

## Alexander M. Klein

### THE RISE OF EMPIRICISM: WILLIAM JAMES, THOMAS HILL GREEN, AND THE STRUGGLE OVER PSYCHOLOGY

The concept of empiricism evokes both a historical tradition and a set of philosophical theses. The theses are usually understood to have been developed by Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. But these figures did not use the term “empiricism,” and they did not see themselves as united by a shared epistemology into one school of thought. My dissertation analyzes the debate that elevated the concept of empiricism (and of an empiricist tradition) to prominence in English-language philosophy.

In the 1870s and '80s a lively debate about psychology emerged. Neo-Kantian idealists criticized the very idea that the mind can be studied scientifically. A group of philosopher-psychologists responded, often in *Mind*. They were among the first to call themselves “empiricists,” arguing that psychology could provide a scientific basis for philosophical progress.

Idealists held that empirical psychology depended on premises developed by Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. These premises were allegedly absurd because they rendered ideas of extension, as well as other ideas crucial to natural science, unreal. Those who wanted to advance psychology towards becoming a legitimate science were forced to engage these philosophical attacks, while at the same time to develop empirical theories that could successfully explain some characteristics of experience. I show how James’s theory of space perception accomplished both tasks.

In developing this theory, James found he had to reject the Lockean notion that reality is associated with passively-registered sensations. James also abandoned Berkeley and Hume’s claim that ideas are ultimately derived from atomic sensations. Instead, James presented experimental evidence that sensation is a continuous stream. The mind must actively parse this stream if it is to gain a coherent representation of its environment. I argue that James’s stream-of-thought thesis served as a presupposition of his entire psychology. The thesis showed how the labor of investigating the mind could be divided between philosophers and scientists, and in a manner sensitive to the concerns of both. The stream thesis also provided a scientific basis for a new philosophical empiricism that, I argue, has a hidden legacy in the history of analytic philosophy.

---

Elisabeth A. Lloyd (Chair)

Karen Hanson

---

Cheryl Misak

Frederick Schmitt

---

Joan Weiner