nervous activity. James's insistence on these

<sup>2</sup> In Wittgenstein's manuscripts and typescripts there are many references to James's *Principles*. According to Stephen Hilmy (1987), this attention to one single author is sporadic in Wittgenstein. He found particularly interesting the chapters on *The Stream of Thought* and on the *Will* (cf. Boncompagni 2016, 167). For a historical and theoretical reconstruction of Wittgenstein's reading of James see Goodman (2002). For a broader analysis of Wittgenstein and pragmatism see Boncompagni (2016).

aesthetic<sup>3</sup> but also relational aspects of our inner life, which have been almost entirely rejected by psychology and philosophy because of the difficulty they pose to analysis and verbalization, is due to their importance in restoring a more concrete, and therefore richer and more plural, image of the human mind. The analysis of mental phenomena taken in their concreteness, that is in the frayed, vague and changing aspects of lived experience, can already be said to be radically empirical or radically anti-intellectualist. In this way, James emphasized the epistemic value of sensory perception<sup>4</sup>, because it is the necessary access point to all the complex and varied phenomenology of mental life recognized in the empirical analysis.

However, James's intention is not to question the function of the substantive parts of thought, which are more stable and defined, as well as the value of concepts; rather, his criticism is directed at two great logical fallacies committed by empirical psychology: 1) thinking that one cannot have images except of perfectly defined things and 2) the idea that through subjective feelings we can know the simple qualities of objects, but not their relations. Thanks to the radical application of the empirical method, James defends the importance of perceptions for a more fundamental and concrete description of the facts of psychology. In his opinion, no introspective observation justifies the sacrifice of our perception of the continuity of our stream of thought.

<sup>3</sup> In *Principles* and elsewhere, James uses the expression 'aesthetical and practical interests' to convey the philosophical use of 'aesthetic' in relation to the sensation.

<sup>4</sup> Perry's perspicuous comment on the role of perception in James's philosophy is worth to be quoted here: '[...] if perception was qualified to play so great a role, it was because this faculty had long since lost the character which it possessed in the earlier empirical tradition. It had been a leading motive in James's philosophy not only to emphasize perception, but to reinterpret it; and in particular to impute to it a continuity and depth, a synthetic grasp and reach, which differed radically from the notions held by his predecessors.' (Perry 1935, vol. I, 459)

Indeed, any paradoxes and contradictions are produced precisely by the atomistic image of mental states shared by associationism and rationalism, and that for James is nothing more than the result of an inaccurate and faulty original description.

#### **What is wrong with empiricism and rationalism?**

The theory of relations that James gradually elaborates also on a philosophical level must therefore be framed in terms of his confrontation with the empiricism and rationalism. Empiricism and rationalism are paradigmatic philosophical attitudes that are also the expression of different mentalities or ways of thinking, as well as temperaments. Using broad and non-technical definitions, in order to sketch the main currents of thought which both pragmatism and radical empiricism had to confront for distinguishing themselves, the empiricists can be identified as those who explain the whole through the parts; that is, they privilege the parts, the elements, the individual, and consider the whole as a collection of parts and the universal as an abstraction. The rationalists, instead, are those who explain the parts by the whole, emphasize the universal and make the whole have priority over the parts both on the level of logic and of being. The same characteristics of these two positions can be found in many texts, both published and unpublished, not least in the article 'A World of Pure Experience' (James 1976, 21-44), in which James tries to formulate his philosophy of experience more explicitly and coherently. The rationalist temperament is defined as tending dogmatism, as it demands necessary conclusions; while the empirical temperament is more modest and works on hypotheses.

The problem is the inadequacy of both idealism and associationism, respectively connected to rationalism and empiricism, as philosophies which, in different ways, do not faithfully describe the real, concrete way in which we have experience. On the one hand, the idealistic drift offers a principle of unity and an apodictic source of intelligibility but without being able to account for

specificity; on the other, empirical associationism, while remaining close to the particularity of experience, could not offer a principle of unity or continuity.<sup>5</sup>

James's philosophy attempts to restore the philosophical legitimacy of our feeling of agreement or disagreement with reality by correcting the mistakes of these two-great philosophical traditions. As a kind of empiricism, it adheres to a world description which considers the parts as a first order being and treats the whole as a second order being.<sup>6</sup> This means a 'mosaic' philosophy that does not reduce plural facts to a unique substance (which is inert) or an absolute mind (which creates them). It is also 'radical' in not admitting elements that are not experienced directly, nor in excluding any element directly experienced. In particular,

*the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system. (James 1976, 22)*<sup>7</sup>

The classical empiricism of Berkeley, Hume and Mill lays itself open to criticism with its tendency to fragment experience on the basis of an atomistic metaphysics, thus requiring a choice between cosmic disorder and

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<sup>5</sup> For James, John Stuart Mill, Alexander Bain and Herbert Spencer were empiricist-materialists; while Thomas Hill Green, Bernard Bosanquet, John and Edward Caird, and Josiah Royce exemplified the rationalist-spiritualist tendency.

<sup>6</sup> James explains that concepts are only designative and argues that 'the concept 'reality' once given back to immediate perception is 'no new conceptual creation, but only a kind of practical relation to our Will, perceptively experienced' (James 1979, 60). In other words, his attempt to recover a broader realm of reality is not to deny that concepts are real. Instead, it is to show how sensations and intellections are practically dynamically interrelated in an antifoundationalist fashion.

<sup>7</sup> Moreover, 'pure experience is also a methodical postulate' according to which 'Everything real must be experienceable somewhere, and every kind of thing experienced must somewhere be real'. In conclusion, he strongly suggests that 'real effectual causation as an ultimate nature, as a 'category,' if you like, of reality, is just what we feel it be, just that kind of conjunction which our own activity-series reveal' (James 1976, 93-4).



rational order. This original fragmentation of reality is also a vision shared by rationalism. In this respect, rationalism has done nothing but correct an otherwise irrational vision by introducing trans-experiential unifying agents, such as substances, categories of intellect, or the transcendental ego. The problem eminently concerns conjunctive relations that have been neglected, even eliminated, by empiricism and have been elevated by rationalism to celestial realities, 'as if the unity of things and their variety belonged to different orders of truth and vitality altogether' (James 1976, 23).

### A world of experienced relations

The challenge is therefore to rehabilitate the direct experience of various types of conjunctive relations, with different degrees of intimacy and inclusiveness which span from simple co-presence, through contiguity, resemblance, activity and causality, to the continuous transition between states of consciousness. The universe of human experience appears to be mostly chaotic, and this means that some parts are only co-present and (in any case): 'No one single type of connexion runs through all the experiences that compose it [our universe]' (James 1976, 24).<sup>8</sup>

The conjunctive relation that a radical empiricist must consider most important is the *co-conscious conjunctive transition*. It is philosophically the most problematic, but it is also the phenomenon that allows us best to describe our experience in concrete terms. A co-conscious transition is a process whereby a specific experience of mine goes from one personal experience into another. This hypothesis implied some logical difficulties that James, in many of his writings, did not fail to recognize and tackle. In short, the distinction between

ultra-rationalism and radical empiricism is about defining the *nature* of relations. In fact, despite the world of internal and essential relations that absolutism projected onto experience, James provides an empirical description of it in terms of particular external or accidental relations. To understand relations between terms in a constitutive way seemed necessarily to imply a static and absolute image of reality, according to James, in which even the most ordinary experiences would become unintelligible.

Specifically referring to his chapters on the 'Stream of Consciousness' and the 'Self' in *Principles* for a psychological description of the matter, James argues that *change* is a continuous transition, thus a conjunctive relation, which as such we experience immediately (it implies duration, or non-conceptual immediacy). Between two moments of our experience we feel that the transition is continuous, just as we feel that the transition is discontinuous between an experience lived and one merely conceived – for instance, someone else's experience. The nature of this relation, which is of all the most intimate of which we are aware, is the same sense of continuity that we feel and which constitutes a real empirical content, as much as the sense of discontinuity that we feel in the other possible experience:

Practically to experience one's personal *continuum* in this living way is to know the originals of the ideas of continuity and of sameness, to know what the words stand for concretely, to own all that they can ever mean. (James 1976, 26)

The radically empirical understanding of *conjunctive relations* is also a way of considering knowledge or cognitive relations as relations of continuous transition. This is precisely one of the three conceptual tools that radical empiricism employs to provide a fully empirical solution to the paradox of the self-transcendence of knowledge: namely, the epistemological leap between the idea and the object. Other indispensable tools are the notion of *pure experience* and the logical function of *substitution*.

<sup>8</sup> This passage is pivotal. Pluralism means that the world of experiences is not reducible to a single type of connection; in other words, it is not entirely homogeneous. Some connections in fact – such as space connections, causes and purposes, etc. – do not work in specific contexts, though they do work in others.

### A processual view of experience

In the first of his radical empiricist essays, 'Does Consciousness Exist?' published in July 1904 and presented as a shorter version the following year at the Fifth Congress of Psychology held in Rome, James declared that 'consciousness' as traditionally investigated does not exist. Consciousness is a type of external relation, not internal (or constitutive) as rationalism has intended it to be. It is itself a function and not a substance, the function that our experiences are known. The distinction between the knower and the known is explained as a functional and not ontological difference that depends on external factors, specifically the different relational contexts to which experience is retrospectively connected:

I think I may now claim to have made my thesis clear. Consciousness connotes a kind of external relation, and does not denote a special stuff or way of being. *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 one another.* (James 1976, 14)

Pure experience is, therefore, a fundamental hypothesis for a philosophy of experience since it requires that in immediate experience (or perceptive intuition) all of reality is given – including conjunctive and disjunctive relations that retrospectively make it possible to classify the parts of the experience. By 'experience' James clarifies that he intends a process that takes place over time through a series of terms that can be replaced and are in fact replaced through experienced relations that are as particular and real as the terms between which they occur<sup>9</sup>.

As mentioned, pure experience is both a metaphysical hypothesis and a methodological postulate. In the introduction to James's *Manuscripts*,

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<sup>9</sup> For an accurate comparative analysis of James's notion of pure experience and Husserl's neutrality, see Lanfredini (2017).

*Essays and Notes*, Ignas Skrupskelis points out that the notion of pure experience appears very few times in his published writings. It can only be found in the *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. In the following three excerpts, it is evident how similar are James's descriptions of pure experience in 'A World of Pure Experience' and in 'Does Consciousness Exist?'. In the latter, we can read:

The instant field of the present is at all times what I call the 'pure' experience. It is only virtually or potentially either object or subject as yet. For the time being, it is plain, unqualified actuality or existence, a simple *that*. In this *naïf* immediacy it is of course *valid*; it is *there, we act* upon it; and the doubling of it in retrospection into a state of mind and a reality intended thereby, is just one of the acts. (James 1976, 13)

*Experience, I believe, has no such inner duplicity; and the separation of it into consciousness and content comes, not by way of subtraction, but by way of addition.* (James 1976, 6-7)

Here, pure experience is defined as the experience that precedes subject-object distinction, therefore as something [*stuff*] that has no internal duplicity (which is only later added to it), and that yet accepts other predicates – i.e. spatiality, intensity, etc. In another article, a few months later, 'The Thing and Its Relations' (Nov. 1904), James defines pure experience in a slightly different way:

'Pure experience' is the name which I gave to the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories. [...] Its purity is only a relative term, meaning the proportional amount of un verbalized sensation which it still embodies. (James 1976, 46)

In this second definition, there is no explicit reference to the absence of subject-object duplicity that we found in the first, and in this context pure experience seems not to accept any predicate. It is identified with the 'un verbalized sensation': pure experience is another name for 'feeling or sensation'. This condition is only possible, however, in infants and people who wake up from a semi-coma; it is not possible in adults in normal psycho-physical conditions. In fact, pure experience is a

*that* which is not yet any defined *what*, though it is ready to be any kind of 'whats'. Adult experience loses at least part of its purity, that is it is widely conceptualized, and more and more it contains 'adjectives, names, prepositions and conjunctions'. The description of the contents of immediate experience inevitably degrades its purity, which remains a relative term.

In the hypothesis of pure experience there is no epistemological leap between the knower and the known – respectively solved by other philosophical schools via either representationalism, or the capacity of self-transcendence of ideas, or else by the act of an absolute agent. For James, knowledge is a natural process that runs entirely within the texture of our finite experience; it is made up of external relations that develop over time: 'Certain *extrinsic* phenomena, special experiences of conjunction, are what impart to the image, be it what it may, its knowing office' (James 1976 [1912]: 28). In James's famous example of the Memorial Hall, he shows how an 'idea' of mine leads me through a series of possible paths – therefore of external, accidental and particular relations – to the direct experience [acquaintance] of the Memorial Hall, within a relational context that demonstrates the non-coincidence of the fact (e.g. I can talk about its history, I feel that my idea and perception of it correspond, etc.), and thus that the final perception of the Harvard building was what I meant by my 'idea' in the first place. Therefore, the trans-experiential continuity ensures that the process of knowledge is not interrupted on the way, and at the end it is possible to classify the starting point as the knower, and the perceptual term as the known – the one which in a certain sense creates the cognitive function. This is for James the nature of knowledge in terms of experience; both the type of perceptual knowledge, in which there is a direct experience of a present object, and the type of discursive knowledge, in which the object is not immediately present.

The unions we come to know in this way are however empirical unions, that is, unions by continuous transition or continuity, not substantial in the sense of a-temporal absolutes. This is the case not only for experiences of discursive knowledge (going from idea to perception) but also for personal identity or logical predication ('is'). Furthermore, even starting from the very same point, the experiential process can run through different possible paths. Some experiences can functionally replace others in their task of leading us to the same perceptual goals. Indeed, substitution is an essential logical function and overall conceptual experiences, as alternative paths, are much more convenient and more rapid ways compared to perceptual ones. The majority of our knowledge is never completely verified, they never reach the perceptual term from which they would obtain a full retroactive validation. For the most part, we remain in the 'virtual stage' of *transiting* knowledge. Indirect verifications prove to be sufficient in ordinary life, for we only need it to be possible that our thoughts proceed without any contradiction being felt between the present experience and the context of our acquired knowledge.

The same argument can be found in the discussion of the notion of truth in *Pragmatism* (1907), in which truth-ideas are presented as cognitive relations *in the making*. This notion of ongoing knowledge, which combines with that of 'pure experience' as something on which I 'proceed and act' and that only retrospectively conceive in a more structured way, obviously involves various issues including the validation of the cognitive process – even assuming that, as James believes, it is 'a function of our active life' and not 'a static relation out of time' (James 1976, 37).

### The difference between percepts and concepts

Finally, the functional replacement of perceptions with conceptions implies a necessary reduction of perception.

Now the immediately present moment in everyone's experience, however complex the content of it may be, has this same absolute character. [...] So far as we tend to act on that, it is real naively or practically. So far as we reflect on it and criticize and 'reduce' it, it appears to us to have subjective status merely, to be a simple 'state of mind' of our own, one of our errors, or delusions perhaps. [...] Our percepts reduce our concepts and, unreduced themselves, constitute our world of material reality. (James 1988, 30)

The relations between immediate and mediated knowledge, or perceptions and concepts, is something that commits James both psychologically and philosophically to the task of showing how much they are effectively interwoven in our ordinary experience and what risks are involved in an 'intellectualistic' or absolute philosophy, which excludes the somatic-physiological component from the factors of knowledge. In *Principles*, the terms perceptions and concepts denote those complex objects, more vivid or faint, to which our substantive mental states refer. They correspond respectively to the sensation and the image as far as simple objects are concerned. We can analytically distinguish the respective semantic areas of the two terms, so that synonyms of 'concept' are terms such as 'idea, thought and intellection', all that is the mediated; whereas, the term 'perception' stands for what is immediate or simply perceived, therefore its synonyms are 'sensation, feeling and intuition' and expressions such as 'sensitive experience, immediate flow'. Their most distinctive characteristic is that perceptions are continuous, while concepts are discreet as regards their meaning. In fact, as he states again in the posthumous *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1911), a concept means what it means and nothing else, while a perception means many things together and without that 'much-at-onceness' it implies a contradiction. The perceptual

stream shows the characters of 'duration, intensity, complexity or simplicity, interestingness, excitingness, pleasantness or their opponents' (James 1979, 32).

Wittgenstein made an interesting point about concepts in James's *Principles*. Besides being a scientist, James claims his belonging to the empiricist tradition of Mill and Hume. This was quite a distant background from Wittgenstein's view. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein saw James's employment of the introspective method of analysis as particularly problematic for its possible metaphysical outcomes: "We are not analyzing a phenomenon (e.g. thought) but a concept (e.g. that of thinking), and therefore the use of a word" (Wittgenstein 2009, § 383)<sup>10</sup>. According to Goodman, Wittgenstein dismisses James's conviction that any reference to or description of experience could provide a sort of special 'bedrock' for meaning. He warned instead that:

Philosophical investigations: conceptual investigations. The essential thing about metaphysics: that the difference between factual and conceptual investigations is not clear to it. A metaphysical question is always in appearance a factual one, although the problem is a conceptual one. (Wittgenstein 1980, § 949)

In this sense, that between grammar and experience remains a significant distinction for Wittgenstein and a matter of disagreement with James. Even though empirical propositions may sometimes work as regulative-normative ones, in his view, logic still 'brings a different kind of certainty' (Goodman 2002, 27). The 'riverbed of thoughts' metaphor he uses to investigate empirical propositions has been interpreted by Anna

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<sup>10</sup> This critique partially resonates with Richard Rorty's critique of Dewey's metaphysics of 'experience', and more generally with the supposed opposition of 'language' and 'experience' in pragmatism. According to Rosa Calcaterra (2018, chap. 2), the pragmatist notion of experience can be understood as a form of epistemological holism which is framed within a processual and dynamic view of cognitive processes. For a critical analysis of Dewey's attempt to think 'language' and 'experience' in an anti-dichotomic perspective, see Dreon (2014).

Boncompagni (2016) as a criticism of James's 'stream of thought'. Wittgenstein considers James's confusion between logical and empirical propositions as a defect of his description. Boncompagni rightly suggests that 'the continuity between logical and empirical is not a defect, but a precise claim' of James (247). Such a claim should be considered as an aspect of the naturalistic and scientific view shared by pragmatists, in parallel with their insistence on the continuity between philosophy and science. A view that Wittgenstein could not share.

For James, concepts introduce ideal cuts in perception by isolating and defining the immediate sensible life that comes as 'a big blooming buzzing confusion'<sup>11</sup>, an expression James uses to convey the aspects of vitality, variety, confusion, excess and continuity of reality. In dealing with perceptions, we can feel no neat boundaries in a continuous fusion of aspects that suffuse even the marginal or successive parts of the present moment. The unity of the stream of experience is unbroken, as its edges or margins are also part of the same stream. Our intellectual life systematically substitutes the abstract order of concepts for the perceptual order of experience. Concepts ideally and eternally identify those objects that our attention has carved out of the perceptive abundance for aesthetic or practical purposes. We cut out portions of the experiential continuum to which we give names and which we classify according to temporary purposes, and in doing so we also modify the order of perceptual experience as initially perceived.

The practical utility of concepts as well as their reality is undeniable, especially for those who, like James, would consider themselves *meliorists*. Indeed, both percepts and concepts are fundamental to our

existence for us to be able fully to know and deal with reality. In every actual situation, concepts are mixed with our present and future perceptions, and concepts enable us to extend our immediate perceptual environment beyond the here and now, as well as to organize and drive perceptual experiences according to our practical and aesthetic interests. As James explains again in 1909 – and long before in *Principles*<sup>12</sup> – things are 'special groups of sensible qualities, which happen practically or aesthetically to interest us, to which we therefore give substantive names, and which we exalt to this exclusive status of independence and dignity' (James 1979, 274).

As in a topographical system, the substitution of percepts for concepts allows us to introduce the whole system of conceptual relations involved and thus to be in a position to say a great deal more about the replaced perception. The important thing, however, is not to forget the perceptive origin of all our possible 'universes of thought' (i.e. such contexts as: the world of common-sense 'things', the mathematical world of pure forms, the world of music), otherwise there is the risk of an indiscriminate rationalization of all the sensible aspects of reality. In fact, to maintain that the perceptual stream is continuous is once again a way to contradict the Kantian idea that discontinuity characterizes experience. This position is crucial to the aim of avoiding reliance on logical conditions that guarantee the possibility of connection; that is to say, rejecting the idea that whatever connection there is can only be a matter of conceptual understanding. It is quite the opposite. Just as with the nature of concepts, so the patterns of relation between concepts are static; and against Wittgenstein's view, the logical relations do not reveal a more profound or less illusory level of reality than the stream of sensations.

<sup>11</sup> In 1865 James joined as a teaching assistant Louis Agassiz's 'Thayer expedition' to Brazil. In my forthcoming book (Bella 2019), I suggest that James's experience of the tropical rainforest, the overwhelming impression of which he described in a letter to his brother Henry Jr. James, forced him to appreciate the *variety* of nature ever after.

<sup>12</sup> 'But what are things? Nothing, as we shall abundantly see, but special groups of sensible qualities, which happen practically or aesthetically to interest us, to which we therefore give substantive names, and which we exalt to this exclusive status of independence and dignity.' (James 1981, 274)



The conceptual order is static with respect to the stream of experience, for static and abstract objects produce fixed orders whose relations and patterns are static in turn. Conceptual relations can be analytically compared, but they can by no means entirely replace the dynamic relations of the experiential stream. James does not intend to establish an absolute difference between knowing and living; these two processes are somewhat inseparable from each other. However, from the empiricist standpoint, he argues that: 'the significance of concepts always consists in their relation to perceptual particulars' (James 1979, 36); 'to hold percepts fast – in James's words – if our conceptual powers are to mean anything distinct' (James 1979, 44).

The 'theoretical' inadequacy of concepts concerning the function of letting us know the nature of reality and the implicit thesis of the 'insuperability of sensation' strongly emerges in the changing character of experience and therefore in the problematic question of a dynamic identity<sup>13</sup>. In continuous processes, the punctual reduction of perceptions to concepts (therefore the translation of a perceptive experience into the conception of the same), fails to reproduce it faithfully and *fully*<sup>14</sup>. And indeed, the attempt to reconvert the conceptual analysis of reality into the original perceptual continuum is entirely misleading, as we can see in all those processual experiences that turn out to be incomprehensible at the level of conceptual explanation: activity and causality, the conceptual impossibility of personal identity and the attribution of conceptual limits to all reality. The reality in its integrity is given to us in the immediate perception that grasps the deepest and

thickest aspects of it, while more superficially, as a subtler representation of sensation, it is given to us in the concepts that help us to extend and ideally complete those same contents.

#### **Conclusive observations on pluralism and indeterminism in an evolutionary perspective**

In 1909 James published *A Pluralistic Universe*, a book that reveals the strong interconnection between his idea of the continuity of experience and his radical reconstruction of empiricism. Radical empiricism is conceived as a doctrine of experiential continuity, which takes advantage of the immediate and therefore sensible experience of continuity; such an approach discloses the intimate interconnection between his principal conceptions, namely pure experience, radical empiricism, pragmatism, humanism and pluralism. They are all ways of illustrating the relation of empirical and contingent continuity that constitutes the field of possible experience in which we operate, as well as of reducing the value of abstract knowledge. Knowledge is above all a means to lead us somewhere in experience. According to James's philosophical reception of Darwin's theory of natural selection, ideas are instruments of adaptation to reality. In this sense, James like Peirce seems to stress the idea that knowledge has an existential dimension: it is needed to live. It is only because something happens to fall into one's universe of connections that one comes to care about it.

James is proposing a 'philosophy of experience' that connects with humanism in its attempt to reconcile our intellectual faculties with our sensible ones and to disregard any dogmatic, incontestable or absolute form of knowledge. Such a philosophy has to be tailored to reality as integrated and plural as possible. It should avoid depriving reality of its qualitative characteristics, even if vague and more challenging to take into account, to make it apparently more intelligible. In this effort, it is evident how James's theory is in sharp contrast to any absolute, naturally and socially disembodied use of

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<sup>13</sup> In Maddalena's theory (2015), complete 'gestures' as synthetic instruments allow dealing with identities as changing processes.

<sup>14</sup> James insists that the 'full nature of reality' is not conceptual, rather it is only given in the perceptual flux. Concepts are secondary 'in point of genesis', they are secondary order realities: 'concept-stuff may often be treated, for purposes of action and even of discussion, as if it were a full equivalent for reality. But [...] no amount of it can be a full equivalent, and [...] in point of genesis it remains a secondary formation.' (James 1979, 59).

intellect because of its perverse and illusory outcomes, while also explaining his urgent call for a constant confrontation with Anglo-American idealism.

The pragmatic perspective, from which radical empiricism does not *de facto* diverge, is rooted in the concrete character of the present experience and always remains open to its future convalidation. This view goes in the direction of an indeterminist epistemology and metaphysics, as future consequences are never fully predictable as far as their concrete (contingent and contextual) developments are concerned. This complex interconnection of psychology, epistemology, and ontology also reveals how profound was the influence of a logical understanding of Darwin's theory of evolution on James.<sup>15</sup> The flowing structure of consciousness is thus analogous to the current of experiences. In other words, we can translate continuity into the practical-ambulatory transcendence of meanings, in the sense that as human beings, affectable and fallible, we are vectors of continuous processes of change concerning which reality proves to be to a certain extent modifiable or 'plastic'. Like Dewey and Schiller, James's argumentation is based on the inductive generalization of psychological processes on the basis of an analogical connection with natural processes. There are interesting connections between the definitions provided by pragmatism and the direction taken by scientists towards more genuine scientific criteria, in particular, the notions of approximation, indeterminateness and pluralism. James's scientific hypothesis points toward a level of approximate generalization, that is, an abandonment of

the idealistic view of natural laws, as well as a move toward the acceptance of the indefiniteness that constitutes the peculiar traits of the 'living present'.<sup>16</sup>

This is why James proposes the metaphysical view of a reality that, unlike the absolute idea of a world which has always been given, is still 'in the making', that is, that at the same time it undergoes and acts continuous processes of change which involve some real 'variation', or the 'free play' on which metaphysical pluralism is built<sup>17</sup>. Despite the accusation of endorsing a downgraded form of utilitarianism<sup>18</sup>, James's philosophical intention is to highlight that, beneath consolidated and seemingly irremovable definitions, meanings are continually flowing and undergoing profound changes according to practical conveniences, or evolutionary processes. This is not a claim for relativism; as far as thought processes are concerned, which are conceived as analogous to natural processes, there is a constant interplay between function and structure, so that pure arbitrariness does not really exist. In thought, it is coherence and continuity that connect us to the past and the future. It is within the epistemological and ontological evolutionary perspective that one can also appreciate the value of the demystifying work James carries out in his intense pragmatist analysis of conventional meanings, by asking for their 'cash-value'. His attitude, however, is that of a man of science – the new science – who is tirelessly campaigning for the abandonment of any undue introduction of *a priori* metaphysical notions, insisting instead on the fundamental significance of the

<sup>15</sup> The debt of Peirce and James with Chauncey Wright's logical and epistemological understanding of Darwinism is evident here. See Parravicini (2012). On pragmatism and Darwinism see McGranahan (2017); Fabbrichesi (2011); Franzese (2009). However, this is not to deny the well-known influence of other authors on James's conception of pluralism, first of all that of Charles Renouvier (see Perry 1935, vol. 1, 659ff). More recently, Russell Duvernoy (2015, 508) talked about 'the intersection of an epistemic need (or condition of possibility) with a quasi-metaphysical intuition or postulate (continuity)' in James.

<sup>16</sup> James's attention to the 'present' goes in the direction of what G.H. Mead claims in his *The Philosophy of the Present* (1932), namely to take time seriously. In this view, pragmatists' anti-reductionist naturalism anticipates several issues related to 'emergentism.' See Baggio (2013).

<sup>17</sup> In *Pragmatism*, James underlines that *pluralism* is satisfied with just 'some separation among things, some tremor of independence, some free play of parts on one another, some real novelty or chance' (James 1975a, 78).

<sup>18</sup> For James's reply to this accusation, see James (1975b, chap. 8).

philosophical treatment of scientific hypotheses. James opposes any form of dogmatism, either philosophical or scientific, therefore both absolutism and scientism, asking them to give reasons in concrete, 'cash-value' form for their convictions so that they can be verifiable in principle. He sheds light on the fact that even scientific convictions inevitably involve personal temperament, preferences, and conventional beliefs. Therefore, he advocates the necessity for scientists to 'lay their cards on the table', so that all personal, social and political matters ultimately would fall within the supposed neutral, rational arena of science.

Only such a change of perspective can make it possible to achieve greater freedom of movement in the field of research: every domain of human life can be the subject of scientific investigation – as James himself demonstrated when dealing with religious experience and other paranormal phenomena. Furthermore, science has to investigate everything that is human by involving humanistic methods and criteria. Science can investigate everything, and indeed it is right that it can do so, as long as we clarify what 'science' means and enlarge its boundaries to redeem its humanist origins and philosophical depth.

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**EXPERIENCE AND GRAMMAR:  
WITTGENSTEIN AND JAMES  
ON THE EXPERIENCE OF MEANING**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper focuses on Wittgenstein's philosophical engagement with James' thought on the experiential account of meaning and understanding. According to this account, meaning is characterized as a state of mind of the subject, while understanding is conceived as a kind of experience of the subject. This paper argues that, although Wittgenstein criticizes the experiential model as a tempting but deceptive philosophical view, James's account has a pervasive positive influence on Wittgenstein's thought. It will be shown that, even though Wittgenstein argues *against* the idea that meanings are experiences, the Jamesian principle of the absence of the will act informs Wittgenstein's alternative conceptions of meaning as use and understanding as mastery of a technique. Moreover, Wittgenstein's discussion of aspect-seeing in the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations* follows the discussion of the experiential account. Wittgenstein's discussion is presented as an instance of the distinction between experience and grammar and as an example of a broader engagement with James's philosophy on the concept of experience.

**Keywords:** Wittgenstein; James; experience; meaning; pragmatism.

### Introduction

The concept of experience is at the core of an interesting "imaginary dialogue" between Ludwig Wittgenstein and William James on meaning. I use the word "dialogue" because, mainly in the spirit of Goodman's work, I think that James exerted a pervasive *positive* influence on Wittgenstein's thought (Goodman 2002). Wittgenstein worked with *The Principles of Psychology*<sup>1</sup> from the 30's till the end of his life and he thought James to be a serious philosophical interlocutor.

In this paper, I will address the issue of the experiential account of meaning and understanding which is paradigmatically found in James' masterpiece. More specifically, I will focus on two theses that

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<sup>1</sup> From now on "The Principles".

Wittgenstein ascribes to James: 1. The idea that meaning is a state of mind of the subject, 2. The conception of understanding as an experience of the subject. Overall, Wittgenstein's discussion of the experience of meaning is presented as an instance of the distinction between experience and grammar, or language. Contrary to the general trend among critics, I will trace Wittgenstein's engagement with James on meaning and experience by looking at Wittgenstein's early discussion found in *The Brown Book*, rather than looking at part II of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Moreover, I will show that, although Wittgenstein argues *against* the idea that meanings are experiences, the Jamesian principle of the absence of the will act informs Wittgenstein's alternative conceptions of meaning as use and understanding as mastery of a technique. This specific topic, therefore, is an example of a more general philosophical engagement between Wittgenstein and James on the concept of experience.<sup>2</sup>

### The experiential model

In ordinary life, we often find ourselves suddenly uttering expressions such as "Now I understand!", "Now I know how to do it!" while reading a text, or while listening to an instruction, or just while deeply thinking about something. Moreover, if we think about what happens when we read a text with understanding we feel as something different is going on than when we read a text we don't understand. We feel like we are having a specific and particular *experience*. Correspondingly, we tend to see meaningful words as words that are intimately infused with their meaning. When an expression is seen as meaningful, it is not seen as a mere sound or black mark, but rather as an entity which would not be the same if the meaning changed. When we employ familiar words, we feel like we are having a specific *experience of meaning*. This can take many forms: we experience a loss of meaning when the

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<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein uses the German term "Erlebnis" when he writes about the experience of meaning. It is this concept of experience which is at issue here, that is, the individual's *primary* and *inner* experience.



word is repeated several times (RPP I §194)<sup>3</sup>, or we experience different meanings of the same word, such as experiencing “bank” as meaning a financial institution and then as meaning a river’s edge, or we take a proper name to be intimately connected to its bearer (PI p. 282). Overall, it seems that every familiar word “carries an atmosphere with it in our minds, a corona of faintly indicated uses” (PPF §35). Is then understanding an inner process, namely the collection of all these experiences? Is the meaning of a word the experience one has in hearing or uttering it?

The phenomenology of understanding seems to suggest that meaning is something that we experience, that is, a state of the mind. We are thereby inclined to define understanding as a kind of experience which *accompanies* the hearing and uttering of words. After all, isn’t this experience that distinguishes an intelligent uttering or reading from an automatic one? According to Wittgenstein, the experiential account of meaning and understanding is a tempting – but still deceptive – philosophical view and it is paradigmatically endorsed by James in *The Principles*.

### James and the priority of experience

James does not actually say that meanings are a kind of experience. However, Wittgenstein ascribes to him the experiential account of meaning and understanding and this ascription, as I shall argue, is not unjustified. As Goodman suggested, experiences seem to stand as the best candidate for linguistic meaning in James’ system of thought (Goodman 2002, 75). The experiential account is found at least in four settings of *The Principles* in chapters IX and X: 1. The passage about the feelings attached to words, 2. James’ discussion on the sense of familiarity, 3. The Ballard case, 4. The empirical self.

1. In chapter IX, James famously states that “there is not a conjunction or a preposition, and hardly an adverbial phrase, syntactic form, or inflection of voice, in human speech, that does not express some shading or other of relation which we at some moment actually feel to exist between the larger objects of our thought. [...] We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue* or a feeling of *cold*” (James 1983, 238). Wittgenstein reads this passage as a view on meaning, that is, the idea that the meaning of a word is the specific feeling, or experience attached to it. However, to be precise, James is not dealing with the problem of linguistic meaning in *this* setting. This gets clearer if we report the entire passage. Before speaking about the feeling of words, James states that “if there be such things as feelings at all, *then so surely as relations between objects exist in rerum naturâ, so surely, and more surely, do feelings exist to which these relations are known*” and, after saying that we ought to say all those feelings, he complains that “we do not: so inveterate has our habit become of recognizing the existence of the substantive parts alone, that language almost refuses to lend itself to any other use” (James 1983, 238). In this context, James is mainly concerned about the misleading classical empiricist view of thought and experience as a set of separate and isolated “atoms”. According to James, by contrast, the thought is sensibly continuous, that is, even the relations are part of it. He indeed distinguishes between substantive parts – the “resting places”, and transitive parts – the “places of flight”, and he criticizes traditional philosophy for not taking into account the latter.<sup>4</sup> However, even if the context is not specifically semantic, James repeatedly states that language is

<sup>3</sup> See “Bibliography” for abbreviations of Wittgenstein’s works.

<sup>4</sup> James criticises the dichotomy between sensationalism and intellectualism: sensationalists have denied the existence of relations and tendencies; intellectualists, on the other hand, have similarly denied the existence of feelings but they have concluded that, since so, relations must be known by a pure act of Reason, or Intellect. This is a point which will be greatly emphasised in *The Essays on Radical Empiricism* (James 1996).

inadequate and it does prevent us to see the truth given by experience. In particular, the naming process is what inclines us to see only the substantial parts of thought: we think that where we have a separate name, a separate thing must be there, whereas where there is no name, no entity can exist (James 1983, 238). This point introduces the priority given by James to experience over language and this is indeed a central part of the experiential model we are discussing.

2. What is the difference between an experience tasted for the first time and the same experience recognized as familiar? The sense of familiarity is generally something we badly manage to describe and characterize. In this context, James immediately moves to the linguistic level.

When we read such phrases as “naught but”, “either one or the other”, “*a* is *b*”, “but, although it is, nevertheless”, “it is an excluded middle, there is no *tertium quid*”, [...] is it true that there is nothing more in our minds than the words themselves as they pass? What then is the meaning of the words which we think we understand as we read? What makes that meaning different in one phrase from what it is in the other? “Who?” “When?” “Where?” Is the difference of felt meaning in these interrogatives nothing more than their difference of sound? (James 1983, 244).

Meaning is here conceived as something that we *feel* and, moreover, it is something that attaches to the word so that the word is not a *mere* word that passes in our mind. If the meaning is so conceived, then, accordingly, “that first instantaneous glimpse of some one’s meaning which we have, when in vulgar phrase we say we ‘twig’ it” is “surely an altogether specific affection of our mind” (James 1983, 245). If we are still not convinced about the genuine linguistic import of James’ passages, it might be useful to point out that James mentions and endorses Dr. Campbell’s theory on sense and nonsense.

That connection [he says] or relation which comes gradually to subsist among the different words of a language, in the minds of those who speak it, is merely consequent on this, that those

words are employed as signs of connected or related things. [...] Hence the sounds considered as signs will be conceived to have a connection analogous to that which subsisted among the things signified; I say, the sounds considered as signs; for this way of considering them constantly attends us in speaking, writing, hearing, and reading. When we purposely abstract from it, and regard them merely as sounds, we are instantly sensible that they are quite unconnected, and have no other relation than what ariseth from similitude of tone or accent (James 1983, 252).

According to James, Dr. Campbell’s view helps to emphasize the fact that when we experience a sentence as meaningful, certain grammatical expectations are fulfilled. Nonsense in grammatical form would sound half-rational to us. If we know a language, then when we hear the first words of a sentence we expect other words to come after and we have a glimpse of the thought expressed even before the end of the uttering (James 1983, 245). In other words, when a sentence is understood and experienced as the expression of a unitary thought, then each word is felt not only as a word but as having a *meaning*. More specifically, this happens when we take meaning dynamically in a sentence. In this case, meaning can be reduced to a bare fringe of felt suitability or unfitness to context and conclusion. But meaning can also be taken statically, that is, without context. “The static meaning, when the word is concrete, as ‘table,’ ‘Boston,’ consists of sensory images awakened; when it is abstract, as ‘criminal legislation,’ ‘fallacy,’ the meaning consists of other words aroused, forming the so-called ‘definition’” (James 1983, 255). Whether we take meaning dynamically or statically, the meaning seems to be a kind of mental state: an experience of fittingness in the former case, and a proper sensory image attached to the word in the latter. Moreover, this conception of meaning seems to presuppose a kind of priority of thought over language: language seems to be a mere vehicle of autonomous and pre-constituted thoughts. This suggestion brings us to the Ballard case.

3. Mr. Ballard is a deaf-mute man from birth who wrote some reminiscences of his childhood. He claimed to have been able to think before he could speak. Ballard writes: "It was during those delightful rides, some two or three years before my initiation into the rudiments of written language, that I began to ask myself the question: *How came the world into being?* When this question occurred to my mind, I set myself to thinking it over a long time" (James 1983, 257). James takes Mr. Ballard reports being sufficient proofs of the fact that thought is perfectly possible without language or speech. This conclusion is based, I think, on two assumptions: the idea that thought may be entirely divorced from behaviour, including the verbal one, and the methodological acceptance of introspection.<sup>5</sup> This brings us to the last point.

4. A man's empirical self is "*the sum total of all that he CAN call his*, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account" (James 1983, 279). The self, so conceived, is constituted by the material self, the social self, the spiritual self and the pure ego. For our purposes, I will focus on the spiritual self. James defines it as "a man's inner or subjective being, his psychic faculties or dispositions, taken concretely" (James 1983, 283). What is to be underlined is that, according to James, we consider the spiritual self through a *reflective process* which is intimately different from an outward-looking point of view. Human beings immediately *know* their own inner states. "This attention to thought as such, and the identification of ourselves with it rather than with any of the objects which it reveals, is a momentous and in some respects a rather mysterious operation, of which we need here only say that as a matter of fact it exists" (James 1983, 284). Moreover, thanks to introspection we can individuate a certain portion of the stream that James calls "the active

element" in all consciousness. This element is what, in a certain sense, gives life to thought, to words, to everything that is experienced and it is something that is *felt* by the subject by *direct acquaintance*.

Overall, we might conclude that the experiential model endorsed by James involves four aspects: the idea that meanings are experiences, that is, feelings associated with the words; the idea that understanding is an affection of the mind which accompanies the uttering or reading of the words; the priority of thought over language, that is, the view of language as a vehicle of pre-constituted thoughts inwardly uttered; finally, epistemic priority given to the first person in the light of the methodological value of introspection. The priority of experience – even epistemologically – is then a core trait of James' thought and it is one of the elements of continuity between *The Principles* and *The Essays on Radical Empiricism*. Wittgenstein, as we shall see, argues against such priority and charges James with the failure to distinguish experience from meaning, language, or grammar.

#### Wittgenstein's concern

According to Goodman, Wittgenstein is mainly interested in James' empiricism, that is, the idea that *experience* is a sufficient fundamental category. However, whereas James aims to analyze and classifying phenomena, Wittgenstein considers *concepts*. As a result, it is the concept of experience which is mainly at issue in his remarks about the experiential model. First of all, Wittgenstein warns us that the concept of experience is often used in philosophy to refer to something solid which could furnish a kind of "bedrock, deeper than any special methods and language-games". Something similar applies to the concept of fact or happening. However, he goes on, "such extremely general terms have an extremely blurred meaning. They relate in practice to innumerable special cases, but that does not make them any *solid*, no, rather it makes them more

<sup>5</sup> Both points are extensively criticized by Wittgenstein (PI §§327-343).

fluid” (RPP I §648). Secondly, further misunderstandings stand behind the attempt to use such alleged “solider concept” to give an account of language. Wittgenstein’s interest in the experiential model is therefore essentially semantic; he is concerned with James’ conception of the experience of meaning as a deceptive model of meaning and understanding. Wittgenstein does not say that we don’t have experiences of meaning, he rather warns us against the tendency to think that those experiences *constitute* meaning.

It is generally assumed that Wittgenstein writes extensively about the experience of meaning after finishing Part 1 of the *Philosophical Investigations* in 1945 because he feels that something is missing in the account of meaning as use exposed in that work.<sup>6</sup> However, there is evidence of an early interest in this topic in writings from the first half of the 1930s and Wittgenstein does draw the distinction between meanings as states of mind and meanings construed in terms of “rules” already in *The Big Typescript*:

What are we to understand the “meaning” of a word? A characteristic feeling that accompanies the asserting (hearing) of the word? (The and-feeling, if-feeling of James.) Or are we to use the word “meaning” completely differently; and, for example, say two words have the same meaning when the same grammatical rules apply to both of them? (BT p. 29e).

I argue that Wittgenstein’s discussion of the experience of meaning is *part* of his reflection about the concepts of meaning and understanding and it helps to shape the alternative model of meaning as use. Therefore, it is not the *later conception* of meaning. For this reason, I will try to retrace Wittgenstein’s engagement with James by looking at an extensive discussion we find in *The Brown Book*, dated 1935-1936.

### Limits and sources of the experiential model

Wittgenstein famously writes that “for a large class of cases of the employment of the word ‘meaning’ – though not for *all* – this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (PI §43). For “use” Wittgenstein does not mean the practical function of the word. Rather, he is pointing to a certain *public* and *shared practice* with the word: the way a word is used in a system of signs, that is, a language. A word is used in accordance with certain *rules*, therefore normativity stands at the core of Wittgenstein’s conception of meaning: meaning is best characterized as the *correct use* of a word in a specific language, or language game. Wittgenstein introduces the notion of grammar to elucidate this new perspective on language. Although the term “grammar” is used by Wittgenstein in a variety of ways, I will be using this term to refer to the rules of usage of a particular word or expression.<sup>7</sup> There is, therefore, a knowing how and when to use a term and this also provides a criterion for someone’s understanding it. The concept of understanding, correspondingly, is best characterized in terms of a capacity to use the word, a “mastery of a technique” which is learned by training in a particular cultural system or, better, in a “form of life” (PI §§150, 19).

Nevertheless, Wittgenstein admits that the idea of meaning as some sort of conscious mental phenomenon is very seductive because it comes from some basic intuitions about the phenomenology of understanding.

We think of the meaning of signs sometimes as states of mind of the man using them, sometimes as the role which these signs are playing in a system of language. The connection between these two ideas is that the mental experiences which accompany the use of a sign undoubtedly are caused by our usage of the sign in a particular system of language. William James speaks of specific feelings accompanying the use of such words as ‘and’, ‘if’, ‘or’ (BB p. 78).

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<sup>6</sup> Zemach 1995, Voltolini 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Wittgenstein also talks about the grammar of an entire language to refer both to the set of rules that constitute that language and the study of the rules of that particular language (PG §§44, 23a, 23e, BT p. 58).

Overall, Wittgenstein does not want to deny a certain phenomenology of the use of familiar terms. He rather criticizes the philosophical tendency to use such experiential elements to *ground* the meaning of terms. The outcome of his discussions is that “[t]he meaning of a word is not the experience one has in hearing or saying it, and the sense of a sentence is not a complex of such experiences” (PPF §37). We surely have specific experiences when we engage with familiar words, however, these experiences can’t determine the meaning because, as we shall see, they presuppose such a meaning. In what follows I will first expose two limits of the experiential model that Wittgenstein discusses in the *Brown Book*: essentialism and the confusion between “expressing an experience” and “describing an experience”.

After mentioning James, Wittgenstein admits that “there is no doubt that at least certain gestures are often connected with such words, as a collecting gesture with ‘and’, and a dismissing gesture with ‘not’. And there obviously are visual and muscular sensations connected with”. However, “it is clear enough that these sensations do not accompany every [my emphasis] use of the word ‘not’ and ‘and’” (BB pp. 78-79). When we understand the meaning of a word, we say, a specific experience must occur in me other than the mere hearing or reading the word. However, do we always have that particular experience when we understand the meaning? It is useful to imagine the following case: I give to a person a list of words and I ask her to say “yes” or “no” after the uttering of each word according to whether she understands the word or not. We then ask this person to remember what happened in her mind when she understood the word and when she did not understand the word. According to Wittgenstein, this mental experiment will show us a multitude of different characteristic experiences, but it will not show us *one* experience which we should call “the experience of understanding”.

There will be such experiences as these: I hear the word “tree” and say “Yes” with the tone of voice and sensation of “Of course”. [...] I hear “Mamma”, this strikes me as funny and childish-“Yes”. [...] I hear “spintharoscope”, and say to myself, “Must be some sort of scientific instrument”, perhaps try to think up its meaning from its derivation and fail and say “No”. [...] There will, on the other hand, be a large class of cases in which I am not aware of anything happening except hearing the word and saying the answer (BB p. 155).

When we describe the characteristic experiences that accompany our use of signs we are describing just *one* possible case within many, but our way of speaking assumes that there should be a specific experience which characterizes what we want to define. This experience is thought to be the *essential* feature of the phenomena, the element which must be in common of all phenomena of that type. Wittgenstein thinks that this philosophical tendency comes from a dissatisfaction toward his own descriptions. Let’s go back to the previous example: there could be the case in which the person should have to say simply “I know of no particular experience at all, I just said ‘Yes’, or ‘No’” after hearing the uttered words. I merely *reacted* in that way. This description, however, is thought to be too meagre. One could say that surely this couldn’t have been all. The experiential element seems to offer a more solid basis for a description which is more respectful of the human character of language but, since we cannot really point to any such essential experience, we find ourselves in

a curious difficulty: on the one hand it seems we have no reason to say that in all cases in which we understand a word one particular experience- or even one of a set- is present. On the other hand, we may feel it’s plainly wrong to say that in such a case all that happens may be that I hear or say the word. For that seems to be saying that part of the time we act as mere automatons. And the answer is that in a sense we do and in a sense we don’t (BB p. 156).

It is in this context that Wittgenstein applies to language James’s view of “the absence of an act of volition” and he explicitly employs James’ example:



It has been said that when a man, say, gets out of bed in the morning, all that happens may be this: he deliberates, "Is it time to get up?", he tries to make up his mind, and then suddenly he finds himself getting up. Describing it this way emphasizes the absence of an act of volition. [...] Now there is something in the above description which tempts us to contradict it; we say: "We don't just 'find', observe, ourselves getting up, as though we were observing someone else! (BB p. 150).

In this context, Wittgenstein is thinking *along with* James. We are not content with that description as we are not content with the picture of meaning as use. There must be something more, we say, otherwise we would employ *mere* words, *mere* sounds whereas when we speak and read we are dealing with meaningful signs. Wittgenstein's discussion of various cases has a deflationary force: just like it is not necessary that there is a willing act every time we do a voluntary act, so there does not have to be an act, or experience of understanding or meaning in order for someone to understand or mean something.

The second limit of the experiential model concerns our misleading way of employing the concept of experience. In particular, according to Wittgenstein we fail to distinguish between "reporting an experience" and "expressing an experience" (Schulte 1993, 60-62). Wittgenstein writes that the philosophical trouble we have been turning over is connected with the use of the word "particular". "We have been inclined to say that seeing familiar objects we have a particular feeling", "that we had a particular experience when we acted voluntarily", or that we feel a particular sensation when we hear or read a known word (BB p. 158). The word "particular" has two different uses: the transitive use, and the intransitive one. In the first case, the word is used preliminarily to a description, a specification or a comparison. That means I can answer the question "In what way particular?" by explaining in different words. For example, we might describe the smell of a dish by saying that "This pasta has a *particular* smell. It is the smell I felt every day when I was a child at school". In the

second case, the word is used to *give emphasis* and it does not require further description. It is an expression similar to "peculiar", "out of the ordinary", or "uncommon". For example, the sentences "What a peculiar smell!", or "This face has a particular expression!". However, this is not the only way we could emphasize something with words. Wittgenstein introduces the interesting notion of "reflexive use of words". Like the intransitive use, the reflexive form of speech is a matter of emphasis but the difference is that it can always be "straightened up" (BB p. 161), that is, we can always rephrase what we want to say in straight – not reflexive – terms. For example, we say in the reflexive mode "That's that" meaning "The matter is closed", or "That is settled". The reflexive form, therefore, is a special case of the transitive use. According to Wittgenstein, when we philosophize about understanding and meaning we use the word "particular" in a way which is very similar to the intransitive use but "we are regarding its use as a special case of the transitive use" (BB p. 160), i.e., the reflexive use. We think we are denoting with the word "particular" an elusive and mysterious experience which cannot be properly grasped by language. In particular, "we feel as though we could give an experience a name without at the same time committing ourselves about its use. [...] We are emphasizing, not comparing, but we express ourselves as though this emphasis was really a comparison of the object with itself; there seems to be a reflexive comparison" (BB pp. 159-160). However, when we employ such expressions we indeed are not properly describing anything, we are just *expressing* those particular experiences we are having. We might say that those expressions are expressions that we correctly employ as expressions of particular experiences – it is a use which is included in their grammar – but they are not descriptions of those experiences. When I say that I feel a particular experience when I read with understanding, a further demand of specification about such an experience may put the mind on a whirl because I would point to that experience again. I am not comparing that

experience with another paradigm, I am just giving emphasis to it, I am saying that I am having it. This is a temptation, though, that it is strictly connected to the philosophical perspective and in particular to a way of doing philosophy that clearly echoes James' introspective method.

