

Discussion Notes

NOTES ON DIPERT'S REVIEW OF *THE EVIDENCE OF THE SENSES*

I would like to address several of the points made in Randall R. Dipert's review of Kelley's book, *The Evidence of the Senses*.

Dipert argues that Kelley's treatment of Kant is "profoundly uninformed." Kelley's treatment fails, Dipert says, because he does not address Kant's "main argument," which is, Dipert asserts, an "extensive and subtle argument based on our conceptions of space, time and cause." (p. 60) According to Dipert, "Without reading Kant, a glance at the table of contents will tell one this." Perhaps so, but when one reads more deeply, one discovers that Dipert is incorrect. Kant's main argument against realism in the *Critique of Pure Reason* does *not* rest on the categories of space, time and cause.

Kant's motivating question is, "How are *a priori* synthetic judgments possible?" (B1⁸)¹ The intuitions of space and time and the category of causality are needed for Kant's argument because they serve as example of such *a priori* synthetic judgments. But Kant's fundamental argument for idealism (and against realism) rests on his view of intuition or immediate awareness.

In Kant's view, direct awareness cannot by its nature be mediated. Kant follows the British Empiricists in holding that the entire process that gives rise to awareness leads to the construction of (or constitutes) a representation of the world. In the last stage of perception, the mind "intuits" this representation to bring it into consciousness. One becomes immediately aware of the representation, but not of the world ("as it is in itself"). (Complications ensue as Kant develops his system. For instance, because causality is a category, part of the way that these representations are organized, the process just described is not really a causal or even a temporal process.)

The key to his argument is the concept of "intuition". Part of its effect is illustrated in a key passage, B67-69, which Kant concludes (B69):

[the mind] then intuits itself not as it would represent itself if immediately self-active, but as it is affected by itself, and therefore as it appears to itself, not as it is.

Kant defines intuition as "that through which [a mode of knowledge] is in immediate relation to [an object]." (B33)

Kant's treatment of space is derivative to his concept of intuition. He begins by arguing that the properties of space are a universal aspect of our experience (e.g., "We can never represent to ourselves the absence of space," (B38) and "geometrical propositions are one and all apodeictic." [B41]) But he concludes (B41) from this very universality and necessity that

...the intuition [of space] has its seat in the subject only, as the formal character of the subject, in virtue of which, in being affected by objects, it obtains *immediate representation*, that is *intuition* of them.

Intuition, be it noted, must be immediate. But our experience of external objects is not immediate; part of that experience "has its seat in the subject." So we don't actually experience (or intuit) the external object. (Kant's argument in this passage rests upon his conception of the *a priori* and of its relationship to necessity, developed earlier. Kant's conception of the *a priori* is tightly linked to his model of human consciousness. But he is, essentially, arguing here that the *a priori* character of our spatial intuition can only be accounted for by the role of the subject in constituting the object of intuition. And the critical point for Kant is that some aspect of this intuition be *a priori*.)

Dipert suggests that if Kelley does not understand what Kant's arguments are, "he should bow out of historical criticism." (p. 61) Notwithstanding, Kelley does present the essence of Kant's argument. His view does not, apparently, agree with Dipert's. But why doesn't Dipert at least indicate *Kelley's* conception?

Kelley has in fact shown considerable insight in isolating the kernel of Kant's argument. As he puts it, (Kelley, p. 22, at the end of the paragraph quoted by Dipert):

A faculty of awareness, Kant argues, has a specific constitution. It is something definite, it has an identity. And it must function in a specific way, determined by the identity it has. The nature of its response to objects outside it is determined by its own constitution. As a result, he argues, consciousness cannot passively mirror a world outside: its own identity gets in the way, distorting the reflection. The fact that consciousness has an identity prevents it from grasping the identities of things outside it.

And, over the next several pages, Kelley sketches the way that Kant develops his argument from his view of human consciousness.

PRIMACY OF EXISTENCE

Kelley presents an argument that the "primacy of existence" is an axiom. What he means by this is that this concept cannot be proven, but must be taken as a starting point for any philosophical discussion. Dipert agrees that the primacy of existence cannot be proven, and attempts to catch Kelley out trying to prove an axiom. He attributes to Kelley the following argument (p. 61):

I am aware of [my awareness itself?]
as non-creative.

