

Jerome Carroll

William James and eighteenth century anthropology: holism, skepticism and the doctrine of experience

Introduction

James and anthropology

Max Scheler, the initiator of philosophical anthropology in the twentieth century, follows William James in employing the term radical empiricism as the title for his approach to epistemology (see Scheler 1973, 138). This reflects other common aspects of their thinking: the refutation or radical reconfiguration of philosophical categories, such as the a priori; the inclusion of emotional aspects like feeling or temperament in their accounts of what determines experience and knowledge; and an emphasis on concrete or lived experience, for instance as evidenced by the focus on activity (James) or the act (Scheler). Such overlaps between William James and the twentieth century tradition of philosophical anthropology have not gone unnoticed. In an essay titled ‘The anthropological foundations of William James’s philosophy’ Michael DeArmey argues that ‘a radical theory of human nature, a theory which has gone previously unnoticed, rests quietly at the foundation of James’s thought.’ (DeArmey 1986, 17) He concludes that

William James’s phenomenological insights are part of a much larger program – the working out of a distinctive theory of human nature. I have tried to show that James is first and foremost a pioneering philosophical anthropologist, America’s central representative of the anthropological movement. (DeArmey 1986, 31)

For DeArmey this anthropological programme is evident in James’s synthesis of phenomenological method – which he characterises as transcendental or spiritual – and his ‘strong training and interests in biology and medicine’: ‘More significantly, their ambitions were to *unite* the important findings from both areas by means of a root conception of human nature.’ (DeArmey 1986, 25) In particular, DeArmey sees philosophical anthropology as offering an alternative to science’s reductive approach to causation, in the form of what he calls its teleology: ‘man is the end-seeker’ who ‘can choose or “affirm” goals’. (DeArmey 1986, 25, 26) In this vein he refers to James’s ‘radically *teleological* anthropology’ (DeArmey 1986, 18), which he sees as being inherited from Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, published in 1798 after many years of lecturing on the topic and which James read in the 1880s.

It may be necessary to point out here that the tradition of (philosophical) anthropology that we are concerned with here is not comparative ethnology, but a more philosophical enquiry about humankind’s essential nature and its relationship to the world around. Scheler is key contributor to

philosophical anthropology in its classical phase in the twentieth century, but Kant's *Anthropology* is one of at least twenty books published in the last decades of the eighteenth century with anthropology in the title. These often practically-oriented writings by philosophers and medics such as Ernst Platner, Gottfried Immanuel Wenzel, Karl Heinrich Pölitiz, and Johann Karl Wezel offer a hybrid discourse comprising elements of popular philosophy, physiognomy, and psychology, which aim in part to address the perceived failure of abstract, a priori and logically constructed approaches to philosophy to either give access to absolute knowledge or guide us in more everyday questions of knowledge and action.

One of Kant's main concerns in his teleological approach was to wrest anthropology from the naturalists, like Ernst Platner, who had sought in the name of anthropological holism to establish the fundamentally physical origins of higher activities, such as memory, imagination, and reason (see Platner 1772, 117-194). Kant thinks that this holist approach does not do justice to human freedom and dignity, hence the cardinal distinction of his 'pragmatic' anthropology: physiology has to do with what nature makes of man, whereas pragmatics concerns itself with what man 'can and should make of himself'. (Kant 2007, 231) According to DeArmey, the key concept of this biological-teleological approach is interest, which for James stands for 'ends, desires, needs, wants, purposes, etc.' (DeArmey 1986, 24)

Sergio Franzese agrees, viewing philosophical anthropology as 'a special discipline which blends together bio-medical science and the phenomenological analysis of human life as a coherent whole in order to define human nature'. (Franzese 2008, 52) But for Franzese, anthropology proposes not merely an *alternative* to science, but a *rejection* of science, insofar as he sees the 'altogether more comprehensive anthropological image in which all the functions, higher and lower, organic and spiritual, are integrated in a single structural unity', which demands James's rejection of the "scientific," namely, naturalistic study of man'. (Franzese 2008, 52) Similar to DeArmey, however, Franzese sees this tension as being resolved in 'the view of the human being as the *indeterminate being*'. (Franzese 2008, 52) Once again, Kant's anthropology is seen to be the model that allows for an accommodation between humankind's unique status as a free rational agent and determinate, biological nature: 'For James, Kant's anthropology appeared not only as a way out of the prison of determinism, but also as a way to reconcile the natural and the spiritual in Man without being obliged to renounce other scientific knowledge or the higher meaningfulness of human life.' (Franzese 2008, 56-57)

But what this picture of reconciliation overlooks is the fundamental tension between the contrasting positions taken by Kant and James as regards the philosophical status of experience, in other words as regards the possible relationships between philosophical categories and lived experience. This tension is brought into sharp relief in the so-called psychologism debates in the 1880s and 1890s, with James

explicitly rejecting the idea that experience and knowledge can depend on concepts that exist outside of experience. Neo-Kantian contemporaries of James thought that this rejection of apriorism and James's focus on experience '*reduc[ed]*' truth to the purely psychological experiences of the knower' (Bordogna 2008, 172), and left no way of separating out 'what *is* true, and what is *thought to be* true' (Bordogna 2008, 167, original emphasis).

