

DID NORMAN KEMP SMITH INFLUENCE WHITEHEAD?

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I examine the connection between Kemp Smith's theory of knowledge and Whitehead's later theory of perception from *Symbolism. Its Meaning and Effects*. I aim to determine whether Kemp Smith influenced Whitehead or not. I conclude that there is a commonality of concerns between the two philosophers, that Whitehead influenced Kemp Smith, but that the latter did not influence Whitehead.

KEYWORDS: Whitehead, Kemp Smith, perception, theory of knowledge, sense-data, symbolic reference.

Norman Kemp Smith was the principal responsible for Whitehead's appointment as a Gifford lecturer². We know also that he was among the only two persons, together with A.E. Taylor, to attend to all of Whitehead's lectures³. His interest in Whitehead's philosophy had been aroused by the latter's works on the philosophy of nature, which Kemp Smith knew very well. He wrote, for that matter, an excellent paper⁴ on Whitehead's philosophy of nature. Whitehead's influence is also manifestly present in *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory of Knowledge*⁵, alongside that of Alexander, Ward, Broad or Stout. But my reason for dealing with Kemp Smith's philosophy is not his being influenced by Whitehead; on the

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² Ford 1984, 79.

³ Lowe 1990, 250.

⁴ "Whitehead's Philosophy of Nature", from now on PN.

⁵ From now on TK.

contrary, what motivates me is the acknowledgement made by Whitehead to *TK* in the Preface to his *Symbolism*⁶. In this paper I try to evaluate the manner in which Whitehead availed himself of Kemp Smith's contributions in elaborating his own theory of perception from *S*, and try to determine whether he was influence by Kemp Smith's views and, if yes, to what degree.

Kemp Smith's Reading of Whitehead

Kemp Smith's *PN* is an excellent rendition of Whitehead's thought, avoiding the technical aspects of the method of extensive abstraction. Kemp Smith privileges in his reading Whitehead's criticism of the theories of bifurcated nature, and the new ontology on which his novel concept of nature is based. Not surprisingly, he quotes more from *CN* than from *PNK*. In his discussion of the bifurcation of nature, we see an anticipation of chapters II, III and IV from *TK*. That is to say that Kemp Smith equates the theories of bifurcation of nature with theories of representative perception, and focuses on this epistemological issue: "the doctrine which Whitehead thus entitles the bifurcation of nature ... largely coincides with what is more usually termed the doctrine of representative perception"⁷. From this, it follows that a criticism of the bifurcation of nature is also a criticism of the doctrine of representative perception; so, insofar as Kemp Smith criticizes this doctrine, he sees himself as walking along Whitehead on the same path.

This doctrine, as dealt with by Kemp Smith, says that the mind does not have direct access to the outer world, but only to its own ideas (or perceptions, impressions etc), which are representations of the outer world. We perceive the outer world in terms of sense-data constructs which correspond to objects existing outside the mind. This epistemological thesis is connected to an ontological position that derives from the Aristotelian substantialism. Things are substances supporting attributes, or qualities,

⁶ "The author's acknowledgements are due to *Locke's Theory of Knowledge and its Historical Relations* by Professor James Gibson, to *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory of Knowledge* by Professor Norman Kemp Smith, and to *Scepticism and Animal Faith* by George Santayana".

⁷ *PN*, p. 205.

and qualities are what can be perceived. A second distinction was added to that between substance and quality, the one between primary and secondary qualities: some qualities really belong to the real objects (shape, movement, extension etc.) while other are the product of the mind (color, taste, smell, sound). The secondary qualities do not exist in the exterior world, but only inside the mind, where they appear as a consequence of things' acting upon the mind. When these two theses are brought together, as they have been during the 17th Century by such philosophers as Descartes, Galileo, Locke, a connection is established between sense-data and secondary qualities. On Kemp Smith's reading of the subject, sense-data and secondary qualities are identical. (This need not be the case: one may argue that secondary qualities are characteristics or *correlata* of sense-data⁸.) Thus, sense-data borrow the *subjective* character attributed to these qualities⁹. Kemp Smith's account of the theory of representative perception is mostly a reading of Locke's theory of perception in terms of sense-data (the term had been recently introduced by Russell).

