

ON A CERTAIN BLINDNESS IN POLITICAL MATTERS

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ABSTRACT: This essay argues for two complementary theses, one pertaining to epistemology and the other to politics. First, unless philosophy adopts a radical empiricist standpoint and seeks the uttermost generalities, it cannot differentiate itself from yet another form of limited expertise and becomes useless. Second, both radical empiricism and imaginative pragmatism lead the philosopher towards the left end of the political spectrum, i.e., to a radically progressive politics.

KEYWORDS: William James, Alfred North Whitehead, radical empiricism, epistemology, political radicalism

This philosophical essay is put under the dual patronage of William James (1842–1910) and Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947). Accordingly, instead of speaking about facts, things, reality, substance and the like, it uses as often as possible the process language of experience and events. It argues for two complementary theses, one pertaining to epistemology and the other to politics.

First, unless philosophy adopts a radical empiricist standpoint and seeks the uttermost generalities, it cannot differentiate itself from yet another form of limited expertise and becomes useless. Hence two important requirements: on the one hand, no experience, no fact, can be excluded a priori from the philosophical agenda; on the other hand, philosophy has to pragmatically seek the broadest empirical truths. Second, both radical empiricism and imaginative pragmatism lead the philosopher towards the left end of the political spectrum, i.e., to a radically progressive politics. In other words: on the one hand, the more you experience, the more you become acquainted with the world, the more concern you find for your fellow human beings, for other forms of life and eventually for the entire biosphere; on the other hand, the

more you think your expanding experiential field, the more you are lured towards the concept of the common good.

We can establish this thesis through the following steps. First, we revisit the question of the nature of the difference between philosophy and expertise. Second, some definition of the socio-political field is provided. Third, the philosophical gesture is specified with a focus on its epistemological dimension. Fourth, consequences are drawn in the political field. A short conclusion goes over the stakes again.

I. EXPERIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

Although there is no agreement amongst philosophers on the definition of their discipline, it is possible to consider all philosophical discussions from a common perspective. For they all select certain *experiences* to deal with and, in order to achieve some systematic understanding of them or at least to obtain some applicable *generalizations*, they apply some kind of *method*. There are three broad speculative possibilities that matter in the context of our argument: radical empiricism, empiricism *per se* and rationalism. All three cast a different light on the *data/method/outcome* cognitive string.

Primo, from what data do we start? From all experiences whatsoever? If, one early morning, I see a pink elephant in my bathroom, this experience should be taken *prima facie* and find an interpretation in my worldview. From some—outer—experiences? In this case, what is called “factual” concerns only what is disclosed in sense-perception and especially in sight; additionally, it is often claimed that facts ought to be measurable. From some—inner—experiences? The factual here concerns only what is clear and distinct to my mind, and these “facts” do *not* spring from sense-perception, from memory or from imagination (all three being notoriously unreliable) but from *some* ideas.

Secundo, what method do we apply to these data? If all experiences are taken into account, only a pragmatic method can allow us to deal with them (James). Whitehead’s version of pragmatism takes the form of imaginative generalization. If only some outer experiences are to be dealt with, simple observation or a non-critical form of (scientific) experimentation is appropriate (Locke). If only some inner experiences are worth the attention of the philosopher, a *mathesis universalis* of sorts will do (Descartes).

Tertio, what is the outcome of the procedure? Radical empiricism’s outcome is panpsychism, which involves two arguments. First, experience does not start from a conscious subject but from a network of pre-conscious experiences. James carves the concept of pure experience in order to name that primordial and pristine reality in

which relations are given. Second, that vague, confused, complex and neutral experience occasions phenomenal transparency through a triple genesis: our conscious experience emerges progressively as the process of individuation takes place (ontogenesis), together with socialization (koinogenesis) and after a long biological evolution (phylogenesis—see *infra* §3.3.1). For their parts, empiricism and rationalism bring forth similar ontologies. Empiricism's outcome is materialistic substantialism, which also involves two claims. First, experience consists of passively acquired simple (particular) ideas; second, these ideas are progressively associated to produce the state of consciousness of everyday life: simple (atomic) impressions occasion simple ideas that are then associated to progressively obtain more and more complex ideas and a unified, conscious experience. Rationalism's outcome is idealistic substantialism, which follows the exact same pattern: innate general ideas are organized by calculus to obtain conscious experience. In other words, a close reading of rationalist and empiricist arguments reveals that both philosophical streams share the exact same substantialism, one rather pluralistic and the other rather monistic.

Accordingly, radical empiricism is designed to overcome *both* rationalism (with its innate general ideas formatted by *calculus*) and empiricism (with its acquired particular ideas put together by *association*). It claims that primitive experience is not equivalent to elementary experience: empiricists have mixed up the source or origin and the element. Experience *qua* experience—"pure experience" as James calls it—does not have at all the simplicity, the atomicity, the individuality that is presupposed by rationalists and empiricists alike: it is vague, confused (neither clear nor distinct, certainly not rational) and above all relational.

This heuristic 3x3 matrix of speculative possibilities requires three short specifications before we resume the main argument. *Primo*, there can be of course a circularity involved in the definition of the data: the outcome of a given train of thought typically serves as rationale for its refinement with the help of data *selected* for their compatibility. The only way to avoid this dogmatic limitation of scope is to adopt radical empiricism. *Secundo*, an additional argument would be needed in order to show that there is a conceptual necessity between (i) the three respective types of data, (ii) the three methods, and (iii) the three outcomes. Historically, the correlation is nevertheless plain obvious. Furthermore, both materialistic and idealistic substantialism are degenerate forms of dualistic substantialism.¹ *Tertio*, this argument

¹ Whitehead argues that ontological dualism is, by definition, totally incoherent. The only way to sort of think two irreconcilable substances is to invoke a divine intervention. As soon as the "God hypothesis" is revoked, dualism degenerates into a one substance ontology.

presupposes the triple opening of the world that defines postmodernity: spatial (Cues, Bruno), temporal (Spencer, Darwin) and consciential (Myers, Freud).²

The most relevant question is to define the cognitive string *data/method/outcome* that best matches the philosophical ideal—as it was defined, say, by Socrates—or at least to specify which one is the most inclusive. It seems to me that only the radical empiricist string both allows the fulfilment of the agenda of philosophy *and* provides an understanding of the other forms of philosophy that exist or have existed. From the radical empiricist standpoint, one can make sense of the rational and empirical forms of substantialism—whereas substantialism cannot understand radical empiricism. In order to keep the argument tight, we will now develop only the first possibility of each of the three dimensions of our matrix and thereby seek to clarify James' and Whitehead's standpoints.

1.1. DATA: RADICAL EMPIRICISM

Jamesian scholars have always been tempted to read the philosopher's corpus only from the perspective of his own blend of pragmatism. Sometimes, they have complemented this approach with the topic of pluralism. It is obvious to me, as it has been to John McDermott, Charlene Haddock Seigfried and Eugene Taylor, that the very core of James' contribution actually lies in his radical empiricism.³ To adopt radical empiricism amounts to two moves.

On the one hand, James argues that *only* experiences are worthy of philosophical inquiry:

Everything real must be experienceable somewhere, and every kind of thing must somewhere be real. (ERE 160)

In other words: “the only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms from experience.” (MT xii) James basically asks philosophers to centre their speculations on their own first-hand experiences (*cf.* VRE).

On the other hand, *all* experiences should be accepted as evidences:

We feel things differently according as we are sleepy or awake, hungry or full, fresh or tired; differently at night and in the morning, differently in summer and in winter, and above all things differently in childhood, manhood, and old age. (PP I 232)

² See our §4.2.3.1. This essay takes over some arguments made in previous works, such as X1.

³ See, e.g., John J. McDermott, “Life Is in the Transitions: Radical Empiricism and Contemporary Concerns,” in Vincent G. Potter (ed.), *Doctrine and Experience: Essays in American Philosophy*, Fordham University Press, 1988, pp. 104-120; Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Chaos and Context. A Study in William James*, Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press, 1978; Eugene I. Taylor, *William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margins*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1983.

