

JAMES AND KANT ON EMPIRICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

A serious confrontation between Kant and Pragmatism should take into account their epistemological reflection on psychology, that is to say the relation between philosophy and psychology. In this respect, in the *Principles of Psychology* (1890), it is clear James's intention to keep separate (*divide et impera!*) empirical psychology and metaphysics. As known, Kant sharply distinguishes empirical psychology from rational psychology and metaphysics. He first criticizes rational psychology as "a science surpassing all powers of human reason", and then states that empirical psychology cannot be a "natural science proper". There are interesting criticisms made by James particularly to Kant's conception of the "I" as a logical function, meant to question Kant's dualistic view (phenomenon/noumenon) and to justify his substitution of the *present passing Thought* for the *transcendental Ego*. At a closer reading, James's main interest is in epistemology and that is the reason why he is in a continuous dialogue with Kant's *First Critique* and overall with post-Kantians interpretations of it. James tries to give a phenomenal description of the unity of the self in order to make the postulation of a noumenal Ego, at least in psychology, a useless element. Moreover, his effort to offer a thoroughly sensational description of consciousness and its reflective aspect is to be considered as an attempt to correct the original sin of 'mental atomism' upon which both rationalism and classic empiricism psychology relied. Still in later and more philosophical works, he will be insisting on the anti-intellectualistic or sensible existence of *conjunctive relations* as the way to radically renew empiricism. My intention is to offer a brief overview of Kant's critiques of psychology (following D.E. Leary's interpretation) and then to focus upon James's interpretation and criticisms of the German philosopher to focus interesting common issues and great differences. Getting the point of the distance between James's empiricism and Kant's transcendentalism, that is following James's criticisms to Kantian epistemology, I think it is possible to understand better James's conception of the relation between philosophy and psychology and therefore the roots of his doctrine of radical empiricism.