

WILLIAM JAMES AND CHARLES SANDERS PEIRCE ON EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTION:

A RADICAL EXPLORATION OF THE UNIVERSES OF EXPERIENCE

Paniel Reyes Cárdenas
Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla
and University of Sheffield
panielosberto.reyes@upaep.mx



This paper aims to show the fundamental accord in Charles Sanders Peirce's and William James's views on perception and experience. Both classical pragmatists discover the richness of experience and from the renewed value they see in experience they construct a theory of perception. There are important nuances and differences between the two, but my claim is that their agreement is deeper than previously thought. Such agreement, in a pragmatic fashion, can be understood in how both of their accounts of experience converge in a richer theory of perception as a result of the pursuit that the pragmatic maxim makes possible.



It has been acknowledged almost unanimously that one key feature of pragmatism is the overcoming of false dichotomies. This goes hand in hand with the directedness of intellectual concepts towards consequences in action and conduct, as well as a future-oriented conception of belief and knowledge. Both Peirce and James in their own versions of pragmatism are quite effective at questioning different dichotomies. This is an important reason why pragmatism criticises the “spectator theory of knowledge,” i.e., a theory of knowledge that assumes a static nature of knowledge. For the classical pragmatists, knowledge cannot be defined in terms of fixed pieces of information. Rather, knowledge is part of an interactive dynamism with experience that is oriented to future interaction with experience. Pragmatists such as Peirce and James hold that beliefs are not discrete information but habits of action. The spectator theory of knowledge (one focused in the past and in fixed individual beliefs) and its corresponding theory of perception presupposes a chasm between the subject who knows and the world that is known. Our pragmatists attacked the presuppositions that led up to such dichotomy.

Thus, in this article, I will put forward both Peirce’s and James’s conception of experience as a natural derivation of their pragmatisms and will propose that this dynamic conception of experience helped them derive an altogether novel conception and theory of perception. Peirce’s pragmatism and James’s radical empiricism allow a natural questioning of experience, reality, and perception. One of the theses to uphold here is that Peirce’s pragmatism and James’s radical empiricism converge in their openness to the universes of experience, that openness is radical and evolves into a deep theory of perception. Peirce himself recognised that his own pragmatism leads up to a view of experience very similar to James’s radical empiricism. In this paper I will substantiate why Peirce thought so. However, Peirce’s attitude to James’s pragmatism is somehow ambivalent. Due to this unclear appraisal of James by Peirce, differences have been emphasized enough. In fact, few people have shown their important

convergence. Christopher Hookway is one of these scholars who has shown the deep elements of convergence between the two pragmatists, Hookway tells us:

On at least two occasions, Peirce acknowledged that his pragmatism was closely tied to James's "radical empiricism." In 1903, he called himself a "pragmatist or radical empiricist" (CP, 7.617); and two years later he attributed James's endorsement of pragmatism to a recognition that "his radical empiricism substantially answered to the writer's definition of pragmatism, albeit with a certain difference in the point of view" (CP, 5.414).¹

Peirce's positive assessment of James's radical empiricism as properly pragmatistic is one of the main reasons why I believe they share a common openness to experience that the pragmatic maxim renders possible. Of course, there is also that puzzling affirmation of James in which he insists that his radical empiricism is not tied necessarily to his pragmatism:

[T]here is no logical connexion between pragmatism, as I understand it, and a doctrine which I have recently set forth as 'radical empiricism.' The latter stands on its own feet. One may entirely reject it and still be a pragmatist.²

Nonetheless, the different perspective that Peirce and James have about pragmatism does not alter the fundamental agreement of their conceptions of experience and perception, as will be shown below. James provided a statement of his own doctrine for Peirce's entry on pragmatism in *Baldwin's Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*. There, James's quotation defined pragmatism as a philosophy which claims that "the whole meaning of a concept expresses itself either in the shape of conduct to be recommended or of experience to be expected."³ Peirce noted that "between this definition and mine there certainly appears to be no slight theoretical divergence, which, for the most part, becomes evanescent in practice."⁴ Furthermore, in yet another passage critical of James's claims about the content of his pragmatism, Peirce again favourably

concludes that “practically, his view and mine must, I think, coincide, except where he allows considerations not at all pragmatic to have weight.”⁵ It is the content of that coincidence and convergence which we will explore in what follows.

