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From Psychology to Metaphysics

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# Novelty and Causality in William James's Pluralistic Universe

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## Introduction

- 1 In an interesting work in which he reconstructs the history of the concept of the emergent in psychology and sociology, R. Keith Sawyer (2002) identifies for psychology four schools of investigation: the so-called British emergentism, Gestalt psychology, American Pragmatism (until the 30s) and the recent philosophy of mind and cognitive sciences (1970s-90s). Sawyer's intention is twofold. On the one hand, he aims to reconstruct the history of the conception of emergentism, starting with the works of Comte, Durkheim, James and Lewes as well as German organicists, to show how some of their insights have profoundly influenced the formation of contemporary cognitive sciences and philosophy of mind. Secondly, given the original proximity of psychology and sociology, this reconstruction is propaedeutic to showing that the reflections on emergence, particularly in authors such as Durkheim and Parsons, have played a crucial antireductionist role by disengaging the science of social phenomena from psychology.
- 2 The philosophical psychology of William James is, in this perspective, seminal for the development of the reflection on the concept of the emergent in both psychology and sociology. Leaving aside, as a possible next step, the investigation of the philosophical implications of the reception of Jamesian psychology by the social sciences, which developed later also through the recovery that G. H. Mead made of it, in this article I propose to analyze the concept of the emergent that James elaborates in the territory between psychology and metaphysics. This is another way to understand the problematic relationship between *novelty and continuity*, that is to say, the issue of the emergence of genuinely new events in a paradigm of natural continuity, which has been analyzed in different fields by Peirce, Dewey, and Mead. As for James's psychology

and philosophy, I intend to devote attention to the concept of *causality* that James will profoundly challenge already in his *Principles of Psychology* (PP) and then both in some articles of the early twentieth century and, in a more systematic way, in his more distinctly metaphysical texts: *Some Problems of Philosophy* (SPP) and *A Pluralistic Universe* (PU). It is my conviction that a reflection on the concept of causality allows us to understand better the role of James's epistemological and metaphysical thinking in today's theories of emergence.<sup>1</sup>

- 3 James is often cited by theorists of emergence.<sup>2</sup> Jaegwon Kim (2005) argues that Huxley and James already posed the “explanatory/predictive questions” on mental causation and consciousness made by classic emergentists. However, following Stephan's (1999) classic distinction of three main varieties of emergentism, the Jamesian perspective is difficult to classify.<sup>3</sup> For a great number of emergentists, *physical monism* is taken for granted whatever version of natural emergentism one may adopt. Like other pragmatists, James is instead clearly committed to an anti-reductionist version of naturalism, which makes his naturalism suitable of different interpretations.<sup>4</sup> In his *Principles* he explicitly adopts the “anti-supernaturalism animus” of scientists, but is not satisfied with a superficial opposition between natural and supernatural causes. Talking about the use of the word “experience,” for instance, a term that expressed the naturalistic perspective, James opposed a purely “ideological” use of this term in favor of a more sophisticated understanding of different sorts of *natural agency* (see chapter XXVIII), and therefore of causality. Pihlström (2002) showed how most emergentist theories, even those by Stephan and Kim, end up in sharing at least what Kim calls “a *minimal physicalism*” (Kim 2005: 13), an expression he uses to define his own theory of mind-body supervenience.
- 4 James is also mentioned in the renewed debate on panpsychism. Brüntrup and Jaskolla recently wrote about contemporary attempts to re-evaluate “quiddities” in order to metaphysically ground the emergence of higher levels of consciousness in both contemporary physics (Stapp 2007) and neuroscience (Koch & Tononi 2015). For Seager (2009), all founders of scientific psychology, namely Fechner, Wundt, Lotze, and James, were somehow panpsychists. He particularly underlines the tension between emergentist and panpsychist commitments in James, and confesses that James's position remains unclear. James's sixth chapter of *Principles* is the “locus classicus” of the so-called “combination problem”<sup>5</sup> for panpsychists since as recently put by Chalmers, any version of panpsychism that holds microexperiences combine to produce macroexperiences is in trouble (Chalmers 2016). However, James would have also defended one of the three main arguments used in favor of panpsychism later recovered by Thomas Nagel: the *genetic argument*, according to which “if human consciousness is to evolve from a physical basis, then basic forms of mental being need to be present at the fundament of this evolutionary process” (Brüntrup & Jaskolla 2016: 3).
- 5 My investigation on James's understanding of mental causation goes in the direction traced by Pihlström: that of reconsidering pragmatists as emergentists of a non-reductionist kind within a renovated framework. James's theoretical use of evolutionary theories,<sup>6</sup> his interdisciplinary training as well as the not-yet-institutionalized context of the sciences in which he worked, contributed to making him well aware of the ontological and epistemological issues linked to the assumption of a full emergentist or anti-reductionist perspective. This awareness is revealed by his

oscillation between more or less *vitalistic* positions on “emergentism” which he seems to adopt through his life. On the one hand, his debt to the philosophy and logic of John Stuart Mill is well known. James dedicated his book *Pragmatism* (1907) to the memory of Mill, who is unanimously considered the inspiration behind the concept of emergence, which is then taken up and developed by his colleague G.H. Lewes and later by evolutionist philosophers such as Morgan, Alexander, and Spaulding in a more naturalistic vein (McLaughlin 1992). On the other hand, we have to consider James's fascination for his French colleague Bergson, particularly for the latter's robust and acute critique of deterministic materialism, his processual metaphysics and also his eventual arrival at a spiritualist position. According to his statements, James considered himself not to be a materialist or a spiritualist but a “natural realist” (De Sanctis 1906: 155). The aim of this article is precisely to attempt to clarify what this *naturalism* consists of in the light of emergentist conceptions by focusing upon his understanding of causation between psychology and metaphysics.

## Novelty and Causality

- 6 In Appendix C of *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909),<sup>7</sup> James takes up the Aristotelian principle that whatever is affirmed or denied of an entire class or kind may be affirmed or denied of any part of it in the formulation that he calls “skipped intermediaries and transferred relations” (PU: 151). This logical principle applies to a series of abstract terms – or, rather, as James already wrote in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), following Augustus De Morgan's *Syllabus*, to homogeneous series, though not to all of them: there are relations, such as causality, that are *intrinsically* transferable, and others such as negation, that are not (cf. PP II: 1254). He seems now to make a further distinction as to the objects to which these logical rules apply. There are abstract objects, which are entirely covered by Aristotle's law, and concrete objects, which instead escape the law for certain relations and under certain respects. As regards the principle of causality, for instance, the Aristotelian rule would provide for the linear transfer of a cause to the effects of another cause, which is the effect of the first cause only in series of abstract objects. In the concrete dimension in which objects do not possess their characteristics in purity, it is instead complicated to argue in favor of this linearity, as in James's example of commodore Perry and the Duma. One may state that commodore Matthew Perry, commander of the naval expedition that forced Japan to establish diplomatic relations with the United States in 1853-4, was the cause of the establishment of the Duma in Russia.<sup>8</sup> However, in a series of real terms such as these, hardly any “real or practical relationship to each other” (PU: 152) holds up because of the vast space-time distance that has occurred between their appearances. Within a temporal perspective, which is that of the practical world, many changes occur between the two events that break in a certain sense the possible direct connection between Perry's unconfirmed intentions and the aforementioned political outcomes. There is a double level of change that has to be considered: not only do the terms we are considering change, with their contexts and relations, but the meaning that we interpreters attribute to those terms changes as well. It is a matter of *experience* that new paths of investigation continuously open up and show new possible connections that stimulate our research interests towards new directions. Therefore, in the perspective of the vast natural connections we live in, and given the unavoidable relevance of our practical interests in all sorts of investigations, it is not possible to speak of a linear transfer of causal relations without

carefully qualifying the conditions. Moreover, it would be, in a sense, a useless self-limitation to persist in following the terms of an abstract linear causality within the broader and thicker landscape of concrete reality. As a result of new experiences, in the course of our research, it is also possible to change the intention with which we began to investigate, so that the effort to stick to the terms that are still covered by the logic law is not worthy of the changing investigation – it would be like climbing a high mountain and then focusing on a single inessential detail, losing the beauty of the landscape view.

