

# Review of David Landy's *Kant's Inferentialism: The Case Against Hume*

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13.10.16

Forthcoming in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*

David Landy's *Kant's Inferentialism: The Case Against Hume* is an ambitious and interesting book. It argues that Kant subscribes to a 'brand of what we would now call inferentialism', which 'in Kant... takes the form of the thesis that concepts are rules for relating intuitions to one another by subsuming them under conditions that prepare them to be used in various syllogisms' (2). It suggests that Kant uses this brand of inferentialism to solve the problems that he identifies with Hume's competing theory of mental representation. Along the way, it attempts to shed light on some of the most important passages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, including the Transcendental Deduction, the first and second Analogies of Experience, and the Paralogisms of Pure Reason.

The book is divided into six chapters and a postscript on transcendental idealism. The subject of the first chapter is Hume's theory of mental representation in his *Treatise of Human Nature*. According to Landy, Hume thinks that an idea represents a given impression in virtue of the fact that it is a copy of this impression, where this means that it is caused by and exactly resembles this impression (22-23). Hume thinks that an idea represents a given complex of impressions in virtue of the fact it is a complex of ideas representing the impressions in this complex (46-47). Finally, he thinks that an idea represents a given complex of impressions

accurately if it is also a copy of this complex of impressions (46-47). In the second chapter, Landy raises two objections against Hume's theory of mental representation, which he claims to find in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* and the *Metaphysical Deduction* of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. The objections are that if Hume's theory is correct, then 'no complex representation is a representation of any particular and determinate complex state of affairs' (62), and that Hume's theory is 'unable to account for, or explain away, the unity of the proposition' (101). In the course of this chapter, Landy also introduces Kant's competing theory of mental representation, which he claims is 'specifically tailored to remedy these deficiencies in Hume' (101). According to Landy, Kant thinks that an intuition represents an object in virtue of the fact that it is brought under a rule governing the permissible inferences between this and other intuitions (66). The rule of inference under which an intuition is brought is a concept, and the act of bringing an intuition under a rule of inference is a judgment. As Landy puts it, judgments are 'the vehicles by which intuitions come to be normatively-inferentially connected with one another' (101), and it is by being normatively-inferentially connected with one another that intuitions come to represent objects.

It should be clear from this that Landy is committed to a strongly conceptualist interpretation of Kant's theory of mental representation. Landy's argument for this interpretation, which he presents in the third chapter, is a familiar one. Kant thinks that the synthesis of a manifold of representations is a necessary condition of the intuition of an object, and he thinks that the application of concepts is a necessary condition of the synthesis of a manifold of representations. So he must think that the application of concepts is a necessary condition of the intuition of an object (21-28). Landy also responds in this chapter to two objections against this sort of strongly conceptualist interpretation. The first objection, which he calls 'Pippin's Problem' (141), is that the theory of mental representation he is ascribing to Kant 'detaches perception, and thereby thought in general, from any worldly constraint' (108). The second objection is that this sort of interpretation flies in the face of the famous passage where Kant writes that 'the categories of the understanding do not

at all represent the conditions under which objects are given intuition' (A89/B122), and that 'intuition in no way requires the functions of thinking' (A91/B123). The standard response to this second objection is to suggest that what Kant is claiming in this passage is just that it is consistent with everything that he has established so far in the Critique that the application of the Categories is not a necessary condition of the intuition of an object. Landy's response is to suggest that what Kant is doing in this passage is 'pointing out the possibility... of an object's producing states in the experiencing subject, sensations, which are not themselves subject to the Categories' (129-130).

I did not find Landy's case for the strongly conceptualist interpretation convincing. First, regarding the second objection, what Kant is doing in the relevant passage is making a point about the conditions under which we can have an intuition of an object, not the conditions under which we can have a sensation. Second, regarding the familiar argument for the strongly conceptualist interpretation, Landy fails to consider possible objections to the claim that, for Kant, the application of concepts is a necessary condition of the synthesis of a manifold of representations (say, because Kant distinguishes different types of synthesis, only some of which require the application of concepts), or to the claim that, for Kant, the synthesis of a manifold of representations is a necessary condition of the intuition of an object. Third, Landy fails to take seriously the evidence that, as far as Kant is concerned, judgment is not a necessary condition of the intuition of an object. It is worth noting that most participants in the on-going debate about the interpretation of the Transcendental Deduction take this point for granted. Opponents of the non-conceptualist interpretation typically defend a much less strongly conceptualist interpretation according to which Kant thinks that a special sub-judgmental application of concepts is a necessary condition of the intuition of an object.

