SYMPATHY IN PERCEPTION

The philosophy of perception has been an important topic throughout history, appealing to thinkers in antiquity and the Middle Ages as well as to figures such as Kant, Bergson, and others. In this wide-ranging study, Mark Eli Kalderon presents multiple perspectives on the general nature of perception, discussing touch and hearing, as well as vision. He draws on the rich history of the subject and shows how analytic and continental approaches to it are connected, providing readers with insights from both traditions and arguing for new orientations when thinking about the presentation of perception. His discussion addresses issues including tactile metaphors, sympathy in relation to the concept of fellow-feeling, and the Wave Theory of sound. His comprehensive and thoughtful study presents bold and systematic investigations into current theory, informed by centuries of philosophical inquiry, and will be important for those working on ontological and metaphysical aspects of perception and feeling.

MARK ELI KALDERON is Professor of Philosophy at University College London. His publications include *Moral Fictionalism* (2005) and *Form without Matter: Empedocles and Aristotle on Colour Perceptions* (2015).

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MARK ELI KALDERON
University College London

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I focused at intervals as the great dome loomed up through the smoke. Glares of many fires and sweeping clouds of smoke kept hiding the shape. Then a wind sprang up. Suddenly, the shining cross, dome and towers stood out like a symbol in the inferno. The scene was unbelievable. In that moment or two I released my shutter.

– Herbert Mason

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Preface

The present essay is an unabashed exercise in historically informed, speculative metaphysics. Its aim is to gain insight into the nature of sensory presentation. Allow me to explain why it should be historically informed and in what sense the metaphysics developed herein is speculative.

One of the fundamental issues dividing contemporary philosophers of perception is whether perception is presentational or representational in character (see, for example, the recent collection devoted to this topic Brogaard 2014 and Campbell and Cassam 2014). To claim that perception is presentational in character is to claim that it has a presentational element irreducible to whatever intentional or representational content it may have. So conceived, the object of perception is present in the awareness afforded by the perceptual experience and is thus a constituent of that experience. Representationalists deny that perception has such an irreducible presentational element, claiming, instead, that the object of perception is exhaustively specified by its intentional or representational content. If there is indeed a presentational element to perception, then, according to the representationalist, this is because sensory presentation is either reducible to the exercise of an intentional or representational capacity or otherwise essentially involves the exercise of such a capacity (see, for example, Chalmers 2006; McDowell 2008; Searle 2015). There are two aspects of this debate. On the one hand, there are arguments on one side or the other urging that perception must be conceived in presentational or representational terms. On the other hand, there is a more positive, constructive aspect, where, taking for granted one's preferred conception, one goes on to develop detailed theoretical accounts of perceptual experience.

Representationalists have been more active in this latter task. And unsurprisingly so. For suppose one took sensory presentation to be an indispensable aspect of perceptual experience and further held, in a Butlerian spirit, that it was reducible to no other thing. What positive account could one

give of sensory presentation, so conceived? Since it is irreducible, no positive account could take the form of a reduction. So no causal or counterfactual conditions on sensory representations, understood independently of perception, could be jointly necessary and sufficient for the presentation, in sensory experience, of its object. One might specify the relational features of presentation in sensory experience, but not much insight into the nature of sensory presentation is thereby gained. The tools of contemporary analytic metaphysics would seem not to leave one much to work with, at least in the present instance. So it can seem that if one maintains that perceptual experience involves an irreducible presentational element, all that one can do is press the negative point that sensory presentation, an indispensable element of perceptual experience, is reducible to no other thing.

I believe that perception has an irreducible presentational element. And yet I hoped to learn something positive about the metaphysics of sensory presentation. If there was, in fact, anything further to be learned, I could not limit myself to the tools of contemporary analytic metaphysics. The present metaphysics is historically informed, at least in part, as a result of looking for tools more adequate to the task at hand. There is a real question about how such borrowings should be understood, if they are not simply an invitation to roll back philosophical thinking about perception to some earlier period. Before we are in a position to address that question, let us first address two additional motives to look to historical material in thinking about the nature of sensory presentation.

Putnam (1993, 1994, 1999) has described the present metaphysical orthodoxy in the philosophy of mind as "Cartesianism *cum* materialism" (compare Merleau-Ponty's 1967 related charge of "pseudo-Cartesianism"). While it is easy to find dissenters to either the Cartesian or materialist elements of that orthodoxy, it is equally easy to appreciate the way in which Putnam's description is apt. That it is apt shows that, despite its technical sophistication and being informed by twenty-first-century psychology, contemporary philosophy of mind is still working within a seventeenth-century paradigm. After an initial collaboration (Hilbert and Kalderon 2000), as I continued to work on color and color perception (Kalderon 2007, 2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c), it became increasingly clear that I was defending an anti-modern conception of color and perception. The conception of color defended was anti-modern in that the colors were in no way secondary, but mind-independent qualities that inhere in material bodies. The conception of color perception was anti-modern in that it was not conceived as a conscious alteration of a perceiving subject, but rather as the presentation

of instances of mind-independent color qualities located at a distance from the perceiver. The anti-modern metaphysics provided an additional motive to look to historical, and in particular, premodern sources. Doing so was a means of self-consciously disrupting habits of mind inculcated by the modern paradigm that has reigned for four centuries.