Kemp Smith dedicates a lot of space to the criticism of this doctrine. His arguments are mostly attempts to show that it is inconsistent, since the arguments in favor of it are based on assumptions that contradict the conclusion. Whitehead, unlike Kemp Smith, considered the doctrine, in its best formulation, perfectly logical. He even said that the first step in order to criticize it is to present it as logically flawless, and then to show that experience does not have the characteristics attributed to it by the doctrine. Whitehead's complex criticism is not reviewed by Kemp Smith, who prefers to carry the discussion in his own terms. In any case, he agrees fundamentally with Whitehead that the whole ontological underpinnings of current natural science have to undergo serious revision.

The revision in question turns nature into something "extraordinarily different from nature as defined in terms of the classical physics. While less tidy, with all sorts of loose ends, it is allowed to have more content"¹⁰. Whitehead's "refusal to countenance any theory of

⁸ This is G.F. Stout's position at some moment. See Stout (1903).

⁹ Russell, although maintained the subjective character of *sensa*, did not consider them mental, but only subject-dependent. Russell is not even once quoted in *TK*.

¹⁰ *PN*, p. 217.

psychic additions to the object known in perception”¹¹ pushes back into nature color, smell, sound, taste and the like, and leaves to the mind only the awareness of such ‘*sensa*’. This is done by replacing the classical concept of nature (as distribution of matter in space-time) with one which conceives of it as “at each moment an all-comprehensive event within which we discriminate constituent events”¹².

Kemp Smith whole-heartedly welcomes Whitehead’s new ontological category of events¹³, but expresses doubts as to the clearness of the distinction between events and objects, insofar as *sensa* have to be counted among objects. Nowhere, says Kemp Smith, does Whitehead discuss explicitly whether *sensa* can be classified as objects or not. But why shouldn’t *sensa* be objects? Kemp Smith discusses the issue referring to sounds. The view that sounds are objects implies that they never come into existence or pass out of existence; consequently, “I may be using some of the self-identical vowel or other sounds of which Julius Caesar availed himself during his campaign in Gaul”¹⁴. Also, Whitehead’s conception would imply that “the same sounds can be in more than one place at a time”¹⁵. As we see, Kemp Smith tries to present Whitehead’s view as being counter-intuitive. But his objections are based on a misunderstanding: he understands Whitehead as claiming that objects are “persistent and recurrent” entities¹⁶, entities that last during the whole span of time. Kemp Smith reasons thus as if objects were particulars (which cannot be intermittent, nor located in more than one place at a time); only on this assumption Whitehead’s view is counter-intuitive.

In reality, there is nothing counter-intuitive about it. For Whitehead objects are not in space and time, or rather they are so only in a derivative way, as being involved in events. Yes, I do “use” the same vowel as Caesar:

¹¹ *CN*, p. 29.

¹² *PN*, p. 199.

¹³ Although other philosophers spoke also of events (e.g. Green, McTaggart), none of them had given them a technical meaning before Whitehead.

¹⁴ *PN*, p. 212.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the same object ingresses in two different events, which are the utterances of the vowel. But my utterance of the vowel is not the same as Caesar's. And no, Whitehead's conception does not involve the multiple location of an object, but its multiple ingestion; the events in which the object ingresses are in several different places at a time, not the object itself. Thus, Kemp Smith's criticism is misguided. However, he is willing to admit the truth of Whitehead's doctrine if "we limit the discussion to the physical field, as ordinarily conceived"¹⁷. That is, Whitehead may be right when it comes to scientific objects, but not when it comes to sense-objects. Kemp Smith believes that "so long as the argument concerns only the secondary qualities and such objects as a melody, there are so many difficulties, and so little specific evidence, that decisive conclusions can hardly be looked for".¹⁸

Kemp Smith's reading of Whitehead, although very sympathetic and careful, rests thus on a fundamental misunderstanding concerning the nature of persistence in general, and of sense-objects in particular¹⁹. If this misunderstanding was not the decisive reason for him to deny the status of objects to sensa, it was none the less one of the reasons. However, Kemp Smith is a convert to Whitehead's novel ontology of events, adopting enthusiastically this new category. In this, Whitehead's influence on Kemp Smith is powerful and evident.

Whitehead's Reading of Kemp Smith

There is considerably less to be said about Whitehead's reading of Kemp Smith. However, we know for sure that he read both *TK* and *PN*.

