MATTS 24 Feb 2023

Notes on wall work: ‘Door Exercise (Standing)’ 1910 (*A&L*, pp 104–5)

Give directions ‘all together, one after the other’ (*Use of Self*, Victor Gollancz 1985: pp. 42 footnote and 68)

Train yourself to attend to the end of an activity and notice when your attention jumps to the next thing prematurely. We talk of having a ‘butterfly mind’. The passage below uses the analogy of a bird flying from perch to perch “aware of the perch rather than the passage”.

Extract from ‘Alex through the looking-glass’ (*Statnews* September 2021, Vol. 11, Issue 3: 27-28).

Maybe Alexander [was] similarly gifted with the “extraordinary sensuous and introspective acuity” attributed to the great William James:

He [James] was highly gifted in the art of describing consciousness. He had an extraordinary sensuous and introspective acuity. He could capture obscure feelings and fleeting impressions which slipped through the courser nets of other observers. Few men, even poets, have had a greater capacity for noting and conveying by graphic description that quality *sui generis* [‘of its own kind’] which each moment of immediate experience possesses for itself.

This capacity shows itself throughout James’s entire work. It was not accidental that he should have been a nativist in his view of the perception of space.[[1]](#footnote-1) He was reluctant to reduce distance to motor experience because he was vividly aware of the unique characters of out-thereness, depth, or cavernousness, which, whatever their genesis, simply are not the same as any sensation, memory, or judgment of motion. Similarly . . . [t]ime was to James the intrinsic quality of pastness, the all-at-once-ness of the immediate present, the about-to-be of the impending future, of the continuous transition from moment to moment. A further example is afforded by James’s alertness to somatic sensations – his discriminating discernment of the organic components of experience, supplied by muscles, tendons, joints, or by the circulatory and respiratory systems. The “omissions” of which psychologists had been guilty were mainly due, James thought, to their failure to free themselves from the habits of practical common sense. This latter attitude selects what is “important” and passes over the rest. It dwells on objects, crucial events, and focal points, neglecting the passage from one of these to another. **The practical habituated mind flies from perch to perch, and is aware of the perch rather than of the passage. . . . The discovery of James is that these transitive states, despite their obscurity, are none the less *there*, for the sensitive and practised eye. They are not only there in themselves, but they qualify their *termini* – both the has-just-been and the soon-about-to-be.** (Perry, R. B. (1938). *In the Spirit of William James*. New Haven: Yale University Press: 80–82.)

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1. I.e. our perception of space is an innate capacity rather than acquired by learning. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)