- 7 This appendix is a critical element in our investigation of the conception of emerging novelty in James's vision. In addition to the obvious connection between novelty and causality – where causality can be seen as a sub-problem of novelty – it shows the main and most mature traits of his criticism of an eviscerated view of the principle of causality and, more generally, of logic. With the backing of Bergson's idea of *devenir réel* and trying to combine it with Peirce's conception of *agapasticism* as developed in the early 1890s,<sup>9</sup> James demonstrates both his constant and strict criticism of the philosophical tendency to indiscriminately apply formal logical rules to the world of real operations, and his sharing of Bergson's and Peirce's vision of novelty as something genuinely real, not just appearance.
- 8 The problem of novelty arises even more distinctly in the ontological continuist framework inherited from Darwinism and adopted by the empirical sciences. The emergence of something genuinely new from the continuous is problematic because it seems to imply creation *ex nihilo* and hence to break the rational order of the continuity of the real. It is at this point that Peircean "agapasticism," as a synthesis of "tychism" and "synechism," or of chance and continuity, together with the idea of creative evolution elaborated autonomously by Bergson, come to the rescue: "To an observer standing outside of its generating causes, novelty can appear only as so much 'chance,' while to one who stands inside it is the expression of 'free creative activity'." (PU: 153). This statement is very significant for understanding James's interpretation of the respective conceptions of his colleagues. It is clear that for James, the human agent is the model of causal agency on the basis of which it is possible to identify the natural causal agency. In other words, James refers to the human agent as the *analogatum princeps* of an analogical argument between human nature and "natural" nature itself. However, there is another crucial step to take that is related to the free and creative dimension of the activity mentioned by James. As we shall see, for James, the matrix of our conception of a real cause is to be found in our physiological experience of the activity. Since psychologically speaking, free activity is the activity governed by our conscious will, one can well envisage the connection between his ontological conception of the novelty of reality and that of the novelty introduced by free voluntary actions.<sup>10</sup>

Novelty, as empirically found, doesn't arrive by jumps and jolts, it leaks in insensibly, for adjacents in experience are always interfused, the smallest real datum being both a coming and a going, and even numerical distinctness being realized effectively only after a concrete interval has passed. The intervals also deflect us from the original paths of direction, and all the all identities at last give out, for the fatally continuous infiltration of otherness warps things out of every original rut. (PU: 153)

- 9 The conception of novelty proposed by Peirce and Bergson is interpreted by James as a novelty that emerges in the same continuous texture of experience. His reference to

the “smallest real datum” of experience immediately reminds not only of his notion of finite *drops* (SPP: 80) by which reality grows but also of his well-known psychological conception of thought as a continuous *stream* presented in the ninth chapter of *Principles*. We should notice that in *Principles*, James's pluralism is quite prominent in this respect. He believes that the distinction between personal selves, or better between thoughts that belong to different selves, constitutes an irremediable breach in nature governed by a law of “absolute insulation, irreducible pluralism” (PP I: 221). Against associationist psychology, James's correct application of empirical methodology leads him to consider not sensations,<sup>11</sup> but personal thoughts to be the real elementary psychic facts in psychology. Following Shadworth H. Hodgson, James harshly criticizes the so-called “theory of ideas” according to which there are *mental atoms* or molecules that remain unchanged amid the flow of thinking.<sup>12</sup> Concretely taken, thoughts exist in personal minds, and all the classes of consciousness are complex states having a temporal breadth that we immediately experience as a synthetic datum.<sup>13</sup>

## Conceptualist vs. Perceptualist View of Causality

- 10 In *Some Problems of Philosophy*, James continues to investigate and tries to systematize the philosophical implications of the pluralistic metaphysics that he proposed in more detail in the eight Hibbert Lectures on “The Present Situation in Philosophy” held in 1908 at Manchester College in Oxford, later published under the title of *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909). The philosophical need to adopt a pluralistic metaphysical vision is a central preoccupation of his final reflections for several reasons. First, metaphysical pluralism is a useful framework for applying the methodological pluralism in which James trusted, and which he had made use of already in his *Principles*. However, further, pluralism is the consequence of an active vision of human mental activity and therefore, as we shall see, it is intimately connected to the assessment of genuine novelty.
- 11 The structure of the book edited by Burkhardt (1979)<sup>14</sup> presents the treatment of the problem of novelty in chapter six, while the so-called subproblems of novelty – which are, in order, the problem of continuum and infinity (chapter seven), and the problem of causality from a conceptual perspective (chapter seven) and from a perceptual point of view (chapter eight) – are developed through the three following chapters.
- 12 It is not an easy task to unravel the full depth of James's mature philosophical vision as he was trying to synthesize it in this book. His argumentation is very complex and above all stratified: some assumptions are not comprehensible outside the general framework of reference that James has built over the years in a cross-disciplinary fashion, and that he tries to recapitulate here in brief and dense sentences. However, I believe that the best way to read these texts is through the lens of his radical empiricism. Since his *Principles*, James's increasingly vigorous attempt has been to offer a contemporary and credible version of empiricism. Such an attempt can be outlined as an amendment of the main psychological and logical faults into which the empiricist authors have plunged. In this case, for James, Hume is the prototype of half-hearted empiricists (SPP: 100), for he limited himself to accepting the pluralistic soul of empiricism while rejecting both the idea of novelty and that of activity (free-will). These two hypotheses, by contrast, are essential to the radically empirical

philosophical vision promoted by James since the 1890s.<sup>15</sup> In brief, it is in the context of his attempt to establish a genuinely empirical psychology that James finds himself confronted with the philosophical problem of the *nature* of relations. Only by succeeding in describing it in terms of particular external or accidental relations, will it be possible to philosophically rehabilitate an enriched conception of experience and a pluralistic conception of reality in which novelty and free-will are not so easily discredited by an only seemingly rigorous logical and scientific reasoning.