When we philosophize about this sort of thing we almost invariably do something of this sort: We repeat to ourselves a certain experience, say, by looking fixedly at a certain object and trying to 'read off' as it were the name of its colour. And it is quite natural that doing so again and again we should be inclined to say, "Something particular happens while we say the word 'blue'". [...] But ask yourself: Is this also the process which we usually go through when on various occasions--not philosophizing--we name the colour of an object? (BB p. 149).

### Two senses of "experience"

In the *Brown Book* Wittgenstein introduces also an intimate connection between the discussion on the meaning experience and the discussion on aspect-perception. "Our sentence 'I have this feeling while I'm writing' is of the kind of the sentence 'I see this'" (BB p. 174). Aspect perception is a mechanism that stands between sensory information and conceptual elaboration. What does it mean to say that one can see a certain object at one time *as this* and at another time *as that*? When we look for a man in a puzzle picture, for example, we might start seeing mere dashes, and then later appears a face. We would then say: "Now I see it as a face" (BB p. 163). In cases like these, Wittgenstein says that we are inclined to think that seeing a man in a puzzle picture is not merely seeing a complex of lines, but rather it is having an additional and particular experience different from the mere seeing of the puzzle picture. Here, however, we are dealing with two different uses of the term "seeing": seeing *tout court* and seeing an aspect. Is aspect-seeing an additional process to seeing *tout court*? Is the meaning experience an additional process to the *mere* hearing or uttering the word? Wittgenstein writes against this philosophical

tendency. Seeing an aspect is not seeing an additional and different object, but it is rather seeing the same object in a *different way*. Aspect-perception, therefore, is not perception of a particular property of the object but it is rather an exercise of some recognition capacities.

At this point, we are in better position to understand Wittgenstein's discussion in Part 2 of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

Only of someone *capable* of making certain applications of the figure with facility one says that he saw it now this way, now that way. The substratum of this experience is the mastery of a technique (PPF §224).

The outcome of Wittgenstein's discussion is to show that, as we are inclined to think about aspect-seeing as an additional process to mere seeing, so we are inclined to conceive the experiences of meaning and understanding as additional processes which accompany the *mere* reading of words. However, Wittgenstein clarifies the fact that when we speak about the experience of meaning, the concept of experience used is not that of the *primary experience*, like having some sensation, feeling pain, etc, but a kind of experience which *presupposes a particular ability*, or competence. This competence is the mastery of the use of words which constitutes their grammar. Such an experience already presupposes meaning as use, therefore it cannot be what constitutes such a meaning.

But how odd for this to be the logical condition of someone's having such-and-such an *experience*! After all, you don't say that one 'has toothache' only if one is capable of doing such-and-such. – From this it follows that we cannot be dealing with the same concept of experience here. It is a different concept, even though related. Only of someone who *can do*, has learned, is master of, such-and such, does it makes sense to say that he has had *this* experience (PPF §223).

According to Wittgenstein, therefore, the experience of meaning is an experience that we actually have when we engage with familiar words, but it is accommodated – together with other subjective aspects of the use of language – by the notion of *secondary meaning* of a word. This meaning presupposes the primary meaning, that is, meaning as the role and use of the word in the language- its grammar. The expression “to experience the meaning of a word” is a secondary use of language, that is, an expression for which the primary use of “meaning” is essential.

### Conclusion: from experience to grammar

The experiences of understanding and meaning occur simultaneously with the reading or hearing of the signs, hence seem radically different from understanding in the sense of the ability to use words and meaning as the role of signs in a system. Wittgenstein’s discussion is meant to show, by contrast, at least the *semantic* dispensability of the notion of meaning experience: it is not a necessary condition for understanding an expression and for correctly employing it.<sup>8</sup> Overall, Wittgenstein’s remarks are meant to reverse the Jamesian view on experience and thought: the priority is given to grammar, that is, the rules according to which we employ and understand words. Part of the philosophical task is then to clarify the grammar of the concept of experience and to show that even such concept, like every other concept, is used in accordance with rules embedded in a certain public and shared practice, therefore it cannot provide a more solid ground for the meaning of words.

To conclude, I would like to highlight two points. Firstly, the priority of grammar over experience involves a different view of language itself. Whereas James sometimes, especially in *The Principles*, seems to conceive language as a tool to share pre-constituted thoughts, Wittgenstein rather conceives language as a

human activity, or practice the mastery of which must be presupposed in order to formulate inward thoughts themselves.

An intention is embedded in its situation, in human customs and institutions. If the technique of the game of chess did not exist, I could not intend to play a game of chess. In so far as I do intend the construction of a sentence in advance, that is made possible by the fact that I can speak the language in question (PI §337).

Secondly, I would like to suggest that Wittgenstein’s distinction between two senses of “experience” might also be used – independently of Wittgenstein’s own interest – to highlight a concept of immediate experience which is not that of the *Erlebnis*. Such a concept does not involve any epistemological priority of the first person and, indeed, it rather focuses on the continuous interaction between the subject and a world which is inherently social; a way of doing and undergoing. The philosophical engagement between Wittgenstein and James on the experiential model of meaning and understanding is, then, an instance of a broader philosophical reflection on the concept of experience, which is a core issue for the pragmatist tradition. By stating that, I do not want to argue that Wittgenstein might be considered a pragmatist philosopher, but rather I want to stress the philosophical relevance of a research which takes into consideration Wittgenstein and the pragmatist tradition together. Wittgenstein, as we have seen, argues against the Jamesian priority of experience over language. However, in the light of what has been suggested above, we might add a further step which can be the object of further research: not just from experience to grammar, but from *Erlebnis* to *Embodiment*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Wittgenstein provides further proof for this point by discussing the case of the “meaning-blind person” (PPF §§257-261).

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<sup>9</sup> In this way, the research might be extended so to include Dewey’s reflection on experience (Dewey 1939).

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**THE CONCEPT OF EXPERIENCE  
IN HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY  
AND JAMES' RADICAL EMPIRICISM**

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper, I develop a comparison between the philosophies of Husserl and James in relation to their concepts of experience. Whereas various authors have acknowledged the affinity between James' early psychology and Husserl's phenomenology, the late development of James' philosophy is often considered in opposition to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. This is because James' radical empiricism achieves a non-dual dimension of experience that precedes the functional division into subject and object, thus contrasting with the phenomenological analysis of the dual structure of intentionality. However, I argue that the later "genetic" development of phenomenology converges with some central aspects of James' radical empiricism. This is because genetic phenomenology leads us to conceive of the flow of primal impressions as a fundamental dimension of experience that precedes the subject-object duality and is at the base of the process of co-constitution of the subject and the object in reciprocal dependence. At the same time, Husserl conceives of the impressional core of experience as structured by formal conditions that depend on the concrete constitution of an embodied subject. For this reason, I argue that Husserl's genetic phenomenology can complement James' radical empiricism, thus leading to the development of the doctrine of pure experience as a form of empirical and not metaphysical realism.

**Keywords:** genetic phenomenology, qualia, consciousness, pure experience, neutral monism

**Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to compare the concepts of experience that are developed in the philosophies of Edmund Husserl and William James. Various authors have stressed the affinities between James' early psychology, as presented in the *Principles of Psychology* (James 1958, hereafter referred to as *Principles*), and Husserl's phenomenology (see Schutz 1941; Gurwitsch 1946; Wilshire 1969; Kessler 1978). In fact, certain ideas presented in James' *Principles* prefigure central features of Husserl's phenomenology. In particular, the starting point of James' inquiry in the *Principles* is the

epistemological dualism of knower (subject) and known (object), conceived of as an essential character of mental states. This dualism is expressed by the notions of "conception" and "cognitive function", which can be likened to Husserl's concept of intentionality (see Schutz 1941; Gurwitsch 1946; Wilshire 1969: 32). This common starting point of the philosophies of Husserl and James is also developed in similar ways. For example, James' distinction between "topic" and "object of thought" is very close to Husserl's distinction between the "object which is intended" and the "object as it is intended" (see Schutz 1941; Gurwitsch 1946). Furthermore, James' idea that the various parts of the stream of thought are surrounded by *fringes*, which also account for the unity of consciousness and the unity of the object, anticipates the phenomenological concept of *horizon*<sup>1</sup>. For these reasons, Husserl's phenomenology can be conceived of as a "radicalization" (see Gurwitsch 1946) of James' programmatic dualism through the investigation of the fundamental correlation subjective-objective.

However, the same reasons that lead us to acknowledge this continuity between James' *Principles* and Husserl's phenomenology also lead us to find a tension between Husserl's phenomenology and James' later doctrine of pure experience, which is presented in the *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (James 1912, hereafter referred to as *Essays*). This is because, in contrast to the analysis of the dual structure of experience by means of notions such as "cognitive function" (in James) and "intentionality" (in Husserl), the doctrine of pure experience achieves a non-dual dimension of experience that precedes the functional division into subject and object.

For this reason, various authors have stressed the opposition between James' late philosophy and Husserl's phenomenology (see Gurwitsch 1946: 163; Wilshire 1969; Kessler 1978). In contrast to this reading, I shall argue that Husserl's genetic development of phenomenology also reaches a non-subjectivist concept

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl (1970: 234) claims that James recognized the "phenomena of horizon [...] under the title of 'fringes'" (see Wilshire 1969: 34).

of experience that is near to James' doctrine of pure experience. This is because the genetic "deepening" of phenomenology finds in the flow of *primal impressions* a fundamental dimension of experience that precedes the subject-object duality, being at the base of the process of co-constitution of the subject and the object in reciprocal dependence. At the same time, reading James' view in the light of Husserl's phenomenology allows us to address an open question in the doctrine of pure experience. This view could be interpreted as a form of metaphysical realism, i.e. as a doctrine about ultimate reality and, specifically, as a metaphysical form of neutral monism. However, the metaphysical reading of James' view contrasts with the rejection of the absolutistic and trans-empirical claims of metaphysics in James' empiricist and pragmatist philosophy. I shall argue that the comparison with Husserl's phenomenology leads us to develop a non-metaphysical reading of the doctrine of pure experience. In fact, Husserl conceives of the impressional core of experience as structured by formal conditions that depend on the concrete constitution of the subject of experience. I shall argue that the phenomenological account of the intertwining of form and matter of experience complements James' radical empiricism, thus leading to the development of the doctrine of pure experience as a form of empirical and not metaphysical realism.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. The doctrine of pure experience

James conceives of the doctrine of pure experience as a "rearrangement" in philosophy and as a *Weltanschauung* into which his mind has grown for many years (James 1912: 40). This doctrine goes beyond the epistemological dualism of subject-object that was at the heart of the *Principles* and it arises from a radical gaze into experience that enters into contact with its

originary nature, before any conceptualization and theorization has taken place. This inquiry finds a "pure" dimension of experience that precedes the functional distinction between subject and object. According to James, the subject and the object of experience are constituted by series of pure experiences and the distinction between them is merely practical, depending on the function that they have in a certain context, which we thereby call "physical" or "mental". Pure experiences are thus situated at the intersection of the subject and the object, being the *neutral* (James 1912: 25, 123) dimension from which the subjective and the objective are constructed for practical purposes. In James' view, the reification of this functional duality is the source of old philosophical dilemmas that can be solved when we recognize the non dual nature of pure experience:

"My thesis is that if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff 'pure experience,' then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter. The relation itself is a part of pure experience; one of its 'terms' becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge, the knower, the other becomes the object known." (James 1912: 4)

This view constitutes an account of knowledge and, above all, of perception. In particular, it constitutes an alternative to both the representative theories and the common-sense theories of perception (James 1912: 52). In the light of the doctrine of pure experience, "external" objects as well as the "internal" images of the objects, turn out to be constituted of the same "stuff", i.e. by pure experiences. According to James, each segment of experience is made "of just what appears, of space, of intensity, of flatness, brownness, heaviness, or what not." (James 1912: 26). These "sensations" are qualitative elements that are neutral, being neither absolutely subjective nor absolutely objective but rather the matter out of which the subjective (mental state)

<sup>2</sup> With these notions I refer to the distinction, which is present in Kant, between two notions of reality: empirical (i.e. relative to the cognitive relation) and metaphysical (i.e. absolute, "in itself").



and the objective (physical reality) is made of (James 1912: 215). Pure experiences are therefore immediately accessible qualitative elements of experience or "qualia". James presents us with an original account of qualia that is different from both the internalism and the externalism about qualities that can be found in various theories of perception.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Neutral monism and the metaphysics of pure experience**

The doctrine of pure experience is, foremost, a theory of knowledge. At the same time, James presents it as a metaphysics, defining pure experiences as the "stuff of which everything is composed" and the "materia prima of everything" (James 1912: 4; 138). These passages can be read as referring to a metaphysical doctrine concerning ultimate being and, in particular, to a form of *neutral monism*. Some authors (e.g. Banks 2010) consider James as one of the main proponents of neutral monism. In fact, James presents his view as a form of "monism" that is centred on the concept of a "primal" and "neutral" reality (James 1912: 226)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> I refer, on one hand, to internalist representationalism, which conceives of qualia as merely subjective properties of mental states and, on the other hand, to externalist representationalism (for e.g. in Fred Dretske) and direct realism (for e.g. in James Gibson), which conceive of qualia as external properties of mind-independent objects.

<sup>4</sup> The expressions used by James in French are "monisme" and "réalité première de nature neutre". The expression "neutral monism" is explicitly introduced by Bertrand Russell, who finally embraced it under the influence of James (see esp. Russell 1921). James develops this view in tandem with the doctrines of *pragmatism* and *pluralism*. However, the relationship between radical empiricism and metaphysical pluralism in James' late philosophy is debated (see Slater 2011). For the purposes of this paper, we can understand James' neutral monism as opposed to substance dualism (i.e. the thesis that mind and matter constitute two distinct ontological domains). However, James also claims that pure experience is manifold and not reducible to an "all form" principle, clarifying that "[a]lthough for fluency's sake I myself spoke early in this article of a stuff of pure experience, I have now to say that there is no *general* stuff of which experience at large is made. There are as many stuffs as there are

When interpreted as a metaphysical view, neutral monism is the theory according to which the immediate data of experience constitute the "intrinsic nature of ultimate reality" (Stubenberg 2014: 1). In this way, it constitutes a specific solution to classic metaphysical issues and in particular to the mind-body problem, being an alternative to both the Cartesian dualism of substances and the monistic absolutization of the subject (idealism) or of the object (materialism). A fundamental precursor of this doctrine is David Hume, according to whom the *impressions* can be conceived of as either subjective or objective, depending on the context (see Hume 1888: 202). The first full-blown form of neutral monism is found in Ernst Mach's doctrine of elements. Mach argues that basic qualitative elements of experience such as hot, cold, red, etc. are neither exclusively physical nor psychological but rather *neutral*. As in James, according to Mach the grouping of the elements into the domains of physics or psychology depends on the direction of our investigation and on our practical interests.

The reference to the affinity between James' and Mach's views is significant because it leads us to problematize the interpretation of the doctrine of pure experience in metaphysical terms. In fact, Mach conceives of his theory as a *scientific* hypothesis that is aimed at dealing with the problem of the relationship between two scientific domains of inquiry – physics and psychology – and he does so in the context of a criticism of the absolute claims of metaphysics.<sup>5</sup>

Also concerning James' doctrine of pure experience, we are faced with the contrast between a metaphysical and a non-metaphysical interpretation of it. On one hand, James presents his view as an ultimate account of the fundamental constituents of reality. On the other hand, James' pragmatism and empiricism can be

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'natures' in the things experienced" (James 1912: 25).

<sup>5</sup> This point is stressed by Paolo Parrini (2017). On the contrary, Erik Banks (2003; 2010) develops a metaphysical interpretation of Mach's view and closely links it to the neutral monism of James and Russell.

conceived of in opposition to the absolute claims of metaphysics and therefore in opposition to metaphysical realism, i.e. to the idea that we can reach knowledge of an absolute reality "in itself". It is also in order to address this ambiguity that is useful to compare James' view with Husserl's phenomenology.

### 3. The concept of experience in phenomenology

Husserl's phenomenology is a radical inquiry into the nature of experience and has its roots in the empiricist tradition. Husserl conceives of Hume as a fundamental forerunner of phenomenology who, however, "almost sets foot upon its domain, but with blinded eyes" (Husserl 1983: 118). In fact, Husserl combines the empiricist faithfulness to phenomena with a transcendental standpoint that seeks to account for the conditions of possibility of the manifestation of phenomena. In pursuing this objective, the phenomenological inquiry into the nature of experience reveals a fundamental co-implication of subject and object.

This central aspect of the phenomenological view is enclosed in the concept of intentionality, which, as we have seen, is in accordance with James' analysis of the mind in terms of cognitive functions in the *Principles*. On the other hand, the epistemological dualism that is expressed by the concept of intentionality clashes with James' late philosophy and its critique of all forms of dualism. In particular, James' late view opposes also the functional dualism that is theorized by neokantian philosophers. According to them, "experience is indefeasibly dualistic in structure" and a functional but not substantial duality of "subject-plus-object" constitutes the minimal element of experience (James 1912: 5). However, this functional dualism is an essential aspect of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology.

This contrast between James' radical empiricism and Husserl's phenomenology emerges when we consider Husserl's account of perception in the transcendental framework of *Ideas I*. We have seen that in *Essays* James

considers the sensations as pure experiences that are neutral, i.e. neither subjective nor objective. The phenomenological account of perception also clashes with the one-sidedness of internalist representationalism on one hand and externalism or direct realism on the other hand, which conceive of the qualitative properties (colors, sounds, etc.) as, respectively, merely subjective properties of mental states or objective properties of a mind-independent world. However, the specificity of Husserl's account of perception is that it admits both "immanent" sensations and "transcendent" sensory properties and develops an analysis of the intentional correlation between them. In the transcendental framework of *Ideas I*, the perceptual act consists in the intentional animation of sensations (hyletic contents) by means of which the perceptual object, with its sensory properties, is *constituted*. This is a central aspect of the phenomenological view that seems to distance it from James' doctrine of pure experience.

This point can be also highlighted by looking at the relationship between the philosophies of Husserl and Mach, whose point of view is very close to James' radical empiricism. While stressing the influence of Mach on the genesis of phenomenology (see Fissette 2012: 53ff.), Husserl repeatedly criticizes him for not acknowledging the distinction between immanent sensations and transcendent sensory properties (Husserl 2001b: 90; see Fissette 2012: 62, 64). According to Husserl, the flaw in Mach's view is that it *reduces* – as do the British empiricists – transcendent objects to sensory contents and for this reason, despite Mach's anti-metaphysical claims, his theory is a type of phenomenalism. According to Husserl, what is missing in Mach's doctrine of elements is the theory of intentionality as correlation subjective-objective (Fissette 2012: 65). The same criticism of Mach's doctrine of neutral elements, from the standpoint of Husserl's phenomenology, can be also applied to James' doctrine of pure experience.

At the same time, from the standpoint of James' late philosophy, Husserl's "phenomenology of constitution"

can be considered as an overly intellectualist philosophy that loses contact with the experience of a concrete human being in its pragmatic relation with the others and the world. This kind of criticism of Husserl has been put forward by various authors, especially after the publication of the first volume of the *Ideas* (for e.g. in Heidegger 1992) and it can also be expressed in the terms of a pragmatist critique of the alleged intellectualism and residual dualism of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. For this reason, Wilshire (1969: 40) sees in James' pragmatism an alternative to Husserl's alleged inclination to idealism and he does so by likening James' late philosophy with the existential phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Kessler (1978) also argues that there is an "existential divergence" between the philosophies of James and Husserl and that, for this reason, James' late philosophy is closer to Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology. However, in the following pages I shall argue that a deeper look at the development of Husserl's phenomenology shows that the opposition to James' radical empiricism is not that radical and that they do have some significant points in common.

#### **4. Genetic phenomenology**

The alleged intellectualistic and dualistic aspects of Husserl's phenomenology can be seen to be in opposition to James' radical empiricism. However, I would like to show that the transition from the epistemological dualism of the *Principles* to the doctrine of pure experience, with its deconstruction of the subject-object duality, is a movement that can be seen at play also in the transition from static to genetic phenomenology. In fact, the fore-mentioned aspects of Husserl's phenomenology belong to a level of the phenomenological inquiry that Husserl himself conceives of as not "ultimate" but as "preliminary" to further developments. The investigation of the dual structure of experience, by means of the notion of intentionality, constitutes the starting point of the

phenomenological inquiry but it is also developed within a fundamental *delimitation*. This is because this inquiry abstains from the investigation of the inner temporal unfolding of the experiences (*Erlebnisse*) and considers them rather as unitary acts of perception, imagination, thought, etc. In this way, the experiences are turned into mental "states" that are intentionally directed towards objects. This level of inquiry is what Husserl calls "static phenomenology" and that methodologically precedes "genetic phenomenology" (see Husserl 2001: 644 ff.), which investigates the deeper temporal and processual nature of the stream of experiences. Husserl explicitly distinguishes between static and genetic phenomenology in his late works, but he implicitly presents this distinction already in *Ideas I*, where he claims that: "The level of consideration to which we are confined [...] abstains from descending into the obscure depths of the ultimate consciousness which constitutes all [...] temporality as belongs to mental processes, and instead takes mental processes as they offer themselves as unitary temporal processes in reflection on what is immanent." (Husserl 1983: 171). The subsequent broadening of the inquiry in genetic phenomenology "deepens" the analysis of the dual structure of experience, investigating the *genesis* of the intentional correlation between subject and object.

At this point, it is useful to compare the genetic analysis of experience in phenomenology with James' doctrine of pure experience. In fact, from the standpoint of genetic phenomenology, at the heart of experience we find a flow of "primal impressions" (*Urimpressionen*) that are neither subjective nor objective, being the primal dimension on the basis of which the subject and the object are co-constituted in reciprocal dependence. This is because, according to Husserl, the subject of experience is not a pre-constituted substance but it comes to be self-constituted in the process of constituting objects. Genetic phenomenology investigates the "genesis of the constitution" (Husserl 2001, 644) that is at the same time the genesis of the "monadic individuality" (Husserl 2001: 635). The notion of "monad" refers to the concrete subject of experience, which "necessarily has the form of

the unity of becoming, of a unity of unflagging *genesis*" (Husserl 2001: 635). Therefore, according to Husserl – and in contrast to an alleged residual Cartesianism in his view – the subject of experience is not a substance but an ongoing process that emerges in correlation with objectivity in the process of experience. On this point, Husserl agrees with James who, already in the *Principles*, tends to reduce the subject to a "vanishing point" (Dewey 1940: 589; see Schutz 1941: 443). In particular, in the *Essays* James clarifies that, when claiming that "consciousness" does not exist, he means "only to deny that the word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function" (James 1912: 5).

Therefore, in the light of the genetic inquiry in phenomenology, Husserl seems to admit a "neutral" dimension of experience, which precedes the functional distinction into subject and object. The flow of impressions can be conceived of as a primal dimension of experience that precedes the subject-object duality, as in James' concept of "pure experience". In this way, by comparing Husserl's genetic phenomenology with James' doctrine of pure experience, we see that both lead to the deconstruction of the subject-object duality, finding at its heart a process of co-emergence of the subject and the object of experience. This is an outcome of Husserl's phenomenology that is stressed, for instance, by Francisco Varela, who argues that the phenomenological reduction "does not sustain the basic subject-object duality but opens into a field of phenomena where it becomes less and less obvious how to distinguish between subject and object (this is what Husserl called the 'fundamental correlation')." (Varela 1996: 339). For this reason, Husserl's phenomenology "does not seek to oppose the subjective to the objective, but to move beyond the split into their fundamental correlation." (Varela 1996: 339)<sup>6</sup>.

However, at this point I would like to consider also some significant differences between James' and Husserl's views of the impressional core of experience. First of all, James seems to conceive of pure experiences as the object of an immediate acquaintance or intuition that precedes any theoretical reflection. It is this reflection that introduces the duality of knower-known. On the contrary, Husserl finds the impressional dimension of experience through a regressive analysis that takes, as its starting point, the dual structure of intentionality. The phenomenological inquiry begins with epochè and reduction and therefore with a detachment from the ordinary and pragmatic "immersion" in the *lifeworld*. The latter concept, which is central in Husserl's late works and is very consonant to James' pragmatism, is the outcome and not the starting point of the transcendental phenomenological inquiry. Yet, we can say that, despite this difference in method, both Husserl and James reach a similar outcome, finding in the qualitative core of experience a neutral dimension from which the subject and the object are co-constituted in the cognitive process.

### 5. Form and matter

In the light of the comparison of James' view with Husserl's phenomenology, we can now look back at the issue of the relationship between the doctrine of pure experience and metaphysics. We can do so by asking if Husserl's view concerning the impressional genesis of experience can be conceived of in terms of a metaphysical form of neutral monism. I shall argue that it is not so and that the motivations against this conclusion can also be applied to James' doctrine of pure experience.

In developing the phenomenological analysis of experience, Husserl takes the Kantian conception of the cognitive process in terms of an essential intertwining of form and matter. As is known, in Kant's view, the knowledge of a certain phenomenon requires the synthetic unification of a manifold of sensations through

<sup>6</sup> Concerning Varela's acknowledgement of a pragmatic dimension of phenomenology see Pace Giannotta (2017).

functions of subjectivity. For this reason, Kant denies the possibility of attaining knowledge of pure *matter* that is not structured by the *forms* of our cognitive faculties. The appearance of a sensible world is not an immediate acknowledgment of a pure "given", because certain features of our sensibility and understanding necessarily give form to sensory matters. Husserl takes this conception of experience as an intertwining of form and matter, developing it in his own way.

Within genetic phenomenology, this interplay of form and matter is investigated at the fundamental level of time-consciousness – within an inquiry that was deeply influenced by James' chapter in *Principles* on the "stream of thought". Husserl highlights the fact that the field of consciousness has a certain structure. In fact, each moment of an experience is constituted by a new primal impression that is intrinsically joined to two primal forms of intentionality: retentions and protentions (Husserl 2001a: 115ff.). By developing this analysis of the temporal unity of consciousness, Husserl agrees with the Jamesian concept of the "specious present" and with its account of it in terms of *fringes*. Husserl argues that it is in virtue of retentions and protentions that the *living present* is not limited to the now-point but has a temporal "thickness", as it includes the retention of past impressions and the protention towards expected ones (see Gurwitsch 1946; Zahavi 2010: 320 ff.). In the light of this analysis, the sensory matters turn out to be always given within a temporal *horizon*, which requires the intentionality of retentions and protentions. Primal impression, retention and protention constitute the non-independent parts of a whole, i.e. the continuous flow of consciousness. This means that in Husserl's account of time-consciousness the primal, qualitative dimension of experience is always structured through the proto-intentional animation of the impressions. I would like to stress an implication of this analysis that is shared by both James' and Husserl's views, against reductionist empiricism. That is: we do not find pure impressions of "redness", "coldness", "heaviness", etc. but an enduring flow of these

impressions that are continuously intertwined with retentions and protentions. The "pure" impression becomes a limit that we achieve by analysing the concrete flow of experience, which is constituted by sensory matters that are "formed" by the intentionality of retentions and protentions. This is a first level of the intertwining of form and matter in phenomenology that goes against the possibility of turning the sensory matter into an absolute, ontological domain that would be known as it is "in itself" (i.e. metaphysical realism).

The essential interplay between form and matter is also present at higher levels of the constitution of objectivity, in relation to the concrete constitution of the subject of experience. In the context of the genetic phenomenological inquiry, Husserl develops a conception of the embodiment of the field of consciousness, acknowledging the essential role of bodily structures and functions in constituting the form and the matter of experience. As is known, according to the phenomenological doctrine of eidetic seeing, when perceiving individual objects and events we can grasp essences that are arranged in a hierarchy of genus and species (e.g. the relationship between a certain shade of red, the genus "color" and its relationship of bilateral foundation with spatial extension). In the light of this doctrine, the "given" is not "amorphous" but has a structure that is expressed by material a priori judgments. In the context of genetic phenomenology, Husserl argues that these material a priori judgements are based on the sensory intuition of a "concrete subjectivity" and, for this reason, they are "contingent a priori" (Husserl 1969: 26). This is because the capability to grasp the eidetic truths expressed by material a priori judgments is based on the bodily "make-up of the experiencing subject" (Husserl 1989: 56). Our capacity to perceive, for e.g., sounds and colors, depends on this makeup of the human body (see Husserl 1969: 26-27). In fact, we must acknowledge that the sensory matters that lie at the basis of the constitution of objects are relative to specific senses, which vary between different animal species. Following Thomas Nagel's famous

example of the bat (Nagel 1974), we can point to the experience of other beings with different senses, without being able to acquire any intuitive knowledge about it. Nagel refers to the fact that third-person knowledge of the physiology of echolocation doesn't give us knowledge of "what it is like" to perceive through this perceptual system. Precisely, what we cannot know is the subjective, felt qualitative experience that is associated with this form of perception. From the standpoint of Husserl's phenomenology, in the light of its theory of the cognitive role of intuition, the reason why we cannot know what it is like to be a bat is that we cannot give an "intuitive filling" to the third-person description of the bat's perception by means of echolocation. Husserl puts forward this thesis when referring to the case of a blind person who cannot have any "intuitive clarity about the sense of color" on the basis of a third-person knowledge about the process of vision (Husserl 1999, 63; see also p. 30). This analysis thus reveals another level of the intertwining of form and matter in the process of the co-constitution of subject and object, which is based on certain features of the bodily constitution of a living being. In this way, in contrast to the metaphysical absolutization of the elements of experience that makes of them elements of an absolute reality, genetic phenomenology acknowledges certain transcendental structures that make possible our experience and that depend on specific features of the living body.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, there is a peculiar circularity in the process of co-constitution, because constituted features of a living being are conditions of the possibility of the constitution of objects. This circularity is assumed as fundamental by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose notions such as *flesh* and *chiasm* (Merleau-Ponty 1968) refer to the living body as locus of an intertwining of subject and object.<sup>8</sup> Kessler (1978) stresses the closeness between

Merleau-Ponty's and James' philosophy, by opposing the concept of "pragmatic body", which he finds in these two authors, to Husserl's concept of "transcendental ego". However, various scholars have also stressed the closeness between Merleau-Ponty's and Husserl's phenomenology (see Zahavi 2002), finding already in Husserl's investigation of the living body a "phenomenology of the flesh" (Bernet 2013). According to these readings, Merleau-Ponty's investigation of the embodiment of consciousness is continuous with Husserl's inquiry.

In particular, Merleau-Ponty develops the phenomenological analysis of the role of the body in the process of co-constitution of subject and object by means of the concept of *body schema*. Samantha Matherne (2016) argues that, with this notion in mind, Merleau-Ponty develops, in a non-intellectualist direction, the Kantian doctrine of *schematism* (Matherne 2016: 195). Doing so, Merleau-Ponty redefines the Kantian notions of "transcendental" and "a priori" in an embodied direction, by conceiving of them as the expressions of "the formal features of our facticity, without which there would be no experience." (Matherne 2016, 217). Merleau-Ponty, therefore, stresses the dependence of transcendental conditions on contingent features of our bodily constitution, seeing in them formal features of our facticity that make possible the manifestation of phenomena and, in so, agreeing with Husserl's concept of the *contingent a priori*.

According to this direction of inquiry that is present in Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the qualitative and "neutral" core of experience is constituted by sensory matters that are necessarily

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enactive approach of Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), who combine Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology with the relationism of the Madhyamaka philosophy. The central thesis of the enactive approach in this original formulation is that "Knower and known, mind and world, stand in relation to each other through mutual specification or dependent coorigination." (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991: 150).

<sup>7</sup> On this point, see especially the analyses concerning the role of the body in the constitution in *Ideas II* (Husserl 1989).

<sup>8</sup> This circularity is also placed at the heart of the



structured by forms that depend on the embodiment of a living being. In my opinion, this inquiry on the intertwining of form and matter of experience complements James' radical empiricism, thus leading to its development in empirical and not metaphysical terms. This is because, in the light of this analysis, we cannot conceive of "pure experiences" as the elements of an absolute reality that would be known as it is "in itself".

### Conclusion

The comparison between Husserl's genetic development of phenomenology and James' radical empiricism has revealed significant points of contact between them. In fact, they both find at the heart of experience a qualitative core that precedes and is at the basis of the functional distinction between subject and object. However, a certain interpretation of James' view as a metaphysics of pure experience could lead us to conceive of it as a form of neutral monism that attains knowledge of ultimate reality. On the contrary, the phenomenological investigation of the relationship between form and matter at the fundamental level of the co-constitution of subject and object shows that sensory matters do not constitute a pure given, being always structured through forms that depend on the concrete constitution of a living being. In this way, Husserl's genetic phenomenology can complement James' doctrine of pure experience leading us to develop it in empirical and not metaphysical terms.

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**IMMEDIATE PERCEPTION AND DIRECT EXPERIENCE:  
IMMEDIACY, INDEXICALITY, AND INTELLIGIBILITY**

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**ABSTRACT:** Though anti-skeptical, the classical pragmatists and the later Wittgenstein do not endeavor to refute the radical skeptic in a direct manner. There is no attempt on either side to “prove” the existence of the external world, while there is considerable attention paid to our relationship to the world. For both parties, the relationship of human beings to the everyday world is taken to be not that of knowers to the known (or what is presumed to be knowable); it is rather envisioned as that of actors to an arena of action. In that context and indeed even in ones far removed yet ineradicably tied to this context (e.g., theoretical inquiry), immediate perception and direct experience play a critical and ineliminable role. But these and related expressions are anything but unambiguous. In disambiguating such expressions, the author shows how experience in particular is, at once, direct yet mediated. The appeal to immediate perception or direct experience is, however, not made by the classical pragmatists or the later Wittgenstein in order to provide an incorrigible foundation for our epistemic claims. Rather this appeal is made primarily for the sake of an *experiential* recovery of the everyday world: the point is not to secure the possibility of knowing, but rather to embrace the actuality of this world.

**Keywords:** belief *and* doubt; categories (Peirce’s); experience; immediacy and mediation; perception; practice; pragmatism; signs (linguistic and otherwise); skepticism; world

**Introduction**

Countless thinkers from pre-Socratics to postmodernists have, in one way or another, called into question the world we directly encounter in experience. The disposition or resolve to call this world into question, in a radical way, seems to be constitutive of philosophy. Simply to be a philosopher would seem to entail not only being critical but also being radically critical, not taking anything for granted. Here the word *radical* implies the necessity to call everything, including the existence of the world, into

question.<sup>1</sup> And this implies the both the inherent possibility and the human ability to question everything virtually all at once.<sup>2</sup>

The classical pragmatists<sup>3</sup> and the later Wittgenstein<sup>4</sup> however call into question the intelligibility of such questioning. They have radical doubts about such radical skepticism.<sup>5</sup> In effect, the possibility of calling into question the existence of the world presumes the possibility of withdrawing into oneself and then establishing, solely

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<sup>1</sup> “The bottom of being is,” William James asserts in “The Sentiment of Rationality,” in *The Will to Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), “left logically opaque to us, as something we simply come upon and find, and about which (if we wish to act) we should pause and wonder as little as possible. The philosopher’s tranquility is thus in essence no other than the boor’s. They differ only as to the point at which each refuses to let further considerations upset the absoluteness of the data he assumes” (p. 64). At some point, we cannot help but acknowledge the world, though the forms of this acknowledge often mark differences that make a difference. See James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 41-42. Also see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, II, 226; also *On Certainty*, #343. See Anna Boncompagni on hinge propositions.

<sup>2</sup> As Susan Haack astutely observes in “Descartes, Peirce, and the Cognitive Community,” in *The Relevance of Peirce*, edited by Eugene Freeman (La Salle, IL: Monist Library of Philosophy, 1983), Peirce and others are not entirely fair to Descartes when they contend that he tries, *in a single stroke*, to call everything into question. In my judgment, this criticism is itself just.

<sup>3</sup> By this expression, I mean Charles S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and to a less extent C. I. Lewis.

<sup>4</sup> Those interpreters associated with the “new” Wittgenstein are disposed to stress the continuity between the early and later phase of his philosophical life. See Crary and Read 2000. My focus on the later Wittgenstein should not be taken to run counter to this hermeneutic turn on the part of very gifted scholars. Even so, the affinity between this enigmatic figure and the classical pragmatists is more evident in reference to his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) and *On Certainty* (1969) than *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922).

<sup>5</sup> See, however, Peirce on the art of doubting, “one which has to be acquired with difficulty (6.498). He goes so far as to claim that the pragmatist’s “genuine [rather than sham or make-believe] doubts will go much further than those of any Cartesian” (*ibid.*). In accord with established practice, I am citing *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (1931-58) by identifying the volume and, then, the paragraph number (so, 6.498 refers to volume 6 of *The Collected Papers*, paragraph #6.498).

within the sanctuary of one's innermost self, the epistemic authority to use such words as *I*, *think*, and *doubt* in an intelligible manner. Even radical skeptics are precluded from doubting the relatively stable meaning of the words on which the articulation of their doubts is dependent. For the intelligibility of their doubts depends on the meaning of their words. If only in relation to itself at later moment, the skeptic is ineluctably an implicated member of a linguistic community (the *reflexive* community<sup>6</sup> of earlier and later selves<sup>7</sup> is, in however circumscribed a form, a human community). The meaning of our words, not least of all that of *doubt*, stretches indefinitely across a span of time; moreover, it, in principle, encompasses an indefinite number of possible others (in other words, it can never be invincibly private). A philosophical meditation in the manner conducted by Descartes cannot avoid being a dialogue of the self with itself and, thus, a process extended across a span of time. Accordingly, the minimal conditions of intelligibility require that the seemingly solitary *cogito* is, however well disguised, a dialogical subject. The possibility of saying anything meaningful is destroyed by severing meaning from community and history. The solitary self who is imprisoned in the present moment is deprived of using the sound or inscription *doubt* meaningfully. The "word"

*doubt* so used is, in truth, a sound or shape without meaning. Its *use* implicates us in a community no less open-ended than the history in which this use ties us.

Linguistic agency is just that – a distinctive form of human agency – and, as such, is itself intelligible only in the context of our practices. The limits of intelligibility are, accordingly, defined by the range of our practices and the experiences available through our engagement in those practices. C. S. Peirce makes this point emphatically when he writes: "I hold ... that man is so completely hemmed in by the bounds of his possible practical experience, his mind is so restricted to being an instrument of his needs, that he cannot, in the least, *mean* anything that transcends those limits" (5.536). But the meaning of this claim regarding the limits of meaningfulness is likely to be misinterpreted. This becomes readily apparent when we juxtapose the passage just quoted with one written around the same time: "if pragmatism is the doctrine that every conception is a conception of conceivable practical effects, it makes conception reach far beyond the practical" (5.196) or what we so often reductively conceive as "the practical." Pragmatism "allows [and, indeed, encourages] any flight of imagination, provided this imagination ultimately alights upon a possible practical effect" (*ibid.*). Hence, it is crucial to see that Peirce attaches an expansive, rich sense to the word *practical*, as used in such expressions as "conceivable practical effects" or consequences. In a narrow sense, however, the practical sharply contrasts with the theoretical; in the expansive sense, it encompasses the full array of our theoretical practices.<sup>8</sup> Theory is itself a form of practice but, even in its loftiest aspirations (e.g., framing a theory of the cosmos), it must ultimately fall back on the most rudimentary practices, such as immediate perception or direct experience.<sup>9</sup> Above all, what we must appreciate is

<sup>6</sup> In *Toward a General Theory of Human Judgement* (NY: Dover Publications, 1979), Justus Buchler helpfully distinguishes between the reflexive community from community in its more commonplace sense, the social community (a group of individuals rather than a relationship of the individual self to itself). "The individual in himself constitutes," Buchler insists, "a community, the reflexive or proceptive community. Logically and generically, the reflexive community presupposes a social community. The soul converses with itself ... but it also articulates itself, ears with itself, consoles itself, and fools itself. It is a community not just of two roles but of at least two roles" (p. 39). Cf. Peirce, 5.421 ("a person is not absolutely an individual," i.e., an *individuum*, but in truth an indefinitely divisible being, there being no determinate limits to the forms or degree of self-division).

<sup>7</sup> As Peirce notes, "even in solitary meditation every judgment is an effort [by the present self] to press home, upon the self of the immediate future and of the general future, some truth. It is a genuine assertion ... and solitary dialectic is still of the nature of dialogue" (5.546; see, e.g., also 4.6).

<sup>8</sup> As most of us do, Peirce used the word *practical* in both its narrow and expansive sense. Hence, pains must be taken to ascertain in any given context how he is using this word.

<sup>9</sup> We learn how to observe and to make judgments on the basis of our observations. While we do not learn this by rules, we do acquire a repertoire of competences, for the most part, in the company, and under the guidance,

that Peirce<sup>10</sup> in his insistence upon humans being “hemmed in by the bounds of their possible practical experience” does foreclose possibilities of what we might yet mean by some word or other sign, but only ties those possibilities to our practices.

#### The “Practical” Limits of Even Theoretical intelligibility

But does not this unduly restrict the range of meaning or intelligibility? And, returning to a point made above, could not the language in which the dialogue of the self with itself is carried on conceivably be the invention of a solitary self or is it necessarily an inheritance from others? To the readers of this journal, the answers to these questions by the later Wittgenstein and the classical pragmatists are well known. There are no invincibly private languages. So, too, there are no completely “abstract” meanings, if we mean by this expression the use of signs having no bearing upon how we might comport ourselves in the world. As Peirce puts it, “there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice” (5.400). It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of the adjective *possible*: meaning is inextricably tied to possible differences in one or another of our shared practices. This does not make meaning crudely practical, but it does make meaning necessarily practical in a sophisticated sense and practically possible in the unpredictable differences discoverable by imaginative practitioners.

Even as theorists and philosophers, we are agents in the world, a world of other human beings and of natural entanglements. For Wittgenstein and the pragmatists, the self can no more extricate itself from other selves than s/he can extricate herself from the world. But their drive to call into question our capacity to call the world into question also draws heavily upon an unabashed commitment to *immediate experience* and to kindred phenomena (e.g.,

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of elders. Wittgenstein thus refers to “*die Praxis des empirischen Urteilens*” (On Certainty, #140).

<sup>10</sup> I am taking Peirce here to be representative, not only of other such pragmatists as William James and John Dewey but also a pronounced tendency in the later Wittgenstein.

direct experience or immediate perception). This brings us to the center of our concern, the topic to which this number of this journal is devoted: immediacy and experience between the pragmatists and Wittgenstein. More precisely, my focal concern is our immediate perception or direct experience of the everyday world, a world so often in the history of philosophy called into question. Are the classical pragmatists and the later Wittgenstein naïve or uncritical or dogmatic in refusing either to call this world into question or to prove its existence?

For some purposes, it might be important to try to get behind even the most forceful disclosures of immediate perception or direct experience. But in this very endeavor we cannot avoid falling back on such perception or experience. In one context a theorist, in the role of an experimental psychologist, might argue that what we ordinarily take to be immediate perception is an unconscious inference and, as an inference, is a mediated cognition. But this same theorist,<sup>11</sup> in the context of phenomenology, might insist upon painstaking attention to the salient features of whatever we directly observe, without speculating about the processes by which the immediate object of our direct awareness might have become available to us. The world of our experience cannot be gainsaid, though it unquestionably can be questioned in myriad and deep-cutting ways. For such questioning to be intelligible, it however must grant immediate perception and direct experience their full weight (i.e., the weight they have in our practices).

Since these are hardly equivalent terms or expressions, distinctions are critical. Since the words *immediate* and *direct* are not necessarily synonyms,<sup>12</sup> disambiguation is

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, Peirce is just such a theorist. He is not contradicting himself when, in the context of experimental psychology, he defines perception as unconscious inference and, in the context of phenomenology and indeed also that of critical commonsensism, he defends what he calls the doctrine of immediate perception.

<sup>12</sup> Of course, *immediate* and *direct* are often used synonymously. But, in some contexts at least, this makes for confusion. Part of my task in this paper is to suggest how we might avoid such confusion.

essential. This distinction is especially pivotal, since (to use the language of Peirce's categories<sup>13</sup>) the *secondness*<sup>14</sup> of perception or experience is ordinarily interwoven with thirdness<sup>15</sup> (or intelligibility). Observation and experience are affairs in which secondness is predominant, though thirdness is hardly absent. In perception or experience, we encounter what is irreducibly other than us: without regard necessarily for our desires or expectations, objects and events forcefully assert themselves and, therein, we are confronted with their secondness. Perceived objects and experienced events strike us with a force and insistence typically greater than (and in other respects different from) the manner in which imagined or dreamt objects and events strike us. But they are, to some extent, inherently intelligible and therein we are faced with their thirdness. In the contexts of our practices, identification, description, and often even explanation are unproblematic. In such contexts, innumerable objects and events are immediately intelligible in the sense that we are able spontaneously, effortlessly, and (for our purposes) effectively to make sense of them.

<sup>13</sup> For a brief accessible, accurate, and illuminating account of these categories, see Richard J. Bernstein's *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 177-83, also T. L. Short's *Peirce's Theory of Signs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Chapter 3. "There is," Bernstein stresses, "a descriptive, empirical, pragmatism temper manifested in Peirce's use of the categories" (179). While much ink has been spilled and much ingenuity expended to show how Peirce, inspired by the example of Kant, tried to offer a transcendental deduction of his three categories, Bernstein is sage to suggest, the "'proof' or, more accurately, the adequacy of the categories is to be found in the ways in which Peirce uses them to illuminate fundamental similarities and differences in everything we encounter" (ibid.). They seem quite apt for identifying distinct and seemingly incompatible facets of perception and experience.

<sup>14</sup> Our experience of what Peirce calls *secondness* is that of opposition, of being energetically and forcefully opposed, "a sense of resisting as much as being acted upon" (5.45) (there being no effort without resistance, no resistance without effort). It designates "not mere twoness but active oppugnancy" (8.291; emphasis omitted). It calls attention to "that which 'jabs you perpetually in the ribs'" (6.95).

<sup>15</sup> While the category of secondness is that of brute opposition, the category of thirdness is that of indefinite or boundless mediation. To complete the picture, the category of firstness is that of qualitative immediacy.

To press doubt as far as we can intelligibly extend it, there will always be some immediately intelligible objects and events, including the meanings of our words and the force of our utterances. "My *life* consists," Wittgenstein reminds us in *On Certainty*, "in my being content to accept many things" (#344). The possibility of rejecting some things depends upon having accepted and continuing to accept countless other things, just as the "game of doubting itself presupposes certainty" (*OC*, #115). This is however not transcendent certainty, but the everyday certitude on which we ineluctably rely whenever we make use of our linguistic inheritance or simply exert ourselves in the rough-and-tumble world of our quotidian engagements.

My recognition that *this* is my hand is however one thing, the philosophical appeal to this everyday certainty, made for the sake of *proving* the external world, is quite another.<sup>16</sup> In general, the philosophical appeal to, say, immediate perception or direct experience is made in response to theoretical claims and, hence, needs to be understood in that context. It assumes a discursive background, frequently an extensively mediated network of claims and counterclaims. In addition, such appeals are made for a variety of reasons and even for opposite reasons (sometimes the purpose of such an appeal is to call the world into question, but sometimes it is used to prove the existence of the world being called into question by skeptics). The appeal to immediacy cannot be immediately comprehended. It can only be historically appreciated (it is a move in a language-game and, unlike many games, linguistic or otherwise, the appeal to immediacy, as such a move, needs to be understood historically<sup>17</sup>).

<sup>16</sup> See, of course, G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World" in *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1939), also in his *Philosophical Papers* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), but also Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, especially #19, 24, 32.

<sup>17</sup> There is an ambiguity here. In a sense, all moves in a language game or, more broadly, a game need to be understood historically (e.g., in a game of chess, an individual moves the remaining castle in light of previous moves and anticipation of anticipated ones). In another sense, however, the game might be taken as it stands, without reference to how it evolved from precursors into its present form. The moves within a language-game



What is, for our purpose, most striking is that the later Wittgenstein and the classical pragmatists reject the problematic of modernity, not because it is untrue but because the kind of radical doubt by which it established itself cannot be intelligibly formulated. “If you tried to doubt everything,” as Wittgenstein puts it in *On Certainty*, “you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty” (#115). The endeavor of the self to call into doubt the existence of the world and, from within itself, to recover most (if not all) of that world is a self-defeating project.

By considering this topic, we can bring into sharper focus than has yet been done the deep affinity between these pragmatists and the mature Wittgenstein but also fundamental differences. Doing so means joining these thinkers in their efforts to clarify the meaning of our practices and experience at least as much as that of our words and utterances. That is, our task is as much philosophical as it is hermeneutic. *Immediacy* and its cognates (especially its adjectival and adverbial forms) must be disambiguated, not least of all by means of painstaking attention to actual usage and pragmatic clarification in its Peircean sense. We must consider not so much how such expressions as *immediate experience* might be abstractly defined but ultimately on how these expressions are actually used,<sup>18</sup> especially outside of philosophy. Moreover,

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are intelligible only as events in a history. In some cases, the language-game itself (especially a language game in which appeals to immediacy play such a critical role) need to be understood historically. How did we get to this point? What are we doing when we are making such appeals? Why are they – or why do they feel to be – necessary? See Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*, #644. But to the Wittgensteinian question (“What does history have to do with me?”), the pragmatists would almost certainly say, “Everything, whether or not you know its inescapable significance or try to ascertain its present import.” And here is a difference of fundamental importance, though Wittgenstein’s position is perhaps more subtle and qualified than this question taken in isolation suggests.