At stake here is the very project of transcendental philosophy as a science that is able to ground knowledge and experience, as is brought out in the writings of the next generation of neo-Kantians, in particular those of Edmund Husserl. Psychology for Husserl is shorthand for subjectivism, which is at odds with the transcendental aims of his version of phenomenology. He wants phenomenology to be a 'science of transcendental subjectivity' that 'aims at absolute, ultimately valid truths which transcend all relativity'. (Husserl 1981, 315, 316) For Husserl phenomenology would thus furnish a 'science of a completely new kind, without which psychology and the other sciences cannot be grounded philosophically.' (Husserl 1981, 315) He classifies any attempt to dispense with such grounding as psychologism, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains: 'The thesis of psychologism is precisely this: that psychology can take the place of philosophy.' (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 56)

The important point for our concerns here is that the model of knowledge that this 'science of transcendental subjectivity' seems to follow is a modern scientific one that prizes objectivity, at least insofar as philosophy stands or falls by virtue of its success in distinguishing objective (or at least transcendently subjective) elements from those that are merely subjective, and the universal bases of knowledge and experience from those that are contingent and particular. Elsewhere I have discussed the ways in which this approach is in stark contrast to Scheler and others' holistic-anthropological approach, according to which such grounds cannot be comprehensibly separated from the concrete life in which they appear (see Carroll 2017, chapter three).

Anthropology: holism and skepticism

What interests me here, and what comprises the basis of this article, is that similar debates about the relationship between selfhood and experience, and conceptual explanations and grounding were had in the period when Kant was writing, specifically in terms of epistemological, ontological, and methodological ideas surrounding the project of anthropology. The position taken by contributors to the discourse on anthropology was fundamentally holist, in the sense that they sought to account for human experience in the round. Their antipathy to philosophy that reckoned to separate essence and grounds from lived experience was at odds with Kant's philosophical *modus operandi*, which precisely sought to isolate the pure and transcendental conditions of possibility of experience and knowledge from its contingent and particular instances.

To cite just one anthropological source at this stage, in 1799 Friedrich Schleiermacher published a famously scathing review of Kant's *Anthropology*. In his view Kant's apriorism precludes him from honouring the spirit of anthropology's holistic approach. Schleiermacher, in the introduction to his book on ethics (1816), suggests that anthropology is split between its physical and psychological aspects, and as such 'cannot be seen as a science'. (Schleiermacher 1967 II, 543) But it is also precisely this hybrid quality that he and others value in anthropology. In his appraisal of Kant he cautions that the empirical, descriptive, observational approach that anthropology is often identified with can relegate it to a mere 'collection of trivia'. (Schleiermacher 1799, 300) He is not particularly explicit about what might save anthropology from this fate, but one can extrapolate from his critical comments on Kant's work that empiricism is not the threat, but precisely the separation of 'physiological' and 'pragmatic' anthropology, which he views as 'incompatible' with any kind of anthropology. At issue is not only Kant's perceived failure to account for the sensuous dimension of life, in an approach that privileges reason, intellect and abstraction over man's sensory or physiological dimension, but also the very idea that you can separate one from the other. Rather than corroborating Kant's separation of man's allegedly 'natural' and 'rational' aspects, 'anthropology should be the joining together of them both, and only through this union can it exist'. (Schleiermacher 1799, 302)

Schleiermacher's faithfulness to the ethos of anthropological holism is evident here, but it is important to understand that he is also making an epistemological point: he thinks that Kant's transcendentalism, the desire to ground human knowledge and experience, thereby incorporating human freedom, contravenes the terms of his own critical project by aiming for what he terms a 'closet realism [*verborgener Realismus*]'. (Schleiermacher 1799, 303) This reference to realism hints at what I see as the crucial epistemological implication of anthropological holism, which I read as an articulation of skepticism about the possibility of establishing philosophical grounds by means of hard-and-fast conceptual separation. Realism here is problematic for Schleiermacher the hermeneutician insofar as it presupposes an ability to separate the known from the knower, or conditions of possibility from the experience that manifests them. We shall see that this attitude is already evident in the increasing sense among those writers on anthropology that these kinds of separation and the objectivity that relies on it are not possible in matters that relate to human experience.