His knowledge of the latter is proven by a letter to Kemp Smith from January 1924. Whitehead expresses there general agreement with Kemp Smith's rendition of his conception. He praises Kemp Smith for insisting upon the fact that he conceived of the world as being "infinitely fuller and richer in different types of entities than ... current philosophy allows".²⁰ There is also one point of disagreement: Whitehead notices that

¹⁷ *PN*, p. 213.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ He has an endurantist understanding of persistence.

²⁰ *UL*, p. 339.

Kemp Smith misinterprets his ‘objects’ as being in time, everlasting. He objects that, to him, objects (like *sensa*) are not in time “in the primary sense of the phrase”²¹. Finally, Whitehead asks Kemp Smith whether he is writing his *TK*, and expresses hope to “profit by it”²² (339).

The first sign that he indeed profited of Kemp Smith’s book is his acknowledgement to it in the preface to *S*. I will discuss later whether there really is a trace of Kemp Smith’s influence in *S*. But Whitehead continued to hold *TK* in esteem even later. A reference to it is to be found in *PR*²³. This time, the reference is important because it sheds light on what Whitehead took it to be the subject-matter of Kemp Smith’s book. In his *Discussions and Applications* of the categorial scheme, Whitehead says that “The unravelling of the complex interplay between the two modes of perception—causal efficacy and presentational immediacy—is one main problem of the theory of perception”²⁴. This affirmation is accompanied by a foot-note which joins together his *S* and Kemp Smith’s *TK*: “Cf. my Barbour-Page lectures, *Symbolism, Its Meaning and Effect*, delivered at the University of Virginia, April, 1927 (New York: Macmillan, 1927; Cambridge University Press, 1928). Another discussion of this question is there undertaken, with other illustrations. Cf. also Professor Norman Kemp Smith’s *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory of Knowledge*, Macmillan, 1924”²⁵. Thus, Whitehead seems to have read Kemp Smith from the angle of his own interests: he appreciates that Kemp Smith discusses in *TK* the problem of the symbolic reference between the two modes of perception. He seems to have found in *TK* something really close to his own concerns, since he sends the reader to *TK*, and not to other works of epistemology, such as Broad’s *Perception, Physics and Reality*, a book read and appreciated by Whitehead, or T. P. Nunn’s papers which advanced views similar in some respects to those of Whitehead (and to which he acknowledges debts in the *Preface to PR*).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 339.

²³ This is the last reference to Kemp Smith that I have been able to find in Whitehead’s works.

²⁴ *PR*, p. 121.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, foot note.

An Insight into Kemp Smith's Theory of Knowledge

The general picture of Kemp Smith's proposed theory of perception is as follows. Space, time, and the categories are fundamental features of the reality. Space and time are directly contemplated, by means of a cognitive process called « intuiting ». The apprehension of space and time is made possible by the categorial thinking, by which the relational forms underlying space and time are apprehended. The two most important categories, without which the intuiting of space and time is not possible, are that of totality (or whole and part) and that of necessitation (what causality has in common with logical implication). Other important categories are substance and causality. Space, time and the categories constitute thus the public, objective, independent world. But this reality is apprehended by each individual, in terms of *sensa*, in a perspective suited to his or her practical needs. Thus, if sense-perception is to be of any help to man, “it must be, not a contemplative apprehension of things as they are *in themselves*, ... but an apprehension of them *in relation to the self*”²⁶. Sense-experience is primarily a practical device, making man's adaptation to his environment possible, and each individual has a private access to the world, from a perspective defined by *sensa*²⁷:

Our conscious experience is thus a function of two distinct factors... Through the constant factors [*i.e.*, space, time and categories] a public world is revealed; through the *sensa*, in terms of which alone this public world can be actually experienced, it is apprehended in a perspective suited to the individual's practical needs²⁸.

As for the *sensa*, they have “a quite definite *biological* function, that of defining the perspective necessary for the purposes of practical adaptation”²⁹. Having a biological function, they have to be rooted in the

²⁶ *TK*, p. 194.

²⁷ The perspectival character of *sensa* is theorized for the first time by Alexander, to whom Kemp Smith owes enormously.

²⁸ *TK*, p. 187.