<sup>18</sup> “One cannot guess,” Wittgenstein insists in the *Investigations*, “how a word functions. One has to look at its use and learn from that” (#340). This is harder than we appreciate: “the difficulty is to remove the prejudice which stands in the way of doing this.” This prejudice is

we must identify how these expressions function in our practices (what roles they play, what work they do). This involves also identifying the habits woven into the very meaning of these expressions (e.g., the disposition to *go on* in certain ways alongside that of going certain judgments, without trying to get behind or underneath them). While the issues being debated by F. H. Bradley, Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, and earlier historical figures (most notably, René Descartes and Immanuel Kant) – that is, by the figures against whom the pragmatists and Wittgenstein were reacting – appear to be abstruse, what is at stake for the pragmatists and Wittgenstein is the defense of nothing less than an orientation toward the world. The world in question is the everyday world of human experience. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that, despite appearances, these authors are not directly engaged in epistemological disputes. They are truly trying to change the conversation, to treat traditional topics in an innovative manner but also to consider hitherto ignored matters. Yet it is all too easy to miss what they are doing, all too common to position them squarely within one or another of the familiar polemics of academic philosophy. In fact, they are in overlapping ways engaged in a polemic against such philosophy. This is evident in their treatment of a number of topics, not least of all their stance toward immediacy.

As a result of the disputes to which I have alluded, our relationship to our world becomes attenuated to the point of being conceivably severed, if not at least temporarily dissolved. In its most extreme form, the act of calling into question the world of our experience takes as unproblematic only the immediate data of one’s own solitary consciousness and, then, only those data in the self-luminous immediacy of the present moment,<sup>19</sup> judging all

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not stupid. The more intelligent we are, the more likely we are to fall prey to it.

<sup>19</sup> Adding this reference to time (to the luminosity of the present) might seem redundant, i.e., it might seem already implied in the expression “the immediate data of one’s own solitary consciousness,” but this is part of what is at issue. For Peirce, James, and Dewey, the present is not an instant (a temporal atom in principle separable from past and future) but a stretch of time. We immediately perceive and experience continuity:

else to be either invincibly unknowable or (at best) problematically inferable.<sup>20</sup> In such instances, the appeal to immediacy renders dubitable or distant what commonsensically seems beyond doubt, what could not be any closer to hand. Such appeals can however be made for the sake of restoring, recovering, or even “proving” what most people never question, an enveloping world frequently at odds with human desires. Part of my purpose in this paper is to highlight how philosophical appeals to immediacy serve a variety of intellectual aims, including opposite goals. For the moment, however, let us focus on those made for the sake of rendering problematic the world in its totality.

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time in its immediacy is not a self-contained present but a self-differentiating continuum in which any one of the dimensions of time mediates between the other two (while the present obviously mediates between the past and the future, the past at least in the form of memory and, to a greater extent, habits mediates between the present and the future, just as the future in the form of imagination and the release of impulses capable of altering the vectors of habituation mediates between the past and the present). We are not located in the present in such a way that both that *from* which we have moved and that *toward* which we are moving are less real than that *through* which we are now moving. In our experience, past, present, and future are inherently inseparable, though distinguishable in myriad ways. See especially Dewey’s “Events and the Future” (LW 2, 62-68). “No becoming can be perceived or thought of,” he insists in this important essay, “except as out of something into something, and this involves a series of transitions which, taken distributively, belong both to the ‘out-of’ and the ‘into,’ or form a ‘through.’ The present has thus nothing privileged about it; it is as legitimate to speak of the present century or the present geological age as of the present ‘moment’ [or ‘instant’]. The present is defined in relation to an ‘out-of’ and by a future or ‘into,’ as truly is the past by the present” (LW 2, 66). See also MW 10, 9-10.

<sup>20</sup> Though there are numerous examples of philosophers starting with the immediate and allegedly indubitable data of present, solitary consciousness. the opening chapters of George Santayana’s *Skepticism and Animal Faith* provide an especially good example of such methodic skepticism.

Such thinkers have in effect *derealized* this world,<sup>21</sup> that is, stripped it of ultimate significance by divesting it of its full or primordial ontological status.<sup>22</sup> From their perspective, the actual world of our immediate experience is ontologically derivative and, as a consequence, largely (if not wholly) illusory. Nature appears *to us* adorned in qualities, but (in truth, as least as alleged by the thinkers in question) it is *in itself* utterly devoid of them. Accordingly, a chasm opens between the world as it appears to us and the world as it really is in itself. As A. N. Whitehead puts it in *Science and the Modern World*, sensations are, on the account offered by Galileo, Descartes, and their multitudinous progeny, “qualities of the mind alone.”

These sensations are projected by the mind so as to clothe bodies in external nature. Thus, the bodies are perceived with qualities which in fact are purely the offspring of the mind. Thus nature gets credit which should in truth be reserved for ourselves: the rose for its scent: the nightingale for his song: and the sun for his radiance. ... Nature [in itself] is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless, merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly. (54)

For the most part, however, these thinkers have questioned the world only to reaffirm it,<sup>23</sup> though their reaffirmations have rarely extended to a full recovery of the qualitative

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<sup>21</sup> “In a world where both the terms [or *relata*] and their distinctions [and relationships] are affairs of experience, conjunctions that are experienced must be,” William James insists, “at least as real as anything else. They will be absolutely ‘real’ conjunctions, if we have no transphenomenal [or trans-experiential] absolute ready, to *derealize* the whole experienced world by, at a stroke” (MT, 230; emphasis added).

<sup>22</sup> This is an example of what Whitehead calls “the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.” “No alternative system of organizing the pursuit of scientific truth has been suggested. It is not only reigning, but it is without rival” (54). “And yet – it is quite unbelievable. This conception of the universe is surely framed in terms of high abstractions, and the paradox arises only because we have mistaken our abstractions for concrete realities” (54-55).

<sup>23</sup> Of the “doubts and negations” pressed by “Saint Michel de Montaigne,” R. W. Emerson means “honestly by them, – that justice shall be done to their terrors. I shall not take Sunday objections, made up on purpose to be put down. I shall take the worst I can find, whether I can dispose of them or they of me” (“Montaigne; Or, the Skeptic,” 328).

world of our immediate experience<sup>24</sup> (Descartes' Sixth Meditation is emblematic of this tendency). They tend to admit only a greatly reduced or austere world (e.g., one in which bodies possessing mass, shape, and position are objectively real, whereas qualities are not). In their judgment, the doctrine of direct realism and that of immediate perception are instances of naïve realism. Being naïve, they take them to be untenable. This is the inevitable result of granting theoretical knowers ultimate authority. The world posited by such knowers is taken by them and countless others to be the really real, while the one directly encountered in our experience is judged to be in some fundamental ways subjective or illusory. But if the classical pragmatists and later Wittgenstein are correct, the primordial relationship between human beings and the experiential world in which they are inextricably entangled is not that of knower to known (especially not that of the theoretical knower to the abstracted domain of contemporary physics). It is rather the relationship of an agent to the world as an arena of action. We inhabit and indeed incorporate the world (it is as much in us as we are in it).

In the later Wittgenstein's writings, the appeal to everyday language is bound up with his commitment to a recovery of our everyday world. This appeal takes our linguistic utterances themselves to be bound up with the circumpressure of the world, as registered indexically in "the circumpressure of experience itself."<sup>25</sup> Such experiential pressure is never more acutely felt than of when it results from our energetic exertions to address

practical exigencies. In the writings of the classical pragmatists, the insistence upon human *experience* in its varied forms is bound up with their commitment to the recovery of just this world. Just as Wittgenstein's notion of language-games includes action, so the pragmatist conception of experience encompasses language.

We appear to be confronted with the choice of turning our backs on nature, as it is disclosed in our immediate experience,<sup>26</sup> or on science, as it claims for itself the ultimate authority to identify the most fundamental features of the real world. The world as disclosed in our immediate experience thus stands in marked contrast to the world as revealed in what seems to be the most reliable source of ontological insight (certain highly successful branches of natural science, above all, theoretical physics). In truth, no choice is necessary, at least if natural science is not allowed to usurp the primordial world of our immediate experience.<sup>27</sup>

From Wittgenstein's perspectives, nothing warrants calling into question the reality of the everyday world. The attempt to sketch a metaphysics of this world however undermines the very world such a sketch tries to recover or save. So, too, the very possibility of providing a proof of this world is in his judgment ruled out. Things speak adequately and, indeed, eloquently, for themselves. They do so however in a practical rather than philosophical or theoretical idiom: the rough-and-tumble give-and-take of everyday action is effect a dialogue in which objects and events have their say.<sup>28</sup> There is consequently no exigency

<sup>24</sup> See especially Dewey's "Affective Thought" (LW 2, 104-110), "Qualitative Thought" (LW 5, 243-62), "Peirce's Theory of Quality" (LW 11, 86-94), and of course *Art as Experience* (LW 10).

<sup>25</sup> In *The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), James writes: "The only *real* guarantee we have against licentious thinking is the circumpressure of experience itself, which gets us sick of concrete errors, whether they be a trans-empirical reality or not" (p. 213). We however instinctively take the circumpressure of our experience to be *indicative* of the pressure of the world itself, however modified this pressure might be by the constitution and state of a given human organism.

<sup>26</sup> Our immediate experience of distinct colors plays an important role in how Wittgenstein thinks through issues of immediacy. On this occasion, however, I can only note this connection.

<sup>27</sup> "The world as we experience it is," Dewey stresses, "a real world [we might interject: *the* real world]. But it is not in its primary phases a world to be known, a world that is understood, and is intellectually coherent and secure" (LW 4, 235). It is rather a world in which we act and undergo the consequences of our actions. Experiences are primarily *had*, not known.

<sup>28</sup> Dewey appropriates for his purpose a pun hit upon by the classicist Basil Gildersleeve: "Object is that which objects, that to which frustration is due" (LW 1, 184). The object in the sense of that which has the power to object, to thwart our purpose or oppose our efforts, is

to speak in their behalf, especially when this is done in the form of an *apologia*.

We are in direct yet mediated contact with reality, both the “internal” reality of our own minds and the “external” reality of what is distinct from those minds. Though often used as synonyms, *immediate* and *direct* can be distinguished. Doing so is a delicate task, since the result can readily be made to appear to be a distinction without a difference.<sup>29</sup> Part of the problem here is that our understanding of mediation tends to seduce us into supposing any mediated relationship is one in which a wedge is driven between the terms being mediated (say, human beings and the everyday world in which they are ineluctably entangled). Certain instances of mediation certainly do involve gross distortions (e.g., the manner in which various forms of deeply rooted prejudices occlude the perception of, say, a woman or a person of color).

While experience is a phenomenon in which secondness is predominant, it is also a phenomenon in which firstness and thirdness are discernible. Indeed, to begin to do justice to this phenomenon, we need to use Peirce’s categories to delineate at least these features of experience: qualitative immediacy, brute opposition, and boundless intelligibility. It would be better to speak not of our affective experience but the affection dimension or facet of any human experience, since this dimension is inextricably intertwined with the conative and the cognitive dimensions of experience. Firstness is in this instance inseparable from secondness and thirdness.

However complexly and variously our relationship to the world is mediated, it is *not* mediated in these ways. First, it is not mediated in the way insisted upon by

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distinguishable from the object in the sense of that which we aim at. But the senses can be practically conjoined, since our purpose might be to discover the contexts and ways in which various objects exert their distinctive or differential resistances to human effort and ingenuity.

<sup>29</sup> While we may use the same word to distinguish the two senses calling for disambiguation (by saying *immediate* in one sense and, then, in another sense), it seems to me more effective to use two different words to clarify this situation. In the case of Peirce especially, this is desirable.

representationalists. Inner or mental representations of external reality are not the original data of human cognition. They do not mediate between mind and reality. Our perceptual judgments, the most rudimentary level of human cognition, are indexical signs and, thus, instances in which there is a causal relationship between the perceiving organism and the perceived object.<sup>30</sup> Here it is instructive to recall a distinction drawn, but left undeveloped by Peirce: “We experience vicissitudes, especially. We cannot experience the vicissitude without the perception which undergoes the change; but the concept of *experience* is broader than that of *perception*, and includes much that is not, strictly speaking, an object of perception” (CP 1.336). In brief, we observe objects but experience sequences of events, especially changes of an unwelcome or disconcerting character. Experience is “the compulsion, the absolute constraint upon us to think otherwise than we have been thinking” (*ibid.*). It is a phenomenon in which secondness is predominant. But even from Peirce’s perspective, it is not illicit to speak of “perceptual *experience*,” since the object of perception constrains our consciousness of it. This relationship between the perceiver and the perceived is at once causal and semiotic. Our knowing is tethered to the world by innumerable and insistent indices (or indexical signs).

The other two senses can be dealt with much more briefly. Second, our relationship to the world is *not* mediated by language as a *tertium quid*, if interposing language in this sense implies that there is a gap to be bridged between mind and world (Sorrell). The need for such a bridge assumes the existence of a chasm. From both the Wittgensteinian and the pragmatists perspectives, however, there is no such chasm, hence no such need. We are always already entangled in a world. Third and finally, no mode of symbolization other than language is needed to bridge this alleged gap. For there is no gap here to be

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<sup>30</sup> “The index,” Peirce asserts, “asserts nothing; it only says ‘There!’ it takes hold of our eyes, as it were, and forcibly directs them to a particular object, and there it stops” (W 5, 163). By only such signs as these are we able to distinguish between the actual world and an imaginary one (W 5, 164).

bridged. We are *in* the world in such a way as to be unable intelligibly to extricate ourselves.<sup>31</sup>

“Few things are more completely hidden from my observation,” Peirce wryly notes, “than those hypothetical elements of thought which the psychologist finds reason to pronounce ‘immediate,’ in his sense” (CP 8.144). The first impressions of sense, as conceived by a variety of theorists (not just psychologist), are in fact hypothetical entities, not experienced data. “When we wake up to the fact that we are thinking beings and can exercise some control over our reasonings, we have to set out upon our intellectual travels,” Peirce adds, “from the home where we already find ourselves” (ibid.). This “home is the parish of percepts”: it is not inside our skulls but out in the open. We directly observe the external world. Of course, such direct perception does not preclude error. But the correction of our errors and indeed the very detection of them takes place at the level of judgment, not beneath that level.

While “our knowledge of the external world is fallible,”<sup>32</sup> “there is a world of difference between fallible knowledge and no knowledge” at all (CP 1.37), that is, between, Peircean fallibilism and radical skepticism. The possibility of error is ubiquitous and radical. But such fallibilism should not be mistaken for skepticism. The only way of detecting, let alone correcting, our mistakes is by a critical appeal to direct experience. On this account, immediate cognition in the sense of an intuitive grasp of an

immutable form is replaced by the uncontrollable judgments of perceptual experience. These judgments do not serve as a foundation for knowledge. Rather they serve as invaluable constraints for monitoring and altering our deliberate endeavors.

What such an understanding or clarification of our condition grants is a reprieve from the task of proving the existence of the world. The everyday world of our immediate experience is truly the matrix from which philosophy and, indeed, all forms of thought spring forth. To conjure the image of a world other than the quotidian and, then, to use that image to discredit the everyday are so deeply woven into the intricate fabric of traditional philosophy that insistence upon the quotidian worlds seems to many philosophers to be the abandonment of their historical task. Even worse than this, it appears to them to be an uncritical acquiescence in inherited prejudices.

This is deceiving. To accept the everyday world does not entail acquiescing in such prejudices (see, e.g., Dewey LW 1, 40-41). Far from being such an acquiescence, “philosophy is,” Dewey suggests, “a critique of prejudices” (40), undertaken for the sake of what we might call a transvaluation of the everyday (LW 1, 41). As often as not, it involves contesting some of its most salient features. The task of acknowledgment however means giving finitude, transience, temporality, sociality, and relationships more generally their due. It does not thereby jettison the possibility of knowing. Quite the contrary, it shows how these and other features of our condition secure that possibility.

Skepticism is not a position to be refuted but an experience to be undergone and, ordinarily, endured without any assurance of coming out the other side (Cavell 2005, Ch. 6; Rorty 1982, Ch. 10). While Wittgenstein’s later philosophy and classical pragmatism are both anti-skeptical and anti-foundationalist, Wittgenstein, on the one side, and Peirce, James, and Dewey, on the other had immediate experience of the most radical doubts and, moreover, a commonplace confidence in the capacity of ordinary people to meet their spiritual crises. It is, after all, these crises to which both sides are responding. As so often happens in a

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<sup>31</sup> “Only because the [human] organism is in and of the world, and its activities correlated with those of other things in multiple ways,” Dewey asserts, “is it susceptible to undergoing things and capable of trying to reduce objects to means of securing its good fortune” (MW 10, 11). Decades before this, James in “Remarks on Spencer’s Definition of Mind” (1878) in *Essays in Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), insists: “the knower is not simply a mirror floating with no foot-hold anywhere. ... The knower is an actor. ... In other words, there belongs to mind, from its birth upward, a spontaneity, a vote. It is in the game, and not a mere looker-on” (p. 21).

<sup>32</sup> Peirce’s anti-Cartesianism is in its own way radical, for he contends our knowledge of our own minds is fallible. See my “A Peircean account of first-person ‘authority’: The radical implications of thoroughgoing fallibilism” in *Thinking Thinking*, edited by Donata Schoeller and Vera Saller (Munich: Verlag Karl Alber, 2016), 160-80.

therapeutic situation, the problem turns out to be its own solution in disguise. The unmasking of the problem as a solution is central to Wittgenstein and the pragmatists. Looking behind, or beyond, or beneath, the condition in which the problem arises is itself symptomatic of being held in the vise of the problem. Attending more patiently, carefully, humbly to the most salient features of the problematic condition is, in contrast, an indication that the recovery of self and world is underway. How could something as wayward and contingent as human experience provide the resources to address our mundane problems, let alone our philosophical perplexities? How could something as parochial and (again) contingent as ordinary language, etc.?

Seeking resources beyond such experience or language<sup>33</sup> hardly points to a solution. The effort to do so only exacerbates and indeed multiples problems and perplexities. This is true because our linguistic inheritance is a bottomless source of rhetorical innovation, just as our experience is itself such a source of novelty, intended and otherwise. There are not only traditions of innovations but also the irrepressible tendencies of even the most hidebound inheritances to modify themselves in their ongoing struggle to maintain themselves.

The appeal to immediate experience has assumed myriad forms and served various functions. Nothing could be farther from either Wittgenstein or the pragmatists than making this appeal for the sake of securing unshakable foundations for the edifice of human knowledge. But, then, nothing could be more central to their aspiration than, in the case of Wittgenstein, a circuitous and hence indirect “defense” of immediate experience or, in the case of the pragmatists, a more direct and “metaphysical” account of the everyday world. As much as anything else, both sides were convinced that such experience and this world needed to be defended against their defenders (e.g., G. E. Moore and the realists with whom James and Dewey took issue). To imagine that the everyday world needs to be proven

betrays a misunderstanding of everything (most obviously, a misunderstanding of mind, world, language, and proof). In turn, to imagine that human experience needs to buttress itself by transcendental structures reveals a fatally flawed comprehension of our human practices, including the evolved and evolving practices of experimental inquiry. The public criteria inherent in these shared practices make of even our solitary performances (e.g., observing a bird alight on the branch of a tree) publicly corrigible endeavors. As Wittgenstein implies in *On Certainty*, observation is itself a practice.

As Cora Diamond has noted, a realistic spirit pervades the Wittgensteinian corpus (1995, Chapter 1). For the pragmatists under consideration here, this is also true (arguably, even truer). The critical appeal to experiential reality (or “immediate” experience) is, for both sides, a defining feature of their philosophical endeavors. The form of life in which such appeals are ceaselessly made is, at once, a humanly recognizable one (Could we imagine any human form of life in which such an appeal was altogether absent?) and our historically identifiable form of human life.<sup>34</sup> We ineluctably appeal to others but we do so in circumstances in which we are ordinarily also appealing to commonly observable phenomena. Others help us the individual see what stares that person in the face.<sup>35</sup> What seizes the attention of the individual might be so forceful yet unexpected as to prompt that person to seek the corroboration of others. We ordinarily do not have to ask, “Do you perceive what I perceive?” since our somatic attunement to one another is so spontaneous, massive, and

<sup>34</sup> This bears upon the question of whether we ought to interpret *Lebensform* trans-culturally or relativistically.

<sup>35</sup> In an interview in *The Paris Review*, James Baldwin offers this recollection: “I remember standing on a street corner with the black painter Beauford Delaney in the Village, waiting for the light to change, and he pointed down and said, Look. I looked and all I saw was water. And he said, Look again, which I did, and I saw oil on the water and the city reflected in the puddle. It was a great revelation to me. I can’t explain it. He taught me how to see, and how to trust what I saw. Painters have often taught writers how to see. And once you’ve had that experience, you see differently” (2007 [1984], 243). See Wittgenstein, OC, #140.

<sup>33</sup> It is not my intention to imply an equivalence between the Wittgensteinian appeal to ordinary language and the pragmatist appeal to everyday experience.



yet delicate that this goes without saying. In subtle, almost imperceptible, and dramatic, often explicit, ways we *show* one another what is on our minds or what is being disclosed in our experience. A gestural conversation of a typically intimate character is taking place between human animals whenever they are in proximity of one another and, indeed, but only between such animals but also humans and other animals (see, e.g., Peirce; Mead).

For pragmatists at least, the relationship between mind and world is in its most primordial form that between one embodied mind and other. For the infant, the mother so mediates between it and the world that she is its world (or the infant is itself the world inclusive of the mother) (Winnicott 1990, Chapter 3, especially p. 39, footnote 1; see also Margolis, Chapter 1). This is an urgently practical relationship, though it can evolve into a boundlessly theoretical stance (James, *MT*, 277-80; Dewey, *MW* 14, 128-31). The other from whom one is compelled by experience to differentiate oneself is a being inscribed in the innermost recesses of the self and, at the same time, an elusive, even enigmatic, being from whom the self feels separated (Mead, Chapters 18 and 24). How can this relationship be both unseverable and attenuated to the point of being destroyed? The world of our immediate experience is however just that: a world from which we can never be absolutely exiled,<sup>36</sup> yet one in which we are time and again finding ourselves “on the outs.” The face of one of the most intimate of our friends without warning turns into that of a stranger.

The scandal of skepticism primarily concerns the self in relation to others and, only secondarily, in relationship to the world without any reference to other selves.<sup>37</sup> It

concerns our acknowledgment of others in their irreducible otherness. The acknowledgment in question is primarily practical: it concerns how we comport ourselves our concrete other beings, especially sentient ones.

To recall the lesson derived from Peirce’s categories, the qualitative immediacy and brute otherness of human experience need to be conjoined to an unfathomable intelligibility. Such intelligibility is secured only by means of mediation but recourse to mediation always threatens the loss of felt immediacy, irreducible otherness, or both. The recovery of a lively and orienting sense of immediacy and facticity paradoxically often relies on one or more forms of mediation, not least of all therapeutic recollections and philosophical maps charting paths to direct experience waiting to be *had* (Dewey, *LW* 1, 389). It is far from clear that James is right when he asserts, “The return to life [and of course he means life *in its immediacy*] can’t come about by talking. It is,” James insists, “an *act*” (1977, 131). Talk or discourse as itself an instance of action woven into an expanding tapestry of conjoined activities might in fact be one of the most effective ways of returning to life. The paradox of pragmatism, Jamesian and otherwise, bears eloquent testimony to the efficacy of what is in effect “talk therapy.” The act of returning to the precarious yet indestructible world of immediate experience is, accordingly, the point of pragmatism, also that of Wittgenstein. If an immediate or instantaneous return were possible, we would enact it. Even when it does not seem possible, we should act as though it were.<sup>38</sup> Alas, such a return, such a marshalling of our energies, is often not possible. Much mediation, many words, are frequently needed. There is nothing silly or stupid about the confusions into which we are thrown. Our bewitchment by language and our betrayals of experience are rooted in noble aspirations *and* ignoble fears, not just such fears and

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<sup>36</sup> This of course needs to be qualified. *Except for death*, it is a world from which one cannot be absolutely exiled. There is arguably a sense in which even the dead person is, for a time at least, not altogether banished.

<sup>37</sup> “But in the everyday ways in which denial [of the other] occurs in my life with the other – in a momentary irritation, or a recurrent grudge, in an unexpected rush of resentment, in a hard glance, in a dishonest attestation, in the telling of a tale, in the believing of a tale, in a fear of engulfment, in a fantasy of solitude or of self-destruction – the problem is,” Stanley Cavell

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contends, “to recognize myself as denying another, to understand that I carry chaos in myself. Here is the scandal of skepticism with respect to the existence of others. I am that scandal” (2005, 151).

<sup>38</sup> This is what James advises in “The Energies of Men.” See *Essays in Religion and Morality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), especially, 131-32.

anxieties. While an immediate recovery of immediate experience is of course possible, a mediated return to everyday life is the requisite route for most human beings, at least for those who have succumbed to the myriad seductions of a transcendent hope (the seeming irrepressible hope to transcend the finite world of human experience).<sup>39</sup> Wittgenstein explicitly advises us to go back to the rough ground, while the pragmatists at least tacitly do so (PI, #107; also see Scheman). There and only there, life is to be lived. There and only there, experience is to be *had*. There and only there, is any act an action, rather than the pathetic posturing of “parlor soldiers” (Emerson, 194).<sup>40</sup>

“In the beginning was the deed” (OC, #402; CV, 31). But, along the way, the *word* as deed (CV, 50) is needed to recover the world as an arena of action, even simply to recollect adequately that the sense in which action stands at the origin of our world (cf. Emerson 263). The recovery of immediacy tends to be circuitous rather than linear or immediate. Words as deeds in the service of deeds in other senses than words are ordinarily at the center of such recovery. “Words, words, words.” There are no words without a world and, in turn, there is no world in any

recognizably human sense without words and other symbols.<sup>41</sup> Words and world cannot be prised apart. Any attempt to bridge an alleged gap between language and reality (or mind and world) can only perpetrate and, indeed, exacerbate what it is designed to alleviate or eliminate. The point is to do philosophy in such a way that the scandal of having failed to prove the existence of the external world is seen for what it is<sup>42</sup> – a fool’s errand. However ingenious and sophisticated are the thinkers who attempt such a proof, the proof itself is doomed not only to fail but also to prolong a futile exercise.

At this juncture, to go on doing philosophy entails, among other things, orienting ourselves toward the world in ways quite different from some of the theoretical fixations of traditional philosophy. Wittgensteinian consideration of actual usage and pragmatic clarification provide therapeutic and, thereby, emancipatory insights. For the purposes of philosophy, as various and indeed heterogeneous as they are, there is no need – to get behind or beyond or beneath immediate experience. Indeed, there is no possibility of

<sup>39</sup> “The demand for a standpoint *outside history* from which to deliver judgements of value is,” Sabina Lovibond suggests, “linked with the demand for a standpoint *outside the body* from which to survey reality: for an embodied creature necessarily exists in time” (143). “The sickness which philosophy sets out to treat ... has,” she goes on to claim in connection with Wittgenstein, “its origins, he implies, in the incomplete acceptance of our embodied condition, and in the failure to acknowledge the significance of that condition for the reflective understanding of such topics as *meaning* and *rationality*” (206).

<sup>40</sup> This is an allusion to R. W. Emerson’s “Self-Reliance”: “We are parlour soldiers. We shun the rugged battle of fact, where strength is born. This passage suggests an equally famous one in an essay by William James (“Is Life Worth Living?”): “If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success, it is,” James emphatically asserts, “no better than a game of private theatricals from which we may withdraw at will. But it feels like a real fight – as if there is something really wild in the universe which we, with all our idealities and faithfulnesses, are needed to redeem; and first of all to redeem our own hearts from atheisms and fears. For such a half-wild, half-saved universe our nature is adapted” (WB [Dover], 61).

<sup>41</sup> This is one of the points where we readily observe a convergence among distinct philosophical traditions (Wittgenstein, pragmatism, and hermeneutics). See Hans-Georg Gadamer’s “The Nature of Things and the Nature of Language” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). The position sketched in this essay is very close to those of Wittgenstein and the pragmatists.

<sup>42</sup> In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant suggests: “It still remains a scandal to philosophy and to human reason in general that the existence of things outside us (from which we derive the whole material of knowledge, even for our inner sense) must be accepted merely on faith, and that if anyone thinks good to doubt their existence, we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof” (34). “The ‘scandal of philosophy’ does not consist in the fact that this proof is still lacking up to now, but,” Martin Heidegger counters in *Being and Time*, “in the fact that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again” (197). See Dewey’s “The Existence of the World as a Logical Problem” (MW 8, 83-97). This essay was originally published in *Philosophical Review*, 24 (1915) and appeared in revised form in *Essays in Experimental Logic* (1916). “It is not the common-sense world which is doubtful ... but *common sense* as a complex of beliefs about specific things and relations *in* the world. Hence never in any usual procedure of inquiry do we throw the existence of the world into doubt, nor can we do so without self-contradiction” (MW 8, 96-97).

doing so. At some point, our efforts to do so inevitably fall back upon the undoubted deliverances of direct experience. If in some respects, for some purposes, we can doubt aspects of these deliverances, that is only because there is a massive background of undoubted beliefs and, deeper than these beliefs, of unacknowledged investments that make specific doubts intelligible. Our games of doubting inescapably take place against this background. But the background itself cannot be doubted since it defines the conditions for the intelligibility of our doubts. For this reason, it cannot be proven. To continue to seek a ground for our certainty in the undoubted commonplaces of everyday life (i.e., to seek nothing less than a transcendent certainty) betrays either a misunderstanding of what grounds are or (more likely) a deeper malady, one connected to failures of acknowledgment. We must, “Forget this transcendent certainty, which is connected with our concept of spirit”<sup>43</sup> (OC, #47; see Scheman). And we must do so as a way toward acknowledging the undoubted certainties of everyday life, including the uncontrollable judgments forced upon us by our perceptual experience. Are there circumstances in which one or another of these certainties might be rendered dubitable?<sup>44</sup> Yes, of course. Even so, perceptual experience *is* experience (and this means that during its duration we experience a series of alterations). In yet other words, such experience is attuned to distinct objects as defining features of the enveloping scenes of everyday life, not to objects in abstraction from such situations. But, then, it is as attuned to affordances as obstacles, at least as much to opportunities to go on as to obstructions.

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<sup>43</sup> This sentence is slightly modified. In the original, it is: “Forget this transcendent certainty, which is connected with your concept of spirit.”

<sup>44</sup> “If you try to doubt everything you would not get,” Wittgenstein insists, “as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty” (OC, #115). OC, #343.

## Conclusion

The world directly encountered in our experience, “immediately” glimpsed in our perceptions, is first and foremost an arena of action.<sup>45</sup> Our form of life is that of an ingenious animal (all too often, all too clever an animal!) having a natural history in which “commanding, questioning, recounting, charting, are as much a part ... as walking, eating, drinking, playing” (PI, #25). “What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – forms of life” (PI, II, p. 226). With any form of life, what is always already acknowledged in countless and irrevocable ways (if only tacitly acknowledged) is the world as an arena of action. Proofs regarding the reality of that world are, as much as the doubts to which those proofs are response, not so much idle as unintelligible. If countless philosophers and indeed others imagine otherwise, that is because they profoundly misunderstand the conditions of intelligibility. The classical pragmatists and the later Wittgenstein were devoted to clarifying these conditions and, central to their endeavor, the appeal to our practices eclipses the appeal to intuitions (Rorty 1961; Colapietro). What strikes us immediately as true ... is not a kind of *seeing* on our part: it is rather “our *acting*” (OC, #204). On this account, practical fluency replaces cognitive immediacy. Even so, perceptual judgments, at least when they are taken to be the uncontrolled result of what is a rudimentary human practice,<sup>46</sup> are among the starting

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<sup>45</sup> “Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; – but the end is not certain propositions’ striking us as immediately true, i.e., it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of our language game” (OC, #204). I read this as an anti-intuitionist stance. See Rorty, “Pragmatism, Categories, and Language” in *The Philosophical Review*, 70, 2 (April 1961), 197-223; also my “Allowing Our Practices to Speak for Themselves” (2011).

<sup>46</sup> “We do not learn the *practice* [*Praxis*] of making empirical judgment by learning rules” (emphasis added); rather “we are taught *judgments* and their connexion with other judgments” (OC, #140; Colapietro 2011). To learn how to make such judgments is to be initiated into the *practice* of looking and seeing. The experience of failing to see is critical. See also Wittgenstein’s *Investigation*, II, p.

points of all human endeavors. The piece of wax, stripped by Descartes of its sensory qualities and defined solely in terms of quantitative dimensions, could not be weighed, measured, or subjected to any other procedure pertaining to these dimensions, except by perception. Perception is truly primordial, even if it is fallible (see Buchler 2000). But it does not provide a foundation for the edifice for our knowledge; rather it provides not only the indispensable means for self-correction but also those for identifying the subject matter of experimental inquiry. The indexical signs by which immediate perception and direct experience are equipped to assist self-correction and, at the most basic level, to enable us to identify a subject to be investigated are, at once, a causal and a semiotic relationship. Nothing less than the everyday world is implicated in their ubiquitous force.<sup>47</sup>

It is the world from which we ineluctably set out and that to which we necessarily return, after the illusion of having severed ourselves from it. To conclude emphatically (or at least to move toward our conclusion in this manner), let us recall Peirce's claim: "we have *direct experience of things in themselves*. Nothing could be more completely false than that we can experience only our own ideas" (CP, 6.95).<sup>48</sup> We directly experience

the world, though experience is itself always a process of mediation in which the possibility of error is ineliminable. Direct perception cannot be gainsaid, though anything directly perceived might, in the light of subsequent perceptions, prove itself unreliable for the attainment of some purpose. Ultimately, we have no recourse but to rely on immediate perception or direct experience. There is no inner world except what is an offshoot of the external world, no outer world except what might disclose itself to us in our "possible practical experience." The limits of intelligibility are defined by the range of our practices, but that range extends far beyond anything yet established. Within these practices, our observations and experiences are tethered to the everyday world by the ubiquitous force of indexical signs. The significance of the objects and events to which such signs so forcefully call our attention is, however, more far-reaching and deep-cutting than our most reliable theories and efficacious habits have even intimated. The world of our experience is, thus, a world at once immediately intelligible and inexhaustibly knowable (arguably, even mysterious).

In their refusal even to try proving the existence of this world, also in their insistence upon conceiving conceivability in reference to our practices (albeit, the full range of our shared practices and the *possible* consequences flowing from our fateful engagement in these shared practices), and finally in granting, in their philosophical accounts, immediate perception and direct experience the tremendous weight they have in our everyday lives, the writings of the classical pragmatist and the later Wittgenstein make this and much more manifest. Between the immediate disclosures of our

extra-personal world long before we study or are aware of processes occurring in our own bodily tissue, so we live in a world of objective acceptances and compulsions long before we are aware of attitudes of our own, and of the action of say the nervous system, in bringing us into effective relationship with them. The knowledge of our own attitudes and of the operation of the nervous system is no more a substitute for *the direct operation of things* than metabolic processes are a substitute for food materials" (LW 1, 381; emphasis added).

<sup>47</sup> In "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," Dewey observes: "if anything seems adequately grounded empirically it is the existence of a world which resists the characteristic functions of the subject of experience, which goes its own way, in some respects, independently of these functions, and which frustrates our hopes and intentions" (MW 10, 18).

<sup>48</sup> "One of the curiosities of orthodox empiricism is that its outstanding speculative problem is," Dewey notes, "the existence of an 'external world.' For in accordance with the notion that experience is attached to a private subject as its exclusive possession, a world like the one in which we appear to live must be 'external' to experience instead of being its subject-matter. I call it a curiosity, for if anything seems adequately grounded empirically it is the existence of a world which resists the characteristic functions of the subject of experience [i.e., the human animal], and which frustrates our hopes and intentions" (MW 10, 18). Near the end of his life, he made much the same point when he insisted: "Being and having, exercising and suffering such things as these [i.e., barriers, mountains, rivers, seas, forests, and plains], exist in the open and public. As we digest food derived from the

direct experience and the boundless mediations resulting from the dynamic conjunction of everyday experience and philosophical imagination, our lives stretch. While these lives are tethered by indexical signs to the external world, they are emancipated from the tyranny of its brute compulsion by the power of linguistic and other symbols.<sup>49</sup> Our world is one in which our transactions overwhelmingly take the form of an exchange of signs.<sup>50</sup> This does nothing to make the world a tissue of signs, though it does much to help us see<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> In "The Poet," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Essays*, edited by Larzer Ziff (NY: Penguin, 1982), Emerson calls our attention to the power of symbols to facilitate this result: "The use of symbols has a certain power of emancipation and exhilaration for all men. We seem to be touched by a wand which makes us dance and run about happily, like children. We are like persons who come out of a cave or cellar into the open air" (276). Language is anything but a prison-house, even if certain pictures, having their roots in language, can hold us captive (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #). Any prison-house in which we are sequestered can, in principle, be identified as such because of our linguistic resources and, beyond this, is one from which we might be able to escape only because of these resources.

<sup>50</sup> "Signs, the only things with which a human being can, without derogation, consent to have any transaction, being a sign himself, are," Peirce insists, "triadic" (6.344). While our experience is always to some extent a play of forces, it is more than this: it is a drama in which that play provides opportunities for discovering the most intricate networks of intelligible relationships. See Wittgenstein's *Blue Book* (1958), 6-8. "If we say that thinking is," Wittgenstein notes, "essentially operating with signs, the first question you might ask is: 'What are signs?' – Instead of giving any general kind of answer to this question, I propose to you to look closely at particular cases" (1958, 16). Even so, there are at least implicit generalizations derived from his painstaking attention to particular cases, just as Peirce's "broad generalizations" (2.14) are derived from attention to particulars. The would have (to say the least) severe reservations about a general theory of signs, while the latter would have little sympathy with the claim that the philosopher should avoid from putting forth theses.

<sup>51</sup> In his *Investigations*, Wittgenstein objects to himself by saying, "You have a new conception [of a familiar object] and interpret it as seeing a new object." "What you have primarily discovered is," he continues, "a new way of looking at things" (#401). He appears, here and elsewhere, to be disparaging his own pretense to have accomplished anything notable. But, in truth, he has hit upon a novel way of seeing familiar things. In a very different context, animated by largely divergent motives, James announces

how immediately and intimately, yet elusively significant is our everyday world.

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in *The Meaning of Truth*: "The whole originality of pragmatism, the whole point in it is its use of the concrete way of seeing. It begins with concreteness, and returns and ends with it" (pp. 281-82). For the most part in quite different ways, Wittgenstein and the pragmatists champion a "concrete way of seeing" familiar things. To some extent their motives overlap, since both sides are preoccupied with the experiential (not simply the intellectual) recovery of the everyday world. The "craving for generality" (Wittgenstein 1958, 17) – more pointedly identified, "the contemptuous attitude toward the particular case" (18) – prompts too quickly and strongly to ride roughshod over particulars. Thus, both sides exemplify a cherishing concern for irreducible particularity, without abandoning the abiding need for broad generalizations (though Wittgenstein is, to a greater degree, wary of such generalizations than the pragmatists). "Broad generalization is," Peirce affirms, "glorious when it is the inevitable outpressed juice of painfully matured details of knowledge; but when it is not that, it is a crude spirit inciting only boils between [sic.] a hundred little dogmas. ... It is the usual fruit of sloth" (2.14).

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**IS THERE ANY ROOM FOR IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE?  
LOOKING FOR AN ANSWER IN DEWEY  
(AND WITTGENSTEIN) VIA PEIRCE AND JAMES**

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**ABSTRACT:** The paper investigates the prospect of dealing with "immediate experience" from a pragmatist perspective. The issue at stake is the possibility of speaking in a deflationary yet tenable way about the direct character of our common experiences of the world, given that the human environment is profoundly characterized by linguistic, inferential and interpretative practices.

The author explores John Dewey's answers to the above-mentioned problem. These can be seen to reflect a sort of tension within classic pragmatism between the young Peirce's lesson about the semiotic and mediated structure of human cognition and James's mature claim for immediate experience.

Not least by means of a comparison with Wittgenstein's approach, the thesis arising from the paper is that Dewey was able to solve the apparent divergence by considering experience in close connection with life and through a complementary understanding of cognition as a specific form of experience, as well as by emphasizing the role of the qualitative or aesthetic aspect of primary experience. Moreover, Dewey's non-foundational and circular conception of the relationships between qualitative and reflective experience is identified as a decisive step.

**Keywords:** immediate experience; qualitative experience; classical pragmatism; semiotic turn; Wittgenstein

Is there any room for immediate experience in the human world, namely a world that is profoundly characterized by linguistic, inferential and interpretative practices, by complex forms of communication and signification, as well as by normative issues? Can we still speak in a deflationary yet tenable way about the direct character of our common experiences of the world after the crucial philosophical turns that took place in the previous century – the semiotic turn, the hermeneutic turn and the linguistic one?

It should clearly be stated that this question is not to be interpreted as a kind of epistemological problem referring to the enduring issue in modern and contemporary philosophy of whether and how it is possible to anchor our

knowledge of allegedly external reality in stable ground. The classical pragmatists as well as the later Wittgenstein – not to speak of Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Merleau-Ponty's "Introduction" to his *Phenomenology of Perception* – clearly acknowledged that the world we belong to and interact with is already there before we begin any epistemological inquiry (see Colapietro's paper in the current issue of this journal). Nonetheless, I fear we run the risk of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, if we do not consider the ways in which the world has a direct or immediate impact on us, on our lives, notwithstanding the linguistic, largely interpretative, inferential and mediated character of our practices.

I think that John Dewey provided a positive answer to this question. Hence, we should try to investigate how and to what extent there is room in his conception of experience for forms of immediate interaction between human organisms and their environment, given that he assumed that our environment is naturally social and culturally configured – in other words, that the human world is naturally characterized by intelligent, broadly linguistic<sup>1</sup> and normative practices.

In the context of the pragmatist tradition, Dewey fully accepted Peirce's lesson about the semiotic and mediated structure of human cognition. Nonetheless, he perceived the claim for immediate experience supported by James in his *Essays in Radical Empiricism* as genuine or legitimate. In these papers, William James had freed himself from the picture of the individual conscience as something characterized by "absolute insularity" and privateness. Nonetheless, James had felt the need to give an account of the vague and overabundant complexity of life against the over-intellectualization of philosophical problems. Consequently, he had made a strong case for recognizing direct, non-inferential forms of human experience (Gavin 1992).

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<sup>1</sup> By "broadly linguistic" I mean properly verbal practices as well as what Joseph Margolis calls "lingual" acts and behaviours, namely activities that are significant in connection to shared forms of life and culture, and which depend on the mastering of a common language. See Margolis 2017.

Dewey was caught between the two – the early Peirce on the one hand and the mature James on the other one – and, in my opinion, he tried to find a way out, even though he did not explicitly pose the problem as arising from the two fathers of pragmatism. His solution is partly grounded in his conception of human behavior as largely based on habits, understood in almost physiological and pre-personal terms, and not primarily as the result of the repetition of a voluntary or conscious action (Dewey 1983). However, I will not explore this route in the present paper, because I have dealt with it elsewhere (Dreon 2016). Differently, I will suggest that an answer to the present question can be found by considering Dewey's conception of experience as a primarily living process that is broader and more inclusive than knowledge – complementarily, cognition is interpreted as an internal phase and extension of primarily qualitative, aesthetic or affective experience. On the other hand, Dewey's solution – or dissolution – of the problem at stake is connected with an explicit acknowledgment of the fact that the relationships between reflective inquiries and eminently qualitative phases of experience are circular and non-hierarchical, because the results of previous inferences and inquiries have loop effects on our primarily qualitative everyday experience and reshape it.

This whole problem, as far as I understand it, is not at all foreign to the Wittgenstein of the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Although Wittgenstein's efforts here are mainly directed at denying or at least questioning the possibility of an *Erlebnis* – namely, an interior and immediately lived experience assumed as a kind of privileged source of certainty – his path seems to be more tortuous, insofar as he obliquely tries to consider the often direct character of our practices. I think that Wittgenstein gave an affirmative answer to the above-mentioned question, but his response only partially coincides with the solutions that Dewey offers us if we approach his texts in the way I am suggesting here.

Consequently, I will begin my inquiry by focusing on Peirce's criticism of introspection and of any assumed primacy of unmediated experience in his so-called anti-Cartesian essays. Then I will consider some similarities with Wittgenstein's criticism of *Erlebnis* as a privileged internal experience, allegedly immune from doubt. I will also sketch out an alternative path leading to different ways of seeing experience as unmediated by interpretations in the second part of his *Philosophical Investigations*. After this Wittgensteinian excursus, I will explore James's claim in favor of pure experience in his *Essays in Radical Empiricism* – where he does not relinquish the notion of immediate experience, but definitely rejects any previous dualistic hesitations. The last section will focus on Dewey's answers to the whole issue, by following his main lines of thought, as briefly outlined above.

### 1. Peirce on the Pervasiveness of Mediation

As a point of departure, I will consider the very strong criticism formulated by the young Peirce of the privileged role traditionally attributed to first-hand experience, which is usually characterized as being immediate and intuitively certain, and hence as deserving an epistemological primacy over other types of indirect, mediated and discursive cognition. The main reference is, of course, to Peirce's anti-Cartesian essays, published in 1868, *Some Consequences of Four Incapacities* and *Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man*. In these papers, we can find a negative answer to the question I posed at the beginning: very briefly, there is no room for immediate experience in a world like the human one, which precludes the possibility of thinking without signs. More properly, we should acknowledge that for Peirce both a specific thought, produced at a certain moment, and a specific feeling arising out of a particular context in a more or less idiosyncratic manner are unique and *sui generis* events that simply happen without any mediation.

However, in order for both of them to signify something for speakers of the same language or for a limited group of individuals involved in a situation (5.289), they must be based on the implicit or explicit institution of a mediating relationship, which is to say on a complete or incomplete inference, on a unifying hypothesis that can be more or less anchored in plausible reasons. There is neither any immediate self-awareness nor any special faculty of introspection of the internal world independent of our knowledge of the external world (5.244), to which we should attribute a privileged certainty in comparison with our mediated knowledge of the external world.

The polemical objective is twofold: first, Peirce tells us (against Descartes's assumption) that self-knowledge and introspection are not immediate, direct experiences, but are the result of complex inferential processes (1). More specifically, Peirce states that the feeling of the self in the young child is the result of a network of processes involving bodily, social and linguistic practices (5.226). For him, the feeling of one's own self is the result of the perception that one's own body is more centrally basic (in terms of the management of one's own space) than other people's bodies, as well as the product of a gradual learning of language by which the baby is exposed, step-by-step, to the testimony of others about a specific state of facts as convergent or divergent from its own. In this way, the young creature would be driven to use the first-person pronoun in order to posit a seat of ignorance or divergence.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, Peirce extends his claim to the point of denying that immediate forms of cognition – and perhaps of experience – exist at all (2). Peirce states that even the perception of two-dimensional and three-

dimensional spaces, as well as sound and tactile perceptions, rest on comparisons, abstractions, selections, and reductions to more or less reasonable units as well as on predictions about features that are not actually present in perception. According to a semiotic approach, perception should be considered to be a mediated process, based on implicit inferences or interpretations (Paolucci 2016, 29).

Peirce is here disputing the associationist claim that mere perceptive data are the basic ingredients of cognitive processes. He is arguing therefore that these data cannot be considered privileged cognitive resources for laying the foundations of the cognitive building, as suggested by classical empiricism. Nevertheless, we should note that in these essays Peirce is still thinking of perception in eminently cognitive terms, as one of the components of a structurally inferential cognitive process.

More radically, he seems to adopt the same approach even with regard to emotions and habits, i.e. forms of affective and practical experience beyond reasoning in the strict sense. As a matter of fact, in this essay, Peirce argues that both emotions and habits involve inferential processes.

He tells us that an emotion is a simple predicate that replaces a series of different predicates by unifying them on the basis of an implicit (and often risky) hypothesis – a form of inference that is not grounded on rational explanations, as in the case of inferential judgments (5.292). Moreover, for Peirce emotions differ from intellectual judgments not because of their alleged immediacy, but because of their close connection with the idiosyncratic circumstances and the particular dispositions of a specific individual, as happens with the sense of beauty and morality (5.247). Differently, intellectual judgments would be more generally related to human nature, the human mind or the human community.

On the other hand, Peirce tells us that a habit is a form of practical inference which is constituted “when,

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<sup>2</sup> As is well known, Mead supported the idea that self-identity emerges out of the capacity to take the role of the other in a conversation of gestures. However, I agree with Cook (in Cook 1993: 78 and ff.) that Mead did not conceive this process as basically involving any kind of interpretation or inference but rather as a kind of affectively based tuning (see also Dreon forthcoming).

having had the sensation of performing a certain act, *m*, on several occasions *a*, *b*, *c*, we come to do it upon every occurrence of the general event *l*, of which *a*, *b* and *c* are special cases" (5.297).<sup>3</sup> Even the recognition of a friend would be based on some form of reasoning: we would not explicitly consider the premises of such an inference simply because it works and goes on without hindrances insofar as the hypothesis on which the inference is based is satisfied (5.223).

To sum up, here Peirce tells us that perceptions and sensations (and clearly judgments) rest on inferential processes; not only that, but even affective sensibility, as well as habits of actions, are grounded in forms of reasoning that can be more or less incomplete. If seen in the light of these specific texts, Peirce's position seems to be exposed to the risk of a reduction of human experience to cognition or to offer a basis for the thesis that cognition pervades every form of human experience – thirdness, to use Peirce's later phenomenological categories, seems to reabsorb both firstness and secondness.

Of course, this is a one-sided viewpoint on Peirce's philosophy, whose steps were much more multidirectional from the mid-1980s onward (Maddalena 2015, 33). More substantially, it could also be claimed that Peirce's development of his three phenomenological categories was a (more or less successful) attempt to defend the thesis that the origin of our knowledge lies in quality (Maddalena 2014: 107). Dewey probably recognized this issue in Peirce's thought by stressing the value of Peirce's theory of quality over his semiotics in an essay dating back to 1935 (Dewey, 1998; on this see Innis 2014).

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that whereas here Peirce provides a rather intellectual picture of habits, the picture he provides in other texts is somewhat different – the emphasis being not on a deliberate inference provoking the fixation of a habit, but on previous habits of action and belief as the basis for new habits. This different emphasis derived from the influence of Alexander Bain on classical pragmatists (see Feodorov 2017) and was systematically developed by John Dewey in Dewey 1983.

Nonetheless, these early essays lay out the issue at stake very clearly – an issue that both Dewey and Peirce himself had to take seriously into account and possibly try to reconcile with the reasons of immediate experience.