PEIRCE’S ACCOUNT OF PERCEPTION AND EXPERIENCE

Charles Sanders Peirce evolved many of his views on experience and perception over the years. We have fascinating material in his early anti-Cartesian papers in his *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* series and in his *Illustrations of the Logic of Science* series of papers. However, in these lines I will mostly focus on his late works. I will focus on late works because these mature thoughts have a reflective clarity of being related to pragmatism. Peirce’s *Harvard Lectures* of 1903 attempted to clarify what kind of pragmatism he was aiming to achieve. In the *Harvard Lectures*, Peirce introduces a new theory of perception grounded in the categories and the results from phenomenology, aesthetics, and ethics (what he called, in his architectonic system, the ‘normative sciences’) and the metaphysical doctrines he considered the consequences of pragmatism.

Thus, for Peirce, there is a realm of reality associated with each of the categories. His phenomenology (the application of his system of categories) helps us to see that by prolonging inquiry in the context of a discipline of knowledge we will eventually find a realm where categories are manifested. With regards to the classification of patterns of intelligible experience, the category that stands out is thirdness. Theories of perception require this methodology; they need to be grounded in the richness of experience. The reality of thirdness, thus, is necessary to explain a mode of influence of external facts that cannot be explained by mechanical action alone but are required to account for the continuity, complexity, and richness of experience. Peirce argued that pragmatism is a logical or semeiotic thesis concerning the meaning of a particular kind of symbol: the proposition. Propositions are vehicles to express the habits of experience in a self-controlled and intelligent way. Therefore, Peirce’s approach to perception reveals a “mode of

being” and uses his pragmatic method and semeiotic to ground perception in the system of categories.

PEIRCE’S METAPHYSICAL BACKGROUND OF PERCEPTION

Peirce derived a body of beliefs and doctrines from the use of the pragmatic maxim. His pragmatism used the maxim in such a way that a theory of categories and a set of metaphysical doctrines evolves out of it. In order to understand his theory of perception, let us introduce, as briefly as possible, this set of conceptions.

Peirce offered his system of categories as a way of making sense of the “three universes of experience.” The system of categories encompasses everything that can be manifested in experience, conceivable as well as actual. The categories are three: firstness, secondness, and thirdness.

Firstness is the category of possibility and quality; something that is undefined and possible is a first. Let us consider for a moment an example we could elaborate on: if I go out and I find myself surrounded by fog, the feeling of indetermination by the presence of the fog is firstness. Secondness is the category of reaction and facts; in our example I will feel the need to stop before the fog, and I react to it. A fact that is concrete is a second, too; let us think of a given individual event: inasmuch as I can identify it as a single event, then it is a second. Finally, thirdness is the category of habits, of patterns of experience: if I successfully find myself a way of navigating through the fog, because I understand it will eventually fade in a particular direction, that habit of action will capture the thirdness or pattern of a natural event such as fog.

Other than the distinction of universes of experience, which accounts for the richness of experience, Peirce also developed, by applying the consequences of using his pragmatic maxim as a logical principle, an a posteriori metaphysics that includes different doctrines. The three doctrines are:

1. Tychism: there is real chance

2. Synechism: real continuity (with respect to experience and perception is fallibilism objectified) is manifested in reality, and is prior to the discreteness of objects of experience.
3. Agapism: real growth of habit-forming behaviour is present in nature and reality.

Peirce recognised propositions as signs. Signs refer to their objects in two ways: indexically and iconically. On the one hand, to refer indexically is to address the subjects of the proposition. Reference in an iconic way, on the other hand, points out the predicates of the proposition. The proposition, as a symbol, bridges reality and language. From the standpoint of Peirce's realism, the *Harvard Lectures* have a very important point of argumentation in explaining how the proposition connects propositional thought and perception. The study of perception is the study of the relationship that allows the proposition to signify experience.

Peirce's realism of categories allowed Peirce to develop a thorough description of the richness of perception from the richness of experience. Peirce (not surprisingly!) proposed a triadic division of conceptions that are at work in perception: percepts, percipuum, and perceptual judgment.

