

FEELING, THOUGHT AND ORIENTATION: WILLIAM JAMES AND THE IDEALIST ANTI-CARTESIAN TRADITION

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Twentieth-century philosophical and psychological thought about emotion effectively started with the work of William James. While for much of the second half of that century, James's work had definitely fallen out of favour, recently there have been definite signs of a revival.¹ Such a positive re-evaluation is, I believe, well-deserved, as James's approach to emotion has many under-appreciated features. Moreover, many of the traditional criticisms not only aim at a caricature, but rely on assumptions about which James was overtly critical. Here I want to work my way towards a way of reading James that puts his views in relation to a variety of approaches to the mind that have been adopted at various times since the seventeenth century, and that can be broadly linked by their shared *anti-Cartesian* stances. I will start with the familiar thought of James that the subjective "feeling" of an emotion is nothing more than an awareness of bodily states and processes, primarily conceived as located "peripherally" within viscera, skeletal muscle, and skin. I'll then proceed by addressing the common criticism that such an approach denies any *cognitive* dimension to the emotions. James, I'll suggest, should be seen as part of a tradition that aimed at undermining the types of dichotomous conceptions of body and mind that his critics still took for granted. This broadly anti-Cartesian tradition can be thought of as including thinkers as diverse as the common-sense realist, Thomas Reid, on the one hand and Leibniz and later idealists and romantics, on the other. But first let us address the much-criticised "James-Lange" theory of emotion.

JAMES'S SOMATIC THEORY OF THE EMOTIONS CONTEXTUALISED

The idea that emotional states should be thought of as "accompanied" by certain physiological changes is, of course, a commonplace. What had been truly distinctive about James's treatment of emotions was his criticism of the idea that such somatic states are *effects* or *expressions* of some associated and distinct *mental states*, conceived as the proper locus of the emotion. James had no place for such a Cartesian conception of the mind, or the sort of "mind stuff" inhabiting it. Thus he claimed that these perceived bodily states simply *constituted* those emotions themselves. In an oft-quoted passage from "What is an Emotion?" he states:

If we fancy some strong emotion, and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feelings of its characteristic bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no "mind-stuff" out of which the emotion can be constituted, and that a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains. ... What kind of an emotion of fear would be left, if the feelings neither of quickened heart-beats nor of shallow breathing, neither of trembling lips nor of weakened limbs, neither

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of goose-flesh nor of visceral stirrings, were present, it is quite impossible to think. Can one fancy the state of rage and picture no ebullition of it in the chest, no flushing of the face, no dilatation of the nostrils, no clenching of the teeth, no impulse to vigorous action, but in their stead limp muscles, calm breathing, and a placid face? The present writer, for one, certainly cannot. The rage is as completely evaporated as the sensation of its so-called manifestations.²

Many have found this idea problematic. In treating the contents of emotions as perceived bodily states, as here he apparently does, James seems to ignore their “cognitive” dimension. Affects and emotions, it is commonly said, have a “cognitive” content and function as types of “judgments” or “appraisals” of worldly objects or situations. They have, in short, *intentionality*. Thus the feeling of fear functions not merely as a reaction to some dangerous situation but as a classification or characterisation of that situation—a type of judgment about it. In fear one judges the situation as dangerous.³ And so, in accounts within the standardly “cognitivist” approach to emotions which came to dominate in the 1960s and 70s, it is common to find the so-called “James–Lange theory” of emotion ritualistically invoked at the outset only to be dismissed in a few sentences.⁴ These critiques, however, only testify to the fact that their authors have not read James beyond the standardly quoted passages like the one above. James was well aware of, and sought to give an account of, the cognitive dimensions of affects, and pointed to their intentionality. Consider, for example, the complexly cognitive status that James gives to affections in what he calls the “appreciative perception” of “affectual facts” in the essay of 1905, “The Place of Affectual Facts in a World of Pure Experience.”⁵

Repeating his anti-Cartesian critique of the idea that “anger, love and fear are affections purely of the mind,” and reaffirming the general somaticist position of the earlier paper “What is an Emotion?”, James expands on an idea he finds in George Santayana, that beauty is “pleasure objectified”, noting that:

The various pleasures we receive from an object may count as “feelings” when we take them singly, but when they combine in a total richness, we call the result the “beauty” of the object, and treat it as an outer attribute which our mind perceives. We discover beauty just as we discover the physical properties of things. Training is needed to make us expert in either line.⁶