In what follows I will firstly present what I see as the main anthropological elements of James's position, namely (1) his preference for holism or antipathy to separation, (2) his concerns about the binomial terms of traditional philosophy, (3) his preference for experience over substances, (4) his sense that this holist doctrine of experience shows a way out of sterile impasses, (5) a preference for description over causation, and (6) the aforementioned skepticism. In the second section I will register the common ground with key ideas in the work of anthropologists from the last decades of the eighteenth century. My argument is not that the anthropologists influence James directly, but rather

that there is a remarkable similarity between his ideas and the arguments of this range of thinkers. I hope that awareness of these parallels will serve to reconceptualise the connection between James's ideas and the tradition of anthropological thinking in German letters since the late eighteenth century, beyond its characterisation as a combination of scientific positivism and teleology.

Anthropological elements in James's radical empiricism

Antipathy to separation

We have registered James's rejection of the idea that determinate experience depends on a level of experience that is in some way independent of that experience. He does use the term *a priori*, but it is precisely used to denote experience before any kind of separation of its elements in conceptual analysis. In a way that perhaps misleadingly makes us think of a quality that is absolute or transcendental, he calls this 'pure experience', and refers to it as the only 'stuff' in the world. (James 1912, 4) But the 'pure' nature of experience here does not indicate the kind of primacy or precondition of Kant's *a priori* forms, but rather expresses James's antipathy to separation:

By the adjective 'pure' prefixed to the word 'experience' I mean to denote a form of being which is as yet neutral or ambiguous, and prior to the object and subject distinction. I mean to show that the attribution either of mental or physical being to an experience is due to nothing in the immediate stuff of which the experience is composed – for the same stuff will serve for either attribute. (Perry 1935 II, 385)

The same idea is denoted by a range of other adjectives – direct, instant, concrete, active, lived – and the idea is always basically the same: that such experience happens prior to any differentiation of subject from object, of thing from thought, or of form from content: 'The instant field of the present is always experience in its pure state, plain unqualified actuality, a simple that, as yet undifferentiated into thing and thought, and only virtually classifiable as objective fact or as some one's opinion about fact.' (James 1912, 74)

Does this amount to a capitulation to sheer and undifferentiated experience, about which we can say nothing definitive? This was one of the criticisms of James's opponents in the psychologism debates. But an alternative view, and one I favour, is to say that the rejection of such differentiation is an attempt to avoid binomial terms, like subject and object, knower and known, form and content, by means of which philosophy has traditionally explained determinate experience. Numerous statements by James support this view, of which I will cite two:

The first great pitfall from which such a radical standing by experience will save us is an artificial conception of the *relations between knower and known*. (James 1912, 52)

Throughout the history of philosophy the subject and its object have been treated as absolutely discontinuous entities. [...] [A]ll sorts of theories had to be invented to overcome [this separation of knower and known, subject and object]. (James 1912, 52)

We have noted that this ‘radical standing by experience’ was viewed as a threat to the project of philosophy, but it is clear that James sees the binomial concepts in terms of which knowledge and experience have been theorised as a theoretical sticking plaster only made necessary by a failure to grasp experience more concretely:

The natural result of such a world-picture has been the efforts of rationalism to correct its incoherencies by the addition of transexperiential agents of unification, substances, intellectual categories and powers, or Selves; whereas, if empiricism had only been radical and taken everything that comes without disfavor, conjunction as well as separation, each at its face value, the results would have called for no such artificial correction. (James 1912, 43-44)

So whilst Bruce Wilshire argues that James’s doctrine of experience places ‘great theoretical load on the concept of pure experience: a single pure experience must be perceiver, perception, and perceived’ (Wilshire 1968, 170), this might be taken to misconstrue James’s concern, which precisely proposes overcoming the standard theoretical categories and separations, as John Wild puts it: ‘This means an abandonment of theoretical constructions that may have become habitual, and even incorporated in accepted modes of speech, like the terms *mind* and *body*. We must make an effort to place these interpretations in suspense, in order to regain the feeling of a lived situation.’ (Wild 1969, 361)

James’s antipathy to the separations that he sees as necessitating such ‘transexperiential forms’ is expressed in various ways: firstly, in terms of meaning as an active process, such as his reference to an ‘*active element in all consciousness, [...] a spiritual something [...] which seems to go out to meet these qualities and contents, whilst they seem to come in to be received by it.*’ (James 1890 I, 285, original italics) Likewise he asks, ‘[w]hy insist that knowing is a static relation out of time when it practically seems so much a function of our active life?’ (James 1912, 75) He contends that ‘this activity of meaning formation goes on in the world where meaning comes into being. Hence it can be studied as it is directly experienced, described and analysed.’ (Wild 1969, 233) Secondly, it is expressed in terms of what we might call the ‘worldly’ quality of experience, as in the above

characterisation of meaning formation as ‘go[ing] on in the world’. It is also evident in James’s view of experience as both generating and fitting into a coherent whole that accompanies experience from birth: ‘The first sensation which an infant gets is for him the Universe. And the universe which he later comes to know is nothing but an amplification and an implication of that first simple germ.’ (James 1890 II, 8) To quote Bruce Wilshire, this is to say ‘that we can never perceive a thing without perceiving a world’. (Wilshire 1968, 163)