## 2. The Two Sides of Wittgenstein

A transition to Wittgenstein seems to be rather consequential at this point of the inquiry, because there is a profound convergence between the anti-Cartesian spirit of *Some Consequences of Four Incapacities* and Wittgenstein's later texts, as some scholars have noted (Hagberg 2016). One of the main polemical targets of the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations* is the idea that we first have an immediate and direct experience of the meaning of words, which we then use in different contexts (see Perissinotto 2002, Perissinotto 2016 and Morelli in this issue). It is clear that Peirce and Wittgenstein converge in their criticism of the picture of a secluded mind and self-consciousness as an inward depository for private contents, which deserves primacy in terms of certainty and undoubted knowledge (Hagberg 2016: 36). In the last sections of his *Philosophical Investigations* (and similarly to Peirce and Dewey), Wittgenstein endorses an overturning of the traditional interpretation of this process: first we learn to do something and use words in appropriate contexts of shared practices, and only later on can we focus on words and their meanings as part of an interior discourse. This means that this interior voice should not be considered the first means of apprehension of meanings; on the contrary, it results from the transposition of previous interpersonal exchanges between individuals who share the same practices, language and form of life. It is only at this (belated) point that we have a direct and immediate experience of meanings, as we draw them out from our allegedly private mental depository – an erroneous notion, deriving from the isolation of a particular kind of solitary

game from already existing social and linguistic practices.

It is exactly in relation to this issue that Wittgenstein makes a polemical reference to the *Principles*, more precisely to the chapter on the stream of thought, where William James characterizes consciousness as “absolute insularity” and says that the “most absolute fracture in nature” is the one dividing our own thoughts from those of others. By evoking James’s reference to the strange *Erlebnis* whereby a word is not yet present but seems to arise out of an inner experience (whether psychological or mental), Wittgenstein offers the famous response:

The words ‘It’s on the tip of my tongue’ are no more the expression of an experience than ‘Now I know to go on!’. We use them in *certain situations*, and they are surrounded by a behavior of a special kind, and also by some characteristic experiences. In particular, they are frequently followed by *finding* the word. (Ask yourself: “What would it be like if human beings *never* found the word that was on the tip of their tongue?”). (Wittgenstein 1958: 219).

Very briefly, there is no privileged psychological or mental access to meanings apart from the common contexts in which humans share their practices and linguistically interact with one another; there is no interior *Erlebnis* giving rise to or constituting the meaning of a word.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, should we understand Wittgenstein’s contribution to our opening question as a complete denial of any kind of immediate or direct experience? I suspect that this is only one part of the story: Wittgenstein was criticizing a certain use (or abuse) of experience in philosophical discussions while, on the other hand, he was also wondering if there could be other ways to consider everyday direct experience from a philosophical point of view without over-

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<sup>4</sup> Although Wittgenstein uses James here simply as a polemic target (as Goodman points out in Goodman 2007: 142), the positive importance of the pragmatist’s work for Wittgenstein’s philosophy has been clearly recognized by many scholars (Boncompagni 2016 and Sanfelix Vidarte 2017).

intellectualizing it. In my opinion, a first clue encouraging a more multifaceted reading of Wittgenstein on experience is given by his use of the word *Erlebnis* in this part of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein’s criticism is directed toward the alleged primacy of *Erlebnis*, understood as the direct experience of meanings as mental or psychological contents – differently, the term *Erfahrung* appears only at the beginning of paragraph XI, in the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*. It is well known that German philosophy has made extensive use of the two German words for experience, *Erlebnis*, and *Erfahrung*, by assigning them different meanings and different roles in various philosophical systems. Hans-Georg Gadamer proposed a famous analysis of the philosophical meanings of the term “*Erlebnis*” in the first part of his *Truth and Method* (part I, B, ii and iii) – the reconstruction of the history of the word played a significant role in his criticism of “aesthetic culture”, namely a cultural form, based on the grounding assumption that the experience of art and the beautiful represented something completely different and separate from other ways of perceiving and experiencing the ordinary world.<sup>5</sup> Very briefly, Gadamer points out some features in the complex philosophical history of the concept of *Erlebnis*, which are essentially the polemical target of Wittgenstein’s criticism. Gadamer emphasizes that a distinguishing feature of the

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<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Gadamer’s hermeneutical choice to distance himself from the phenomenological approach could be detected in this rejection of the concept of *Erlebnis* in favour of the idea of an *Erfahrung* of art as involving a real change in the subject having an experience. It has to do with a criticism of the alleged decisive primacy conferred by Husserl’s phenomenology on the noetic pole of the so-called intentional relation, to the detriment of the noematic pole. Roberta Lanfredini has highlighted a similar point at the beginning of William James’s essay *Does Consciousness Exist?*, where the author criticizes the strong asymmetry between the two poles of experience that emerged from Kant’s transcendental philosophy onward – and hence the position he himself had adopted in the *Principles of Psychology* (Lanfredini 2016).

philosophical concept of *Erlebnis* is the fact that it belongs to the inwardness of an individual conscience. This feature would guarantee a direct, unmediated access to its owner: the first person character of an *Erlebnis* would constitute the first unmediated and indisputable given, on which any other knowledge should be founded. Intimacy and adherence to one's own inner life as well as certainty and immunity from doubt are the two main characteristics defining the concept of *Erlebnis* and lending it a philosophical primacy that is criticized and regarded as illegitimate both by Wittgenstein and by Gadamer. On the other hand, in his further treatment of art Gadamer recalls that the German philosophical tradition developed also the more inclusive concept of *Erfahrung*, which extends beyond the limitedness of inwardness, inner life, the individual conscience and the mind. Differently from *Erlebnis*, the term *Erfahrung* – at least in its philosophical, mainly Hegelian, dimension – tends to include everything that happens, involving human actions and passions, as well as the historical and cultural relations between the so-called experiential poles (CFR. Gadamer 1990, part II, 4, 3, B).

This last point brings us back to Wittgenstein and to our thesis that he is inquiring whether there is still room to consider other modes of experience (*Erfahrung*) beyond introspection, mental or internal experience, and the like. Speaking about the experience (*Erfahrung*) of “noticing an aspect”, he famously says that his inquiry is focused on the “grammar” of the concept, which is to say its use in a language (and not on the alleged psychological causes of a concept, i.e. a specific *Erlebnis* which should be investigated by psychologists, not philosophers). What has been largely overlooked, by contrast, is the fact that Wittgenstein also makes an explicit reference to a plurality of *Erfahrungsbegriffe*: “We are interested in the concept and its place among the concepts of experience” (Wittgenstein 1958, 193).

A second passage deserving consideration for our purposes is the beginning of the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*, where Wittgenstein famously states:

One can imagine an animal angry, frightened, unhappy, startled. But Hopeful? And why not?

A dog believes his master is at the door. But can he also believe his master will come the day after tomorrow? – And what can he not do here? – How do I do it? – How am I supposed to answer this?

Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the use of a language. That is to say, the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life.

(Wittgenstein 1958, 174)

The passage seems to suggest that Wittgenstein was interested in understanding whether the fact that humans speak with one another – that our forms of life are strictly intertwined with exchanged words – has an influence on the ways they believe and hope, as well as fear certain things and feel pain or see something as a duck or a rabbit. In other words, I tend to read this passage as though Wittgenstein were posing the question of whether our being speaking creatures contributes to re-shaping the animal sensibility in which our roots are embedded. More specifically, it seems to me that Wittgenstein focused the problem whether our everyday seeing, feeling pain, shouting, believing or hoping should always be considered mediated experiences, always involving inferences and interpretations. Wittgenstein resists the idea that our ordinary seeing something as a specific thing is grounded on an inferential process. Differently, this can be the case when we shift from seeing something as a duck to seeing it as a rabbit: there could be a reason eliciting a change in my perceptual experience and a reasoning – the change is due to a non-artificial doubt (to use Peirce's lexicon) or to hesitation about what I can and should do when a situation becomes indeterminate (to recall Dewey's formulation of the issue).



This is also the case with exclamations and interjections, as well as with shouts and human cries. It is even the case with words themselves when they are perceived by the interlocutors as unmediated behaviors, similar to shouts.<sup>6</sup>

Most of our seeing something as something as well as the functioning of certain words and sentences as bodily gestures works immediately because we are intimately familiar with a context and a linguistic game, we adhere to it by means of an attitude or a 'belief' that is more primitive than an epistemological assumption. According to Moyal-Sharrock, this kind of immediacy is connected to our belonging to a form of life that is deeply rooted in our animality, consequently preceding any epistemological doubt and any inferential process (Moyal-Sharrock 2016).

Wittgenstein's famous observations on following a rule (§§ 197-202) are largely consistent with this view: he states that "there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation (*Deutung*)" (Wittgenstein 1958, 81). Wittgenstein refers to specific practices and to dispositions to act in a certain way, to habits of action and behavior that are not the result of the unconscious repetition of an originally intentional act. On the contrary, they are anchored in a shared form of living preceding any individual act as well as any singular word utterance (Dreon 2016).

Considering cases of this kind, Luigi Perissinotto argues that such linguistic games should be considered extensions of more primitive behaviors. The word 'primitive' in these cases has no reductive characterization, but simply refers to what is not the result of any reasoning. "From this point of view", he says, "'primitive' is not so much a synonym of 'elemental' or 'simple' as of 'immediate', where 'immediate' means: non mediated by reasoning,

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. also § IX (in Wittgenstein 1953), where Wittgenstein excludes that an expression such as "I am afraid" is the description of an interior state (an *Erlebnis*). However, he emphasizes that a word can be either very far from a shout or very close, since there are various degrees and nuances between the two extremes.

calculation, inductive and analogical processes, and so on and so forth" (Perissinotto 2002, 107, my translation).

It is in this sense, according to Wittgenstein's perspective, that we can speak of immediate experience, once we have freed ourselves from the myth of introspection and the direct intuition of one's own self.

### 3. James's claim for immediate experience

Let's return to the classical pragmatists and more precisely to the way William James poses the whole issue in his *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. I will focus my attention on some features of his text which Dewey found compelling and further developed in his own way. The influence of these essays on Dewey's *Experience and Nature* is very strong but it is always filtered through Deweyan lenses. The first element I wish to emphasize is that James, as a radical empiricist, does not abandon his preference to consider 'immediate experience' an important issue but a crucial shift is made with respect to the *Principles* (see Bella in this volume). As has already been observed, in the chapter on the stream of thought immediateness and immunity from doubts are attributed to interior experience in its allegedly "absolute insularity": "the personal self rather than the thought might be treated as the immediate datum in psychology" (James 1981: cap.IX, § 1).<sup>7</sup> In *Does Consciousness Exit?*, as well as in *A World of Pure Experience*, it is no longer the strictly personal consciousness that is already given but the continuum of experience.<sup>8</sup> Some remarks are important for a better

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<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, James's *Principles* are marked by tensions and ambiguities also with regard to the issue of consciousness, as is interestingly acknowledged by Dewey in an essay dating back to 1940, whose eloquent title is *The Vanishing Subject in the Psychology of James* (Dewey 1988 b).

<sup>8</sup> I owe to Kenneth Stickers an interesting detail about Wilhelm Jerusalem, the Austrian scholar who translated James's *Pragmatism* into German and worked on the project of founding epistemology and logic on social psychology. Jerusalem still suggested to use the German word "*Erlebnis*" (rather than "*Erfahrung*") for

understanding of James's shift from the stream of consciousness to the experiential continuum – without denying some problems in James's theory of neutral monism that cannot be the object of this inquiry. Negatively, experience is no longer understood as a kind of interior dimension; on the contrary, it is everything which occurs without the need for an underlying foundation – “In radical empiricism there is no bedding; it is as the pieces clung together by their edges, the transitions experienced between them forming their cement” (see the “Conclusion” of *A Word of Pure Experience*).<sup>9</sup> “There is no general stuff of which experience at large is made” (*Does Consciousness Exist?*, section V): experience is made of everything – stuff, nature, features – we experience and consequently it is genuinely pluralistic. It is the dynamic world, including human life, which is not perceived as an exclusive property belonging to a personal consciousness; on the contrary, it simply is what it is: namely, superabundant, chaotic, vague, without sharp edges dividing one part from another (see Gavin 1992). I suggest we could understand the term ‘radical’ that is attributed to empiricism to mean the rich and vague plurality of processes that do not need any reference to principles transcending them. James wanted to account for this immediate experience we adhere to before posing any philosophical question and any real or merely artificial doubt (see Colapietro in this volume).

Of course, we could object that James's insistence on *pure* experience as “plain unqualified actuality, a simple *that*, as yet undifferentiated into thing and thought, and only virtually classifiable as objective fact or as someone's opinion about fact” (*A World of Pure Experience*, section V) is the late result of a sophisticated philosophical approach.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that James clearly does not refer to the dogmatic assumption of pure experience as a neutral given, assumed as the ground for cognition. On the contrary, James alludes to the continuum of dynamic processes – both organic and environmental – in which we are embedded before we can functionally establish whether something is either subjective or objective, whether it should be an attribute of things or thoughts, of physical reality or the mind. We practically adhere to this kind of continuum before specific cognitive relations take place between certain parts of experience and others. The immediacy of experience, in this broad and inclusive sense, is not at all a cognitive feature, because it is already there whenever it becomes necessary to distinguish a knower from the known, because a real doubt (not a paper one) arises from what Dewey will later describe as an indeterminate situation.

As a matter of fact, this reshaping of the role and place of knowledge within experience will represent one of the strengths of Dewey's approach to the issue – he will later make it much more explicit and develop all its consequences.

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“experience” in James's later works. In my opinion, this choice was connected to the strong influence of James's *Principles* on his readers – the same influence that pushed Wittgenstein to consider James as the paradigm of a dogmatic conception of introspection. Kenneth Stickers says that Jerusalem's preference for “*Erlebnis*” was connected to his criticism of James with respect to the lack of the social dimension of experience in his thought (Stickers 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Lanfredini (2017) interprets this change in James's thought in phenomenological terms, by arguing that with this new conception of experience James abandons any primacy previously attributed to the subjective (or noetic) pole of experience at the expenses of the objective (or noematic) pole.

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<sup>10</sup> Gavin (in Gavin 1992, 4) claims that James was deeply conscious of the impossibility of foregoing any theoretical disposition toward the object of philosophy, even when it consists in the allegedly “unarticulate” tissue of immediate experience: although theories and languages are structurally “directional”, they are “not dismissable”. His answer, according to Gavin, consisted in adopting a method of vigilance, while, at the same time, resisting the temptation to “clean up the vague” for epistemological reasons.

In my opinion, Dewey will also further develop another aspect foreshadowed in the *Essays in Radical Empiricism* in his 1925 volume, namely James's reference to so-called "affectual facts".

James transformed one of the cruxes of modern philosophy into an argument in favor of his anti-dualistic conception of experience – his idea of integral and practical experience as prior to and exceeding dualistic distinctions, such as mind and world, subject and object and so on. In a nutshell, the traditional philosophical problem is whether appreciations of values – both aesthetic and ethical ones – should be considered subjective or objective. For example, what is painful? Are some objects painful or should the property be attributed to the experiences we have of them? Is a certain figure fascinating or are we projecting a quality of our *Erlebnis* onto the object at stake? Are morally valuable characteristics *in res* or in the subject who is experiencing them? Is beauty an attribute of the object (a work of art or a natural landscape) or is it located in the eyes of those who appreciate beauty?

James takes advantage of the "chaotic", "hybrid", and "ambiguous" character of this class of experiences. According to James, the never-ending debate on the subjective or objective character of qualities shows that it is misleading and inconclusive to attempt to definitely regiment them by attributing them either to a *res cogitans* or to a *res extensa*, which is to say two modes of being (psychic and physical, mental and neural) which are supposed to be completely discontinuous. Alternatively, we can draw functional and contextual distinctions, for example, between a pain that is serious and in need to be nursed and a pain that is the result of hypochondria. Those distinctions are connected to the relations we assume as crucial from time to time at the expense of other relations we tend to overlook in the continuum of experience. In other words, the fact of characterizing something as either subjective or objective does not depend on the metaphysical stuff or nature out of which it is allegedly constituted. By means

of a deflationary argument, James states that these distinctions between the various phases of an experience respond to our temporary needs and to an ever-changing context.

Dewey will develop James's idea that these affective qualities of experience (he will also speak of them as "esthetic") exercise an effective role in our experiences, by conferring emphasis or enhancing them at the expenses of other features, as well as by making them more interesting – in more contemporary terms, we might say that these qualitative features in experience tend to draw salience lines and to control our orienting in the environment.

In any case, this kind of emphasis, salience and the like hardly seems to be the last result of an inferential process; consequently, a serious tension seems to arise between the Peirce of *Some Consequences of Four Incapacities Claimed for Man* and James's radical empiricism. Dewey was faced the difficult task of putting these two profound yet apparently opposite issues back together. On the one hand, he did so by recognizing the crucial role and the irreversible change produced in the very structures of human experience by the emergence of language and semiotic processes; on the other hand, by avoiding a kind of philosophical straining, namely the attribution of an inferential structure (if only a hypothetical and incomplete one) to each and every human interaction with the environment.

#### **4. Dewey's ways out of a philosophical impasse**

John Dewey shared Peirce's and (virtually) Wittgenstein's profound criticism of immediate experience understood as the direct perception of one's own mental contents (Dewey 2004: 8-9, 13). He was very far from assuming a conception of inwardness as a privileged kind of experience that is supposed to be given directly and primarily to the subject, who could have an unmediated access to it and consequently adhere to it as a locus of certainty immune to any doubt.

Dewey's understanding of experience was very remote from the *Erlebnis* model – not only for theoretical reasons but also because of the socio-political consequences of the misuse of this concept in relation to everyday life, as is evident in *Individualism Old and New*.<sup>11</sup>

On the contrary, Dewey had a very inclusive idea of experience, as something unfolding in the natural and human world and involving the complex of dynamic and historic processes that have to do with human actions in the real world. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey famously stated that

[...] experience is *of* as well as *in* nature. It is not experience that is experienced, but nature – stones, plants, animals, diseases, health, temperature, electricity, and so on. Things interacting in certain ways *are* experience; they are what is experienced. Linked in certain ways with another natural object – the human organism – they are *how* things are experienced as well. (Dewey 1981: 12-13).

Dewey insistently highlights that human actions and sufferings are as real as natural events because they are natural events dynamically contributing to changing and shaping the environment to which they belong. As a consequence, this picture of experience has a strong sense of contingency to it, an awareness of a structural lack of clear and complete epistemic transparency, as well as an explicit assumption of the hypothetical, risky and provisional character of our truth claims – not because they are supposed to be merely subjective but because both the organic and environmental conditions for interaction are always shifting (see Calcaterra, 2011).

Taking a step back, it is useful to focus on the connection between organic life and the environment, which constitutes the core of Dewey's idea of

experience. From his point of view, Darwin's evolutionary biology offers some beneficial feedback on philosophical distortions because it definitely abandons the traditional modern assumption that human subjects are independent entities dealing with an already given and complete reality that exists *per se*. This assumption dissolves when considering some "biological commonplaces" (Dewey 1989: 20): all living beings, including humans, depend on an environment to survive, flourish and die; life goes on in and by means of an "environmental medium, not in a vacuum" (Dewey 1980: 7). Furthermore, living beings belong to an environment on which they depend and with which they continuously interact. Consequently, they constantly contribute to changing their environment from within to a more or less wide extent.

At the end of *The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy*, Dewey sums up the possible effects of Darwin's evolutionary biology for developing a sounder philosophical conception of experience. First of all, "If biological development be accepted, the subject of experience is at least an animal, continuous with other organic forms in a process of more complex organization" (Dewey 1980: 26), because different forms of life stand out through the greater or lesser degree of complexity of their interactions with an environment. Moreover (and foreshadowing the more recent idea of neural reductionism), "experience is not identical with brain action; it is the entire organic agent-patient in all its interaction with the environment, natural and social. The brain is primarily an organ of a certain kind of behavior, not of knowing the world" (*ibidem*). Finally, "experience means primarily not knowledge, but ways of doing and suffering" (*ibidem*).

To sum up, experience is constituted by the dynamic interactions between human organisms and their natural as well as naturally social environment.

<sup>11</sup> On this issue see Calcaterra 2013, introducing the Italian translation of Dewey's 1929 volume. On the "Pathology of Inwardness" see also Lothstein 1977. See Dreon 2015 on Dewey's criticism of the political and economic consequences of an exclusive cultivation of one's own inner life at the expense of real emancipation.

This kind of approach to experience makes it possible to speak plausibly and non-dogmatically of immediate experience, by denying that there exist any forms of direct, non-inferential knowledge.

By reading Dewey's texts as though they were mainly aimed at solving the whole issue and by simplifying the complexity of his lines of thought, I suggest that his answer could be connected to three main arguments. (1) Dewey endorses a conception of experience as something including vital interactions that are not primarily or eminently cognitive relations, by at the same time downsizing the role of knowledge in experience. (2) Furthermore, he decisively emphasizes the aesthetic, qualitative or affective meanings of things, persons and situations in primary experience. (3) Finally, he adopts a non-foundational, circular conception of the relationship between reflective and eminently qualitative phases of experience, so that the results of previous reflective inquiries are absorbed by primarily qualitative experience and react on it, enriching its depth and complexity.<sup>12</sup>

Let's now consider these lines of thought more analytically.

**4.1.** In *Experience and Nature*, there is room for immediate experience – Dewey seems to favor the formula “primary” experience over “immediate” experience, even though he does not stick to a fixed expression. In the first chapter of the 1925 volume, he claims that all forms of unreflective primary experience are unquestionable. If we read this statement through a Peircian lens, Dewey is supporting the idea that we cannot really suspend our belief in “gross, macroscopic, crude subject-matters in primary experience” (Dewey

1988: 15); if we did, this would be a clear case of a “paper doubt”, namely an artificial and derived doubt (see Colapietro in this volume). In Dewey's language, it would be a philosophical fallacy, consisting in the assumption of the refined outcomes of a reflective inquiry as though they were the primary elemental features of experience.

For Dewey, everything happening in the world – things and circumstances that hinder us or simply happen to us and have an impact on our lives – is not primary in the sense of representing the first neutral data on which knowledge is based. Rather, these elements are primary in the sense that they are already there, something which has already happened to us and has already conditioned our actions and behaviors before a specific cognitive problem arises and elicits a process of inquiry. In a formula, it is life that is primarily at stake in experience, rather than knowledge. By returning to Peirce and his phenomenological categories, we could translate Dewey's distinction between primary, “consummatory” experience and more reflective phases of experience in terms of relations: primarily dyadic relations, which bear the impact – be it favorable or unfavorable – of something on our lives, are the more inclusive background in which triadic or symbolic references can be developed as further chances, whenever necessary. When something does not work in our largely habitual interactions with the environment, the opportunity for inference is opened up – but knowledge is a secondary or intermediate phase in the temporal development of experience, as Dewey emphasizes in his 1916 introduction to his *Essays in Experimental Logic*:

But it is indispensable to note that [...] the intellectual element is set in a context which is noncognitive and which holds within it in suspense a vast complex of other qualities and things that in the experience itself are objects of esteem or aversion, of decision, of use, of suffering, of endeavour and revolt, not knowledge (Dewey 2004).

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<sup>12</sup> For a different point of view on the opportuneness of speaking about immediate experience, see Ryder (forthcoming). The core of Ryder's argument is grounded in the development of Justus Buchler's distinction between query and inquiry rather than in Dewey's distinction between primary experience and reflective experience.

This does not mean that knowledge enters into experience as an alien or transcendent feature. On the contrary, if all experience is of nature as well as in nature,

[e]xperience thus reaches down into nature; it has depth. It also had breadth and to an indefinitely elastic extent. It stretches. That stretch constitutes inference (Dewey 1981:13).

Inference is, for Dewey, “the use of what happens, to anticipate what will—or at least may—happen” and it “makes the difference between directed and undirected participation” (Dewey 1980: 16). It is the capacity to see something happening now as the sign of some possible consequences in the future, it is a more or less risky forecast – an abduction – of whether propitious or painful events might take place. It is an extremely powerful tool in human experience, decisively extending – “stretching” – its chances beyond those limits that are out of reach for non-human forms of life. Consequently, inference is an intrinsic feature in human experience,<sup>13</sup> yet it does not exhaust its qualitative complexity. Thought and reason are reflective modalities in experience which are elicited primarily by practical difficulties regarding human actions when we face the problem of what to do in new and unexpected circumstances. Reason in action is the process of returning to an indeterminate situation, by trying to analytically discriminate the vague, qualitatively thick features of primary experience – where we mostly move habitually, without any need for analysis. Inquiries are grounded in attempts to draw distinctions in the rich and largely continuous fabric of primary experience, by means of procedures that are functional to producing a

<sup>13</sup> See *The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy*, where Dewey says that experience “is full of inference” (Dewey 1980: 6) in the sense that, if we abandon the atomistic point of view of classical empiricism, we cannot but acknowledge that connections and continuities are pervasive in our experiences. In this reasoning we can perceive Dewey’s capacity to put together Peirce’s and James’s different approaches by undoing their (sometimes) apparent contrasts.

hypothesis, i.e. to making inferences – that are more or less complete and more or less risky, according to Peirce’s lesson – about further consequences.<sup>14</sup> To sum up, this stretching of experience to meet needs stemming from experience itself is still an internal chance, although an impressive one.

**4.2.** Dewey’s emphasis on the qualitative or aesthetic aspects of primary, unreflective experience represents a second important element for developing a non-dogmatic conception of immediacy. Qualitative, aesthetic or affective features are not to be considered in eminently cognitive terms, as properties channeled through mere sensory perception, which would constitute the purely descriptive ground of subsequent cognitive processes (be they inferential or interpretative). On the contrary, Dewey wanted philosophy to acknowledge that in ordinary, everyday life, each time something happens to us, things, other persons and events are immediately felt as hostile or favorable, welcoming or detrimental, sweet or bitter, bearing hope or anxiety, as well as boring and indifferent. They are “immediately felt” not for any metaphysical reason, but simply because there is no native separation between an alleged merely sensory level of data and a subsequent affective quality which would be subjectively superimposed upon them. These two alleged levels can be abstracted and distinguished only later on for specific reasons and purposes when something goes wrong and a process of inquiry must be developed. Dewey uses the words *felt* or *had*, by contrast to *known* – and this is the reason why he speaks of aesthetic qualities or meanings by referring to a kind of affectively oriented sensibility, rather than to sense perception as a basic feature of an eminently cognitive

<sup>14</sup> In *The Philosophy of Gestures*, Maddalena emphasizes that analysis should be regarded as an intermediate phase between two synthetic moments in experience and, consequently, that discrimination should be considered an internal chance within a basic continuum (Maddalena 2015).



framework.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, hostility and sympathy, bitterness and joy, hope and anxiety should not be considered “self-enclosed states of feeling, but [as] active attitudes of welcome and wariness” (Dewey 1980: 10). They are not merely subjective qualities: on the contrary, they are real qualities characterizing real connections<sup>16</sup> and interactions taking place between organisms and the environment. Moreover, qualitative experience is not primarily cognitive because it is connected to the biological and anthropological dimension of life, which is structurally exposed to an environment on which life depends at different levels of complexity and which, consequently, always has an impact and a basic (biological or existential, not cognitive) meaning for life itself. In these cases, references are direct, connecting life and its environment; they are not inferential because they basically assume the impact of an *Umwelt* on life – which deals primarily with existential connections and not with logical relations and triadic references, considering something that is not actually present as a sign for a possible consequence. From this perspective, Dewey could be seen to be re-using and re-interpreting Peirce’s phenomenological categories of Firstness and Secondness (see Dewey 1998) against the more one-sided young Peirce, who may be regarded as considering

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<sup>15</sup> This use of the word “esthetic” is basically consistent with James’s and Peirce’s approaches (see Shusterman 2011, Maddalena 2014 and Innis 2014). Nonetheless, I think that Dewey developed and made more coherent a claim that was already to be found in the works of classical pragmatists.

Marcuse draws an exemplary distinction of these two ways of understanding sensibility in the chapter on the aesthetic dimension in his book *Eros and Civilization*, by contrasting an epistemologically oriented conception of sensibility with an affective and embodied sensitivity, basically animated by desires and refusals – or longings and concerns, to speak in more Jamesian and Deweyan terms.

<sup>16</sup> In Dewey 1980, the philosopher suggests that we distinguish between connections, which are existential, and relations, which can be understood as merely logical relationships. He probably introduced this distinction because he sought to avoid certain misunderstandings that could arise in reading James on “relations”.

inferential processes pervasive in every form of experience.

I suggest that Dewey expanded and radicalized the role of James’s so-called “affective facts” in experience (see also Shusterman 2011). First of all, things happen to us as pleasant or painful, hateful, tragic or joyful, they are nice or ugly, and we welcome or reject them: qualitative or aesthetic characterization is pervasive in human experience. At the same time, qualities are not merely descriptive properties, because they are laden with a sort of proto-evaluation that is not based on any inference but on the direct impact of a certain situation on one’s own life. In *Art as Experience* (Dewey 1989, Chap. XI), Dewey explains that aesthetic qualities (and, later on, artistic qualities) should not be interpreted as either subjective or objective properties, depending on the context and its specific purpose. Partially redirecting James’s interpretation of “affective facts”, Dewey says that aesthetic qualities concern the specific relations taking place between the various components or phases of an experience, which are just as real as the things and entities involved in an interaction, because they have consequences and affect the dynamic configuration of the environment. But Dewey is also very careful to avoid any hypostatization: qualities are not entities but modes of relation, they concern the ways in which interactions take place between human organisms and their natural as well as social and cultural environment.

**4.3.** Nonetheless, the most important point in Dewey’s approach, in my opinion, is that his distinction between primary and reflective experience is not foundational – and probably it is for this reason that he avoids James’s use of the ambivalent adjective “pure” to characterize primarily qualitative experience. The distinction between qualitative experience and reflective inquiries cannot be a founding element because human beings are animals who, from the very beginning, find themselves caught in the middle of communicative and linguistic interactions as well as inferential processes, which belong to a

community more than they do to any individual speaker and knower. All of this interferes with and has consequences for qualitative experience, which incorporates the results of previous inquiries and is modified by them, whether it is enriched or impoverished. There is a kind of circular process which moves from qualitatively thick experience to analysis, hypothesis, and inference each time a difficulty arises about what can or should be done in a specific context. On the other hand, the outputs of reflective experiences cannot but return to the primary experience out of which the need for them emerged and through which their strength will be tested. Consequently, primary experience is continuously re-set and re-shaped, in some way or other: I correct my disposition to act if a particular mode of action works better than another in a new context of action. Primary experience checks the efficacy of the outputs of previous inquiries and appropriates them in largely unconscious ways when something unexpected and disrupting happens that requires a reassessment.

From this point of view, the results of knowledge and inferences are everywhere in human experience, even in primarily qualitative and non-cognitive experiences of what ordinarily happens. However – as is clear from Dewey's *Rejoinder* to some objections presented in the volume edited by Schlipp (Dewey 1939) – the American philosopher states that we should distinguish between knowledge understood as process *in actu* and the outputs of previous inquiries, which are absorbed and (collectively) established in primarily qualitative experience, and assumed as an integral part of the experiential fabric. Qualitative experience can be more or less vague, yet it is nonetheless appropriate when things unfold normally and there is no hindrance.

At present in our culture, even the man on the street immediately sees the thick brush strokes of a Van Gogh's painting as wheat in the hot summer fields of the Mediterranean, rather than as nervous splotches, without the need for any inferential process. Differently,

a *Deutung* becomes crucial for the art expert who is expected to distinguish whether a painting is an authentic Van Gogh or a mere daub. Similarly, an uneducated elderly woman will say that she is *suffering* from gastritis, while her physician must *investigate* the causes of this and find possible remedies, if the old lady asks him for help when she can no longer endure her condition.

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**IMMEDIACY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD  
WITTGENSTEIN, THE PROBLEM OF LIFE  
AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE “PROBLEMATIC”**

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*Here one can only describe and say:  
this is what human life is  
Ludwig Wittgenstein  
(Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough)<sup>1</sup>*

**ABSTRACT:** The paper intends to clarify the use that Wittgenstein makes, in various moments and contexts, of the adjective “problematic” and of the adjective-used-as-a-noun “the problematic”, as well as to demonstrate that this clarification may teach a lot on the aims and spirit of Wittgenstein’s philosophical method. Particularly, the paper drives at exposing (a) that what Wittgenstein names “the disappearing of the problematic” is, at one and the same time, his primary ethical goal and the main purpose of his philosophic method; (b) that referring to this purpose, both ethical and philosophical, one can better understand some peculiar aspects of his philosophical method, in particular his repetitive claim of immediacy, which shall be identified with the invitation that covers his entire philosophy: “to regard what appears so obviously incomplete, as something complete”.

**Keywords:** Wittgenstein; philosophical method; problem; ethics; immediacy

**Premise**

The scholarly literature on Wittgenstein rarely points out the use that – at different times and places in his writings – he makes of the adjective “problematic” (*problematisch*) and of the adjective-used-as-a-noun “the problematic” (*das Problematische*). In this essay, I would like to amend this (partial) inattention,<sup>2</sup> particularly believing that a clarification of this use can teach a lot, both in general and in detail, on the aims and spirit of Wittgenstein’s philosophical method.

More in depth, in the first two sections I would like to demonstrate that (1) it is exactly the disappearing of the problematic which constitutes the principal aim of

(his) philosophical method, while at the same time the disappearing of the problematic is (his) principal ethical aim too; an aim that – may one be a professional philosopher or not – is fulfilled when one is “in agreement with the world” (Wittgenstein 1979, 75; 8 July 1916),<sup>3</sup> that is, when one lives what another passage of the *Notebooks 1914-1916* calls “the life of knowledge”;<sup>4</sup> in the last section I shall show (2) that it is precisely this aim (the disappearing of the problematic) that may clarify why it is philosophically so important to Wittgenstein (a) to reject that “contemptuous attitude<sup>5</sup> towards the particular case” which, in his analysis, stems from the idea that the particular case is incomplete (Wittgenstein 1969a, 18-19) and (b) to renounce – as difficult as it may be – all theory in order “to regard what appears so obviously incomplete, as something complete” (Wittgenstein 1980a, I, §723).

Wittgenstein’s philosophy, if regarded from the perspective of its method, contains – we may say or maintain synthetically – a kind of peculiar call to immediacy: immediate is what we look at as complete, although incomplete (“obviously incomplete”) it may seem, if considered from the perspective of theory (of science or of metaphysics; that is, of philosophy as a science). To the scientist or the metaphysicist that

<sup>3</sup> “In order to live happily I must be in agreement with the world. And that is what ‘being happy’ means” (Wittgenstein 1979, 75; 8 July 1916). “I am in agreement with the world” means, in the language of religion, “I am doing the will of God”. (Wittgenstein 1979, 75).

<sup>4</sup> “The good conscience is the happiness that the life of knowledge preserves. / The life of knowledge is the life that is happy in spite of the misery of the world. / The only life that is happy is the life that can renounce the amenities of the world. / To it the amenities of the world are so many graces of fate” (Wittgenstein 1979, 81; 13 August 1916). The knowledge implied in the expression “the life of knowledge” isn’t, evidently, scientific knowledge. Let’s recall here that, according to the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, “[p]hilosophy is not one of the natural science”; indeed, “[p]hilosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity” whose aim is “the logical clarification of thoughts” (Wittgenstein 1974, 4.111 and 4.112).

<sup>5</sup> It is by no means irrelevant that, in order to describe the philosophical behaviour he wants to resist, Wittgenstein makes use of an adjective (“contemptuous”) and a noun (“contempt”), which are markedly ethical.

<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein 1993, 121.

<sup>2</sup> With regard to the Wittgensteinian notion of (philosophical) problem see Kuusela 2008.

affirm: If you don't complete it, you won't understand it, indeed Wittgenstein wants to reply and induces us to rebuke: “If you complete it, you falsify it” (Wittgenstein 1980a, I, §257). Hence, that of Wittgenstein is not a philosophy of immediacy, even though a call to immediacy is one means of his philosophical method.

### Wittgenstein and the problem of life

As far as our aim is concerned, the first occurrence of the adjective “problematic” is in the *Notebooks 1914-1916*, more precisely in an annotation of July 6, 1916. In this context the adjective “problematic”, referred to life and its meaning,<sup>6</sup> appears in a question that is almost the *Leitmotiv* of many annotations in these difficult months of Wittgenstein's life:<sup>7</sup> “But is it possible for one so to live that life stops being problematic?” (Wittgenstein 1979, 74).<sup>8</sup> As becomes clear in the subsequent annotation, to ask whether it is possible to live as if life ceased to be problematic means for Wittgenstein to ask if (and how) it may be possible to live “in eternity and not in time” (Wittgenstein 1979, 74). However, we ourselves could ask, why a life in time should be problematic? And in what respect and what for a life in eternity would be any different from a life in time? And what does it mean to live in eternity?

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<sup>6</sup> In this regard, see also the annotation of June 11, 1916: “What do I know about God and the purpose of life? / I know that this world exists. / [...] / That something about it is problematic, which we call its meaning (*Sinn*)” (Wittgenstein 1979, 72-73).

<sup>7</sup> We should keep in mind that already in August 1914, that is, at the outbreak of World War I, Wittgenstein volunteered in the Austrian–Hungarian army and that since then he had actively taken part to the warfare on the Eastern front, often in difficult and dangerous conditions. With regard to Wittgenstein's war experience and the meaning it may hold see McGuinness 1988, 204-266.

<sup>8</sup> It deserves to be noted that this question resonates in a famous paragraph of the *Philosophical Investigations*, although this time with regard to philosophy and not to life: “The real discovery [in philosophy] is the one [...] that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question” (Wittgenstein 2009, I, §133).

The answer between the lines of the *Notebooks 1914-1916* is that someone definitely lives in time, when oscillating with regard to the meaning of life, between “not anymore” and “not yet”, between nostalgia of a supposedly lost meaning and hope of a meaning yet to be discovered.<sup>9</sup> In any case, what appears relevant to notice is that the solution to the problem of life – both for the one who looks back at the origin and for the one that observes the future – is (supposing it is) never in the life that we are *now* living. It may be clear, then, why living “in eternity” or living “eternally” are the same to Wittgenstein as living “in the present”, of course “[i]f by eternity is understood non infinite temporal duration but non-temporality” (Wittgenstein 1979, 75); but it may even be possible to understand how he could write, in an annotation a month earlier, that there is only one way to become “independent of the world – and so in a certain sense master it – by renouncing any influence on happenings (*auf die Geschehnisse*)” (Wittgenstein 1979, 73; June 1916).<sup>10</sup> As a matter of fact, those who try to influence the events necessarily live in time; that is, between the hope that events shall correspond to their desires and that they shall serve to fulfil their projects, and the fear that these events may miss the former and fail the latter. After all, as pointed out by the *Tractatus* in

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<sup>9</sup> Both nostalgia as well as hope are accompanied by fear: the fear of a permanent loss of that sense or the fear that sense will never be discovered. It is indeed for this reason that “[w]hoever lives in the present lives without fear and hope” (Wittgenstein 1979, 76; 14 July 1916).

<sup>10</sup> This annotation recalls other annotations which date back to the late Summer of 1914 and are now published in the so-called *Geheimene Tagebücher*: “Nur eines ist nötig: Alles, was einem geschieht, betrachten”; “Habe mir gestern Vorgenommen, *keinen Widerstand zu leisten*”; “Mein Vorhaben der vollkommenen Passivität habe ich noch nicht recht ausgeführt”; “Zur vollkommenen Passivität habe ich mich noch nicht entschlossen” [“Just one thing is necessary: To observe everything, that happens to someone”; “Obliged myself yesterday, *not to make any resistance*”; “Did not yet carry out my plan of absolute passivity”; “I did not yet make up my mind to absolute passivity” ] (Wittgenstein 1991, annotations of August 25, 26 and 29 and of September 6, 1914).



one of its most suggestive passages, "[e]ven if all that we wish for were to happen, still this would only be a favour granted by fate, so to speak" (Wittgenstein 1974, 6.374).<sup>11</sup> Desires, one should say, are merely prayers.

A second occurrence of the adjective "problematic" as well as of the adjective-used-as-a-noun "the problematic" can be found in a remark now published in *Culture and Value*. The first three paragraphs of this remark, dated 27 August 1937, read as follows:

Slept a bit better. Vivid dreams. A bit depressed; weather & state of health. / The solution of the problem you see in life is a way of living which makes what is problematic disappear. / The fact that life is problematic means that your life does not fit life's shape (*die Form des Lebens*). So you must change your life, & once it fits the shape, what is problematic (*das Problematische*) will disappear (Wittgenstein 2006, 31).

As in the *Notebooks 1914-1916*, here too Wittgenstein deals with the problem of life,<sup>12</sup> although the diagnosis is – at least partially – different:<sup>13</sup> in 1916, problematic is the life of those who live "in time"; in 1931, problematic becomes – so it seems – the life that "does not fit life's shape". However, there is the same belief that life's problem is not of a scientific or cognitive nature<sup>14</sup> and

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Wittgenstein continues saying, "there is no logical connexion between the will and the world, which could guarantee it, and the supposed physical connexion itself is surely not something that we could will" (Wittgenstein 1974, 6.374). Proposition 6.374 is a comment on proposition 6.37: "There is no compulsion making one thing happen because another has happened. The only necessity that exists is *logical necessity*".

<sup>12</sup> Obviously the circumstances differed a lot. In 1931 Wittgenstein was in Cambridge with a fellowship, thus in a condition which – at least at an outward look – was very different from the one he found himself in 1916. With regard to this period of Wittgenstein's life, see Monk 1991, 255-280.

<sup>13</sup> Even the formulation is slightly different: "the problem of life" becomes here "the problem you see in life".

<sup>14</sup> "It is certainly not the solution of any problems of natural science that is required" (Wittgenstein 1974, 6.4312). "The facts all contribute only to setting the problem, not to its solution" (Wittgenstein 1974, 6.4321).

the certainty that its solution does not depend on a major or better knowledge of facts, be they physical, biological, psychological, historical etc. Hence, life is not a problem because we still don't know enough or because we ignore many things yet, about ourselves, nature, history etc. Indeed, as can be found in the *Tractatus*, "[h]ow things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher" (Wittgenstein 1974, 6.432).<sup>15</sup> It is thus by no means a chance that in these annotations of 1931 Wittgenstein reiterates – almost to the letter – what he maintained already in the *Notebooks 1914-1916* (Wittgenstein 1979, 74) and later in the *Tractatus*, that is that "[t]he solution of the problem of life is to be seen in the disappearance of this problem" (Wittgenstein 1974, 6.521).<sup>16</sup>

One still needs to ask, though, how life should change according to Wittgenstein in order for the problematic to disappear. At a first glance we may think he is recalling – in a slightly Platonic or Platonist manner – a sort of conflict between ideal and real, as if he intended that such a life is problematic, which is not how it should be and, thus, is not entirely or in its deepest sense life. However, there are various reasons to hold this interpretation implausible. Primarily the reason is the divide between ideal and real, as with other divides – for instance the one between interior and exterior<sup>17</sup> – always was a main critical target of Wittgenstein. Coherently, according to this stance, we shouldn't say life is a problem since it doesn't correspond to its ideal, but rather that those who live life as a problem produce

<sup>15</sup> The continuation of proposition 6.432 ("God does not reveal himself *in* the world") suggests one should consider "what is higher" (*das Höhere*) and "God" as synonyms; however, we must not forget that in the *Notebooks 1914-1916* Wittgenstein wrote "The meaning of life, i.e. the meaning of the world, we can call God" (Wittgenstein 1979, 73; 11 June 1916).

<sup>16</sup> "Is not this the reason – observes Wittgenstein in brackets – why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constituted that sense?" (Wittgenstein 1974, 6.521).

<sup>17</sup> On Wittgenstein's attitude toward the inner-outer divide see, for instance, ter Hark 2001.



– so to speak – the split between real and ideal. Even disguised as a discovery or vision, here the ideal is nothing but a need or requirement generated by our own dissatisfaction towards life; and this dissatisfaction eventually and simply grows, as Wittgenstein clearly demonstrates in the *Philosophical Investigations*, when addressing that conviction that logic has to do with an ideal language “supposed to be something pure and clear-cut”, instead of our actual language. (Wittgenstein 2009, I, §105). Here he writes, thinking also but not exclusively of the *Tractatus*:

The more closely we examine actual language, the greater becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not something I had discovered: it was a requirement). The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming vacuous” (Wittgenstein 2009, I, §107).<sup>18</sup>

The life which, through change, fits its shape cannot thus be the life which is finally in accordance with the ideal, but the life that – so to speak – is in accordance with itself; that is, the life which again according to the *Notebooks 1914-1916* “no longer needs to have any purpose except to live” (Wittgenstein 1979, 73; 6 July 1916).

With regard to life as well as to language, hence, Platonism with its divide between ideal and real is but a symptom, perhaps even a cause of the problem, and hardly ever (only) the beginning of the solution. It is by no means a chance that Wittgenstein thought precisely of Socrates when he was trying to understand why; in the years of the *Tractatus*, in addressing the problems of logic he was experiencing what Russell felt (as he often did in their conversations) when exclaiming “Logic’s hell”, “namely their immense difficulty. Their hardness –

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<sup>18</sup> The paragraph continues as follows: “We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction, and so, in a certain sense, the conditions are ideal; but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk; so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!” (Wittgenstein 2009, I, §107).

their hard & *slippery* texture” (Wittgenstein 2006, 35; 1 October 1937). Wittgenstein seemingly maintains that at the origin of their mutual experience was the fact “that each new phenomenon of language that *they* might retrospectively think of could show *their* earlier explanation to be unworkable” (Wittgenstein 2006, 35). This is precisely the moment when Socrates comes in.

But that – he writes – is the difficulty Socrates gets caught up when he tries to give the definition of a concept. Again and again an application of word emerges that seems not to be compatible with the concept to which other application have led us. We say but that *isn’t* how it is! – it *is* like that though! – & all we can do is keep repeating these antitheses” (Wittgenstein 2006, 35).

It isn’t difficult to imagine the reader’s objections at the first few paragraphs of the annotations dated August 27, 1937, which are being scrutinised. One could object, for instance, that the life from which the problematic eventually disappears is the life that settles for how it always lived or the life of whom, instead of living, is being lived. According to political language, this person would be a conservative bourgeois; someone who substituted “status” with “life” and of whom could be said what Wittgenstein observed on Frank Ramsey; that is, “[t]he idea that this state might not be the only possible one partly disquieted him and partly bored him” (Wittgenstein 2006, 24).<sup>19</sup> Wittgenstein was absolutely conscious of this possible or even very predictable reaction; a reaction he was not insensitive to, as the two questions following the aforementioned paragraphs demonstrate:

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<sup>19</sup> Wittgenstein begins this annotation on November 11, 1931, defining Ramsey “a bourgeois thinker” (Wittgenstein 1979, 24). The topic of the relationship and reciprocal influence between Ramsey and Wittgenstein is such an interesting one, as much as it is a complex one which, in any case, goes far beyond our brief quote, further involving the more general question of Wittgenstein’s relationship to pragmatism. Many useful indications may now be found in Misak 2016.

But don't we have the feeling that someone who doesn't see a problem there [in his or her life] is blind to something important, indeed to what is most important of all? / Wouldn't I like to say he is living aimlessly – just blindly like a mole as it were; & if he could only see, he would see the problem? (Wittgenstein 2006, 31).

In reading this passage, it almost appears there is no alternative between seeing the problem and living "blindly like a mole". Hence, since no one fancies to be blind like a mole, it seems we must accept living life like a problem. With due caution,<sup>20</sup> Wittgenstein attempts though to offer an escape that consists in distinguishing between two modes of experiencing the problem of life; he observes that it can be lived "as sorrow", as a sort of "murky background", that is "as a problem", but that some may even live it "as joy", that is "as a bright halo round his life". Only one who "lives rightly", Wittgenstein suggests, experiments the problem as joy and, thus, "not after all as a problem" (Wittgenstein 2006, 31).

The fact that life is a problem doesn't implicate that it shall also be that it is a problem that life is a problem. The problem of life, one could say, is a first order problem that needs to be separated from that second order problem, which is the problem that life is a problem. Only those who are capable to do this – that is, not to live as if the problem of life was a problem – live the problem as joy, meaning they live it as a *part* of life and not as sorrow, not as something that brings life itself into in question.<sup>21</sup>

An annotation that follows slightly after may help us to focus better the point, when Wittgenstein observes that today's situation is such "that ordinary common sense no longer suffices to meet the strange demands life makes". Indeed, while in the past (for instance in traditional societies) it sufficed "to be able to play the game well", today "the question is again and again: what

sort of game is to be played now anyway?" (Wittgenstein 2006, 31). This is the problem we have now; living this problem as joy means thus living it as a part of the life we are living, acknowledging there is no way to live this life and, together, deny the question: "what sort of game is to be played now anyway?". One could say that those who live this problem as joy accept life and, thus, accept its problem, while those who live it as sorrow find in this problem something besetting and threatening, like "a murky background". In a language reminiscent of Nietzsche, we could say that the first ones say yes to life, while the second ones say no instead. Or less emphatically, that one thing are the problems in life and another one is life as a problem.

#### From the problem of life to the method of philosophy

What connects though these observations of Wittgenstein on the problem of life to the way of intending and practising philosophy? A first hint can be found in an annotation of June 29, 1930, which was also collected in *Culture and Value*. The annotation is made of two long sentences, the first one being very similar in tone and content to the previously scrutinised remarks. This is what they maintain, in fact:

If anyone should think he has solved the problem of life & feels like telling himself everything is quite easy now, he need only tell himself, in order to see that he is wrong, that there was a time when "this" solution had not been discovered; but it must have been possible to live *then* too & the solution which has now been discovered appears in relation to how things were then like an accident (Wittgenstein 2006, 6).

Here Wittgenstein dispenses a sort of test to anyone who thinks he or she eventually found the solution to the problem of life; a test that can be easily explained with an example. Indeed, we could compare the solution to the problem of life to the invention of the car. Obviously, before the car was invented, humans did not travel by car, although they travelled over lands and sea,

<sup>20</sup> This last paragraph begins, in fact, with a cautious "Or shouldn't I say" (Wittgenstein 2006, 31).

<sup>21</sup> For this formulation, see the passage of the *Philosophical Investigations* quoted in footnote 8.

and they surely lived before the supposed solution to the problem of life was discovered. This demonstrates that maintaining that one really lives only once the discovery is made, is like asserting that humans really travelled only after the car was invented and that before their travelling wasn't a real travel. To whom should anyway say so, in fact, it could be pointed out that – as far as travelling in the past is concerned – the invention of the car appears “like an accident”. In conclusion, in order to travel, humans did not wait for the invention of the car, although this invention affected and even deeply changed their way of travelling.