- 13 In this broader framework, his insistence on the necessity of a different understanding of the principle of causality finds its proper place. Causality is, in fact, a principle of logical relation, the principle radically questioned by Hume, and incorrectly interpreted in a *materialistic* sense by most intellectuals. On a severe rethinking of cause-effect relations in part depends the possibility of real novelty, and finally, since free voluntary activities are considered as acts that introduce genuine novelty into reality,<sup>16</sup> it is easy to see why the problem of novelty occupies a significant portion of James's last philosophical efforts.
- 14 The principle of causality has generally been interpreted as saying that, in specific ways, the effects are already contained in the causes. If this is true, then there is no genuine novelty and, as a consequence, no pluralistic vision can be true. James intends to conduct a historical-epistemological analysis of the meaning assumed by the concept of causality. He aims to show that both a conceptual translation of the facts of causality and the perceptual translation made by empiricism are just different methods of looking at the reality that is eventually based on different preferences.
- 15 As to what concerns the rationalization of causality, however, it began with Aristotle. From the scholastic interpretation of his "efficient cause," as "that which *produces something else by real activity proceeding from itself*" (SPP: 97),<sup>17</sup> three logical implications were derived: namely, that (1) there must be a cause for an effect to occur; (2) that a proportion between cause and effect is necessary; and (3) that what is the effect should be *aliquo modo* in its cause. The rationalizing trend dominating the history of western philosophy established the epistemic priority of concepts over perceptions, considering perceptions to be fallible and therefore incapable of founding knowledge. This view also profoundly affected the perceptual view of causation and led to an almost complete "overthrow of perception by conception" (SPP: 98). The perceptual process of production,<sup>18</sup> too difficult to explain in conceptual terms, was, in fact, translated into a relation of logical consequence that contradicts everyday experience:  

The cause becomes a reason, the effect a consequence; and since logical consequence follows only from the same to the same, the older vaguer causation-philosophy develops into the sharp rationalistic dogma that cause and effect are two names for one persistent being and that if the successive moments of the universe be causally connected, no genuine novelty leaks in. (SPP: 98)
- 16 Even scholasticism maintained in its definition the expression "*aliquo modo*" to guarantee the possibility of a slight difference between cause and effect, and in this way to avoid completely disregarding the common-sense acknowledge of causality. The intellectualist reading of causation, instead, which is for James a perversion of the correct use of our intellectual faculty, produced the logical exclusion of the possibility of real novelty as a mere unfaithful impression of our senses.
- 17 In Chapter four, stating the distinction between percepts and concepts, he dwelled on showing how our inability to translate into a conceptual language the phenomena of



the change and growth of reality to be to the detriment of ordinary perceptual experience. Since the conceptual vocabulary can only *nominate* these living processes, but it cannot embrace them unless by way of distorting them, it is not possible to fully translate perceptual processes into conceptual expressions. From the fact that we cannot correctly say, for instance, the process of change, conceptual language gets into the habit of denying its existence. It is a sort of "colonization process" whereby the conceptual impotence to say something is converted into the power to negate that which does not fall within its linguistic domain.

- 18 This perspective is connected with a form of ontological dualism that from Descartes onwards considers mental and physical matters as distinct substances. No causal relationship between mind and body could be rational in this perspective. In the monistic attempt to solve this problem, first occasionalism and then Leibniz's theory of pre-established harmony achieved rationalistic domination over the immediate data, in particular by conceptually translating and finally depriving of their perceptual qualities the notions of activity and continuity. As mentioned before, Hume, the "half-hearted" empiricist, has gone so far as to deny any impression or idea of necessary connection. He maintained that our pseudo-idea of connection only derives from the *habit* of repetitively experiencing the same succession of events, and forming from this usual expectation produced by our imaginative faculty the impression of the idea of necessary connection. On the one side, Hume was a radical pluralist, for he considered events to be disconnected; on the other, however, he was a rationalist, for he believed in the uniformity of natural events, and thus refused to admit that really new events can emerge.
- 19 For James, causality is one of the forms in which the perceptive continuity of our experience is manifested. On a perceptual level, concrete causal relationships are how we describe the transition from one mental state to another: "the manner in which some fields of consciousness introduce other fields" (SPP: 100) – which is what James calls the *co-conscious transition* (ERE: 25). At this point, James's remarks get more complicated. Firstly, he claims that we have a keen capacity to discriminate among different sections of continuity of experience. In fact, just as we use the idea of causality for the co-conscious relationship, we use prepositions and conjunctions instead to indicate other aspects of experiential continuity. Secondly, recovering an argument he used already in his *Principles*, he stigmatizes Hume's adoption of the intellectualist rule according to which separate names should correspond to separate facts so that if there is not an identifiable fact that matches its name, that name is meaningless. Now, James's conviction is that Hume has made a mistake in his starting-point and consequently, in all his reasoning. In fact, experience is in its original constitution continuous, concrete facts and meanings are "fringed" – just like our mental states are (cf. PP I: 249). Therefore, it is not possible to find pure, ideal atomic elements in immediate experience corresponding to the words with which we nominate it. Our capacity for abstraction works on this original continuity, focusing attention on some aspects and extrapolating them for the sake of practical operations, but it cannot break its continuous structure.

Causal activity, in short, may play its part in growing fact, even tho no substantive "impression" of it should stand out by itself. Hume's assumption that any factor of reality must be separable, leads to his preposterous view that no relations can be real. (SPP: 101)



- 20 Hume's empiricist preference for facts does not prevent him from dismissing an entire class of facts just because these facts do not have the same separate form that words have. As to causality, the Scottish philosopher was not able to find an impression corresponding to the relation of causality because he was looking for some discrete element of sensation, some standing impression of it whereas James claims that facts originally come in the form of "perceptual *durcheinander*" (SPP: 100).<sup>19</sup>
- 21 Then Kant agreed with Hume on the multiplicity of perceptual immediacy but tried to recover it by introducing a transcendental ego and its synthetic categories, so that causality is a category. In his analysis of Kant's chapter "The Second Analogy of Experience" in his *First Critique* (2nd ed.), James believes that like Hume, Kant has, in fact, destroyed the idea of dynamic causation and replaced it with a mere temporal succession of events. He found a similarity between the Humean notion of "habit" and the Kantian notion of "rule." In brief, Hume took the time-succession to be "loose" and its uniformity a subjective impression, while for Kant uniformity was objective in so far as our sensibility is ruled by reason. Accordingly, Kant's category of causality gives nothing but an external description of sequences of events, and James observes that, like many laws of nature, Kant's causality only states co-existence and succession. It inductively generalizes sequences of facts but does not *unite* them in some more intimate way.
- 22 More generally, he found that the positivistic approach of science is to reply to questions for an *explanation* of phenomena – the *why* questions – with more and more generalized descriptions of them. According to the inductive methodology, the less general laws are continually referred to the more general ones, and that is all there is to do.<sup>20</sup> In search of a more intimate explanation of causal sequences than that provided by positivist empiricism, James hints at the monistic tendency of some contemporary scientists, such as Lewes, Riehl, Heymans, and Bowne, to deduce facts from previous facts. This way of proceeding would be an interpretation of the aforementioned scholastic principle of *proportionality* between causes and effects so that the effects would be nothing more than successive appearances of the cause that have no scientific value. It is clear that by reducing causality to a *relation of identity*, these writers consider natural phenomena of variety, activity, and novelty as mere illusions or by-products (SPP: 103n). However, this is often a somewhat artificial scientific explanation, not a valid metaphysical assumption, which is useful for scientists to predict facts elegantly.
- 23 This conceptualist vision of causality represents for James the main polemical object, in order for him to promote a radically genuine, *additive* idea of novelty that supports his pluralistic metaphysics. Their mistake is the same as that made by Hume, that is, without finding in reality a discrete phenomenon that corresponded to our concept of causal "power," they indeed deleted "the activity-feature of the sequence." They intellectually operate a replacement for the perception of the causal connection with a "static relation of identity between two concepts" (SPP: 104). To stress how the view of logicians contradicts both our instinct and our common-sense notion of causality, James quotes a passage from Wilhelm Jerusalem's *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (1906), in which the author discusses the possibility for mathematicians to make use of a generalized conception of *function* to describe quantitative and qualitative relations. The world of scientific logic results in being abstract, an "unearthly ballet of bloodless categories" (SPP: 104), in which change happens, but it remains somewhat *unexplained* for neither reasons nor activities play any dynamic causal role.