But whilst it expresses the parameters of possible experience, this worldly quality does not make it possible in any Kantian sense. Rather, and a third way in which James’s refutes separation, such forms are seen to be secondary to active, concrete, lived experience: they are ‘contingent’ (Wild 1969, 50, see also 233) and not legislating: ‘These ordering forms originate in the mind, it is true, and not from experience. But they are not changeless nor do they have “as Kant pretended [...] a legislating character even for all possible experience”’ (James 1980 I, 664-5, see also Wild 1969, 232). Here James does express the view that such forms originate elsewhere than experience, but only at the same time as he severely limits any claims regarding their philosophical status. It is in this vein that John Wild insists that ‘[c]onceptual thought may clarify and extend the range of meanings that are present in perception. This is not guaranteed, however, by any a priori status of reason. It is a hope that may be approximated by historical effort and struggle.’ (Wild 1969, 52)

Against dualism

This antipathy to the separations of traditional philosophy causes some commentators to associate James’s thinking with a turn against Cartesian dualism, with Owen Flanagan for instance interpreting James’s late *Essays in Radical Empiricism* as marking ‘the culmination of two decades worth of thinking that there was something wrong with substance dualism’. (Flanagan 1997, 43) From here it is a small step to characterise him as a monist, supported by his reference to experience as involving the same ‘immediate stuff’. (James 1912, 2) But even his repeated references to ‘concrete’ experience (see e.g. James 1912, 117) or to the ‘felt’ quality of experience must not cause us to think in terms of substances, as monism tends to do. In James’s doctrine of experience it is anathema to reduce experience to something substantial, because: ‘thoughts in the concrete are fully real. But thoughts in the concrete are made of the same stuff as things are.’ (James 1912, 37) This is why Flanagan resists all accounts of experience that posit any component of our experience as ‘a thing, a substance, or an entity’. (Flanagan 1997, 45)

But this non-substantialist ontology does not mean that we must align James with idealism. Indeed, the point is here that the antipathy to separation that is at the heart of his doctrine of experience reckons to make such classifications as realism and idealism redundant. For James it makes no sense to distinguish between material and immaterial aspects of experience, as Flanagan puts it:

Experiences will do. What will happen [...] is that our experiences will relate in ways that typically lead to the constructions of certain distinctions, for example, between what is mental and nonmental. But this distinction can be made without commitment to some essential underlying ontological difference. (Flanagan 1997, 45)

Likewise, James Edie insists that ‘the philosophy of James is neither a philosophy of objects and actions nor a philosophy of ideas; it is a philosophy of the *experience* of objects and actions *in which the subject itself is a participant*.’ (Edie 1965, 121) In a similar vein, James’s approach precisely questions the distinction between internal, mental, individual and external, social elements of experience, with James referring to ‘appreciations’ as ‘an ambiguous sphere of being, belonging with emotion on the one hand, and having objective “value” on the other, yet seeming not quite inner nor quite outer [...]’ (James 1912, 34) For Edie this means James’s approach cannot be aligned in any straightforward way with idealism or realism: ‘Must we therefore say that James remains on the side of “realism” versus “idealism,” or is he not rather, [...] also searching for a way out of this sterile impasse, for a theory of experience which will be neither realistic nor idealistic but phenomenological?’ (Edie 1965, 119)

Causation, description, skepticism

One interconnection about which James is particularly circumspect is causal connection between aspects of experience. As Wilshire puts it, ‘[f]or [...] James the notion of sensation as a mental state, insofar as it is an element in the stream of consciousness, is specifiable only internally, or in conjunction with that which it is of, i.e. things in space. Thus the attempt to relate them through contingent and causal reasoning is an absurdity.’ (Wilshire 1968, 166) For this reason James’s analysis of human experience is seen to prefer description to causal analysis: ‘the lesson that was so painfully taught by the *Principles*: the causal analysis of mind must give up priority of inquiry to the descriptive and the cognitive.’ (Wilshire 1968, 170) Whilst James sometimes disparages description as a primitive stage in science (see James 1890 II, 448 and 454), in the *Principles* it becomes the primary method.

