

**THE CONCEPT OF EXPERIENCE
IN HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY
AND JAMES' RADICAL EMPIRICISM**

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I develop a comparison between the philosophies of Husserl and James in relation to their concepts of experience. Whereas various authors have acknowledged the affinity between James' early psychology and Husserl's phenomenology, the late development of James' philosophy is often considered in opposition to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. This is because James' radical empiricism achieves a non-dual dimension of experience that precedes the functional division into subject and object, thus contrasting with the phenomenological analysis of the dual structure of intentionality. However, I argue that the later "genetic" development of phenomenology converges with some central aspects of James' radical empiricism. This is because genetic phenomenology leads us to conceive of the flow of primal impressions as a fundamental dimension of experience that precedes the subject-object duality and is at the base of the process of co-constitution of the subject and the object in reciprocal dependence. At the same time, Husserl conceives of the impressional core of experience as structured by formal conditions that depend on the concrete constitution of an embodied subject. For this reason, I argue that Husserl's genetic phenomenology can complement James' radical empiricism, thus leading to the development of the doctrine of pure experience as a form of empirical and not metaphysical realism.

Keywords: genetic phenomenology, qualia, consciousness, pure experience, neutral monism

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to compare the concepts of experience that are developed in the philosophies of Edmund Husserl and William James. Various authors have stressed the affinities between James' early psychology, as presented in the *Principles of Psychology* (James 1958, hereafter referred to as *Principles*), and Husserl's phenomenology (see Schutz 1941; Gurwitsch 1946; Wilshire 1969; Kessler 1978). In fact, certain ideas presented in James' *Principles* prefigure central features of Husserl's phenomenology. In particular, the starting point of James' inquiry in the *Principles* is the

epistemological dualism of knower (subject) and known (object), conceived of as an essential character of mental states. This dualism is expressed by the notions of "conception" and "cognitive function", which can be likened to Husserl's concept of intentionality (see Schutz 1941; Gurwitsch 1946; Wilshire 1969: 32). This common starting point of the philosophies of Husserl and James is also developed in similar ways. For example, James' distinction between "topic" and "object of thought" is very close to Husserl's distinction between the "object which is intended" and the "object *as it is intended*" (see Schutz 1941; Gurwitsch 1946). Furthermore, James' idea that the various parts of the stream of thought are surrounded by *fringes*, which also account for the unity of consciousness and the unity of the object, anticipates the phenomenological concept of *horizon*¹. For these reasons, Husserl's phenomenology can be conceived of as a "radicalization" (see Gurwitsch 1946) of James' programmatic dualism through the investigation of the fundamental correlation subjective-objective.

However, the same reasons that lead us to acknowledge this continuity between James' *Principles* and Husserl's phenomenology also lead us to find a tension between Husserl's phenomenology and James' later doctrine of pure experience, which is presented in the *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (James 1912, hereafter referred to as *Essays*). This is because, in contrast to the analysis of the dual structure of experience by means of notions such as "cognitive function" (in James) and "intentionality" (in Husserl), the doctrine of pure experience achieves a non-dual dimension of experience that precedes the functional division into subject and object.

For this reason, various authors have stressed the opposition between James' late philosophy and Husserl's phenomenology (see Gurwitsch 1946: 163; Wilshire 1969; Kessler 1978). In contrast to this reading, I shall argue that Husserl's genetic development of phenomenology also reaches a non-subjectivist concept

¹ Husserl (1970: 234) claims that James recognized the "phenomena of horizon [...] under the title of 'fringes'" (see Wilshire 1969: 34).