- 24 As far as the alternative perceptual view of causality is concerned, that advocated by James, it must be pointed out that the need to adopt a critical approach to perceptual data is not at stake. There are, in fact, many perceptual errors that we ordinarily make, for example, by attributing a direct causal power to certain things without considering all the more complex chains of causal successions.<sup>21</sup> However, while accepting the critical premises of the conceptualist view, James refutes their skeptical conclusion as incongruous. As with many other parts of sensible experience, it would be a fallacious argument to deduce from perceptual errors of *localization* that perceptions are entirely false and that change, activity, movement, and novelty do not exist at all. For the sake of clarity, I summarise how James's argument develops as follows:
- (1) the meaning of causation is derived from an original perceptual experience;
  - (2) the perceptual experience from which we derive the meaning of causation is that of personal activity-situations;
  - (3) he offers a psychological description of the causal process as a process that we experience in our consciousness of activity;
  - (3a) vague hypothesis that desire and will are unconditional causes;
  - (3b) psychophysiological criticism of our consciousness of activity;
  - (3c) logical conclusion: the nature of causation may be given in experience, but philosophy must ascertain the mind-body relation.
  - (4) Further difficulties: pan-psychic philosophy and brain physiology.
- 25 Among the many interesting aspects of James's argument, we will underline that the process that James currently uses as a reference in analogy with the natural world is always that of the stream of thought, that is, the felt continuity between successive fields of consciousness. In this view, it is more comprehensible why co-conscious transitions constitute a core problem of all James's reflection. Moreover, within such an embodied perspective, how we as human beings are physiologically able to *feel* things inevitably shapes how we *understand* them. The perceptive experience of the process of conscious transition that happens in us when we activate ourselves in view of a result constitutes the *authentic* matrix of our conception of activity. In the flow of thought, desires and will are real causal agents, and they also respect the scholastic definition of containing "somehow" their effect. In fact, the desire for a specific result contains – in the sense of being in harmonious continuity with – the field of consciousness that corresponds to the realization of the activity. However, desire contains effects only in a *general* way as a kind of direction in which external agents also intervene and contribute to forming the final result, which is not entirely predictable. Following Mill, our will can be an unconditioned cause, in the sense of being an indispensable cause, but not a *close* one.<sup>22</sup> The close or direct continuity that our perception suggests to us in our activity-experiences is not easily proved at the physiological level of analysis, for our will is not causally continuous with its apparent effects. In between are many causal successions – neural, muscular, and instrumental intermediaries – which remain entirely unknown to our perception. Even if James can work out a possible logical objection to this psychophysiological criticism,<sup>23</sup> he prefers to stop his investigation here for the moment. After having shown the main conflicting results of the conceptualist and the perceptual treatment of causality, in wanting to explore the perceptual view further, James would have to face at least two significant difficulties. On a microscopic level, such would be the problems related to the physiological discontinuity of will-acts, i.e., the mind-body problem; on a macroscopic scale, instead, James would have to be ready to extend his conception of an inwardly experiential

nature for activity-experiences to physical cases of causality, thus having to face the implications of a *pan-psychic* philosophy.<sup>24</sup>

## The Problem of Causation in Psychology

- 26 The problem of causal connections has already appeared in the *Principles of Psychology*. As we have mentioned, still in *A Pluralistic Universe*, there is a direct reference to the last chapter of his *Principles*. If we examine the pages dedicated to metaphysical axioms, as ideal unverified relations, we find these following comments on the notion of cause:

Take for example the principle that “nothing can happen without a cause.” We have no definite idea of what we mean by cause, or of what causality consists in. However, the principle expresses a demand for *some* deeper sort of inward connection between phenomena than their merely habitual time-sequence seems to us to be. The word “cause” is, in short, an altar to an unknown god; an empty pedestal still marking the place of a hoped-for statue. (PP II: 1264)

- 27 The notion of cause is metaphysical in this case, representing the need for there to be a deeper level of connection in reality than what is empirically verifiable. Some interesting insights into James's conception of causality in psychology can be found in Chapters V, VI, and XI, as well as in the more well-known Chapters IX, X, and XXVI. For the latter, to which we will refer here and there, I recommend other works, while we will try to focus on some aspects of the other chapters that are relevant to our inquiry.
- 28 In Chapter XI, James analyses the phenomenon of attention. It becomes more evident the criticism that James makes of classical empirical psychologists such as Locke, Hume, Hartley, James and John S. Mill, and also Spencer. These authors, unlike German scholars, have largely ignored the phenomenon of selective attention – which James began to explore in the previous chapters on consciousness and the self. The reason for such an omission is to be found in the conception of *experience* advocated by these authors, and against which James has been striving since his early works in the 1870s. The empirical account requires that experience is of something *given* and that all mental faculties, even the highest ones, can be derived from experience. According to James, it is important not to confuse experience with the mere presence of something to our senses. In fact, not everything we feel, but only what awakens our *interest* enters into our experience. Talking about the importance of interest in making the experience and therefore of the selective activity of the mind poses the problem of introducing a dimension of spontaneity into the natural explanation of the development of knowledge. Even though the spontaneous activity of the human mind is an empirical fact that is difficult to deny, authors such as Spencer prefer to avoid dealing with the theoretical difficulties that such an admission entails and rather, as we shall see, to consider: “the creatures as absolutely passive clay, upon which ‘experience’ rains down.” (PP I: 381). With his characteristic irony, James points out that following these authors in considering the sentient organism as a ‘passive mirror’ only shaped by experience – intended as a constant factor – one could imagine that even a race of dogs repeatedly exposed to visual artistic stimuli would make them expert connoisseurs in that field. Yet, James notes that: “Surely an eternity of experience of the statues would leave the dog as inartistic as he was at first, for the lack of an original interest to knit his discriminations on to.” (PP I: 381). In a nutshell, as Franzese (2009) pointed out, we can talk for James of a “natural *a priori*” in so far as “[t]he interest itself, though its

genesis is doubtless perfectly *natural*, *makes* experience more than it is made by it" (PP I: 381).

- 29 Interest is therefore considered to be the *cause* of our attention. We may be interested in sensory or ideal objects, either directly or indirectly, voluntarily or involuntarily.<sup>25</sup> By the way, James has already defined "things" as groups of sensible qualities that interest us practically or aesthetically. Now, dealing with the effects of attention, he tightens a possible connection based on the phenomenon of the habit of attention between psychological attention and philosophical vision: "each of us literally *chooses*, by his way of attending to things, what sort of a universe he shall appear to himself to inhabit." (PP I: 401).
- 30 Two physiological processes seem to coexist in attentive acts, namely the process of *sensorial adjustment* and that of internal *ideational preparation* of the brain-centers concerned with the object attended to. Having already pointed out the importance of voluntary attention in forming the core part of the self (Chapter X), and in view of the subsequent identification of the will with attention (Chapter XXVI), here we come to the psychological and metaphysical question of the internal forces that activate psychological attention. The issue is delicate because it affects the defense of free-will, which as we mentioned James does not find in the skeptical empiricism of Hume – a fact that offers the American psychologist a further reason for criticism. Quoting a well-known passage from Lucretius' *De rerum natura*,<sup>26</sup> two theories can be distinguished, the so-called *effect-theory* and the *cause-theory* of attention, and James takes a clear stand in favor of the latter.<sup>27</sup> A few pages earlier, talking about the process of pre-perception (or ideational preparation) in attention, he left open the possibility of a materialistic or spiritualist reading of the *cause* of the excitement of brain-centers that comes from within the organism, not from the external object of attention. He states that: "[w]hilst the object excites it [a brain-cell] from without, other brain-cells, or perhaps spiritual forces, arouse it from within." (PP I: 417). The answer to this question, whether it is material or spiritual forces that direct our capacity for attention, is not only a psychological option but inevitably a metaphysical one. Either hypothesis leads to different world views that James summarizes as "materialism, fatalism, monism" or "spiritualism, freedom, pluralism" (PP I: 424). The analysis of the phenomenon of attention brings us back to the controversial issue of the causal power of *feeling*, which has already been addressed in the chapter dedicated to the automaton theory (Chapter V), that is to say, whether feeling is a mere by-product of brain activity, or performs some function of control over it.
- 31 For James, it is evident that the plan by which one decides for the *effect* conception or the *causal* conception is rather metaphysical since from a psycho-physiological point of view both options are sustainable. Material laws entirely predetermine the phenomenon of attention if feeling is not recognized as having certain causal powers (effect-theory). Instead, if feeling has its partial autonomy of reaction concerning nervous processes, then it can be considered as a cause at least in a restricted sense. Here we have an interesting passage:

It does not necessarily follow, of course, that this reactive feeling should be "free" in the sense of having its amount and direction undetermined in advance, for it might very well be predetermined in all these particulars. If it were so, our attention would not be *materially* determined, nor yet would it be "free" in the sense of being spontaneous or unpredictable in advance. (PP I: 424)

- 32 His restriction of the meaning of the terms in use is an essential indication of the method when talking in psychology about issues such as freedom, that have a philosophical history. However, above all, he attempts to propose a careful reading of psychological phenomena, which, if on the one hand, it contrasts with reductionism in a strictly *materialistic* sense, does not degenerate into an equally flawed and contrary theory on the other. The effort of attention is a fundamental aspect of the conscious will, and in James's vision, there can be a collaboration between neural and spiritual forces.<sup>28</sup> As is evident, the polemical object is still the arrogance of materialistic scientism, which takes the form of Thomas H. Huxley's automaton-theory.<sup>29</sup> Already in his 1879 article "Are We Automata?,"<sup>30</sup> which was later integrated into his Chapter V of *Principles*, James considered both Huxley's conscious-automaton theory and the opposite theory of common sense to be "conceptions of the possible" (EPs: 40). In particular, he stated that claiming the validity of one or the other based on aesthetic preferences or relying on direct (ostensive) evidence of the effectiveness of mental states would mark the methodological defeat of the scientific approach. In fact, against the common sense view, the materialistic mechanistic view of the mind-brain relationship considers mental states to be mere shadows or by-products of neurosis.
- 33 Here James argues that psychology has to recognize that causality is a metaphysical issue. However, despite the fact that the question has to be philosophically investigated, as far as psychological investigations are concerned, the vision of common sense claims causal power for feelings and ideas, while the vision of the so-called "automatists" à la Thomas Huxley and William Clifford, denies causal power to ideas and recognizes it only to physical matter. In this way, according to James, they commit an illicit philosophical sin: either they accept Hume's lesson that causation is ultimately an unintelligible process, or they reject it entirely; one cannot pretend to adhere to the empirical perspective and then assign in principle a preference to material causality over psychic causality.
- 34 Here is a significant passage in which James says that the causal power of feelings is only to do with the reinforcement or inhibition of existing reflex currents, and that "[t]he feelings can produce nothing absolutely new... and the original organization of these [reflex currents] by physiological forces must always be the ground-work of the psychological scheme" (EPs: 141).
- 35 Echoing his criticism of Herbert Spencer smuggling in metaphysical contents after psychological definitions, James was averse to mechanistic philosophy first and foremost for *ethical* reasons. Since it is not possible to verify the effectiveness of feelings and especially of the feeling of effort – which plays an important moral role in his description of voluntary actions<sup>31</sup> – the supporters of the materialistic vision should not arrogate to themselves the right to define their theory as "scientific" and discredit the others. The argument on which mechanists base their epiphenomenal theory about mental states is a reasoning by analogy, which, as James argues, is: "drawn from rivers, reflex actions and other material phenomena where no consciousness appears to exist at all, and extended to cases where consciousness seems the phenomenon's essential feature." (PP I: 429-30). In other words, it is a metaphysical and not a scientific impertinence to apply equal relationships to fields of knowledge that are not homogeneous, without considering the necessary distinctions. Thus, James proposes to find circumstantial or presumptive evidence that can make the hypothesis of common

sense supportable without pretending to prove it definitively in order to avoid the risk of “non-scientific” conduct.

## Non-Reductionist View of Consciousness's Causational Power

- 36 James's reception of Darwinism is evident in his early publications and becomes a relevant source for the development of his functional psychology. According to many scholars, the Darwinian argument helped James to assess the autonomy of the mind from the brain, therefore the activity of consciousness, as well as his view of the “mind as a selective industry” and the spontaneity of its ideas. His original epistemological endorsement of Darwin's logic of evolution<sup>32</sup> emerges in disagreement with Herbert Spencer's evolutionism (1878, in EP), and even his argument against the automaton thesis (or “epiphenomenalism” as we may call it today) is revealing of this debt to Darwin's view. Now James does not only criticize epiphenomenalism as a materialistic theory but, as recently underlined by Brüntrup and Jaskolla, he also offers “an inference to the best explanation when trying to give a metaphysical account of the emergence of consciousness in evolution” (2016: 6).
- 37 James moves from the observation that consciousness is a general universal trait shared by human beings and higher animals. Within an evolutionistic framework, consciousness is an outcome of evolutionary processes, that is to say, it was selected by nature. However, to be selected, it must be useful, and therefore, it cannot be a mere by-product or inert epiphenomenon. In these first statements, James is excluding the possibility that consciousness is a mere byproduct of evolution. In other words, James's theory of the emergence of consciousness is an anti-reductionist and anti-epiphenomenalist theory.<sup>33</sup> Universality, complexity (and preciseness) of consciousness are essential characteristics that still today provoke biologists to decide which traits are most probably results of the pressure of natural selection.
- 38 Physiological studies offered empirical evidence for the *causal* activity of consciousness. They described “higher” brains as affected by significant instability: higher nerve centers are less specialized in their functions and perform indeterminately and unforeseeably in comparison with those of the basal nucleus. The plasticity of higher brains constitutes their most significant advantage. As a most indeterminate and vague organ, the human brain can perform multiple adaptive activities, and adapt conduct to the minutest alterations in the environment, so much so that it needs a kind of assistance in pursuing its survival. The function of consciousness results fundamentally from trying to avoid the side effects of the extreme responsiveness of our brain to the environmental stimulations.
- The brain is an instrument of possibilities, but of no certainties. But the consciousness, with its own ends present to it, and knowing also well which possibilities lead thereto and which away, will, if endowed with causal efficacy, reinforce the favorable possibilities and repress the unfavorable or indifferent ones.  
(PP I: 141-2)
- 39 The evolutionary theory, which agrees with the theory of common sense as to the efficacy of consciousness, generally considers consciousness as a superadded organ which grows more complex and intense at higher stages of the animal kingdom and is supposed to help animals in their struggle for existence. However, to be useful,