And it is important to reiterate here that in terms of epistemology opting for a methodology of description need not be aligned with positivism, but is for James a consequence of skepticism about the availability of other options. It is precisely not scientifically grounded naturalism, which James had once held to, and which we have noted that others view as linking him to philosophical anthropology. Certainly, in the Preface to the *Principles* he insists: ‘I have kept close to the point of view of natural science throughout the book.’ (James 1890 I, v) Likewise in 1875 he had written: ‘A real science of man is now being built up out of the theory of evolution and the facts of archaeology, the nervous system and the senses’ (cited in Franzese 2008, 52). But in the later, shorter version of his psychology book, James is more skeptical:

When we talk of “psychology as a natural science,” we must not assume that that means a sort of psychology that stands at last on solid ground. It means just the reverse; it means a psychology particularly fragile, and into which the waters of metaphysical criticism leak at every joint, a psychology all of whose elementary assumptions and data must be reconsidered in wider connections [...]. A string of raw facts; a little gossip and wrangle about opinions; a little classification and generalization on the mere descriptive level . . . but not a single law in the sense in which physics shows us laws, not a single proposition from which any consequence can causally be deduced. [. . .] This is no science, it is only the hope of a science. (James 1892, 334-5)

And in the *Essays on Radical Empiricism* he explicitly associates his approach with skepticism, noting that critics of humanism ‘have showered blows on doctrines – subjectivism and skepticism, for example’ (James 1912, 52, see also Wild 1969, 52).

Anthropology

If space permitted one might draw links between James’s positions here and those of the classical twentieth century philosophical anthropologists, most notably Max Scheler and Arnold Gehlen. The parallels are evident in their anti-dualist or holist approach to experience, in particular their doubts about the merit of isolating apriori aspects of experience, and their tentativeness as regards drawing general conclusions about causal links between aspects of human reality. Sometimes this similarity extends to the very terminology they use. Like James, Scheler uses the notion of value to denote the way in which our inner perception is entwined with a web of attitudes in the external world: ‘the world is given in lived-experience as the “bearer of values”’. (Scheler 1973, 143) And James’ sense of such values being ‘not quite inner nor quite outer’ is all but replicated in Gehlen’s sense that we inhabit an ‘inner outer-world’. (Gehlen 1988, 339-40)

But Gehlen is citing the eighteenth century poet and philosopher Novalis here, and what interests me is that all of the above aspects of James’s doctrine of experience feature at some point in the anthropological thinking that took place in the late eighteenth century, a hundred years and more before he was writing: the antipathy to separation, in particular the concern about categorical, conceptual separations; the validation of subjective experience and the concern to account for lived experience in ways that contrast with an ontology that works by such separations; the sense understanding the nature of selfhood and reality in these holist terms might offer a way out of the dualist impasses of dominant approaches to philosophy; the focus on a looser notion of interconnection, and the concomitant preference for a methodology of description in place of causation; and the association with skepticism. In what follows I will register relevant sources for each of these overlaps in turn, which I hope will support a reading of James not as a neo-Kantian, but

as part of an anthropological tradition that refutes the dualism at the heart of Kant's philosophical method.

Holism, naturalism, description

Holism is the watchword of anthropology from Ernst Platner onwards. Heinrich Benedict von Weber, for instance, in the first volume of his *Anthropologische Versuche zur Beförderung einer gründlichen und umfassenden Menschenkunde für Wissenschaft und Leben* (1810) defines 'true anthropology' as the 'science of the whole, concrete human, an external and internal science of the human [Menschenlehre] together'. (Weber 1810/1817 I, 7) This holism is part of what is referred to as a 'naturalist' turn in the eighteenth century (see for instance Käuser 1990, 201), evident for instance in Johann Georg Sulzer's insistence in *Investigations into the origin of pleasant and unpleasant sensations* [*Untersuchung über den Ursprung der angenehmen und unangenehmen Empfindungen*] (1751/1752) that imagination has a basically physiological basis (see Dürbeck 1998, 135). This physiological orientation, which we also registered in Platner's ideas, may be seen as a consequence of the transition from a philosophical to a medical approach to human experience and capacities, centring on biology and physiology. But the epistemological implications of this bio-medical approach are not straightforward. For some commentators it is accompanied by a positivist epistemology, with some medics consciously seeking to distance themselves from techniques and practices that were deemed to be overly theoretical, as Elizabeth Williams puts it: 'As "positive" techniques of medicine – clinical observation, statistical inquiry, and especially pathological anatomy – gained more advocates, the old "philosophical" medicine of the erudite theoretician was dismissed as superannuated, speculative, and metaphysical.' (Williams 1994, 13)

Some doctors consciously avoided fundamental philosophical questions such as metaphysical reflections on beginnings, in which vein Samuel Tissot, writing in 1768, draws a clear distinction between the physician's concerns and those of metaphysics:

Metaphysics investigates the causes of the influence of the mind on the body and of the body on the mind: medicine [*Arzneykunst*] concerns itself with objects [*Gegenständen*] that are more slight [*weniger groß*] but perhaps more certain, and is happy not to ascend [*aufsteigen*] to the question of first causes of this mutual influence of both substances which comprise the human, but rather contents itself with the detailed observation of the appearances that derive from this. (Tissot 1768, 16-17)

Physician Hieronymus David Gaub and scientist Georges-Louis Buffon separately identified description as a way to avoid getting lost in teleological explanations of final causes (see for instance Hieronymus David Gaub, *Institutiones Pathologiae* (1758) and Georges-Louis Buffon, *Buffon's Natural History* (1797), both cited in Steinke 2005, 202).

