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## **On Andrea Kern's "The Knowledge View of Perception"**

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Perceptual knowledge has been taken to combine perceptual experience that is "less than a paradigmatic act of reason" (Kern 2022: 2) and the rational capacity to judge, such that perceptual experience "enable[s] the exercise of th[e] capacity [to judge] whose exercise consists in judgments about how things are" (6). Contra this "two-capacity" view, Kern argues that perceptual knowledge is not enabled by another mental episode...described as perceptual experience" (12). Instead, perceptual knowledge is the actualization of our "self-consciously possess[ed] capacity for perceptual knowledge" (17). If this capacity is "perfectly actualiz[ed]," then perceptual experience *is* perceptual knowledge, but perceptual experience can depart from perceptual knowledge if this capacity is "defective[ly]" exercised (21).

Kern does not adequately justify this view for the following reasons.

(a) Kern claims that we possess the "concept," or a "kind of knowledge," of our "self-conscious capacity for perceptual knowledge" (17). This concept of our perceptual capacity is available to us "independently" of any particular actualization of the capacity, and "in this sense, contained in any exercise [of it]" (ibid.). If the concept is rudimentary, our awareness of this capacity is "reflected in [our] capacity to answer the question "How do you know that p?" by saying "because I see it" (ibid.). But if it is well-articulated, one could use concepts like judgment, truth, error, etc. to specify "what it is to exercise the [self-conscious] capacity [for perceptual knowledge]" (ibid.).

In these passages, Kern seems to justify the claim that our awareness of the self-conscious capacity for perceptual knowledge is "contained" in all perception as follows. If someone asks me "How do you know that p?", I respond: "Because I see it." For Kern, this response demonstrates that an awareness of the self-conscious capacity for perceptual knowledge is

“contained” in all perceptual acts including p. However, Kern’s premise here does not sufficiently support her conclusion.

To say “I know that p, because I see it” certainly relates “seeing pink” and “knowing pink.” But the fact that we are capable of responding to the query “How do you know that p?” with “Because I see it” does not necessarily imply that an awareness of our self-conscious capacity for perceptual knowledge is “contained” in all perception. This is because it seems possible to account for the response “Because I see it” in terms of a two-capacity view, as I now indicate.

Suppose perception is construed as object-consciousness “wring from the perceiver” rather than knowledge. Judgment enables us to recognize an object-consciousness, p-stuff, as instantiating the concept “p” which belongs to our epistemic schema, and in this way engenders perceptual knowledge that p.

Such an account of perceptual knowledge makes it at least possible to hypothesize that when I see p, and someone asks me how I know that p, I respond: “Because I see p,” where “seeing p” expresses the fact that I generally relate “seeing p-stuff” and “knowing that p-stuff is classified under the concept ‘p’.” More specifically, when I say “I know that p, because I see it,” I am saying that I know that p, because I see p-stuff that is classified as “p” rather than “non-p” in my conceptual schema.

In sum: If one can potentially explain the response “Because I see it” from the two-capacity perspective, then this response does not necessarily demonstrate that an awareness of the self-conscious capacity for perceptual knowledge is contained in every perceptual act, as Kern suggests.

(b) According to Kern, all perceivers actualizing their self-conscious capacity for perceptual knowledge possess the “idea” that perception is object-dependent (17) and connected to sensory affection (16). They also have an “idea of factors” that “hinder” the actualization of this capacity (18), and the “concept” that they can make perceptual errors (20).

Kern, however, does not specify how perception might include the idea of the conditions of perception. Is the awareness of these perceptual conditions a priori, or acquired empirically in time? It is important to respond to this question, because, as I now show, if this awareness is

not a priori but empirically acquired, one could potentially endorse the distinction between perceptual experience and perceptual knowledge, which Kern rejects.

Imagine that I see pink for the first time ( $t_1$ ). I am self-consciously aware that I am able to perceive, I know the conditions of perception, and my capacity for perceptual knowledge is perfectly actualized. Under these circumstances, in Kern's view, I have perceptual knowledge of pink.

Suppose now that, at time  $t_2$ , the pink looks red. In this event, one could argue that I could not know that the red is actually pink, or that the pink was really red. This is because if we assume that the knowledge of perceptual conditions is empirically acquired over time, I could say that I do not have perceptual knowledge of pink, since I have meagre experience of pink. Therefore, unless I gain the pink-perceptual-conditions, which requires time, I am merely entitled to perceptual experience of pink-stuff, and not perceptual knowledge of pink, or even a basis for investigating if I have perceptual knowledge of pink at  $t_1$  or  $t_2$ .

Now, if we come to know perceptual conditions empirically over time and so cannot get perceptual knowledge of pink when we see it for the first time, then a distinction between perceptual experience (first sighting of pink) and perceptual knowledge (pink with awareness of perceptual conditions)—which Kern denies—seems justified.

Kern could argue here that, at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ , the actualization of our self-conscious capacity for perceptual knowledge is defective. Therefore, we can only have perceptual experience, and not perceptual knowledge, of pink. However, if perceiving any  $p$  for the first time can only yield perceptual experience of  $p$ , and perceptual knowledge requires learning the  $p$ -perception-conditions over time, then perceptual knowledge of  $p$  necessarily requires multiple iterations of perceptual experiences of  $p$ . But if this is metaphysically true, then perceptual experience does, in some sense, enable perceptual knowledge, which makes the conceptual distinction between perceptual experience and perceptual knowledge in the two-capacity view, at least *prima facie*, defensible.

## **Bibliography**

Kern, Andrea. 2022. "The Knowledge View of Perception: Capacities, Opportunities and Hindrances for Perceptual Knowledge," pp. 1-24.