***Sympathy in Perception*,** by Mark EliKalderon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xix + 213.

Deftly weaving together ancient, phenomenological, analytic, and empirical sources and ideas, *Sympathy in Perception* is a rich and rewarding elaboration and defence of a naïve realist (or relationalist) theory of perception. But although the general shape of the theory is familiar from contemporary debates in philosophy of perception, insofar as *Sympathy in Perception* represents ‘an unabashed exercise in historically informed, speculative metaphysics’ (ix), Kalderon develops the view by requisitioning explanatory concepts from the pre-modern era. Kalderon’s central thesis is that perception is a ‘mode of formal assimilation’ that ‘places us in the very heart of things’ due to the operation of a ‘principle of sympathy’. By excavating philosophical insights from pre-modern philosophical thought, and deploying these insights, transformed, to the contemporary debate, Kalderon aims to ‘contribute to, if not indeed effect, a Kuhnian revolution’ in philosophy of perception (xii). This is a bold and ambitious project that will be of interest to anyone working on the philosophy of perception or its history. *Sympathy in Perception* greatly expands the repertoire of historical figures, traditions, and concepts that are relevant to the contemporary debate, simultaneously helping to move the focus of the debate away from vision, to senses that have been less widely discussed.

Kalderon’s starting point is that perceptual experience is *a mode of formal assimilation of its object*, relative to a perceiver’s partial perspective on it in the particular circumstances of perception. Haptic experience provides the paradigm case (Chs. 1-2), but the general framework is extended to all forms of sensory experience, with a specific focus on auditory (Chs. 3-4) and visual experience (Ch. 5).

In the haptic case, when we reach out to grasp an object our hand shapes itself to the object. This is a kind of ‘enclosure’, ‘incorporation’, or ‘assimilation’ of the object. This mode of assimilation is *partial* because there is (normally) more to the object than we can take in at any one time; to enjoy a fuller, more rounded experience of the object, we therefore need to move it around in our hands, or move our hands across its surface. Hence, assimilation is relative to a perceiver’s perspective. This mode of assimilation is also *formal*, rather than *material*, because we do not literally take in the matter of the object, as we do when we taste something. Rather the hand takes on the *form* of the object, ‘by becoming like it, at least in some respect’ (p. 16). One way in which the hand becomes like the object it assimilates to is that it ‘approximates to the overall shape of the object’ (p. 16). More generally, however, your haptic experience ‘becomes like’ the object that it assimilates to in the sense that there is a similarity between ‘the haptic experience that the hand’s activity gives rise to and the tangible qualities presented to it’ (p. 17). This, in turn, provides a generalised understanding of ‘formal assimilation’ that can be applied to other sensory modalities: the phenomenological character of experience formally assimilates to the sensible qualities presented to it.

Kalderon argues that the claim that perceptual experience is a mode of formal assimilation has important consequences. When the hand shapes itself to an object and encloses it, haptic experience is the ‘joint upshot of forces in conflict’ (p. 13):

On the one hand, there is the force exerted in molding the hand more precisely to the contours of the rigid, solid body. On the other hand, there are the self-maintaining forces of the rigid, solid body itself (p. 12).

That perceptual experience is the joint upshot of forces in conflict is a manifestation (or perhaps even the source p. 11) of the ‘objectivity’ of perception: the fact that perceptual experience is experience of an independently existing world.

This in turn has epistemic consequences. Given that perceptual experience depends on the way that the world is independent of the perceiver, the world plays an ineliminable explanatory role in the experience being the experience it is. The precise force and shape of the hand in grasping depends on the shape of the object that it assimilates to. This results in an anti-Cartesian, disjunctivist, account of perception (§1.5 and §6.2). Perceptual experiences are shaped by their objects, not causally but constitutively. If the object to which we are related differs, then so does the experience; if there is no object of the relevant kind, then there is nothing to which the experience can assimilate to. Even if this is not alone sufficient to undermine Cartesian scepticism, according to Kalderon it nevertheless provides the basis of an explanation of how we are epistemically warranted in judging how things are in the world on the basis of our experience of them.