And the anthropologists, many of whom were physicians, followed suit, in a way that tells the other side of the story of Kant's turn against the naturalist aspect of anthropological holism. As opposed to the methodologies of conceptual abstraction, speculation, or deduction associated with rationalist and then Kantian philosophy, anthropology is claimed by its proponents to proceed by means of what Roger Smith calls a 'descriptive approach to knowledge' (Smith 1995, 95, see also Zammito 2002, Käuser 1990, Williams 1994, 80, Moravia 1980, 247), emblematic of which is Herder's maxim: 'Not speculation [*Vernünffteln*], but gathering [*Sammeln*].' (Herder 1985, 672)

Skepticism: man as puzzle or anti-dualism

But whilst description may rescue us from theoretical abstraction, it should not be equated with any kind of simple positivism, as should be apparent from the aforementioned association of anthropology with skepticism. For Wolfgang Riedel this skepticism is so central to philosophical anthropology that he asserts 'where philosophy becomes skeptical, it becomes [...] anthropological'. (Riedel 1994, 96) There is repeated reference in the eighteenth century to anthropology's skeptical aspect, for instance in the characterisation of the human as puzzle and the sense that any knowledge of the link between body and soul is fraught with 'difficulties that cannot be overcome [*unüberwindliche Schwierigkeiten*]'. (Linden 1976, 43) Karl Pölitiz for instance refers to man as 'the puzzling [*rätselhafte*] being, sensory and super-sensory, combined in us into a unity'. (Pölitiz 1800, 5) It is in this sense that the recent commentator Hans-Peter Krüger describes the basis of philosophical anthropology as 'negative', explaining: 'The essence of the human is in the final analysis unfathomable [*unergründlich*].' (Krüger 2001, 30)

Here we must distinguish between skepticism relating to the make-up of the human, which becomes a puzzle when the examination of it starts with dualist premises, and skepticism about the idea that human experience and our understanding of it can be grounded with reference to transcendental categories: the point is that those who are skeptical about the latter precisely reject that the former is a problem. In other words, several of the eighteenth century writers on anthropology precisely refute the idea that the human is a puzzle for anything other than the abstracting philosophical gaze, and they do so precisely in the name of concrete, lived experience.

It is important to register here that anthropological holism develops in the shadow cast by Cartesian dualism: that is to say, not dualism *per se*, but the sense that man's dual nature is somehow a *problem*, that man is made up of two different kinds of substance that do not add up or whose interconnection needs to be explained theoretically. There is a range of positions, with some writers retaining dualist categories and referring to the interactions between them, and others questioning the very basis of substance dualism. A seminal instance of the latter is Johann Herder, who in his most anthropological essay, 'On Cognition and Sensation, the Two Main Forces of the Human Soul' (1778), insists that only philosophical thinking abstracts reason from sensation. Thus the stated aim is not to explain the

interconnection between mental and corporeal experience, nor to achieve harmony between the two. Rather because things *are* interconnected in experience, the challenge is for knowledge to trace and describe the manifold interrelations between disparate elements.

Several of the contributors to the discourse on anthropology in the late eighteenth century state explicitly that they are not interested in explaining the interconnection between body and mind, rather they precisely take man's *unity* as a starting premise, as the *sine qua non* of meaningful experience. Platner for example insists that the question of how the connection between soul and world is possible is irrelevant to him (see Platner 1772, xi-xii). Johann Georg Heinrich Feder sees the connection between mind and body as being a matter of everyday experience, albeit that he does not want to give up on dualist categories (see Linden 1976, 42). Even Kant claims in a letter that his anthropology would 'omit entirely' the 'subtle and, to my view eternally futile inquiries as to the manner in which the bodily organs are connected with thought'. (Kant 1999, 141) He remarks in his *Anthropology* that any attempts to establish anthropology as a 'science with thoroughness encounter[s] considerable difficulties that are inherent in human nature itself'. The difficulties he lists include man's self-consciousness when being observed and the operation of habit, which 'make it difficult for the human being to judge how to consider himself', and ultimately 'make it very difficult for anthropology to rise to the rank of a formal science.' (Kant 2007, 233) In the face of what Philip Blosser calls 'the impossibility of a rational psychology of the soul that would yield substantive knowledge of the soul' (Blosser 2002, 42), Kant's response is to claim the existence of transcendental grounds. But Schleiermacher's criticism of Kant's anthropology precisely centres on the concern that the price of grounding in Kantian thinking is the perpetuation of a dualism that separates experience into a priori and empirical, free and determined aspects, etc.

