

Daniel Kalpokas, *Perception and Its Content: Toward the Propositional Attitude View*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2024, 162 pp.

What is the nature of perceptual experience? How does it relate to our knowledge about the world? And how does it enable the very possibility of empirical thought? During the past decades, these questions have been at the center of a debate that connects philosophy of perception and epistemology. However, as years went by and the positions on offer exchanged their respective arguments, many considered an unsavory stalemate to be reached. Daniel Kalpokas' *Perception and Its Content: Toward the Propositional Attitude View* could be the book that brings an end to such stalemate. While taking explicit inspiration from McDowell (1996, 2009), Kalpokas breaks away from tradition by offering an original and refreshing perspective on the nature of perception. His main objective is to propose a characterization of perceptual experience that can fulfill three interconnected objectives: explain the epistemic role usually granted to perceptual experience as the ultimate "tribunal" for the justification of empirical thoughts, accommodate the phenomenological characteristics that define perceptual experiences, and elucidate the transcendental conditions for empirical content itself.

The book is structured in three parts, prefaced by a brief introduction explaining the lingering relevance of Sellar's "Myth of the Given". The first part comprises chapters 1 and 2, and centers around the question of whether perceptual experience has content or not. In it, two types of positions that reject perceptual content are considered, the "causal-linkage view" and the "relational view", and found inadequate on both phenomenological and epistemological grounds. Having established that perceptual experience has content, the second part of the book (comprised of chapters 3, 4 and 5) centers around the question of how perceptual content should be understood. This leads Kalpokas to consider and argue against both traditional non-conceptualism and conceptualism, and to offer and defend his own view: perception is a propositional attitude, and its content is partly conceptual and partly world dependent. Finally, the third part of the book is composed of chapters 6 and 7 and is dedicated to explaining in further detail how Kalpokas' position can accommodate the epistemological role of experience and the transcendental conditions for empirical thought.

Chapter 1 is dedicated to the positions, particularly those belonging to the "post-sellarasian" tradition (e.g. Rorty, Davidson, Brandom), that understand perceptual experience only in terms of some form of causal

linkage. These positions deny that perceptual experience has any epistemic role *per-se*, and instead hold that perception merely causes epistemic-relevant states, like beliefs. However, Kalpokas argues, this strategy would be unable to explain how or why the content of those beliefs would actually reflect true facts about the perceived world (*i.e.* grant epistemic access to the world). Moreover, insofar as causal relations are extensionally defined, these positions seem unable to explain the “aspectual” component of phenomenological experience and its contribution to belief formation. So, for example, these positions would be ill fitted to explain how a single reversible figure like the duck/rabbit could be seen as either a duck or a rabbit, and how each of those experiences could lead to the formation of different beliefs. These considerations, among others, lead Kalpokas to consider that the causal linkage theories fail to account for the nature of perceptual experience on both epistemological and phenomenological grounds.

Chapter 2 analyses in depth the position commonly known as “naïve realism”. According to this view, we do not represent the objects that affect our senses. Instead, we are immediately aware or, in Russellian terms, “acquainted” with them. As with the causal linkage theories, the underlying idea with naïve realism is that positing perceptual content amounts to introducing an unnecessary epistemic intermediary between belief and the world. However, here again Kalpokas finds both epistemological and phenomenological issues. Firstly, naïve realism seems to plunge directly into Sellar’s Myth of the Given, despite not being its original target. That is because an object (*i.e.* a physical entity) simply isn’t the kind of thing that can count as a reason to believe in something, in so far as it lacks any kind of predicative structure to state matters of fact. Therefore, if naïve realists want to capture the epistemic role of perception, they seem forced to either include a predicative aspect in perceptual experience (*i.e.* include content) or hold that non-epistemic elements are fulfilling epistemic roles (*i.e.* adopt the Myth of the Given). Phenomenologically, naïve realism also seems incapable of accommodating the aspectual component of perceptual experience, insofar as this component isn’t defined only by the extensional object being perceived. Therefore, Kalpokas concludes that naïve realism is an inappropriate characterization of perception.

Chapter 3 centers around different versions of non-conceptualism. According to these positions, perceptual experiences have contents that represent the world as being in some particular way, even though the perceiving subject doesn’t need to have the concepts required to specify such content. Here, Kalpokas is interested in three versions of non-conceptualism, all of which grant some sort of epistemic relevance to the non-conceptual contents of experience: Heck’s (2000) informational

content, Peacocke's (1992) protopropositional and scenario content, and Hanna's (2011) essentially non-conceptual content. Kalpokas main line of objection is that, for perceptual experiences to count as reasons for holding beliefs, the perceiving subject must be able to incorporate their contents into her cognitive life. However, if the perceiving subject lacks the relevant concepts to understand what is being non-conceptually represented, then it becomes implausible to claim that she could incorporate such contents into her cognitive life. Therefore, non-conceptualism seems to fall into the following contradiction: the subject's own perceptual reasons for holding her beliefs would be unintelligible for her (something that, as Kalpokas is quick to point out, constitutes another version of the Myth of the Given).