The claim here is that what, from one point of view, can be considered as “feelings” can, from another, *count* as the content of some perceptual characterisation of an object—in this case, its “beauty.” James’s account in fact seems to have been a development of the same idea found earlier in C. S. Peirce, who had argued against the idea that introspection could be regarded as a privileged source of information about one’s mental states, even one’s emotions.⁷ Knowledge that one is angry, for example, can be thought of as acquired inferentially (“as a mark of returning reason”) on the basis of a direct “perception” of the qualities one perceives in external objects, a perception that one expresses by claims such as “this thing is vile, abominable” and so on.⁸ This is analogous, Peirce thinks, to the reflective grasp that the *sensation* one is now having is one of, say, “redness,” only makes sense on the basis of the knowledge that the object one is perceiving is, in fact, *red*. And while “it must be admitted that if a man is angry, his anger implies, in general, no determinate and constant character in its object . . . it can hardly be questioned that there is some relative character in the outward thing which makes him angry.”⁹ The strongly anti-Cartesian approach of these two pragmatists here might be seen as having something in common with that of earlier critic of Cartesianism, the eighteenth-century Scottish common sense realist, Thomas Reid.

REID ON SENSATION AND PERCEPTION

Importantly Reid had distinguished between “sensation” and “perception,” and criticised empiricists such as Locke and Hume for conflating them. “‘Sensation’ doesn’t in itself imply a conception of, or belief in, any external object. It implies a sentient being, and a certain way in which that being is affected, and that is all it implies.”¹⁰ In contrast “‘perception’ implies an immediate conviction and belief in something external—something different both from the mind that perceives and from the act of perception.”¹¹ Because they occur together, they are confused in everyday life, and indeed, they are confused by those philosophers who, after Descartes, follow the “way of ideas.” This can be seen in Locke, who thinks that the mind knows the world on

the basis of its knowledge of its own states—its “ideas.” But the philosopher “does have reason to distinguish them when he wants to analyse the compound operation that they make up.”¹²

Locke had thought of perceptual knowledge of the objects of the outside world as arrived at inferentially from judgments made about “ideas” or “impressions” thought of as perceivable “inner” objects. But, for Reid, the notion of “idea” here conflates perception and sensation. As Reid points out,

The external senses have a double province—to make us feel, and to make us perceive. They furnish us with a variety of sensations, some pleasant, others painful, and others indifferent; at the same time they give us a conception of and an invincible belief in the existence of external objects. . . . This conception and belief which nature produces by means of the sense, we call *perception*. The feeling which goes along with perception, we call *sensation*.¹³

One of Reid’s favoured examples of a sense with this double province is the sense of smell.

One might stick one’s nose into a bunch of flowers or a glass of wine, slowly inhale and simply luxuriate in the experience that one is having. But the nose can also function in a different way. Imagine walking into your kitchen to be confronted by some unwelcomed and unpleasant smell. The task becomes one of using one’s nose in a way analogous to that in which blood-hounds use theirs: to sniff out the source to eliminate it. For Reid, the co-occurrence of perception and sensation in everyday life would produce what, in James’s terminology, would be an “appreciative perception.” And the other sense organs, Reid argues, can be thought of as having the same dual function. Perhaps Jamesian emotions can be thought of a type of “sensing” of the world that works in the same way. Considered as sensations, they reflect states of the body, but regarded as *perceptions*, they furnish “appraisals” of situations in the external world.

Some have seen Reid’s theoretical distinction between sensation and perception as having recently been given a concrete and dramatic instantiation by the development of a certain type of medical technology, the “tactile vision substitution systems” (TVSS) technology developed by the late Paul Bach-y-Rita, an American physician who sought to provide a type of *ersatz* “seeing” for the blind. In the late 1960s Bach-y-Rita first started experimenting with ways of bypassing the normal visual pathways via devices that “projected” the output of hand-held video cameras as tactile “images” displayed on the skin of the back.¹⁴ Subjects sat in modified dentists’ chairs, the backs of which were equipped with arrays of vibrating points which allowed the skin on the back to substitute for the retina as a receptive surface. Manipulation of the video camera allowed these subjects to identify and discern basic facts about distal objects. Later these devices were reduced to stamp-sized “tongue display units” converting the output of small video cameras, mounted on spectacles or strapped to the forehead, into patterns of electrical stimuli applied to the surface of the tongue.¹⁵ Typically, on first use of these devices subjects describe their experience as one of feeling sensations *on* the back or the tongue, and as figuring out something about their environment on the basis of these sensations. But with practice the experience becomes described as that of *seeing* distant objects and as “forgetting” about the feeling on the back or the tongue. At this later stage, it would seem, sensation has *become* perception.