Anti-theoretical attitude

And the response among some anthropologists to this 'impossibility' is precisely not abstract and universal, but often anti-theoretical and concrete – and it is this approach that makes the link with the methodology of description that we started with above. So whilst some, such as the Kantian Carl Schmid, ultimately ranked anthropology below philosophy (see Schmid 1791, 8), which is described as 'true, rationally grounded knowledge [*wahre Vernunftkenntnis*]' (Schmid 1791, 10), other proponents of anthropology, as we have seen with some of the physicians who preceded them, rejected key principles, methodologies, and objectives of speculative, transcendental philosophy: apriorism, rationalistic deduction or speculation, and philosophy's quest for absolute grounds. It is in this vein that Karl Pölitz contrasted 'skeptical' anthropology with teleological or physiological anthropology (Pölitz 1800, 9-10), a comment that underlines the idea that we must beware of identifying all theories associated with anthropology as teleological. Pölitz saw anthropology as taking place in the wake of the failure of metaphysical, systematic philosophy. As such, anthropology is seen to attempt no

historical representations of the various philosophical opinions about the relationship of things to appearances, raised to the level of a science, leaving this higher portrayal and the way that it dignifies the various scholastic metaphysical systems, or more accurately the history of philosophy, after the fall of systematic metaphysics. (Pölitz 1800, 14-15)

Moritz, Wezel and the ‘wobbly’ system

A similar critique of overly systematic metaphysical explanations is evident in the writings of the pioneering psychologist Karl Philipp Moritz and of the poet and anthropological thinker Johann Karl Wezel. In ‘Vorschlag zu einem Magazin einer Erfahrungs-Seelenkunde’ (1783) Moritz argued that any ‘system of morality’ may only serve as an ‘approximate outline [*ohngefährer Grundriß*]’, which we should apply ‘as loosely [*schwankend*] as possible; merely establishing a few points, but not yet drawing the lines from one point to another, rather waiting until these lines draw themselves.’ (Moritz 2006, 798-9) In a similar vein he prefers ‘observations from real life’ to those ‘ladled from books’. (Moritz 2006, 795) And Fernando Vidal describes the combination of empirical observation and rational reflection in his *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde* (1783-93) as ‘reject[ing] the abstract and intellectualizing language of the mental faculties in favour of observations which often took the form of existential and personal narratives, based on the examination of the self.’ (Vidal 2011, 112)

Wezel likewise insisted that universally valid statements about interconnections between self and reality are not available. Knowledge can and must rise above the subjective and personal, but only to a level that is ‘relatively general’. (Wezel 1804-5 I, 36) In his two-volume *Versuch über die Kenntnis vom Menschen* (1784/5) Wezel states his aim as being to explicate the interconnected elements of experience without abstracting or reductive explanation. Interestingly, he limits his explanation of the interconnections between different elements of the self to a seemingly intentionally vague ‘law of general interconnection [*allgemeinen Verknüpfung*]’. (Wezel 1784/5 I, 129) Jutta Heinz points out that statements about the nature of any interconnections between different aspects of reality must be guided not by ‘ideological assumptions [*Vorannahmen*] or metaphysical certainties’ but by experienced interconnections. (Heinz 1996, 37) She sees the eschewing of ‘any absolute definitions’ in Wezel’s *Versuch* as emblematic of a gradual ‘emancipation’ of anthropology from philosophy. (Heinz 1996, 69, 38) Likewise Herbert Schnädelbach sees anthropology precisely as marking a waning of the idea that transcendental-metaphysical philosophical has special access to reality: ‘Philosophising does not have its own special access to reality; it is always mediated by experience and the empirical sciences.’ (Schnädelbach 1989, 32)

Lived experience and Schütz's anthropological psychology

Heinz and Schnädelbach's references to experience and to empirical science reflect the widespread view among eighteenth century anthropologists that considerations of the nature of selfhood and reality should be more closely wedded to concretely lived experience. We have already registered von Weber's definition of 'true anthropology' as the 'science of the whole, concrete human'. (von Weber 1810, 7) Kant himself associated anthropology with experience rather than speculation (see Kant 2012, 446), and Wezel subtitled his *System of Empirical Anthropology* (1803) a 'study of human experience [*Erfahrungsmenschenlehre*]'.

