

4 Kant on Concepts in Experience

4.1 The Point of Departure

According to Kant's Cooperation Thesis (KCT), intuitions unaccompanied by concepts are "blind." A "blind" intuition can be understood as an intuition that lacks reference to an object. Accordingly, intuitions unaccompanied by concepts must be non-intentional and also nonrepresentational. But nonconceptual content is both intentional and representational. Therefore, the nonconceptualist reading of Kant seems to lack sufficient warrant.

In reply to this, the nonconceptualist may point out that KCT applies, quite limitedly, to a certain kind of representational states, namely those states that bear some cognitive value. Mere perception, or intuition in Kant's language, does not have to bear any cognitive value, but this does not preclude its being object-directed. One can grant that not every case of perceiving an object is doxastic and hence not every instance of perception results in a judgment about an object.

But the conceptualist may again offer a response to such an argument. He may appeal to the transcendental deduction of the categories and contend that this argument establishes that intuition are necessarily subordinated to the pure concepts of the understanding insofar as they are to represent objects. For, in order to bring about any kind of representation, including an intuition, there must be synthesis that proceeds in accordance with the categories – rules provided by the understanding. There can be no passively taken-in content of perception. All representations must therefore be products of the mind's activity.

To this, the nonconceptualist may reply by noticing that some kinds of the contents of experience, and hence some kinds of representations do *not* result from synthesis in accordance with the rules provided by the understanding. Space and time, the forms of intuition and pure intuitions, as such, are not results of the synthesizing activity of the mind. But space and time, the conceptualist may respond, are not objects of representation, let alone of sense perception. Besides, as some commentators have argued, space and time *are* the outcome of the synthesizing activity of the mind, or "flowing constructions," as Arthur Melnick has called them.²²⁹ Therefore, they are contingent upon the conceptual furnishing of the mind, indeed, upon its categories.

A move to be made now, by the nonconceptualist, comes down to the analysis of the arguments put forward by his adversary. If the arguments are based on an

²²⁹ "Indeed, I believe that what Kant means by space and time being given in pure intuition is that they are, or exist in, flowing constructions." A. Melnick, "Categories, Logical Functions and Schemata in Kant," *The Review of Metaphysics* 54 (3), 2001, pp. 617-618.

adequate rendering of the Kantian texts, the conceptualist wins; if there are gaps in the conceptualist reading, however, then the victory can be granted to his adversary, or to neither.

In what follows, I will consider the arguments which make the conceptualist reading compelling and see to what extent this is indeed the case. Regardless of this, one could anyway argue for Kant’s nonconceptualism in that one would show that KCT applies primarily to the kind of experience that is valuable from the cognitive perspective. Thus, it does not encompass all possible kinds of experience, in particular the kind of experience that does not amount to cognition, such as aesthetic and ethical experience.

4.2 “The Same Function”

Unlike general logic, which abstracts from the content of concepts and analyzes the forms of thinking in general, transcendental logic deals with concepts by means of which we cognitively relate to objects in an a priori manner.²³⁰ Transcendental logic studies the a priori conceptual content of cognition. That there is such content is not immediately evident because the formal conditions of representing objects could as well be limited to the forms of intuition, space and time. However, in both the *Metaphysical* and the *Transcendental Deduction of the Categories*, Kant purports to show that the forms of intuition are insufficient as conditions of representing objects. If these arguments are cogent, then there must be more than a grain of truth in the conceptualist reading of Kant’s theory of experience.

The following statement from the third section of the “Clue to the Discovery of all Pure Concepts of the Understanding” seems to epitomize the idea of the conceptualist reading:

“The same function that gives unity to the different representations in a judgment also gives unity to the different representations in an intuition, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of understanding.”²³¹

In McDowell’s interpretation, what Kant suggests is that the same structure pertains to judgments and to intuitions.²³² So, what one, for example, can see and what one

²³⁰ Cf. I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by P. Guyer and A. W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 196-7 (A 57/B 82).

²³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 211 (B 105).

²³² More specifically, as Piotr Szatek notes, “in McDowell’s reading of this passage, Kant claims that intuitions (as ‘cases of sensory consciousness of objects’) have logical structures identical with logical structures of judgments.” P. Szatek, “Kant, Hegel and the Puzzles of McDowell’s Philosophy,” *Diametros* 29, 2011, p. 113. Cf. J. McDowell, “Hegel and the Myth of the Given” in: W. Welsh, K.

judges to be the case is structurally identical, even though what one can see and what one judges to be the case does not have to be the same kind of things (for experience itself delivers mere “appearings,” rather than judgments proper²³³). But, in Kant’s idiom, structure could be identified with form. And to say that the categories provide forms for intuitions, as well as for thought, is to blatantly miss Kant’s point. Rather, the point is that, although the categories do not provide forms for intuitions, they refer to the objects that can be represented in intuition in an a priori manner, thus necessarily.

The key word in the above passage from the *Metaphysical Deduction* is “unity.” For Kant does not claim that the objects represented in intuition are of necessity represented conceptually, as if intuiting, or perceptual experience was a kind of, or analogous to, thinking. The pure concepts of the understanding account for representing manifolds of intuition *as unified* and they account for unifying conceptual representations in a judgment. Thus, though it is not a kind of, or analogous to, thinking, intuiting must be rule-governed.