The percept is the limiting case of inference contained in the perceptual judgment. The percept, as a limiting mind-independent aspect of inference, holds the end of reality. For Peirce, the doctrine of scholastic realism (universals or generals are real, and they are prior to their instantiations) is assumed in the claim that generality is present in perception, not something added up by the mind in the process of cognition. This constitutes the "mode of being" of perception. If we were to use the pragmatic maxim, we would discover what is involved in perception: a limiting case can be a habit, something general or continuous, or something vague, or both. A percept is from the point of view of the perceiver, the limiting case of what is perceived. In a wide sense, the percept tells us that experience is continuous and independent of us; the real world is actually the world of "insistent generalised percepts."⁶ In a more specific sense: experience is experimental and never detached

from interpretative activity (habits of anticipation), so percepts are conditioned by our organisms. A perceptual judgment (which is a second, the statement of a fact) is defined: “a higher grade of the operation of perception.”⁷ The perceptual judgment involves our ability to react to a percept. In a wide sense the perceptual judgment is a fallible *prima facie* account of what is perceived (we do not feign doubts on these). In a narrow sense the perceptual judgment is an abductive hypothetical element that can be true or false. The theory of perception finally integrates the *percipuum* (which is the third, the mediating relation): a content of perceptual judgment that connects with the percept as a habit. The *percipuum* in a strict sense is temporarily rooted, always understood in a context of continuity and in a wide sense is a dispositionally organised sense of expectation (habit), and a belief. Let us offer an example: I am having a stroll outdoors and suddenly I do not feel the sunlight anymore (that is the percept), I look up to the sky and notice that the clouds are closing so I make a judgment with a proposition such as “the sky is closing,” and then I connect the judgment with previous experience and notice that it is consistent with the higher possibility of a storm, so I dispositionally prepare to act and find refuge.

The distinction between percepts (which are not propositional) from “perceptual judgments” (which are propositional) addresses real elements of perception mediated by reference. For instance, Peirce’s example of a “composite photograph” reflects how generality is given in percepts as well as perceptual judgments. Peirce liked the example of a composite photograph: a composite photograph is a complex representation. However, this representation reflects reality better than a simple photograph; a simple photograph can only account for one angle of an event or fact. Peirce rejected the view that perception is composed of individual discrete impressions. Perception, like experience, is governed by continuity. Perceptual judgments are the first premises of all reasoning. The processes by which perceptual judgments arise from percepts became crucial for Peirce’s realist case. If perceptual judgments are the starting points for all intellectual development, then we must be able to perceive generality; percepts are the limiting

cases of inference where there are perceptual judgments. A logical consequence of this trend of thought is that percepts are themselves general; we cannot single them out as individuals without carrying out inferential steps.

In the *Lowell Lectures*, Peirce rejects a version of Kantian idealism that exhibits a problem in its account of perception. Peirce's diagnosis, unsurprisingly, finds a nominalistic prejudice at the origin of the problem. The problem lay in the denial of immediate perception. This is due to the nominalist belief that: should inquiry and cognition find an incognizable aspect of things, then inquiry must stop. According to Peirce, this viewpoint "cuts off all the possibility of ever cognising a relation,"⁸ for what makes reasoning sound is having a right method that can take into account the tendency to guess correctly and assure progress towards the truth.

In this way, the realism involved in the new theory of perception is a premise of pragmatism. Furthermore, in spite of its limits, perception has the added guarantee of eliciting progress in further inquiries.

Secondary qualities, those aspects of our perceptions that the empiricist tradition dismissed as characteristics not of things, but of our ideas of things, are real though degenerate. As long as experience reveals law-governed patterns and changes in the colours or other secondary qualities that things display, then experience of percepts can reveal patterns of qualities and properties that should be included in the idealisations forming our description of reality.

By 'reality' is to be understood that part or ingredient of the being of anything which does not depend upon that thing's actually being represented.⁹

Peirce's interest in realism converges with his constant desire to offer a proof for pragmatism. The assumption is that scholastic realism is one of the premises of a proof of pragmatism: should we want to carry out successful abductions (and inferences in general), we need to adopt scholastic realism first. What mediates between all

our inferential processes is a real mediation, only provided by scholastic realism. The proof of pragmatism did not have a definitive form; it seems that one of the things Peirce continued to believe was the fundamental assumption that realism must be a premise for correct reasoning. Anything related to the science of inquiry and pragmatism as a method of right thinking, as expressed in the *Harvard Lectures*.

Peirce argued that the mode of inference that he called abduction is also latent in perception. Perception is experience mediated by inference, and most clearly by hypothetical inference. For Peirce, pragmatism, considered as the logic of abduction, followed from these propositions involved in the case for perception:

- (1) that nothing is in the intellect that is not first in the senses;
- (2) that perceptual judgments contain general elements;
- (3) and that abductive inferences shade into perceptual judgments without any sharp line of demarcation.

