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DISTINGUISHING FAILED FROM INCOMPLETE KNOWLEDGE

I want to raise a kind of case that Kern does not consider, but that proponents of the Two-Capacity View (TCV) might invoke against her Knowledge View (KV). I then want to suggest how KV might respond, thereby both offering Kern a further articulation of the concept of ‘mere perceptual experience’, and explaining how this concept is a specification of the conceptually prior concept of ‘perceptual knowledge’.

Consider this case: I now come to know that a drawer contains a hammer because of my having seen the drawer’s contents yesterday. Crucially, until now I did not know that the drawer contained a hammer, because I did not pay attention to the question whether it did.

TCV would explain this case as follows: Yesterday I had a perceptual experience of the drawer that was not knowledge that it contains a hammer, but now I attend to my memory of that perceptual experience and on that ground make a knowledgeable judgment that the drawer contains a hammer. Accordingly, my perceptual knowledge is a compound of yesterday’s exercise of my capacity for perception, which yielded a perceptual experience, and today’s exercise of my capacity for judgment, which yields a knowledgeable judgment.

Proponents of TCV might suggest that the drawer case is problematic for KV in two respects:

First, Kern rejects a construal of perceptual knowledge according to which it is “a unity of two acts that differ from each other in that the former’s content contains the *potentiality* of being thought and judged while the latter *actualizes* this potentiality.” (Kern, this volume, chapter 10) But is the drawer case not exactly one in which I now actualize a potential for knowledge that I acquired yesterday?

Second, while KV acknowledges that we can have perceptual experiences without thereby having perceptual knowledge, it conceives of such *mere* perceptual experiences as “*defective*”

exercises of our capacity for perceptual knowledge (Kern, this volume, chapter 10). But if my perceptual experience of the drawer's contents is defective, how can it ground perceptual knowledge, which is perfect?

Here is how KV might respond to the latter question: There are two ways in which something can be defective: *either* something *is not* what it is supposed to be, i.e., *it does not actualize the potential* it would need to actualize to be what it is supposed to be: it is *failed*; or something *is not yet* what it is supposed to be, i.e., *it has not yet fully actualized the potential* it needs to actualize to be what it is supposed to be: it is *incomplete*. For instance, a dead tree is a failed tree because it does not actualize its potential to be a living tree, while an acorn is an incomplete tree because it has not yet fully actualized its potential to be a living tree.

Accordingly, KV can distinguish two kinds of mere perceptual experience as defective exercises of a capacity for perceptual knowledge: failed exercises and incomplete exercises. A *failed exercise* of our capacity for perceptual knowledge does not actualize its potential to be knowledge because of some hindrance such as misleading lighting conditions, thus yielding a perceptual experience that *is not* knowledge. Kern focuses on this case. An *incomplete exercise* of our capacity for perceptual knowledge has not yet fully actualized its potential to be knowledge, say because it is not attentive, thus yielding a perceptual experience that *is not yet* knowledge.

We thus have two concepts of mere perceptual experience: (i) perceptual experience that is *failed perceptual knowledge*, i.e. an exercise of our capacity for perceptual knowledge that, due to some hindrance, does not actualize its potential to be knowledge; and (ii) perceptual experience that is *incomplete perceptual knowledge*, i.e. an exercise of our capacity for perceptual knowledge that has not yet fully actualized its potential to be knowledge.

KV can thus explain the drawer case as follows: In seeing the drawer yesterday I did not pay attention to whether it contained a hammer, so that I exercised my capacity for perceptual

knowledge incompletely, thus not fully actualizing that exercise's potential to be knowledge that the drawer contains a hammer. Now, I pay attention to my memory of that exercise and thereby fully actualize its potential, so that I perceptually know that the drawer contains a hammer. The concept of mere perceptual experience as incomplete perceptual knowledge thus enables KV to respond to the second question by noting that an act of perceptual knowledge that is defective in the sense of being incomplete can ground perceptual knowledge.

This leaves the first question, whether KV can accommodate what seems to be the current actualization of a potential for perceptual knowledge that I acquired yesterday.

Here we need to distinguish *temporal priority* from *conceptual priority*. KV does not deny that in the drawer case a mere perceptual experience occurred *before* an act of perceptual knowledge. What it denies is that the act of perceptual knowledge is a *different kind of act* than the perceptual experience. For, it argues that the act of perceptual knowledge is the completion of an incomplete act of perceptual knowledge, namely of a mere perceptual experience as incomplete perceptual knowledge. Therefore, on KV, the act of perceptual knowledge does not actualize a potentiality contained in an act of a different kind, but it is the full actualization of the same act. The mere perceptual experience and the act of perceptual knowledge are two different acts only in time, while conceptually they are the same act, only incompletely actualized in the experience, completely actualized in the act of knowledge.

Consequently, while mere perceptual experience can be temporally prior to perceptual knowledge, perceptual knowledge is conceptually prior to mere perceptual experience. This conceptual priority is illustrated by our articulation of the concept of mere perceptual experience. We arrived at this concept by specifying the concept of perceptual knowledge. Concretely, we presupposed an understanding of perfect exercises of our capacity for perceptual knowledge, and then specified two kinds of defective exercises to arrive at two concepts of mere perceptual experience, as failed and incomplete perceptual knowledge.

KV can thus respond to the first question as follows: In now actualizing the potential for knowledge that I acquired yesterday I perform an act of perceptual knowledge, by paying attention to whether the drawer contains a hammer, that is temporally distinct, yet conceptually identical, with yesterday's mere perceptual experience. So, the drawer case does not threaten KV's claim that perceptual experience and perceptual knowledge are the same kind of act.¹

¹ What leads proponents of TCV to take the drawer case to support TCV is their identification of *attention* with *self-consciousness*. This makes it impossible to understand how my perceptual experience could be the incomplete exercise of a self-conscious capacity for perceptual knowledge. For, since in my experience I did not pay attention to the hammer, there was no self-consciousness with respect to the hammer and thus no self-conscious capacity was involved in my experience of the hammer. KV distinguishes between attention as a *potentiality of acts of a self-conscious capacity*, and self-consciousness as *the manner in which that capacity is actualized*. This makes it possible to understand that my perceptual experience is the incomplete exercise of a self-conscious capacity for perceptual knowledge. For, while my experience is self-conscious qua exercise of a self-conscious capacity, it has not yet actualized its potential for being attentive.