²⁹ *TK*, p. 13.

evolutionary history of man. That is, Nature allowed man to have sense-experience in order that he can react to those features of the environment on which his survival depends. It is important at this point to emphasize the biological approach that Kemp Smith takes to *sensa*. If *sensa* exist, it is because at some moment in the adaptation history of living organisms, those who could react to a complex environment faster than others gained a substantial survival advantage over the rest of the competitors. *Sensa* are a simplifying device serving to reduce the complexity of the environment to manageable proportions. This, at least, is what Kemp Smith's general argument seems to imply. And, as such, this evolutionary explanation plays a central part in Kemp Smith's theory of *sensa*. To complete this picture it must be said that Kemp Smith insists in many places on the realist thesis that *knowledge is contemplative*; the human mind does not produce anything while knowing, it just takes account of the Nature's self-revealing.

Kemp Smith's Ontology of Sensa

I will now discuss Kemp Smith's doctrine of the ontological nature of *sensa*. While examining it, we have to bear in mind that the philosopher tries to revise the concept of *sensa* as subjective, private entities.

Identifying secondary qualities with *sensa*, Kemp Smith considers however that they are not subjective, but genuinely objective entities. Are *sensa* private entities? Several answers are possible. The subjectivist would affirm that they are, indeed, private, as they are subjective. For the naïve realist they would be qualities of the independently real objects. Waving these answers, Kemp Smith considers that *sensa* are, indeed, private, but objective. They are private not because they fall outside nature, that is, in mind, but because the epistemic access to them is private: they are accessible only to one observer. Two different observers cannot have the same *sensa*, not any more than they can taste the same piece of chocolate.

If sense-data are objective entities, they must belong to nature. But how can they be physical? Aren't they rather psychical in nature? Aren't they mental? Kemp Smith's answer is that there aren't any good reasons to exclude *sensa* from the realm of the physical. This domain is larger than the domain of the material. If *sensa* are not material, that doesn't mean that they are not physical. They are "events, conditioned by physical, physiological

and possibly also ... psychical factors³⁰.

But why should *sensa* be events? To answer that they are transitory would not be enough, since one might reply that it is our awareness of them which is temporary. They go in and out of experience, one might say, but that doesn't imply their going in and out of existence. Sense-data are events because Kemp Smith adopts Whitehead's distinction between events and objects, and holds - as we saw - that they cannot be objects. That is, sense-data are not universals, but particulars.

On that account, perceptual experience is not an awareness of some representations of real things, but includes an awareness of some objective, private events, ontologically dependent of other physical and physiological events (maybe also of some psychical events). Thus, for example, the heat that I sense when putting my hand into fire is an event depending on the physical event of fire burning, of my hand's entering into the fire, and on the physiological events of which my nervous system's functioning consists. The heat of the fire comes into being when the fire touches my hand, and perishes when the flames do not touch my hand anymore.

But, if sense-data thus generated are to be components of nature, they must exist in space and time. That is, they must have spatial and temporal extension. The problem is that they really don't. Kemp Smith offers three reasons for which *sensa* cannot have extension. First, *sensa* being conditioned by antecedent physical and physiological conditions, a long chain of processes and, maybe, of entities interpose between them and things; therefore, *sensa* can't be qualities *inherent* in the physical objects which are the origin of the chain. Secondly, if *sensa* were extended, then the space perceived would be not the real space, but a copy or a projection of it, and that would mean a fall back into subjectivism. Thirdly, space and time cannot be sensed. Sense-data are our most precious allies in the perception of space and time; nevertheless, we do not sense space or time: we intuit them. As Kemp Smith holds, we perceive space *in terms of sensa*, but not *through sensa*. The human cognition relies not only on the faculty of sensing, which provides us with *sensa*, but also on a non-sensory intuition, infused by categorial thinking. This intuition gives us space and time as

³⁰ TK, p. 71.

public structures, essential constituents of reality. How, then, does it happen that we perceive space as colored and *sensa* as extended?

If sense-data are perceived as having extension, it is because intuiting and sensing somehow interfere (together with categorial thinking). Kemp Smith maintains that

the cerebral processes conditioning our human sense-experience will consist in the concatenated interplay, on the one hand, of the three types of processes which condition sensing, intuiting, and categorial thinking, and, on the other hand, of these three types of processes with those other processes which condition *sensa*³¹.