I dare say, in Wittgenstein's eyes those who believe they have solved the problem of life are essentially – perhaps even unaware – Platonists that reject into appearance all life before this discovery and believe that they can say anyone who lived before this discovery didn't live or did so only in appearance.

Then, in the second sentence of this annotation, Wittgenstein extends these considerations to logic (to philosophy) observing that what he said on the problem of life is true even for the idea that there is a “solution to the problems of logic (philosophy)” or, to put it differently, for the idea that logical (philosophical) problems were identical or, at least, similar to those of science:

And it is the same for us in logic too. If there were a “solution to a problems of logic (philosophy)” we should only have to caution ourselves that there was a time when they had not been solved (and then too it must have been possible to live and think) – (Wittgenstein 2006, 6).

Here Wittgenstein is expressing a belief that animates his philosophising, from the beginning to the end. For instance, in the *Philosophical Remarks* written in the same period there is a passage in which clearly this spirit shines through:

How strange if logic were concerned with an ‘ideal’ language and not with *ours*. / [...] Logical analysis is the analysis of something we have, not of something we don't have. Therefore it is the analysis of propositions *as they stand*. (It would be odd if the human race had been speaking all this time without even putting together a genuine proposition.) (Wittgenstein 1975, §3).<sup>22</sup>

Let's reiterate: the solution to a logical (philosophical) problem is not like a scientific discovery or invention. Surely, only after the invention of the telephone one could communicate to a friend in New York, while being at home in Milan; however, we definitely don't have to wait until all problems of logic are solved to finally put a genuine proposition together. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the *Philosophical Investigations* maintain “[t]he name ‘philosophy’ might [...] be given to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions” (Wittgenstein 2009, I, §126).

The last occurrence of the expression “das Problematische” that we will analyse is to be found, in fact, in the *Philosophical Investigations* and it belongs to an observation not explicitly pertaining to the problem of life, but directly to the question of the philosophical method. Here it is:

Don't take it as a matter of course, but as a remarkable fact, that pictures and fictitious narratives give us pleasure, absorb us. / (“Don't take it as a matter of course”—that means: puzzle over this [*Wundere dich darüber*], as you do over some other things which disturb you. Then what is problematic [*das Problematische*] will disappear, by your accepting the one fact as you do the other.) (Wittgenstein 2009, I, §524).

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<sup>22</sup> In turn, this passage refers to one of the most famous propositions of the *Tractatus*: “In fact, all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order. – That utterly simple thing, which we have to formulate here, is not a likeness of the truth, but the truth itself in its entirety. / (Our problems are not abstract, but perhaps the most concrete that there are.)” (Wittgenstein 1974, 5.5563).

Here, taking for instance the fact that pictures (or fictitious narratives) give us pleasure and absorb us, Wittgenstein is showing two possible attitudes as regards facts and invites us to take a stance for the second one: "Don't take it as... but as...". The first attitude consists in taking "as a matter of course" the fact that pictures (or fictitious narratives) give us pleasure or absorb us. Indeed, who would ever deny this? Don't we perhaps feel pleasure admiring the *View of Delft* by Johann Vermeer? Or are we not absorbed by reading the *Great Expectations* of Charles Dickens? That it is so or that this happens, thus, is no problem; the true problem – one might be tempted to say – is why it is so or why this happens and (in case) which science may give us a convincing explanation: psychology, most recent neurosciences or perhaps sociology? What really interests here, it seems, is not the fact that pictures give us pleasure, but rather why they do, as if in the absence of an explanation that pleasure was – so to speak – suspended over the void. Here "why?" prevails over "that", so much so that Wittgenstein is led to compare those who always ask "why?" to those "tourists, who stand in front of building, reading Baedeker [a famous German tourist guide], & through reading about the history of the building's construction etc. etc. are prevented from *seeing* it" (Wittgenstein 2006, 46).<sup>23</sup>

Of course asking "why?" and attempting to answer is not wrong in itself. After all, seeking an explanation, making a hypothesis and elaborating a theory are a constitutional part of that scientific behaviour, which – taken as such – Wittgenstein has nothing to blame for. What he criticises, in case, is the assumption that this is the only legitimate mode to look at facts; and in particular the belief that a fact ceases to be "remarkable" or "astounding" once it is explained scientifically:

As though today [that is, in a time when we have a scientific explanation with regard to lightening] lightning were more commonplace or less astounding than 2000 years ago (Wittgenstein 2006, 7).

In any case, it is part of Wittgenstein's method to induce (or persuade) us to consider those facts remarkable, which we usually don't see, either because we take them as a matter of course or because we are so occupied with explaining them. It is as if, for instance, in wishing to explain *why* pictures give us pleasure, we forgot about the fact – taken as obvious or irrelevant – *that* pictures give us pleasure. For this reason, he insistently calls to look and surprise oneself: "Let yourself be *struck* by...",<sup>24</sup> "To repeat: don't think, but look!" (Wittgenstein 2009, I, §66a); and hence suppress this way – at least when philosophising – the question "Why?", convinced as he was that "[o]ften it is only when we suppress the question 'Why?' that we become aware of those important facts, which then, in the course of our investigation, lead to an answer" (Wittgenstein 2009, I, §471).

It should be noted anyway that Wittgenstein doesn't mean we should leave things unanswered, nor is he taking ignorance for the philosopher's virtue.<sup>25</sup> This would make the philosopher plainly – and sadly – a non-scientist. The philosopher's task is rather subtracting facts – particularly those he calls "facts of living" (Wittgenstein 1980a, I, §630) – from the obviousness that conceals them, but without for this reason delivering them straight away to that other form of concealing that is – for Wittgenstein – the scientific explanation.

Furthermore, it isn't at all easy to recognise facts, such as the often mentioned fact that pictures give us pleasure. On the contrary, it is a matter of investigating, closely and in detail, the concept of pleasure that is at

<sup>23</sup> In this regard, see Genova 1995, 65.

<sup>24</sup> "Let yourself be *struck* by the existence of a such a thing as our language-game of confessing the motive of my action" (Wittgenstein 2009, II, xi, §334).

<sup>25</sup> As appears to think Fogelin 1987, 209-210.

work here, asking ourselves, for example, what place it occupies and how it is incorporated "in all of the situations and reactions which constitute human life" (Wittgenstein 1980b: II, §16), but also whether it refers exclusively to phenomena of human life.<sup>26</sup> For example, what would we say about a puppy that wags its tail in front of Vermeer's *View of Delft*: does it take pleasure? If not, why not? Or if so, why so? Or would we say it most certainly takes pleasure, but not in the picture. And does "in front of" have the same meaning in "the puppy is in front of the *View of Delft*" and in "my friend Paul is in front of the *View of Delft*"? And when Paul tells me about the pleasure Vermeer's picture gave him, is he using the same concept as when he tells me about his pleasure during a swim in the open sea? How can I decide? Where should I look? Or should I ask Paul himself? Hence, while it is true that the facts of living are "[w]hat has to be accepted" or they are – as one could also say – "the given" (Wittgenstein 1980a, I, §630), it is also true that, in order to accept them, it is necessary to know how to see them, since they are "hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity" (Wittgenstein 2009, I, §129).<sup>27</sup>

### Completeness and incompleteness

In the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein devotes a few pages to what he calls "our craving for generality" (Wittgenstein 1969a, 17)<sup>28</sup> that coincides with what could be also named "the contemptuous attitude towards the

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<sup>26</sup> "Human beings think, grasshoppers don't." This means something like: the concept 'thinking' refers to human life, not to that of grasshoppers" (Wittgenstein 1980, II, §23).

<sup>27</sup> Wittgenstein adds in the same paragraph that "we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful" (Wittgenstein 2009, I, §129).

<sup>28</sup> According to Wittgenstein, among the main sources of our craving for generality there is "our preoccupation with the method of science [...] the method of reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest possible number of primitive natural laws; and, in mathematics, of unifying the treatment of different topics by using a generalization" (Wittgenstein 1969a, 18).

particular case" (Wittgenstein 1969a, 18); which, as we already recalled in the premise, "springs from the idea that it [the particular or special or less general case] is incomplete" (Wittgenstein 1969a, 19).

The example he uses to depict this point is particularly effective. Let's consider a treatise on pomology. Of such a treatise we can say that it is incomplete, if it doesn't mention this or that type of apple; for instance, if it doesn't mention the fruits of the European crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*).<sup>29</sup> In the case of a treatise on pomology, thus, "we have a standard of completeness in nature" (Wittgenstein 1969a, 19). But let's consider now the game of chess and compare it with two very similar games: one without pawns and the other one with more pieces. Would we be inclined to maintain that the first game is an incomplete game (with regard to our game) or that the second one is a more complete game (than ours)? A game without pawns is perhaps like a treatise on pomology that doesn't mention the fruits of the *Malus sylvestris*? Obviously we could always affirm that only the game of chess with pawns is complete; and that the first one (that without pawns) is incomplete and the second one (that with more pieces) is redundant, but we may do this only to reiterate that this is our game (the game we are playing or that we want to play); or to invoke an ideal of completeness that appears clear only because or until it is left unexpressed.

As a matter of fact, why should a game without pawns be considered incomplete? Or why would the addition of pawns render it complete, making it a game eventually? Surely, the game without pawns could be treated like an easier game or a more primitive one than ours, maybe because there are less pieces to be put on the board or perhaps since we noticed it is usually quicker to learn how to play. In any case, that game without pawns – be it simpler or more primitive than ours – "bears no mark of incompleteness" (Wittgenstein

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<sup>29</sup> The example of the fruits of *Malus sylvestris* is mine.

1969, 19).<sup>30</sup> If it is played, it is by all means a game, even if it isn't our game.

The key point of Wittgenstein's considerations could here be expressed as follows: to say that it isn't our game is not the same as saying that it isn't yet (or completely) a game; or otherwise: that the presence of pawns in our game doesn't make a game without pawn a "not-yet-a-game" or an incomplete game. The only concession could be that, given the two games, it is very likely we might chose the one with pawns. Anyway, the game without pawns is so little incomplete as much as was our language "before the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were incorporated in to it" (Wittgenstein 2009, I, §18); or, consequently, so little as much as our actual language is.<sup>31</sup>

"To regard what appears so obviously incomplete, as something complete" (Wittgenstein 1980a, I, §723), is far from easy, as Wittgenstein explains well in an annotation from the previously quoted *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*:

[O]ne believes that one needs to fill out the facts in order to understand them. It is as if one saw a screen with scattered colour-patches, and said: the way they are here, that are unintelligible; they only make sense when one completes them into a shape. – Whereas I want to say: Here *is* the whole. (If you complete it, you falsify it.) (Wittgenstein 1980a, I, §257).

Wittgenstein's variations on this point are a lot and of particular interest. For instance, he shows to think it little fruitful to look at the "feeble-minded" as to incomplete or lacking humans, as becomes clear in a

little quoted passage, which could well stimulate psychologists and psychiatrists:

The feeble-minded are pictured in our imagination as degenerate, essentially incomplete, as it were in rags. Thus as in a state of disorder, rather than more primitive order (which would be a far more fruitful way of looking at them.) (Wittgenstein 1980a, I, §646).

However, he also seems to hold it as misleading or little fruitful to look at animals not as animals, but as non-humans; or as beings that bare in them a mark of incompleteness and that will never become humans. Of particular interest are in this regard a series of questions on children, cats and squirrels, which appear in *On Certainty*:

Does a child believe that milk exists? Or does it know that milk exists? Does a cat know that a mouse exists? (Wittgenstein 1969b, §478).

What Wittgenstein wants to reckon is that it is meaningless to maintain that, when it is hungry, the child tends towards the maternal breast, because he believes or knows that milk exists; the like it makes no sense saying the cat hunts the mouse, because the thinks or knows the mouse exists; above all, however, he wants us to ask, why we are tempted to add that "because he believes or knows" and why we are not satisfied to ascertain that cats hunt mice and children suck milk. Here, though, some may rebut saying that matters simply are as follows: children and cats don't know, in fact they are children and cats; the former aren't human yet and the latter never will. Only humans (speak adults) know, while children don't know yet and animals will never know: the child sucks milk "without thinking" the same as the cat hunts the mouse "without thinking". Wittgenstein's answer goes that many human behaviours – those he calls in fact "instinctive", "natural" or "primitive" (Wittgenstein 1967, §545), – are not different from the child's behaviour who (naturally) sucks the maternal milk or from that of the cat which

<sup>30</sup> Here Wittgenstein is thinking especially about the tendency "to talk of arithmetic as something special as opposed to something more general. Cardinal arithmetic bears no mark of incompleteness; nor does an arithmetic which is cardinal and finite" (Wittgenstein 1969a, 19).

<sup>31</sup> Would you be ready to say that our language is incomplete, because we surely cannot rule out the possibility that in the future new symbolisms and calculations may be included?



(naturally) hunts the mouse or from that of the squirrel which (naturally) hoards food in the Summer it will need during the Winter. As "[t]he squirrel does not infer by induction that it is going to need stores next winter as well", the like "no more we need a law of induction to justify our actions or our predictions" (Wittgenstein 1969b, §287). In this sense, we are like children, cats and squirrels when, for instance, we attempt "without thinking" to aid someone hurt:

[I]t is a primitive reaction to take care of, to treat, the place that hurts when someone else is in pain, and not merely when one is so oneself" (Wittgenstein 1980a, I, §915).

An example used by Wittgenstein at least twice, that of art and of the Egyptian style, may help us understand better what really is at stake here.<sup>32</sup> Wittgenstein starts by observing that we could easily assume the prospective representation of humans and of other things is correct when "compared with [the] Egyptian way of drawing them" (Wittgenstein 1993, 387); and we could thus be tempted to conclude that Egyptian art is incomplete precisely because it lacks – as became evident after the Renaissance invention of perspective – the perspective. But would we be right to draw to such a conclusion? In order to understand why Wittgenstein's reply is negative, one may further articulate his example by comparison with other four cases: an Egyptian painting, one by Paolo Uccello, a Cubist work, a drawing by an art novice. In the case of Paolo Uccello's painting we may maintain it is fully (perhaps obsessively) perspectival; of the novice's drawing we could say, at a glance, that the rules of perspective were not applied

correctly, while the Cubist work we may affirm did deliberately break them. But what should we say of the Egyptian painting? As a matter of fact, it appears we cannot say anything of what we said respectively of Paolo Uccello's painting, the Cubist work and the novice's drawing. Indeed, Egyptian artists did neither apply nor not-apply nor apply in an incorrect way the rules of perspective, because perspective was no option for that painting style. To blame Egyptian art for lacking the perspective is, thus, like reproaching a checkers player because she didn't checkmate the king.

Still, someone may insist that it is provable that Egyptian art is lacking something, that is, by the fact that in front of Egyptian paintings we can easily ascertain that "after all, people don't really look like that" (Wittgenstein 1993, 287). This would prove we have here, nevertheless, a standard "in nature" (remember Wittgenstein 1969a, 19). A painting without the perspective thus wouldn't be like a chess game without pawns, but rather as a treatise or pomology without the European crab apples. According to Wittgenstein, however, this cannot at all "count as an argument" as his query which concludes this annotation demonstrates: "Who says I want people on paper to look the way they do in reality?" (Wittgenstein 1987, 387). As is obvious, the answer goes that no one is saying this, neither the nature of art nor human nature. Hence, why should we say this to the Egyptians (and with which right and what for)?

However, we may go on asking, don't we risk thus forgetting what Wittgenstein himself recalled in a famous passage of the *Philosophical Investigations*, when he observes that, while it surely happens that "new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence", it also happens that "other become obsolete and get forgotten" (Wittgenstein 2009, I, §23)? At least in some cases, shouldn't we be able to say, in fact, that if a game was forgotten this happened because it was finally discovered it wasn't a game, for instance because its

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<sup>32</sup> They are the examples on the Egyptian style in the *Philosophical Investigations*: "Compare a concept with a style of painting. For is even our style of painting arbitrary? Can we choose one at pleasure? (The Egyptian, for instance.) Or is it just a matter of pretty and ugly?" (Wittgenstein 2009, II, xii, §367) and in the annotations of the years 1937-1938 published with the title *Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness* (Wittgenstein 1993, 387).

rules contained a contradiction? Wittgenstein's mode of responding to these questions and puzzlements can be illustrated by means of an example from the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. Let's thus imagine a game that "is such that whoever begins can always win by a particular simple trick". No one did however notice his fact; hence we can say it is a game: it is played and anyone who plays tries to win. But "[n]ow someone draws our attention to it [the trick it contains]; — and it stops being a game". (Wittgenstein 1978, III, §77). This conclusion, as Wittgenstein immediately acknowledges, is ambiguous though; indeed, he promptly asks how he should turn things around, "to make it clear to myself".

As a matter of fact, one may think that, by revealing the trick, we discover that what we have been playing was not a game at all (it seemed to be a game, but it actually wasn't) and that therefore, and properly speaking, up to now we have not been playing. But this isn't exactly what Wittgenstein really wants to say: "I want to say: 'and it stops being a game' — not: 'and we now see that it wasn't a game' (Wittgenstein 1978, III, §77).<sup>33</sup> What I can do, once the trick has been revealed, is alter the game so that, when playing, it may be possible to win or lose, because if one couldn't lose, the game would miss its point which is winning. However, nothing that happens now can make the things that previously happened not happen: if one played, trick or not, one did play.

<sup>33</sup> However, we could even imagine that it continues to be a game for some. For example, once the trick has been discovered someone could react this way: "What a great game! And so relaxing! Everyone has the certainty that, when it's their turn to begin, they'll win."

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## WITTGENSTEIN ON FORMS OF LIFE AND THE IMMEDIACY OF HABIT

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**ABSTRACT:** Though Wittgenstein conceived of forms of life as the given that has to be accepted, his analyses are not what we might expect: they are not descriptions of empirical facts. On the contrary, they are grammatical investigations, primarily concerned with the normative dimension of our concepts. In this paper I elaborate on the notion of the given, trying to show that it includes linguistic habits characterized by the immediacy (or blindness) of rule following. This allows the philosopher to conceive of language-acquired habits as "having become nature to us", thus as a constitutive part of the given, without eliminating the normative dimension of linguistic habits by reducing them to non-linguistic entities, whether physical or mental. The last point highlights the difference between Wittgenstein's and William James's conception of the role of experience (*Erlebnis*) in concept formation.

**Keywords:** Ludwig Wittgenstein; forms of life; habit; second nature; William James

### Preface

In this paper, I will be dealing with Wittgenstein's views on the unmediated nature of habit (or of some habits). I will try to show how such views affect his conception of the given (*das Gegebene*) as presented in the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*, e.g. where he states that "What has to be accepted, the given, is – one might say – *forms of life*." (PPF, §345)<sup>1</sup> This will require some preliminary reflections on the notion of a form of life. Wittgenstein scholars know that much ink has been spilled on the issue of forms of life; I myself have been dealing with it on several occasions (e.g. Andronico 1998). Thus, what I am going to say will not appear entirely new. However, I hope it will help to throw some light on a vaguely circumscribed notion, which has been misunderstood in several ways (though most often in a foundationalist way, be it of a naturalistic or of a transcendentalist bent).

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<sup>1</sup> For abbreviations of titles of Wittgenstein's works, see the Bibliography.

### Forms of life

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, the phrase *form of life* occurs five times: twice at the beginning (§19 and §23), then about midway in the First Part (§241), then twice in the Second Part, that is in PPF, §1 and §345. The phrase occurs less than 10 times in the whole Wittgensteinian corpus. Therefore, one might be led to think that this is a somewhat marginal notion, surely not as crucial as the repeatedly employed notion of a language game. Not so. The first two occurrences belong in a sequence of remarks that appear to have a programmatic tone: in other words, these are remarks by which Wittgenstein introduces the object of his reflections, the tools he is going to employ in carrying them out, some aspects of the methods he will adopt, and some indications concerning the results he hopes to achieve. Synthetically, and not without some simplification: the object consists of language and the activities into which it is woven (PI, §7), or again, language understood as a "spatial and temporal phenomenon" (PI, §108); the tools are language games (PI, §§130-131); methods include the comparative method (PI, §130 and §132) as well as the imaginative method (PI, §19); the result the philosopher aims to achieve is a perspicuous, or clear presentation of the state of language (PI, §122), which engenders a therapeutic effect, i.e. the dissolution of some (individual) philosophical problem and the fading out of philosophical disquiet (PI, §124 and, most of all, §133). Within such programmatic context, the phrase 'form of life' shows up to characterize both the object of inquiry and the imaginative side of the comparative method: in PI, §23, Wittgenstein points out that "The word 'language-game' is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life", while in PI, §19 he states that "...to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life".

Again in PI, §23, Wittgenstein explicitly brings in the plurality of language games alongside the connection of language game and form of life: there is a multiplicity of language games, as well as "countless kinds of use of the

things we call 'signs', 'words', 'sentences'. And this diversity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence and others become obsolete and get forgotten". As there are many language games, and as "the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (Ibid.) to the point that imagining a language game amounts to imagining a form of life, we can conclude that the notion of a form of life must also be understood in the plural: a multiplicity of activities, or forms of life, corresponds to the multiplicity of language games.

In general, we can say that when Wittgenstein introduces the notion of a form of life in the *Investigations*, he is explicitly presenting the anthropological point of view from which he will be carrying out his research on language from the 1930s on; or rather, his research on the meaning of some linguistic expressions. For his research persists in being, in the first place, semantic in nature. By taking up the anthropological stance, Wittgenstein is forever forsaking the viewpoint and style of analysis that had characterized *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, where, in his own words, language had been seen as "a formal unity" (PI, §108), or as "a non-spatial, atemporal non-entity" (PI, §108). That stance consists in looking at the meaning of a linguistic expression taking into account, in addition to the linguistic context of its occurrence, the overall circumstances of its use, including, beside acts of language, the material and non-material circumstances in which they take place. It is as if Wittgenstein intended to give prominence to the fact that human life goes on *with* language and that people live *in* language: "Language – he points out in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* – relates to a *way of living*" (RFM, VI §34); our concepts, which take form and body in language, "correspond to a particular way of dealing with situations" (RFM, VII §67). In the *Investigations*, just next to §23, the anthropological stance is clearly presented in §25:

It is sometimes said: animals do not talk because they lack the mental abilities. And this means: "They do not think, and that is why they do not talk." But - they simply do not talk. Or better: they do not use language - if we disregard the most primitive forms of language. - Giving orders, asking questions, telling stories, having a chat, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing. (PI, §25)

That language is part of our natural history means that it is integral to the human species-specific endowment; but it also means that its workings and the practice of it are made possible by facts that involve both non-human nature and certain features of our psychophysical constitution. Thus, Wittgenstein's writings contain many remarks about the relation between language and natural history, both human and non-human, i.e. features of our natural environment. For example, "if our memory functioned differently, we could not calculate as we do" (RFM, IV §24); or again, "If we only saw one of our primary colours, red say, extremely seldom and only in tiny expanses, if we could not prepare colours for painting, if red occurred only in particular connections with other colours, say at the very tips of leaves of certain trees, these tips gradually changing from green to red in the autumn, then nothing would be more natural than to call red a degenerate green" (RPP, I §47), in other words, we would possess a different concept of red: *not* of a primary color. Similarly, "if our footrules were made of very soft rubber instead of wood and steel ... we should not get... *that* measurement which we get with our rigid rulers. [...] It can be said: What is here called 'measuring' and 'length' and 'equal length', is something different from what we call those things." (RFM, I §5). Such remarks seem to suggest that "It is as if our concepts involved a scaffolding of facts" (RPP, II §392 – Z §350). However, this formulation is in quotes, as if Wittgenstein were not entirely happy with it. Instead, he chooses to describe his interest in the connection of language, concepts, and facts of nature by the following words: "What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of man: not curiosities however, but rather observations on

facts which no one has doubted and which have only gone unremarked because they are always before our eyes" (RFM, I §142).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Wittgenstein's anthropological stance and interest in forms of life, as described so far, can easily lead us to believe that he was after the natural causes of our use of language, or even that he meant to ground the latter in the former (in its "basis in nature"). Such was not his intention. In fact, on several occasions he appears to be aware of (and worried by) the possibility that his inquiry may look like natural science in disguise:

If we can find a ground for the structures of concepts among the facts of nature (psychological and physical), then isn't the description of the structures of our concepts really disguised natural science; ought we not in that case to concern ourselves not with grammar, but with what lies at the bottom of grammar in nature? (RPP, I §46)

and his answer is:

Indeed the correspondence between our grammar and general (seldom mentioned) facts of nature does concern us. But our interest does not fall back on these *possible* causes. We are not pursuing a natural science; our aim is not to predict anything. Nor natural history either, for we invent facts of natural history for our own purposes. (RPP, I §46; Cf. PPF xii §365 and §366)

In order better to understand Wittgenstein's worry, let me emphasize from the beginning a peculiarity of his philosophical approach, namely that the anthropological stance does not in any way override interest in *grammar*. 'Grammar' is here used equivocally for both the set of rules that govern the several uses of language and the remarks and descriptions the philosopher produces concerning such rules. Mentions of facts of

nature are mostly background with respect to the aims of philosophical analysis, i.e. untying the knots, the conceptual muddles that arise when "we are entangled in our own rules" (PI, §125). This side of Wittgenstein's reflection is undoubtedly hard to grasp and has often originated controversial interpretations.<sup>3</sup> Another way of trying to describe it is to insist that for Wittgenstein, interest in natural facts affecting our concepts does not suppress or replace interest in the rules that constitute and shape them. Such rules are alive in language, whether they are explicitly formulated or implicitly acquired.

Anyway, only by grasping this side of Wittgenstein's reflection can we come to understand how, among language games and the related forms of life, we do not just find natural patterns of action but forms of behaviour and activities we would not hesitate to describe as "cultural". Relying on a different dichotomy, beside forms of behaviour that are innate, or natural developments of innate psychophysical properties (e.g. walking, eating), other forms of behaviour are mentioned that are acquired in social situations thanks to education and training:

The behaviour of humans includes of course not only what they do without ever having learned the behaviour, but also what they do (and so, e.g. *say*) after having received a training. (RPP, I §131)

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<sup>2</sup> "The *facts* of human natural history that throw light on our problem, are difficult for us to find out, for our talk *passes them by*, it is occupied with other things. (In the same way we tell someone: "Go into the shop and buy..." - not: "Put your left foot in front of your right foot etc. etc., then put coins down on the counter, etc. etc.")" (RPP, I §78).

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<sup>3</sup> From Conway (1989) to Moyal-Sharrock (2007), Wittgenstein's interest in forms of life has been read as an attempt to ground the meaning of words in certain relevant facts of our psychophysical nature (or so I believe such contributions can be understood). In a recent restatement of her view, Moyal-Sharrock sees Wittgenstein's forms of life as conditioning, not grounding or justifying world pictures and language games (2015, 38). I believe this reading is more in tune with Wittgenstein's texts. For a recent survey of interpretations of the notion of form of life, see Boncompagni (2015).

Moreover,

If we teach a human being such-and-such a technique by means of examples, - that he then proceeds like *this* and not like *that* in a particular new case, or that in this case he gets stuck, and thus that this and not that is the 'natural' continuation for him: this of itself is an extremely important fact of nature. (Z, §355)

Now, all or most of this becomes clear if we keep in mind that there are two senses, or two uses of the word 'nature' in Wittgenstein: on the one hand, the word is used for prelinguistic, instinctual forms of behaviour (such as avoiding pain or caring for a suffering person); on the other, it refers to forms of behaviour that have been acquired in language and by way of language, and that "have been turned into nature for us." In the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, speaking of our classification system, Wittgenstein remarks:

We're used to a particular classification of things. - With language, or languages, it has become second nature to us" (RPP, I §678).<sup>4</sup>

And then he adds:

These are the fixed rails along which all our thinking runs, and so our judgement and action goes according to them too (RPP, II §679; Z, §375).

For the sake of presentation, 'nature' or 'natural' in the latter sense could be replaced by the phrase 'second nature', following the English translators of these remarks.<sup>5</sup> However, Wittgenstein does not use the German equivalent ('zweiter Natur') nor is it clear to me whether doing so would really simplify the presentation of his views or might instead complicate it and make it misleading.<sup>6</sup> Leaving the terminological issue aside, what

matters is emphasizing that in these remarks Wittgenstein is talking about an activity – classifying – which is largely learned (as shown by the fact that cultures differ in their types of classification), and he is describing it as a habit of speaking and thinking that "has become nature to us", i.e. that shares something with prelinguistic, possibly innate forms of behaviour and activities.

### Rules

I believe that to understand what is shared by both kinds of activities we must consider the outcome of Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations. To begin with, the notion of "following a rule" is related to the notion of habit or custom: following a rule is a practice (PI, §202), i.e. a way of behaving or acting (in a wide sense). We properly speak of acting according to a rule when one and the same action is performed several times (more than once) so that, thanks to repetition, a habit is established:

It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which only one person followed a rule. It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which a report was made, an order given or understood, and so on. - To follow a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (usages, institutions). (PI, §199)

Now, every custom is a regularity (of behaviour), hence to every custom a rule is attached. However, this should not be understood to imply that every custom is inherently normative. Walking the dog every day, in the same park at the same hour, may be someone's custom; but there needn't be anything normative about it. It would be peculiar to insist that it is "wrong" for that person to walk the dog at a different hour, or in a

<sup>4</sup> The original German is as follows: "Sie ist uns mit der Sprache, oder den Sprachen, zur Natur geworden."

<sup>5</sup> The English translators are C.G. Luckhardt and M.A.E. Aue.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase 'second nature' could hint at a philosophical theory of the relationship between "first"

nature (or nature *stricto sensu*) and second nature, such as we find in McDowell (1996). However, saddling Wittgenstein with an interest in the construction of such a theory would be a misunderstanding.



different park.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, *linguistic* customs have normative force. ‘Dog’, ‘park’, and ‘same’ - English words that draw their meaning from the practice of using them in a certain way - *are* to be used in that way (i.e., according to the rule that is implicit in their regular use): it is *right* to use them so, while using them differently is *wrong*. In contrast with other behavioural routines, what I here called “linguistic customs” or habits necessarily involve normativity of the rules they induce.

Secondly, as is well known, following a rule does not require any interpretive mediation;<sup>8</sup> not in the sense that accompanying thoughts are somehow precluded, but in the sense that no such thoughts are either required or sufficient for rule following:

Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. One is trained to do so and one reacts to an order in a particular way (PI, §206).

and

When I follow the rule, I do not choose – I follow the rule *blindly* (PI, §219).

What an acquired linguistic habit shares with a natural, prelinguistic form of behaviour is just such blindness or quasi-instinctiveness; it is the action’s immediacy (or the immediacy of application of the rule). As Wittgenstein puts it in the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology I*, §§125-126, even when we want to express a feeling, a very peculiar one as the “feeling of unreality”, we *spontaneously* employ a technique of using words such as “feeling” and “unreality” in their ordinary meanings. That a linguistic technique has been learned is not incompatible with spontaneity of its employment. We could now accept the English translation of *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology II*, §678) and use the

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<sup>7</sup> Hence, while I agree with Roberta Dreoni's claim that rules, in Wittgenstein, are best understood in terms of habits (2015, 103), this should not be taken to imply that every habit has normative force.

<sup>8</sup> I am referring to PI, §201, and the ensuing, vast debate in connection with Saul Kripke's reading of it in his (1982).

phrase ‘second nature’, realizing that ‘second’ hints at learning and training and whatever in language is acquired by following rules, whereas ‘nature’ hints at immediacy and the quasi-instinctive application of rules, once they have been acquired.<sup>9</sup>

Now, as this concerns language, it concerns the articulation of our conceptual apparatus. Semantic habits are conceptual habits. Analysing a concept coincides with analysing the application of a word: “We do not analyse a phenomenon (for example, thinking) but a concept (for example, that of thinking), and hence the application of a word” (PI, §383). Thus, the notion of second nature extends to the realm of our ordinary concepts, what Wittgenstein later called a “picture of the world” (OC, §94), “the substratum of all my inquiring and asserting” (OC, §162).

### The given (*das Gegebene*)

Perhaps we can now understand why Wittgenstein, while accepting (like other philosophers) a distinction between the natural and prelinguistic and what is acquired by way of education into language – let us say, a distinction between nature proper and second nature – does not deem useful for his purposes to carry out an investigation by which both levels of human life are in each case distinguished and kept separate. Inquiries aiming to clarify the meanings of linguistic expressions (particularly those which tend to originate conceptual confusions and philosophical maladies) differ, in his mind, from scientific investigations exactly because they neither put forth hypotheses to be confirmed or disconfirmed nor make predictions; hence, they do not aim at determining, for a given conceptual formation embedded in language, which part of it is naturally given and which is acquired by training or education. Investigations of meaning are rather like attempts at drawing maps of our uses of words and concepts,

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of both the “blindness” of rule following and its possible limitations, see Boncompagni (2016, 175).

describing forms of life and language games together as they both constitute the *given* which the description applies to. It is, I believe, in this light that we should read some remarks we find in the *Philosophical Investigations* and, with some variations, in the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*. Concerning forms of life as the given of analysis, the remark of *Investigations Part II*: “What has to be accepted, the given, is – one might say – *forms of life*” (PPF, §345) is clarified by being read alongside the following text from *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology Part I*:

Instead of the unanalysable, specific, undefinable: the fact that we act in such-and-such ways, e.g. *punish* certain actions, *establish* the state of affair thus and so, *give orders*, render accounts, describe colours, take an interest in other feelings. What has to be accepted, the given – it might be said – are facts of living. (RPP, I §630)<sup>10</sup>

Here Wittgenstein invites us to switch from a certain conception of the given to another: from the given conceived as what is ‘specific’, ‘undefinable’, ‘unanalysable’ to the given conceived as forms of life or facts of living. This should be clarified. We could imagine that forms of life, conceived as the given, are to inherit the properties usually attached to the entities a philosophical theory assumes as given: properties such as metaphysical simplicity and absolute impenetrability to analysis (e.g., these were some of the properties of *Tractatus* objects). However, with forms of life this is not the case: that punishing certain actions, or describing colours are “the given that has to be accepted” does not mean that they are limits, physical or metaphysical, our attitude towards which can only be one of acquiescence. It only means that *within a certain kind of inquiry* they play the role of irreducible elements which circumscribe the domain of inquiry. As we know, anthropological contexts are particularly singled out, in that observing and describing them contributes to clarifying the

meaning of certain expressions of language. Concerning language games, Wittgenstein puts forth similar claims: like forms of life, language games are what is specific,<sup>11</sup> what is primary, something we just have to take account of (PI, §655) or that has to be accepted (PPF, §161). According to him, only by looking at language games in this light can we resist the temptation to *explain* them from non-grammatical perspectives. Not that doing so would be impossible or forbidden. E.g., we might provide evolutionary explanations of our language games (in terms of their adaptive value), or we might explain them “by means of our experiences [*Erlebnisse*]”, as Wittgenstein critically remarks (PI, §655). In so doing, however, we would altogether miss the sense-conferring role of language games that is, instead, highlighted by taking them as primary. When he claims that the given we have to accept are forms of life, or that we should look at language games as something primary, Wittgenstein is both expressing his antireductionist worries and putting forth a radically *sui generis* notion of the given. Antireductionism goes hand in hand with the rejection of any conception of philosophical inquiry as modeled upon scientific inquiry; more generally, Wittgenstein’s antireductionism rejects any explanation of something in terms of something else, any reduction of an *explanandum* to an *explanans* as relevant to philosophy. The presentation of the state of our language – which aims to show how we get entangled in our own rules – draws no benefit from switching from one level of reality to another, for problems of meaning that involve terms at one level show up again, unchanged, as involving terms and concepts at the other level. The word ‘cube’ means the picture of a cube, but how is the picture to be interpreted, what does it *mean*? (Cf. PI, §139). The word ‘no’ stands for a certain nod of our head, but what does that gesture mean? Does it mean ‘no’? (Cf. PG, I §5 and PG, IV §46).

Concerning the *sui generis* notion of given, or the

<sup>10</sup> In a footnote, we find ‘forms of life’ (*Lebensformen*) as a variant.

<sup>11</sup> For an analysis of Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘specific’ as meaning ‘undefinable’ or ‘unanalyzable’, see Schulte (1993, 50-52).

given *tout court*, let me stress again that its being regarded as on a par with what is conceived as undefinable, specific, and unanalysable does not by itself make it purely and simply given, the way we tend to say that the data of perception, or of consciousness are pure and simple. As the given we have to accept is constituted by forms of life and language games, its ingredients are both facts of nature and facts that, with language, have become nature for us (or in other words, both first and second nature come into it). It involves both immediate natural reactions and linguistic habits, where the latter, though acquired, are so deeply embedded in the texture of our experience that they have come to possess the same immediacy as the former. As I remarked earlier, the philosopher is mostly interested in the latter component – linguistic habits – as they bring in the normative dimension of rules, which does not reduce to facts of extralinguistic nature, whether physical or mental.

As pointed out by Boncompagni (2016), Wittgenstein's interest in forms of life motivated Goodman's (2002) likening of William James's empiricism to Wittgenstein's naturalism. Boncompagni challenges such parallelism by emphasizing – as I do – that for Wittgenstein references to natural facts include “not only biological characteristics of human life, but also cultural and historical facts”, so that “the core of his investigations is not what exists, but the grammar of concepts.” For this reason, she insists, “Wittgenstein's approach is not only far from empiricism, but also from naturalism (unless one categorizes the latter in a very peculiar way)” (2016, 255-257). My suggestion at this point is that, having interpreted forms of life as anthropological contexts – natural as well as cultural – and having identified such contexts with the given to which grammatical investigations apply, we are licensed to categorize Wittgenstein's anthropologism as a kind of naturalism, namely as naturalism extending to second nature. Though the core of Wittgenstein's investigations is the grammar of concepts, and though the methods such investigations employ are not those of science, the

given to which the investigations apply does not transcend nature.

Let me conclude by a qualification concerning the notion of experience that is involved in the notion of a linguistic (and conceptual) habit that has become nature for us. In particular, I would like to focus on the irreducibility of the normative not just to facts of nature but to the mental realm as well, where ‘mental realm’ is understood in a wide sense, including not only thoughts and concepts but also the psychological experiences that could be associated with them. As is well known, here one of Wittgenstein's targets were William James's views concerning our psychological life as presented in the *Principles of Psychology* [henceforth PP]. Wittgenstein did appreciate James's insistence on bodily processes being an essential ingredient of what we mean by an emotion (such as sadness).<sup>12</sup> What he rejected in James was what he saw as conceptual psychologism, i.e. the reduction of conceptual content to sensations, or emotions, or experiences.<sup>13</sup> Nor would he have countenanced the psychological “sense of sameness” on which such reduction is grounded (see PP I, 459-60). Sameness, for Wittgenstein, is an inherently normative notion: “The use of the word ‘rule’ and the use of the word ‘same’ are interwoven” (PI §225). Contrary to what James appears to be taking for granted (as in PP I, 459), application of the notion of sameness is not (and cannot be) reduced to experiencing a sense of sameness, or to a portion of the mental stream “knowing” that it means the same as another portion:

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<sup>12</sup> Such appreciation is apparent in the *Brown Book*, p.103. On Wittgenstein's reading of James on emotions see Schulte (1995, 249-250), among others.

<sup>13</sup> He may have had in mind texts like the following: “New conceptions come from new sensations, new movements, new emotions, new associations, new acts of attention, and new comparisons of old conceptions, and in no other ways.” (PP I, 467) – “Conceptions...translate the process of our perceptual experience, which is naturally a flux, into a set of stagnant and petrified terms.” (PP I, 467-8).

"Before I judge that two images which I have are the same, surely I must recognize them as the same". And when that has happened, how am I to know that the word "same" describes what I recognize? Only if I can express my recognition in some other way, and if it is possible for someone else to teach me that "same" is the *correct* word here. (PI §378, it. added)

More generally, as stated in a remark I already quoted,

The point is not to explain a language-game by means of our experiences, but to take account of a language-game (PI, §655).

Wittgenstein is here trying to describe and clarify what is going on when we use such words as 'intention', 'memory', or when we use a phrase such as 'reporting a desire or an intention we experienced in the past.' Even in such a context he rules out that bringing in an experience (*Erlebnis*) conceived as something separate from, and independent of any language game may help us to carry out our analytic task. In fact, according to Wittgenstein even this kind of experiences – the *Erlebnisse* - are linguistically articulated and have their life and their meaning in the language games they belong to:

The concept of experience (*Der Begriff des Erlebnisses*): Like that of happening, of process, of state, of something, of fact, of description and of report. Here we think we are standing on the hard bedrock, deeper than any special methods and language-games. But these extremely general terms have an extremely blurred meaning. They relate in practice to innumerable special cases, but that does not make them any *solider*; no, rather it makes them more fluid. (RPP, I §648)

Speaking of *Erlebnis* or experience does not bring us in touch with some rock-solid ultimate foundation, concerning which agreement is universal. On the contrary, in Wittgenstein's view, what we are faced with is the use of a word, and a pretty vague use at that. Hence, the kind of philosophical work he recommends here will once more consist of looking at a large number of special cases: at the different language games where

the word occurs, with meanings that, though related with one another, may still differ in each case, depending on the practices and forms of life with which the several uses are intertwined.

A question naturally arises here, and Wittgenstein himself is the first to ask it:

But weren't there all these appearances – of pain, of wishing, of intention, of memory, etc., before there was any language? (RPP, I §165)

Or again:

"So if someone has not learned a language, is he unable to have certain memories?" Of course – he cannot have linguistic memories, linguistic wishes or fears, and so on. And memories and suchlike in language are not mere threadbare representations of the *real* experiences; for is what is linguistic not an experience? (PI, §649)

For Wittgenstein, language as a characteristic feature of human life, hence of human experience, does not leave the other domains of such experience unaltered, in two distinct ways: first, it is in language that they take their shape, their physiognomy; secondly, it is in language that they are expressed – we speak of them in language. This is why in philosophy it is impossible – better, it doesn't make sense – to try and keep distinct (e.g.) experience *proper* (say, of a memory) from its verbal articulation within a language game (the one it is "at home" in). Consequently, philosophical inquiry into experience is itself bound to be concerned with the meanings of words we use to describe experience and talk about experiences.

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**IMMEDIACY AND EXPERIENCE  
IN WITTGENSTEIN'S NOTION OF  
'IMPONDERABLE EVIDENCE'**

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**ABSTRACT:** The subject of this paper is the notion of 'imponderable evidence', employed on a few occasions by the later Wittgenstein. Our perception of others' feelings, thoughts and emotions, Wittgenstein observes, is ordinarily guided by an imponderable evidence, which, while remaining unmeasurable and ultimately ungraspable, gives us access to an immediate – yet fallible – form of understanding. This understanding, I will argue, is essentially qualitative.

Section 1 of the paper introduces the issue through the examination of some remarks on how our attitude towards living beings differs from our attitude towards objects. Sections 2 and 3 present the notion of imponderable evidence in the framework of Wittgenstein's approach to the philosophy of psychology and his remarks on aesthetic judgment. In section 4, I will turn to Dewey's conception of 'qualitative thought' as an aid to clarify further the sense of Wittgenstein's terminology. The final section concludes on why philosophers should care about the qualitative dimension of human existence.

**Keywords:** Ludwig Wittgenstein; John Dewey, imponderable evidence; qualitative thought; immediacy

**Introduction**

This paper investigates a seemingly elusive notion that the later Wittgenstein employs only on a few occasions: the notion of 'imponderable evidence', which he mostly associates with the related concept of 'Menschenkenntnis', the knowledge of human beings or the knowledge of human nature. Our perception of others' feelings, thoughts and emotions, Wittgenstein observes, is ordinarily guided by an imponderable evidence, which, while remaining unmeasurable and ultimately ungraspable, gives us access to an immediate – yet fallible – form of understanding. This understanding, I will argue, is essentially qualitative. In order to clarify this, I will compare Wittgenstein's remarks on imponderable evidence and Menschenkenntnis with John Dewey's conception of 'qualitative thought'. Without claiming that the two

perspectives overlap, I will more modestly put them side by side and point out some affinities, with the aim of shedding some light on an important dimension of our life, too often neglected in philosophy.

Section 1 of the paper introduces the issue through the examination of some Wittgensteinian remarks regarding our attitude towards living beings and how it differs from our attitude towards objects. Sections 2 and 3 present the notion of imponderable evidence in the framework of Wittgenstein's approach to the philosophy of psychology and his remarks on aesthetic judgment. We shall see that *immediacy* and *experience* are intertwined in imponderable evidence. In section 4, I will turn to Dewey's conception of qualitative thought as an aid to clarify further the sense of Wittgenstein's terminology. The final section concludes on why philosophers should care about the qualitative dimension of human existence.

**1. Inanimate objects and living beings**

The expression 'imponderable evidence', *unwägbar* *Evidenz*, where *wägen* means 'to weigh' or 'to ponder', is used by Wittgenstein chiefly in some late writings on the philosophy of psychology, dealing with our relationship with the other(s). As we shall see, in this context Wittgenstein is addressing the mixture of immediate certainty ('evidence') and uncertainty or indeterminacy ('imponderable') that characterizes our perception and understanding of other peoples' emotions, expressions, feelings, reactions, intentions, and thoughts. By paying attention to the ordinary practices and exchanges that belong to our everyday life, more generally, Wittgenstein is engaged in the dissolution of a traditional problem of philosophy, namely, the problem of skepticism about other minds. The notion of imponderable evidence is (also) part of this reflection.

A good starting point for introducing the issue is Wittgenstein's reasoning concerning the difference between our attitude towards living beings and our attitude towards objects or minerals, in the *Philosophical Investigations*. This reasoning is strictly connected with



the so-called 'Private Language Argument', where Wittgenstein contests the idea that an absolutely private language is possible, or even coherently conceivable. Without entering the larger debate on this topic (see Candlish & Wrisley 2014 for an overview), let us just examine a few passages:

[O]nly of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious. (PI<sup>1</sup> § 281)

Look at a stone and imagine it having sensations. – One says to oneself: How could one so much as get the idea of ascribing a *sensation* to a *thing*? One might as well ascribe it to a number! – And now look at a wriggling fly, and at once these difficulties vanish, and pain seems able to get a *foothold* here, where before everything was, so to speak, too *smooth* for it.

And so, too, a corpse seems to us quite inaccessible to pain. – Our attitude to what is alive and to what is dead is not the same. All our reactions are different. – If someone says, 'That cannot simply come from the fact that living beings move in such and such ways and dead one's don't', then I want to suggest to him that this is a case of the transition 'from quantity to quality'. (PI § 284)

Think of the recognition of *facial expressions*. Or the description of facial expressions – which does not consist in giving the measurements of the face! Think, too, how one can imitate a man's face without seeing one's own in a mirror. (PI § 285)

Different points are made in these remarks. A general one seems to be that there is something strange in the idea that we ascribe feelings to others on the basis of our knowledge of our own internal states and the consideration of the similarity between our own and others' bodily behaviour. In seeing pain in the wriggling fly, a much more immediate process seems involved: something more akin to perception, maybe, rather than 'ascription' of pain to the fly. More precisely: it is our *immediate* attitude and *natural* reactions towards that

living being that are different from the immediate attitude and natural reactions we have towards, say, a stone or an object.

This is connected to a second point: Wittgenstein's attention is focused on our *attitude* (*Einstellung*), not on our *knowledge* of others and of others' minds. This shift of focus is central to Wittgenstein's overall strategy in the context of the problem of other minds. The skeptical challenge regarding other minds, in fact, is an *epistemic* challenge: its core claim is that we are unable to prove that we have or can have knowledge of other peoples' mental states (thoughts, emotions etc.). Wittgenstein's claim, by contrast, is *not* simply that we do have knowledge of others' mental states; rather, he shows that talk of knowledge in a strict sense, in this context, is inappropriate. Even more radically, he shows that it is precisely talk of knowledge that makes the problem itself arise. Indeed, once we frame the question in epistemic terms, we cannot but give credit to the hypothesis that there are some things (others' mental states) waiting to be known. And once in this framework, it is a short step to also accept that in our attempt to know the other person's state of mind, we face a problem, because we do not have a direct epistemic access to her or his state of mind, due to the asymmetry between first and third person.<sup>2</sup> As Wittgenstein puts it some years later:

My attitude towards him is the attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul (PPF § 21)

Attitude, in this sense, precedes knowledge, and it is attitude rather than knowledge that governs our life with others (cf. Gangopadhyay and Pichler 2016).

A third point that emerges from the quoted passages above, has to do with *measurement*. In recognizing and in describing the expressions of a face, we do not

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<sup>1</sup> For abbreviations of Wittgenstein's works, see the list of references.

<sup>2</sup> There is a form of scientism in this craving to know: we are inclined to shape the problem of other minds as science does, that is, as a matter of empirical knowledge. See Child (2017).

measure: we do not care about how many millimeters the lips or the eyebrows of the person raise when she is happy or angry, nor do we judge her happiness based on the width of her smile – though, of course, the width of a smile, just like the number of someone's tears or the frequency of his pulse rate, do have connections with the intensity of that person's emotions. The point is that we do not measure these elements in order to know how she is feeling. A transition 'from quantity to quality', says Wittgenstein, is at stake here.

Let us keep in mind this point: the difference in our attitudes when we are concerned with human (and more generally, living) beings rather than inanimate objects has to do with the difference between quantity and quality. This is something Wittgenstein does not linger on, but we shall return to it, because one aspect that the notion of imponderable evidence helps us to see is precisely the qualitative dimension of human life, and especially of human life with others.

## 2. Imponderable evidence and the other minds

I will now proceed to examine the passages in which Wittgenstein talks of imponderable evidence.

We saw that our relationship with living beings is different from our relationship with inanimate objects. One shape that this difference assumes is that in the context of interpersonal relationships, the rules of evidence, as well as those of agreement and disagreement, are peculiar.

I am sure, *sure*, that he is not pretending; but some third person is not. Can I always convince him? And if not, is there some mistake in his reasoning or observations?

'You don't understand a thing!' – this is what one says when someone doubts what we recognize as clearly genuine – but we cannot prove anything. (PPF §§ 353-354)

While the truth of empirical claims about inanimate objects is ascertained through observation and reasoning, and can be proved or confuted, when it

comes to the genuineness of a person's expressions of feelings, these methods, so to speak, lose their grip. Yet, the impossibility of proving the genuineness or authenticity of a person's expressions does not entail that one cannot be *sure* about them. Certainty and proof are disconnected here.