Taking into account all experiences basically means to open the field of *empirical* evidence as widely as possible. This requirement sweeps away most of Western philosophy, which has heavily relied upon sight to find evidences for and against its theses. Jonas, for one, has forcefully shown the impact of the metaphor of vision—a study that, interestingly enough, might have been directly spurred by Whitehead’s own insistence on the issue⁴—: the metaphor of vision imposes the idea of a *spectator-subject* factually unaffected by the scenery or by visceral awareness. The three essential characters of vision are: *simultaneity* of the data presented (instant-like coordinated picture), *neutralisation* of the causality of sense-affection (frozen, non-relational, perspective), and *distantiation* in the spatial and mental senses (totally passive onlooker independent of all mundane contingencies). When you think about it, substance metaphysics is actually short-sighted.

Accordingly, simply accepting data from all senses would already constitute a tremendous improvement, but James has a far broader field in mind. Whereas sight suggests and enforces dualism, the mundane roots of the normal state of consciousness (that I call the “zero” state in order to avoid the derogatoriness of the concept of “normality” and to suggest straight away the existence of a local hierarchy of states)⁵ emerge more and more as soon as the data coming from the other senses are brought into consideration: the spectator-subject discovers its embodiedness and its embeddeness. Three main types of experiential opening need to be taken into account: coenesthesia, relations, and altered states of consciousness.

Primo, coenesthesia, i.e., the togetherness of exteroception, interoception and proprioception, is of importance. Taking exteroception—the five external senses that are commonly gathered under the heading “sense perception”—fully into account is only the first step. Interoception names the internal sensitivity complementing the exteroceptive one. Proprioception names the messages of position and movement allowing, with the help of the internal ear’s semi-circular canals a spatialisation—i.e., a full (ap)propriation—of the body.

Secundo, relations deserve to be listed separately by reason of their historical and speculative importance. Because Western philosophers have traditionally accepted only a limited range of data, the very existence of relations has been sometimes denied (Bradley) or only internal relations have been acknowledged (Hegel) or only external

⁴ Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1966; *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1974, pp. 224-236. With regard to our contention that Jonas has been lured into that critique by his acquaintance with Whitehead, see his *Wissenschaft als persönliches Erlebnis*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987.

⁵ See my X2.

relations have been reluctantly accepted (Hume). James takes relations as granted and furthermore hints that what was previously explained from the subject-object dualistic perspective requires a new understanding that got fully clarified by Whitehead twenty years later: relations are vectorial, they are *both* internal and external.

Tertio, altered states of consciousness also matter; they range from the very common states of dream, absent-mindedness, hypnotism, nausea, automatism, hysteria, degeneration, genius, drunkenness and other intoxications, to less frequent “pathologies” such as neurosis, hallucinations, multiple personality, schizophrenic delusions, demoniacal possession, witchcraft, and religious visions.⁶ All experiences that are at the edges of the zero state, that take place around the threshold of consciousness, in the fringes unplundered by substantialism, are of tremendous importance for two reasons. First, they bring to the fore data that cannot be ignored if one seeks to overcome the ever-present danger of limited expertise and dogmatism. Second, they display or advocate for the existence of relations and especially of causation.

1.2. METHOD: IMAGINATIVE PRAGMATISM

It is well-known that James attempted only at the very end of his life to work out his own philosophical system and hence tried to define what philosophy is, or ought to be. Although his attempt to circumscribe the philosopher’s attitude, purpose and temperament (cf. SPP 6) was never completed, James points at a *central trait* that is likely to be accepted by all philosophical schools and at a *gesture* that is actually a bit more controversial.

On the one hand, the philosopher seeks ideas of universal scope (SPP 5), a system of completely unified knowledge (SPP 27): coherent, logical, necessary and applicable (PR 3).⁷ Such a completely unified system is however unobtainable in a chaosmos, i.e., in a world that is in becoming: the philosopher can only create a system that happens to fit—but will never match—local contingencies.

On the other hand, the philosopher’s inquiry is also a personal quest: philosophy is not just a matter of theory but also of practice—in the most existential sense of the word. What existential difference does it make to use such and such concepts? Three criteria are relevant here: self-transfiguration, ironic dialogue and destinal vision. They all point in the same direction: when it exists, the philosophical commitment bends the theoretical work.

⁶ See Eugene I. Taylor’s reconstruction of James’s 1896 Lowell Lectures in *William James on Exceptional Mental States. The 1896 Lowell Lectures*, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1982.

⁷ Whitehead was more precise in PR 3.

Now, the philosopher who endorses the radical empiricist standpoint is very quickly drowned under innumerable experiences of various complexity, intensity, value and frequency, some of them being first-hand, others second-hand or even imagined. The problem is all the more acute that these nebulae are not static objects at all: new experiences keep occurring and they never repeat exactly the same pattern as their predecessors (we are not talking about *experiments* here). If the past is settled once and for all, its valuation, interpretation, assessment varies according to the new situation. How should she deal with these experiential nebulae? Two stages can be distinguished: first, the solution offered by natural processes—pragmatic selection—and, second, the attitude required by philosophy—pragmatic deselection.

Primo, the zero-state allows a very sharp awareness of our contemporary world and this sharpness is basically achieved by cutting off as much data as possible, deeming them irrelevant for survival: “Intensity is the reward of narrowness” (PR 111-112). This is very straightforward in the context of the biological theory of knowledge that sprang from Spencer’s evolutionism and was later generalized by Peirce and James.

Secundo, philosophers need both to become aware of this natural pragmatic selection process *and* to overcome it through a pragmatic deselection. Philosophers, like everybody else, usually enjoy a pretty limited experience of the world that is called consciousness-zero. Sense-data and behavioural patterns are selected and reinforced by habits according to our life contingencies—the shift to a technological society bringing furthermore numerous changes to our ethos. Pragmatism acknowledges this as a process necessary for everyday purposes. But it is not because most experiences are ignored that they are philosophically irrelevant, on the contrary. They are not ignored randomly (this is the problem of *attention*, which comes later), but pragmatically. To cut a long story short, “the task of philosophy is to recover the totality obscured by the selection” (PR 15). This means that beyond the contingencies of everyday life we find a nexus of experiences that actually secure these contingencies *and* provide the conditions of possibility for a meaningful life. *Relations*—Whitehead would say *prehensions*—are decisive.

In sum, pragmatic generalization is the only method available for philosophy because of the pluralistic, chaosmotic nature of experience. But the late James and the equally late Whitehead point at the philosophical necessity of an imaginative form of pragmatism. Pragmatism is, in itself, a local method that allows to settle local problems. As soon as the philosopher is en route for the big picture, a methodological update is required. In a nutshell, the problem is again cosmological: looking for

broader generalizations means to reactivate the quest of the principle (archè), i.e., exactly what is forbidden by the chaosmos.

Since the “Whole” is not conceived anymore as a *kosmos* or a *universus* but as a *chaosmos*, we never know exactly what comes next. Provided that we accept all experiences, we guarantee that our philosophical systematization will evolve accordingly. “Ever not quite” is definitively James’s and Whitehead’s motto.⁸ Last but not least, it seems to me that the radical empiricist approach to philosophy is the sole one that prevents dogmatism. If one objects that defining philosophy amounts to, *ipso facto*, adopting a normative stance, one has not understood the radical opening that James’s empiricism performs and the process context he works.

The basic requirement is thus experience—all of it. If thought starts from an embodied and embedded experience, i.e., that the very existence and significance of the body is not denied *and* that thoughts are rationally articulated in order to be able to be shared with fellows human beings, you are necessarily *en route* for the broadest generalities. If thought does not start from an embodied and embedded experience, our argument does not apply but it is not falsified for all that. A madman does not think, neither does a politician, an economist or a plumber because their experience is limited to a certain section of the world and, moreover, because this experience goes in loops.