Peirce called the above statements of his pragmatism “cotary” propositions. The cotary propositions are presented as obvious truths which can be used as premises in arguing for pragmatism. Peirce, as noted above, makes a distinction between “perceptual judgment” and “percept;” it seems that all we know about the percept is drawn from the perceptual judgment.

Thus, according to Peirce, the fundamental dichotomy that we need to address for a theory of perception is the specific way we encounter experience: “everything which is present to us is a phenomenal manifestation of ourselves,” but this “does not prevent its being a phenomenon of something without us, just as a rainbow is at once a manifestation both of the sun and of the rain.”¹⁰ Peirce states of the pragmatist:

That he will have no difficulty with Thirdness is clear enough because he will hold that conformity of action to general intentions is as much given in perception as is the element of

action itself, which cannot really be mentally torn away from such general purposiveness.¹¹

After understanding Peirce's theory of perception and experience, we can understand why Peirce says that the definition of pragmatism formulated by James

differs from mine only in that he does not restrict the 'meaning,' [...] as I do, to a habit, but allows percepts, that is, complex feelings endowed with compulsiveness, to be such [...] if he is willing to do this, I do not quite see how he need give any room at all to habit.¹²

Indeed, for Peirce, habits are embedded in reality itself, and then one needs to be a radical empiricist in order to correctly apply the pragmatic maxim. Let us move on to introduce James's account of experience and perception.

JAMES'S ACCOUNT OF EXPERIENCE AND *THE PRINCIPLES OF PSYCHOLOGY*

As Owen Flanagan explains with regard to the Jamesian view on consciousness, there is a conflicting development in James's psychology that swayed as he developed his thought.¹³ What applies to consciousness, however, is not exactly the case for his view of experience that seems to be very consistent throughout his writings. In these lines we will see that early work on psychology and perception and later views are bound by the conviction about the richness of experience. In the *Principles of Psychology*, James defended introspective psychology as a way of searching to validate an experimental shift to psychology. He tells us:

The English writers on psychology, and the school of Herbart in Germany, have in the main contented themselves with such results as the immediate introspection of single individuals gave, and shown what a body of doctrine they make. The works of Locke, Hume, Reid, Hartley, Stewart, Brown, the Mills, will

always be classics in this line; and in Professor Bain's Treatise we have probably the last word of what this method taken mainly by itself can do – the last monument of the youth of our science, still untechnical and generally intelligible, like the Chemistry of Lavoisier, or Anatomy before the microscope was used.... But psychology is passing into a less simple phase. Within a few years what we may call a microscopic psychology has arisen in Germany, carried on by experimental methods, asking of course every moment for introspective data, but eliminating their uncertainty by operating on a large scale and taking statistical means.¹⁴

The tradition of empiricist psychology that goes from Locke to Herbart treats experience as a succession of units (“ideas”) that are discrete, independent, and substantive. James thinks that the requirement to make psychology a true science involves a recognition of the biased view of experience previous psychology holds. The imposition of a discrete nature to experience is, indeed, an atomisation of experience that James (and Peirce) does not take for granted. The view of James is quite opposed to the discrete conception of a scattered experience of atoms of individual experience. In his chapter “The Stream of Thought,” James avows the fluidity and continuity of experience and consequently of perception. James criticises the Humean view of sensations as units of image and sensation. Or as James describes it,

Hume's fantastical assertion that we can form no idea of a thing with either quality or quantity without representing its exact degrees of each.... Strange that so patent an inward fact as the existence of ‘blended’ images could be overlooked! Strange that the assertion could virtually be made that we cannot imagine a printed page without at the same time imagining every letter on it – and made too by a school that prided itself particularly on its powers of observation! However, of such blunders is the history of psychology composed.¹⁵

What is true for the psychology of perception is also true for the theory of knowledge that dominated modern philosophy and its view of consciousness. On this, Gerald Myers tells us:

That same tradition went astray, James held, in locating the basic unit of consciousness in something discrete like an image or sensation. The picture that resulted, of consciousness being compounded into “complex ideas,” was especially mischievous. It not only fostered a wrongheaded kind of introspection, neglecting relations, feelings of continuity and changes in consciousness, and so forth, but it also promoted the notion that the basic units of consciousness resemble physical objects by being discrete, independent, substantive, and capable of being rearranged in successive complexes.¹⁶

James’s proposal in the *Principles of Psychology* is to ground psychology in experimental methods, but this proved quite limited insofar as there are some philosophical misconceptions that can bias our interpretation of experimental conditions. This is why it was necessary for James to propose a more radical theory of experience: his radical empiricism.