consciousness for James has to be efficacious and influence nervous systems. The way consciousness works is described as “selective industry”: it selects and corroborates particular “interests” while disregarding others according to the goals or purposes it has already chosen. It “exert[s] a constant pressure in the right direction” by reinforcing (or inhibiting) those nerve processes that are respectively functional (or not), in order to reach the goal it has established. As James states, “the mind is at every stage a theatre of simultaneous possibilities. Consciousness consists in the comparison of these with each other, the selection of some, and the suppression of the rest.” (PP I: 277) (cf. Leary 2003). In this respect, whereas Spencer’s benchmark of adaptiveness was the perfect correspondence of the mind with its environment (say perfect receptivity), James suggests instead that the character of the indeterminacy of higher brains and the spontaneity of the mind is an advantage in evolution (EPs: 42). The passivity of the mind promoted instead by Huxley, Spencer, and other thinkers<sup>34</sup> proves to be at least less compatible both with scientific discoveries about cerebral physiology and mere observational description of human behavior. The latter shows *purposes* which are not immediately connectable with stimuli *present* in the environment (e.g., ideals, etc.). Moreover, an active and selective consciousness in organisms with “higher” nervous centers would have been a consistent reply to the geological objection to evolution. The geological time supposed to be necessary for evolution to happen would have been much reduced with the introduction of an active and selective factor such as consciousness (directionality – natural teleology). Other circumstantial evidence for the effectivity of consciousness was the correlation between subjective feelings of pleasure/pain and objective harmful/beneficial activities, as they could be explained in evolutionary terms as being effective in adaptive activities,<sup>35</sup> and in the recovery of intellectual faculties in brain-damaged people. According to Richards, James derived this argument from Darwin’s *Descent of Man* (1871), and his conversations with Chauncey Wright.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, even if he did not explicitly make clear his opinion, Darwin was probably closer to Huxley in thinking that mental faculties were determined by brain patterning (see Richards 1982: 411).

- 40 To claim the spontaneity of mind and its *impulsive* nature helps us to argue in favor of real activity and real novelty. A key aspect already revealed and carefully investigated by McGranahan, Richards, and others, is the physiological and metaphysical role of the “will” in the Jamesian vision. We must overlook here James’s long quarrel against Wundt’s conception that we have feelings of innervation. Suffice it to say that by applying the law of parsimony, whereby consciousness tends to withdraw itself from all actions which are not useful for leading us to certain ends, once some internal mechanisms are associated and work, they become imperceptible since their knowledge would be a mere complication for our ordinary life. This is also the case for many voluntary movements, once there are established connections between mental cues and particular movements. The simplest explanatory hypothesis being that these mental cues are: “memory-images of the movement’s distinctive peripheral effects, whether resident or remote.” (PP II: 1108). This brings us to the ideo-motor action theory, which, according to many interpreters, is one of the central assumptions of the Jamesian theory of will and partly feeds his formulation of the theory of truth.<sup>37</sup> More specifically, James claims not only that the idea of the sensitive effects of movement is enough to determine what our movements will be, but he also means that there is no need for the further intervention of consciousness to agree to such movements being performed: “Wherever movement follows *unhesitatingly and immediately* the notion of it



in the mind, we have ideo-motor action. We are then aware of nothing between the conception and the execution.” (PP II: 1130). As is evident, reflex actions and ideo-motor actions are core assumptions of James's theory of will. To understand his vision, it is necessary to adopt an understanding of consciousness as embodied – as we would call it today – which for James meant that consciousness shows an *impulsive* nature. Thoughts and feelings are correlates of neural activities, they are “cross-sections [...] of currents whose essential consequence is motion” (PP II: 1134).<sup>38</sup>

- 41 This brief parenthesis on the psychological conception of will shows how there is a close correlation between sensation-thought-action, and also reveals the background on which the Jamesian conception of the experience of activity as the original experience of our notion of causality is based. Deriving from the Darwinian argument, McGranahan's analysis of the possibility of introducing real novelties by means of voluntary actions is particularly impressive.<sup>39</sup>

## Emergent Properties in Evolutionary Psychology

- 42 Before considering the experience of activity presented by James in 1904, we will take a look at the probably most metaphysical chapter of the *Principles*, or at least that which James considered as such (PP I, *Preface*), the chapter on the theory of the mind-stuff. This theory is the most radical form of the theory that our mental states are compounds. Within the framework of evolutionist theory, all the new forms of being are supposed to be results of the redistribution of original and unchanged materials. No new nature, no factor that was not present at the beginning, can be introduced at a later stage. However, the advent of *consciousness* seems to introduce something genuinely new. For however small it may be, it is a real discontinuity in nature, and this is not a legitimate assumption in a continuist philosophy. The theory of evolution works better, then, if it is possible to show that in some form, consciousness was present at the origin of the world. The doctrine of *atomistic hylozoism* is an indispensable part of a philosophy of evolution: originally there were atoms of matter that formed bodies and brains and mental atoms that always by aggregation have merged to form larger consciousnesses. The first duty of psychological evolutionism is to prove that distinct degrees of consciousness already existed before consciousness appeared. Although many authors, regardless of evolutionism, have argued for the existence of a vast amount of subconscious mental life – like Fisk, Spencer, Taine – for James, the theory of mind-stuff incurs two orders of difficulty: one physical and one logical. On the level of physical analogy, the problem is that this theory disconnects feelings from brain processes, arguing that the composition of a complex feeling takes place on the mental-conscious level without direct-immediate physical feedback. On the level of logic, moreover, the self-composition of mental facts is inadmissible. All the combinations of which we have real knowledge are effects provoked by some other entity from the combined units so that without a medium, the notion of the combination does not make any sense. Forces, material particles, mental elements cannot be added together; their sum can only exist either for an external observer who sees their combination or as some different effect produced on an external entity. As in the example of H<sub>2</sub>O, molecules of hydrogen and oxygen combine into water, thus showing new properties. But, according to James: “‘water’ is just the old atoms in the new position, H-O-H; the ‘new properties’ are just their combined *effects*, when in this

position, upon external media, such as our sense-organs and the various reagents on which water may exert its properties and be known." (PP I: 161). The theory of mind-stuff is unintelligible for the combination of multiple psychic units can only be either a different wording of those same units or something different, which is a new addition to those units.

- 43 The reason why James is interested in discussing the logic of the theory of mind-stuff is that the latter explains the constitution of higher mental states by treating them as *identical* to lower mental states combined. What James claims is that they are not identical but different: a higher mental state is not a collection of many lower mental states, but it is itself. The occurrence of many lower mental states, or of brain conditions that produce them, are undoubtedly the conditions for the emergence of a higher mental state. However, this emerging state will be a completely new psychic fact, which is different from saying that it is, instead, an 'integration' of lower mental states – as the theory of mind-stuff wants it to be.
- 44 The issue of the compounding of consciousnesses will resurface as a constant concern in James's published and unpublished writings – not least to reply to Bode's and Miller's criticisms. These authors found James's original idea that mental states are psychic units not coherent with his metaphysical notion of "pure experience."<sup>40</sup> Again in lecture V of *A Pluralistic Universe*, he goes back to the initial position he had adopted in psychology against the self-compounding of higher-complex mental states from lower-simpler ones. He confesses that he could not logically accept that: "a collective experience of any grade whatever can be treated as logically identical with a lot of distributive experiences" (PU: 86).