1.3. OUTCOME: PANPSYCHISM

If the philosopher accepts all experiences and seeks to extract from them the broadest generalities, she is forced to adopt a *neutral monism* of sorts. The expression itself is not to be found in James’s corpus because of its commitment to pluralism. James speaks only of a neutral and simple *pure experience* (ERE 26), but the tension between pure experience and pluralism is not pacified until the adoption of the bud theory of actuality, that Whitehead will call the epochal theory of time. Only then can we understand his mosaic philosophy (ERE 42 and 86).

This neutral monism constitutes actually a panpsychic worldview. Here also, the development of James’s philosophy adumbrates Whitehead’s. All experiences have to be taken into account and the most significant of them are *not* the ones occurring in consciousness-zero. This double mistake is typical of Modernity and prevalent in most contemporary philosophical schools: it is true that some scholars try to cure this blindness but the nosology they invoke is usually psychoanalytical and the patient dies uncured... In the same way that Locke improperly imported in psychology Boyle’s

⁸ WB viii, PU 321; cf. PR 7.

corpuscular paradigm, Spencer wrongly used Laplace's cosmogenetic model of the solar system to understand psychogenesis. In the West, it is only in the process-pragmatic "school" that, thanks to the underground legacy of Myers and Ward, prophylaxis has substituted for the *analytical* cure.

The proper assessment of the concept of panpsychism involves first the precise definition of the incriminated concept and second the study of its adequacy for James. First, we need to flesh out the meaning and significance of the concept of panpsychism. Like most philosophical concepts, it has been used in various ways and carries nowadays a wealth of meaning that generally does not help clarifying the debate.⁹ The question that the concept seeks to answer is properly ontological: what can be predicated of *all* actualities? For the sake of the present short discussion, let us examine the two main sources of difficulties and thereby propose a 2x4 hermeneutical matrix.

On the one hand, the prefix "pan" can either refer to the Whole (*cf.* the concept of World-Soul) or to all parts (*cf.* the concept of hylozoism). A complementary—Leibnizian—version of that basic contrast is the one between aggregates and individuals.¹⁰ Please notice that this first partition makes no pretence of exhausting the set of possibilities; moreover it indicates the need to specify the relation(s) existing between the parts and the whole.

On the other hand, the root word "psychism" works at various *stages* or *levels* that can be heuristically identified and hierarchized in the following way. First, it stands for *psyche* or soul itself and, in conjunction with the prefix "pan" leads irresistibly in the direction of animism. Second, it stands for *subjectivity*, *i.e.*, for consciousness or at least for an awareness of some sort: self-experience is its key-word. Third, it stands for some *mental activity*, which means capacity of abstraction, of valuation, together with some freedom (or spontaneity, depending on how you define your variables). Fourth, it stands for *pure experience*, in the sense that everything that "is" either experiences or is experienced—full stop. This is what Whiteheadians call panexperientialism.

This perspective discloses a developmental and abstractive progression: psychism/subjectivity/mentality/experience. As usual in philosophy, the use of abstractions is quite paradoxical: it means both the quest for the ultimate generalities—that are not (necessarily) obvious for common sense, *i.e.*, there is a distantiation from immediate experience—and it claims that, by doing so, the very marrow of any experience whatsoever is revealed. Plato's argument leads him to

⁹ See David Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West*, Cambridge, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2005.

¹⁰ This difference is stressed by Griffin, *e.g.*, in his *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy. Peirce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 35n17.

claim that solely the contemplation of *pure forms* is meaningful... because they are what is most *concrete*! This paradox, which stems from the disregard for sense perception inherited from Greeks, should lead us to be exceedingly careful in the handling of daring generalities.

Second, the nature and extent of James's panpsychism needs to be assessed. At the very least, it is doubtful that his entire philosophical development belongs to the same panpsychic level. One could claim that the above abstractive progression is indeed at work in James, who first (already in the *Principles*) embraced a rather non-technical (or gut) panpsychism—in 1909, he is still speaking of “mother-sea” or “common reservoir of consciousness”¹¹—and later (in the *Essays in Radical Empiricism*) spelled the (dry) basics of a panexperientialist framework.¹² The quest for higher generalities and the stripping of immediate experience of its “obvious” and “subjective” features are the two faces of the same coin. At any rate, these various conceptual stops do make sense from the perspective of the “infinite number of degrees of consciousness, following the degrees of complication and aggregation of the primordial mind-dust.” (PP I 149)

2. THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AXIS

Social and political issues are intrinsically intertwined: for brevity's sake, one can claim that the political pole is nothing but the soul of the social body—the question being whether the soul imposes (or should impose) its will on a foreign body or whether the soul emerges out of a pre-existing body. Historically, the very idea of participatory democracy provides evidence for the later alternative. So does, speculatively, process philosophy at large (but other possibilities are also contemplated, such as the simultaneous co-development of both poles).

Three dimensions have to be taken into account in order to think the possible socio-political landscapes. They reflect the three characteristics of the creative advance of nature, Whitehead's core idea: creativity, efficacy and vision, that are introduced contrapunctally: “We live, as it were, upon the front edge of an advancing wave-crest.” (ERE 69; cf. 86-87)

2.1. INDIVIDUAL

The individual is without doubt the basic social component—but it is neither a static nor an immortal one. Human life, from birth to death, is a growth process that can be

¹¹ William James, “Confidences of a ‘Psychical Researcher’” [1909], in EPR 361-375.

¹² Cobb and Griffin proposed the concept of “panexperientialism” in 1977 to name Whitehead's attitude.

depicted with the concept of individuation: through life, each and every one of us seeks, willy nilly, his or her own destiny. Autonomy or independence is the key-word here. It involves creativity and freedom (see the §3.2.3.2). This is what Greeks called *archein*.¹³

Creativity means the irruption of the unheard, of the unexpected and the unforeseeable. This, in turn, involves the ending of a past causal chain and the beginning of a new one. In common philosophical parlance, it refers to process and becoming and also to natality and birth. It necessitates the concepts of epochality (Whitehead's "epochal theory of time" that amounts to James's bud-like experience) and liberty because difference necessarily involves discontinuity and discontinuity is the signature of a free decision of sorts. Liberty, conceived at the broadest scale, amounts more to spontaneity than to free-choice. The point is to distinguish with Bergson liberty *qua* option-picking from liberty *qua* creation. We are free when we are creative. If freedom consists only of choosing between pre-existing alternatives, we are actually not free at all since we are strictly bound by these options. The *liberium arbitrium* is ultimately a *servum arbitrium*.

2.2. COMMUNITY

Although it makes sense to understand community from the perspective of the interactive aggregation of individuals in the making, the argument can be made that community always comes first, that no individual was ever born in a social vacuum (but he can die of course in a social void). There is no pre-social individual but one can imagine a pre-contractual one. Solidarity or heteronomy is what matters here, i.e., some form of efficacy and determinism.

Efficacy basically means the power of the past, the stubborn reproduction of existing patterns—that consist either of previous events or of atemporal archetypes (PR's eternal objects). In common philosophical parlance, it refers to being and necessitates the concepts of continuity and determinism: the efficacy of the past fosters the same patterns for ever. In other words, repetition involves blind continuity. It belongs to potentiality or virtuality,¹⁴ i.e., to the pervasive past and its physical time—but also to the continuous transition towards an impending future. Objectification and superjection are two faces of the same processual coin. Whitehead's concept of satisfaction names another type of *prattein*: to pass through one to get to the other:¹⁵ the

¹³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 177; see p. 189.

¹⁴ To differentiate potentiality, virtuality and actuality, see *The Basics*, ch. VI.