In the fourth chapter of his book, Landy explores what he describes as Kant's 'sophisticated inferentialist account of what an object is and how it is that we represent such objects,' according to which '[an] object... is first and foremost that which explains the consistency and coherence of manifold of sensations with which we

find ourselves' (173). This chapter also goes into greater detail about the rules of inference that Kant thinks are constitutive of concepts. As an example, Landy claims that the rule of inference: "There is short gray tail in front of me' implies 'There is a large gray body at the end of that tail" is 'part of the concept of an elephant? (186-187). In the fifth chapter, Landy presents an interpretation of the first and second Analogies of Experience informed by his inferentialist interpretation of Kant's theory of mental representation. And in the sixth chapter, he presents an interpretation of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason according to which the 'I think' is a purely formal representation the content of which is the 'normative-inferential activity' of the mind (238). According to Landy, Kant thinks that '[t]he self is constituted by... three inferential norms' (266) governing the 'I think', these being the rule that it 'does not have a predicative use', the rule that it 'cannot be analysed into any more simple semantic parts', and the rule that it 'is univocal with a given subject's thought' (264).

There are some surprising omissions. In a book dealing with Kant's theory of mental representation in the Critique of Pure Reason, it would be reasonable to expect a discussion of the letter that Kant wrote to Marcus Herz on 21st February 1772, where he famously raises the question 'what is the ground of that in us which we call 'representation' to the object?' (Ak X:130), and specifies some of the conditions under which we can understand 'how [a] determination of our mind can represent something, i.e., have an object' (Ak X:130). Landy refers to this letter only once, and then only to mine it for evidence that Kant 'takes sensations to be a kind of representation' (157). Landy also ascribes to Hume the claim that '[the] idea of a spatial complex is nothing more than a spatial complex of ideas' (45). He remarks in an endnote that this claim 'will, of course, strike the reader's ear as quite odd', since 'we don't normally think of our ideas as being spatially located at all' (50). Yet he fails to mention the fact that this is a point of disagreement with Kant, who thinks that our representations are located only in time.

Landy takes a light-touch approach to the secondary literature. Particularly striking is his lack of engagement with two recently published books that also fo-

cus on Kant's case against Hume, viz. Henry Allison's (2008) *Custom and Reason in Hume: A Kantian Reading of the First Book of the Treatise* and Paul Guyer's (2008) *Knowledge, Reason and Taste: Kant's Response to Hume*. Landy justifies this lack of engagement on the basis that, '[w]hile each of these important books shares the approach to Kant through Hume of the current study, each also differs from what will follow in fundamental ways that take the three studies down widely divergent paths' (15). Whereas Landy takes Hume and Kant to be making conflicting semantic claims about what it is possible for us to represent, Guyer takes Hume and Kant to be making conflicting epistemological claims about what it is possible for us to know (15). And while Allison, like Landy, takes Hume and Kant to be making conflicting semantic claims about what it is possible for us to represent, he 'quickly abandons on Hume's behalf the thesis... that a representation of a complex state of affairs is just a complex of representations' (15). According to Landy, 'not much interaction between the two [approaches] is possible from that point on' (16). I was not entirely convinced by this justification, and I am not entirely sure that this book would not have benefited from a greater engagement with these other works. There are many places where I would have found helpful a comparison of Landy's inferentialist interpretation of a given passage with an alternative non-inferentialist interpretation. This would have made it easier to grasp what is special about Landy's interpretation, and to assess its relative costs and benefits. I would have found this especially helpful in light of Landy's tendency to drift into Kant-speak, which occasionally blurs the line between exegesis and mere paraphrase (for example, 'the conceptual necessities connecting the manifold of representations not only transform that manifold into a representation of an object but also thereby come to posit that object as the ground of those necessities', '[the] concept of an object, and the necessary connection of its parts, is the concept of that which explains the conceptual necessities among the representations of those parts; it is the concept of that at which those conceptual necessities aim', 181).

This book would also have benefited from more careful proofreading. First,

there are frequent, distracting typographical mistakes (e.g. 222-223). Second, a number of philosophers have their names misspelled. The names of French philosophers are deprived of their accents ('Rene Descartes', 171, 'Beatrice Longuenesse', 18, 106), and the first name of one philosopher is confused with the surname of another ('Hanna Ginsborg', 17, 171). Third, there are mistakes in the use of English (139), Latin (251, 277), French (292), and German (18, 147). To take just one example, the first German word to appear in the book is an uncapitalized noun ('erinerrung', 53). By the way, it is not clear to me why this word appears in the book at all. Is it philosophically significant that Kant used the word 'Erinnerung' in his famous remark: 'die Erinnerung des David Hume war eben dasjenige, was mir... zuerst den dogmatischen Schlummer unterbrach...?' (Ak IV:260)?

Kant's Inferentialism: The Case Against Hume will be of interest to philosophers working on Kant's theory of mental representation. It makes a significant contribution to the strongly conceptualist school of Kant interpretation that draws its inspiration from the work of Wilfrid Sellars. However, it is unlikely to win this school any new converts.

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