Popular news presentations of the TVSS technology invoke the perplexing idea of “seeing with the tongue,”¹⁶ but on reflection there doesn’t seem to be anything particularly counter-intuitive here. Galileo had described vision as involving light “tickling” the back of the eyeball in a way analogous to that in which a feather can tickle sensitive skin around the nostril.¹⁷ And if one thinks of *seeing* as involving a type of tickling of a sensitive surface, what in principle is to prevent the skin of the back or the tongue from playing this role? We can learn about external objects by both touch and sight and we can learn about certain features of objects, such as their shape, from both modalities. Returning to James, then, from Reid’s conception of the double province of the senses there would seem to be no impediment to the idea that the causal effects of the world on our bodies might, from one point of view, be treated as providing information about what is going on in our bodies, and, from another, thought of as information about the world. Taken “singly” the various pleasures we experience on the basis of contact with an object “may count as ‘feelings’” but “when they combine in a total richness, we call the result the ‘beauty’ of the object.”¹⁸

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But immediately we seem to face an obstacle when using the sensory substitution model to help us understand the phenomenological and cognitive features of *emotion*. As James's account of the experience of *fear* is meant to illustrate, it is precisely the specificity of the feelings involved, the feelings of one's quickened heart rate, one's trembling lips, weakened limbs and so on that define that emotion *as* fear. Different senses may be substituted when trying to find out about the shape or location of some distal object because the precise *quality* of those sensations do not seem relevant to that task. That's why they can be "forgotten" in the production of *perceptions*. But the "property" of the object being "assessed" in the emotional response, its *fearsomeness*, as it were, is, presumably, tied to such responses in the way that an object's shape or location is not. The TVSS technology suggests a type of "switching" between sensation and perception, but *appreciatively* perceived "affectual facts" requires some type of coexistence of perception and sensation. But here, another application of TVSS technology perhaps suggests itself as a more relevant model.

ORIENTING PERCEPTION, PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY

After its success in helping the blind, the TVSS technology was adapted to address the incapacities of patients with impairments of the vestibular mechanisms of the semi-circular canals in the inner ear. One of Bach-y-Rita's associates contracted an inner-ear infection leaving him unable to stand and experiencing the world as spinning around him.¹⁹ The semi-circular canals are sensory organs—supplying us with information about our orientation in space, but we are normally much less aware of their inputs than we are from traditionally conceived senses like sight and touch—the senses at the centre of *Reid's* idea of the dual-functioning sense organs. Unlike the traditional "five" senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste), we are generally unaware of the functional role played by organs like the semi-circular canals, which only becomes obvious (and then all too obvious) when they *malfunction*.

To bypass the cerebral input from the malfunctioning vestibular apparatus the TVSS technology was adapted to transduce the informational output of accelerometers built into headpieces responding to changes in spatial orientation. Such cerebral inputs as those from the vestibular mechanisms or the proprioceptive feedback from the muscles and joints, by keeping us *oriented*, form the part of *background conditions* against which normal "perception" is interpreted. On the Jamesian account of emotion, it is similarly feedback from the body's periphery that is implicated in emotional experience and that enters into the subject's appraisals of "appreciative facts." Thus, rather than think of affect as disclosive of features of objects in the world on the model of "objective" properties as shape and location, perhaps we can think of it as involved in the maintenance of normal orientation in the world which *allows* some kind of perceptual disclosure of the world in the first place. Something like this seems to characterise the situation of Phineas Gage whose story is recounted by Antonio Damasio in his popular *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*.²⁰

Damasio, wielding a renewed Jamesian approach to the mind, recounts how the 25 year old Gage, a railway worker during the nineteenth-century rail roll-out across the United States, had a "tamping iron"—a crowbar-like solid metal tube three and a half foot-long, and weighing thirteen pounds—propelled cleanly through his skull and brain like a launching rocket, when the gunpowder he was tamping with the iron, exploded. Not only did Gage recover from such a massive assault on his brain (in fact, he apparently didn't lose consciousness), but he seemed to have no discernible cognitive deficits despite having ablated large tracts of neural tissue from his frontal lobes. His practical life was, however, profoundly affected, and he had personality changes like those now associated with the recipients of pre-frontal lobotomies. Gage had no impairment of *senses* such as vision, and so was able to negotiate space as before, and no obvious impairment to *cognition*, that is, to what we might describe as the ability to negotiate the "conceptual space" of inferential reasoning. However, he had lost what we might describe as the capacity to negotiate *social space*—the capacity to interact with others in appropriate ways. On Damasio's analysis, he had lost the type of emotional colouring or tone that normally accompanies interpersonal experience, albeit at a barely conscious level, a colouring or tone that seems to play a crucial role in one's sense of the propriety and appropriateness of one's behaviour. We might think of him as losing just that capacity that in the eighteenth century Francis Hutcheson had conceived of as the "moral sense." Damasio shows from the perspective of contemporary neuroscience that Gage's injuries would have interfered with just the sorts of feedback from the body that William James had thought made up the content of emotion.