of experience that is near to James' doctrine of pure experience. This is because the genetic "deepening" of phenomenology finds in the flow of *primal impressions* a fundamental dimension of experience that precedes the subject-object duality, being at the base of the process of co-constitution of the subject and the object in reciprocal dependence. At the same time, reading James' view in the light of Husserl's phenomenology allows us to address an open question in the doctrine of pure experience. This view could be interpreted as a form of metaphysical realism, i.e. as a doctrine about ultimate reality and, specifically, as a metaphysical form of neutral monism. However, the metaphysical reading of James' view contrasts with the rejection of the absolutistic and trans-empirical claims of metaphysics in James' empiricist and pragmatist philosophy. I shall argue that the comparison with Husserl's phenomenology leads us to develop a non-metaphysical reading of the doctrine of pure experience. In fact, Husserl conceives of the impressional core of experience as structured by formal conditions that depend on the concrete constitution of the subject of experience. I shall argue that the phenomenological account of the intertwining of form and matter of experience complements James' radical empiricism, thus leading to the development of the doctrine of pure experience as a form of empirical and not metaphysical realism.²

1. The doctrine of pure experience

James conceives of the doctrine of pure experience as a "rearrangement" in philosophy and as a *Weltanschauung* into which his mind has grown for many years (James 1912: 40). This doctrine goes beyond the epistemological dualism of subject-object that was at the heart of the *Principles* and it arises from a radical gaze into experience that enters into contact with its

originary nature, before any conceptualization and theorization has taken place. This inquiry finds a "pure" dimension of experience that precedes the functional distinction between subject and object. According to James, the subject and the object of experience are constituted by series of pure experiences and the distinction between them is merely practical, depending on the function that they have in a certain context, which we thereby call "physical" or "mental". Pure experiences are thus situated at the intersection of the subject and the object, being the *neutral* (James 1912: 25, 123) dimension from which the subjective and the objective are constructed for practical purposes. In James' view, the reification of this functional duality is the source of old philosophical dilemmas that can be solved when we recognize the non dual nature of pure experience:

"My thesis is that if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff 'pure experience,' then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter. The relation itself is a part of pure experience; one of its 'terms' becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge, the knower, the other becomes the object known." (James 1912: 4)

This view constitutes an account of knowledge and, above all, of perception. In particular, it constitutes an alternative to both the representative theories and the common-sense theories of perception (James 1912: 52). In the light of the doctrine of pure experience, "external" objects as well as the "internal" images of the objects, turn out to be constituted of the same "stuff", i.e. by pure experiences. According to James, each segment of experience is made "of just what appears, of space, of intensity, of flatness, brownness, heaviness, or what not." (James 1912: 26). These "sensations" are qualitative elements that are neutral, being neither absolutely subjective nor absolutely objective but rather the matter out of which the subjective (mental state)

² With these notions I refer to the distinction, which is present in Kant, between two notions of reality: empirical (i.e. relative to the cognitive relation) and metaphysical (i.e. absolute, "in itself").

and the objective (physical reality) is made of (James 1912: 215). Pure experiences are therefore immediately accessible qualitative elements of experience or "qualia". James presents us with an original account of qualia that is different from both the internalism and the externalism about qualities that can be found in various theories of perception.³

2. Neutral monism and the metaphysics of pure experience

The doctrine of pure experience is, foremost, a theory of knowledge. At the same time, James presents it as a metaphysics, defining pure experiences as the "stuff of which everything is composed" and the "materia prima of everything" (James 1912: 4; 138). These passages can be read as referring to a metaphysical doctrine concerning ultimate being and, in particular, to a form of *neutral monism*. Some authors (e.g. Banks 2010) consider James as one of the main proponents of neutral monism. In fact, James presents his view as a form of "monism" that is centred on the concept of a "primal" and "neutral" reality (James 1912: 226)⁴.

³ I refer, on one hand, to internalist representationalism, which conceives of qualia as merely subjective properties of mental states and, on the other hand, to externalist representationalism (for e.g. in Fred Dretske) and direct realism (for e.g. in James Gibson), which conceive of qualia as external properties of mind-independent objects.