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

achievement of the subjective process of concrescence and the toppling into mundane objective endurance and divine everlastingness.¹⁶

2.3. CULTURE

The double tension between the individual and the community, between independence and interdependence, is at the root of Jamesian pluralism: there are genuine individuals endowed with an existential trajectory incommensurable with any other and, yet, they all belong to the one same community that benefits from their idiosyncrasies, reinforces them *and* bends them toward the common interest. A strong community requires—and fosters—strong individuals. Dewey has seen this very clearly, e.g., in “Creative democracy: The task before us.”¹⁷

The same dialectic can be founded with Whitehead’s actual entities and nexûs or with his mental and physical “poles.” It is also at work at a deeper level: “The individuality of entities is just as important as their community. The topic of religion is individuality in community.” (RM 86)

The imaginary institution of society conditions personal growth so that it is likely to contribute to social growth—while the imaginary institution of individuals brings social progress. (Growth and progress are used here in their original existential meaning as inspired by their biological meaning. Econometrics is totally irrelevant.) There is, in other words, a *common sense* that inspires the best definition of culture: culture provides the grand narrative that allows the merging of the conditions of possibility of individuation *and* of socialization. As a result, in a community where a genuine culture prevails, all citizens are animated with a sense of social duty that takes the form of a sacerdotal citizenship: the personal spiritual quest and the enforcement of the common good do coincide. This was at the very least plain in Athenian participatory democracy. The Judeo-Christian creation narrative constitutes probably the best recent historical exemplification of Western culture. But France’s Third Republic motto—*liberté, égalité et fraternité*—and the *Bildungsroman* offer, respectively, a global and a local instance that seems more likely to be universally adopted.

Traditionally, the political “right” insists on the individual and the necessity to give as much elbow-room to free will as possible, whereas the “left” argues that community values should come first. This simplistic stance has not lost its validity but it gains applicability when it is properly defined with the help of the concept of social

¹⁶ See *The Basics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 226 sq.

¹⁷ J. Boydston (Ed.), *John Dewey: The later works, 1925–1953*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, volume 14, pp. 224–230.

horizon that is used in the section 3.2 below in order to refresh the concepts of class, class consciousness and class struggle.

Vision basically designates an eschatological horizon, a melioristic open trend—not a teleological one. In common philosophical parlance, it refers to God’s luring of all existences. It necessitates the concepts of (hierarchies of) universals (or eternal objects) and of (primordial nature of) god. In a purely metaphorical way, it can be attached to the future. Creativity is wild and efficacy is blind. Only some vision can orientate the gearing of creativity and efficacy towards the best possible world. It is important to notice here that Whitehead does not offer any demonstration of the existence of God. Since God belongs to PR’s “Derivative Notions,” not to its “Categorial Scheme,” it could even be argued that God is not a metaphysical necessity, only a contingent cosmological feature of our “cosmic epoch.” Gnosticism would not be far.

To offer an anthropomorphic exemplification: creativity refers to novelty, invention; efficacy to causation, repercussion of past actions, and vision to horizon and projection of oneself in a more or less imaginary future. If we refine these conceptual mile-stones, we come to the concepts of, respectively, event (or accident, in the Aristotelian sense of *sumbebekos*), plastic structure, and divine *eschaton*. The structure is plastic because it is both a condition of possibility of eventfulness and a consequence of it. The history of philosophy offers three interesting complementary instantiations of these functors: Heraclitus, who insists on becoming, seemingly refusing any speculative worth to being; Parmenides, who attempts on the contrary to think exclusively the Absolute Being; and Plotinus’ hierarchy of beings (or, alternatively, Teilhard, with his noodynamics and omega-point). In Arendt’s interpretation of the Greeks, vision is of course *theorein*,¹⁸ but a *theorein* that is a *contact* rather than a contemplation *per se*.

3. ON EPISTEMOLOGICAL BLINDNESS

Now that the background of our discussion is settled, a more specific argument can be provided. This section is directly inspired by James’s “On a certain blindness in human beings,” a lecture delivered in 1892 and originally published in *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* (1899). It provides the bridge between the epistemological issues lying at the core of the philosophical enterprise and the political consequences that should be drawn from them.

¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*. One-volume edition, San Diego, New York, London, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978.

3.1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The historical context in which James delivers his lecture is itself quite eloquent. Three points deserve to be mentioned, starting with the most general one.

3.1.1. Monroe Doctrine, 1823

The broadest background of James's political stance is the Monroe Doctrine, that developed in three stages.

The first one is the presidential message delivered by Monroe in 1823, directly inspired by his Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, to reply, on the one hand, to France's intention to dispatch troops in Hispanic America in order to support and foster Spanish monarchies and, on the other, to Russia, that was ogling Oregon after Alaska. Monroe made two claims: the US will not tolerate any European intervention in the Americas; and the US will not intervene in European politics.

The second stage consists of the nebulous and dogmatic glorification of the US written for Ulysses Grant by his Secretary of State Hamilton Fish in 1870. Its rationale is the following: the US will not support the Cuban revolution against the Spanish colons if the UK agrees to pay war damages for the support they have granted to the Confederates during the Civil War. The British agreed and paid in 1872 but the US nevertheless invaded Cuba in 1898.

The third stage occurs with the affirmative Biblical imperialism of McKinley, Roosevelt, Lodge, Taft and Wilson: the US take South America under their wing to protect it against European colonialism. Hence the possibility of pre-emptive wars and the shameless affirmation of imperialism thereafter.

3.1.2. Cuban war and Philippines wars, 1898

The year 1898 sees the start of two important conflicts: the Cuban war (April 21), seemingly a consequence of the unexplained explosion of the USS Maine (Feb. 15), and the Philippines war (May 1st).

3.1.3. The American Anti-Imperialist League, 1898

Some intellectuals were not, however, among the warmongers. On June 15th, the American Anti-Imperialist League is established to battle the annexation of the Philippines. James becomes a dedicated member of the League from 1899 until 1910, the year of his death.

3.2. BASIC CLAIMS: PLURALISM AND COMMON SENSE

In his Preface to *Talks to Teachers*, James introduced “On a certain blindness in human beings” with two main ideas: first, whatever “truth” is and whatever/whoever “God” is, they are different, i.e., there is some ontological surplus, some experiential opacity; second, the individual perceiver can never properly communicate his experience, which means that language and rationality break down at some point.

In fact, three complementary claims are made in his enduring pluralistic argument: the opacity of facts, the privacy of minds and the existence of a “common sense.”

3.2.1. Opacity of facts

James’ epistemological pluralism manifests itself first of all in his advocacy of the opacity of factual experiences, which basically means that we experience more than what we are conscious of and more than we can conceive or rationalize. Needless to say, this opacity cannot be clarified, but only partially circumscribed. To do so we propose two stages.

3.2.1.1. Experiential wealth

First, the opacity is due to the fact that we experience more than what we are conscious of: the data available in consciousness-zero constitute only the tip of the experiential iceberg, they are neither the sole data available, directly or indirectly, nor the most relevant ones for philosophy.

The fact that what we consciously experience is only a part of our total experience is usually not welcomed by professional philosophers unless they are under the spell of psychoanalysis.

3.2.1.2. Nonrationality

Second, we experience more than we can conceive or rationalize: what we consciously experience is only partially rational and what we unconsciously experience is largely—but not entirely—symbolical.

Of course the two issues blend into one another: experiential wealth induces nonrationality and nonrationality manifests itself in the buzzing confusion. Whereas idealists understand the universe as purely transparent to reason (what is rational is real and what is real is rational), radical empiricists understand it as made of elements that should be seen as asymptotic experiences and variegated relations. In the Jamesian lexicon: the privacy of the skulls and the innumerableness of their binding appendices.

3.2.2. *Privacy of minds*

Pluralism does not manifest itself only in factual opacity but also in mental privacy. Whether we are awake or asleep, we mysteriously keep our identity. Here again we can distinguish two complementary issues: we are not fully transparent to ourselves—and neither are our fellow human beings transparent to us.