Now, Kemp Smith's insistence that sense-data are not extended and that, when we attribute to them some spatial position, we are definitely in error, strengthens even more the crucial difficulty: if sense-data do not have extension, how can they belong to the order of Nature? If sense-data are physical, without being material, how can we conceive of such an immaterial event? One way of accommodating our puzzles is to interpret Kemp Smith's *sensa* by means of recent categories conceptualized by analytic philosophers. We know that *sensa* are events, ontologically dependent, epistemically private, but objective. They might be better understood, then, as tropes (abstract particulars), since there is general agreement among trope-theorists that events are just a kind of tropes³². The only thing that distinguishes *sensa*-tropes from other types, is that they are dependent both on the object perceived, and on the perceiver's physiology, and that they are epistemically private. Their being private is a feature left unexplained and, perhaps, unexplainable. Thus, one might say that Kemp Smith introduces a trope-theoretical account of sense-data in order to avoid representationalism about perception. Contrary to post-Quinean philosophers obsessed with parsimony, Kemp Smith was not bothered by the fact that he accepted in his ontology universals, concrete particulars, and tropes. If being objected that his ontology is redundant, he would have

³¹ TK, p. 224.

³² This is notably the opinion of Bennett (1988) and his followers.

answered, like Whitehead, that reality is far richer in kinds of entities than what we are able to conceptualize, and that the three ontological categories that he explicitly admits are only what is necessary for a realistic account of knowledge.

Sense-data make up, then, a kind of image, which is private to each perceiver, but not subjective. This image, adequate to each individual's immediate situation and needs, exists in nature just like a painting which we contemplate. The term "painting" is perhaps not well chosen: it is more like a synesthetic three-dimensional hologram. But, unlike any holographic image, which is in regular cases a reproduction of some part of nature, the *sensa*-image is itself a part of nature and is not a reproduction of anything.

Kemp Smith's doctrine of perception and *sensa* bears direct relevance to his conception of nature. Just like Whitehead, he is interested in bridging the ontological gap between the nature of natural science and the nature of sense-perception. Just like Alexander, he maintains that space, time and the categories form the public structures of the world, that *sensa* define perspectives suited for the individual's practical needs, and that the sense-images are not in any sense mental (they neither depend on the mind, nor are 'in' the mind). Unlike Whitehead, Kemp Smith holds that *sensa* are event-tropes, appearing and perishing. *Sensa* are creations of nature, serving at the same time to the apprehension of nature³³.

Kemp Smith's 'Idealist' Cosmology

Kemp Smith's main aim in *TK* is to provide a realist epistemological foundation for an 'idealistic' cosmology. The cosmological vision is only vaguely suggested in a few pages. Apparently, it was to be developed in a second volume, which was never written. But the brief sketch offered might give us some insight into Whitehead's reasons for referring to Kemp Smith's book. Before trying to formulate the essentials of Kemp Smith's position, I should comment on his use of the phrase 'idealism'.

Normally, by this term is understood a philosophical position which maintains that reality is somehow mind-dependent, mind-coordinated, or

³³ Kemp Smith maintains, for that matter, that the brain must have two different functions: one responsible for the generation of the *sensa*, the other supporting their perception.

mind-correlated³⁴. As such, idealism opposes realism, which affirms basically that the mind doesn't condition in any way the reality. Of course, these characterizations are matter of debate. In Kemp Smith's own time, idealism was understood mostly by reference to Bradley's and Bosanquet's absolute idealism, that is, to a theory which stated that reality consists of experience, but not the finite experience of any person. To contextualize further, I will note that the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* said that

Idealism as a philosophical doctrine conceives of knowledge or experience as a process in which the two factors of subject and object stand in a relation of entire interdependence on each other as warp and woof. Apart from the activity of the self or subject in sensory reaction, memory and association, imagination, judgment and inference, there can be no world of objects.

Kemp Smith does not comply with these uses. For him, the term "idealism" covers "all those philosophies which agree in maintaining that spiritual values have a determining voice in the ordering of the universe"³⁵. The central contention of idealism is, according to Kemp Smith, that "spiritual values can be credited as operating on a more than planetary, that is, on a cosmic scale"³⁶. Moreover, idealism does not oppose realism, but "naturalism", which is the conception according to which "these values emerge, and begin to vindicate their reality, only at some later stage in a process of evolution". Thus, "idealism" and "naturalism" characterize cosmological attitudes, rather than ontological or epistemological ones. The difference between the two is the one between a religious and a secularist view of life, idealism calling for transcendence, while naturalism rejects it. It has been correctly remarked that a more appropriate name for naturalism

³⁴ See Rescher 2005, 1 *sq.*, for a panorama of diverse types of idealism. Also, Timothy Sprigge, in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, defines idealism as "the view that mind is the most basic reality and that the physical world exists only as an appearance to or expression of mind, or as somehow mental in its inner essence".