RADICAL EMPIRICISM

James explains to us that rationalism emphasises universals and makes wholes prior to parts in logic and in being, while empiricism stresses the part and treats the whole as a collection and the universal as an abstraction. For James, these views have generated an unjustified dichotomy: we must either trust reason alone or trust the sense data. Classical empiricism, however, as we have seen above, imposes some preconceptions to experience that in fact impede it from being radical enough. James tells us:

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced.¹⁷

The problem of classical or ordinary empiricism is that it is not sufficiently open to experience, it imposes a philosophical misconception as to what counts as “an experience.” James was becoming aware of the limited view of experience that empiricism holds: reduced to a pale report of what we can count as individual sensations and facts. Empiricism inverted the perceptual report of the knower for what is known. The sorry state of empiricism needed a radical reform, Blum tells us:

This deceptively simple and reasonable sounding methodological tenet would ultimately lead James to articulate a bold and innovative notion of experience, a notion inspired by various facets of James’s research and reflections.¹⁸

James starts with the parts and considers the whole of experience as of the second order. This is a philosophy of plural facts, referring them neither to substances nor to absolute mind. But it differs from Hume and others; it is more radical. Our consciousness of experience does not include only what we call events and qualities of those events. James tells us:

The only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience...the fact that the relations between things, conjunctive as well disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct particular experience, neither more or nor less so, than the things themselves.¹⁹

This entails that

the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience. The elements of experience are not connected by us. Experience itself possesses a concatenated or continuous structure.²⁰

Experience is, then, always continuous: “fringed forever by a more that continuously develops,”²¹ and which can therefore never be contained or hemmed in by our predictions and expectations.²²

Radical empiricism only allows elements directly experienced and does not exclude any such elements, even the ones that were not included in a conscious report of what we experienced. The relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations and so be counted as real. Ordinary empiricism tends to do away with connections of things, insisting mostly on disjunctions. There are different negative consequences of the biased view of the classical empiricists. James tells us that George Berkeley was led to a nominalism, the idea that the connections are not real but imposed by our perceiving mind. James, here, turns out to be a realist about the real connections as independent of us. With David Hume, as it was stated above, things are loose and separate with no manner of connection. As for the Mills, James tells us that for James Mill similars have nothing really in common and for John Stuart Mill physical things and selves are made of discontinuous possibilities. Rationalism is in no better place than empiricism, rationalism adds trans-experiential agents of unification, imposes a priori conditions to experience. But if empiricism had been radical and had taken conjunctions into account this would not be needed. Radical empiricism gives full justice to conjunctive relations and unlike transcendentalism, it does not treat them as true in a supernal (heavenly, ethereal) way. For the radical empiricist, the unity of things and their variety do not belong to different orders.

JAMES'S "EXPERIENCED RELATIONS"

In order to be a radical empiricist James acknowledges the existence of other senses, which, although vague and imprecise in their content, nonetheless represent significant components of our experiential repertoire. James acknowledges the vagueness that exists even with regards to our senses, sometimes two or more senses interact in ways that allow us to engage with experience more organically:

It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call 'something there,' more deep and more general than any of the

special and particular ‘senses’ by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed.²³

There is an important number of different ways in which we experience relations and, unfortunately, we cannot exhaust them here. But suffice to say that the coordination of our senses bespeaks the interrelatedness of our coordination of experience and perception. About this, Blum tells us:

Putting the matter in his typically poetic but lucid prose, James asserts that “knowledge . . . lives inside the tissue of experience” (P: 321). Experience, for James, is a broad category of awareness or awarenesses, within which knowledge obtains. The visual metaphor is useful for understanding the notion of experience that James endorses, and its contrast with “knowledge.” Experience is no clean concatenation of rational states of discursive knowledge that follow one after the other like an assembly line of distinct tableaux—it is, rather, a dynamic and often roiling stream of concepts, images, intuitions, feelings, and intimations, much of which may only tantalize our awareness at the fringe, but which colors and tints the whole of our experience in pervasive and profound ways. “Static concepts,” James insists, cannot be substituted for the complex and multicolored warp and woof of our “moving life.”²⁴