3.2.2.1. Who am I?

First, we are not fully transparent to ourselves:

My present field of consciousness is a centre surrounded by a fringe that shades insensibly into a subconscious more. I use three separate terms here to describe this fact; but I might as well use three hundreds, for the fact is all shades and no boundaries. (PU 288)

Even if I am an experienced radical empiricist (no pun intended), I still cannot make sense of my immediate experience and even less of my entire journey. Perhaps I will intuit in a glimpse what really matters and act accordingly, but this will remain to a large extent a pre-rational and private issue. Some of us have an intense introspective life, others accumulate experiences through social intercourse, reading, travel or have a talent to envisage the universal interconnectedness. Yet others have an intense religious faith or even have enjoyed natural or drug-induced altered states. None is able to answer this simple question: *who am I?*

3.2.2.2. Who is s/he?

Second, this privacy does also apply to others. James has often emphasized this, for instance quoting Josiah Royce (*The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, 1885, pp. 157-162):

What, then, is our neighbor? [...] He seems to thee a little less living than thou; his life is dim, it is cold, it is a pale fire beside own desires. (TT 241)

This is plain common sense unless you are endowed with the spurious behaviouristic faith—in that case, although you cannot access to your own experience, you are fully able to elucidate someone else's.

Overall, we are all haunted by a sense of intrinsic difference and peculiar destiny. Even nowadays in massified societies where people are made to conform *even in their dissent*, everyone still cling to their presupposed difference and is willing to fuse with the first heroic archetype fed to him.

3.2.3. *Common sense*

In sum, factual opacity and mental privacy are not only due to the complexity of our world (that could be understood statically) or the limitation of our faculties, intuitions and/or linguistic skills, but to its process character: opacity and privacy are basically experiential and experience happens, it does not last. Please notice that this also means that each new experience is incommensurable with all past experiences. Even if it somehow repeats a past event, taking place in the exact same spatial standpoint and reproducing the exact same experiential pattern, it is not the same event for the simple reason that it cannot take place in the same spot of the extensive continuum, which is, in the Whiteheadian lexicon, the matrix of solidarity that underlies all events.

However, pointing at experiential opacity and privacy constitutes only half of the story. The argument needs to be pushed in two additional directions: on the one hand, despite the nebulous aspects of inner and outer experiences, we all share a common world; on the other hand, the basic reason for this lies in the panpsychic nature of experience.

3.2.3.1. Consensual interobjectivity

Despite the tensions that exist between, say, a forest settler and a Boston Brahmin, a common world is shared within or even without a given culture. You are a cosmopolitan philosophical aristocrat living in buzzing cities surrounded by sophisticated intellectuals and multiple contraptions but when you meet a simple fellow, poorly if at all educated, dwelling in the woods and enjoying voluntary simplicity you cannot but acknowledge that his factual opacity, however remote from your own, somehow reaches the universal nexus of experiences that classical philosophers called “reality.” His vision is not yours, but it makes sense and could become yours. Moreover, his mental privacy will manifest itself in such a way that you will not doubt of his humanity and perhaps that you will even look forward to his company. Such is the mystery of friendship, as it stands out in Aristotle and Augustinus.

3.2.3.2. Panpsychism

That sympathetic *experience* can be extended to other forms of life. Granted, we feel particularly close to mammals, and especially to those that share our everyday life, but it is not difficult to recover, or to build, our sense of sympathy for all life forms and, gradually, for the entire biosphere. James and Whitehead came to believe, especially

in their late years, that no valid argument can be made to break the proximity between types of existence and forms of being. To establish an ontological gap between types or grades of experience would amount to renewing the mistake of substantialism.

The technicalities of this claim are not always easy to work out in details but the basics are straightforward enough: as soon as you acknowledge the humanity of *some* of your fellow humans, you are necessarily led to acknowledge the community of *feeling*¹⁹ that exists with all other humans and, step by step, you become aware of the unity of the pluriverse. The concept of pure experience is the heir of one epiphany: opacity is privacy and privacy is opacity—what matters is the standpoint that one seeks to express.

3.3. THREE CASES OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL BLINDNESS

Finally, let us mention three topics that are presupposed by our analysis and that have important parallelism in political matters, which is the subject of our next section.

3.3.1. *Opacity presupposes factual selection*

Our analysis presupposes the genesis of consciousness-zero through the selection of data: awareness becomes sense-perception through a triple genesis: experience is not *amalgamated* by calculus or by association from simple to complex, but *emerges* from complex to simple.

First, the cognitive functions of the human mind are not static operators at all, they are the transient *phylogenetical* result of a long adaptive process (see Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, 1855). Under the pressure of environmental adjustment (better knowledge allows a better chance for survival), the human intellect has become a master in the logic of solid bodies and “Aristotelian” logic, but this is just an evolutionary adjustment to a limited—perceived—segment of a throbbing and coalescing world. In sum: the categories that are *a priori* for the individual are *a posteriori* for the species. This is nothing but the very root of pragmatism.

Second, these functions result furthermore from an *ontogenetical* process: individuals are not born fully equipped with the rational apparatus embodied in adult’s consciousness-zero (see Piaget, *La représentation du monde chez l'enfant*, 1926). Four temporally and logically sequenced stages can be distinguished: the sensorimotor stage (ages 0–2) during which sense perception and spatial movement are tuning-in to

¹⁹ Feeling is the term that James sometimes uses for pure experience (SPP 94, etc.) and that Whitehead chose to name the vectorial relations binding all events (PR 23, *et passim*).

explore the world; the preoperational stage (ages 2–7) that coordinates motor skills with little significant mental actions on objects; the concrete operational stage (ages 7–11) which exhibits logical thinking only about concrete operations directed at objects and events; and the formal operational stage (ages 11–adult) which exhibits the ability to think and reason abstractly on a representation of the world.²⁰

Third, the evolutionary success of humans also lies in the fortunate oversimplifications the species has achieved and perpetuates through cultural endeavours (see Bateson, *Naven*, 1936). *Koinogenesis*²¹ is the process of socialization *qua* convergence of individual consciousnesses through learning. It is a process of integrative synchronic tuning that can be contrasted with schismogenesis—or progressive and pathological differentiation.²²

Last but not least, not all the data that are produced by the triple genesis are actually entertained: *attention* provides yet another filter. In sum: the transition from factual opacity to perceptive transparency takes place through a triple genesis. *Factual selection* means the creation of facts from experiences.

3.3.2. *Privacy presupposes a mental blind spot*

That triple genesis explains how the past “objective” world brings about the contemporary “subjective” one. It is only by metaphor that James writes on how “mind brings things together.”²³ As Whitehead claimed, well-tempered process philosophy “is a recurrence to pre-Kantian modes of thought” (PR xi): the idea of the construction of phenomena and of the importance of subjectivity is kept in process philosophy, but the categorical work is replaced by the triple genesis and anthropocentrism is gone. The *reformed* subjectivism that is advocated works within a panpsychist worldview: according to Kant, subjects bring objects into phenomenality; according to Whitehead, past subjects bring contemporary subjects into existence.

The blind spot is not another name for the transcendental ego but a metaphor for the inadequacy of consciousness-zero. Experience in the making cannot be fully

²⁰ Wolfe Mays’ “introduction” to Piaget’s *Principles of Genetic Epistemology* points at the fact that the stages of learning are not quite linear but exhibit a dialectical pattern of a *depassement*. There is a kind of return through a re-appropriation at a higher level that contains what was not even present at the earlier stage. (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972)

²¹ From *koinos*, meaning “common,” “public.” I picked the concept in order to contrast Bateson’s schismogenesis and later realized that Cornélius Castoriadis made basically the same claim in *L’institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1975).

²²For Bateson’s term, see *e.g.*, “Culture Contact and Schismogenesis,” *Man* XXXV, 1935, pp. 178–183, reprinted in Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*, London, Intertext Books, 1972, pp. 61–72.

²³ “Knowing of Things Together,” 1894/1895, reprinted in CER.

rationalized: it can only be fully experienced—felt, enjoyed. Consciousness-zero, strictly speaking, is a consciousness of the past; reason works with data that are not actual, only past. As soon as we are fully immersed in the experience, rationality is bypassed.

Interestingly enough, this contrast between immersion in experience (or awareness) and emersion in consciousness is at work whether you interpret it from the perspective of a pure flux (i.e., of continuity) or from the perspective of a sequenced flux (i.e., of epochal contiguity). In the former, there is simply no spot at all but dark fluxes; in the later, the spot is embodied in the contemporary duration defining the concretescent experience.