This aspect shows the distance from the context of empirical knowledge, in which if someone knows something with certainty, they are normally able to give evidence and reasons for their knowledge, and can be asked to produce evidence and reasons. It is common to disagree in judgments about a person's sincerity, and although in discussion one may be asked to give reasons for one's beliefs (for instance, to recall other situations in which the person in question behaved in such and such a way and was or was not genuine in her expressions), these are not decisive in convincing others. To reiterate: the absence of proofs does not disrupt the possibility of being legitimately sure about another's sincerity. Quite the opposite, the impossibility of proof is part of the ordinary practice of judging the other's feelings, in such a way that without it (without the impossibility of proof), the practice itself and the patterns of life in which it occurs would be radically and unpredictably different.

Interestingly, this constitutive absence of proof is not an absence of criteria for judgment, neither is it an absence of 'expert judgment' on others' feelings. 'Here too – Wittgenstein observes (§ 355) – there are those with "better" and those with "worse" judgment', and '[i]n general, predictions arising from judgments from those with better knowledge of people [*des bessern Menschenkenners*] will be more correct' (ibid.). *Menschenkenntnis*, clearly, is not a form of knowledge in a strict sense, but rather a sort of sensibility to the physiognomy of the human, a capacity in perceiving and judging the others' nature, moods, dispositions, and states of mind, which to a certain extent can be learned and taught.

Can one learn this knowledge [*Menschenkenntnis*]? Yes; some can learn it. Not, however, by taking a course of study in it, but through 'experience' [*Erfahrung*]. – Can someone else be a man's teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right tip. – This is what 'learning' and 'teaching' are like here. – What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgments. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people [*Erfahrene*] can apply them rightly. Unlike calculating rules. (PPF § 355).

Experience, therefore – not in the sense of lived experience (*Erlebnis*), but in the sense of training, repetition, 'varied observation' (PPF § 357), and learning by doing – can provide a person with this special kind of skill or familiarity with human nature, an ability or a disposition to judge correctly the genuineness of others and to predict correctly their future behavior from their present actions. This experienced knowledge is perhaps more akin to a form of knowing-how than a knowing-that: it is a capacity, whose rules are *not* the systematic rules of a calculus, but the unwritten, implicit and hardly definite rules of experience.

Although there is no proof here, there is a form of evidence – and here we come to the notion of imponderable evidence:

One can indeed be convinced by the evidence that someone is in such-and-such a state of mind: that, for instance, he is not pretending. But there is also 'imponderable' evidence here. (PPF § 358)

The question is: what does imponderable evidence *accomplish* [*leistet*]? (PPF § 359)

The first thing to underline here is that Wittgenstein is not drawing a sharp distinction between (ponderable) evidence and imponderable evidence. Both can be at work in our judgments concerning someone's state of mind. In distinguishing between the two, Wittgenstein is trying to understand what imponderable evidence does, performs, accomplishes, provides, or affords; in other words, what is its place or role in our life.

The case is compared in the following lines with evidence concerning the chemical structure of a substance, and the genuineness of a work of art:

Suppose there were imponderable evidence for the chemical (internal) structure of a substance; still, it would have to prove itself to be evidence by certain consequences which *are* ponderable.

(Imponderable evidence might convince someone that a picture [*Bild*] was a genuine ... But this *may* be proved right by documentation as well). (ibid.)

In the case of the chemical structure, imponderable evidence *has* to be also supported by ponderable evidence: if for some reasons I were miraculously equipped with the capacity to know the internal, invisible structure of a substance, this kind of evidence would not suffice. Something measurable would also be needed.

The case of the genuineness of a work of art seems to stand midway between human expressions and the internal structure of a substance: in judging whether a painting is (say) a Titian, an art critic can have imponderable evidence for this, but this evidence *may* also be confirmed (or not) by documentation (scientific information on the dating of pigments, for instance).

Notice that the reflection pivots on the internal/external distinction: in each case, evidence, be it ponderable or imponderable, is supposed to provide knowledge or understanding of something that seems to be, in some form, *inside* the object and not in plain view. Wittgenstein draws on a range of cases: for inanimate objects, even if imponderable evidence were possible, ponderable evidence would be necessary; for a work of art, both ponderable and imponderable evidence are possible and can supplement each other; for human states of mind, both forms are possible, and imponderable evidence seems to have the most important role. I am probably oversimplifying here, but my point is that Wittgenstein is comparing various forms of evidence in various contexts, making us aware of how our epistemic practices and our interactions vary, and at the same time how boundaries are not as sharp as we might tend to think.

Ponderability and imponderability, he seems to suggest, are not mutually exclusive, and even in the domain of interpersonal relationships ponderable evidence is possible. In fact, feelings, emotions, and intentions are bound to the external criteria, behavior – visible actions that to a certain extent can be evaluated, documented, and 'weighed'. Therefore, if on the one hand it would not be satisfactory to negate the role of imponderability in our judgments, on the other hand, it would equally be unsatisfactory to say that the genuineness of an expression can *only* be 'felt' by gifted people who can feel it (see PPF § 357). We do not measure the width of a smile in order to know 'how much happiness' someone feels, and yet we do not simply 'feel' or have an inexplicable private intuition of that person's happiness. We are aware of someone's state of mind because we are acquainted and familiar with her behavior and with human behavior in general, in all its nuances and complex variability.

Imponderable evidence includes subtleties of glance, of gesture, of tone.

I may recognize a genuine loving look, distinguish it from a pretended one (and here there can, of course, be a 'ponderable' confirmation of my judgment). But I may be quite incapable of describing the difference. (PPF § 360)

When we recognize the authenticity of another person's expression, *something* in her way of behaving makes us certain of her psychological state; and yet we are not able to explain exactly what it is. As ter Hark puts it, '[i]mponderable evidence is evidence which can make us certain about someone's psychological state, without our being able to specify what it is in their behaviour that makes us so sure' (ter Hark 2004, 140). This immediate and yet expert certainty can be utterly impossible to put into words.

### 3. Having an 'eye' for something

As we saw, Wittgenstein touched on aesthetic judgment as a case in which imponderable evidence has a role, though it may also be supported by ponderable elements. I would like now to expand a little on imponderable evidence and aesthetics. Aesthetic *creation*, instead of judgment, is also called for in the second part of PPF § 360, immediately following the quoted passage above. After stating that by imponderable evidence it is possible to distinguish between a genuine and a pretended loving look, but we 'may be quite incapable of describing the difference', Wittgenstein continues:

[T]his is not because the languages I know have no words for it. Why don't I simply introduce new words? – If I were a very talented painter, I might conceivably represent the genuine and the dissembled glance in pictures. (ibid.)

While words would not help us in describing what it is in that look that makes us certain of its sincerity, we may – talent permitting – represent a genuine look, and others would recognize in the representation sincerity or insincerity. The internal state, so to speak, is displayed in the look and can be displayed in a represented look, if the artist is good enough in capturing and rendering the expression. Notice that the representation need not be an exact portrayal: the talented artist is able to represent 'the' genuine glance, not this particular one. The good painter knows how a genuine loving glance looks like, and how it is embedded in and connected with bodily movements, gestures, and attitudes.

How does the painter know? Not only does he or she develop the capacity to depict the genuine glance; first and foremost, the artist develops the capacity to see and recognize the genuine glance in people around him or her, and to see in the glance the feeling, emotion, or state of mind of the person. To a greater or lesser degree, this capacity is naturally developed by human beings in general as they grow up. But there are also

many specific contexts, most notably aesthetic ones, in which some people develop a particular 'eye' for something, a marked sensibility or ability to perceive subtle nuances, differences, and tones. This is what enables them to fully appreciate the overall quality of a performance, or a work of art, for instance.

Ask yourself: How does a man learn to get an 'eye' [*Blick*] for something? And how can this eye be used? (PPF § 361)

The 'eye' for something can be trained and refined through experience and practice; more specifically, through the kind of experience and practice that a master can teach to an apprentice.

An important fact here is that we learn certain things only through long experience and not from a course in school. How, for instance, does one develop the eye of a connoisseur? Someone says, for example: 'This picture was not painted by such-and-such a master'--the statement he makes is thus not an aesthetic judgment, but one that can be proved by documentation. He may not be able to give good reasons for his verdict.--How did he learn it? Could someone have taught him? Quite.--Not in the same way as one learns to calculate. A great deal of experience was necessary. (LS I § 925).

The continuous immersion in a context and involvement in its practices, with the imitation of more trained participants and sometimes the explicit guide of experts, progressively sharpens the capacity to perceive nuances, as well as to respond appropriately when a response is expected. As time passes, what initially had to be made explicitly conscious, is acquired as part of a *Bildung* and begins to work in the background, becoming 'natural'. Aesthetic reactions are therefore, at the very same time, immediate and experienced, in the sense of trained or made expert. *Immediacy*, we might say, is the expression of experience.

The affinity between the aesthetic eye and the perception of human emotions and states of mind is also touched on by Wittgenstein in his lectures on aesthetics. In discussing our use of words like 'good' and 'beautiful'

in aesthetic reactions and judgments, he points out that these words themselves are unimportant, while what matters is the 'enormously complicated situation in which the aesthetic expression has a place' (LC, 2). Other adjectives, not strictly descriptive, can be used more efficaciously by an art critic or a music expert: a melody, for instance, could be called 'youthful', 'springly', 'stately', or 'pompous' (ibid, 3). But notice:

If I were a good draughtsman, I could convey an innumerable number of expressions by four strokes [omitted: sketches of faces]

Such words as 'pompous' and 'stately' could be expressed by faces. Doing this, our descriptions would be much more flexible and various than they are as expressed by adjectives. If I say of a piece of Schubert's that it is melancholy, that is like giving it a face (I don't express approval or disapproval). I could instead use gestures or [Rhees] dancing. In fact, if we want to be exact, we do use a gesture or a facial expression. (ibid, 4).

Even when we can find words to express the impression that a melody or a painting produces on us and what we think of it, a facial expression – including a drawn facial expression, like the sketches proposed by Wittgenstein, oddly similar to smileys – would be more *exact*. This is the exactness of an appropriate expression, not the exactness of a measurement: it is a sort of 'imponderable exactness', we might say, that belongs to the person who has an 'eye' for something.

All we have seen thus far indicates that imponderable evidence is inextricably interwoven with the variability and indeterminateness of the phenomena of human life. A selection of passages from Wittgenstein's later remarks on the philosophy of psychology can help us to consolidate this theme.

Sufficient evidence passes over into insufficient without a borderline. A natural foundation for the way this concept is formed is the complex nature and the variety of human contingencies.

A facial expression that was completely fixed couldn't be a friendly one. Variability and irregularity are essential to a friendly expression. Irregularity is part of its physiognomy.

The importance we attach to the subtle shades of behaviour.

That the evidence makes someone else's feelings merely probable is not what matters to us; what we are looking at is the fact that *this* is taken as evidence for something; that we construct a statement on *this* involved sort of evidence, and hence that *such* evidence has a special importance in our lives [...]. (RPP II §§ 614, 615, 616, 709)

The last remark makes clear Wittgenstein's general point: rather than focusing on the fact that shades of behavior give us only a probable evidence of the other's state of mind, we should consider that this is the kind of evidence we normally go by: *this is how we act*; imponderable evidence is part of our form of life (see also LS II, 89). Neither imponderability nor the imperfection of this form of evidence should worry us. Absolute epistemic certainty is neither what we need, nor what we actually look for when we interact with one another. As he puts it in LS (II, 81), 'That our evidence makes someone else's experience only probable doesn't take us far; but that this pattern of our experience that is hard to describe is an important piece of evidence for us does. That this fluctuation is an important part of our life'.

Acquiring an 'eye' for something, just like acquiring *Menschenkenntnis*, is only possible in virtue of our belonging to a form of life in which fluctuations in the pattern of experience and imponderable evidence are important, so important that they contribute in an essential way to its characterization. In fact, we would not really even be able to imagine how our life would be, without imponderable evidence. Convinced by the skeptic, we might wish to eliminate imponderable evidence from our life, in favour of an alternative scenario in which we could always *know* with ponderable and verifiable evidence what is in another person's mind. Notice that this scenario is ultimately what is called for in the commonsensical, yet scientific urge to 'read' another's mind, or to know via scientific instruments what the other's thoughts and desires really

are (cf. Child 2017). A similar outlook is tacitly at work in the dispute between 'Theory Theory' and 'Simulation Theory' characterizing the debate of the last decades in cognitive science<sup>3</sup>. Suppose we took this urge seriously, and built a portable mechanical 'lie-detector' that would reveal, 100% accurately, any lies in our interpersonal exchanges. 'Lie' would be redefined as 'that which causes a deflection on the lie detector'. Now, Wittgenstein asks:

Would we change our way of living if this or that were provided for us?--And how could I answer that? (LS II, 95)

The reason why the question remains open, if my reading is correct, is that in such a scenario our life would be so profoundly different, that we cannot really imagine it. Some of our most fundamental concepts would be involved in the change, such as those of evidence, prove, truth, and lie. The point is that imponderable evidence is *conceptually* bound to our form of life, and to suppose that our lack of knowledge of other minds is a defect, something that we might overcome, amounts to not being able to see how central this imponderability is in our way of living. Thinking that it is possible to turn this qualitative aspect into something measurable, is not merely making an empirical hypothesis: it is an attempt compelled by a misleading picture, which betrays, in the end, a conceptual confusion.

<sup>3</sup> Both approaches indeed aim at explaining how one acquires the capacity to 'mind-read' an agent's intentions by acquiring knowledge of her or his internal mental states (be it through a system of concepts, as in 'Theory Theory', or by using one's own mind as a model, as in 'Simulation Theory'). For a survey of this literature, see Marraffa (2011).



#### 4. Dewey's qualitative thought

With the aim of clarifying the qualitative nature of Wittgenstein's notion of imponderable evidence and possibly extending its purport beyond Wittgensteinian literature, I will now make use of another thinker's perspective, which shows interesting affinities with this Wittgensteinian reflection: John Dewey's. Yet, I will approach Dewey only with respect to some aspects of his conception of 'qualitative thought', without claiming either to offer a full description of this conception, or to draw a general comparison with Wittgenstein.<sup>4</sup> For the sake of remaining focused on the theme of quality, I will also leave aside Dewey's reflections on the expression and understanding of emotions, on which other parallels with Wittgenstein's approach would undoubtedly be interesting, but would require a much more extensive work<sup>5</sup>. My use of Dewey's perspective is therefore admittedly instrumental.

Dewey defends the qualitative dimension of experience on a number of occasions. In *Experience and Nature*, for instance, against the typical philosophical fallacy of reifying those features of reality which appear most stable and permanent into ontological entities, he vindicates the ineffable and qualitative character of events as they are immediately enjoyed or suffered (see in particular Chapters 3, 4, and 7). 'Empirically,' he says, 'things are poignant, tragic, beautiful, humorous, settled, disturbed, comfortable, annoying, barren, harsh, consoling, splendid, fearful [...]' (Dewey 1925, 96<sup>6</sup>). From an empirical point of view, he claims, aesthetic quality,

in a broad sense, characterizes situations and events as they occur in the world, and in the end science, even quantitative science, must recognize that it has its basis in qualitative events (p. 86).

In his 1930 article titled 'Qualitative Thought' Dewey puts forth some ideas which are particularly illuminating for our purposes. The world in which we live, he claims, is primarily qualitative, and *thinking* itself, including logic, is shaped and informed by an intrinsic qualitative background. The very beginning of the article is straightforward:

The world in which we immediately live, that in which we strive, succeed, and are defeated is preeminently a qualitative world. What we act for, suffer, and enjoy are things in their qualitative determinations. This world forms the field of characteristic modes of thinking, characteristic in that thought is definitely regulated by qualitative considerations. (Dewey 1930, 243)

It is a fundamental mistake, Dewey argues, to exclude the qualitative dimension from logic. In fact, this 'leaves thought in certain subjects [e.g. aesthetic matters, morals and politics] without any logical status' (245). Conversely, taking aesthetics as the exemplary case, the quality of a work of art (but the same holds for a person or an historical event) is what internally 'pervades, colors, tones, and weights every detail' of it, and externally demarcates it from other entities (ibid.). Such underlying and pervasive qualitative dimensions need to be acknowledged. The core of Dewey's argumentation is the following, based on the distinction between 'situation' and 'object':

By the term 'situation' in this connection is signified the fact that the subject-matter ultimately referred to in existential propositions is a complex existence that is held together, in spite of its internal complexity, by the fact that it is dominated and characterized throughout by a single quality. By 'object' is meant some element in the complex whole that is defined in abstraction from the whole of which it is a distinction. The special point made is that the selective determination and relation of objects in thought is controlled by reference to a situation--

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<sup>4</sup> Although I'm inclined to think that there are significant affinities between Wittgenstein and the pragmatist tradition in general (Boncompagni 2016), and although many thinkers (most notably, but also contentiously, Rorty 1979) have claimed that Wittgenstein and Dewey have a similar outlook and similar objectives in their conception of philosophy, I would not underestimate the differences between the two; see Volber 2012 on this.

<sup>5</sup> Besides Dewey (1925), see in particular Dewey (1894), (1895) and (1934, chapters 3 and 4).

<sup>6</sup> Notice the similarity here with William James' (1976) characterization of affectional facts in his *Essays on Radical Empiricism*.

to that which is constituted by a pervasive and internally integrating quality, so that failure to acknowledge the situation leaves, in the end, the logical force of objects and their relations inexplicable. (Dewey 1930, 246)

The qualitative situation, therefore, is the implicit and tacit background that underlies any propositional symbolization and regulates its pertinence, relevancy, and force (248). Logic selects its objects with reference to a situation, and excluding the situation from logic would be nonsense. A situation is grasped by 'intuition', where intuition is taken in its everyday sense, without any mystical implication (249): intuition is what precedes reflection and rational elaboration, catching the pervasive quality of the situation.

Now, what is especially interesting and has relevance in respect to the Wittgensteinian reflection above, is that the immediate grasping of a situation is not conceived of by Dewey as a kind of unmediated perception of elements in reality: rather, it is an intuition essentially shaped by habit and training. Immediacy is mediated by a complex system of meanings, ultimately grounded in human practices and their history<sup>7</sup>. This is evident in Dewey's treatment of ejaculations and interjections and of aesthetic judgments.

Some ejaculations, he observes, have an intellectual import. For instance, expressions like 'Alas,' 'Yes,' 'No,' 'Oh' may be 'the symbol of an integrated attitude toward the quality of a situation as a whole', and an expression like 'Good!' may 'mark a deep apprehension of the quality of a piece of acting on the stage, of a deed performed, or of a picture in its wealth of content', in a way that is *not* adequately replaceable by more complicated words and long disquisitions (250). These ejaculations are meaningful because they carry with them habits, past experiences, and past reflections, unifying them in a single reaction. In Dewey's words:

Such ejaculatory judgments supply perhaps the simplest example of qualitative thought in its purity. While they are primitive, it does not follow that they are always superficial and immature. Sometimes, indeed, they express an infantile mode of intellectual response. But they may also sum up and integrate prolonged previous experience and training, and bring to a unified head the results of severe and consecutive reflection. (ibid.)

Notice that Wittgenstein too underlined that words are unimportant and may be not the best way of expressing a global and *exact* aesthetic judgment, while facial expressions and gestures may accomplish the task better. Moreover, just like Wittgenstein, Dewey invokes the example of recognizing immediately the author of a work of art, before analytically examining the picture:

A man sees a picture and says at first sight that it is by Goya or by some one influenced by him. He passes the judgment long before he has made any analysis or any explicit identification of elements. It is the quality of the picture as a whole that operates (259).

Again, like Wittgenstein, Dewey notes that it is also possible to accomplish a more technical and detailed analysis of the painting, which will prove the initial intuition right or wrong; nevertheless, the 'basic appreciation of quality as a whole' is already a reliable ground for such an analysis, more dependable than the judgments of a critic 'who knows history and mechanical points of brushwork but who is lacking in sensitiveness to pervasive quality' (ibid.).

Although aesthetic judgment is Dewey's paradigmatic case of the qualitative dimension, his other examples in the introductory lines of his article were a person and a historical fact: in these cases too, quality is grasped as a whole. Concerning the person, in particular, his or her character or personality, including the ethical aspects, forms his or her 'quality'. In other words, quality is *not* an attribute to be added to the person; the qualitative dimension *is*, in the end, the person, and we are able to see and recognize it thanks to our acquaintance with a complex net of social habits, rules,

<sup>7</sup> See Ryan 1994 and Colapietro, this issue (2018).

and customs. Dewey also makes the example of a person's expression, where the expression itself is not a single feature among his or her traits but 'a total effect of all elements in their relation to one another' (260). He also mentions *family resemblances*, which, he observes, we are often able to detect immediately in two faces or in two people in spite of our inability to specify *where* exactly these resemblances are.

I hope it is clear from putting Wittgenstein's and Dewey's quotes side by side, the former with his notion of imponderable evidence and the latter with his notion of qualitative thought, that despite the differences that there may be in their overall perspectives, the two philosophers seem to be pointing in the same direction: for both, especially in some contexts (chiefly, interpersonal relationships and aesthetic judgment), there is a form of understanding which is at the same time immediate and experienced, and cannot be accounted for in strictly epistemic or cognitive terms, that is, as a form of knowledge. Both highlight that this is *not* marginal: rather, it is what deeply characterizes our life and the everyday exchanges we have with each other and the world. We live primarily in a qualitative dimension, in which immediacy and experience are bound together. Our immediate reactions are experienced reactions, and they are so in virtue of our upbringing in and belonging to a form of life. This dimension, at once complex and immediate, is for both what must be acknowledged as 'the given'.

[T]he original datum is always such qualitative whole. [...] What is 'given' is not an object by itself nor a term having a meaning of its own. The 'given', that is to say the existent, is precisely an undetermined and dominant complex quality. (Dewey 1930, 253)

What has to be accepted, the given, is – one might say – forms of life. (Wittgenstein, PPF § 345)

It goes without saying that there are differences between the two approaches. Most notably, in Dewey's view, since quality is the substratum of cognitive

processes overall, it is a pervasive aspect characterizing *all experiences*, while Wittgenstein deals with imponderable evidence with the primary aim of highlighting some features of our experience with living beings, and of aesthetics. Yet, within the domain of human life and its social and cultural practices, Dewey's 'qualitative whole' is not distant from Wittgenstein's 'forms of life', in that both perspectives, to a certain extent, stem from the refusal to reduce the 'given' to sense data or similar postulated entities. Both thinkers show themselves to be interested, instead, in catching the immediacy of human life in its complex and qualitative dimension.

#### 5. Imponderable evidence and the qualitative dimension of human life

The comparison with Dewey's conception of qualitative thought helps us to see Wittgenstein's notion of imponderable evidence in a wider framework. We might consider it as one example of a way of doing philosophy centered (or re-centered) on the qualitative dimension of human life and of human forms of life, that is, on what usually is either neglected or taken for granted (or neglected because taken for granted) in philosophy. Paying attention to imponderable evidence is a way of turning the direction of the gaze, as far as possible, to this tacit and immediate background of everyday practices, exchanges, and thoughts, which is, in the end, what gives them meaning and sense.

Grasping this 'whole hurly-burly, [...] the background [which] determines our judgment, our concepts, and our reactions' (in Wittgenstein's words, RPP II § 629), or 'the immediate existence of quality [as] the background, the point of departure, and the regulative principle of all thinking' (in Dewey's, 1930, 261) is an unusual task for philosophers: a background cannot be put in the foreground without losing its nature. The background is, so to speak, the shadow cone of phenomena, and deciding to investigate the background implies accepting the inevitable vagueness and blurredness of its

boundaries. This vagueness characterizes in particular the imponderable evidence regulating the expression and understanding of feelings and emotions, which varies in flexible, continuous, and irregular ways. Importantly, this indeterminacy is not a defect, but rather a constitutive feature of imponderable evidence. As ter Hark has it, 'the absence of conclusive criteria is not a shortcoming in the evidence, but is akin to the impossibility of scoring a goal in tennis' (ter Hark 2004, 128), that is to say: indeterminacy belongs to the very grammar of imponderable evidence, to its rules. Wittgenstein explains this point by highlighting that:

A sharper concept would not be the same concept. That is: the sharper concept wouldn't have the *value* for us that the blurred one does. Precisely because we would not understand people who act with total certainty when we are in doubt and uncertain (LW I § 267)

Attention to the intrinsically vague 'hurly-burly' of everyday life allows us to see that epistemic certainty with regard to others' feelings and emotions not only is impossible: more radically, it is neither attained nor needed, because it has no role in our life. I am not claiming that one does not want to be sure about others' feelings: this is in fact something that happens quite often. Rather, the point is that this sureness (and unsureness) has different criteria and rules than the criteria and rules of justified true belief about empirical facts. The evidence one has of the other's feelings is imponderable: it cannot be weighed according to quantitative standards. This is part of our life with others, and it is an *important* part of it.

Dewey warns that losing sight of the qualitative dimension leaves us vulnerable to 'a large part of the artificial problems and fallacies that infects our theory of knowledge and our metaphysics, or theories of existence' (1930, 261). One of these artificial problems, Wittgenstein teaches us, is the urge to know, with quantitative methods, what is 'inside' a person's head. If this were really achieved, as we saw in respect to the 'lie detector' example above, our form of life would not be

better: it would be an utterly different form of life, one we are hardly able to conceive. A related artificial problem in the philosophy of mind is the idea that there is an ontological divide between brain and mind and a consequent explanatory gap that waits to be filled (Boncompagni 2013). Conversely, attention to imponderable evidence shows that 'psychological indeterminacy has nothing to do with either unbridgeable ontological divides or epistemological defects, and everything with the enormous variety and flexibility of human life' (ter Hark 2004, 142). The depth, complexity, and thickness of psychological concepts is saved, together with the naturalness and immediateness with which we ordinarily live and use them. This perspective more generally suggests that 'intersubjectivity is first and foremost based on a special, practical attitude of responding that precedes epistemological discussions of knowledge, beliefs, justifications, and doubts' (Gangopadhyay and Pichler 2016, 1318). This also makes room for a novel strategy that avoids skepticism with regard to other minds by recognizing that knowledge, as epistemology has it (i.e. justified true belief), is *not at stake* in interpersonal relationships. Stanley Cavell would put it this way: there is a truth in skepticism, namely, the truth that our relationship with the world and with the others is *not* primarily epistemic in character; this relationship is *not one of knowing* (Cavell 197, 45)<sup>8</sup>.

Finally, there is an ethical aspect in all this. By returning to the imponderable evidence of the everyday practices with others, and claiming that *this* is what is important in our form of life, philosophy advocates for itself the task of educating, or re-educating, our sensibility towards what matters in human phenomena.

<sup>8</sup> According to Volber (2012, 110-11), reading Wittgenstein through these Cavellian lenses highlights a contrast between his philosophy and Dewey's, a contrast that has to do precisely with knowledge. Though I agree that this is generally true, I also think that with respect to the topics we are dealing with, Dewey too insists that our relationship with quality is not one of knowing; see for instance Dewey 1925, 86.

Indeed, not being able to see and perceive the complex and qualitative dimension of life not only results in theoretical failures: what is worse in this neglectful attitude is that it fosters inattention and indifference in our relationships themselves. Not being able to see pain, joy, curiosity, suffering in the other's expressions and gestures, or to capture subtle nuances of behavior and appreciate the complexity of the person in front of us, is the first step towards insensibility. If it ignores these immediate aspects of understanding in favour of discussions on the unknowableness of the other's mind, philosophy facilitates this amnesia. If conversely it ceases these discussions in favour of the reappraisal of the everyday, immediate and yet experienced sensibility with regard to others' feelings and emotions, it can help to focus the attention on these aspects and can enrich our capacity for understanding others and attuning ourselves to situations of interaction.

To borrow a line of argument that Floyd (2017, 371) applies to the concept of acquaintance, but that (in my view) fits perfectly well with our topic:

[Wittgenstein] returned 'acquaintance' to our everyday sense of the word: the sort of acquaintance, or experience, we may have with an object or a person or animal. This sense of 'acquaintance' requires comportment, discernment, attunement, response, experience, sensitivity to context, some elements of convention (handshaking, nodding, smiling) and, in the case of a person or animal, at least some shared sense of interests and instincts. It involves looking and response, acknowledgement of another who is expected to respond back with a look.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have argued that the Wittgensteinian notion of imponderable evidence is an example of how philosophy can investigate the qualitative dimension of human life, a dimension in which immediacy and experience are interwoven in an inextricable way. After introducing the topic through the examination of how Wittgenstein accounts for the difference in our attitudes towards inanimate objects and living beings, I have considered the notion of imponderable evidence as it appears in his notes on the philosophy of psychology and in some remarks on aesthetic judgment. In order to clarify this notion further and to interpret it in a wider framework, I have invoked John Dewey's conception of qualitative thought, pointing out some affinities with the Wittgensteinian outlook that helped to elucidate some aspects of it. Though the two philosophers have different perspectives overall, an interesting point of contact is that both emphasize the importance for philosophy of acknowledging the interplay of immediacy and experience in our ordinary practices and exchanges with the world and others. For both, the aim here is to 'come to understand better what is already within the common experience of mankind' (Dewey 1925, 36-7), a task that philosophy can accomplish by paying attention to the pervasiveness and importance of qualitative elements in our existence (and co-existence).

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**IN SEARCH OF LOST BODY:  
ON PRAGMATISM, EXPERIENCE, AND LANGUAGE <sup>(\*)</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** Modern accounts of knowledge do not make much of the fact that we are bodily beings. First, Cartesianism assigned cognitive functions exclusively to the mental. Then the linguistic and the pragmatic turns in philosophy moved away from mind-centred approaches to these functions and focused on meanings and discursive practices, but these were also seen as somehow independent of the physical/material reality of speakers and of signs themselves. In this context, classical pragmatism stood as an alternative account that stressed corporeality as essential to knowledge processes. An illustration of it is John Dewey's appeal to "immediate experience," which I interpret in this connection as a statement about the epistemological significance of the somatic.

The first section of this paper summarizes some traditional sources of the philosophical neglect of the body. In the second section I argue for an alternative starting point that takes the "lived body" as a sort of philosophical premise—a contention suggested by some Wittgensteinian remarks together with some interesting findings by the neuropsychiatrist Oliver Sacks. The third section discloses the affinities between such view and the notion of "immediate experience," and why the latter is not necessarily committed to a dichotomy between language and experience. In the last two sections I face two objections that linguistic pragmatists typically rise against immediate experience—i.e. its alleged commitments to prelingualism and to foundationalism—and try to show that they miss the target.

**Keywords:** epistemology; immediate experience; lived body; (neo)pragmatism; (non)discursive practices

In an ordinary sense of the terms "experience" and "reality," both our experience and our sense of reality persuade us that we are bodily beings. If someone believes that she can walk through a wall, materialize and dematerialize at will, transport herself to a distant place leaving her body behind, and things of the like, we say that she is a half-wit and does not live in the real world. And if she insists that she has experienced such things, we conclude that her senses are somehow disturbed. Even those who believe that they will live after death as disembodied souls place that way of existence in a reality that transcends ours, and make their belief rest on faith, not on human experience. However, philosophical discussions of these very terms, "experience" and "reality," tend to pay little attention to the human body. One can understand that "metaphysical revisionists"—as Peter Strawson (1959) called the philosophers who try to replace the structure of our ordinary general concepts with an allegedly better one—depict reality in a way that, when deprived of its philosophical justification, resembles that of the deranged person. One can also understand that philosophers who do not credit experience as a means to assess the real indulge themselves with statements that experience would easily revoke.<sup>1</sup> But it is cause for surprise that philosophers who oppose such revisionisms and try to dismiss them have not taken more advantage of the connection amongst the body, the real, and the experienced, that our common speech so clearly embraces.

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<sup>1</sup> But one can share at the same time Paul Feyerabend's perplexity regarding these philosophical efforts: "Why are so many people dissatisfied with what they can see and feel? Why do they look for surprises behind events? Why do they believe that, taken together, these surprises form an entire world, and why, most strangely, do they take it for granted that this hidden world is more solid, more trustworthy, more 'real' than the world from which they started?" (1999: vii).

## 1. The lost body

The neglect of the human body within the mainstream of Western philosophy goes back to Plato, whose influence pervaded Neoplatonist doctrines and then was rapidly subsumed in the early philosophical systems of the Middle Ages. The influence was so strong that it eclipsed other Ancient schools, like the Cyrenaics, the Stoics, or the Cynics, where concern with the body was taken as a central issue. As a matter of fact, Plato's influence was so determinative that it cast a shadow even over Socrates's opinion, phrased by Xenophon in the following terms:

The body is valuable for all human activities, and in all its uses it is very important that it should be as fit as possible. Even in the act of thinking, which is supposed to require least assistance from the body, everyone knows that serious mistakes often happen through physical ill-health (quoted in Shusterman 2000: 267-8).

In Modern philosophy, Descartes admittedly consolidated the isolation of thought activities from bodily processes by construing the relationship between them as that of a (problematic) communication between two different, self-sufficient entities. Thus a "metaphysical problem" emerged —and we all know that the adjective "metaphysical" evokes as pessimistic prognoses when applied to problems, as the adjective "lethal" does when applied to diseases. Descartes, however, did not ignore that an ill condition of the body can cause serious mistakes in judgment. This was precisely one of the reasons for him to distrust the senses as a reliable source of knowledge —like the Ancient skeptics did before him. But he did not draw the seemingly obvious conclusion that a good condition of the body should count therefore as a necessary, though probably not a sufficient, condition of reliable judgment. Descartes acknowledged that without sense experience we would not be able to complete our scientific picture of the world in all its particularities (1998: 249), but he firmly believed that the first principles of the world order

revealed themselves to pure reason only, "pure" meaning a faculty that does not depend upon bodily operations.

Most contemporary epistemology is —or purports to be— anti-Cartesian in two important respects: it condemns foundationalist views of knowledge as well as vocabularies that refer ultimately to "the mental." The latter, however, is not accompanied in the least by the conjugate vindication of the corporeal as an indispensable constituent of knowledge. It is quite true that the so-called "strong program" in naturalized epistemology strives to redirect philosophers' attention to the study of the organic processes underlying cognitive functions. But it is hard to see, for those who do not commit to that program, how a better understanding, say, of brain activity would shed any light by itself on such epistemological questions as justification, objectivity, or realism, which in fact are begged in the very use of brain science as a source of relevant answers. On the other hand, and more to my point here, the program does not account for the *inherent* relationship (if there is any) between knowledge and the body. The latter is, I think, the conceptual challenge that Cartesian metaphysics left us to cope with, not the empirical challenge of finding out physical counterparts for mental operations.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. "Here is one leg"

Ludwig Wittgenstein is one of the contemporary philosophers who can help in coping with the aforementioned challenge; even though his philosophy

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<sup>2</sup> Descartes did not deny that such correlations exist, and he himself looked hard for them. It is a common mistake to think that Descartes held that the self is just a mind or spirit and not, *de facto*, also flesh and blood; this is already evident from the full argument of *Meditations on First Philosophy* and even more so from his work as a whole. Nevertheless, that mind and body are "numerically the same" did not mean for Descartes that they are "essentially" or conceptually one. See footnote 4 below —and, for a full discussion of this point, Ors & Sanfélix 2014.

is not directly concerned with epistemology, it still suggests reasons to think that epistemologists' inattentiveness to the corporeal dimension of human beings has misled them in important ways.

When Wittgenstein states that one cannot doubt whether one has a body (1979: §257), his statement should strike not only Cartesians but also "neurophilosophers." For one thing, if I think of my body as an observable object among others, or as a mere "material thing," it does not seem that the proposition "I am a material thing" has a privileged epistemic status, for the question "What is a material thing?" has not an evident answer. If I take "matter" to mean what physics says about such entities as fields and particles, or such magnitudes as mass, force, or movement, I must accept that my own material nature is no more transparent to me than is the material nature, say, of Mars. In this respect, my being a piece of matter, according to whatever description of matter provided by physical theory, is known to me indirectly and only as far as I commit to that theory. Hence, it is not indubitable knowledge.

Certainly, the notion of matter admits of descriptions that are independent of our present scientific framework, though not independent of any framework of thought whatsoever. A cursory historical survey would show that the meaning of the term "matter" has shifted many times; or, more properly, that to read Aristotle's "hylé," Descartes' "res extensa," and Popper's "first world" (just to mention some representative cases) as if they all referred interchangeably to "matter" is a convenient expedient but not a rigorous view. Now, what is significant about Wittgenstein's above statement is precisely that it does not seem to depend on any particular framework of thought concerning material entities in general.

On the contrary, this statement brings to the foreground the discontinuity existing between what we *know* about things like Mars, particles, or what science generically calls "bodies", on one hand, and the awareness that we ourselves are corporeal, on the

other. According to Wittgenstein, what I know is that about which I can give or ask for reasons, produce or demand proofs, rise or resolve doubts, etc. In a word, knowledge is *discursive*. Then, the statement that one cannot doubt whether one has a body amounts to say that the awareness of our own bodies is *not* discursive, in this sense. This is the reason why we cannot make sense of doubting or proving that we have a body; nor can we use such awareness—as G. E. Moore (1993a) wrongly thought—as a premise in order to prove the existence of "bodies" in general. The question is, then: how *that* body that we indubitably have—not the one that we tentatively know to need oxygen in order to live and neurons in order to think—intervenes in knowledge?

The first thing to be noticed in this connection is that one *experiences* that body. This may sound vaguely esoteric, for this experience is not of the same sort as the one that a physicist, a physician, or a neurologist may have of a human body as an "observable object," and this fact seems to suggest that the kind of experience involved here is out of reach for science. However, some scientists think that the converse is true: it is the reductionism exerted by science when it comes to think of the human body—in what the neuroscientist Alexander Luria labelled as the "veterinary approach"<sup>3</sup>—that impedes a scientific outlook on the subject. Oliver Sacks, one of Luria's followers, points at the Cartesian bias of this reductionism:

It is clear, first and foremost, that our bodies are personal—that they are the first definers of ego or self. ("The ego is first and foremost a body-ego," as Freud writes.) But none of this has really entered neurology. Neurology still bases itself on a mechanical model [...]. The mechanical model goes back to Descartes, to his dichotomous division of body and soul, his notion of the body as an automaton, with a knowing-willing "I" somehow floating above it.

But clinical and personal experience—an experience such as I relate in this book—is totally incompatible with such a duality; it shows

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<sup>3</sup> See Sacks 2012: 202.

the bankruptcy of the classical model (2012: 203).

The appeal to “clinical and personal experience,” coming from a scientist, should catch the attention of epistemologists with a naturalistic disposition. On the other hand, it is telling that Sacks thought of Wittgenstein when he underwent the astonishing experience that he recounts in his book: the temporary “loss” of one of his legs as a result of an operation after a mountain accident. His left leg was still there after the operation, but not only was he unable to feel it and unable to move it, but he did not even recognize it as *his*, that it was an integral part of *his* body, or as belonging to *him*. To all *empirical* effects, that inert limb had ceased to be a part of his personal, corporeal reality, and seeing it stuck *to his body* was revolting and terrifying for him. This syndrome had been described earlier in psychiatry books as a mere hysteric disorder, but now Sacks had found out that it had a neurologic basis —it was a mistake in judgment caused by an illness of the body, so to say. Going through that experience in the first person made him understand in what relationship his personal self stood to his body in an entirely new way. In describing the struggle that took place inside him while lying in bed and trying to assimilate intellectually what he was living, Sacks writes:

I heard, in Wittgenstein’s voice, the opening words of his last work, *On Certainty*: “If you can say, *Here is one leg*, we’ll grant you all the rest... The question is, whether it can make sense to doubt it.” (And only later did I realize that my memory, or imagination, had interposed “leg” for “hand.”) “Certainty,” for Wittgenstein, was grounded in the certainty of the body. But the certainty of the body was grounded in action (2012: 65).

The kind of experience described by Sacks (the loss of certainty regarding a part of his observable body) and Wittgenstein’s statement both invalidate the analysis according to which the proposition “I am a body” is the inclusion of an individual term within a general concept, as, for instance, in “Mars is a body.” My corporeity and

that that I can attribute to any other observable thing apart from me are “categorially” different, for I experience other things as being corporeal, while my *experiencing* things (including my experiencing myself) is *somatic* in itself. A way to stress the difference I am pointing at would be to distinguish between “the observed body” and “the lived (or personal) body.”<sup>4</sup> During his episode, Sacks still could observe his left leg, but he did not live (in) that part of his body any more. Complementary to this, the remark that one cannot doubt whether one has a body conveys our sense that we do not know what it would be like to live a disembodied life.<sup>5</sup> Now, in adding that the certainty of our own body is grounded in *action*, Sacks is expressing an insight that leads to an alternative analysis of the proposition “I am a body:” namely, the experience of being a body is not a conceptual apprehension, it is immediate, because it is primarily practical.

<sup>4</sup> It is fair to acknowledge that this distinction did not escape Descartes, who differentiated the body as “united to the soul” from the body as “a determinate part of matter” in one of his letters (February 9, 1645) to Mesland: “First of all, I consider what exactly is the body of a man, and I find that this word ‘body’ is very ambiguous. When we speak of a body in general, we mean a determinate part of matter, a part of the quantity of which the universe is composed. In this sense, if the smallest amount of that quantity were removed, we would judge without more ado that the body was smaller and no longer complete; and if any particle of the matter were changed, we would at once think that the body was no longer quite the same, no longer numerically the same. But when we speak of the body of a man, we do not mean a determinate part of matter, or one that has a determinate size; we mean simply the whole of the matter which is united with the soul of that man. And so, even though that matter changes, and its quantity increases or decreases, we still believe that it is the same body, numerically the same body, so long as it remains joined and substantially united with the same soul” (1991: 242-243). I thank Vicente Sanfélix for calling my attention to this passage.

<sup>5</sup> Maybe for this reason most Christians believe in a material resurrection with a restored human body, not just in the resurrection of the individual soul. The restoration of the material body is needed to make sense of the idea of immortality as eternal personal *life*.

### 3. The practical character of immediate experience

Sacks quotes from a letter that Alexander Luria addressed to him: “The body is a unity of actions, and if a part of the body is split off from action, it becomes ‘alien’ and not felt as part of the body” (2012: 166). These words could have well been written by William James—to whom Sacks also refers several times in his book. As a matter of fact, classical pragmatists conceived the practical character of experience precisely in the sense that having an experience is an inherently somatic affair. For instance, when John Dewey spoke of “immediate qualitative experience”<sup>6</sup> he did not mean a pre-conceptual content presumably given in experience, but the specific way in which each situation, as it is experienced by the subject, evokes an active response—a sensory-motor reaction in the first place—to the contents there presented.<sup>7</sup> Pragmatically considered, every experience is, so to say, an awareness of the potentialities of the active body within the situation given at that moment.

The most outstanding feature of this pragmatic concept of experience is that it is radically non-solipsistic. Dewey used to remind William James’ remark that the term “experience” is “double-barreled,” for it points in two directions simultaneously:

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<sup>6</sup> See Dewey 1971: 73-74 and Dewey 1991a and 1991b.

<sup>7</sup> According to Dewey, the fact that experienced situations are invested with a specific quality is also at the basis of the intellectual operations that the subject makes with “ideas” referring to those experiences: “When I think of a nest why does a bird come into my mind? As a matter of contiguity, there are multitudinous leaves and twigs which are more frequently and more obviously juxtaposed than is a bird. When I think of a hammer, why is the idea of nail so likely to follow? Such questions suggest, I hope, that even in seemingly casual cases of association, there is an underlying quality which operates to control the connection of objects thought of. It takes something else than contiguity to effect association; there must be relevancy of both ideas to a situation defined by unity of quality” (Dewey 1991a: 257-258). That unity of quality lies not within the situation itself but in the subject’s active disposition to that situation, as the example of the hammer clearly illustrates.

Like its congeners, life and history, it includes *what* men do and suffer, *what* they strive for, love, believe and endure, and also *how* men act and are acted upon, the ways in which they do and suffer [...], in short, processes of *experiencing*. [...] It is “double-barrelled” in that it recognizes in its primary integrity no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them both in an unanalyzed totality. “Thing” and “thought,” as James says in the same connection, are single-barrelled; they refer to products discriminated by reflection out of primary experience (1971: 10-11).

That is to say, primary (i.e. immediate, qualitative, unanalyzed, non-discursive, practical) experience does not confront us “solipsistically” with our own body, if this means that it does not comprise also the shakes, pressures, and resistances coming from what *is not* our body. It is not accidental that Dewey links “experience,” “life,” and “history,” because “I am a body” entails my being immersed in a temporal course of events, my feeling impacts from the environment as well as my having a sense of traction on it. Could I *not* doubt that I am a body but *do* doubt that it is alive and has a history?<sup>8</sup> Thus, primary experience, far from committing us to subjectivism, reveals subjectivism to be a misrepresentation of experience itself where the abstract dialectic of concepts overlooks the functional inseparability of single-barreled terms like “subject” and “object,” “act” and “material,” “thought” and “thing,” thus concealing the fact that what is experienced and the act of experiencing it entail each other, just as *what* is lived entails the process of *living* it, or the *happening* of some event entails the fact that it *happens to* somebody—i.e. to some *body*.

It is not hazardous to presume that such epistemological problems as realism, objectivity, or skepticism, would have had a different discussion if their

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<sup>8</sup> Moore himself, when he produced his “list of truisms,” already implicitly linked the existence of a human body with its being a living thing existing in time: “There exists at present a living human body, which is *my* body. This body was born at a certain time in the past, and has existed continuously ever since, though not without undergoing changes” (1993b: 107).

departing point would have been a “somatic experience” of the type sketched here. Next, I will consider two reasons why this trail was not, in fact, followed. In a somewhat paradoxical fashion, both have to do with the anti-Cartesian spirit of contemporary epistemology, for in its laudable effort to evade foundationalism and mind-centered approaches to knowledge, it, however, fell prey to the same oblivion of the body as the Cartesian view did.

#### 4. Body and language

The first reason seems rather obvious: the linguistic turn in philosophy would have precluded the vindication of anything that may present itself as “non-discursive” and, to that extent, extra-linguistic. However, I use the conditional tense because the case is not that simple. Nelson Goodman once summarized the evolution of mainstream contemporary epistemology in the following sequence:

[It] began when Kant exchanged the structure of the world for the structure of the mind, continued when C. I. Lewis exchanged the structure of the mind for the structure of concepts, and [...] now proceeds to exchange the structure of concepts for the structure of the several symbol systems of the sciences, philosophy, the arts, perception, and everyday discourse (1978: x).

According to this narrative, the linguistic turn redirected philosophical scrutiny from the Cartesian mind, formalized later by Kant as a rigid structure of possibilities impressed a priori upon our subjectivity, to the languages that codify the symbol systems that make thought possible in the first place. This way, the mind/body opposition seems no longer fundamental inasmuch as languages are not seen as primary mental realities. Therefore, the linguistic turn did not imply by itself that the old view in which the body was left out of the picture should subsist, but something else is needed to explain why a philosophy that redirects scrutiny to the linguistic remains indifferent to the body. In other

words, the dualism that concerns us now is not that between mind and body, but that between body and language.

This “something else” is the view that language is *essentially* a vehicle for discourse, that is, a view that equates linguistic competence with the ability to connect meanings in terms of truth-functional relations. The most recent and explicit expression of this view is Robert Brandom’s “semantic inferentialism,” which defines language users as individuals that get into normative commitments within the practice of giving and asking for reasons (see 2000); but it has an old ancestry, for it descends from that Modern tradition that made the term “experience” to mean a repository of “impressions” whose whole function and use were to validate “ideas” or “concepts,” that is, a tradition to which experience was philosophically relevant only because of its justificatory relationship to knowledge. Thus, when the structure of concepts was exchanged by linguistic structures, to use Goodman’s phrase, there remained the habit of thinking of the latter as nothing more than a scaffolding for reasoning — a habit, by the way, that Goodman himself avoids, for the symbol systems that he mentions above include systems that are not inferentially articulated, like perception or the arts, along with others that indeed have this articulation, like philosophy or the sciences.

To a philosophy of language that understands the linguistic only as a manifestation of discursive reasoning, the body remains as irrelevant to the comprehension of linguistic practices as it was, before the linguistic turn, to the comprehension of the activities of the mind. However, not everything in language is reasoning, as true as not everything in experience is cognition. As indicated earlier, Wittgenstein remarked that our experience of being a body cannot be conjugated with epistemologically-laden verbs such as “know,” “believe,” “doubt,” or “justify.” For Goodman, on the other hand, the range of language extends to non-inferentially articulated symbol systems like the arts. From the standpoint of these philosophers, thus, the



abandonment of mind-centered approaches imposed by the linguistic turn does not commit us *per force* to a new dualism between (discursive) language and (non-discursive) bodies.

Moreover, such dualism seems explicitly precluded in Wittgenstein's case by his peculiar way of relating linguistic to non-linguistic behaviour —i.e. to bodily movements— within “language-games.” His *Philosophical Investigations* opens with a paragraph of Augustine's *Confessions* where different movements of the body are mentioned at least five times in scarcely ten lines —“corpus ad aliquid movebant,” “ostendere,” “ex motu corporis,” “vultu et nutu oculorum,” “membrorum actu”— as necessarily accompanying the utterances of words (1981: I, §1). And, in the “primitive language” that Wittgenstein imagines in the subsequent paragraph in order to criticize Augustine's concept of meaning, communication between a builder and her assistant consists of a sort of choreography where utterances —“block,” “pillar,” “slab,” “beam”— are combined with the movement of their arms passing the stones from one to the other (I, §2).<sup>9</sup> Brandom argues (2011: 31), consistently enough with his own theoretical assumptions, that the latter is not in fact a case of linguistic communication, provided that the rules that both participants follow in using words do not involve inferential commitments. However, Brandom's contention that the participants are not *saying*, i.e. that their behaviour is “vocal” but not “verbal,” seems to me a mere stipulation in order to preserve his own restrictive definition of what should count as “language.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> As Wittgenstein's “counterexample” reveals, it is not the intervention of bodily movements what he thinks mistaken in Augustine's picture of the acquisition of language.

<sup>10</sup> Wittgenstein, in contrast, limits himself to observe that this would be only “a language more primitive than ours” (ibid.). I have developed more fully this criticism of Brandom's narrow concept of “linguistic practice” elsewhere (see Faerna 2014).