Therefore, awareness is non-creative.

Dipert, apparently, constructs this argument by finding the premise in Kelley's book and then supplying the conclusion himself. But he misconstrues Kelley's intention and the argument is a straw man.

For Kelley, the primacy of existence is the view that

objects exist independently of the subject. Awareness is nonconstitutive, the identification of things that exist and are what they are independently of the awareness of them. (p. 27)

Kelley argues, as Dipert acknowledges, that this thesis must be taken as axiomatic. He then proceeds to provide an argument, not for the truth, but for the axiomatic status of this proposition. And he takes pains to point out how far his own argument parallels Descartes' *cogito* and to attribute his basic argument to Plato.

As part of this discussion, Kelley argues (Kelley, p. 31-33) that the "claim that the objects of awareness depend on consciousness...is simply unintelligible." (Kelley, p. 32) This conclusion is supported, in part, by Kelley's phenomenological analysis. Kelley's intention here is to support his view that the primacy of existence is intelligible. And, of course, he is counting on there being an independent reality to argue about (as, in Kelley's view, his opponents must tacitly do as well). Perhaps Dipert dislikes this argument as well. But he needs to identify Kelley's argument before he can reject it.

Dipert's failure to come to grips with Kelley's approach is compounded when he says (p. 62):

But saying that we are certain we do not intentionally create our environment, or that we are certain we do not intentionally infer anything when we perceive an object before us, does not serve to establish that some element of our consciousness is not making a contribution to our *awareness*. (emphasis added)

Kelley would agree! Indeed Kelley's analysis of the contribution that our physiology makes to our awareness runs throughout his discussion of perception.

However, the relevance of this sentence is Dipert's subsequent move from "awareness" to "content". He writes (p. 62):

Just because we do not "feel" our creativity hardly implies that our consciousness is making no contribution and that reality "determines" the *content* of our consciousness.... (emphasis added)

But this begs the question: What does Dipert mean by the word "content"? Is the "content of our consciousness" reality or is it some feature of our awareness? Dipert's formulation suggests the latter.

Kelley's position is not put in these terms; he writes: "The object of awareness is the object as it actually exists." (p. 31)

So there are two possibilities. Perhaps Dipert equates "content" with some feature of the awareness. If so, his remark may be valid but it does not meet Kelley's position. Or Dipert's "content" may mean the same thing as Kelley's "object". But then he has done nothing to justify his move from "awareness" to "content".

PERCEPTION AND DIRECT AWARENESS

Dipert's discussion of Kelley's views on direct awareness (pp. 62-64) challenges Kelley's ability to distinguish perception from other, possibly related, phenomena. He seems to be making one of two points. Either he is saying that Kelley does not distinguish perception from numerous other psychological phenomena, or he is suggesting that a theory that accounts

for perception is also obliged to account for its perceptual cousins, such as memory, alleged "unconscious" inferences, computation, and calculation.

A logical starting point for a discussion of Kelley's views on perception would seem to be Kelley's definition of perception (p. 144): "the direct awareness of discriminated entities by means of patterns of energy absorption by sense receptors." This does, in fact, distinguish perception from Dipert's entire list of perceptual cousins.

Unfortunately, except for a brief reference to something in Chapter 6, there is little in Dipert's review to suggest that he read Kelley's book beyond page 143, the first page of Chapter 5. Had he turned the page to page 144, he would have encountered this definition. He would find it unnecessary to ask, as he does, "What is the 'Realist theory of perception' that [Kelley] defends?", implying that no answer is given in the book. He would also have encountered, on pages 147-153, a distinctive view of "direct awareness," one of the central elements of Kelley's definition, and an entire chapter, Chapter 5, devoted to an exposition and *defense* of this definition.

For instance, in explaining what he means by direct awareness, Kelley distinguishes perceptual awareness from conceptual or inferential awareness on the one side, and passive awareness on the other. (Perception isn't passive; it involves attention.) Furthermore, he distinguishes his own conception of direct awareness from the various ones in the representationalist tradition.