³⁵ TK, p. 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

is “emergent evolutionism”, as illustrated by the metaphysical scheme of Samuel Alexander.

What Kemp Smith endeavors, is to arrive to a *well-founded idealism*. When discussing the ways of founding an idealist cosmology, Kemp Smith seems closer to the usual meaning of “idealism”. Thus, he remarks that idealism can be established either by demonstrating that “matter is so opposite in nature to mind that it is patently incapable of generating or of accounting for it”³⁷; or by showing that matter, as dependent by consciousness, calls by itself for the reality of the mind. Where both these methods fail, is to give a satisfactory account of Nature. On the standard idealist accounts (that of Berkeley, mostly, but also that of Kant), Nature is voided of any mystery. It presents itself as a rational contraption, which contains no other mystery except its detail of functioning and whose significance is clearly apprehensible. But Nature is far from being such a simple and un-mysterious device; it must be accepted that it is far richer than we can hope to comprehend. Nature’s complexity excludes any possibility of accounting for it either as the creature, or as the opposite of mind. It follows that the two foundational strategies previously mentioned fail. They are incapable of taking nature seriously.

One other way of making the task easier is to smooth the contrast between Mind and Nature, by contending that they are mutually dependent. However, Neohegelians like Bradley and Bosanquet have formulated even this thesis in a much too strong version: everything is experience. By using the ambiguous concept of experience, some difficulties are avoided, but at the costs of reducing Nature’s relation to Mind to the logical implication between them. But this issues in another non-satisfactory account of nature, since it fails to give due account of the causal efficacy within Nature, as well as of the influence of the body on our apprehension of the outer world. This view leads to the acceptance of an Absolute, in whose totality the distinctions that initially interested us are blurred, instead of being explained. Bradley’s view of the Absolute as a whole of experience experiencing itself seems rather to explain away the distinction between Mind and Nature than to give a satisfactory explication of the relation between the two. No justice is being done either to Nature, or to human

³⁷ TK, p. 1.

experience in this way.

But the idealist's goal is to establish his idealism; he is called upon to find decisive arguments for idealism, as against naturalism. Hence, finding the true, precise answer to the problem of the relation between Mind and Nature need not be his first concern. This task is better to be left to science, or delayed until the progress of science can provide sufficient data to encourage a philosopher's taking position. The idealist's best hope is to arrive, by an accurate analysis of experience, in a position where to be able "to discern certain ultimate alternatives, bearing upon the meaning of life and of the Universe, and even perhaps to find grounds adequate for deciding between these alternatives", to "give an answer decisive of our attitude towards naturalism and idealism respectively"³⁸.

The spiritual values alluded to by Kemp Smith include, as one can conjecture, goodness, truth and beauty. On the idealist account, they are supposed to be operational in the universe since forever, and the analysis of the experience should lead also to an understanding of why the human beings search for these values and orientate their lives accordingly. How comes that human mind apprehends values? With the answer to this question, I get to the core of what seems to be Kemp Smith's cosmological vision.

It is all the work of Nature, he says. But nature did not proceed randomly. In the organic realm, Kemp Smith notices, "it exhibits ... a willfulness not wholly without analogy to the activities of the self"³⁹ (*TK*, 3). Nature (whom "we can hardly help personifying ... we obtain so versatile and intriguing a personality when we do"⁴⁰ (*ibid.*, 230)) seeks man out; she progressively reveals itself to man; she provides man with what he needs in order to survive and endows him with the abilities of finding what she provides for him; but she allows man to set himself free from the pragmatic necessities of survival, and to set aside all practical purposes in order to adopt the attitude of contemplation in which he discovers truth, beauty and goodness, values that will conduct him to organize "on a

³⁸ *TK*, p. 9.

³⁹ *TK*, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

different plane” even his practical life. This Nature seems thus to pursue some purpose; whether man is part of the purpose, or the purpose presupposes man only as a means of arriving to it, I have not been able to figure out. But what seems to me obvious, is that Kemp Smith endorses some conception of Providence, of acting agency connected to truth, goodness, and beauty, which provides the man with the capacities of apprehending these values, and with the impetus to seek these values. Something “not without analogy to the self”, to paraphrase Kemp Smith’s expression, is active in nature and is responsible for the self’s capacity of transcending the given and the immediate, towards an “apprehension of totality and infinitude” in which “all its metaphysical needs have their source”⁴¹.