There is a third additional motive for the turn to historical sources, one flowing from the methodology pursued in the present essay. Given our presupposition that sensory presentation is irreducible, and leaving to one side what form a positive account of sensory presentation could take if it is not, indeed, a reduction of some sort, how are we to proceed? How can one gain insight into the nature of the irreducible presentational element of perceptual experience? My thought, not at all original, was to proceed dialectically, by considering puzzles about the nature of sensory presentation. As it happens, there are a number of historically salient such puzzles that are useful for a metaphysician proceeding dialectically to consider (for a detailed historical discussion of at least one of these, see Kalderon 2015). Moreover, many of these puzzles are premodern, though they have been obscured by the prevailing modern paradigm.

It can often happen, in the course of dialectical argument, that the insights of one's predecessors are not only preserved, but transformed. Thus, it can happen that a respected predecessor was right to hold a certain opinion, but only on an understanding as of yet unavailable to them. That is one way, at least, in which the insights of our predecessors may be transformed even as they are preserved in the course of dialectical argument. This bears on the question of how such historical borrowing is to be understood. There is no real possibility of rolling back philosophical thinking to the fifth century BC, say, just as there is no real possibility of living "the life of a Bronze Age Chief, or a Medieval Samurai," in our present historical circumstances, as Williams (1981, 140) reminds us. In deploying ancient or Scholastic concepts in a contemporary metaphysical inquiry new sense is accrued, and such borrowings become a kind of concept formation (Moore 2012, 587–8). New sense is accrued when an ancient or Scholastic concept is applied to novel problems that arise in a theoretical and historical context distinct from the one in which the concept was originally formed. Compare Bergson's (1912a) retrofitting the concepts of Stoic physics in the development of his philosophical psychology. If we are to take it at all seriously, it can only be understood as a method of concept formation. Moreover, novel concepts are what are needed if one hopes to contribute to, if not indeed effect, a Kuhnian revolution against the prevailing modern paradigm.

That the present metaphysical inquiry proceeds dialectically bears on its speculative character. In proceeding dialectically, in taking puzzles about the nature of sensory presentation as a guide to uncovering its nature, the present essay is aporetic and exploratory. Its conclusions necessarily fall short of apodeictic proof. This, at any rate, should be obvious since the conclusion of dialectical argument hardly constitutes an a priori demonstration, drawing, as it may, upon the testimony of the many and the wise, as well as any empirical evidence as may be relevant.

Self-proclaimed naturalistic metaphysicians sometimes lampoon their opponents as engaging in a priori reasoning from the armchair. But eschewing reductionism about sensory presentation while pursuing insight into its nature by proceeding dialectically, no a priori demonstration is offered. Nor indeed could there be if the ambition is to contribute to, if not indeed effect, a Kuhnian revolution. Demonstrations are only possible at the stage of normal science. Demonstrations require a stable conceptual framework, about which there is widespread and non-collusive agreement, in which to take place. Part of the present task is to disrupt just such a framework.

A more specific task provides a fourth motivation for why the present metaphysical inquiry should be historically informed. I have long been puzzled by the primordial and persistent tactile metaphors for sensory awareness, even for non-tactile modes of sensory awareness such as vision and audition. Such imagery persists even among those who would eschew any explanation of perception in terms of, or on analogy with, tactile perception. Thus, in a remarkable passage, Brian O'Shaughnessy, a careful, independent thinker, warns against taking such tactile metaphors too literally but cannot restrain himself from deploying such a metaphor in describing the contrasting conception:

> I think there is a tendency to conceive of attentive *contact* [my emphasis], which is to say of perceptual awareness, as a kind of palpable or concrete contact of the mind with its object. And in one sense of these terms, this belief is surely correct … However, there is a tendency – or perhaps an imagery of a kind that may be at work in one's mind – to overinterpret this "concreteness," to think of it as in some way akin to, as a mental analogue of, something drawn from the realm of *things* – a palpable connection of some kind, rather as if the gaze literally reached out and touched its object. (O'Shaughnessy 2003, 183)

And M. G. F. Martin has observed that "content" is a metaphor of assimilation – to have a content is to be, in a way, its container, containment being itself a mode of assimilation, as is grasping. Moreover, Martin also notes the way in which this imagery is in tension with the theoretical role

content plays in representationalist theories of perception. For surely what is contained within a perception is its object, but the content of that perception is not the object of perception. Rather, the object of that perception is what is represented by its content (Martin 1998).