The dynamism of experience requires, then, a philosophical disposition to cope with an ever-changing world. Radical empiricism is glad to acknowledge dynamism, but this also bears the realisation of our own limitation: we ought to humbly recognise that our perceptual reconstruction is always fallible. In the experimental context of exploring radical empiricism with the development of some boys, Blum tells us:

But this quality of the experience can hardly be appreciated by the out-side observer, who—despite having access to all its outward features—cannot grasp the sense of the experience as it is created and undergone by the boys themselves. This is the import of James’s radical empiricism—a philosophy that, while seeking to

provide as concrete and accurate a perspective on experience as possible, also insists on accommodating all those inherent dimensions of experience that, by their very nature, resist clear and distinct articulation.²⁵

Radical empiricism, thus, enriches our conceptual ability to account for everything that presents itself to experience and configures perception. James is aware that sometimes there are aspects of experience that allow us to make sense of it but are not always manifested as sense data as such. That is the case of the most important aspects that actually help us to make sense of experience, such as conjunctive relations, the cognitive relation, substitution, and especially the co-terminousness of different minds. Our limited access to experience assumes that for us, no matter how well we construct a report of our perception, experience is always the work of subjects with a particularly perspectival situation. On the discovery of the inevitable subjective aspects of experiences, Myers comments:

Experiences are to be explored introspectively, partly for the experimental discoveries enjoyed, but also for revealing the pragmatic value of notions like, for instance, oneself. Failing to appreciate this, one will never survive a reading of *The Principles of Psychology*. It is a monumental attempt to connect, introspectively, key philosophical and psychological concepts with relevant experiences so that the experiential differences (cash-value) made by the distinctions contained in the concepts are disclosed.²⁶

What could be better suited to understand our perceptual access to experience in its relation to our goals than James's pragmatic method? Let us recall what James understood the method achieves:

I wish now to speak of the pragmatic method. The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable. Is the world one or many? – fated or free? – material or spiritual? . . . disputes over such

notions are unending. The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to anyone if this notion rather than that were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle.

This view is already present in the early work. James's pragmatism and the notion of experience is germinally present in the *Principles*:

That theory will be most generally believed which, besides offering us objects able to account satisfactorily for our sensible experience, also offers those which are most interesting, those which appeal most urgently to our aesthetic, emotional, and active needs.²⁷

The above, then, means that James's radical empiricism is pragmatic, it reconciles the different positions and limitations of our access of experience and then helps us construct a coherent and open account of perception.

JAMES'S ACCOUNT OF PERCEPTION

For James the distinction between sensation and perception is less sharp than commonly conceived. Sensing is awareness of the perceiving subject in an aspect of her perceiving, sensing is the lively aspect of our experiencing. James tells us:

a set of that's, or its, of subjects of discourse, with their relations not brought out. The first time we see light, in Condillac's phrase we are it rather than see it. But all our later optical knowledge is about what this experience gives.²⁸

The account of sensation is not independent of our habits of perception. Only in idealised cases is sensation separable from perception. James's famous example focuses on what the baby comes across in its initial experience:

[T]he infant encounters an object in which (though it be given in a pure sensation) all the 'categories of the understanding' are contained. It has externality, objectivity, unity, substantiality, causality, in the full sense in which any later object or system of objects has these things. Here the young knower meets and greets his world; and the miracle of knowledge bursts forth, as Voltaire says, as much in the infant's lowest sensation as in the highest achievement of a Newton's brain.²⁹

Perception, then, includes sensation as conscious, mediated by our habits: this is the point at which James realises the need of the metaphysics of experience:

thoughts and things are absolutely homogenous as to their material, and...their opposition is only one of relation and of function. There is no thought-stuff different from thing-stuff...but the same identical piece of 'pure experience' (which [is] the name I give to the *materia prima* of everything).³⁰

One example of how the ubiquitous pure experience is a necessary presupposition of perception is given in what James takes to be the experience of the "present consciousness." On this, Myers explains James's words thus:

The elusive nature of the experience is precisely this flow or continuity of constant transition, and it is easy to overlook it in favour of the events (the "content" of the specious present) themselves merging one into another. But, though the "content" of the specious present is ever changing and thus distracting to consciousness, "the specious present, the intuited duration, stands permanent, like the rainbow on the waterfall, with its own quality unchanged by the events that stream through it."³¹