Perhaps we might start by thinking of Gage's emotion-deprived perceptual life as lacking a type of orientation mechanism, analogous to the sorts of orientation mechanisms lacking in people with malfunctioning vestibular or visual systems.

Gage's impairments bring into focus the difference between the capacities to be perceptually aware of "objective" facts on the one hand and "appreciative" ones on the other. In places James appears to run these together, such as when he asserts that we "discover beauty *just as* we discover the physical properties of things."²¹ But elsewhere, James was to distinguish them. Prior to James, Peirce had described the chief difference between disclosing the world in feeling and "an objective intellectual judgment" as residing in the fact that "while the latter is relative to human nature or to mind in general, the former is relative to the particular circumstances and disposition of a particular man at a particular time."²² Linking affects to the function of the disclosure of evaluative facts, he could then say that "what is here said of emotions in general, is true in particular of the sense of beauty and of the moral sense."²³ But James goes further when he links the question of whether in the experience of affect I am experiencing my body or some appreciative fact about the world to the question of how I conceive of *myself*.

I may first reflectively regard the disgustingness of a rotting carcass as not a *real* property because, unlike "objective" properties, it has no apparent effects on its surroundings.²⁴ On reflection, however, I realise that it *does* have an effect on the world: it has an effect on *my own body*, churning my stomach, for example, this being the somatic change which I first experience as disclosive of the thing's disgusting qualities. But while conceiving of the situation in this causal way attests to there being *something* "objective" in the presentation, it does not by itself capture the *evaluative* qualities of these perceived things. To capture the former I have to consider myself as part of the objective world, but to capture the latter I have to think, as it were, from the *position of my embodied self*. To think of my body as *simply* causally affected requires a type of detachment from my body and its reactions that *destroys* their world-disclosing significance. James makes this distinction explicit when he says that:

Our body itself is the palmary instance of the ambiguous. Sometimes I treat my body purely as a part of outer nature. Sometimes, again, I think of it as "mine," I sort it with the "me," and then certain local changes and determinations in it pass for spiritual happenings. Its breathing is my "thinking," its sensorial adjustments are my 'attention,' its kinesthetic alterations are my "efforts," its visceral perturbations are my "emotions."²⁵

James *qua* radical empiricist sometimes talks about the two "associative systems" or "axes" along which I can locate my mental contents. On one axis are contents normally thought of as contents of my subjective world. Here, the relation between the sight of my old house and, say, my remembered parents with whom I associate it, is as real as the spatial relation between the house and its neighbouring houses on the other "objective" axis. But we must not think of the former as relations among "ideas" conceived as "Cartesian stuff" and the latter as among some objective existences "outside" the mind. And these two associative systems intersect at particular points at which I have to think of a *single* content belonging to both systems. Clearly, my body and its sensations can be thought of as figuring in quite complex ways on *both* axes. On one axis, my emotions are happenings in a *thing*, my body, something belonging to the objective array. On the other, they enter into the known characteristics of other objects. As for "me," "I" am not a thing, but am rather constituted in some way in this complex lattice-work of relations. What we need to hold onto here is the non-given nature of personal identity as it appears in this picture. The nature of the "I" is in some sense a function of how "I" relate these complex constituents of consciousness to each other—an activity over which "I" seem to have some "say."

The anti-Cartesian picture that James presents so vividly in works such as "Does Consciousness Exist?" could be understood as a type of "eliminativist" stance with regard to the mind.²⁶ It can, however, be understood in another way—as analogous, for example, to the treatment of "the mind" found in the German idealist J. G. Fichte, who was critical of the assumption that there was any such *thing* as the mind, any fact or "*Tatsache*," and who attempted to describe "it" with a neologism: the mind is a "*Tathandlung*," a type of performance or act ("*Handlung*"), a performance or act, however, for which there was no underlying performer or actor.²⁷ But the ineliminable characteristic of such a "performance" was its self-consciousness—the ineliminable sense that it is

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*someone's—mine.*²⁸ For Fichte, these acts are understood as “positings” of a content, contents whose intelligibility is a result, in Kantian fashion, of having a subjectively supplied conceptual *form*. But this does not mean the mind *produces* its contents in some quasi-magical way. Positing is always an act which responds to a “check” [*Anstoss*] that comes from the world beyond and that is experienced as “feeling” [*Gefühl*].²⁹

SENSATION AS THE BACKGROUND TO THE MIND'S INTERPRETATIONS OR “POSITS”