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the propositional attitude view (PAV) and could be divided into two parts: one dedicated to clarifying this view, and one dedicated to arguing in its favor. According to PAV, perceptual experience has propositional content and is, therefore, a propositional attitude. Here, Kalpokas identifies three elements that require further clarification: (i) the propositional content of experience, (ii) the attitude of perceiving or experiencing and, (iii) that which experience is about. Regarding (i), Kalpokas points out that, by itself, PAV merely implies a minimal understanding of propositions as the bearers of truth-values. However, given the additional arguments offered in the previous chapters (regarding the epistemic and phenomenological nature of perceptual experience), he holds that those propositions must be composed, at least partially, of concepts. Regarding (ii), Kalpokas argues that perception doesn't merely present things or states of affairs, but rather discloses them as being facts. In this sense, one could say that perception has some sort of assertive force (a force that, given the adequate context, the subject could choose to reject). Finally, regarding (iii), Kalpokas goes into lengths to clarify that, while PAV holds that perceptual experience is a propositional attitude, it does *not* hold that we perceive propositions. In this sense, the object of experience, that which experience is about, are facts or states of affairs. Moreover, he argues against McDowell (1996) that facts should not be equated to true propositions, nor to the content of perceptual experiences *per-se*, but to what is *represented* by them instead. After these clarifications, several arguments are advanced to promote PAV as the view that best captures the epistemological and phenomenological nature of perception, as well as our linguistic practices when talking about it. Finally, Kalpokas considers and answers some traditional objections against PAV, among which is the criticism that it over-intellectualizes experience and makes it unavailable to non-linguistic animals. In another departure from McDowell's position,

Kalpokas readily acknowledges that we have empirical evidence to hold that some non-human animals do possess concepts, and that that's enough for them to have both beliefs and perceptual experiences.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to presenting Kalpokas' own version of PAV. His position tries to tackle what we could call "Kalpokas' Dilemma": if we hold that perceptual experiences have representational content that is fully independent of the world, we lose epistemic contact with it. However, if we prevent such independence by adopting a relational view (*e.g.* naïve realism), we also lose epistemic contact with the world for a different reason (*i.e.* the Myth of the Given). Kalpokas' solution is to offer a conciliatory view: perceptual experiences have content, but that content includes both conceptual propositions *and* the particular sides of the perceived objects themselves. This way, perception is both a contentful *and* relational mental state, with both conceptual and world-dependent contents. The perceived object itself anchors our experience to the world, giving us the epistemic contact needed to make empirical knowledge possible. Nonetheless, it is the conceptual propositional content that makes perceptual experience intelligible to the subject, enabling perception to participate in reason-giving relations with beliefs. More specifically, conceptual contents penetrate perceptual experience to categorize perceived objects in the same way as judgement do, therefore enabling logical relations between the two. And, phenomenologically, that categorization reflects on the fact that we generally experience the perceived side of objects as parts of *full* objects (instead of mere *façades*). This way, despite perceptual content having two "dimensions" or "factors", such dimensions are not separable in experience (a result that pays homage to Kant's *dictum* about blindness and emptiness). The rest of the chapter is dedicated to showing how Kalpokas' contents are different from both Fregean senses and Russellian propositions, and to previewing how his position grants perceptual experience with epistemic significance without the risk of falling into the Myth of the Given.

Chapter 6, aptly named "Perceptual Reasons", further examines Kalpokas' view of how perceptual experiences can serve as justificatory reasons for beliefs. Perceptual reasons are understood as distinctive propositional attitudes. Given the peculiar assertive force of perception, experience can motivate us to acquire or hold certain beliefs. Moreover, given the conceptual and propositional nature of (part of) the experienced content, perceptual content can bear truth and participate in the required logical relations to (both inferentially and non-inferentially) justify beliefs. This justifying relation involves a transmission of (mostly) identical contents from experience to belief. And, since experience also discloses the truth-maker of the belief, it offers an undefeatable justification for it.

This way, the propositional dimension of perceptual content can serve as a reason for holding a belief, while the relational dimension of perceptual content anchors it to the perceived object (and world), all the while avoiding the Myth of the Given.

Finally, Chapter 7 is dedicated to a topic that was among McDowell's chief motivations for presenting his conceptualism but that has been, surprisingly, seldom addressed in the subsequent literature. That is, the transcendental topic of how the empirical content of thought is possible in the first place. Here, "empirical thought" is understood as thought that is directed towards the factual world (*i.e.* thinking that tries to represent states of affairs). Therefore, empirical thought must be "answerable" to how things actually are if it is to have meaning at all. And, since we can only ultimately know states of affairs by perception, it must be possible to know by experience what state of affairs makes an empirical thought true (or false). Crucially, Kalpokas holds (against causal-linkage views) that it isn't enough to have empirical thought merely connected to empirical objects by experience, but that it is also required that the subject understands what the truth makers of their thoughts are. However (against McDowell and fully representational views), Kalpokas holds that some connection to the actual objects of empirical thought in experience is required, if experience is supposed to disclose the truth makers of empirical thoughts at all. Kalpokas' view elegantly incorporates both elements into his characterization of perceptual content, therefore giving a new and interesting answer to this often ignored issue.

Thus, Daniel Kalpokas' *Perception and Its Content: Toward the Propositional Attitude View*, offers an overarching examination of the nature of perception, its relation to knowledge and empirical thinking, and the variety of philosophical positions that have tried to tackle these issues before. It is an amenable reading, that doesn't waste too much time on re-explaining often treaded ground, and instead advances on challenging established ideas and proposing new solutions to standing issues. For this reason, it is a particularly recommended reading for scholars that already have some knowledge on philosophy of perception and are looking for refreshing, challenging and inspiring ideas. (*Nicolás Alejandro Serrano, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina, naserrano@filo.uba.ar*)

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