⁴ The expressions used by James in French are "monisme" and "réalité première de nature neutre". The expression "neutral monism" is explicitly introduced by Bertrand Russell, who finally embraced it under the influence of James (see esp. Russell 1921). James develops this view in tandem with the doctrines of *pragmatism* and *pluralism*. However, the relationship between radical empiricism and metaphysical pluralism in James' late philosophy is debated (see Slater 2011). For the purposes of this paper, we can understand James' neutral monism as opposed to substance dualism (i.e. the thesis that mind and matter constitute two distinct ontological domains). However, James also claims that pure experience is manifold and not reducible to an "all form" principle, clarifying that "[a]lthough for fluency's sake I myself spoke early in this article of a stuff of pure experience, I have now to say that there is no *general* stuff of which experience at large is made. There are as many stuffs as there are

When interpreted as a metaphysical view, neutral monism is the theory according to which the immediate data of experience constitute the "intrinsic nature of ultimate reality" (Stubenberg 2014: 1). In this way, it constitutes a specific solution to classic metaphysical issues and in particular to the mind-body problem, being an alternative to both the Cartesian dualism of substances and the monistic absolutization of the subject (idealism) or of the object (materialism). A fundamental precursor of this doctrine is David Hume, according to whom the *impressions* can be conceived of as either subjective or objective, depending on the context (see Hume 1888: 202). The first full-blown form of neutral monism is found in Ernst Mach's doctrine of elements. Mach argues that basic qualitative elements of experience such as hot, cold, red, etc. are neither exclusively physical nor psychological but rather *neutral*. As in James, according to Mach the grouping of the elements into the domains of physics or psychology depends on the direction of our investigation and on our practical interests.

The reference to the affinity between James' and Mach's views is significant because it leads us to problematize the interpretation of the doctrine of pure experience in metaphysical terms. In fact, Mach conceives of his theory as a *scientific* hypothesis that is aimed at dealing with the problem of the relationship between two scientific domains of inquiry – physics and psychology – and he does so in the context of a criticism of the absolute claims of metaphysics.⁵

Also concerning James' doctrine of pure experience, we are faced with the contrast between a metaphysical and a non-metaphysical interpretation of it. On one hand, James presents his view as an ultimate account of the fundamental constituents of reality. On the other hand, James' pragmatism and empiricism can be

'natures' in the things experienced" (James 1912: 25).

⁵ This point is stressed by Paolo Parrini (2017). On the contrary, Erik Banks (2003; 2010) develops a metaphysical interpretation of Mach's view and closely links it to the neutral monism of James and Russell.

conceived of in opposition to the absolute claims of metaphysics and therefore in opposition to metaphysical realism, i.e. to the idea that we can reach knowledge of an absolute reality "in itself". It is also in order to address this ambiguity that is useful to compare James' view with Husserl's phenomenology.

3. The concept of experience in phenomenology

Husserl's phenomenology is a radical inquiry into the nature of experience and has its roots in the empiricist tradition. Husserl conceives of Hume as a fundamental forerunner of phenomenology who, however, "almost sets foot upon its domain, but with blinded eyes" (Husserl 1983: 118). In fact, Husserl combines the empiricist faithfulness to phenomena with a transcendental standpoint that seeks to account for the conditions of possibility of the manifestation of phenomena. In pursuing this objective, the phenomenological inquiry into the nature of experience reveals a fundamental co-implication of subject and object.

This central aspect of the phenomenological view is enclosed in the concept of intentionality, which, as we have seen, is in accordance with James' analysis of the mind in terms of cognitive functions in the *Principles*. On the other hand, the epistemological dualism that is expressed by the concept of intentionality clashes with James' late philosophy and its critique of all forms of dualism. In particular, James' late view opposes also the functional dualism that is theorized by neokantian philosophers. According to them, "experience is indefeasibly dualistic in structure" and a functional but not substantial duality of "subject-plus-object" constitutes the minimal element of experience (James 1912: 5). However, this functional dualism is an essential aspect of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology.