## A Radically Empiricist View of the Experience of Activity

- 45 In 1904 James was elected president of the American Psychological Association for the second time and his presidential address, then published in the *Psychological Review* in 1905, and again as Appendix B of *A Pluralistic Universe*, focuses precisely on the experience of activity. These are the years in which James published his famous article on the existence of consciousness as a function, discussing the related epistemological and metaphysical issues. He maintains a sort of interdependence of his radical empiricism with its "rules of method," namely the Pragmatic method and the principle of pure experience: "Everything real must be experienceable somewhere, and every kind of thing experienced must somewhere be real." (ERE: 81). Also, from this perspective he tries to respond to the psychological question: "Have we perception of activity?," the metaphysical question: "Is there a *fact* of activity?," and a logical question: "Whence do we *know* activity?"
- 46 There are two aspects: that the experience of activity characterizes the beings as experiencing beings; and that activity as apprehension of any change is somehow synonymous with the sense of life that, at least at a subjective level, is in continuous and changing activity. Also, in the *Essays*, James spoke of conjunction relations as the relations that a radical empiricist must try to rehabilitate, and here, activity as change is one of them. The metaphysical question concerning activity emerges in relation to whether what we feel to be activities are *real* activities. For James, some activity

experiences are accompanied by desire, sense of direction, effort, and have a goal. The central question is what drives activity into being: do our feelings make activity act, or they are just signs of activity? James then considers our tendency to reduce reality to the “immediately felt activity-situation” for the benefit of different agents: a wider consciousness, or certain ideas or certain nerve-cells. The meaning of these alternatives is pragmatically intense because not merely verbal differences, but very different actual results depend on the agent to which we choose to attribute real causal power. The alternative is in the end between materialism and teleology, or between forces acting blindly or with foresight in the world.

- 47 The metaphysical question regarding activity, in any case, depends on two beliefs regarding causality: “a belief that *causality* must be exerted in activity, and a wonder as to how causality is made.” In the end, real activities bring us to the problem of creation. At this point, James can only present his radically empiricist perspective on the matter. He states that according to the methodical postulates mentioned above, somewhere the *that* and *what* of “real creative activities” – if they exist – must be experienced as a unity. James specifies that the immediate unitary experience should not be misinterpreted. Sensations are fallible but rather as to the way we interpret them and fix their meaning. The only possible and correct starting point for us remains our concrete experience of causality. There is no possibility of getting out of it, insofar as it would mean getting out of our specific sensibility, and therefore of human life. He strongly suggests that “real effectual causation as an ultimate nature, as a ‘category’ [...] of reality, is *just what we feel it to be*, just that kind of conjunction which our own activity-series reveal” (ERE: 93-4). Here we encounter James’s effort to clarify the scope of metaphysics as a form of knowledge, as mentioned in a 1904 letter to François Pillon (CWJ 10: 409-10). James always looks for ends; his philosophy is teleological but not in an essentialist way. Understanding the nature of causation would be essential in order to use that knowledge to recognize actual causes or to foresee future developments in a more intelligent way. Quoting some passages of Royce’s review of Stout’s *Analytic Psychology*, James agrees with his colleague about the fact that metaphysical problems – such as the problem of effectual activity – are superficial unless they have a “possible use in helping us to solve the far deeper problem of the course and meaning of the world of life” (ERE: 94). Life is full of significance, full of meaning, he repeats, and without explicating this as a goal (the “pragmatic note”) – which is also an evident moral amelioration of our life and an integral engagement in all that is part of life – philosophy and psychology lose their ultimate reason for existing.

## Some Remarks in Conclusion

- 48 In a note to “The Experience of Activity,” James contests the accusation of having proposed a metaphysical principle of activity. All he has deliberately sustained is rather, he writes, “the indeterminism of our efforts” (ERE: 93n). The main object of the criticism was his defense of free will, which however can be understood as the novelty that human activity produces.

the only “free will” I have ever thought of defending is the character of novelty in fresh activity-situations. If an activity-process is the form of a whole “field of consciousness,” and if each field of consciousness is not only in its totality unique (as is now commonly admitted) but has its elements unique (since in that situation they are all dyed in the total), then novelty is perpetually entering the world and

what happens there is not pure *repetition*, as the dogma of the literal uniformity of nature requires. Activity-situations come in short each with an original touch. (ERE: 93n)

- 49 As one can read in this brief quotation, the attention to the personal dimension, and to the creativity of human action constitute a central aspect of all Jamesian reflection. In this perspective, the moral concern also plays a key role in James's psychology as well as in his metaphysical vision. The influence of Darwinism and his view of the emergence of fortuitous variations in nature helps James to formulate a conception of novelty as emerging from natural continuity, and to formulate an anti-epiphenomenalist argument on the emergence on consciousness.
- 50 As we have tried to show, causality plays a crucial role in this subject. On the one hand, it is one of the greatest metaphysical mysteries, and on the other hand, it is very often misinterpreted in a materialistic and reductionist sense. This is not the sense in which James understands causality, which in his view remains an open question, and in *Principles* he even talks of the possible cooperation of neural and spiritual causes. His philosophical doctrine of radical empiricism and his pluralistic metaphysics mark a step forward in this direction since he comes to postulate – in accordance with Bergson and Peirce – a gradual infinitesimal growing of reality. A question to be investigated concerns Miller's and Bode's criticism of the contradictions in James's writings on pure experience. There remains a tension between his profoundly anti-atomist conception of reality and his metaphysical pluralism, which has often given rise to many misunderstandings, and influenced the vision of other authors, including, as is well known, that emergence of Whitehead. Further reflection on these aspects would be important, as well as on the sociological interpretations of Jamesian psychology.

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## NOTES

1. For an interesting reading of James's theory of truth in an emergentist sense, see Pihlström 2007.
2. See Kim 2005; Clayton & Davies 2008; Meixner 2016.
3. Achim Stephan proposes two versions of *strong* (synchronic and diachronic), and one of *weak* emergentism, but in the end stronger versions of emergentism, which are incompatible with property reductionism, can be considered "integrated" versions of weak emergentism, which is instead compatible with property reductionism. Moreover, according to Stephan, weak theories of emergence show three common characteristics: the thesis of physical monism, the thesis of



systemic (or collective) properties and the thesis of synchronous determinism (cf. Stephan 1999: 50).

4. On the possibility of a “reconciling view” among the different interpretations of James as a neutral monist, physicalistic naturalist, panpsychist, and phenomenologist see Cooper 1990.

5. We know that James will be dealing with this issue of “combination” for a long time and he will return to it again in *A Pluralistic Universe*, see Moller 2001; Bella 2019.

6. As we shall see, since the late 1970s, James adopted Darwin's distinction between “different operational cycles in nature”: the causes of production (*fortuitous variations*) and the causes of preservation (*selection*) and made this distinction an important element of his anti-deterministic conception.

7. *On the Notion of Reality as Changing* (PU: 151-4).

8. The Russian elected legislative body.

9. See Peirce's articles on *The Monist* (1891-1893) collected in the first volume of *The Essential Peirce* (1992).

10. On this point, it is easy to observe a series of similarities with the Bergsonian conception of real actions. However, one must not overlook the differences between their two philosophical perspectives. See Madelrieux 2011; Teixeira 2011; Čapek 1950.

11. As James explains, the sensations are instead the result of a psychological work of discrimination: “No one ever had a simple sensation by itself. Consciousness, from our natal day, is of a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations.” (PP I: 219).

12. This criticism of *psychological atomism* anticipates what he writes in Chapter X about different conceptions of *Self*. From the belief in “permanent self-identical psychic facts that absent themselves and recur periodically” follows the “Humian doctrine that our thought is composed of separate independent parts” and our *Self* is a theatre of representations. Whereas, from James's description of mental facts as vague and changing descends the description of consciousness as a sensibly *continuous stream* and the *Self* as the corresponding succession of presently felt states of consciousness.

13. This is not the result of an inference from the perception of the succession of the temporal parts of thoughts; on the contrary, it is a single sensible perception whose parts are inseparable.