But how is the formal assimilation of objects in perception possible? Kalderon supplements this account of perceptual experience as formal assimilation, relative to a perceiver’s partial perspective on it in the particular circumstances of perception, with appeal to the principle of *sympathy*. The problem to which sympathy is a solution is how self-awareness, and in particular awareness of a limit to our bodily activity, provides us with an awareness of something distinct from ourselves (§1.7). Kalderon’s suggestion is that the operation of sympathy discloses to us the presence of a distinct body—in the case of haptic perception, an object with particular tangible qualities. This is not supposed to be a form of indirect realism. Kalderon argues on phenomenological grounds that we are not explicitly aware of the bodily experience of the hand’s shape and force when we touch an external object. Rather our awareness of the limit to our bodily activity is implicit, something to which we can attend, but which is not routinely the object of our attention. What we are explicitly aware of is the object and its tangible properties (§§2.2-2.4).

What exactly is sympathy? The principle of sympathy cannot be understood ‘synthetically’ (p. 52), as a principle that can be understood independently of haptic perception, and out of which an understanding of haptic perception can be constructed. Rather, the claim that the presentation of objects in haptic perception is governed by the principle of sympathy is to be understood ‘analytically’. This approach:

explains and renders intelligible elements and principles that must be operative if haptic perception is so much as possible. On the analytic approach, the task, then, is to articulate the intelligible structure determined by the presupposed activity (p. 53).

In particular, sympathy is not to be confused with our modern notion of sympathy, understood as a form of fellow-feeling. Rather, sympathy should be understood in a way that pre-dates this modern conception of sympathy. It is inspired by the way that the Stoics appealed to sympathy to explain action at a distance, and by the way that Plotinus remodeled this to explain distal perception (§2.7). Abstractly characterised, Kalderon defines sympathy as follows:

*Sympathy*: A case of formal assimilation is governed by the principle of sympathy when and only when one part of a unified manifold formally assimilates to a potentially noncontiguous part of that manifold because the parts, disposed as they are, are united in the manifold, in the way that they are (p. 74).

This account of haptic perception is then extended to auditory (Chapters 3-4) and visual perception (Chapter 5). In the auditory case, Kalderon defends a version of the ‘wave theory’ of sounds, according to which sounds are propagations of patterned disturbances through a dense and elastic medium (p. 105). He combines this wave theory of sounds with a refined form of Heideggarian theory of auditory perception, according to which we hear the sources of sounds (sound-generating events) *directly*, but through *implicitly* hearing the sounds they create. This Heideggarian view of auditory perception contrasts with Berkelian and neo-Berkelian theories according to which what we hear directly are sounds, and the sources of sounds are at best heard indirectly. Like haptic perception, auditory perception also involves forces in conflict: on the one hand, the psychological force of active *listening* (as distinct from mere *hearing*), and on the other the sound-generating events that are the sources of sounds, and which constitutively shape the auditory experience (pp. 141-147). Sympathy explains how we hear the sources of sound in, or through, the sounds they produce.

Generalising Maine de Biran’s dictum that ‘In order to hear well, it is necessary to *listen*’, Kalderon then extends the account to vision, arguing that visual perception involves *looking*. Visual perceptual experience has an active, outer-directed phenomenological character; it is this that classical ‘extramissionist’ theories of perception sought to capture, and which underlies the existence and persistence of ‘extramissionist’ intuitions in children and even adults. This active, outer-directed phenomenology is the result of looking. Looking is an active power – although like listening, it is not necessarily something that is fully active, but rather can be sustained by the capacity to act in visually relevant ways (in Aristotelian terms, it can be sustained by a first actuality of a second potentiality) (p. 166). When we look at an object, the psychological force comes into conflict with the object. Sympathy in turn explains how the limits to visual activity provided by objects in the environment disclose those objects, in doing so placing us ‘in the very heart of things’, it being there, with the objects, that ‘visual apprehension takes place’ (p. 160).

*Sympathy in Perception* provides a wealth of historical, methodological and philosophical insights. Of course, it also raises a number of questions. Many of these questions revolve, more or less directly, around the book’s central explanatory concepts, and in particular the principle of sympathy.

Consider, by way of illustration, Kalderon’s discussion of auditory experience. This is interesting, and controversial, both for the theory of sounds it defends, but also because of its account of the relationship of sounds to sound sources. Both aspects of this view raise questions.

At least part of Kalderon’s motivation for accepting a version of the Wave Theory—relatively unpopular in recent discussions—is to vindicate the claim that auditory experience has an ‘emanative’ phenomenology (p. 108): that sounds are heard as coming to us from certain directions. Engaging in characteristically careful phenomenological investigation, Kalderon argues that the emanative phenomenology of auditory experience is not to be understood on the model of the movement of a solid object towards the hearer, as if sounds were ‘sonic missiles’. Rather, we should understand the sense in which sounds appear to come towards us on the model of ‘growth’, as if they are expanding into the space surrounding their source (pp. 120-125).