This contrast between James' radical empiricism and Husserl's phenomenology emerges when we consider Husserl's account of perception in the transcendental framework of *Ideas I*. We have seen that in *Essays* James

considers the sensations as pure experiences that are neutral, i.e. neither subjective nor objective. The phenomenological account of perception also clashes with the one-sidedness of internalist representationalism on one hand and externalism or direct realism on the other hand, which conceive of the qualitative properties (colors, sounds, etc.) as, respectively, merely subjective properties of mental states or objective properties of a mind-independent world. However, the specificity of Husserl's account of perception is that it admits both "immanent" sensations and "transcendent" sensory properties and develops an analysis of the intentional correlation between them. In the transcendental framework of *Ideas I*, the perceptual act consists in the intentional animation of sensations (hyletic contents) by means of which the perceptual object, with its sensory properties, is *constituted*. This is a central aspect of the phenomenological view that seems to distance it from James' doctrine of pure experience.

This point can be also highlighted by looking at the relationship between the philosophies of Husserl and Mach, whose point of view is very close to James' radical empiricism. While stressing the influence of Mach on the genesis of phenomenology (see Fisette 2012: 53ff.), Husserl repeatedly criticizes him for not acknowledging the distinction between immanent sensations and transcendent sensory properties (Husserl 2001b: 90; see Fisette 2012: 62, 64). According to Husserl, the flaw in Mach's view is that it *reduces* – as do the British empiricists – transcendent objects to sensory contents and for this reason, despite Mach's anti-metaphysical claims, his theory is a type of phenomenalism. According to Husserl, what is missing in Mach's doctrine of elements is the theory of intentionality as correlation subjective-objective (Fisette 2012: 65). The same criticism of Mach's doctrine of neutral elements, from the standpoint of Husserl's phenomenology, can be also applied to James' doctrine of pure experience.

At the same time, from the standpoint of James' late philosophy, Husserl's "phenomenology of constitution"

can be considered as an overly intellectualist philosophy that loses contact with the experience of a concrete human being in its pragmatic relation with the others and the world. This kind of criticism of Husserl has been put forward by various authors, especially after the publication of the first volume of the *Ideas* (for e.g. in Heidegger 1992) and it can also be expressed in the terms of a pragmatist critique of the alleged intellectualism and residual dualism of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. For this reason, Wilshire (1969: 40) sees in James' pragmatism an alternative to Husserl's alleged inclination to idealism and he does so by likening James' late philosophy with the existential phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Kessler (1978) also argues that there is an "existential divergence" between the philosophies of James and Husserl and that, for this reason, James' late philosophy is closer to Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology. However, in the following pages I shall argue that a deeper look at the development of Husserl's phenomenology shows that the opposition to James' radical empiricism is not that radical and that they do have some significant points in common.

4. Genetic phenomenology

The alleged intellectualistic and dualistic aspects of Husserl's phenomenology can be seen to be in opposition to James' radical empiricism. However, I would like to show that the transition from the epistemological dualism of the *Principles* to the doctrine of pure experience, with its deconstruction of the subject-object duality, is a movement that can be seen at play also in the transition from static to genetic phenomenology. In fact, the fore-mentioned aspects of Husserl's phenomenology belong to a level of the phenomenological inquiry that Husserl himself conceives of as not "ultimate" but as "preliminary" to further developments. The investigation of the dual structure of experience, by means of the notion of intentionality, constitutes the starting point of the

phenomenological inquiry but it is also developed within a fundamental *delimitation*. This is because this inquiry abstains from the investigation of the inner temporal unfolding of the experiences (*Erlebnisse*) and considers them rather as unitary acts of perception, imagination, thought, etc. In this way, the experiences are turned into mental "states" that are intentionally directed towards objects. This level of inquiry is what Husserl calls "static phenomenology" and that methodologically precedes "genetic phenomenology" (see Husserl 2001: 644 ff.), which investigates the deeper temporal and processual nature of the stream of experiences. Husserl explicitly distinguishes between static and genetic phenomenology in his late works, but he implicitly presents this distinction already in *Ideas I*, where he claims that: "The level of consideration to which we are confined [...] abstains from descending into the obscure depths of the ultimate consciousness which constitutes all [...] temporality as belongs to mental processes, and instead takes mental processes as they offer themselves as unitary temporal processes in reflection on what is immanent." (Husserl 1983: 171). The subsequent broadening of the inquiry in genetic phenomenology "deepens" the analysis of the dual structure of experience, investigating the *genesis* of the intentional correlation between subject and object.