Fichte's anti-entitative approach to the self makes the question of what is or is not *part of me* one that does not have a fixed answer. Are my bodily based feelings *part of me*? Well, for James it seems that the answer to this question is in some sense *up to me*. I can distance myself from my feelings or sensations such that they appear simply *as* sensations and, hence, as states of *my body*. They become part of *me*, however—are counted among my “spiritual happenings”—when they no longer play the role of some focal *object* of my consciousness, but when they subserve a *perception of or judgment about* the state of my environment. The situation seems analogous to that of the blind person adapting to the TVSS technology. We are unlikely to think of the content of that person's sensations as “part of” that person *qua* knower when she is aware of them *as* sensations, but when they somehow become correlated with the content of perceptual judgments, we might indeed think of them as part of her *qua* the *minded* being she is, a being with the sort of mental capacities allowing her to know the world and act thoughtfully in it. Although James would object to the Kantian terminology, we might say that in both cases sensations can be thought of as part of the person *qua* transcendental condition of her judging. But they only do so when she is no longer conscious of them *as* sensations, and with this we seem to run up against the limits to Reid's analysis. Reid was still enough of an empiricist to think that the idea of a *non-conscious* mental state was incoherent. Sensations and perceptions are treated as two different types of information I am liable to confuse, information about myself, on the one hand, and information about the external world, on the other. But in contrast, Leibniz, almost a century earlier, had a very definite conception of *non-conscious* “perceptions” and of their role in cognition, and so I want to move onto a more Leibnizian way of thinking about these phenomena. The place to start is with Leibniz's peculiarly anti-Cartesian take on Descartes' teaching about clear and distinct ideas.

As Graciella de Pierris has pointed out,³⁰ Descartes's conception of what it was to make ideas clear and distinct is ambiguous: sometimes he thinks of this in terms of some sort of phenomenal resolution of a given perceptual presentation into its parts, sometimes he seems to conceive of it as a quasi-logical analysis of the conceptual structure of some presentation or thought. The first idea goes into the empiricist tradition of the resolution of perceptual givens into their components conceived of as sensations—the picture that Reid complains about. The second idea, she thinks, goes into Leibniz's own distinctive take on Descartes' approach where he develops the idea of the logical or conceptual rather than phenomenological side of the distinction. But this goes along with another important distinction between Leibniz's approach and that of Descartes and the empiricists who came after him.

Leibniz was critical of the sort of nominalist assumptions underpinning empiricism, and his starting point was the opposite of the empiricists' atomistic starting point. Rather than think of a monadic mind as having atomic representations that get built up into representational molecules, Leibniz approached the representationalist features of the mind in a holistic fashion. We should think of each mind or monad as representing, not this or that thing, but *the entire universe*, and as representing the universe from that monad's *limited own point of view*. As he says in the *Monadology*, each simple substance is a “perpetual living mirror of the universe.”³¹ Since,

a monad is representative in its nature, nothing could restrict it to representing only a part of things. But it is of course true that this representation of the details of the whole universe is confused, and can only be distinct with respect to a small part of things, namely those which are either closest or largest in relation to each monad. Otherwise every monad would be divine.³²

This may seem a perverse starting point for thinking about emotions, but I think it is internally connected to valuable bits of Leibniz's approach. For a start, it is helpfully connected up with his idea that there are uncon-

scious “perceptions,” an idea that becomes necessary once we move away from obvious senses such as sight and touch, to those background orientation-maintaining ones, like proprioception or Jamesian affect considered as somatic feedback.³³ Another way of thinking of Leibniz’s idea that the monad represents the universe from a “point of view” is that one’s perceptions of objects are always situated against the backdrop of a contextualising global representation of the world, a representation against which one is oriented towards the particular objects one perceives. But as such this globalising representation is unconscious.

Leibniz’s idea of unconscious cognitions is reflected in his tripartite distinction between obscure, clear but confused, and clear and distinct cognitions. Leibniz gives different accounts of what it is for a cognition to be obscure, but most generally obscure cognitions as those which I have but of which I’m not conscious. Thus in a deep, dreamless sleep, for example, I still have cognitions of which I’m not aware. To tightly link cognition to consciousness or apperception, Leibniz says, is “where the Cartesians went badly wrong.”³⁴ But it is not only the context of totally unconscious states like deep dreamless sleep that Leibniz locates obscure cognitions. Thus he gives the example of the sort of inability to distinguish anything perceptually that can be induced by the action of continuously spinning in the same direction³⁵—presumably like that experienced by Bach-y-Rita’s associate upon waking up with his middle ear infection with a sense of the world as unstable and whirring around him. In such cases, says Leibniz, one has “a great multiplicity of small perceptions” but they do not cohere into clear perceptions.³⁶ Here my representation of the universe is still fundamentally obscure: it contains *no* regions of clarity. Finally, obscure representations also occur *within* conscious states as components of clear perceptual contents. To use one of Leibniz’s examples, if I am seeing a mixture of blue and yellow powders, I may see the powder *as green*. Although individual cognitions of blue and yellow will be involved, they are playing a role *below* the level of consciousness. The cognition of green that I am having is *clear*, because I can differentiate green things from red, blue, yellow things, and so forth, but to have *clear* conceptions of the individual yellow or blue grains I have to get into a new perceptual relation to the powder—I have to view it through a microscope, for example.