Dipert's discussion on page 64 brings up alleged "unconscious" cognitive processes which, for Dipert, include "computation", "calculation", and "inference". He begins by indicating Kelley's rejection of the view "that any processing of receptor responses must involve computation of inference" (quoted by Dipert from Kelley, p. 69). And Dipert replies (p. 64), "The real problem is whether there can be unconscious/unintentional calculation, computation or inference in any meaningful sense." But Kelley's argument against this view spans 16 pages and, although Dipert disputes Kelley's conclusion, he offers no hint of Kelley's argument.

"Inference" and "calculation" arise as concepts of consciously directed activity. If the perceptual process required such activity, then perception would not be direct. So as part of Kelley's defense of perception as direct (pp. 63-79) he argues exhaustively against such a view, specifically challenging the "claim that the percept is produced unconsciously out of some more primitive cognitive state." (Kelley, p. 63) Drawing on examples from Gibson's theory of stimulus invariants, Kelley presents perception as a physiological process and argues that trying to describe this process as somehow involving inference or calculation is neither justified nor helpful.

In opposition to his thesis, Kelley considers the views of D. W. Hamlyn, Helmholtz, R. J. Richards, R. L. Gregory, Jerry Fodor, Zenon Pylyshyn, P. H. Lindsay, and Donald Norman, who typically argue to the effect that only inference or calculation could account for the degree of specificity of our perceptions. But at the root of these various arguments Kelley generally finds either the Kantian premise that consciousness constitutes its own object or the diaphanous model of direct awareness. So Kelley's earlier arguments for rejecting both the Kantian thesis and the diaphanous model lead him, therefore, to reject these arguments as well.

If Dipert sees a problem in this line of argument, he should have pointed it out.

Dipert exhibits particular difficulty with Kelley's refusal to grant hallucinations a status on a par with perception. Now Kelley's reasons are

clear enough: hallucinations are an essentially different phenomenon from perception. As we have seen, Kelley does not take definitions lightly. He certainly does not, as Dipert seems to imply, assert definitions arbitrarily and then use them to deduce "analytic" conclusions. Rather, he accepts and discharges the burden of using a definition to isolate an aspect of the world in essential terms. In this case, Kelley holds that perception is a type of awareness and hallucinations are not. So the two phenomena differ in an essential respect and should be studied as distinct phenomena.

Almost none of Kelley's extensive analysis of the relationship between (perceptual) awareness and its object nor the extensive experimental data on perception that he cites have any bearing on hallucinations. And hallucinations, though they are given their due (see, e.g., pp. 133-38; pp. 217-18; and pp. 236-38), are not Kelley's primary interest.

What objection can Dipert have to this procedure? He says that Kelley's theory is uninteresting. Does this mean that hallucinations are interesting but awareness isn't? Why?

Dipert's answer is to ask, rhetorically, (Dipert, p. 66), "How does he test whether he is perceiving the object?" This, of course, is an important and legitimate question. He could have found Kelley's answer to it in Chapters 6 and 7 which comprise Part II, entitled "Perceptual Knowledge."

Did Dipert really read these chapters? The question needs to be asked, because at one critical point he attributes a view to Kelley that is directly contradicted in Kelley's book, is nowhere supported in the book, and that is contrary to everything in Chapter 7.

On page 65, Dipert places quotation marks around the statement, "Perceptual judgments are never mistaken." Dipert does not, quite, attribute these words to Kelley, but in his next sentence Dipert attributes the thought to Kelley ("This last assertion is of course especially curious, and requires us to turn to Kelley's analysis of 'illusions'.")

Perhaps Dipert missed Kelley's statement about illusions, in connection with the fallacy of the bent stick, (p. 93): "That form is apt to be misleading, and the person may make the *wrong perceptual judgment* about it," (emphasis added)

After all, one sentence on a page with many other sentences is easy to miss. But Chapter 7, entitled "Perceptual Judgments" is devoted to developing a theory of the justification of perceptual judgments. The title doesn't, perhaps, give it away. (Tables of contents can be misleading, after all.) But this chapter deals with perceptual judgment as a fallible cognitive activity, potentially mistaken, and hence in need of justification.

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1. In Kant scholarship, this citation format refers to the page number in the second German edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.