

A. B. Dickerson. *Kant on Representation and Objectivity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. x + 217pp. ISBN 0-521-83121-0. \$55.00.

This work is primarily concerned with one of the most crucial sections of the Critique of Pure Reason—the second edition version of the Transcendental Deduction (or B-Deduction). Dickerson pursues his interpretation through an analysis of a different topic, representation itself. If this original analysis of representation is acceptable, Dickerson argues, alternative interpretations of spontaneity, apperception, self-consciousness, etc. can be obtained. Chapter 1 concerns Kant's notion of representation as an alternative to the traditional, early modern conceptions of representation. In Chapter 2, Dickerson presents an overview of his reading of the B-Deduction. In Chapters 3 and 4, the interpretations of representation and the overall argument of the B-Deduction are defended through closer analysis of the text. However, one must be cautious of works that concern themselves primarily with one contested area of the first Critique. Kant thought of the Critique as an architectonic project. Frequently, conclusions are reached on the basis of a variety of arguments, scattered throughout the book. While arguments such as those found in the Transcendental Deduction and the Refutation of Idealism tempt one to view the Deduction and Refutation independently of Kant's entire metaphysical project, it remains the case that an examination of sections in isolation may hinder rather than enhance one's understanding of Kant's true intentions.

However, Dickerson's aim in *Kant on Representation and Objectivity* is in one sense modest. He frequently refers to his interpretation of Kant's theory of representation as merely a "hypothesis" that he thinks can "make good sense" of the B-Deduction. Dickerson is attempting neither to argue that the Kantian interpretation presented is philosophically sound nor, more surprisingly, to argue for the architectonic significance of the analysis. Dickerson stipulates that he will not analyse the implications of his interpretation for the various other sections of the first Critique—for example, the Refutation of Idealism is mentioned in

passing only twice (174, 210) and empirical realism fails to receive any mention at all. Still, Dickerson's work has considerable merit. Dickerson is concerned with being as clear as possible, no easy task considering the subject matter. More specifically, he tries to present Kant's account of representation within its historical context, a strategy that proves profitable. Furthermore, Dickerson confidently presents his interpretation against competing accounts found in the secondary literature. He covers a wide variety of topics that fall under the philosophical scope of the B-Deduction, more than I can do adequate justice to in this review. But despite the quality of the exegesis, the central claims of the book do not receive their promised justification. One of these claims concerns an account of the role of unity in the B-Deduction:

What is perhaps my key interpretive claim is that at the core of the B-Deduction is a problem—the problem of making intelligible the unity of complex representations—that is the representationalist parallel of the semantic problem of the unity of the proposition.(1-2)

Dickerson concedes that in the first two chapters he writes “at quite a distance from Kant's text” (3) and is aware of this risk. He stipulates that his more distanced start to his interpretation is designed to give the reader “a synoptic view of [the] overall structure” (3) of the B-Deduction and its related passages in the first Critique. In the remainder of the work, Dickerson applies the more abstract interpretive results of the first two chapters to particular sections of the text and attempts to vindicate the interpretive strategy.

Another claim concerns the content of representation and the activity of synthesis that makes complex representing possible. I shall limit the majority of my remaining critical comments to these points. Kantian representations are neither reducible to constructions made from collections of independent mental entities (an idealist model), nor images, etc. that stand for some other object, the existence and nature of which is determined through acts of inference (the indirect realist model). Rather, Dickerson claims that “the picture... does not stand proxy for something outside of itself, but rather presents something to us off its own bat—or ‘auf

eigene Faust', as Wittgenstein has it" (15). What we might call Dickerson's 'representational hypothesis' (**RH**) is constituted by the claim that Kant's notion of representation appears to have anticipated Wittgenstein's in at least two crucial respects. First, it is claimed that a representation for Kant presents its object to us "off its own bat" (a notion that's left obscure in Dickerson's text). Second, the active component that contributes the unity of the proposition (for Wittgenstein) or the unity of complex representations (for Kant) is central to the possibility of understanding and experience.

In evaluating this interpretation, one must first approach the question as to whether **RH** has any prima facie plausibility. Only when this first question is examined can one approach the second question: whether **RH**, if granted prima facie plausibility, receives enough textual support to constitute part of the B-Deduction. It appears to me that on both counts **RH** is problematic.