3.3.3. *Common sense presupposes cultural bias*

The common sense that binds private and public aspects of experience is always, in its concreteness, culturally determined—and this brings to the fore precisely the topic of our next section. Each individual belongs to a certain social horizon or *Umwelt* and only a few core experiences actually overlap with all horizons: Griffin's hard-core common sense beliefs that are inevitably presupposed in practice, even if denied in theory. The main ones are: there is a world lying outside of our experience and mentation; this world is structured by physical causality; our volition can bend this causality; freedom thus constitutes an important dimension (however fleeting and rarely actualized) of our existences.²⁴

4. BLINDNESS IN POLITICAL MATTERS

Let us now repeat our argument in the context of politics.

4.1. WAR AND PEACE

First, here is the broad context as provided by Whitehead's and by James's respective legacies.

4.1.1. *Whitehead's appeal to sanity, 1939*

Whitehead has unfortunately left very few indications with regard to his personal political stance and the political consequences of his organic philosophy. The basic conceptual tool he manipulates in the adjacent field of the history of ideas and of

²⁴ Cf. David Ray Griffin and Huston Smith, *Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology*, Albany, New York, State University of New York Press, 1989.

civilizations is actually borrowed from Plato's onto-theological speculations. The rise and fall of cultures would exemplify the struggle of two antagonistic forces: persuasion towards common Adventure *versus* coercion leading to individual and social sclerosis.

In March 1939, Whitehead seems to briefly wake up from his political slumber when he publishes in Boston's *Atlantic Monthly* his "Appeal to Sanity." His analysis is, however, rather dispassionate even though it claims to assess its topic with the concept of emotion:

To-day—he writes—the world is plunged in this second phase of contagious emotion. [...] The point to notice is that war, even if successful, can only increase the malignant excitement. The remedy is peace, fostering the slow growth of civilized feelings. War may be necessary to guard world civilization. But for Central Europe the effective remedy is peace. (ESP 53-56)

Strangely, he further invokes the possibility of a *miracle* to solve the crisis.²⁵ So the very first meaning of our title refers to Whitehead's political blindness and to the chronic weakness of Whiteheadian political studies. Intellectuals—and especially academics—totally fail their mission when they lack political commitment.

4.1.2. *Remarks at the peace banquet, 1904*

To assess the political significance of Whiteheadian process philosophy, we have thus basically the choice between James's and Dewey's respective historical commitments. Here primary and secondary literatures are burgeoning but, as far as I know, no political argument has ever succeeded to sail close to the radical empiricist wind. Pragmatist approaches are championed, sometimes assisted with pluralistic premises.

First of all, it is easy to identify James's stance. For the Bostonian philosopher, duty and reverence are more anchored in political experience than in pedagogical and metaphysical speculations. James sees that scholarship and commitment are intertwined—a point Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) repeatedly made only a few decades later.

The first lecture that is worth citing in this context is James's 1904 "Remarks at the Peace Banquet," made the year he became Vice-President of the national Anti-Imperialist League:

Our permanent enemy is the noted bellicosity of human nature. Man, biologically considered [...] is simply the most formidable of all beasts of prey, and, indeed, the only one that preys systematically on its own species. We are once for all adapted to the military status. A millennium of peace would not

²⁵ "Of course, miracles do happen; but it is unwise to expect them" (ESP 58); "miracles are always possible" (ESP 60).

breed the fighting disposition out of our bone and marrow, and a function so ingrained and vital will never consent to die without resistance, and will always find impassioned apologists and idealizers. [...]. The plain truth is that people *want* war. (MS 300-304)

Really, there is “something wrong about us as we naturally stand” (VRE 508)—but how could we be saved from this wrongness? “We must cheat our foe, circumvent him in detail, not try to change his nature.” (MS 304) James remains nevertheless evasive on the *preventive cure* of sorts that is needed: one cannot dispose of martial virtues, “man lives *by* habits indeed, but what he lives *for* is thrills and excitements.” (MS 303) Perhaps that a bit of educative work would do to responsabilize individuals, especially the political “leaders” and other economical “shakers and movers”? Actually not.

4.1.3. *The Moral Equivalent of War, 1906*

Let us face it: “History is a bath of blood” (MS 269). “The Moral Equivalent of War” (1910) claims that pacifists need to proactively invent substitute outlets and sublimated forms of the military life:

Martial virtues must be the enduring cement; intrepidity, contempt of softness, surrender of private interest, obedience to command, must still remain the rock upon which states are built. [...] The martial virtues, although originally gained by the race through war, are absolute and permanent human goods. goods. Patriotic pride and ambition in their military form are, after all, only specifications of a more general competitive passion. (MS 287-288)

“New outlets for heroic energy” (MS 306) are needed. Therefore James proposes to replace military service by a civil service in order to inflame the civic temper just as “past history has inflamed the military temper” (MS 293).

The Jamesian pragmatic trick is very seductive but how practical is it? It brings to mind the utopia that the late Huxley wrote: *Island* (1962). Community should foster individuation, and this process benefits from some physical, mental and spiritual training indeed. Initiation is its experiential keystone.

4.2. BASIC CLAIMS: PLURALISM AND COMMON PRAXIS

Whitehead provided an alternative formulation of the radical empiricist axiom when he argued that the task of philosophy is *to recover the totality obscured by the selection*—never ever to add an extra process of exclusion. The very same holds for political philosophy.

How can we avert the chief danger of narrowness? In order not to repeat the exact same argument as the one unfolded in the previous section, it is necessary to introduce a new type of experience, one specific to socio-political issues, and to proceed from there. Here is how the argument is adjusted: factual opacity is embodied in the opacity of class awareness; mental privacy becomes the privacy of class consciousness; common sense is replaced by a common praxis that binds *and* separates citizens: the class struggle.

4.2.1. *Opacity of classes*

The first thing to do is to define the concept of class that is put to work in our argument. It will not directly rely upon Marx for two reasons. *Primo*, we need a broader argument, independent of the question of the relations of production: if there is such a thing as social classes, they mould the social tissue in a deeper way. In other words: everything should be done to avoid reading Marx as reducing all that matters in human experience to economics and, by the same token, adopting a blind materialism. *Economic materialism* can aptly describe the ideological core of the XXth and XXIst century. It has had only nefarious consequences, both in capitalist and in communist societies. Moreover, in light of Whitehead's remarks on the vacuity of materialism,²⁶ it is plain obvious that Marx could be rescued from such a short-sighted vision of cosmic evolution. *Secundo*, we should not seek the same universality of the concept of class *per se*: class struggle is a praxis that has only fairly recently replaced *another* form of social polarization: cast alliances.

The starting point of our radical empiricist overhaul should be experiential. There is a very concrete experience that is usually ignored outside sociological studies: the existence of a sociological horizon that corresponds to what Whitehead calls our "actual world" and von Uexküll (after von Baer but independently of Peirce) "Umwelt."²⁷ The *Umwelt* is similar to a soap bubble or a cobweb that would be animated by two virtues: on the one hand, the living organism in question is largely defined by its relational tissue; on the other hand, the horizon incorporates interferences between different worlds and accounts for the relativity of the perceptual community. Scale effects do of course matter: the world of the ant is not the one of the mole. The *Welt* is a mosaic of *Umwelten*.

Humans are born with the smallest experiential—and social—horizon possible: themselves. It is only very slowly that the interpersonal world of the infant grows and

²⁶ SMW 107.

²⁷ The concept of *Umwelt* has been instrumental in the development of a zoo- or bio-semiotics and its phenomenological blend (Husserl, Heidegger, Goffman, Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze)

that her horizon expands. Slowly gently, the infant appropriates movements, spaces, forms of mentation, temporalities, abstractions... and her surrounding world grows accordingly.