I wanted to understand why contemporary philosophers apply tactile metaphors for sensory awareness unselfconsciously, indeed, unconsciously – even when such imagery ultimately fails to cohere with their espoused doctrine. One explanation, to be pursued throughout this essay, is that without reducing perception generally to sensation by contact, there is, nonetheless, a way in which tactile metaphors for sensory presentation are apt. Moreover, if tactile metaphors for perception generally are apt in the way that I shall suggest they are, then the resulting conception of perception is anti-modern, or so shall I argue. But if it is, then the unconscious tendency to apply tactile metaphors for sensory awareness, even if it is in tension with one's stated doctrine, is subject to a psychoanalytic explanation, hence rendering the present essay a psychoanalytic narrative. It is the return of the repressed. Or more specifically, the return of what has been repressed by the modern paradigm. Our unconscious use of tactile metaphors for sensory awareness is the vestigial remnant of a vivid sense of the Manifest Image of Nature and our perceptual relation to it not utterly extinguished by four centuries of modernity.

Grasping is at the center of a semantic field of tactile metaphors for sensory awareness loosely organized as modes of assimilation (Section 1.1). I attempt to understand what, if anything, makes grasping an apt metaphor for sensory awareness more generally by undertaking a phenomenological investigation into grasping or enclosure understood as a mode of haptic perception. The idea is that if we better appreciate how grasping presents itself from within haptic experience, we will be in a better position to understand what, if anything, makes grasping an apt metaphor for perception generally. Moreover, in undertaking this phenomenological investigation we shall freely draw upon empirical and historical sources. Empirical psychology has a lot to teach us about the phenomenology of haptic experience. But so does the testimony of our respected predecessors and the puzzles that arise both within and without the *endoxa*.

Moreover, there is a reason why a phenomenological investigation into haptic experience whose ultimate aim is to uncover the aptness of tactile metaphors for perception generally should take the form of a conceptual genealogy. In looking at earlier occurrences of such metaphors, when they were more strongly etched in light and shadow, one can get a better sense of what made them live for these earlier thinkers and, by extension,

a better sense of the power they continue to exercise over us. At any rate, it is almost impossible to get anywhere merely by examining the unself-conscious metaphors deployed by contemporary philosophers – they are lifeless in their hands. Much better to examine earlier occurrences of these metaphors, when they were more strongly and vividly felt, to get a sense of their power and persistent aptness.

Thinking our way to the future by thinking our way through the past may strike some as hopelessly anachronistic. In my defense I only say that, here, I am following Ricoeur (2004, xvii) in exercising "the right of every reader, before whom all the books are open simultaneously."

The present use of historical material contrasts with the use of historical material in my previous book. *Form without Matter* was an essay in the philosophy of perception written in the medium of historiography. Though it was an essay in the philosophy of perception, like the ancient commentators, I primarily worked exegetically. While the present essay is historically informed in the ways that I have described, I do not, however, primarily work exegetically. In the present essay, I am driven less to understand the history of my subject matter than to speculatively resolve certain puzzles concerning it. In the present essay, then, selective historical reflection is in the service of, and subordinate to, this larger aim in speculative metaphysics. Toward this end, I have endeavored, less to interpret and exposit our predecessors systematically, than to speak to them across the ages like colleagues (see Ryle 1971, 10–11).

The present essay is an exercise in historically informed speculative metaphysics. I have explained in what sense it is speculative and in what sense it is historically informed. But in what sense is it metaphysics? Consider the central question to be pursued in the present essay: What is it for the object of perception to be present in the perceiver's experience of it? This is a metaphysical question. It concerns what it is to be something. Specifically, it concerns what it is to be present in perceptual experience. In asking what it is to be something, one asks a metaphysical question, even should the thing, whose being one is inquiring into, turn out to be mental. "But metaphysics concerns extra-mental reality!", one might object. One might, but the objection is not very cogent. Substance dualism is a metaphysical thesis. That there are two mutually exclusive kinds of substances is, straightforwardly, a metaphysical thesis. And it remains one, even when one of these kinds of substances turns out to be essentially thinking and hence mental.

The results of the present inquiry may strike analytically inclined philosophers to be more in line with continental metaphysics. And while the

present essay is self-consciously a departure from the prevailing orthodoxy of analytic metaphysics, it remains true to, and is a staunch defense of, what has been a central tenet of analytic metaphysics from its inception, namely, realism. And while it is true that recent continental thinkers have recovered for themselves a form of realism, the present perceptual realism is more in line with Cook Wilson (1926) than Meillassoux (2008). Moreover, continental philosophers will quickly recognize that the present essay defends, in Heideggerian terminology, a metaphysics of presence. The present conception of sensory presentation is thus fundamentally at odds with conceptions of perception developed within the phenomenological tradition. To be honest, I care little for such categories. And in what follows I have drawn freely from a variety of sources.