Kemp Smith’s Influence in *Symbolism*

Besides the acknowledgement in the *Preface*, Whitehead mentions Kemp Smith in *S* when he speaks of the capacity of sense-data of functioning as symbols. Here is the context:

We enjoy the symbol, but we also penetrate to the meaning. The symbols do not create their meaning: the meaning, in the form of actual effective beings reacting upon us, exists for us in its own right. But the symbols discover this meaning for us. They discover it because, in the long course of adaptation of living organisms to their environment, nature* taught their use. It developed us so that our projected sensations indicate in general those regions which are the seat of important organisms.⁴²

In this quotation, the asterisk sends the reader to the following foot-note: “Cf. *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory of Knowledge*, by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1924)”.

The reference from *PR*, previously quoted, suggested that the essential problem of a theory of perception is *how* the two modes of perception interfere. In other words, how comes that sense-perception tell us anything

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁴² *S*, p. 57.

about the causally efficacious environment? How comes that sense-data indicate real things in our environment, acting upon us? The theory of symbolic reference is destined to answer to this question precisely. On the contrary, the context from *S* in which reference is made to *TK* is that of an answer to a different question: *why* is it that sense-data can function as symbols?

This is a question that Whitehead hadn't asked before. As a matter of fact, in his works of natural philosophy he even pronounced himself against the meaningfulness of this question:

Knowledge is ultimate. There can be no explanation of the ‘why’ of knowledge; we can only describe the ‘what’ of knowledge. Namely we can analyze the content and its internal relations, but we cannot explain why there is knowledge⁴³.

Obviously, his opinion had changed from *CN* to *S*. Even if percipience is taken for granted, it is now legitimate to ask why sense-perception results, in humans, in knowledge about their environment, and the answer comes from Kemp Smith. But Whitehead need not refer to Kemp Smith if all he had in mind was an evolutionary explanation of the development of sense-perception in humans; Kemp Smith didn't invent this way of seeing things and the idea was hardly new in 1924. So, there has to be more than this.

I think that the significance that can be reasonably attributed to Whitehead's reference to Kemp Smith is that he found the Scot's cosmological suggestions appealing. For the evolutionary biology ‘nature’ proceeds through blind, purposeless selection; and, within its framework, there is no explanation for what Kemp Smith called the ‘many-sidedness’ of Nature. Nature, under the appearance of endowing the man with what he needs in order to survive, gives him the very instruments by which he can free himself from the practical order of survival. This is most clearly seen in the functioning of the perceptual apparatus: nature invented the device of *sensa* in order that the man survive in a complex environment, but the perception is also a source of aesthetic emotion, revealing to man meanings

⁴³ *CN*, p. 32.

which lure him towards an order different from that of survival. Nature, thus seen, is “integrally bound up with the conditions that make knowledge possible”⁴⁴. It “has imposed [K.S. emphasis] upon the mind an objective interpretation of its private *sensa*”⁴⁵.

When Whitehead sends the reader to Kemp Smith, in order to justify his contention that nature taught percipient organisms that their presentational immediacy offers valuable information about the relevant features of their environment, he means - I suggest - Kemp Smith’s Nature, not that of evolutionary biology. This explanation of why symbols reveal meanings, which combines a ‘realistic’ view of perception with an ‘idealistic’ view of Nature does not find its place in *PR*, where this Nature-character plays no part. The Super-Nature of which Kemp Smith speaks⁴⁶ makes its presence felt briefly only in *S*. This suggests, as final conclusion, that Whitehead’s references and acknowledgment to *TK* are at best a generous way of showing the intellectual appreciation he had for Kemp Smith. If there is a lot from Whitehead in Kemp Smith, there is virtually nothing from Kemp Smith in Whitehead.

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- [4] PNK - Whitehead, Alfred North. *An Inquiry into the Principles of Natural Knowledge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919.

⁴⁴ *TK*, p. 232.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁴⁶ *TK*, p. 232.

- [5] S - Whitehead, Alfred North. *Symbolism. Its Meaning and Effects.* 1925. Fordham University Press, 1983.
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