Freely inspired by Uexküll's ethological work on the *Umwelt*, here is how I propose to define and to refine the concept of class.²⁸ A *class* is an unconsciously lived (experiential) territory. For simplicity's sake, we could arbitrarily reduce its dimensions to three: a lived space, a lived duration, and lived values—but a more shaded approach adds of course considerable weight to this concept. *Qua* unconscious, the lived territory involves an internal boundary and an external boundary, which were, *mutatis mutandis*, also foreseen by James. I mention between brackets Uexküll's relevant concepts.

4.2.1.1. Internal boundary

The *internal* boundary is embodied in the physical standpoint of the subject considered; it is from that existential nucleus that the horizon itself is outlined. "The knower is not simply a mirror floating with no foot-hold anywhere."²⁹ There is no unembodied standpoint; the "lived body"³⁰ can be analyzed in two complementary worlds: primo, the presented world ("Gegenwelt"), i.e., the environment as apprehended (constructed) by the central nervous system; secundo, the innerworld ("Innenwelt"), made of affectivity, interoception, proprioception and imaginative projections.

4.2.1.2. External boundary

The *external* boundary is constituted by the social horizon itself ("Umwelt"). The fringes or "surrounding-world" can be analysed in two steps: primo, the perceived world ("Merkwelt") woven by education, values, (over-)consumption...; secundo, the operational world ("Wirkwelt") which is the sociographical area defined by the subject's action in space and time.

In order to delineate how exactly do the internal and external boundaries relate to the opacity of classes, we need to shift to the next stage.

²⁸ Jakob von Uexküll, *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen: Ein Bilderbuch unsichtbarer Welten*, Berlin, J. Springer, 1934.

²⁹ William James, "Remarks on Spencer's *Definition of Mind as Correspondance*," 1878, reprinted in CER 67.

³⁰ It would be interesting to develop this concept along some of the lines suggested by Merleau-Ponty's "lived body."

4.2.2. *Privacy of class consciousness*

The existence of social classes is a given, a *presentation* that is not necessarily *represented*. To use a metaphor: all human beings live in a bubble that is more or less extended, more or less transparent and more or less pervious to her fellows' whereabouts. However, because of personal circumstances not always purposely sought, some individuals become conscious of the existence of their own class and therefore pave the way for a new understanding of social intercourse.

The class *qua* consciously represented territory involves the boundaries mentioned in the previous section: it mobilizes either nuclear or liminal perspectives, or both.

4.2.2.1. Nuclear representation

From the perspective of the *internal* boundary, the nuclear standpoint becomes conscious when it is contrasted with other standpoints—and this involves three main characteristics: age, gender and race. More subtle cultural categories could be evoked as well to specify the nuclear representation, but these three mark out adequately the territory at stake.

4.2.2.2. Liminal representation

From the perspective of the *external* boundary, the horizon itself gets so to speak fleshed out when one realizes that there is, if not actually, at least potentially, an overlap of horizons.³¹ This step of the argument introduces a presupposition: the existence of some *local* form of social hierarchy. Some people have more family and friends than others, some have friends from various *horizons*, some pick them only within their neighbours or their colleagues, while others have so to speak a far broader sample of social personalities: some citizens have simply access to a *richer* experience than others. The old metaphor of the social pyramid is thus useful to fuel the discussion; what is presupposed is then made explicit by the analysis. Please notice that no *global* hierarchy is either presupposed or demonstrated: precisely because we are condemned to speak from a certain sociological standpoint, the opacity of our horizon prevents an all-embracing vision. At the global level, the social circumstance could equally be depicted as a coral rather than a tree. This is, *mutatis mutandis*, the same question as Darwin's.³²

³¹ A parallel topology can be found in Edward T. Hall's proxemics.

³² What exactly was on Darwin's agenda? Did he really intend to argue for one single tree of life and hence for one single evolutionary scale of consciousness? Is that pyramidal concept furthermore worthy of the pragmatic standpoint? The fact is that the single illustration that enriches *On the Origin of Species* (in chapt. 4) does not share the characteristics of Haeckel's more well-known tree: it basically pictures

To understand the different possible overlappings, three criteria matter. First, the horizontal **size**: some individuals have a far bigger horizon than others. This is really an experiential matter. Physical, mental and spiritual growths, that are supposed to be enforced together by a proper upbringing and an adequate education, should, by definition, amount to increasing the size of the experiential horizon of the members of the community. However, size matters only in so far as it increases the probability of the awareness of *qualitatively* different experiences. Hence the two following dual characteristics.

Second, the **elongation** of the horizon and its **direction**: what is the shape of the horizon and how is that shape orientated in the social power field? A very wide horizon that includes only experiences of the same type does not really prepare the subject to become conscious of the social stakes: it defines a shallow horizon covering similar experiences; another way of putting it is to speak of an *horizontal* horizon within the social pyramid or field. A *vertical* horizon is an elongated horizon that runs through multiple levels of the pyramid: although both types of horizon could have the same size, their significance is completely different. In sum, every citizen belongs to a social horizon that is defined by its size and orientated shape: a big horizon is always preferable but an horizontally elongated horizon does not have the same impact on social consciousness as a vertically elongated one.

Third, the **centration** of the subject and her **projection** clarify how the subject values her position within her horizon. Primo, the subject is rarely centred within his horizon: usually she has a better knowledge of some areas encompassed by the horizon than others. Secundo, the subject is never statically (de)centred: there is always a tropism that brings her towards some parts of the horizon. Most of the time, the subject is attracted by the lifestyle of the upper classes. But sometimes the ideal of voluntary simplicity scale down her social agenda.

In conclusion, the opacity of classes can be partially made conscious within a private subjectivity but this does not necessarily awake the subject to the ethos that drives the actors.

4.2.3. *Common praxis*

Once the private class consciousness is obtained through the consideration of overlapping horizons or territories, the subject becomes able to rationalize its

human races as one of the currently most evolved organisms, not as the sole pinnacle of natural selection. Darwin's vision is dramatically different, as his notebooks make plain. In July 1837, shortly after his return from renowned *Beagle* voyage (1831–1836), he drew a coral-like diagram and wrote that “the tree of life should perhaps be called the coral of life” (*B Notebook*, p. 25). Darwin's natural selection does *not* necessarily involve either anthropocentrism or progress.

meaning and significance. When different private consciousnesses are shared, i.e., rationally discussed, another step is crossed and the meta-concept of class struggle can be obtained.

In a nutshell: so far we have dealt with the statics of the system; we now have to understand its dynamics. Currently, Western and Westernized societies (the reality behind the *politics* of “globalization” and its fancy literature) are ruled by the class struggle—but this hasn’t been always the case, and one cannot but hope that it will not continue to be the case. A quick overview of three important historical stages that such hope implies is helpful.

One of the oldest social ethos is the hierarchically differentiated cast-based communities. Their basic *modus operandi* is the cast alliance that provides a rigid social organization, which means less opportunities for the subject to change his social status but also more cohesion and, overall, more meaning. An individual born into slavery is likely to die into slavery, but his owner has a direct interest in keeping him alive and well. Proletarians are unlikely to raise above their ill-birth and the capitalist should only worry about paying the minimal wage possible. The reproduction of the stock is not always a concern since foreign work power is available (that is before plants were actually delocalized).

4.2.3.1. Class struggle

The current ethos is the class struggle. It was brought to the fore by a triple opening or deterritorialization.

Primo, the spatial opening that started in the XVth century with the enclosures, was carried on with Columbus’ “discovery” (1492) and crowned with the works of Cues, Copernicus and Bruno. The Greek given *kosmos*, that gave its premises to the Christian created *mundus*, was about to become a pluriverse and its finite hierarchy, infinite.

Secundo, the temporal opening originates in the transformation of the concepts of growth and progress, that used to be private matters, into public realities by the works spreading from Herder (1764) to Condorcet (1793). It was then carried on by the speculation around the biological theory of evolution by Spencer (*Principles of Psychology*, 1855), Wallace and Darwin.