Earlier than Wittgenstein, John Dewey (1987: 67 ff.) had already conceived meaning as inseparable from non-linguistic behaviour, not by imagining more primitive forms of language but simply by observing how linguistic abilities emerge in real contexts of psychological development. Before they are able to speak, children learn how to say what they need or want by crying. They *say* it because their cries are intended to evoke a certain response; that is, these cries are already speech-acts,<sup>11</sup> in contrast to the involuntary cries that the baby effects as mere vocal counterparts of its organic condition. In these rudimentary utterances, the primary use of language as a signal-system for human communication reveals itself —a function that could by no means be accomplished without a parallel display of motions, gestures, grimaces, glances, and other forms of body expression. In a substantial sense, therefore, we learn — and teach— to talk with and from our bodies within practical contexts or situations that involve physical action; it is only as a part of such practical situations that “language-games” can take place.

This explains Wittgenstein's dictum that “language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination” (1979, § 475). Anyway, Dewey and Wittgenstein were not thinking from scratch. Dewey, for instance, quotes the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen in support of the idea that language emerged in connection with such physical activities as dancing and singing, where playful dimensions overtake intellectual reasoning.<sup>12</sup> Situations

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<sup>11</sup> Let me note in passing that not only the approach to language inspired by “the second Wittgenstein,” but also that stemming from John Austin's theory of speech-acts, challenges inferentialist semantics and pays attention to non-discursive dimensions of linguistic behaviour.

<sup>12</sup> “Language originated as play, and the organs of speech were first trained in this singing sport of idle hours” (Jespersen 1894: 355). Dewey's quotation from Jespersen in *Experience and Nature* (where the author's name is misspelled as “Jespersen”) comes from pages 356-357 of the same work: “[Jespersen] says that many linguistic philosophers appear to ‘imagine our primitive ancestors after their own image as serious and well meaning men, endowed with a large share of common sense ... They leave you with the impression that these first framers of speech were sedate citizens with a strong

as those described by Jespersen, Wittgenstein or Dewey, in spite of being pre-discursive —or maybe *because* of this fact— disclose the original use of language tools, namely, to serve as symbolic systems that channel and shape shared practices within human communities.<sup>13</sup>

The philosophers of the linguistic turn proceeded in due course to a “pragmatic turn” that gave pre-eminence to language as practice, but this second turn was not of the type advocated by Dewey or Wittgenstein, where the practice involved was not linguistic through-and-through. Had it been of that type, epistemological inquiries would have been likely readdressed toward problems less concerned with justification and much more involved in what can be loosely called “philosophy of culture.” The naturalization of epistemology would have then turned an eye to disciplines like anthropology, history, sociology, or psychology, instead of plunging into neurophysiology — that “quaint favorite child of the analytic philosophers,” as Jürgen Habermas calls it (1990: 15).<sup>14</sup> This would have been so because the rationale of the practice that supports language as a whole refers ultimately to

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interest in the purely business and matter of fact aspects of life.’ [...] He concludes that the ‘genesis of language is found ... in the poetic side of life; the source of speech is not gloomy seriousness, but merry play and youthful hilarity’” (Dewey 1971: 71). It is not unlikely that Jespersen had also partially inspired Wittgenstein’s association of language with games. I thank Nicolás Sánchez Durá for pinpointing the exact reference to Jespersen’s work, which is missing in Dewey’s book.

<sup>13</sup> Dewey stressed the difference between language considered as a means for communication, this being its primary function as a cultural device, and language considered as a means for inquiry, or as ordered discourse, which appeared later as a result of cultural evolution and intellectual maturation (see Faerna 2014: 365-368).

<sup>14</sup> This shift toward cultural naturalism is being demanded by philosophers nowadays like Thomas Alexander: “It is high time we started thinking about ‘philosophy of culture’ rather than ‘philosophy of mind’ and turned toward anthropology and semiotics rather than physics, neurology, or information theory. One could even speak of reviving the idea of a philosophy of symbolic forms” (2014: 67). Alexander does not see this as a turn *within* epistemology, but rather as a move *away from* it (79-80), but I take this to be a verbal question mainly.

experience in the pragmatic, double-barreled sense: i.e. to situations in which speakers find themselves, to existing needs and ends in view —in a word, to the experience, life, and history of human bodies. This means that linguistic experience and somatic experience are not only merged in origin, but they remain inseparable all the way down. Linguistic meaning and “the lived body” cannot be severed apart. When Wittgenstein anchors language games to “forms of life,” he is thinking of the bodies that we human beings live in no less than of the social habits that we incorporate. For this reason, when he wants to illustrate a situation where linguistic communication is entirely hopeless, he does not ask us to imagine the talk of an alien or a barbarian, but the talk of a lion (1981 II xi: 223).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In the same paragraph, just before saying that “if a lion could talk, we could not understand him,” Wittgenstein admits that “one human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the country’s language. We do not *understand* the people.” He contrasts this with our feeling that “some people [...] are transparent to us,” in the sense that we do not think that there is something “*internal* [in them that] is hidden from us.” For example, “if I see someone writhing in pain with evident cause I do not think: all the same, his feelings are hidden from me.” The second example qualifies, I think, the statement that one person can be “a complete enigma” to another person; note that, if the woman writhing in pain is from a strange country, this does not affect in the least my feeling that I *understand* her. The fact that writhing in pain is a case of body expression supports the point I am trying to make, for it is her being a *human* body that convinces me that she and I share a form of life. It is wholly different with animals; even if we learn to interpret their movements —as intimidating, submissive, attentive, distrusting, menacing, and so on— we cannot know what it is for them to have the corresponding *experience*, even if we avoid conceiving it in solipsistic terms. We cannot say what it would be like to be a lion or a bat, they are not transparent to us (unless we *decide* to think so; see Faerna 2002 for more on this).

## 5. Experience and the Given

Let us proceed now to the second reason that explains why epistemology after the linguistic turn still remains unconcerned with our bodily dimension. The first reason, I have argued, had to do with the wrong idea that the non-discursive character of bodily experience separates it from public language and confines it to the private sphere of “mental states”. The second one alleges that, even if the language/body dichotomy is somehow overcome by following Dewey’s or Wittgenstein’s account of language, an appeal to experience in any of its forms will take us back to the second mortal sin of Cartesianism: foundationalism.

The concept of experience has been surely the foremost victim of the epistemology inspired by the linguistic turn, ironic as this may be for a tradition that originated in logical *empiricism*. A second irony is that the strongest efforts to obliterate the term “experience” came from philosophers as fond of pragmatism as Richard Rorty or the above-mentioned Brandom, provided that it is hard to pick a single page from James’ or Dewey’s works that does not contain the term several times —not to mention titles like *Experience and Nature* or *Essay in Radical Empiricism*—. <sup>16</sup>

Rorty’s version of the argument <sup>17</sup> contends that the use of “experience” in epistemological contexts always involves an attempt to make knowledge rest upon something outside language, which means something that transcends the contingency of our vocabularies and reveals how the world really is —or how it can be univocally known. Any attempt of this sort —the argument proceeds— falls prey to what Wilfrid Sellars called “the myth of the Given:” i.e. the idea that something that is pre-conceptually given can provide

evidence for or against propositional (therefore conceptualized) assertions.

It is true that what Dewey or James termed “experience” (or what Wittgenstein called “certainties”) should be taken as something given, for it is not a conceptual elaboration, it is not attained by inference, and it is not the propositional content of a belief. Now, to affirm that there can be something given in this sense is not in itself to commit “the myth of the Given,” for the affirmation does not entail that the given element serves as an independent instance to assess the truth-value of judgments, or as a foundation of knowledge. <sup>18</sup> As stated earlier, to see every experience as conveying knowledge is reductionist, and Rorty incurs this sort of reductionism in assuming that if experience cannot have the role of a foundation in epistemological contexts, then it cannot have any role whatsoever.

To say that experience is something “given” amounts to say only that it is something “had,” as opposed to something that we do or produce. <sup>19</sup> But etymologically the term “given” evokes the Latin word “datum” and so the given seems to refer to a collection of “data.” The dictionary defines “datum” as “something *known* or assumed; information from which conclusions can be *inferred*,” <sup>20</sup> and this semantic resonance makes Rorty’s argument appear plausible enough. But the precedent discussion should have made clear that experience in the pragmatic sense has little to do with the artificial, atomistic notion of a “repository of data” for justificatory

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<sup>18</sup> “It does not follow [from the argument based on the myth of the Given] that philosophy should never concern itself with the nondiscursive. Drawing this conclusion means assuming that philosophy’s only possible use for nondiscursive experience is in justificational epistemology, and that assumption is neither self-evident nor argued for” (Shusterman 1997: 171-172).

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Alexander has noted that, although pragmatism is generally associated with the primacy of action or “doing”, Dewey considered that “undergoing” is prior: “Undergoing is what Dewey also calls ‘having,’ the qualitative, determinate immediacy of existence as the outcome of a history of events” (2014: 75, see also n. 31).

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from Webster’s New World Dictionary, Third College Edition; emphases added.

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<sup>16</sup> The most recent summary of the present pragmatist debate on experience is Hildebrand 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Rorty combats the appeal to experience by philosophers prior to the linguistic turn, like Dewey (Rorty 1982a), as well as subsequent to it, like McDowell (Rorty 1998).

purposes, i.e. the concept of experience that Modern philosophy coined in order to foster its foundationalist epistemological agenda.<sup>21</sup> Thus, this line of argument moves in a vicious circle. In order to break it, we should ask first, not what particular role experience can play within knowledge, but whether it is at all possible to make sense of knowledge pragmatically without that “minimal empiricism” that takes into account what is “given” to us, or what we immediately “have” in the form of situations, needs, and purposes in which our language-games take place. If everything in discursive knowledge reduces itself to a negotiation over meanings, what can account for the existence of discursive knowledge itself *as a practice*? One can dodge this question if one is ready to say that there exists no practice other than linguistic practice. Although some philosophers seem ready to say that, their move does not take us away from the pitfalls of Modern epistemology, but rather takes us back to the long shadow casted by Plato. As Richard Shusterman persuasively puts it:

Textualist ideology has been extremely helpful in dissuading philosophy from misguided quests for absolute foundations outside our contingent linguistic and social practices. But in making this therapeutic point, [...] textualism also encourages an unhealthy idealism that identifies human-being-in-the-world with linguistic activity and so tends to neglect or overly textualize nondiscursive somatic experience. As “the contemporary counterpart of [nineteenth century] idealism,” textualism displays idealism’s disdain for materiality, hence for the corporeal. [...] The whole project of policing the borders between “the logical space of reasons” and the realm of “physical causes” so as to confine philosophy to the former is just one more assertion of the old dualism of separating the concerns of the superior soul from the corruption of the material body (1997: 173-174; the terms between quotation marks are from Rorty 1982b).

<sup>21</sup> As a matter of fact, it was Peirce who, as early as 1868, gave the foundationalist agenda the deathblow with his criticism of the faculty of “intuition” (i.e. a cognition not determined by previous cognitions) in “Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man” (Peirce 1992)

The distinction between reasons and causes is one of those conceptual tools that are useful as long as they are not construed as a philosophical dichotomy. It shows its limitations when one tries to take the abandonment of the Cartesian dualism seriously. For if we adopt the pragmatist definition of belief as habit<sup>22</sup> and admit that habits belong, per se, to the body, it will be difficult for us to see the reasons that support our beliefs (discursively) as totally independent of the causes that make our bodies acquire their habits (physically).<sup>23</sup>

Rorty’s target is the idea that experience is a source of “data” to render the exact, univocal depiction of things, but his argument, in fact, deprives language of the capacity that he himself claims for it when he invites us to create new vocabularies that allow for better forms of life.<sup>24</sup> If transforming our ways of speaking can diminish the existing violence and suffering, how can we deny, then, that there is a connection between the meanings we use and the somatic experience that is expressed and reinforced through them? Although the foundationalist ideal of a “tribunal of experience” must be dismissed, the ulterior dismissal of experience at large in accounting for our linguistic practices seems to take things definitely too far.<sup>25</sup> Rorty’s and Brandom’s

<sup>22</sup> According to Alexander Bain’s famous definition, of which “pragmatism is scarce more than a corollary” (Peirce 1998: 399).

<sup>23</sup> This insight was anticipated by Spinoza, the Modern philosopher that made most to escape the Cartesian dualism of mind and body: “Human affairs, of course, would be conducted far more happily if it were equally in man’s power to be silent and to speak. But experience teaches all too plainly that men have nothing less in their power than their tongue, and can do nothing less than moderate their appetites. [...] The decisions of the Mind are nothing but the appetites themselves, which therefore vary as the disposition of the Body varies” (1988: 496-497).

<sup>24</sup> I follow Shusterman (1997: 172-173) on this point. Shusterman observes in the same place that Rorty admitted (in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*) that the distinction between reasons and causes loses utility once we abandon the idea that language “represents” the world.

<sup>25</sup> I suspect that Rorty’s criticism of McDowell is biased by the fact that the latter slips the term “tribunal” in his characterization of “minimal empiricism,” i.e. “the idea

mistake is not so much to have despised experience than to have assumed that whoever uses this term is enlisted in doing bad epistemology.

## 6. Conclusion

Those symbolic systems that Nelson Goodman talked about are generally understood nowadays as aggregates of socially regulated practices, not as mere linguistic objectifications of what previous theories of knowledge had put inside the subject's mind. If one is not willing to repeat the old dualism of mind and body, or the more recent one of language and body, in the form of a third dichotomy between linguistic and non-linguistic games—let me remind that “non-linguistic games” are what really matters if philosophy is to be of any human interest, for they are the arena in which happiness and unhappiness, life and death are decided—, the assessment of such practices should involve something that, in the absence of a better word, can only be described as “experience.” This experience does not reside in mind nor vanish in language; it does not supply us with “data” to adjudicate truth-values among propositions taken one by one; it cannot put us in touch with a univocal reality placed beyond the contingency of our vocabularies; but it is the experience enjoyed and suffered by our material bodies, one that links the

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that experience must constitute a tribunal, mediating the way our thinking is answerable to how things are, as it must be if we are to make sense of it as thinking at all” (McDowell 1996: xii). “Mediate” is a function that admits of non-foundationalist interpretations, but Rorty's reply turns again, all the same, to the distinction between reasons and causes: “One of the ways in which we interact with [things and persons] is through their effects on our sensory organs and other parts of our bodies. [We should] be content with an account of the world as exerting control on our inquiries in a merely causal way, rather than as exerting what McDowell calls ‘rational control’” (1998: 140). I insist that a philosophical dichotomy between reasons and causes is an unnecessarily high price to pay for the rejection of foundationalism, for it renders all the interactions that our bodies have with persons and things completely irrelevant to epistemology, as nineteenth century idealism did.

discourse of knowledge to specific existential conditions, that does not sever justificatory practices from the activity of evaluating, reproducing, and transforming forms of life. This experience links together the space of reasons and the space of causes, without confusing them but also without making of them something too close to the Kantian distinction between “phenomena” and “noumena.”

Experience in the pragmatic sense not only defies traditional and recent dichotomies in epistemology, it also fights cultural divisions as those decried by John Dewey:

Traditional theories in philosophy and psychology have accustomed us to sharp separations between physiological and organic processes on the one hand and the higher manifestations of culture in science and art on the other. The separations are summed up in the common division made between mind and body. These theories have also accustomed us to draw rigid separations between the logical, strictly intellectual, operations which terminate in science, the emotional and imaginative processes which dominate poetry, music and to a lesser degree the plastic arts, and the practical doings which rule our daily life and which result in industry, business and political affairs (1991b: 104).

Particularly, the parallelism that Dewey established between science and the arts becomes more apparent when their respective experiential subject-matters are connected to our bodily existence. If we stop thinking that epistemology and aesthetics are inquiries into something incorporeal (Propositions, Forms), we will start seeing cognitive and artistic activities as parts of one and the same “existential economy” of the lived body, i.e. as forms of organizing the energies of the body in the direction of an enhanced, more meaningful experience.<sup>26</sup>

To say that epistemological inquiries should acknowledge the tribunal of pragmatic experience is not to say that this is the bedrock where the spade is turned, it is rather a proposal to change the tool, or at least to

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<sup>26</sup> See Dewey 1987, and also Shusterman 2000.

start digging somewhere else. If we are to be naturalistic and anti-dualistic philosophers, or even simply realistic persons, we must admit that no one mind ever achieved anything without a body, least of all truth and knowledge and a language to express them. The overly intellectualized outlook bequeathed by Plato not only encouraged metaphysical revisionism—a relatively innocuous consequence—it also legitimized an undesirable division of labour between those who think and those who act. As Dewey wrote in an almost Foucaultian mood, “Prestige goes to those who use their minds without participation of the body and who act vicariously through control of the bodies and labor of others” (1987: 27). This issue cannot be pursued within the limits of conventional epistemology, and this very fact proves that those limits were drawn too narrowly. Pragmatists should persevere today in the task of pushing them down.

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## GESTURES AND EXPRESSIONS:

### THE OVERFLOW OF IMMEDIATE QUALITIES

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of the present study is to indicate the features of those gestures that can contribute to an immediate experience. If gestures share some sort of indexicality with signs, they do not seem to carry the kind of symbolic meaning required in formalized language. How can an immediate experience arise from an interaction between human gestures? How can we make sense of a gesture without interpreting it?

My first enquiry into the link between gestures and immediate experience makes use of Dewey's critique of Darwinian evolutionism. I then develop a pragmatist reading of the later Wittgenstein with whom Dewey shares a number of ideas. The result of these enquiries is the finding that the immediate quality of a gesture does not express itself directly, but it does so by an act that *over-flows* its organic mode of existence.

**Keywords:** gesture; meaning; expression; emotion; language; indexicality

#### A Scene as a (Non)Premise

Imagine yourself in a specific situation. You are at a train station, and because you arrived a little bit too early, you decide to sit at a table and order a coffee. You watch the people passing by. Two women in colourful clothes are carrying heavy baggage, two young men come running from the staircase searching anxiously for the departures board. A young couple seem to be quarrelling and a group of kids, all wearing the same red hat, are standing on the left corner, chatting. At a certain moment, you observe two young women who appear to be waiting for somebody to arrive at the end of platform 23. You imagine who that person could be: the girls look alike, could they be sisters? Maybe they are waiting for their parents? The train that they are waiting for gets into the station; a lot of people get off it and flow down into the hall.

The two girls wave in excitement towards a particular point into the crowd, they smile and talk to each other, they walk towards the crowd. You are very

curious to see whom they came to pick up. And here the person comes, an elderly woman with a silver suitcase. The girls hug her and greet her, she smiles back at them but seems to be worried about something, or maybe she's just tired, one of the girls takes her suitcase, the other one gives her a bottle of water; she immediately drinks from it. The three women appear to know each other well, but there does not seem to be any intimacy between them, you would not bet that the elderly lady was the girls' grand-mother, there is something friendly but rather too respectful, and even slightly formal, in the way they relate to her. Is she maybe somebody with whom they work? Now, the three of them turn back and walk towards the exit, you follow them with your gaze, they become more and more distant and disappear behind a family with a stroller. They are gone.

This rather ordinary event may have lasted from five to ten minutes. It's a scene. Something that you have witnessed as a spectator benefitting from anonymity, like a prince wandering in the streets in *incognito*, as Baudelaire says about the anonymous C.G., *The Painter of Modern Life*. Now, think about the fact that in order for you to imagine this scene from the lines that I have written above, you not only had to have had experienced similar scenes in similar situations, but you had to imagine in your mind a lot *more* than what is written in the above paragraph. You had imagined smiling mouths, frowning foreheads, hands moving, feet stepping on the floor, elbows bending, necks turning and shoulders turning. You had to imagine all of these gestures in a specific sequence in order to adapt them to the written text and, most of all, you must have given the imaginary movements a certain *quality* for them to adjust to the emotions and interactions that are described.

There appears to be a qualitative *overflow* that allows a body to express sympathy rather than love, anxiety rather than haste, respect rather than intimacy, concern rather than fatigue. That quality is seemingly *expressed* in an *immediate* way through the body. You can make sense of it without being able to hear what people are saying and without knowing them. This

immediate quality appears to exceed the body by expressing more than a simple physical input or movement. But how does it do this? How can a bodily quality become expressive and be immediately understood? How can we “make sense” of a specific situation without passing by a verifiable structure of references and premises? One answer could be: *past experience*. It is only because we already had similar encounters in the past that we can relate a specific emotion to a gesture. We construct an imaginary situation insofar as it sets the scene up as a perfect mirror of our daily lives, we invent it insofar as it corresponds to our own prior observations of people, gestures, faces, and human interactions. From this perspective, the interpretation of the present situation is not immediate but built upon multiple previous empirical experiences that serve as premises, and even as truth propositions. It is these experiences that are the source of the psychological and sociological coherency of the situations you have imagined.

Hence, the supposedly “immediacy” of the sense that we make of a situation could in reality be a mediated interpretation based on *habits* (See Dreon 2016). The immediate and the habitual are so entangled that we could conclude that it seems there is no space for direct experience in a world where language, signs and words shape the meaning of what we think. However, following the pragmatist path, one way to extrapolate and untangle habits from immediate experience is to go back and relate our present experience to the primary empirical situation which acts as the beginning and the first step from which all the rest results.

If pragmatists agree in the idea that knowledge is not the fundamental and primary way we experience the world, they do not limit this primary experience to a supposedly “given” world as an immovable set of sensory data. It is a qualitative background that does not function as habit nor as knowledge but rather as a pre-scientific and pre-semiotic sensory mode of acting and living. But the problem with this primary experience, as

the pragmatist method teaches us, is that it is too connected with the particular disposition and contexts in which it takes place and cannot be reduced to a purely first action with no links to the environment. In other words, it does not function as a premise.

That is why a pragmatist premise is a contradiction in terms insofar as, from a pragmatist point of view, sense and meaning are systematically to be found *in medias res*, in the middle of the action, at a train station, in a context that is neither primary nor given but rather secondary, as part of a sequence of living actions and reactions showing that the immediate experience could be direct without necessarily being generative. Making sense *of* a scene, or situation, implies making sense *from* a scene, because we are not dissociated from that scene, but we are part of it. We do not even need to interpret it. We are passengers, waiting at a train station, observing a reality that is not simply “around” us, but that includes us, a reality that is the world in which we are anchored (and this is where pragmatism and phenomenology, especially in its Merleau-Pontian version, can meet).

Inside this scene, which acts as a (non)premise, what counts above all are gestures: waving in a certain way, dragging a baggage or climbing up the stairs, smiling in a certain way, moving one’s shoulders, turning one’s head, in a certain way. Neither primary actions nor simple habits, these *ways* (or modes of behaviour) give the bodily movement a distinctive tint, a quality that comes across as natural, and that is often immediately understood. This is possible, mostly because gestures possess a feature of “mediality” (Agamben, 1996), they are always “in between”: between communication and production, between actions and reactions, between intention and interpretation, between words and real things. And it is because of their mediality that gestures can serve as research field for what we can name an “immediate experience”, that experience lying in between the biological and the sociological, the mechanical and the organic, the intentional and the spontaneous.

The aim of the present study is not to define and analyse the general concept of gesture, a task that would lead this enquiry into the fields of communication sciences, semiotics and linguistics, going beyond the limit of this text. The aim is to indicate the features of those gestures that can contribute to a supposedly immediate experience. How can an immediate experience arise from an interaction between human gestures? What kind of meaning does a gesture need to bear in order to provoke an effect of immediacy?

### Gesture and immediate experience

The English word "gesture" derives from the Latin term *gestum* which is the noun derived from the verb *gero*, *gerere* which means to carry, to administer, to represent, to produce, to accomplish, to carry on, to continue and to behave. A gesture usually designates a particular bodily activity of a person and her habits, it indicates the specific aspect of this person, her way of moving in space, her way of using her hands when she speaks, her way of sitting. Following ordinary language, I am limiting the study to bodily gestures, excluding other possible types of gestures, like highly complex intellectual meditations or mathematical proofs. Usually, a gesture is interpreted as a somatic movement that on a physical level doubles a psychological experience, since it alone signifies a message, a feeling, a judgment. (Kendon 2004) The polysemy of the verb *gerere* shows the different facets of the noun *gestum*. On the one hand, a gesture is understood as management, on the other hand as attitude and behaviour. This Latin root is evident in the French word "gestion" or the Italian word "gestione", which mean administration or management. This aspect is important; in his essay "Notes on Gesture" Giorgio Agamben claims that gesture includes a supportive and managing structure which is precisely what secures its independency from production and action, thus opening up an ontological interval between the Aristotelian dualism of *poiesis* and *praxis* (Agamben 1996), highlighting the *medial* quality of the gesture.

The conceptual possibilities and disruptive qualities of the idea of "gesture" lie in the interstice between two supposedly distinctive fields such as creative production and political action, aesthetics and ethics, art and life, body and mind. But above all, the idea of gesture can help to reorganize, rethink and readjust the definitions, borders and principles of the relationship between knowledge and experience. Thereby the concepts and phenomena related to the idea of "gesture" are truly fecund and directly related to pragmatism, as Giovanni Maddalena's work has shown (Maddalena 2015 and 2016).

Maddalena suggests that a **gesture** "is any performed act with a beginning and an end that carries a meaning (from **gero** = I carry on)" (Maddalena 2015, 69-70). If I can agree with the idea of «performance» and the idea of «carrying», I have some reservations about the closed temporality (beginning and end) and with the idea of *meaning*. The analysis of the temporality that underlies the performance of a gesture would go beyond the purpose of this article<sup>1</sup>, but I will address here the question of meaning: why would a gesture necessarily carry a meaning? And if it does, how would this meaning be carried and expressed? Finally, what definition could we give to the term "meaning"? If a meaning is necessarily something that has a relationship to knowledge and consciousness, then the attribution of meaning to gestures would entail a separation between habitual behaviour, unconscious acts on one side and intentional acts and willing responses on the other, recreating the same hierarchy between knowing and not knowing that pragmatism attempts to overcome. In this

<sup>1</sup> The studies that I have accomplished in this field, mainly by collaborating with performers and artists through the *Laboratoire du Geste* ([www.laboratoiredugeste.com](http://www.laboratoiredugeste.com)) at the Sorbonne University, have confirmed for me the idea that the temporality of a gesture is highly loose and cannot be extracted from a continuum of living as an action can be. This questions have been central for our two years seminar leading to a symposium in 2014 on Art, Time and Performance opening up the question of repetition and originality that are highly investigated in the field of performance studies.

separation there would be some gestures that are meaningful (and legitimate for analyses) and other activities that are not meaningful (and that can be disregarded).

However, one can find some definitions of meaning in pragmatism which cannot be reduced to such a mentalistic definition; pragmatism contests the primacy of consciousness and intentionality as in Mead's definition of meaning as the response prompted by a gesture. In Mead's perspective – even though this issue is the object of a longstanding discussion –, the idea that every gesture has a meaning entails that every gesture tends to prompt a response. The problem lies then in the interpretation: what if, as we will see later through Wittgenstein, we can respond to a meaning carried by a gesture not only without being able to explain this meaning but also to fully interpret it? This possibility, which is very recurrent in ordinary life, suggests that there is something that can be carried out by a gesture that is not yet meaning, even in the minimalistic definition of meaning proposed by pragmatism.

Reshaping Maddalena's definition, I would propose a more restricted, but at the same time more open and vague, definition of gesture as "*any performed act that carries a quality*". This definition can be understood not only from Wittgenstein (associating gestures to language games) but also from a Deweyan point of view: we "make sense" of a gesture when we can grasp its quality, the latter being a singular quality of the performed act that exists with no relationship to anything else than itself. It is, we may suggest, what Dewey calls an *immediate quality*. But what is difficult to grasp in this situation, is that the immediate quality is not always immediately perceived, as we will see in the next section on Wittgenstein.

In *Experience and Nature*, the expression "immediate experience" occurs only once, in the chapter "On Nature and Communication" where Dewey writes: "The part of wisdom is not to deny the causal fact because of the intrinsic value of the immediate experience. It is to make the immediately satisfactory

object the object which will also be most fertile." (Dewey 1929, 204). Dewey points out that an "immediate" experience cannot be closed in itself or univocal, it needs to give rise to other possibilities of meanings and values, it needs to be "fertile". But if the expression "immediate experience" is rare, the adjective "immediate" is used frequently by Dewey in *Experience and Nature*, often as a synonym of "direct" and many times in a link with "enjoyment" (Dewey 1929, 79 and sq; but also in Chapter 9 on art). Above all, Dewey uses the adjective "immediate" to designate a certain type of "quality": immediate qualities are empirical and non relational: "Quality is quality, direct, immediate and undefinable." (Dewey 1929, 110). And, in Chapter "Nature, Ends and Histories", he clearly defines immediacy as a non-relational quality:

In every event there is something obdurate, self-sufficient, wholly immediate, neither a relation nor an element in a relational whole, but terminal and exclusive. Here, as in so many other matters, materialists and idealists agree in an underlying metaphysics which ignores in behalf of relations and relational systems, those irreducible, infinitely plural, undefinable and indescribable qualities which a thing must *have* in order to be, and in order to be capable of becoming, the subject of relations and a theme of discourse. (Dewey 1929, 85)

Knowledge cannot be primary<sup>2</sup>, "no knowledge is ever merely immediate." (Dewey 1929, 322), it is something that is added in a dialectical way to a situation that is necessarily vague, open and uncertain<sup>3</sup>. It is precisely

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<sup>2</sup> "It is impossible to tell what immediate consciousness is – not because there is some mystery in or behind it, but for the same reason that we cannot tell just what sweet or red immediately is; it is something had, not communicated and known." (Dewey 1929, 307). This immediate relationship of natural things to a person, can exist as a form of "animism" and "its legitimate and constant form is poetry" (Dewey 1929, 181). This consciousness cannot be identified with knowledge because "the belief, assertion, cognitive reference is something additive, never merely immediate" (Dewey, 1929, 321).

<sup>3</sup> "When philosophers have insisted upon the certainty of the immediately and focally present or 'given' and

because the immediate qualities of the supposedly “given” are vague that they are more fertile and open, because “‘This’, whatever *this* maybe, always implies a system of meanings focussed at a point of stress, uncertainty, and need of regulation” (Dewey 1929, 352). Hence, the immediate quality of a gesture, its *way of unfolding* in time and space, needs also to be unclear, open, and ambiguous so to liberate itself from a given meaning and a truthful and decisive interpretation because the openness and the uncertainty of the immediate allows the experience to become a process. This is similar to Dewey’s suggestion in Chapter 9 (“Experience, Nature and Art”), where he associates the intellectual journey of the mind with the process of a work of art:

To be conscious of meanings or to have an idea, marks a fruition, and enjoyed or suffered arrest of the flux of event. (...) It marks the conclusion of long continued endeavor; of patient and indefatigable search and test. The idea is, in short, art and a work of art. As a work of art, it directly liberates subsequent action and makes it more fruitful in a creation of more meanings and more perceptions. (Dewey 1929, 371)

Here the process of art making and the emergence of the aesthetic experience join the unfolding of a consciousness that is not yet knowledge but a premise, or rather a (non)premise of knowledge. This unfolding consciousness shows the continuity between art and life, between aesthetic qualities and empirical ones: “the origin of the art-process lay in emotional responses spontaneously called out by a situation occurring without any reference to art, and without “esthetic” quality save in the sense in which all immediate

have sought indubitable immediate existential data upon which to build, they have always unwittingly passed from the existential to the dialectical; they have substituted a general character for an immediate this. For the immediately given is always the dubious; it is always a matter of subsequent events to determine, or assign character to. It a cry for something not given, a request addressed to fortune, with the pathos of a plea or the imperiousness of a command.” (Dewey 1929, 349).

enjoyment and suffering is esthetic.” (Dewey 1929, 391).

On this subject, in *Art as Experience*, in Chapter 3 (“Having an Experience”), Dewey describes a scene of a job interview with a variety of details relating the meeting between two men, and he explains that as the interview continues, the primary or general emotion of the candidate is transformed by the secondary emotions providing an aesthetic quality to the meeting. Dewey writes:

(...) secondary emotions are evolved as variations of the primary underlying one. It is even possible for each attitude and gesture, each sentence, almost every word, to produce more than a fluctuation in the intensity of the basic emotion; to produce, that is, a change of shade and tint in its quality. (Dewey 1929, 43)

These gestures, tones of voice, ways of holding oneself, which can at first be considered secondary, in reality not only reveal a series of real emotions, but possess the power to change the overall quality of the primary or basic impression. In other words, the detail of the gesture surpasses and exceeds its small scale to the point of transforming the appearance of the subject herself in her singularity. This capacity “to produce a change of shade” and to give more than it seems to possess, makes the gesture something important though often neglected. This excess is why a gesture designates something more than a simple mechanical automatic act or a technique.

Unlike the Greek concept of *techne*, a gesture is not predictable. In a very pragmatist sense, the gesture is first of all a relationship, or even an interaction, it only emerges where it can potentially establish a response or a reaction. However, if we suppose this relationship to be a natural circumstance, a difficulty immediately emerges. If we think of gestures as natural, primitive, or animal-like bodily occurrences, it becomes difficult to envisage and conceptualize the possibility of an ordinary language rooted in the sociability of our shared habits. Naturalized gesture would lose the practical and acquired scope of our daily interactions. Hence, in



Dewey's analysis of the job interview, first of all the relationship between the interviewee and the employer is regulated by standard social behaviour and the conventional habits of the workplace. Then, for the interview to actually unfold, what is required is a whole series of secondary emotions which allow each participant's "presence and behavior...[to] either harmonize with [their] own attitudes and desires or to...conflict and jar" (Dewey 1929, 43).

More generally, the immediate or primary quality can come across as secondary, even if it is central to the meaning of the experience. The primary, singular, non-relational quality of a gesture is perceived as long as the experience evolves in the duration and temporal development of the experience as an interaction. The primary quality is perceived, paradoxically, as secondary mainly because of the length of the process of the experience and the unpredictability of it. Dewey does not hesitate to associate this encounter to drama and theater because the scene, as a theatrical stage upon which characters act, makes sense when the singular quality of a gesture is perceived and irradiates the whole scene. Dewey terms these emotions "secondary" because they are often hidden and felt in a second phase of the unfolding of the experience, and not because they are second in degree or in value. As the relation between the two people unfolds, the non-relational quality appears secondarily even if it is an immediate quality.

Pragmatism offers ways of overcoming the dualisms between nature and culture, immediate and mediated experience, art and science, spontaneity and intentionality, bodies and words. But, as far as our inquiry into gestures goes, the continuity between these dualisms reappears mutely, as we will see, in the separation between emotion and gesture, between a supposedly inner state or disposition and a manifestly sensitive externalization of it. In order to clarify this point we need to understand the process of expression that a gesture uses in order to manifest its immediate and singular quality. If a gesture carries a quality, how can this quality be perceptible?

### **Emotion and Expression: Dewey and Darwin**

If a quality is immediate – in the sense of being non-relational and singular – does that necessarily imply that its method of expression is immediate too? Or does it need an interpretation, a filter, or at least a relation? And more specifically, how can a gesture express its immediate quality? Following Dewey, one would say that a gesture is not a vague expression but an "act of expression", to use the title of Chapter 4 of *Art as Experience*. But what does Dewey mean by "act" of expression, how does it unfold? Dewey starts his analysis from the etymology of the word "expression", and emphasizes the "act" that is already present in that etymology; the action of (ex-) extracting the usually liquid matter from a body by the application of pressure. An expression is an act of elimination or expulsion by compression. In a very pragmatist perspective, Dewey underlines in this act the need for an interaction with something outside the body (for example with "the wine press" for the grape, Dewey 1934, 64). This interaction produces a transformation within the material itself so that it passes from "raw" or "primitive material" to "product of art" (*ibidem*).

Dewey finds in the act of expression a type of transformation that echoes the continuity between immediate experience and knowledge, as far as knowledge also involves a kind of art process, as we saw in the section above where he identifies the formation of an idea with a work of art. The "work" is visible in the "act" of expression: just as primitive material is not enough to produce an expression and needs an external force to transform itself into an artistic or artificial product, so emotion alone is not enough: it needs an external environment that resists it and gives it the impulse to express itself. Thus the action of expressing, or expressing oneself, needs two competing forces that meet and interact to be able to make an emotion manifest, and these two forces cannot simply be placed one on the inner side, supposedly spiritual, and the other on the outer side, supposedly physical. The two

forces meet as they blend into a single ontological continuity.

Expression becomes self-expression and a form of language without there having been any rupture between the primary material and the expressed one. According to Dewey in each act of expression there is a transformation of matter from “raw” or “primitive” to “artificial”, and this transformation is accomplished via a continuity. This transformation is similar, we can argue, to the one that occurs between the immediate quality and its manifestation in a gesture. But how does something actually change while remaining the same? And how can this idea of a transformation of oneself avoid the risks of naturalism without incurring the opposite and equally dangerous trap of idealization by which transformation would require conforming to a model? There is a deeply pragmatist solution and it lies in the well-known continuity between the biological and the sociological; this continuity is the same that arises, in Dewey, between a primary experience and any kind of meaningful experience (principally ethical or aesthetic).

This continuity, which is not identification, could be explained by the fact that if Dewey does not limit the act of expression to an organic reaction, nor does he over-emphasize the importance of intention. Thus in *Art as Experience* he explains that crying and smiling are not true acts of expression because at an organic level, “emotional discharge is a necessary but not sufficient condition of expression” (Dewey 1934, 61). That is to say, a simple physical reaction alone is not an expression. But Dewey does not encourage, on the other hand, a cognitive or simply conscious definition of the act of expression, rather he defines expression as “the clarification of turbid emotion” (Dewey 1934, 77). This clarification is neither intentional nor theoretical and nor is it carried out externally; rather, it is a question of social interaction because, as Dewey says in the chapter entitled “The Expressive Object”, “expression, like construction, signifies both an action and its results” (Dewey 1934, 82). There is no true naturalness in

expression, since it is a social construction, but there is a continuity at the level of its existence: expression accomplishes the form of emotion and brings it to its fulfilment through the interaction with others.

Accordingly, in the chapter “The Natural History of Form” of *Art as Experience*, Dewey quotes Charles Darwin's book *Expression of Emotions* and clearly distinguishes between the natural expression as “discharge” and the pragmatist expression as “rhythm” (Dewey 1934, 155). The former would be immediate and would end in a loss of energy, while only the latter succeeds in creating a “tension, and thereby a periodic accumulation and release”. Darwin's book, according to Dewey, “is full of examples of what happens when an emotion is simply an organic state let loose on the environment in direct overt action” (Dewey 1934, 156). Contrary to this “pure” organic state, Dewey proposes a sort of rhythm in energy which is the condition of possibility of an aesthetic experience. Evolutionist theory is constantly seeking a residual form of natural qualities in the opposite of will, namely reflex reactions. Although this attempt is laudable and important to the extent that it opposes cognitivism, it does not offer the advantage of pragmatism, namely the attention paid to the practical function of gestures in their social context.

Instead of thinking of gestures as organic expressions or direct discharges of emotion, Dewey encourages us to see them as overflows of meaning that are used and shared within a community, where the immediacy of the experience is not merely “a direct and overt action”. As he says in *Experience and Nature*:

Gestures and cries are not primarily expressive and communicative. They are modes of organic behavior as much as are locomotion, seizing and crunching. Language, signs and significance, come into existence not by intent and mind but by *over-flow*, by-products, in gestures and sound. The story of language is the story of the *use* made of these occurrences; a use that is *eventual as well as eventful*. (Dewey 1934, 175. My italics)

We seem to have here a response to our question: the immediate quality (of a gesture) does not express itself immediately, but it does so by an act that *over-flows* its organic mode of existence. The difference with a simple naturalistic approach consists in the fact that during the achievement of language, there can be an overflow, a typically gestural *surplus* which gives *meaning* to the expressive act itself and may even contribute to a meaningful experience without limiting the gesture to an organic discharge and without transforming the gesture into a formalized and logical form. A gesture suggests a bridge and a link between two – or more – entities and by doing so it uses neither the power of cognitive clarification nor of bodily force. In this overflow of meaning lies the difference between evolutionism and pragmatism, between a purely physiological approach to expression and another approach that imbibes the biological with a social nuance.

A gesture is not merely biological but not yet intellectualized, and it possesses a sociological aspect. When emotion overflows its physical manifestation, then it finds an additional meaning to organic discharge, it finds a social, aesthetic, cultural meaning by freeing itself from the strictly physiological domain. In this overflowing, meaning does not end up dispersed, but it gives form to the history of language. Following Dewey, language is formed and developed according to the way in which this over-flow of gestures and sounds is used. In this manner, gestures and sounds are not by-products that end up lost, but rather they form the very foundation of language since it is in their excess of meaning that a possible (“eventual”) use can see the light of day, one that is also full of meaning (“eventful”).

There is therefore a certain amount of serendipity in the fabric of the meaning, since it is in the fortuitous use of an excess that the event of language takes place. Unlike Darwin who sees in the gesture a simple external expression of a pre-existing psychic state, Dewey sees in emotion the site of the production of a sense, of the transformation of an organic matter into a social material. Similarly to Peircean signs, gestures cannot be

reduced to a purely symbolic definition in so far as they are opposed to arbitrariness. However, if those gestures which carry an immediate quality share with signs some Peircean features, such as indexicality and firstness (as we will see in the next section), they seem to be dissociated from iconicity in so far as their forms do not always correspond to the meanings that they express by overflow.

#### **Grasping the Gesture: a pragmatist reading of Wittgenstein’s philosophy**

The first part of the title for this section begins from one of Giovanni Maddalena’s articles (Maddalena 2016). Maddalena inspires us to ask: how can we grasp the quality of a gesture? What type of intellectual process correspond to the grasping of its meaning<sup>4</sup>? In order to proceed, I can now render more complex the initial simplistic definition of gesture given at the beginning. If the simpler definition is: “a gesture is a performed act that carries a quality”, the more detailed definition could be now “a gesture is a performed act that carries an immediate quality that is expressed by overflow”. It is this overflow that needs to be grasped and, it is because of this overflow (or “by-product”, as Dewey says), that it is quite possible, and even very recurrent, to perfectly understand a gesture without being able to explain its meaning.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Vincent Colapietro: “Gestures are commonplace. In fact, they are ubiquitous. Not only are they commonplace, but our understanding of them is as well. For the most part, however, this understanding is tacit and situated, not explicit and abstract. Moreover, it is practical, not theoretical. There is nonetheless also such an understanding of gestures in general. That is, we *immediately grasp* the significance of someone extending a hand upon being introduced to us or the significance of a friend upon leaving turning around and waving an arm. But we also immediately *grasp* what such acts **in general** are. Quite apart from being able to define words or ideas in a formal, abstract manner, we often have an *effective* and, in many instances, a *nuanced* and *subtle comprehension* of their meaning” (Colapietro 2015, my italics).

Concerning this “grasping”, Maddalena rightly indicates, following the heart of his book *The Philosophy of Gesture*, that there “is the need for a rationale of a synthetic and a vague part of our reasoning” (Maddalena 2016, 7). The difference between a definition of gestures as “carrying a meaning” (as for Giovanni Maddalena) and my definition of gestures as “carrying a quality” implies that for the first case the meaning is proper to the gesture (and associates gestures with signs, in particular Peircean signs) but in the second case the meaning is indirectly expressed by the gesture as a surplus of a quality (and this dissociates gestures from signs). This has also to do with the “ordinary” nature of gestures (Formis 2010) and the immediate comprehension of them. We can “make sense” of a gesture without being able to explain fully its meaning.

This is the case, for example, of a Neapolitan gesture whose semantic value seems to have been at the origin of the philosophical rupture between the first part of Wittgenstein's work and the second. Wittgenstein came to know this gesture through his friend Piero Sraffa, an Italian Marxist economist exiled in Cambridge during the fascist period. The gesture consists in passing the top of the hand under the chin as if to indicate a state of boredom and disapproval. The supposedly illogical and at the same time understandable nature of the gesture provides Wittgenstein with the main argument for his abrupt transition from a linguistic and logical system to a social anthropology. The meaning of the gesture would thus have a deeply illogical foundation and a nature that cannot be modelled, which invites Wittgenstein to break with the logical philosophy and the idea of an ideal language. What appears obvious, as the later Wittgenstein will say, is that the gesture *is* the expression, just as the grimace *is* anger, since the whole meaning lies in the use, namely its capacity to be understood without having to go through a formalized interpretation.

The question would be: how can we grasp the meaning of a gesture without interpreting it? Gestures seem to suspend the conventional structure of language since they show without saying. There is an essential difference here between “show” and “say”, and Wittgenstein points out that in German these two verbs are close in sound: *zeigen* and *sagen*. The gesture (*Gebärde*<sup>5</sup>) is the element that reveals, shows (*zeigen*) the condition of possibility not only of the word and of saying (*sagen*), but more generally of the meaning as a relationship between the body and the sound of the voice. The ostensive character of language, presented by the German verb *zeigen*, gives primacy to gestures. The father who shows his daughter an apple by pointing his finger and saying the word “apple”, shows that the word is the sign of a reality, while the gesture acts as a vector, as an element of connection between this word and this same reality. Similarly to Dewey's idea of overflow, for the later Wittgenstein gestures are like links, or somatic arrows that associate a sound with an intention, a word whose meaning is often not understood with a tangible and visible reality. Similarly to *vagueness* which seems to belong to the Peircean phenomenological category of *firstness*, gestures need to remain open and unclear in order to provoke an immediate experience.

Moreover for Wittgenstein, similarly to pragmatism, especially that of Peirce, the ostensive or demonstrative quality of gestures must remain imprecise, embryonic and vague, otherwise they risk being constrained within a formalized proposition. Their indexicality needs to be non-referential and their meaning functions via secondary indices. Thus, in §71 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein insists, in a very Peircean tone, on the fundamentally “vague” aspect of the gesture, which retains its dimension of “approximately” and indeterminacy, since it is precisely in indeterminacy that its openness lies and its ability to designate, without expressing, “the common element” between different

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed account of the occurrences of the term *Gebärde* (gesture) see Gorlée 2012, 285 et sq.

examples (§ 72). And the simplicity of the gesture is also summed up in its “spontaneity” (§ 75) which allows one to say “I am almost sure”, I can reconstruct my experience, while describing it in its simplicity and spontaneity.

The feature of mediality that appears in gestures has a specific sustainable form. In Wittgenstein as in Dewey there is a kind of encouraging and stammering quality of gesture, that is to say, a way in which gesture presses forward, we can *use* words through gestures. Gestures allow a simple carrying on (from *gero*). Wittgenstein notes that there is a sort of precedence of the gesture in taking shape: “The gesture tries to prefigure – we would like to say – but it cannot.” (§ 434) In German: *Die “Gebärde versucht vorzubilden - möchte man sagen - aber kann es nicht.”* The incise *möchte man sagen* “We would like to say” is not anecdotal, there is a desire of the language to say what the gesture cannot say, there is an attempt to visualize and show in the form of figure something that cannot be determined in a figure. *Versuchen* means to try, to attempt, while *vorzubilden* means to “perform” or “model”. The gesture is thus given in a stammering that shows the desire and the possibility of regulating understanding, that is to say, giving a place to meaning within reality and at the same time the real being understood as an elusive and unformed kind of meaning, a sort of possibility of meaning. So in its demonstrative and ostensive power the gesture does not say (*sagen*), but it shows, and it does so without becoming a sign (*Zeichen*) understood as a clear mark.

Unlike signs, which can still possess a referential indexicality, gestures represent nothing: they cannot be the representatives of something else and they are difficult to translate. It is through gestures that we can “carry on” into language, and maybe more generally into ordinary life: gestures are the ostensive characters of the meaning of reality insofar as they act as vectors placing and rearranging the meaning of words in reality. As Wittgenstein says in § 208, “the gesture of continuing so”, and “so on”, has an indexical function comparable to that of designating an object or a place. Thus, there is in the process of understanding a way of seeing that

Wittgenstein relates to a certain temporality, and an untimely discovery: one says “now it is right”.

This temporality requires an adjustment, “I see it that way”. There's the idea of going “together” between two examples, or between two different entities: “Now take these two things together!” or “Now these go together”. This “grasp” is to be understood as a phenomenon of understanding that could encompass several “organizational aspects”. This discovery concerns rather the arrangement of the visible, the audible and the exterior in such a way that one can say “now I see it like that”. It is the way of seeing that changes and not the vision *per se*. “Now I see it as...”, “Now I know how it fits together!” (p. 355). Now I can carry on, I can manage (in French, “je gère”, in Italian “gestisco” from Lat., *gero*).

In this reorganizational “grasping” Wittgenstein identifies something similar to what Dewey indicates in the “overflow” as an act of expression that goes beyond the rational form of knowledge. Gestures allow elements to be arranged and organized in such a way as to reflect a lived experience; they allow meaning without using logic nor symbolism and are fundamental elements of forms of life (*Lebensform*). But this faculty of “making sense” is not a simple physical capacity, a simple sensation of the body through which one somatically feels this “going together” of things. It is “a modified concept of sensation” (Wittgenstein 1953, Second Part, XI, 209) insofar as the demonstrative aspect of “grasping” requires imagination in order to allow a passage, a bridge, a surpassing that does not take place by “strong” means (intention, physiology, biological order): the passage takes place by a weak, or supposedly weak link (sociology, friendly relationship, cultural). If imagination is demonstration, it is because it has the ostensive power of the play of language, of the primitive stage of language which is profoundly demonstrative and ostensive. This imagination allows us to perfectly picture a situation like waiting at a train station, as we have seen at the beginning.

Following Wittgenstein, we may try to accept that words and meaningful exchanges between people are made possible by the demonstrative, gestural and imaginative nature of speaking because the processes linked to the experience of understanding are all ways of “discovering” the meaning of thought. It is not a question of identifying something that is “hidden”, inaudible or invisible, quite the contrary. It is precisely because the meaning is there before us, since it is indicated to us by the gesture of the hand, and accompanied by a sound of a voice, that this meaning is not to be discovered in the sense that we see it for the first time<sup>6</sup>. This discovery concerns rather the arrangement of real so to relate to the immediate quality of the gesture. In this “discovery” lies a sort of immediate experience by which understanding is also often a question of “guessing” organizational aspects, in a language game that Wittgenstein names “guessing thoughts” (Wittgenstein 1953, Second Part, XI, p. 225). The indexicality of gestures as they are used in ordinary language does not only need the impulse of habits but also the imagination of a mental composition or the capacity of “guessing thoughts”.