At this point, it is useful to compare the genetic analysis of experience in phenomenology with James' doctrine of pure experience. In fact, from the standpoint of genetic phenomenology, at the heart of experience we find a flow of "primal impressions" (*Urimpressionen*) that are neither subjective nor objective, being the primal dimension on the basis of which the subject and the object are co-constituted in reciprocal dependence. This is because, according to Husserl, the subject of experience is not a pre-constituted substance but it comes to be self-constituted in the process of constituting objects. Genetic phenomenology investigates the "genesis of the constitution" (Husserl 2001, 644) that is at the same time the genesis of the "monadic individuality" (Husserl 2001: 635). The notion of "monad" refers to the concrete subject of experience, which "necessarily has the form of

the unity of becoming, of a unity of unflagging *genesis*" (Husserl 2001: 635). Therefore, according to Husserl – and in contrast to an alleged residual Cartesianism in his view – the subject of experience is not a substance but an ongoing process that emerges in correlation with objectivity in the process of experience. On this point, Husserl agrees with James who, already in the *Principles*, tends to reduce the subject to a "vanishing point" (Dewey 1940: 589; see Schutz 1941: 443). In particular, in the *Essays* James clarifies that, when claiming that "consciousness" does not exist, he means "only to deny that the word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function" (James 1912: 5).

Therefore, in the light of the genetic inquiry in phenomenology, Husserl seems to admit a "neutral" dimension of experience, which precedes the functional distinction into subject and object. The flow of impressions can be conceived of as a primal dimension of experience that precedes the subject-object duality, as in James' concept of "pure experience". In this way, by comparing Husserl's genetic phenomenology with James' doctrine of pure experience, we see that both lead to the deconstruction of the subject-object duality, finding at its heart a process of co-emergence of the subject and the object of experience. This is an outcome of Husserl's phenomenology that is stressed, for instance, by Francisco Varela, who argues that the phenomenological reduction "does not sustain the basic subject-object duality but opens into a field of phenomena where it becomes less and less obvious how to distinguish between subject and object (this is what Husserl called the 'fundamental correlation')." (Varela 1996: 339). For this reason, Husserl's phenomenology "does not seek to oppose the subjective to the objective, but to move beyond the split into their fundamental correlation." (Varela 1996: 339)⁶.

However, at this point I would like to consider also some significant differences between James' and Husserl's views of the impressional core of experience. First of all, James seems to conceive of pure experiences as the object of an immediate acquaintance or intuition that precedes any theoretical reflection. It is this reflection that introduces the duality of knower-known. On the contrary, Husserl finds the impressional dimension of experience through a regressive analysis that takes, as its starting point, the dual structure of intentionality. The phenomenological inquiry begins with epochè and reduction and therefore with a detachment from the ordinary and pragmatic "immersion" in the *lifeworld*. The latter concept, which is central in Husserl's late works and is very consonant to James' pragmatism, is the outcome and not the starting point of the transcendental phenomenological inquiry. Yet, we can say that, despite this difference in method, both Husserl and James reach a similar outcome, finding in the qualitative core of experience a neutral dimension from which the subject and the object are co-constituted in the cognitive process.

5. Form and matter

In the light of the comparison of James' view with Husserl's phenomenology, we can now look back at the issue of the relationship between the doctrine of pure experience and metaphysics. We can do so by asking if Husserl's view concerning the impressional genesis of experience can be conceived of in terms of a metaphysical form of neutral monism. I shall argue that it is not so and that the motivations against this conclusion can also be applied to James' doctrine of pure experience.