What then of distinctness? Of the *clear* notions of which I am conscious, some will be *confused*, some will be distinct. Cognition is confused “when I cannot enumerate one by one marks (nota) sufficient for differentiating a thing from others, even though the thing does indeed have such marks and requisites into which its notion can be resolved.” The normally perceived qualities of objects will be known in this way. “And so we recognise colours, smells, tastes, and other particular objects of the senses clearly enough, and we distinguish them from one another, but only through the simple testimony of the senses, not by way of explicit marks.”³⁷ But as we have seen, my cognition of a colour as *green* might be made up of obscure cognitions of blue and yellow. What is necessary for a notion to be clear *and* distinct is that I become aware of its differentiated components, thus my cognition of the green powder becomes *distinct* when the initially obscure component perceptions of blue and yellow grains *themselves* become clear.

Going back to the example of the blind person equipped with TVSS, we might consider the transformation in their experience when they go from experiencing a *sensation* located at the tongue, to the experience of some object located in the world, as a type of movement between obscurity and clarity. When aware of the sensation on the tongue, we want to say that the cognition is *clear*, but when they move to the perception of the distal object, the sensation is “forgotten,” and becomes obscure, forming part of the background conditions allowing them a new clear cognition, that of the “seen” object. The sensation is still *there*, but as unconscious and hence *obscure*, to be thought of as subserving the new perceptual state in ways analogous to that in which the “obscure” cognitions of the blue and yellow grains subserve the clear cognition of the *green* powder.³⁸

Moving to James’s example of the emotionally based perception of “appreciative facts,” reflection upon the states of my body involved in the emotion gives me *clear* conceptions of what is going on *there*, but when I take them not as informing me of states of myself but of states of the object perceived, these somatic states now become known only “obscurely” and subserve a different type of cognition, a clear cognition of some external fact. But James’s own *scientific* account of this somatic infrastructure of such judgments will in turn restore this somatic basis, in a way like that in which the analysis of the green powder as made of blue and yellow grains. But on his picture, none of these orientations by themselves tells us what the emotions “really” are. In each case there seem to be epistemic gains and losses involved in these transitions. The movement of science on the

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Leibnizian model is to make clear and confused conceptions clear and distinct, that is, to achieve clarity with respect to the *components* of some already clear cognition, but this, it would seem, comes at a cost. That is, it would seem to involve a loss of knowing something *confusedly*—knowing it in terms of its phenomenality or in terms of “what it’s like” to know in that mode. That “confused ideas” have their own kind of “perfection” was what came to be insisted upon by the modern founder of aesthetics, Alexander Baumgarten, who adopted Leibniz’s distinctions but challenged the Leibnizian idea that the movement from clear and confused to clear and distinct ideas was a type of *perfecting* of cognition.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT OF ANAESTHETIC DISORIENTATION

The idea that scientific cognition, by stripping the world of those evaluative properties disclosed in “appreciative perception,” had a necessarily *nihilistic* consequence is an idea that gained traction at the end of the eighteenth century, especially in the wake of Jacobi’s attack on philosophy. This concern was to power the intellectual current of “romanticism” into the nineteenth. The general problem might indeed be seen as exemplified in the problems besetting Phineas Gage, that of a type of anaesthetic disorientation. In Leibnizian terms, Gage had lost the capacity to grasp his world in terms of those cognitions that are “clear but confused”—cognitions in which the world is disclosed in terms of local proprieties of action and that are rich in affect. But as we have seen, Gage seemed *not* to have lost the capacity for the type of cognition we think of as dealing in *clear and distinct* cognitions—to think and reason about the world in an “objective” way. In the eighteenth century, the philosopher-clergyman and moral sense theorist Frances Hutchinson had believed that the creator had constructed humans with appropriate bodily-based moral responses that revealed themselves in terms of emotions of approval and disapproval, and the creator had wisely done so because of the impracticality of leaving the decisions of our moral life in the hands of abstract moral reasoning.³⁹ By his bit of self-inflicted neurosurgery, Gage had involuntarily given himself a “moral-sense-ectomy” and deprived himself of the benefits of that wise piece of divine design. As a result he was, as we say, “at sea” in the world of social interaction.