Wittgenstein, like Dewey, also poses himself against Darwin, allowing us to think the consistency of ordinary language beyond the illusion of a natural language or the creation of an ideal language such as that of metaphysical philosophy. It is on the basis of anthropological observation that Dewey and Wittgenstein agree and both depart from Darwin's biologism. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey recalls that the act of expression is a construction, and that this construction is necessarily participatory and requires cooperation between at least two people. Similarly to Wittgenstein, Dewey's sense of gesture is also not external, nor antecedent to the very expression of this gesture, and its expression is nothing if it is not in agreement in a reciprocal activity with others. Meaning

is not given by a declarative force; meaning is not claimed, but it is given by consent and agreement between subjects within a shared activity.

### Conclusion

Wittgenstein and Dewey, although from different backgrounds, have shown the way forward for an attempt to discredit metaphysics but not simply to replace it with the physical and the biological, but rather to hold together the biological and the sociological, the sensitive impression with the intellectual grasp, the confused with the reflected, the gesture with the word. From this aspect, this kind of immediate experience acts like a gesture, insofar as a gesture mostly links two things: for example, a reality and the sound of the word; the meaning of what I want to say and what is expressed by the tone of my voice; my physical attitude and my emotion. The gesture is what allows a correspondence, a “bridge” between two dimensions; but differently from iconicity, the correspondence produced by a gesture with an immediate quality is not definite and clear. It is not a real arrow, linear and clear, but rather a sketch, a draft whose meaning we discover almost immediately even if we find it difficult to describe. Wittgenstein and Dewey teach us that the primitive forms of language (especially gestures) can neither be reduced to words nor to concepts, yet they give consistency to our existence: they indicate our individuality and our particularity. Wittgenstein's famous formula: “meaning is use” is therefore entirely pragmatist. This form of language should be able to account not for *what* the gestures mean but rather *how* they mean, because what is essential is the “certain way” by which they express their immediate quality.

Here we see the possibility of a social behaviourism common to Wittgenstein, Dewey and of course to Mead, in which the rejection of intentionality makes it radically different from classical behaviourism: life forms are a way of acting, they put in place a premise and a context, an announcement and a beginning of action. They are

<sup>6</sup> For this reading of the second Wittgenstein see Cavell 1969 and McDowell 1994.



activities, they are actions and meanings in which living beings find themselves in agreement. The activity thus becomes a manner, a way of doing things, a form of life, and a gestural overflow. It is a question of insisting on the overflowing capacity of the almost nothing, of those secondary gestures, aiming at condensing in a point, a *punctum*, a particular rhythm, the energy of a flow which can mark time, memory and produce an experience.

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**TWO CONCEPTS OF EXPERIENCE:  
SINGULAR AND GENERAL\***

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of the article is to make a distinction between two concepts of experience, *singular* and *general*. They track two ways in which we connect experientially to the world. The former is captured by the idea of “having an experience”; the latter is captured instead by the idea of “having experience”. Classical and contemporary pragmatists contribute to this distinction, and the article explores some of their views. Finally the article indicates some consequences of the distinction. In fact, in the spirit of Peirce’s pragmatic maxim, those consequences are the very meaning of the conceptual distinction at stake, since they point out how we inferentially treat in different ways the fact of having an experience and the fact of having experience.

**Keywords:** empiricism; experience; law; pragmatic maxim; signs

On ne sait plus comment ramasser tout  
ce que l’on gagne  
à la loterie de l’expérience.  
Tous les résultats parlent à la fois...  
(Paul Valéry, *L’Idée fixe*)

The purpose of this article is to make a distinction between two concepts of experience. They track two ways in which we connect experientially to the world. In absence of better names, I would call the one *singular* and the other *general*. The former is captured by the idea of “having an experience”, be it religious, aesthetic, ethical, or else. The latter is captured instead by the idea of “having experience”, be it located in this or that domain of our life. The double use of “experience”, as countable and uncountable noun, signals the point I want to make. The relevant conceptual distinction will be presented and discussed in more detail in § 1 of the article.

In § 2 I will show how the classical pragmatists contributed to that distinction. I will pick some insights from the writings of Peirce, James, Dewey and Mead in particular. Moreover, I will claim that some

contemporary philosophers would profit from that contribution, for that distinction between two concepts of experience is somehow neglected in their work and it would likely strengthen their views if accepted.

Finally, I will explore in § 3 some of the consequences of the distinction. In fact, in the spirit of Peirce’s pragmatic maxim (CP 5.402), those consequences are the very meaning of the conceptual distinction at stake, since they point out how we inferentially treat in different ways the fact of having an experience and the fact of having experience.

### **1. The Basic Distinction**

Let me focus on the difference between (A) *having an experience* and (B) *having experience* (or *being experienced*). In (A) something novel is involved; it is a novelty for the person having the experience.<sup>1</sup> The subject-matter of the experience is an object, or a situation, or an activity which is novel to the person in question.

In (B) something past is involved. Having experience (or being experienced) means having some training, or practical skill, or valuable habit acquired with cognition and exercise.

Saint Paul’s conversion experience on the road to Damascus has the character of (A). It was presented as a divine revelation, the experience of a blinding light, something that was entirely new to Paul.<sup>2</sup> The same is true of many forms of experience, though to a lesser extent. We have experiences in this sense when we attend a concert, when we taste some new food, when we visit a place we have never been to, when we face a puzzling ethical situation, even when we run a scientific experiment.

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<sup>1</sup> In some Continental languages the point is even stronger: *fare un’esperienza* or *faire une expérience* is stronger than *to have an experience*, for the latter sounds less active.

<sup>2</sup> On religious experience see, of course, James 1902/1985. Cf. Putnam 2017 and Misak 2017.

Instead, the surgeon's professional experience has the character of (B). A teacher, a performer, a veteran can be said to have this sort of experience. It is the experience which stems from training, exercise, habit. It requires time, repetition, cumulative receptivity. And intelligence of course.

Hence, (A) has a singular character. I shall call it *singular experience*. (B) has a general character. Therefore, not surprisingly, I will call it *general experience*. Consider the following examples:

- (1) Going to Tibet was an exciting experience;
- (2) The guide was quite experienced.

The two can refer to the same scenario, but they use different concepts of experience. (1) is about a singular experience, namely visiting Tibet. (2) is about the general experience of the guide. I don't see any reason to deny their obvious difference. But at the same time I wish to point out that there are interesting cases where the two are less easily distinguishable. Consider this:

- (3) I don't remember anything like that in my experience.

Is this a case of experience in the singular or in the general sense? It is not entirely clear. The reference to the speaker's experience alludes to something past, so it is in line with experience of kind (B). But the subject-matter of the statement is something novel, surprising, puzzling. So it is an experience of kind (A), in tune with the novelty condition pointed out above.

Perhaps, if preferable, we might weaken the novelty condition and use the concept of a singular experience to encompass any kind of direct acquaintance with something, including what we have already experienced (tasting a certain food for a second time, etc.). In this sense, any perceptual experience, aesthetic experience, or life experience concerning a singular object, situation, or activity, would be a singular kind of experience. I am doubtful on the usefulness of such a larger category, but

I am also ready to revise this attitude if presented with reasons for dropping, or at least weakening, the novelty condition of singular experience.

An interesting aspect of the matter is the degree of interdependence between the two. What our example (2) is about is the general experience of the guide, but this has developed out of the singular experiences of the guide. In order to be experienced, one has to have experiences. On the other hand, experiences of a certain kind are only possible if one is experienced. In order to develop some sensitivity to music one has to undergo musical experiences. But some musical experiences (for instance enjoying an innovative interpretation of a musical piece) are only possible if one has musical experience.<sup>3</sup> Consider this question:

- (4) Have you ever experienced a bass clarinet solo in a smoky jazz club?

The experience the question is about is singular, for sure, but the question presupposes the capacity to discriminate a bass clarinet from other instruments, let alone the understanding of what a solo is and what the atmosphere of a smoky jazz club is like. Thus, this kind of singular experience requires some general experience about musical instruments and places where jazz is performed.

The pragmatist insights that I am going to discuss show that our distinction is fruitful and unstable at the same time. Fruitful because it helps us give an account of different aspects of our life and connection to the world; unstable because the two forms of experience interact in several ways and make it difficult to separate what is singular from what is general.

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<sup>3</sup> For similar considerations on "now" and "here" experiential concepts, see Soldati 2016, 161-3.

## 2. Some Pragmatist Insights

First, I will consider some of the writings of the classical pragmatists that are relevant to our topic. Second, I will address some claims of other philosophers who are considered to have some family resemblance with pragmatism. Peirce, James, Dewey and Mead are the classical pragmatists I will refer to. Wittgenstein, Quine and McDowell are their relatives.

Of course, given space and knowledge limits, I will just address some aspects of their views. I don't pretend to be exhaustive. In a sense I will do injustice to all of them, for the benefit of conceptual reconstruction at the price of idiosyncratic simplification.

### 2.1. Classical Pragmatists

The early Peirce had a tendency to reduce individuals to general properties.<sup>4</sup> From his realist and anti-nominalist metaphysical standpoint, he contended that the cognition of an individual always depends on the ascription of some properties to it and, of course, the ascription of properties to individuals depends on the grasping of general properties instantiated in them. The most extreme version of this view has it that there are no individuals, properly speaking: there are only bundles of properties. This can be put into inferential terms, claiming that the cognition of individuals is always inferential: not only a judgment as "This is a chair" depends on the inferential categorization of what is perceived, but also a judgment like "This is my cousin Max" does so, for the thing indicated has the general property of being the speaker's cousin, known as "Max".

<sup>4</sup> I refer in particular to his papers of the 1860s. The same tendency is shown, to a lesser extent, in the papers of the 1870s. His views changed significantly around 1885. Cf. Murphey 1961/1993, 299ff; Fisch 1986, 321ff; Short 2007, 46ff.

This is not the place to discuss that metaphysical standpoint of Peirce.<sup>5</sup> What is relevant here is the idea that experience is experience of general things. In this sense there are no singular experiences.

However, the later Peirce admits that individuals are not reducible to generals. He reaches this conclusion elaborating on his theory of categories and claiming that the category of "Secondness" (what exists, what is present, here and now) cannot be reduced to other categories.<sup>6</sup> What happens *hic et nunc* is not a mere instantiation of general properties. It is not entirely reducible to them.

If we look at the same issue from the point of view of semiotics, we realize that *indices* have a key role here. Such are the signs that bear an existential connection with their object (notably a causal connection). They are different from *symbols*, which can be used to describe real as well as imaginary things.

The real world cannot be distinguished from a fictitious world by any description. It has often been disputed whether Hamlet was mad or not. This exemplifies the necessity of *indicating* that the real world is meant, if it be meant. [...] It is true that no language (so far as I know) has any particular form of speech to show that the real world is spoken of. But that is not necessary, since tones and looks are sufficient to show when the speaker is in earnest. These tones and looks act dynamically upon the listener, and cause him to attend to realities. They are, therefore, the indices of the real world. (CP. 2.337, c. 1895)

The early Peirce conceived of semiotics as a general theory of representation (see W1: 169-70, 280ff, of 1865); at that time he was interested in the functioning of symbols as signs that represent their object and that, unlike other signs, allow the construction of arguments (CP 1.559, 1867). Around 1885, he became more

<sup>5</sup> See among others Tiercelin 1985, 1997, 2016 and 2019.

<sup>6</sup> I deliberately set aside Peirce's phaneroscopy (the theory of what is "present to the mind, quite regardless of whether it corresponds to any real thing or not" – CP 1.284), since it would need a work on its own. Let me only say that categories have parallels in phaneroscopy. See Short 2007, 60ff.

interested than earlier in icons and indices. One of his reasons to go deeper into the study of icons was the fact that they allow certain forms of reasoning on possible objects (such as mathematical reasoning; see e.g. CP 3.363, 4.531, 2.267). And one of the reasons for focusing on indices (see W5: 111) was the fact that they are characterized by a direct relationship with an existing thing, something which is untrue of icons and symbols (see CP 3.361, 3.363).<sup>7</sup> Language hooks on to the world in virtue of indices.

The features of icons, indices and symbols can be also understood in terms of time experience:

An icon has such being as belongs to past experience. It exists only as an image in the mind. An index has the being of present experience. The being of a symbol consists in the real fact that something surely will be experienced if certain conditions be satisfied. (CP 4.447)

Now, the experience of a thing indicated and present in a given context is a singular experience. It has the character of Secondness, but also the character of Firstness if it is the experience of something novel (Firstness being the category of what is novel, fresh, spontaneous; see e.g. CP 1.302). So, if we insist on the novelty condition of singular experiences, they have, using Peirce's categories, the dimensions of Firstness and Secondness. If we drop the novelty condition from our account of singular experiences, Secondness suffices to characterize them. General experience, on the contrary, is indeed the domain of Thirdness (namely the category of what is general, mediated, rational; see e.g. CP 1.427).

Turning now to epistemology, Peirce stressed in 1877 that the felt quality of doubt (that is, the experience of it) is the factor that motivates inquiry, whose aim is the fixation of belief (CP 5.370-6). More specifically, he claimed that the "irritation of doubt" causes "a struggle to attain a state of belief" and he

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<sup>7</sup> See Burks 1949, 680ff. Cf. Thibaud 1975, 85, 166-8; Atkin 2005; Short 2007, 219-20.

named this struggle *inquiry* (CP 5.374). To the purpose of belief fixation he recommended the "method of science," which is superior to others (namely to the methods of tenacity, of authority and of the a priori) because by following it "any man, if he have sufficient experience and he reason enough about it, will be led to the one True conclusion." (CP 5.384) He added in a passage of 1902 c. that inquiry "must react against experience in order that the ship may be propelled through the ocean of thought" (CP 8.118).<sup>8</sup> And he stressed in 1893 that what matters is "not 'my' experience, but 'our' experience" (note 2 to CP 5.402; cf. 8.101-2). What matters for science and inquiry is the social dimension of experience.

Notwithstanding these relevant insights, the notion of experience, in my view, is less central to Peirce's thought than it is to other pragmatists. James made of it something more substantial. In particular, in *A World of Pure Experience* (published in 1904 and collected in his *Essays in Radical Empiricism* of 1912) he established a certain account of experience as the crucial point of his "radical" empiricism.

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, *the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as "real" as anything else in the system.* (1912/1976, 22)

Everything which is experienced is in the system (including relations between experiences), and everything which is not experienced is out of it.<sup>9</sup> The experiences James talks about are basically singular (which is in tune with his nominalist attitude). They

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<sup>8</sup> On inquiry and the ship metaphor, see Haack 2018. Cf. CP 5.51 (1903) on the "action of experience."

<sup>9</sup> "Direct acquaintance, knowing in its first intention, is not readily available to the philosopher in the way that concepts are (taken not as pure experiences, but as referring to them), but it is identifiable, James thinks, partly because of the unpredicted trail of novel determinacy it leaves behind." (Lamberth 1999, 43)

involve, epistemically, a form of direct acquaintance, or “knowledge of acquaintance”,<sup>10</sup> and they let novelty accrue to our account of the world. James’ insistence on the “that” of singular experiences shows quite well their indexical dimension (1912/1976, 8ff). The irony of it is that James, who was in a sense the most pragmatist of the pragmatists,<sup>11</sup> seems to neglect here the active or practical dimension of experience. Dewey vindicated it.

As it is for James, the complexity and richness of Dewey’s philosophy cannot be rendered here. Let me mention his *Art as Experience* of 1934, whose chapter 3 is entitled “Having an Experience” and addresses how singular experiences, distinct from experience at large, are “integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences” (LW 10: 42). Dewey focuses on the fulfillment or “consummation” conditions of singular experiences (eating a meal, playing a game of chess, etc.) and, in a subsequent part of the same work, he also stresses the role of what is stored from past experience, something therefore generalized (LW 10: 78). This general experience results in responses to present conditions and habits. Some habits develop into crafts and arts that make enjoying experiences possible (LW 10: 53), as, in a mundane example, the cook has some general experience and the consumer has singular ones.

Let me also mention one work of 1917, *The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy*, where Dewey claims that experience “is a matter of *simultaneous* doings and sufferings” (MW 10: 9) and he highlights five points that mark the distinction from the traditional and empiricist conception of it:

- 1) experience is not only a “knowledge-affair,” it is also the intercourse of a living being with its physical and social environment;

- 2) it is not a purely subjective thing, since it is the way in which the objective world enters into the actions and sufferings of men and undergoes modifications through their responses;

- 3) it is not only and not mainly the registration of past events, for in its “vital form” it is “experimental,” it is the “effort to change the given,” and it connects with the future;

- 4) it is not “committed to particularism,” because connections are central to it and to the effort of changing existing conditions;

- 5) it is not opposed to thought, for it is “full of inference” (MW 10: 6).<sup>12</sup>

I will comment below on the inferential dimension of experience. Now notice that, as experience is a matter of “doings and sufferings,” Dewey’s notion of “transaction” is similar, in that it conveys the idea of a balance between doing and receiving.<sup>13</sup> The word “transaction” is notoriously used in economics to name a kind of interaction between economic agents, namely an exchange of goods or services. In Dewey’s use it helps us give an account of our “exchange” with the world: we obtain information from the world, and, at the same time, we give structure to it and elaborate practical responses to it. Dewey emphasized the active and predictive (anticipatory) aspects of experience. Not only do we give structure to experience imposing concepts and relevance criteria on it, but we also take it in a practical sense (see also LW 10: 50). We anticipate what

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<sup>10</sup> See James 1890/1981, 216-8.

<sup>11</sup> Remember Peirce’s complaint (CP 5.414) about the kidnapping (presumably by James) of the term “pragmatism,” which led him to introduce a new term that was “ugly enough to be safe from kidnapers,” namely “pragmaticism.”

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<sup>12</sup> However, see Ryder 2005 (claiming that Dewey’s conception of experience remains epistemological, and expressing doubts on the idea that experience is “full of inference”). Cf. Cometti 1999, Shook 2000. See also *Experience and Nature* of 1925 (LW 1), and Reichenbach 1938 on the predictive aspects of experience.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. LW 12: 24, 105-6. Cf. Mead 1926 on aesthetic experience, and LW 10: 42ff on the relation, in having an experience, between doing and undergoing. See also Calcaterra 2003.



is meaningful to us, and we generally elaborate responses to it.

Mead contributed to this view. His nice example of the ball illustrates the inferential aspects of experience (beyond the strictly perceptual ones) and, for our purposes, shows how the singular and general dimensions intertwine:

We see a ball falling as it passes, and as it does pass part of the ball is covered and part is being uncovered. We remember where the ball was a moment ago and we anticipate where it will be beyond what is given in our experience. (1934/1967, 176)

It is the singular experience of a falling ball. But the anticipation of where it will be is driven by the general experience of the cognitive subject. This sort of predictive inference goes “beyond what is given in our experience,” where “experience” is taken in the singular sense.

In other passages, Mead addresses the dispositional properties of things and gives an account of them in terms of hypotheses of future experiences:

Our environment exists in a certain sense as hypotheses. “The wall is over there,” means “We have certain visual experiences which promise to us certain contacts of hardness, roughness, coolness.” Everything that exists about us exists for us in this hypothetical fashion. Of course, the hypotheses are supported by conduct, by experiment, if you like. We put our feet down with the assurance born out of past experience, and we expect the customary result. (1934/1967, 247)<sup>14</sup>

Such hypotheses about the hardness and other properties of things are “supported” by our general experience of how things work and how we react to them. But of course this experience is not a guarantee of

what will truly happen in the future. This is the point, as anyone knows, of Hume’s attack on inductive inference, and, more recently, of Goodman’s “new riddle of induction”.<sup>15</sup> General past experience, made of singular experiences, does not concern future cases and cannot make us sure about them. Still, it is what we have and it is our best resource to deal with the future, making testable hypotheses and anticipations of future experience.

Now, “our” experience, taken as something that we socially share, depends for Mead upon individual *physiological* processes:

individual experience and behavior is, of course, physiologically basic to social experience and behavior: the processes and mechanisms of the latter (including those which are essential to the origin and existence of minds and selves) are dependent physiologically upon the processes and mechanisms of the former, and upon the social functioning of these. (Mead 1934/1967, 1-2)

So, given the “social functioning” of the basic elements, physiological processes are just a part of the story. *Psychological* processes and behavior develop in a social dimension, where singular and general experience intertwine.

The experience and behavior of the individual organism are always components of a larger social whole or process of experience and behavior in which the individual organism – by virtue of the social character of the fundamental psychological impulses and needs which motivate and are expressed in its experience and behavior – is necessarily implicated, even at the lowest evolutionary levels. (Mead 1934/1967, 228)<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Compare this with the emphasis on *memory* in the following passage by Austin (1979, 92): “Any description of a taste or sound or smell (or colour) or of a feeling, involves (is) saying that it is like one or some that we have experienced before: any descriptive word is classificatory, involves recognition and in that sense memory.”

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<sup>15</sup> “The problem of the validity of judgments about future or unknown cases arises, as Hume pointed out, because such judgments are neither reports of experience nor logical consequences of it.” (Goodman 1954/1983, 59) Goodman’s riddle is “new” because it asks not *whether* induction is justified, but *what* induction is so.

<sup>16</sup> “The biologic individual lives in an undifferentiated now; the social reflective individual takes this up into a flow of experience within which stands a fixed past and a more or less uncertain future.” (Mead 1934/1967, 351)

If I may briefly shift the focus, let me mention that some juridical discussions at the end of the XIX century, through the first decades of the XX century, run parallel to the philosophical ones I have recalled here. One example is Justice Holmes' "prediction theory" of law, according to which the law amounts to the "prophecies of what the courts will do in fact" (1897, 461).<sup>17</sup> To say that you have a certain right is to anticipate what a court will decide in given conditions, not very differently from anticipating sensory experiences when we say, borrowing from Mead, "The wall is over there".

Another example is Holmes' well-known dictum concerning the nature of the law: *the life of the law has not been logic, it has been experience*. Holmes' claim is worth quoting at length:

The life of the law has not been logic: it has been experience. The felt necessities of the time, the prevalent moral and political theories, intuitions of public policy, avowed or unconscious, even the prejudices which judges share with their fellow-men, have had a good deal more to do than the syllogism in determining the rules by which men should be governed. (Holmes 1881/1923, 1)

This is an appeal to general experience in the social sense of it.<sup>18</sup> In this context, general experience is social experiment, it is practical experience, habit, skill, craft. And it is also the transmission and refining of it through time, from generation to generation. Holmes' words had a large impact on legal culture and practice. Other authors, though, embraced a more conciliatory position as to logic and experience in the law. Max Radin, for instance, claimed that the "law as experience is desperately aware of its logical insufficiencies and the law as logic is uneasily conscious that its authority to

represent experience to the mind has never been ratified." (1940, 33) And Roscoe Pound contended that law "is neither wholly reason nor wholly experience. It is experience developed by reason, and reason checked and directed by experience." (1940, 367) Experience assesses logical constructions and legal means to social ends. It tests them over time, refining them or substituting them with new ones if needed.

In any event we need not take general experience as necessarily shared by a group of people. In principle it can be individual: the experience of the person with a certain habit, skill, etc. But it is generally true that individuals acquire competences and skills in social contexts where other people educate them and give them forms of feedback.

## 2.2. Pragmatist Relatives

Ramsey made Wittgenstein familiar with some pragmatist themes and claims (see Misak 2016, 155ff). Concerning the topic we are investigating, when in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein refers to the experiences associated with the act of pointing to something (1953, §§ 34-5), he plausibly uses the concept of experience in the singular sense. But when he refers to the habits and skills involved in language games or in forms of life (e.g. 1953, § 7), he presupposes some concept of general experience in line with the pragmatist emphasis on habits (natural or acquired) and on social interactions. Going backwards, the concept of experience more prominent in the *Tractatus* was the singular one,<sup>19</sup> but the general one had some room too:

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<sup>17</sup> Remember that Holmes was a member of the "Metaphysical Club"; see Fisch 1942. Actually the prediction theory has been criticized on semantic grounds by Hart 1994, 10-1; cf. Tuzet 2007 and 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Radin 1940, Pound 1960 and Hart 1963. In evidence scholarship, the phrase "general experience" figures in the title of a landmark work, i.e. Wigmore 1913.

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<sup>19</sup> For instance: "The "experience" which we need to understand logic is not that such and such is the case, but that something is; but that is no experience." (Wittgenstein 1922, 5.552) I leave aside the issue of "private experience" and "sense data," which is relevant to the concept of singular experience but would deserve a specific work that I cannot carry out here; see, however, Wittgenstein 1968.

The process of induction is the process of assuming the simplest law that can be made to harmonize with our experience. (Wittgenstein 1922, 6.363)

What Wittgenstein calls here “our experience” is the experience of generations, or at the least of some people through time, or of many people belonging to the same context. In any case, it is the general experience with which a law “can be made to harmonize”. Harmony with past experience is a first step and prediction of future experience a second step. Then future experience will confirm or refute such inductions.

The pragmatist attitude is more apparent in Quine’s work, as widely known. For our purposes I will focus on his celebrated paper of 1951 on the dogmas of empiricism, noting that an effect of abandoning these dogmas was for Quine a “shift toward pragmatism” (1951, 20).<sup>20</sup> Consider his attack on the dogma of *reductionism*, namely on “the belief that each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience.” (1951, 20) No reduction to immediate experience is possible according to Quine. On the other hand, experience is crucial for the testing of our statements about the world. To convey this idea he used the legal metaphor of a *tribunal* and claimed that the “tribunal of experience” works holistically. As he famously put it,

our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body. (Quine 1951, 38)<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See also Quine 1981, where he distinguishes his own position from that of the classical pragmatists and of Peirce in particular. The key points, for Quine, are these: the shift of semantic focus from sentences to systems of sentences, methodological monism, and naturalism.

<sup>21</sup> Notice a second legal metaphor in the “corporate body” of our statements about the world.

Atomist reductionism is the critical target of this view.<sup>22</sup>

Abandoning such dogma does not mean, for Quine, abandoning empiricism. Empiricism remains the best option for those who wish to give an account of the world, but only if it is understood holistically. This holism makes sense of past experience and predicts future one.

As an empiricist I continue to think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool, ultimately, for predicting future experience in the light of past experience. (Quine 1951, 41)

Now it seems to me that, notwithstanding his holism, Quine maintains a notion of experience which is basically singular. Experience is “sense experience” and it is of individuals. Actually the phrase “past experience” figures in the last quote, but it sounds to me as a summative view of singular experiences. Notwithstanding his appeal to a pragmatist “shift” as an effect of abandoning those dogmas, Quine does not truly discuss the practical aspects of experience, nor general experience as such. His views fit basically the singular dimension of experience. And perhaps a broader understanding of it and a distinction of the two relevant concepts (singular and general experience) would have made his conception even more interesting and more pragmatist.

In contemporary philosophy, John McDowell takes seriously the idea of experience as a tribunal of thinking, and claims that it cannot be so if it is conceived in a strict empiricist sense: “if we conceive experience as made up of impressions [...] it cannot serve as a tribunal, something to which empirical thinking is answerable.” (1996, xv) He wants to show that “the very idea of experience is the idea of something natural and that empirical thinking is answerable to experience.” (1996, xix) So, if strict empiricism is an unsatisfying position, what is the positive side of his story? He claims that humans acquire a second nature, in part, by being initiated into *conceptual capacities*, which are already operative “in the transactions in nature

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<sup>22</sup> “Taken collectively, science has its double dependence upon language and experience; but this duality is not significantly traceable into the statements of science taken one by one.” (Quine 1951, 39)

that are constituted by the world's impacts on the receptive capacities of a suitable subject." (1996, xx)<sup>23</sup> Experiences already have conceptual content and our conceptual capacities are active in judgment and passive in sensibility (1996, 10, 12, 39).

His thesis, in a nutshell, is that "experiences themselves are states or occurrences that inextricably combine receptivity and spontaneity." (McDowell 1996, 24)<sup>24</sup> This is a claim, again, about *singular* experiences. And it allows a parallel between experience and agency:

experiences are actualizations of our sentient nature in which conceptual capacities are inextricably implicated. The parallel is this: intentional bodily actions are actualizations of our active nature in which conceptual capacities are inextricably implicated. (McDowell 1996, 89-90)

McDowell criticizes Quine's view of experience as stimulation of sensory receptors. Despite his attack on the dogmas of empiricism, for McDowell Quine remained an empiricist as to the nature of experience. "Quine conceives experiences so that they can only be outside the space of reasons, the order of justification." (McDowell 1996, 133) This empiricist view renders totally opaque the process of empirical justification of beliefs and judgments. For McDowell it is fundamental not to separate conceptual spontaneity and sensory receptivity:

the idea of an interaction between spontaneity and receptivity can so much as seem to make it intelligible that what results is a belief, or a system of beliefs, about the empirical world – something correctly or incorrectly adopted according to how things are in the empirical world – only if spontaneity's constructions are rationally vulnerable to the deliverances of receptivity. (1996, 138-9)

<sup>23</sup> Notice the reappearance here of the notion of "transaction," echoing Dewey. Cf. Lindgaard 2008.

<sup>24</sup> See also McDowell 1996, 26 on experience as openness to reality. Cf. Senchuk 2001, 172-3 (contrasting Dewey's conception of experience as active with McDowell's view on the passivity of experience, notwithstanding McDowell's claims on the implication of conceptual capacities in experience).

This is singular experience, with the view that it involves conceptual capacities and constructions. So it is a broader understanding of singular experience, if compared to Quine's. But again the general dimension of experience is neglected. And its practical implications are neglected as well.

On the contrary, to my sense, a pragmatist is expected to incorporate both concepts of experience in a non-partial account of it, and to maintain their conceptual distinction at the same time. Hopefully faithful to the spirit of Peirce's pragmatic maxim, I will elaborate on their distinction in the last section of this work, where I point out some of their different consequences.

### 3. Some Consequences of the Distinction

What are the consequences of the distinction we made? They are various. Some of them are practical, some of them are not. All of them, in any case, are displayed in the inferences that we are disposed or supposed to make when we assume that a certain kind of experience is the case.

Consider the following examples:

(5) You attended a piano concert, therefore you can play the piano;

(6) You studied piano for years, therefore you can play the piano.

(5) is clearly an illegitimate inference, whereas (6) is legitimate on the implicit and acceptable assumption that a person who studies a musical instrument for years is capable of playing it (at least to a minimal extent). (5) tries to draw a certain consequence from a singular experience, but that consequence can only be drawn from the general experience of the person involved.

That is not to downplay singular experience. Someone who has made a singular experience is supposed to know what the character of that singular

experience was. (Or at least, they are supposed to have some justified belief about it). A specific knowledge of this kind is not involved in general experience. If someone tells me they attended a certain event, but then are unable to report me how the event was, I am entitled to put either their sincerity or their cognitive capacities into doubt. I would not be entitled to this if my interlocutor was simply claiming to have a general experience in the field: from such general experience no detailed report of a singular event is expected.

However, some inferences about singular cases are justified by general experience assumptions. If the police stops me while I'm driving a stolen car, they are entitled to make an abduction to the conclusion that I am the thief, or at least that I have something to do with the theft of the car. The truth is not necessarily so, of course. I might be really unaware that it was a stolen car; it might be the case that I was framed by someone, or so. In fact, abductive conclusions are hypotheses, not necessary truths. But if I am unable to offer any counterevidence or explanation, it is reasonable to believe that I have something to do with the theft. (More boldly, my being involved in it is the best explanation of the fact that I was driving the stolen vehicle). Now, why is it reasonable so to infer? Because it is a general teaching of experience that thieves have the stolen goods upon them, at least for a while after the criminal act.

The German jurist Friedrich Stein called *Erfahrungssätze* the statements reporting what experience has taught us about certain kinds of situations and independently from the case in hand (Stein 1893). The case in hand, for Stein, is to be decided using not only the evidence presented by the parties but also the knowledge that general experience gives to judges.

Many authors have addressed this evidentiary issue, often under different names. William Twining, a leading evidence scholar and legal theorist, has discussed the topic of "background generalizations" used in judicial reasoning and argumentation. He claims that

generalizations are *necessary* because every inferential step from particular evidence to particular conclusion "requires justification by reference to at least one background generalization" (2006, 334).<sup>25</sup> Every abductive inference, I would say, requires a major premise stating some generalization. Without it, it would be impossible to move from the minor premise reporting some evidence to the conclusion providing an explanatory hypothesis. Twining also claims that generalizations are *dangerous*:

Generalizations are dangerous in argumentation about doubtful or disputed questions of fact because they tend to provide invalid, illegitimate, or false reasons for accepting conclusions based on inference. They are especially dangerous when they are implicit or unexpressed (2006, 335).

Of course abductive inferences are invalid from a deductive point of view. They instantiate the "affirming the consequent" fallacy. Their conclusions can be false even if their premises are true. But we cannot dispense with them if we want to explain puzzling facts. In any case I agree with Twining on the importance of making them explicit.

Interestingly, Twining contrasts generalizations with "stories," namely accounts of particular facts (2006, 338). When witnesses tell such stories, they purportedly provide an account of their singular experiences (about the doubtful or disputed facts).<sup>26</sup> And when, using some generalizations, judges or juries draw conclusions from such stories, they make appeal to general experience.

Let us move now to thoroughly practical and normative consequences. Someone who has a kind of

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<sup>25</sup> Generalizations are a continuum that goes from scientific laws and well-founded scientific opinions, through commonly held, but unproven or unprovable, beliefs, to biases and prejudices (Anderson, Schum and Twining 2005, 102; cf. Dahlman 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Perhaps this is a kind of situation that provides a reason for weakening the novelty condition of singular experience: we don't want witnesses to limit their stories to what was novel, surprising, or puzzling; we want them to tell everything which is relevant to the case.

general experience may be liable for the consequences of the activity in which their general experience is used, or should be used. It is not so for someone who simply has an experience. In law the distinction is quite clear and contributes to the establishment of the (professional) standards of due care and liability.<sup>27</sup>

A surgeon is supposed to have some general experience concerning certain medical conditions and the ways to treat them. If a patient dies out of an omission the surgeon is responsible of (because they didn't intervene when general experience told them, or should have told them, to intervene), then that surgeon is morally and legally liable for the death of the patient. This makes sense if we assume that some general experience exists. It may be the experience of the person in question, or the experience of generations collected and synthesized in the medical science of the time. If the surgeon had it, or should have had it, they should have intervened to save the life of the patient. If they did not (because of negligence, laziness, or else), then they are liable. This is not the case if we imagine a young medical student facing a suffering patient. For sure the young student can have the painful experience of a patient who suffers terribly; but they are not supposed to intervene and save the life of the patient in virtue of their experience.

In brief, consider these inferences:

(7) You are an experienced surgeon, therefore you should have intervened;

(8) You are a medical student, therefore you should have intervened.

(7) is fine, (8) is not. The reasons are obvious enough, there is no need to restate them. Let me only stress one more time that the practical and normative consequences of general experience cannot be identical to those of singular experiences.

Practical knowledge (knowing-how) depends on general experience. And liability for an omission or improper use of practical knowledge is also dependent on it. It would be unreasonable, in any context, to hold liable a person who lacks the relevant practical knowledge and the general experience that is needed to successfully perform a certain act.

*Expertise* raises similar concerns. Legal systems usually have specific rules that govern the intervention of experts in legal proceedings and in trials in particular (for instance, Rules 702-6 of the U.S. Federal Rules of Evidence).<sup>28</sup> Experts are so because they are supposed to have experience. Being such, they are supposed to draw certain inferences about particular cases, and to take some course of action when needed. This is entirely foreign to the case of the person who simply has an experience. Of course it is general experience which is required in expert knowledge issues. And of course this knowledge doesn't come out of nowhere: it is the result of starting singular experiences – and of time, repetition, cumulative receptivity, training, etc. Such singular experiences are basic, but, in order to run scientific experiments and have the relevant experiences, experts need some kind of general experience. This enables them to perform the relevant operations and determine the relevant findings. So the two forms of experience interact, as we already pointed out. They do not occur in completely different contexts.

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<sup>27</sup> For a philosophical discussion of the major liability schemes, see Coleman 2003, 212ff. With a "strict" scheme, there is liability when the victim has suffered a compensable loss and the injurer's conduct caused the loss. With a "fault" scheme, there is liability when, in addition to those conditions, the injurer's conduct was negligent.

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<sup>28</sup> Rule 702, in particular, states that a "witness who is qualified as an expert by knowledge, skill, experience, training, or education may testify in the form of an opinion or otherwise if: (a) the expert's scientific, technical, or other specialized knowledge will help the trier of fact to understand the evidence or to determine a fact in issue; (b) the testimony is based on sufficient facts or data; (c) the testimony is the product of reliable principles and methods; and (d) the expert has reliably applied the principles and methods to the facts of the case."



The conclusion I would like to draw is simple: singular and general experience interact but remain different things. The different consequences they have, according to our inferences, show their different aspects and why we care about them. We care about singular experiences because we care about novelty, surprise, enjoyment. And we care about general experience because we care about learning, rationality, and responsibility.

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## **V. BOOK REVIEWS**

## BOOK REVIEW

RICHARD SHUSTERMAN (Ed.) *AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND SOMAESTHETICS. EMBODIED PERSPECTIVES IN PHILOSOPHY, THE ARTS AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES*

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Somaesthetics, the conception created by Richard Shusterman, is arguably one of the most promising areas in the humanities and social sciences. There is nothing surprising about this. Somaesthetics is a unique discipline which brings together a plethora of various research fields giving them clear guidance as to directions and aims of their investigations. The reviewed book is a remarkable example of the significance of somaesthetics for contemporary thought. It originated from the conference on somaesthetics organized by Alexander Kremer in Budapest in June 2014. The conference was an important step in the expansion of somaesthetics as it showed its significant potential for the interpretation of works of arts as well as for the cultivation of aesthetic experience.

The book consists of the papers presented at the conference as well as some written especially for the volume. It is the first book published in the Brill series devoted to somaesthetics edited by its founder Richard Shusterman. He has written the first chapter of the book *Introduction: Aesthetic Experience and Somaesthetics* where he writes about the origin of the concept that: "...it derived from pragmatist aesthetics, which emphasizes the importance of aesthetic experience for the philosophy of art but also, more generally, for the philosophy of life." (p.1) However, somaesthetics Shusterman argues has transcended its pragmatist genesis developing into an original domain. Thus, it is defined as "the critical study and meliorative cultivation of the body as the site of sensory appreciation (aesthesia) and creative self-fashioning. A field that seeks to integrate theory and practice, somaesthetics argues that our sensory perceptions (and consequently the

feelings and performances based on those perceptions) can be improved by cultivating one's somatic capacities that include both sensorimotor skills and powers of body consciousness. Somaesthetics, therefore, examines (in theory and through concrete bodily practice) the various methods designed to improve those capacities and their actual expression in experienced feelings, representational appearance, and performative achievement." (p.1)

Departing from these premises Shusterman enumerates various aspects of somaesthetics' interest in aesthetic experience. First, he stresses that somaesthetics in "[i]ts integration of theory and practice, along with its melioristic thrust to improve (rather than merely correctly describe) somatic experience and practice, reflects somaesthetics' roots in pragmatist aesthetics which puts aesthetic experience at the center of its philosophy of art." (p.2) A second important aspect of the relation between aesthetic experience and somaesthetics is "...rooted in the idea of philosophy as an art of living... As the soma is the central and necessary medium through which a philosopher (or anyone) lives, it is therefore important to cultivate it as part of the effort to live a better life." (p.3) Third, he briefly but very interestingly raises the issue of the relationships between somaesthetics, ethics, and politics: "Aesthetic norms are clearly entrenched in our established artistic practices in which we find implicit (and sometimes even explicit) rules or conventions for proper composition or correct performance, along with other normative aesthetic criteria for better and worse.

On the other hand, aesthetic experience can sometimes be powerful enough to challenge the existing norms and create room for different sorts of artistic practices involving different norms." (p. 3) It is obvious that political and social order is based on norms so the aesthetic experience can be a vehicle of the emancipatory change. Therefore, somaesthetics has a potential of liberating individuals from the oppression through even small changes in everyday life of individuals.

I have decided to present Shusterman's introduction at length not only because it is very interesting in itself as an elaboration of the relationships between somaesthetics and art and aesthetic experience but also because these ideas serve as theoretical background for the texts included in the book.

The first part of the book entitled: *Embodiment in Philosophy and Aesthetic Experience* contains three essays which tackle the fundamental questions of somaesthetics in the context of the contemporary philosophy. The first chapter is written by Catherine F. Botha *Nietzsche on Embodiment: A Proto-somaesthetics?* is an examination of Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the body. The author corrects Shusterman's reading of Nietzsche that his position on mind-body problem is merely a reversal of Cartesian paradigm. She claims convincingly that: "Nietzsche's work could be argued to be a kind of (proto-) somaesthetic position, because of its affinities to Shusterman's work" (p. 28) and enumerates two aspects of this affinity. First, Nietzsche stresses that the complicated character of various ways of interaction between the body and the mind. Second, he also considers the body as a "locus of creative self-fashioning." The paper is thus an important contribution to the genealogy of somaesthetics showing its rooting in the Western philosophical tradition.

The second article in this part *Experience and Aesthetics* written by Béla Bacsó takes up a crucial topic of reconsidering "a new version of the aesthetic or somatic experience." As the author writes: "It seems to be a very democratic and liberal version of thinking. It has become free from the abstract limitations of theory in the aesthetic field and has made it possible to speak freely and truly about the affective encounters with artworks." (p.36) The author does a very detailed analysis of the concept of aesthetic experience in various traditions and confronts them with that developed by Richard Shusterman. It seems that what Bacsó finds the most interesting in Shusterman's pragmatist notion of aesthetic experience is its connection with the deepest

layers of our existence which a new interpretation of an artwork can reveal. "The artwork as already existent and covered by the dust of various interpretations is ready to open up different ways of interpretation, approaches that do not simply negate the previous ones but actually affect me. These experiences cannot be predicted based on earlier or preliminary meaning-attributions. This is why it is necessary to conceive the artwork as an in-between – known but never utterly experienced. We are only able to accept our own proper existence –that is usually hidden from us – in such changeable, uncertain situations." (p.39)

Alexander Kremer in his paper *Art as Experience: Gadamer and Pragmatist Aesthetics* deals with the comparison of two seemingly distant traditions: that of pragmatism and that of German hermeneutics. He demonstrates very competently how both traditions influenced Shusterman's concept of art and aesthetic experience and consequently he shows that: "They both speak about the same primary features and essences of art and artworks, but with different terminology. Gadamer uses a hermeneutical and Shusterman a pragmatist language, but they both emphasize the importance of a special action or experience in the artwork and hold that that the artwork in some sense presents a truer world; they moreover attribute similar roots to art." (p. 52)

The next part of the book *Somaesthetic Approaches to the Fine Arts* deals with various dimensions of arts. The first chapter in this part *Art as Embodied and Interdisciplinary Experience* is a dialogue between the well-known artist Olafur Eliasson and the art historian Else Marie Bukdahl. I think that a key point in this dialogue is Eliasson's recognition of Shusterman's concept of soma as the crucial for the interpretation and creation of contemporary art. Ellison makes it clear stating: "Vision is still the predominant theoretical tool, though once you move into the realm of theatre and performance. This attitude changes. I like Shusterman's idea of connecting the notions of soma and aesthetics. It

reflects my view of the body as well. As I understand it, somaesthetics implies that you are not only capable of shaping but that you are also being shaped. The body learns from different layers of experience, both constituting and being constituted, as we know from phenomenology." (p. 64) Following this thesis, he develops the concept of felt meaning stressing that meaning is not only a cognitive phenomenon but also it is something we sense "without the conceptual grid or architecture of words to attach to it." (p. 69) It is clear that somaesthetics is an ideal tool for capturing this aspect of meaning.

The succeeding chapter is written by Yanping Gao *Winckelmann's Haptic Gaze: A Somaesthetic Interpretation* contains a revisionist interpretation of the work of famous German aesthetician Johann Joachim Winckelmann with the stress on his haptic engagement which brings him close to somaesthetics. Referring to Winckelmann's works but to his biography, she concludes: "Behind this charm, charisma, enthusiasm, and intuitive perception lies Winckelmann's somaesthetic approach—his deeply embodied way of perceiving art that brings together the different senses and one's emotional sensibility in the pursuit of understanding and pleasure." (p. 84) Therefore, we can assume that at the fundamentals of aesthetics lies in corporeal experiences which are conceptualized into ideas, notions, and so on.

In the following chapter *Rethinking Aesthetics through Architecture?* Bálint Veres discusses aesthetic ambivalences of architecture from a somaesthetic perspective. His intention is not the substitution of somaesthetics and pragmatism for imagination, intimacy, and spirituality but to combine both sets of values. This approach is necessary as according to Veres architecture „...never witnessed the tendency of overcoming sensuality, never acknowledged the interpretation-heavy mentalism of the so-called 'artworld,' and never legitimized the suspension of the physical-corporeal reality. On the contrary, architecture

mediates between the mental and the corporeal."(p. 99)

John Golden in the next chapter *'The Co-Presence of Something Regular': Wordsworth's Aesthetics of Prosody* examines the role of prosody as a means for harmonizing the text with the rhythms of our bodies. He writes at the beginning of his article: "Literary texts engage our bodies perhaps most immediately through the sounds of the words they enlist us in saying—or in imagining we say—with our own breath. And of all of literature's sonic effects, the poetic meter has perhaps the most suggestive connections with the body: both meter and human bodies involve felt pulses and repeated movements." (p. 101) The author discusses various perspectives on the role of the prosody in the text using William Wordsworth's poems. Although Golden does not refer directly to somaesthetics, it is clear from his considerations that prosody constitutes a link between the text and corporeal activity and somaesthetics would be a useful tool for examining this relationship. Moreover, the author argues: "...that meter is as pure an expression of the communal dimension of poetry as we can expect to find within the borders of a text." (p. 118) This aspect of prosody is also significant from the perspective of somaesthetics as it shows the importance of the corporeal dimension for social life.

The last chapter in this part *Singing, Listening, Proprioceiving: Some Reflections on Vocal Somaesthetics* is written by Anne Tarvainen deals with vocal somaesthetics which "[I]n contrast to the traditional research of human vocality...will be interested in the bodily sensations of what it feels like to vocalize and to listen to another person vocalizing. Vocal sound as heard is understood here being only a part of the multimodal experience of vocalizing and listening. Vocal somaesthetic experience is auditive, proprioceptive, aesthetic, motional, affective and intersubjective." (p. 121) The point of departure for the author is Shusterman's division between representational, performative, and experiential somaesthetics. Experiential somaesthetics is devoted mainly to the issue



of experiencing our bodies and how by the various method we can enrich our experience. Tarvainen concentrates in this context on the proprioceptive vocal experience as a necessary although the often neglected aspect of singing. Such approach has far-reaching consequences as it leads to “[T]he disappearance of the clear distinction between subject and object, inside and outside, as well as body and mind...” (p. 129) Moreover, it also confirms the status of somaesthetics as in the conclusions Tarvaines asserts: “The broad aim of vocal somaesthetics is to create a comprehensive understanding of human being as a bodily, sentient and vocal being. It will illuminate the human being’s diverse vocal, sensory and aesthetic relations to his/her environment and other people.” (p. 138)

The third part of the book *Somaesthetics in the Photographic Arts and the Art of Living* consist of four papers. The first one *Spectral Absence and Bodily Presence: Performative Writings on Photography* is written by Éva Antal. She interprets Shusterman’s writings on photography as well as his performative activity opposing them to the perspective on photography developed by Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida. It seems that Shusterman’s consciousness of the body enables him to capture a new sense of photography. “Barthes and Sontag call attention to the loss of the meaningful event that characterized old photography, while Derrida’s creative writing on Bonhomme’s old-new photos incorporates his philosophical ideas on time, death and writing *mise en abyme*.”

Toma and Shusterman try to capture the auratic essence of the subject in their artistic transactional project. Shusterman’s essay gets closest to the meaning of performance in photography: not only does the bodily SOMAFLUX project present the performative process itself, but also his performative writing about it displays the features of somaesthetic discourse.” (p. 159)

The subsequent chapter *Cosmetic Practices: The Intersection with Aesthetics and Medicine* examines the

aesthetic meaning of surgical and cosmetic intervention into the body. Elisabetta Di Stefano shows the importance of artistic practices of the transformation of the body as well as cosmetic practices of the beautification of the body. Somaesthetics “can provide a meeting point between high culture and popular culture, while reconciling the different ways of evaluating cosmetic practices from the medical and aesthetic perspectives in the light of a rediscovered psychosomatic unity.” (p. 163) It enables us to find a harmony behind the excesses of the artistic creations but also helps us to “improving everyday life and experience.”

Nóra Horváth’s paper *Santayana on Embodiment, the Art of Living, and Sexual Aesthetics* refers to the ideas of George Santayana whose conception is in many aspects parallel to that of the pragmatists. Horváth writes that for Santayana “Aesthetic experience is ... central to his philosophy of life. For him, perfection and beauty are not separable ideas; beauty is an objectified pleasure, and the feeling of pleasure gives the feeling of perfection.” (p. 186) This perspective puts him near to Shusterman’s notion of the transfiguration of ordinary experience into the more refined experience of self-creation although Shusterman is more suspicious of an excessive aestheticism. Similarly, Santayana claims to refer to Ancient Greece that “...the attraction of sex relies upon the attraction of senses, which suggests that a man with a refined aesthetic sense has a better sexual sense.” (p. 190) Shusterman who also is preoccupied with the role sexual desires play in our bodily self-fashioning draw his inspiration mainly from Asian culture.

The last paper in the volume *Thinking through the Body of Maya: Somaesthetic Frames from Mira Nair’s Kamasutra* written by Vinod Balakrishnan and Swathi Elizabeth Kurian is an interesting exploration of the usefulness of somaesthetics for the interpretation ancient Indian bodily rituals as presented in the contemporary movie *Kamasutra: A Tale of Love* which is a narrative about two women: the 16<sup>th</sup>-century

courtesan Maya and the princess Tara. They represent two parallel concepts of relation to one's own body. "Tara's perception of her beauty is cosmetic and epidermal. Maya's understanding is more somaesthetic as she believes in an enhancement of beauty by turning the soma into a receptacle of practices and experiences." (p. 204)

Philosophy of science claims that the crucial criterion for the usefulness of a theory is its fruitfulness for posing problems. I am sure that the book is a significant argument for the fruitfulness of somaesthetics. The book shows that somaesthetics can generate in many areas new interpretations that in turn enable the researcher to re-conceptualize a research field. This somaesthetics' ability has been demonstrating in all papers included in the collection. Some of them develop the original insights of somaesthetics, some enter into a dialogue with its underlying assumptions, but all prove that it is a unique conception which opens new ways of research for the humanities and social sciences.



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