This is an interesting suggestion, but we may still wonder about its claim to capture the phenomenology of auditory experience. It is not the case that sounds typically appear to grow in the way that, say, we can hear the sound of chattering growing as a room fills with people; nor is it this kind of growth (in volume, i.e. loudness, rather than spatial extent) that Kalderon has in mind. It is plausible to suppose, as Kalderon argues, that sounds are essentially dynamic entities, that unfold over time; but this kind of temporal growth is not what is at issue either. The growth metaphor might seem to more aptly describe at least some cases of olfactory experience, for instance in cases where a smell gradually pervades a room. But then we might wonder whether there isn’t an important difference between auditory experience and the more clearly emanative phenomenology of olfaction. Although there may be cases in which sounds seem to ‘fill’ a space—for instance, if they are very loud or the space is very small—it is less clear that this captures the phenomenology of other, more common, kinds of auditory experience, such as hearing the call of the birds from outside your window.

The Heideggarian aspect of Kalderon’s account also raises questions. Kalderon argues that we do not hear objects, strictly speaking. According to Kalderon we hear sound-generating events in, or through, the sounds that they create, but we don’t strictly speaking hear the objects that are constituents of, or participants in, these events: so, for instance, we hear Big Ben’s striking through the sound that this striking creates, but we don’t hear Big Ben itself. At best, Big Ben is ‘present as absent’, in the form of a dynamic ‘aural image’ (p. 102). The motivation for this claim is that sounds are essentially dynamic temporal entities, and objects are of the wrong metaphysical category to sustain audible qualities. But given the role that sympathy is supposed to play in explaining how our experience of one thing can disclose something else, is this hard line necessary? Why couldn’t the sound that we are implicitly aware of disclose both the sound-generating event and the object that is a constituent of that event?

Indeed, we might wonder exactly how the principle of sympathy is supposed to operate in this case. In the haptic case, sympathy is an answer to the question of how implicit awareness of a limit to the body can explicitly disclose the presence of something distinct from it. In the auditory case, sympathy plays a subtly, but importantly different explanatory role. In the auditory case, what we are implicitly aware of is not just a limit to the body. We are also implicitly aware of a sound: a perturbation of a surrounding medium, and so something that is constitutively independent of perceiving subjects. Sympathy plays a role in explaining how our implicit awareness of limitations to the psychological force of hearing disclose to us a sound; but it also seems to play a role in explaining how our implicit awareness of the mind-independent sound discloses to us the source of the sound. Can sympathy play this dual role? Given Kalderon’s abstract characterisation, sympathy can play a role if the sound ‘formally assimilates’ to the sound-generating event. But does the sound formally assimilate to its cause, in the sense of ‘becoming like it’? There are echoes here of the neo-Aristotelian view of the transmission of ‘sensible species’ from objects to the eye, although it is unclear that this part of the Scholastic heritage is something to which Kalderon himself subscribes.

There are also more general questions about the key concepts in Kalderon’s project. Consistent with his description of the project as a project in ‘historically informed speculative metaphysics’, Kalderon sees the central concepts of ‘formal assimilation’ and ‘sympathy’ as part of a theoretical, explanatory project. They are intended to be part of a substantive metaphysical explanation of (respectively) the nature of perceptual experience, and how perceptual experience, given its distinctive nature, is possible. Part of the motivation for an historically informed approach is that Kalderon thinks it is necessary if we are to give an illuminating account of the irreducible presentational element of perceptual experience. This, he claims, is because the ‘tools of contemporary analytic metaphysics would seem not to leave one much to work with’; instead we need ‘tools more adequate to the task at hand’ (x).

Consistent with something like the naïve realist approach that Kalderon develops, we might wonder whether further explanation of the presentational element of experience is indeed necessary. On the one hand, it might be denied that a *substantial* metaphysical explanation is needed: perhaps the irreducible presentational element of perceptual experience can be taken as metaphysically primitive. On the other hand, it might be suggested from a quietist perspective that we can resist the need to provide a *metaphysical* explanation of perception at all.

But assuming that a substantive metaphysical explanation is required, is the explanation that Kalderon provides more successful than that provided by contemporary naïve realists, who standardly appeal to conscious relations of direct acquaintance that are constitutively dependent on their objects?