First, in order to constitute part of the B-Deduction, **RH** would have to be formulated as the result of an anachronistic analogy. While it appears plausible that Wittgenstein's account of the latter feature, i.e. the unity of the proposition, was influenced by Kant's account of the combination of complex representations by the activity of synthesis, it seems wrong-headed to run the analogy in the other direction, inferring that Kant's account also shares the former feature, i.e. the notion of representation that presents its object "off its own bat".

Second, there is a shortage of textual evidence to support that Kant thought of himself as reconceiving representation in the specified way. Dickerson describes representationalism as the commitment to the claim that "the immediate objects of consciousness are the mind's own ideas, impressions, or representations" (8). As he correctly points out, this does not specify the nature of those immediate objects of consciousness (specifically whether or not they are independent entities or mental states or something else). Therefore, we can describe Kant as a representationalist in the above sense without committing him in any way to the question of the actual status of representations in general. Dickerson claims therefore that while "no doubt representationalists like Hume and (perhaps) Ber-

keley do think of ideas as independent entities, there seems no reason to think that Kant is committed to such a view" (8).

This would appear to overstate the matter somewhat. As an interpretative hypothesis, it might be suggested that since Hume almost certainly reified representations, and since Kant was surely motivated in the first Critique to respond to Hume's conclusions, one should assume that Kant also followed Hume in this crucial regard. One might object then that for an interpretation that is *prima facie* anachronistic in nature, one requires textual evidence that clearly favours **RH** over more traditional interpretations. Even evidence that can be interpreted equally in favour of one or the other is surely insufficient to sway the reader away from the traditional interpretations.

As Dickerson notes, when Kant attempts to differentiate transcendental idealism from traditional representationalism, it is most frequently on the grounds that the former involves a synthesis of representations according to necessary rules (e.g. 59-60). Yet this is sufficient to differentiate the Kantian account from those of Berkeley, Locke, or Hume, even without the inclusion of a radically different conception of the representations undergoing this synthesis. The question that must be posed for Dickerson's interpretation is: 'Why didn't Kant explicitly differentiate his version of idealism if his account concerned an entirely different conception of representation?'. Why should one entertain an interpretative hypothesis that represents such a radical discontinuity with the traditional accounts of the nature of representation itself if Kant himself did not specify this as being the crucial point of departure?

Third, there is the issue of realism. Dickerson argues that **RH** "is an attempt to recapture the realism that has disappeared in these Cartesian and empiricist accounts [of representation]" (19). There is no discussion as to how this recaptured realism is supposed to configure within Kant's project of transcendental idealism. One might have thought that if, as Dickerson claims, for Kant **RH** is primitive (7-8) and furthermore implies a commitment to realism, the theory of the transcendental ideality of the objects of experience would appear convoluted at best, superfluous at worst. Furthermore, it renders the motivation for the transcendental idealism/

empirical realism distinction, so crucial to Kant's aims, even more mysterious. In this sense at least then, the examination of the B-Deduction, outside of its architectonic context, raises more issues than it resolves.

As to the first question, it is unclear whether **RH** has even any *prima facie* plausibility. Dickerson himself thinks that as long as **RH** is acknowledged as being a plausible account of Kant's notion of representation, **RH** can subsequently be vindicated by its ability to "make good sense" (31) of certain obscure sections of the B-Deduction. Unfortunately, even putting aside my doubts regarding the initial plausibility of **RH**, Dickerson's interpretation receives only ambiguous support from the text itself.

As has already been mentioned, Dickerson holds that Kant shares with Locke and Berkeley a broad adherence to representationalism. Where Kant apparently diverges from the traditional representationalist path is in regard to an account of just how complex cognition takes place, of just what it is to represent an object. Whereas Berkeley holds that this activity is a matter of construction from a collection of representations, Dickerson holds that Kant sees cognition as the power of synthesis acting upon representations, where "this act of synthesis is best understood on the analogy of seeing something in a picture" (71).

Therefore, according to Dickerson, Kantian representing crucially involves the activity of synthesis, which transforms Kant's representationalism into something entirely different from the versions held by Berkeley and Hume. Of course, this is not in itself a controversial interpretative claim—most commentators acknowledge the centrality of synthesis in Kant's account. Dickerson differs, rather, concerning his position of just what synthesis consists in—whether or not it involves a commitment to **RH**.