The stream of our perception is, then, our ability to engage with a world of experience, our awareness of the sensations that are given to us as well as the ability to interpret them. Myers says about this:

Perceiving is more complex than sensing; it involves awareness of the relations surrounding the objects of sensing and is thus "knowledge-about" and not merely "acquaintance". I am sensing if noticing a pink patch more or less in isolation, but am perceiving if noticing the relations belonging to the patch. On this view, sensing is not subjective, and in saying of a baby that it only senses and does not perceive, we should mean simply that the baby does not apprehend the multiple relations surrounding what it does succeed in noticing.³²

Summing up the very many interesting aspects of James's account of perception that we cannot explain further here, it becomes quite clear that the radical openness to experience that James requires is a pragmatist attitude. James's radical empiricism is a body of beliefs about experience and perception that follow from the adoption of his pragmatic method and his pragmatic attitude.

PRAGMATISM: EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTION

Both Peirce and James emphasise the continuity of experience and the natural and seamless connection of perception and experience. A natural consequence of this is the non-discreteness of perception. The overcoming of dichotomies, a characteristic of pragmatism, is also at play: both pragmatists show us that there is an unjustified dichotomy assumed in experience. Empiricist and rationalist views of experience tend to presuppose that sensation is objective and perception is subjective, and that there is a chasm between the two. Peirce and James explain to us that these views lack an adequate theory of mediation. Peirce's realism of perception and James's radical empiricism provide the required mediation. On this issue, Hookway tells us:

When Peirce tried to meet these challenges by insisting that mediation, law, and external things are directly present in experience, he agreed with James in insisting that experience is richer than earlier empiricists had supposed. And when he argued that law and mediation were present in experience through our

experience of real continuity, the connections with radical empiricism are very strong indeed.³³

In this article I argued that the convergence that Peirce and James have on their views of perception is derivative of their radical openness to experience. For James experience is mediated by experienced relations, and they have to become the mediation for a fair view of perception. For Peirce, the theory of categories allows us to develop a theory of perception that is radical too: it allows us to make sense of all the universes of experience. For Peirce, the ability to construct such a theory of perception is yet another liberating consequence of the use of his pragmatic maxim, as he argued in his *Harvard Lectures*. Though James expressed the view that his pragmatism is independent of his radical empiricism, we can actually see that James's view of the maxim also had the same liberating effect: understanding that the maxim helps us to focus on desirable action is a first step towards a radical approach to experience. When James tells us that his pragmatism is not necessarily tied to his radical empiricism he is thinking about the philosophical attitude of the pragmatist, but the methodology that the maxim offers is indeed linked to his radical openness to experience.

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NOTES

- ¹ Hookway, "Logical Principles and Philosophical Attitudes," 122.
- ² James, *Pragmatism*, 6.
- ³ Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 5, 466.
- ⁴ Peirce, 466.
- ⁵ Peirce, 494.
- ⁶ Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 8, 148.
- ⁷ Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 7, 634.
- ⁸ Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 5, 56.
- ⁹ Peirce, *Annotated Catalogue*, 'Reflexions upon Reasoning,' MS 686:1.
- ¹⁰ Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 5, 283.
- ¹¹ Peirce, 212.
- ¹² Peirce, 494.
- ¹³ Flanagan, "Consciousness as a pragmatist views it," 46.
- ¹⁴ James, *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1, 191–2.
- ¹⁵ James, *Essays in Psychology*, 145.
- ¹⁶ Myers, "William James on Time Perception," 26.
- ¹⁷ James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 22.
- ¹⁸ Blum, "William James on How to Study Experience," 431.
- ¹⁹ James, *The Meaning of Truth*, 6–7.
- ²⁰ James, 6–7.
- ²¹ James, *Pragmatism*, 150.
- ²² James, 327.
- ²³ James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 62.
- ²⁴ Blum, "William James on How to Study Experience," 432.
- ²⁵ Blum, 435.
- ²⁶ Myers, "Pragmatism and introspective psychology," 21.
- ²⁷ James, *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 2, 940.
- ²⁸ James, 3–4.
- ²⁹ James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, 20.
- ³⁰ James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 72.
- ³¹ Myers, "William James on Time Perception," 358.
- ³² Myers, 353.
- ³³ Hookway, 133.