This revalidation of experience indicates that anthropology should not be considered in isolation from discipline of psychology, and a brief excursus here is helpful. Since its inception in the writings of Christian Wolff in the 1730s, psychology had wrestled with the tension between necessarily subjective empirical experience and the rationalist aspect of psychology, which deduces abstract concepts and develops more or less systematic accounts of allegedly a priori capacities and qualities that make experience possible, such as the unity of identity. But in the second half of the eighteenth century, in a shift that Wolfgang Riedel calls a 'psychologisation of philosophy' (Riedel 1994, 106), empirical psychology begins to overturn the subordinate position of empirical introspection. Evidence of this shift is to be found in the work of Johann Georg Sulzer, who already in 1759 had insisted that one could not deduce all qualities of the soul from its 'essence [*Wesen*]'. and therefore prioritised empirical psychology as the 'most important' aspect of this science of the soul. (Sulzer 1759, 156, 157)

But this privileging of empirical experience arguably merely opts for one side of this rationalist-empiricist divide over another. A more nuanced approach comes with Christian Gottfried Schütz's remarkable essay, 'Betrachtungen über die verschiedenen Methoden der Psychologie' (1771), in which he called for a methodology that combines empirical and rationalist elements, both of which have their weaknesses. The former may appear more reliable and certain, but he lists the manifold obstacles that stand in the way of our own self-perception, for example the speed of our successive thoughts, our own enthusiasm, the assumption that we know ourselves already, and the fact that we all wear social masks (see Schütz 1771 2, 197-202). Rationalist analysis may supplement experience, but is itself beset by its own difficulties. For instance, he points out that the deduction of causal connections is difficult, not least because 'one and the same tendency may have several causes'. (Schütz 1771 2, 202) As Vidal puts it – in terms that echo Moritz and Wezel's hesitancy about such schema – this kind of methodology 'required a lively but orderly imagination, and the formulation of a small number of principles'. (Vidal 2011, 138-9) It is of particular note for our concerns that Schütz characterises the eclectic methodology that he thinks psychology should adopt as anthropological: 'It would be much more advantageous if psychology were treated more like anthropology.' (Schütz 1771 2, 268)

The uncertain self

This underlying hesitancy about schema and systems means that I can only partly agree with Schnädelbach's above-cited remark regarding the 'scientific' quality of empirical approaches to experienced reality. Thinkers associated with anthropology recognise that the proximity to lived experience they seek brings with it what Brian Jacobs calls a 'denial of certainty' around knowledge of one's own self, which is 'on an order altogether different than that of the natural sciences'. (Jacobs 2003, 111) Jacobs is referring to Kant here, but some thinkers in the late eighteenth century went further than Kant in questioning some of the qualities bestowed upon selfhood by rationalist deduction, such as the coherence of identity and of inner representations. Wezel is one such thinker, and another is Christoph Meiners, professor of philosophy in Göttingen. Meiners insists in his essay 'Psychologisches Fragment über die Verschiedenheiten des inner Bewußtseins' that we can have a sense of selfhood without feeling that we are always identical (see Meiners 1775/6 2, 39) in a way that was unusual at the time. This insight is part of what motivates his desire, expressed in the preface to his *Grundriß der Seelenlehre* (1786), to reconceptualise philosophy as a study of man, centred on psychology and distinct from mathematics and natural science. By this time Wezel had also developed a notion of the fallible self, referring in *Versuch über die Kenntnis vom Menschen* (1784-1785) to the self as a fleeting collection of effects:

Many philosophers speak of the soul as if they were thinking of memory, imagination, and understanding as separate elements that stand next to one another, or as if ideas were like images on a screen [*Bilder auf der Leinwand*]. He however who thinks of everything in the human and the soul as fleeting effects, which we might compare for example with the tone of the satyrs or with vibrations in the air is on a much better path. (Wezel 1784/85 I, 65-6)

Closing remarks: common ground

Some aspects of the parallels between James's epistemological attitude and those of the anthropologists and psychologists of the late eighteenth century are clear. Both prefer proximity to lived experience over theoretical system-building. And whilst it is only with the twentieth century anthropologists that James's ideas come to be replicated almost verbatim, such as that the knower and known cannot easily be separated, or that inner experience has a worldly quality, it is important to see that these attitudes can be traced back to the signature ontological holism of eighteenth century writings on anthropology, and its related epistemological skepticism. In those writings the preference for lived experience is primarily a rejection of Cartesian dualism, and the problems it generates, of precisely the kind that we see replicated in James's formulations. Likewise, in his writings experience is conceived as an alternative to overly systematic 'agents of unification', a circumspect attitude about theoretical models that overstate the products of rationalist deduction with strong echoes of the eighteenth century concerns. James and the anthropologists' more skeptical epistemology also gives rise to a methodological preference for description rather than definitive claims about causation. And

whilst we might say that Scheler and Gehlen follow suit in this respect, my argument here has been that we would also do well to look further back to the history of anthropological thinking. Rather than identifying his anthropology as comprised of ‘science plus teleology’, or viewing him as neo-Kantian, this might help to locate James in an – essentially anthropological – tradition whose holism is fundamentally at odds with the dualist approach of Kantian philosophy.

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