Tertio, the consensual openings. Usually scholars mention only Freud’s *Traumdeutung* (1900), but Freud dogmatized a broader (and deeper) conceptual and therapeutical revolution that goes back to Leibniz and Mesmer, the Nancy and Salpêtrière schools, and psychophysics. Political openings have to be mentioned as well (the *Republiek der Zeven Verenigde Nederlanden*, 1579–1632; the *Bloodless Revolution*,

1688; *The Boston Tea Party*, 1773; the French revolution, 1789), alongside religious reformation (Luther, 1517).

As a result of all these openings: the social model shifted from perpetual clockwork (Claude Lévi-Strauss' "société-horloge") to steam locomotive ("société-vapeur").

How, as deterritorializations, do the three openings relate to class struggle? Culture has been destroyed in so far as there is no big narrative providing the conditions of possibility of both independence and interdependence. There is no more culture—only some cultivated people.

4.2.3.2. Fascistic terror or reterritorialization?

The next stage is likely to be fascistic terror but one cannot rule out the possibility of a reterritorialization with a return to an alliance system or the creation of compassionate communities. The key is the political apathy that has ruled over the last two decades.

Primo, *terror* is already the contemporary motto and its enforcement factually cancels the class struggle. In order to have class struggles *per se* you need individuals endowed with a sharp class consciousness and organized into unions or similar entities. On the one hand, class consciousness relies indeed upon the existence of reasonably sized social horizons and especially upon *overlapping* horizons. On the other hand we have to ask how is terror possible? Aristotle knew it already: to allow the rule of a tyrant, the City should not be composed of citizens seeking individuation (independence, autonomy) and keen to secure solidarity (interdependence, heteronomy)—but of conforming and atomized consumers of sorts.³³ The description of the current state of affairs and the blueprint of what comes next is written down in black and white in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Only two technoscientific possibilities seem to have escaped Orwell: the forthcoming bio-nano robotics and the extensive use of geolocalized RFID chips...

Secundo, the common praxis would become an alliance if the actors could recover their respective sense of duty and reverence. Since the contemporary state of affairs is the antechamber of a fascistic implosion of unknown magnitude, the reversion to a feudal mentality would undoubtedly constitute an improvement.

Tertio, only the irruption of the ideal of participatory democracy could really obtain a decisive improvement of the life of all the actors. It would involve scaling down the social tissue in order to nurture again the compassion that keeps communities alive. Sacerdotal citizenship would be back.

³³ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1313a34-b16.

4.3. THREE CASES OF POLITICAL BLINDNESS

Overall, the topological definition of classes presupposes two pluralistic facts: one, there are social differences and they are systematically enforced; two, they are largely pre-conscious and opaque.

Primo, social differences are a qualitative matter, not a quantitative one. For instance, most people tend to believe nowadays that all individuals consume the exact same goods with the exact same enjoyment, the only difference between lower and higher wages being the size of their car(s), the amount of garages attached to their house(s) or the rate at which they can replenish their fridges: besides sharp differences in sex, gender and race, there is no social structure and especially no classes at work. We have showed that this is a very superficial understanding that has been first noticeable in US-American society.

Secundo, these systematic differences are not obvious, either experientially or rationally, for citizens in their everyday life. Depending on your whereabouts, you may, or may not, become conscious of them and your perspective will forever remain short-sighted unless you adopt a working hypothesis on the common praxis—but here also you can argue only for a limited clarification, both because of the finitude of your horizon and its cultural localization (its position in space and time). Let us further clarify this issue in light of the contemporary state of affairs.

4.3.1. Deselection of class membership

Applied to politics, radical empiricism requires not only that we accept all social experiences, but that we look for new experiences at the edges of our customized territory. We need to adopt the widest social horizon possible and this in turn leads to a broadening of our concern for our fellow human beings and to the enjoyment of a corresponding drift towards the far left of the political spectrum.

The first type of blindness that should be cured is the one touching the opacity of the class membership. So far, we have introduced the concept of class from the perspective of a personal, positive, experience. Complementarily, one can define class by what is negated in or rejected by these experiences. Class membership is then the product of a process of selection that could be deactivated. When one reads the opacity of class membership as the ground for conformism, it becomes clear that, just like in epistemological matters, the selection process needs to be de-activated in order to allow for genuine individuation.

4.3.2. *Lucidity of class consciousness*

The deselection of class membership is not the sole key. The privacy of class consciousness, when it succeeds in overcoming the selective process, often leads to atomism.

Social lucidity requires the abandonment of atomic seclusion—at work even in class consciousness—to implement solidarity. The subject needs to focus on the overlappings between her horizons and other's and enter in dialogue with her peers.

4.3.3. *Culture*

Nowadays, the all-embracingness of class struggles is doubtful because of the disintegration of the social tissue: classes are not easy to identify anymore since each individual's horizon has tremendously shrunk and since the residual horizon *conforms* most of the time to one single pattern: the immediate satisfaction of a blind consumer's will. Even in the rare cases when a choice is rationally made, the instrumental rationality at work remains uncritical and the data are valued through advertising. The question remains: could culture be a culture of struggle, war and colonial predation? Social life should be weaved out of sacerdotal citizenship; it cannot result from massified consumerism and warmongerism. We have now entered the epoch of total disorientation: there is no self-identity (independence), no communal identity (togetherness), and no historical identity (Grand narrative, i.e., "paideia" or "Bildung").

In sum, the three forms of political blindness are best seen through the lens of the three necessary conditions of participative democracy, themselves reflecting the three guises of authentic life. The selection of class membership is detrimental to individuation; the blind spot of class consciousness needs to be clarified by the requirement of solidarity; class struggle loses its impetus as soon as culture is activated. Culture is that which seeks to foster *both* individuation and solidarity. Once the recent common praxis (class struggle) and its likely outcome (fascistic terror) are identified, it becomes possible to aim at a broadened rationality that transfigures class struggle into a compassionate lifestyle. In short: the incipient terror is to be replaced by culture and, to repeat, this leads to the inflation of our social horizon and therefore to a far left political standpoint.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the more you experience, the more you imagine and the more you think, the more you expand your horizon and the more you shift to the left of the

political spectrum. So far, Western philosophy has largely committed itself to a metaphysics of feudalism,³⁴ it is about time to realize that philosophy *qua* philosophy is intrinsically subversive.

There can be conservative politicians, right-wing theologians, Nazi intellectuals, socialist psychoanalyst or crypto-fascist sociologists—but no conservative philosophers, right-wing philosophers, Nazi philosophers or crypto-fascist philosophers. As soon as you accept all experiences and seek the ultimate generalities, you are *ipso facto* led to embrace a far left political stance. But do notice that this does not imply any extremism whatsoever: it simply means the radical will to see the actualization of the three conditions of possibility of authenticity: individuation, solidarity and culture. Accordingly, this “far left” does not belong either to historical liberalism or to the communist ideal or even to the *paideic* archetype. It is a place that remains to be invented for our time, an utopia that should not remain longer an uchronia.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY & ABBREVIATIONS

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AI *Adventures of Ideas*, 1933 (Free Press, 1967).
ESP *Essays in Science and Philosophy* (Philosophical Lib., 1947).
PR *Process and Reality*, 1929 (Free Press Corr. Edition, 1978).
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SMW *Science and the Modern World*, 1925 (Free Press, 1967).

³⁴John Dewey, *Characters and Events. Popular Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*. Edited by Joseph Ratner, New York, Henry Holt, 1929, Vol 2, p. 852.

William James:

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EMS *Exceptional Mental States* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982).
ERE *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 1912 (Bison Books, 1996).
MT *The Meaning of Truth* (Longmans, 1909).
P *Pragmatism*, 1907 (Longmans, 1916).
PP *The Principles of Psychology*, 1890 (Dover Pub., 1950).
PU *A Pluralistic Universe*, 1909 (Bison Books, 1996).
SPP *Some Problems of Philosophy*, 1911 (Bison Books, 1996).
TT *Talks to Teachers and Students* (Henry Holt, 1900).
VRE *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Longmans, 1902).
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