On the one hand, the concept of ‘formal assimilation’ is not basic within Kalderon’s pitcure, but can itself be understood in terms of the metaphysical notions of *constitution* and *individuation*. Formal assimilation involves a kind of ‘constitutive shaping’ of experience by its objects. Experiences are not shaped by their objects in a merely causal sense: they are not logically distinct existences that stand only in an extrinsic relationship to their causes. Rather, the relationship between experiences and their objects is much tighter: experiences are individuated by their objects, and constitutively dependent on them in the way that the London skyline is constitutively dependent on St Paul’s in the image on the book’s cover (pp. 23-29). In this case, therefore, it seems as though the central pre-Modern conception of *formal assimilation* can itself be elucidated using the tools of contemporary metaphysics, and in this respect the distance between Kalderon’s approach and that of the contemporary naïve realist is limited.

The concept of ‘sympathy’, on the other hand, is more clearly a novel explanatory tool, but presents a slightly different challenge. The notion is appropriated from the Stoic and Neo-Platonic traditions. Kalderon’s discussion of the historical introduction of the term provides a fascinating account of its development, and highlights the embeddedness of the historical notion within particular metaphysical systems. Within these systems, sympathy was intended to be an entirely general principle that explains all forms of physical and psychological action at a distance, and operates between different parts of the natural world because the sensible cosmos is a unity that is animated by a World-Soul (pp. 63-66). Kalderon transforms the concept, in part, by divorcing it from the broader metaphysical theories in which it was originally embedded. But while this is not necessarily problematic in and of itself, the wider context helps to give the concept a certain depth.

First, Kalderon does not endorse the monistic and vitalistic metaphysics of the Stoics or neo-Platonists (p. 78), but we might wonder whether something like this background metaphysical picture is required in order to get a purchase on the explanation that sympathy is introduced to provide. At the very least, the objects to which we formally assimilate in perception have to be such that our conscious experience can become ‘like’ them. There has to be some form resemblance between their sensible qualities and the qualities of our conscious experiences; perceivers cannot be radically different from that which they perceive. At a minimum this requires what Kalderon describes as the ‘anti-modern’ conception of sensible qualities like colour that he defends elsewhere (x).

Second, Kalderon is agnostic on whether the principle of sympathy applies only in the case of perceptual experience, or is rather a more general principle that explains all forms of action at a distance or other psychological phenomena. There is a dilemma here. Kalderon considers a hypothetical example of how sympathy might work outside a perceptual context, appealing to a suggestion by van Fraassen to show that action at a distance is at least an intelligible effect of a global contraint on a physical system (p. 67). But the situation envisaged, in which matter spontenously appears in random locations to balance out the disappearance of matter elsewhere, does not describe the actual world, and it is unclear how plausible the wider application of the principle would be. Narrowing the scope of the concept so that it applies just to perceptual experience, however, would mean that it would lose its generality: it would no longer be able to provide the unifying explanation of a range of distinct phenomena that it was in pre-Modern theories. This would also make it susceptible to encroachment. If we no longer need to appeal to sympathy to explain other forms of physical and psychological interaction, then why should we retain it in the case of perception: why suppose that perceptual experience is distinctive?

Third, and more generally, we might wonder whether the ‘analytic’ account of sympathy that Kalderon provides is sufficient to help us get traction on the concept. Kalderon follows Plotinus in rejecting the Stoic assumption that we can provide a ‘synthetic’ explanation of sympathy, for instance by appealing to a mechanism that explains how the parts of a unity work together. Rather, sympathy is explained ‘analytically’: we cannot understand what sympathy is independent of the experience that it makes possible. The obvious concern with this is that the explanation sympathy provides is rather shallow. Our grasp on how perception, understood as a formal assimilation of its object, is possible, bottoms out in a principle that cannot be understood independently of the fact that perception is a formal assimilation of its object. So, whilst the pre-Modern concept of ‘sympathy’ extends the explanatory toolkit provided by contemporary metaphysics, we might wonder whether this tool is sufficiently sharp to do the explanatory work it was introduced to do.

But these questions do nothing to blunt the force of *Sympathy in Perception* as a ‘disruptive’ intervention into contemporary debates in the philosophy of perception. The tour that Kalderon takes the reader on through the ancient, medieval and phenomenological ancestors and relatives of contemporary naïve realist theories is like travelling to a foreign country, where things are both noticeably different, and also recognisably similar. Like foreign travel, this journey will give philosophers of perception a refreshed perspective on their home when they return.\*

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