In developing the phenomenological analysis of experience, Husserl takes the Kantian conception of the cognitive process in terms of an essential intertwining of form and matter. As is known, in Kant's view, the knowledge of a certain phenomenon requires the synthetic unification of a manifold of sensations through

⁶ Concerning Varela's acknowledgement of a pragmatic dimension of phenomenology see Pace Giannotta (2017).

functions of subjectivity. For this reason, Kant denies the possibility of attaining knowledge of pure *matter* that is not structured by the *forms* of our cognitive faculties. The appearance of a sensible world is not an immediate acknowledgment of a pure "given", because certain features of our sensibility and understanding necessarily give form to sensory matters. Husserl takes this conception of experience as an intertwining of form and matter, developing it in his own way.

Within genetic phenomenology, this interplay of form and matter is investigated at the fundamental level of time-consciousness – within an inquiry that was deeply influenced by James' chapter in *Principles* on the "stream of thought". Husserl highlights the fact that the field of consciousness has a certain structure. In fact, each moment of an experience is constituted by a new primal impression that is intrinsically joined to two primal forms of intentionality: retentions and protentions (Husserl 2001a: 115ff.). By developing this analysis of the temporal unity of consciousness, Husserl agrees with the Jamesian concept of the "specious present" and with its account of it in terms of *fringes*. Husserl argues that it is in virtue of retentions and protentions that the *living present* is not limited to the now-point but has a temporal "thickness", as it includes the retention of past impressions and the protention towards expected ones (see Gurwitsch 1946; Zahavi 2010: 320 ff.). In the light of this analysis, the sensory matters turn out to be always given within a temporal *horizon*, which requires the intentionality of retentions and protentions. Primal impression, retention and protention constitute the non-independent parts of a whole, i.e. the continuous flow of consciousness. This means that in Husserl's account of time-consciousness the primal, qualitative dimension of experience is always structured through the proto-intentional animation of the impressions. I would like to stress an implication of this analysis that is shared by both James' and Husserl's views, against reductionist empiricism. That is: we do not find pure impressions of "redness", "coldness", "heaviness", etc. but an enduring flow of these

impressions that are continuously intertwined with retentions and protentions. The "pure" impression becomes a limit that we achieve by analysing the concrete flow of experience, which is constituted by sensory matters that are "formed" by the intentionality of retentions and protentions. This is a first level of the intertwining of form and matter in phenomenology that goes against the possibility of turning the sensory matter into an absolute, ontological domain that would be known as it is "in itself" (i.e. metaphysical realism).

The essential interplay between form and matter is also present at higher levels of the constitution of objectivity, in relation to the concrete constitution of the subject of experience. In the context of the genetic phenomenological inquiry, Husserl develops a conception of the embodiment of the field of consciousness, acknowledging the essential role of bodily structures and functions in constituting the form and the matter of experience. As is known, according to the phenomenological doctrine of eidetic seeing, when perceiving individual objects and events we can grasp essences that are arranged in a hierarchy of genus and species (e.g. the relationship between a certain shade of red, the genus "color" and its relationship of bilateral foundation with spatial extension). In the light of this doctrine, the "given" is not "amorphous" but has a structure that is expressed by material a priori judgments. In the context of genetic phenomenology, Husserl argues that these material a priori judgements are based on the sensory intuition of a "concrete subjectivity" and, for this reason, they are "contingent a priori" (Husserl 1969: 26). This is because the capability to grasp the eidetic truths expressed by material a priori judgments is based on the bodily "make-up of the experiencing subject" (Husserl 1989: 56). Our capacity to perceive, for e.g., sounds and colors, depends on this makeup of the human body (see Husserl 1969: 26-27). In fact, we must acknowledge that the sensory matters that lie at the basis of the constitution of objects are relative to specific senses, which vary between different animal species. Following Thomas Nagel's famous