This means that there are plenty of passages where Kant himself appears to take the time to differentiate his account from Berkeley's. The question still remains whether Kant is referring in these passages to **RH** or to a more traditional notion of synthesis as the ground of the objective a priori rules of experience. In such a scenario, the evidence cited fails to support **RH** any more than it does the traditional accounts that Dickerson is attempting to revise. Although I believe that this is the case with many of

Dickerson's cited passages, I shall illustrate it here with just one example. In Chapter 4, Dickerson quotes a well-known section from the B-Deduction. Here, Kant makes the following claim regarding the necessary unity of representations in a judgement:

By that, to be sure, I do not mean to say that these representations necessarily belong to one another in the empirical intuition, but rather that they belong to one another in virtue of the necessary unity of the apperception in the synthesis of intuitions, i.e., in accordance with principles of the objective determination of all representations insofar as cognition can come from them, which principles are all derived from the principle of the transcendental unity of apperception. Only in this way does there arise from this relation a judgment, i.e., a relation that is objectively valid, and that is sufficiently distinguished from the relation of these same representations in which there would be only subjective validity, e.g., in accordance with laws of association.¹

Dickerson argues "what is under attack here is the familiar representationalist idea that cognition is ultimately founded upon an immediate awareness of one's own 'ideas'" and that instead "Kant makes it clear that apperception is not to be identified with the immediate awareness of one's internal states or 'ideas', but with the cognition of an objective world in those internal states" (179). However, rather than assuming that Kant is explicating how we employ an altogether different account of representation, it is surely a simpler and more intuitive reading of the above passage to suggest that Kant is arguing that it is the addition of a priori rules of thought, made possible by synthesis and the transcendental unity of apperception, that grants those representations objective rather than subjective validity. Unless one had already given strong reasons for preferring **RH** in the first place, I cannot see how such an interpretation of this passage could be considered preferable, yet it is Dickerson's claim that it is the ability of **RH** to "make good sense" of sections such as this that ultimately vindicates its initial adoption.

A final drawback of Dickerson's interpretation is the (conceded) relegation of the importance of scepticism to the B-Deduction as a whole. Since a major sceptical threat, namely doubt

regarding the correspondence of our representations to an independent reality, is negated by taking that correspondence as being an intrinsic part of a concept of representation, which is itself primitive, there remains the question 'What is the purpose of the Deduction?'. Dickerson seems to suggest that the role is merely explicatory in nature and conditional in its conclusions:

If the B-Deduction is simply an analysis of cognition, then the most it can achieve is a proof of what else must be the case if we have cognition or objective experience. (206)

Dickerson acknowledges that he will not give a full and complete response to this charge of the neglect of scepticism in this work; nevertheless, the brief responses that he does offer are far from satisfactory. His first textually-based response is "simply that the interpretation of the B-Deduction as an anti-skeptical argument does not fit Kant's text as well as my own interpretation" (207). There is a somewhat ad hoc response—since Dickerson claims his interpretation fits the text of the B-Deduction, yet this interpretation does not account for the Deductions' explicitly anti-sceptical function, Dickerson concludes that the text must lack any essential anti-sceptical content. Yet, there is evidence that Kant appears to use the sceptical scenario of a subjective association of appearances, where the appearances might fail to correspond to any independent reality, as a motivation for the entire project of the Deduction (e.g. B 127).

Dickerson also defends his interpretation on the grounds that it presents an interpretation of the B-Deduction that is "philosophically interesting" (207), despite no longer being primarily concerned with responding to a form of scepticism. This is undeniably true; nevertheless, whether or not the interpretation is philosophically interesting says nothing as to whether or not it is an accurate interpretation of Kant's intentions in the Critique of Pure Reason, but this is the question at hand.

As has already been mentioned, the present review cannot do justice to the variety of topics Dickerson covers in his book. The ownership of mental states, the conceptual content (or lack thereof)

of intuitions, the difference between inner sense and apperception, the notion of an intellectual intuition and many other topics all receive interesting analyses. Ultimately though, the impression received is that the reasonableness of the overall interpretation depends upon the reasonableness of accepting **RH** in the first place. The result is that the interpretation is more provocative than persuasive. While I doubt the veracity of some of the crucial claims that Dickerson presents in this book, there is no doubt in my mind that it is of a standard worthy of serious investigation and that committed study will reap the appropriate dividends.

Notes

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, B 142. The above passage is a segment of the entire passage quoted by Dickerson (178).

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