14. I am referring to the critical edition edited by Burkhardt and Bowers in 1979 because, as is now well known, in 1911 Horace M. Kallen, a pupil and friend of James, edited a first version of the text based on two existing manuscripts. Ralph B. Perry revised the 1911 edition, which was introduced by James's son, Henry Jr. James. Subsequently, with the discovery of a third manuscript revised by James himself, Kallen's version was revised and expunged from his comments and interventions generally considered too personal (see SPP: v-ix; 153ff). In the edition edited by Kallen, the problem of novelty and its sub-problems appear from chapter IX to XIII.

15. James proposes his doctrine of radical empiricism, first in WB, *Preface*; and later in *The Meaning of Truth* (MT).

16. Cf. ERE: 93n.

17. James shows how one can shift from the original meaning of the definition to other meanings only by adding or avoiding considering some of its words. This practice led to the derivation of undue logical implications from the definition following the interpreters' view.

18. In Darwin's theory of evolution James detects two different cycles of operation in nature relatively independent of one other: “the causes which originally *produced* the peculiarity in him and the causes that *maintained* it after it is produced.” (WB: 167).

19. “The original form in which fact come is the perceptual *durcheinander*, holding terms as well as relations in solution, or interfused and cemented.” (SPP: 100-1).

20. In this regard, I think it is interesting to reread the debate of that period on the meaning of the explanatory capacity of psychological hypotheses. See Bella 2018.

21. John S. Mill and John Venn talk about causes respectively as *unconditional* and *close* antecedents. Peirce wrote a review of John Venn's 1867 work *The Logic of Chance* (*Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, Volume 2: 98-102). John Venn is also quoted by James in chapter XXI of *Principles*, where James considers the relations of belief and will.
22. James points out that particular attention is paid to the perception of causal activity. In this regard we have a tendency to skepticism that is not found in other experiences in which we also make perceptual errors.
23. His logical objection consists in stating that since cause-effect is a transitive relation, the causal connection holds between the external terms even if the intermediate neural, muscular, and instrumental connections are skipped.
24. "Perception has given us a positive idea of causal agency, but it remains to be ascertained whether what first appears as such is really such, whether aught else is really such, or finally whether nothing really such exists. Since with this we are led immediately into the mind-brain relation, and since that is such a complicated topic, we had better interrupt our study of causation provisionally at the present point, meaning to complete it when the problem of the mind's relation to the body comes up for review." (SPP: 109).
25. There are several varieties of attention: attention can be sensorial or intellectual; immediate or derived (apperceptive); passive or active (see PP I: 395ff).
26. "*Principium quoddam, quod fati foedera rumpat, ex infinito ne causam causa sequitur.*" (PP I: 424).
27. In this case, Ewald Hering is the author of reference, even though James indicates ambiguities in his treatment, cf. PP I: 425n.
28. "No object can *catch* our attention except by the neural machinery. But the *amount* of the attention which an object receives after it has caught our mental eye is another question. It often takes effort to keep the mind upon it. We feel that we can make more or less of the effort as we choose. If this feeling be not deceptive, if our effort be a spiritual force, and an indeterminate one, then of course it contributes coequally with the cerebral conditions to the result. Though it *introduce* no new idea, it will deepen and prolong the stay in consciousness of innumerable ideas which else would fade more quickly away. The delay thus gained might not be more than a second in duration – but that second may be *critical*." (PBC: 257).
29. James's reviews of T. Huxley's *Lectures on the Elements of Comparative Anatomy* (1864) and A. Wallace's essay "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man Deduced from the Theory of 'Natural Selection'" (1864) are in ECR: 197-205; 206-8.
30. "Are We Automata?," *Mind*, 1 January 1879, Vol. 4 (13), 1-22.
31. In Woodward's introduction to the *Essays in Psychology*, on the question of feelings of effort, James's *afferent* view of sensation is in open contrast with Helmholtz and Wundt. However, in addition to the action of muscular feelings, which refers to effect-theory, James admits moral feelings and refers to them as the cause-theory (cf. PP II: 1167n). In short, his concern is to keep together the importance of reflex actions for the current psychology and to safeguard, however, a spontaneous dimension of voluntary behavior. See EPs: xx-xxi. For an accurate and quite innovative analysis of James's moral view see Marchetti 2015.
32. See McGranahan 2017; Pearce 2018; Klein 2016; Richards 1982; Wiener 1949.
33. "As odd as it may sound today, James invokes Darwinism to defy mechanistic reductionism, rather than viewing it as part and parcel of reductionistic modern science. Today we would call James's Darwinian functionalist account of consciousness an *adaptationist* hypothesis, or a speculation about the origin of trait based upon its apparent function." (McGranahan 2017: 80).
34. James and Hodgson were attacking, and Spencer was defending what is now called epiphenomenalism, "the view that mental events are caused by physical events in the brain, but have no effects upon any physical events" (Robinson 2015). James's criticism of the causal conception of perception was recovered by Putnam (1999) against Jaegwon Kim's "psychophysical supervenience." According to Putnam, Kim's theory is a sophisticated

combination of Cartesianism and materialism that still presupposes a conception of perception mediated by internal representations. Putnam clearly understood the importance of James's criticism for "natural realism" – a notion that James tried to elaborate and that was later recovered by R. B. Perry and Montague, but also by Moore and B. Russell. The problem of Putnam's "direct realism," in the sense of James's "natural realism," was a serious problem also for philosophers of language like Austin. According to Putnam, Austin's analysis of the language of perception can be read in close relation to James's criticism. Only by abandoning a conception of perception as mediated by internal representations it is possible for Putnam to overcome the traditional Cartesian problems perpetrated in philosophy of mind and epistemology.

35. In his anonymous review of the *Principles of Psychology*, Peirce will respond to this.

36. James quotes Wright (1873) in his 1875 review of Wundt's *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie*.

37. As Francesca Bordogna perfectly summed up: "for James a voluntary act follows simply from the fact that one idea has been able to capture the mind's attention, either because it succeeded in predominating over other antagonistic or inhibitory ideas, or because it was actively selected in view of certain interests or purposes of the knower. In either case, action follows simply from the motor power of the idea." (Bordogna 1998: 88n).

38. "Movement is the natural immediate effect of feeling, irrespective of what the quality of the feeling may be. It is so in reflex action, it is so in emotional expression, it is so in voluntary life." (PP II: 1135).

39. On James's teleological understanding of free-will see McGranahan 2017; Bordogna 2008; Pawelski 2007.

40. See MEN: 65-129. See also Moller (2001; 2008). However, he also states: "I hold to it still as the best description of an enormous number of our higher fields of consciousness. They demonstrably do not contain the lower states that know the same objects. Of other fields, however, this is not so true; so, in the *Psychological Review* for 1895, vol. ii: 105 (see especially: 119-20), I frankly withdrew, in principle, my former objection to talking of fields of consciousness being made of simpler 'parts,' leaving the facts to decide the question in each special case." (PU: 87).

## ABSTRACTS

The issue of the emergence of genuinely new events in a paradigm of natural continuity has been analyzed in different fields by Pragmatists authors like Peirce, Dewey, and Mead. Another way to consider the problematic relationship between novelty and continuity is by considering William James's understanding of causal connections. This article addresses the concept of causality that James repeatedly addressed and deeply rethought throughout his career. I believe that the concept of causality provides an excellent platform from which to view the various aspects that have made James's epistemological and metaphysical thinking so influential in the history of theories of emergence, and which is experiencing currently a major revival.

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