example of the bat (Nagel 1974), we can point to the experience of other beings with different senses, without being able to acquire any intuitive knowledge about it. Nagel refers to the fact that third-person knowledge of the physiology of echolocation doesn't give us knowledge of "what it is like" to perceive through this perceptual system. Precisely, what we cannot know is the subjective, felt qualitative experience that is associated with this form of perception. From the standpoint of Husserl's phenomenology, in the light of its theory of the cognitive role of intuition, the reason why we cannot know what it is like to be a bat is that we cannot give an "intuitive filling" to the third-person description of the bat's perception by means of echolocation. Husserl puts forward this thesis when referring to the case of a blind person who cannot have any "intuitive clarity about the sense of color" on the basis of a third-person knowledge about the process of vision (Husserl 1999, 63; see also p. 30). This analysis thus reveals another level of the intertwining of form and matter in the process of the co-constitution of subject and object, which is based on certain features of the bodily constitution of a living being. In this way, in contrast to the metaphysical absolutization of the elements of experience that makes of them elements of an absolute reality, genetic phenomenology acknowledges certain transcendental structures that make possible our experience and that depend on specific features of the living body.⁷

Therefore, there is a peculiar circularity in the process of co-constitution, because constituted features of a living being are conditions of the possibility of the constitution of objects. This circularity is assumed as fundamental by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose notions such as *flesh* and *chiasm* (Merleau-Ponty 1968) refer to the living body as locus of an intertwining of subject and object.⁸ Kessler (1978) stresses the closeness between

Merleau-Ponty's and James' philosophy, by opposing the concept of "pragmatic body", which he finds in these two authors, to Husserl's concept of "transcendental ego". However, various scholars have also stressed the closeness between Merleau-Ponty's and Husserl's phenomenology (see Zahavi 2002), finding already in Husserl's investigation of the living body a "phenomenology of the flesh" (Bernet 2013). According to these readings, Merleau-Ponty's investigation of the embodiment of consciousness is continuous with Husserl's inquiry.

In particular, Merleau-Ponty develops the phenomenological analysis of the role of the body in the process of co-constitution of subject and object by means of the concept of *body schema*. Samantha Matherne (2016) argues that, with this notion in mind, Merleau-Ponty develops, in a non-intellectualist direction, the Kantian doctrine of *schematism* (Matherne 2016: 195). Doing so, Merleau-Ponty redefines the Kantian notions of "transcendental" and "a priori" in an embodied direction, by conceiving of them as the expressions of "the formal features of our facticity, without which there would be no experience." (Matherne 2016, 217). Merleau-Ponty, therefore, stresses the dependence of transcendental conditions on contingent features of our bodily constitution, seeing in them formal features of our facticity that make possible the manifestation of phenomena and, in so, agreeing with Husserl's concept of the *contingent a priori*.

According to this direction of inquiry that is present in Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the qualitative and "neutral" core of experience is constituted by sensory matters that are necessarily

⁷ On this point, see especially the analyses concerning the role of the body in the constitution in *Ideas II* (Husserl 1989).

⁸ This circularity is also placed at the heart of the

enactive approach of Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), who combine Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology with the relationism of the Madhyamaka philosophy. The central thesis of the enactive approach in this original formulation is that "Knower and known, mind and world, stand in relation to each other through mutual specification or dependent coorigination." (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991: 150).

structured by forms that depend on the embodiment of a living being. In my opinion, this inquiry on the intertwining of form and matter of experience complements James' radical empiricism, thus leading to its development in empirical and not metaphysical terms. This is because, in the light of this analysis, we cannot conceive of "pure experiences" as the elements of an absolute reality that would be known as it is "in itself".

Conclusion

The comparison between Husserl's genetic development of phenomenology and James' radical empiricism has revealed significant points of contact between them. In fact, they both find at the heart of experience a qualitative core that precedes and is at the basis of the functional distinction between subject and object. However, a certain interpretation of James' view as a metaphysics of pure experience could lead us to conceive of it as a form of neutral monism that attains knowledge of ultimate reality. On the contrary, the phenomenological investigation of the relationship between form and matter at the fundamental level of the co-constitution of subject and object shows that sensory matters do not constitute a pure given, being always structured through forms that depend on the concrete constitution of a living being. In this way, Husserl's genetic phenomenology can complement James' doctrine of pure experience leading us to develop it in empirical and not metaphysical terms.

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