When we think of James’s idea that any movement between “clear and confused” and “clear and distinct” ideas involves some type of alteration in the concept of the self this may help us understand what is at stake in the general “enlightenment” project of attempting to understand ourselves. The type of scientific analysis that characterised his own early theory of emotions succeeds only at the expense of changing the character of the *explanandum*. In understanding our emotions *simply* as somatic states we lose a sense of ourselves as cognitive beings for whom those states tell us something about the world. While our capacity *for* such explanations is part of what makes us human, this very type of reflective thought can in turn seem to strip us, *qua* objects of that thought, of those very characteristics. This dialect was, I believe, grasped with particular acuity by those thinkers who, in the wake of Baumgarten and Jacobi, attempted to both hang on to Leibniz’s powerful way of thinking of our self-transcending intellectual capacities and yet were alert to the danger to our very humanity inherent in the use of those capacities. Thus the early “Jena” romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) exploited a notion found in Fichte concerning the subject’s capacity to be suspended between or to oscillate between—the verb they employ is “*schweben*”—two different points of view, the one more affective, the other more reflective and conceptual. Rather than freedom being identified with the intellectualist drive to move from the subjective to the objective, Schlegel portrays romantic poetry as that which can “hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer [*zwischen dem Dargestellten und dem Darstellenden*], free of all real and ideal self interest, on the wings of poetic reflection.”⁴⁰ Similarly for Hardenberg,

To be free is the tendency of the I — the capacity to be free is the productive imagination. — *Harmony* is the condition of its activity — *of [its] oscillating*, between opposites. ... All being, being in general, is nothing but being free — *oscillating* between extremes that necessarily are to be united and necessarily are to be separated.⁴¹

The thought here seems to exploit the indeterminate nature of affects and their relation to subjectivity that is expressed in James’s “central thesis”:

Subjectivity and objectivity are affairs not of what an experience is aboriginally made of, but of its classification. Classifications depend on our temporary purposes. ... In the case of affectional experiences we have no permanent and steadfast purpose that obliges us to be consistent, so we find it easy to let them float ambiguously, sometimes classing them with our feelings, sometimes with more physical realities.⁴²

Prior to James, North America had bred its own local version of the Jena Romantics—the so-called “Transcendentalists.” James’s complex thinking about emotions and their role in our mental lives might, on my reading, be thought of as a contribution to this literature, and through it, to the anti-Cartesian tradition of European idealism.

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FEELING, THOUGHT AND ORIENTATION

NOTES

1. See, for example, from the perspective of neuroscience, Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1994), and from the perspective of philosophy, Jesse J. Prinz, *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
2. William James, "What is an Emotion?" in *Essays in Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 173–4.
3. Sometimes this is taken so far as to treat them as "propositional attitudes" akin to beliefs.
4. See my *The Logic of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), chapter 1 for a brief history.
5. William James, "The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience", in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 137–154.
6. James, "The Place", 143.
7. Charles Sanders Peirce, "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties for Man", *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 2 (1868), 103–14, republished in Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Vol. 1*, eds. Nathan Houser and Christian J. W. Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 22–23.
8. Peirce, "Questions", 23.
9. Peirce, "Questions", 22–3.
10. Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), ed. Derek R. Brookes, introduction by Knud Haakonssen (University Park: Penn State Press, 2002), Essay II, Ch XVI.
11. Reid, *Essays*, Essay II, Ch XVI.
12. Reid, *Essays*, Essay II, Ch XVI.
13. Reid, *Essays*, Essay II, Chap. XVII. See also, Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, a critical edition, ed. Derek R. Brookes (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press), 1997, section XX.
14. See, in particular, P. Bach-y-Rita, C. C. Collins, F. Saunders, B. White, and L. Scadden, "Vision substitution by tactile image projection", *Nature*, 221 (1969), pp. 963–964; Paul Bach-y-Rita, *Brain Mechanisms in Sensory Substitution*, (London: Academic Press, 1972); and Juan C. González, Paul Bach-y-Rita and Steven J. Haase, "Perceptual Recalibration in Sensory Substitution and Perceptual Modification", *Cognitive Technologies and the Pragmatics of Cognition*, ed. Itiel E. Dror (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2007). Nicholas Humphrey gives a Reidian interpretation of Bach-y-Rita's work in Nicholas Humphrey, *A History of the Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 58–61. For a critique of Humphrey's Reidian analysis, see Alva Noë, *Perception in Action* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2004), 116–7.
15. Caroline Seydel, "Suck it and see. Electrode on tongue helps blind navigate", *New Scientist* 169.2282, (March 17, 2001), 24.
16. See, for example, Michael Abrams, "Can You See With Your Tongue?", *Discover Magazine*, June 2003.
17. Galileo, "The Assayer", reprinted in *Philosophy of Science*, ed. A. Danto and S. Morgenbesser (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1960), 28.
18. James, "The Place", 143.
19. PBS Wired Science, "Mixed Feelings", originally aired 19/12/2007. Streaming video < http://www.pbs.org/kcet/wired-science/story/97-mixed_feelings.html>
20. Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1994).
21. James, "The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience", 143, emphasis added.
22. Peirce, "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties for Man", 23.
23. Peirce, "Questions", 23.
24. James, "The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience", 153.
25. James, "The Place", 153.
26. William James, "Does Consciousness Exist?", *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, 1 (1904), 477-491, reprinted in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 1–18.
27. See in particular, J. G. Fichte, "Review of Aenesidemus", in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism* trans. George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 141.
28. C.f., James, commenting on a debate over the feeling of agency between James Ward and F. H. Bradley. "Taken in the broadest sense, any apprehension of something *doing*, is an experience of activity. Were our world describable only by the words 'nothing happening', 'nothing changing', 'nothing doing' ... [w]e should feel our own subjective life at least, even in noticing and proclaiming an otherwise inactive world. ... This ... seems to justify, or at any rate to explain, Mr. Ward's expression that we *are* only as we are active, for we *are* only as experients." William James, "The experience of activity", in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 161–2.
29. The Anstoss doctrine is to be found in Fichte's "Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge" in J. G. Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 189.
30. Graciella De Pierris, "A fundamental ambiguity in the cartesian theory of ideas: Descartes and Leibniz on intellectual apprehension", *Manuscrito: Revista Internacional de Filosofia*, 25, 2 (2002): 105–46.
31. G. W. Leibniz, "Monadology", in *Philosophical Texts*, trans and ed. R. S. Woolhouse and Richard Francks (Oxford: Oxford