Acknowledgments

Fortuitous serendipity has been all too evident in the composition of the present essay. Tempering the humility I feel in recognizing this – there, but for the hand of chance, go I – is the further recognition of just how much work must go into making such serendipitous encounters both possible and fortuitous. I owe a debt to many, both for providing occasions for such encounters and for preparing the way for them. Allow me to acknowledge some of them.

For a number of years now, I have taught a course structured around the opening remarks of C. D. Broad's (1952) "Some elementary reflections on sense-perception." The first five pages of that essay involve a comparative phenomenology of vision, audition, and touch. The class proceeds by evaluating Broad's comparative phenomenological claims in light of more recent literature about the senses. Sometimes I feel that my students got a raw deal. Not that I was neglectful in my pedagogical duty. Rather, I feel that I learned more from these class discussions than they did. For all that I have learned from them, and all the serendipitous encounters that they have helped prepare the way for, I am most grateful.

Material from the first two chapters was presented in a research seminar at UCL in 2015. I am very grateful to all who participated, especially for the many clarifications they elicited from me that resulted in considerable improvement of the text.

To Maarten Steenhagen I am grateful for one such serendipitous encounter. In *De spiritu fantastico sive de recptione specierum*, Robert Kilwardby provides a vitalist twist on the Peripatetic analogy of perception with wax receiving the impression of a seal. Specifically, Kilwardby imagines life to inhere in the wax and to be actively pressing against the seal. Reflection on Kilwardby's vitalist twist on the Peripatetic analogy forms one of the key threads throughout this book. I am very grateful to Steenhagen for bringing my attention to it. I am also grateful for his intellectual companionship.

We have discussed these and related issues over the years. Steenhagen also read some preliminary drafts of early chapters, which helped me to improve them greatly, for which I am also indebted.

Craig French also read drafts of two chapters. The level-headed clarity of his comments, and more than that, the demand that I too should sometimes display such clarity, prompted considerable improvement, and for that I am most grateful. I am also very grateful to have had the opportunity to discuss the nature of perception with French over a number of years.

I have long wondered whether extramission theories of perception, though false if interpreted as causal models of perception, might, nonetheless, express some phenomenological truth. A serendipitous encounter with Keith Allen introduced me to the research of Winer and Cottrell (1996). Allen also pointed out this research's relevance to a passage in Merleau-Ponty. This provided renewed impetus to think about the phenomenological underpinnings of extramission and Chapter 5 is the result. I am also grateful to Allen for discussions, over the years, about color and the nature of perception.

Clare Mac Cumhaill provided another serendipitous encounter in reminding me of a passage in Hans Jonas that plays a key role in Chapter 5, for which I am grateful as well. My colleague Sarah Richmond, upon encountering me in the hallway clutching a copy of Maine de Biran's *Influence de l'habitude sur la faculté de penser*, pointed out to me some relevant passages in Sartre that proved very useful and for which I am most grateful.

A not unsympathetic, if not exactly credulous, audience at the University of Glasgow to whom I presented material culled from Chapters 1 and 2 in 2014 provided much-needed feedback and prompted considerable improvement. I would especially like to thank Fiona MacPherson for her comments on that occasion.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Charles Travis for his friendship, intellectual companionship, and encouragement. His encouragement proffered at an early critical period kept me motivated, and for that, I am especially grateful. I am also indebted to Matt Soteriou, who also generously proffered encouragement at a critical period.

Mike Martin has been a friend and colleague since I first arrived at UCL. My discussions with him about the nature of perception have been invaluable. I doubt, though, that he would approve of the application of his insights, which must appear in the text as if reflected through a glass darkly. Sometimes, as I wrote, I fancied that I could hear a Humean

growling somewhere. Is it wrong to give thanks when, perhaps, an apology is due?

Greenwich Park is a ten-minute walk from where I live in Blackheath. As I composed the present work, I walked through that park almost daily. In a Peripatetic fashion, much of my thinking was done on these walks. And before I even embarked upon the present work, Plotinus' *Enneads*, an inspiration to much of what follows, were read, for the most part, in the rose garden of Greenwich Park. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the park emerges as a minor character in the examples that I give. Let these remarks serve as both an acknowledgment and an expression of gratitude.

Finally, I would like to thank the readers for the Press who provided detailed and insightful comments. I have learned a lot from these, and I am very grateful for the spur they provided. I would also like to thank Hilary Gaskin for her help and encouragement in seeing the present essay into print.