University Press, 1998), § 56.

32. Leibniz, "Monadology", § 60.

33. The idea of *unconscious* affects, in fact, became important in debates in the 1980s between cognitivists and their opponents. Thus, the psychologist Robert Zajonc questioned the then dominant "cognitivist" approach which stressed the essential role of an interpretative "appraisal" of the cognitive stimuli in the production of some response. While *appraisal* theorists presupposed that such "appraisals" were by necessity *consciously* accessible to the subject, critics like Zajonc argued that "subliminally" perceived or "unconscious" stimuli could trigger emotional reactions quite independently of, and even in opposition to, the conscious appraisals subjects gave. See, for example, Robert Zajonc, "On the Primacy of Affect", *American Psychologist* 39 (1984), 117-23. I argue that Freud had an important place for unconscious affects of this kind in "Freud's Theory of Consciousness", in Michael Levine, ed., *The Analytic Freud: Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2000), 119-31.

34. Leibniz, "Monadology", § 14.

35. Leibniz, "Monadology", § 21.

36. Leibniz, "Monadology", § 21.

37. Leibniz, "Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas (1684)" in G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. R. Ariew and D. Garber, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 24. "Thus we cannot explain what red is to a blind man, nor can we make such things clear to others except by leading them into the presence of the thing and making them see, smell or taste the same thing we do, or, at very least, by reminding them of some past perception that is similar."

38. Significantly, Bach-y-Rita had reported that with the TVSS technology, subjects blind from birth or with long-term blindness did not experience the affective dimension of perceptual objects usually associated with their "qualia." Paul Bach-y-Rita, "Sensory Substitution and Qualia", in (eds), *Vision and Mind: Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Perception*, ed. Alva Noë and Evan Thompson (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2002), 496.

39. "The weakness of our reason, and the avocations arising from the infirmities and necessities of our nature, are so great that very few men could ever have formed those long deductions of reason which show some actions to be in the whole advantageous to the agent and their contraries pernicious. The Author of nature has much better furnished us for a virtuous conduct than some moralists seem to imagine, by almost as quick and powerful instructions as we have for the preservations of our bodies. He has given us strong affections to be the springs of each virtuous action, and made virtue a lovely form, that we might easily distinguish it from its contrary, and be made happy by the pursuit of it." Francis Hutcheson, "Preface to the Two Inquiries," in *Philosophical Writings* ed. R. S. Downie (London: J. M. Dent, 1994), 4-5.

40. Friedrich Schlegel, "Athenäum Fragments" number 116, translated Kathleen Wheeler (ed.) *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 46.

41. Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, ed. Jane Kneller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), #555. For a discussion of the notion of "schweben" in the thought of Novalis, see Martha B. Helfer, *The Retreat of Representation: The Concept of Darstellung in German Critical Discourse* (Ithaca: State University of New York Press, 1996), ch 3.

42. James, "The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience", 141-2.