Does it imply that without concepts the manifolds of intuition would be represented, as it were, in disarray or confusion? And does it imply that without concepts no directedness at objects, and no representation, would be possible? I think that this does not have to be the case. For why not concede that furnishing the manifold with a structure or order may come in degrees? The forms of intuition would provide the basic structure for representations, a kind of primitive intentionality,²³⁴ and the categories would add further structuring, which would not be indispensable to entertaining intuitive representations, nonetheless. As I suggested in chapter 2, where I discussed Kant’s claims from his essay on directions in space, the basic structuring of the field of experience – in terms of relations such as “to the left,” “in front of,” “behind,” etc., which exemplify spatial relations – would be due to the bodily constitution of the subject, rather than to the subject’s conceptual repertoire.

To illustrate this point, let us think of a toddler’s way of getting acquainted with objects. For a baby that has not mastered any language yet, it may be difficult to parse her perceptual field in the same manner as adult humans do; what “competent” subjects regard as separate objects, for example food and a plate that the food is on, the baby may take as one object. But when she throws a ball on the floor, the child will easily perceive a difference between the ball and a cube, for instance. When thrown

Vieweg (eds.), *Das Interesse des Denkens: Hegel aus heutiger Sicht*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München 2003; “L’idealismo di Hegel come radicalizzazione di Kant,” translated by T. Fracassi, *Iride* 34, 2001.

²³³ McDowell defines “appearings,” the contents of perceptual experience, as being “just more of the same kind of things beliefs are: possessors of empirical content, bearing on the empirical world.” J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1996, p. 142.

²³⁴ Richard Aquila furthers a reading along these lines in: *Representational Mind: A Study of Kant’s Theory of Knowledge*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1983.

against the floor, the cube will not roll smoothly, unlike the ball. When catching the cube, the child will feel the protruding edges of the solid, unlike when catching the ball. Sensorimotor capacities enable thus the first stage of structuring one's perceptual field, without the employment of concepts.²³⁵

But, according to Kant, at this stage experience manifests no unity; so, strictly speaking, it is no experience (no empirical cognition) at all. For, as Kant remarked in the *Anthropology*, a small child has no experience but mere perception.²³⁶ Granted, the notion of unity is somewhat ambiguous here; for it may refer to the unifying principle such as apperception (experience has one "owner" who can attribute it to himself) or to conceptual capacities, the understanding (concepts, like the category of cause, establish connections between perceptions, e.g. between a ball lying on a pillow and a dent in the pillow). But, endorsing either way of understanding the principle of the unity of experience one can see that, on the Kantian tenets, small children lack both apperception and conceptual capacities, which does not preclude yet that they have some degree of intentionality or conscious perception (unless intentionality and conscious perception presuppose the two principles of the unity of experience, which would be the case on a narrow conception of experience).

4.3 Three Syntheses: Does Apprehension Require Recognition?

In the A-edition Transcendental Deduction Kant argues for the necessary involvement of the categories in experience. A programmatic statement, which one can find in A 97, reads:

"Now these concepts, which contain a priori the pure thinking in every experience, we find in the categories, and it is already a sufficient deduction of them and justification of their objective validity if we can prove that by means of them alone an object can be thought."²³⁷

Two claims seem to be worth underlining: (i) that every experience involves a pure form of thought, a category, and (ii) that only by means of the pure concepts can the objects of experience be *thought*. This is compatible with KCT and with understanding experience in the narrow sense – as empirical cognition rather than mere perceptual acquaintance with an object. That the narrow sense of experience is at issue here emerges from the following statement:

235 The sensorimotor theory of consciousness has been discussed in: J. K. O'Regan, E. Myin, A. Noë, "Sensory Consciousness Explained (Better) in Terms of 'Corporality' and 'Alerting Capacity,'" *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 4 (4), 2005.

236 Cf. I. Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, edited by G. Zöllner and R. B. Loudon, translated by M. Gregor et al., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, p. 240 (7:128).

237 I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit., p. 227 (A 97).

“If every representation were entirely foreign to the other, as it were isolated and separated from it, then there would never arise anything like *cognition*, which is a whole of compared and connected representations.”²³⁸

Thus, insofar as they are to refer to objects, representations must be connected, and this must be the case in virtue of a priori laws inherent in the mind. This connection of representations is contingent upon an activity of the mind, which Kant calls synthesis, and it pertains both to empirical and a priori, or pure, representations. In the A-edition Deduction, three kinds of synthesis are involved: a synthesis of apprehension in the intuition, a synthesis of reproduction in the imagination and a synthesis of recognition in the concept – according to the threefold division of cognitive faculties into sensibility, imagination, and understanding.

The word “synthesis,” in Kant’s use, refers to an operation of the mind that consists in “putting together” simple mental items into more complex ones.²³⁹ For instance, a representation of seven green dots arranged in an array is a result of synthesis in that the mind, as it were, runs through each separate item and connects it with another one. The process occurs in time: for representing a row of seven green dots presupposes representing, first, one green dot and then another green dot, and then another one etc. Furthermore, to produce a complex representation of this kind, one needs a rule – in our case, a rule which says that we start from the first item and proceed “forwards” adding every next item to the sum of the preceding ones. In arithmetic, this operation would be defined as the function of successor.

The three syntheses are interrelated and dependent upon one another; thus, the synthesis of apprehension, which consists in putting together a manifold of intuition into a unified representation, presupposes the synthesis of reproduction: for without retaining in mind the previous stages of the synthesis of a representation one would not get at the representation as a whole. For example, I could not represent seven dots in an array if I did not retain the moments of synthesizing the previous six ones. As Kant says:

“[...] if I were always to lose the preceding representations [...] from my thoughts and not reproduce them when I proceed to the following ones, then no whole representation and none of the previously mentioned thoughts, not even the purest and most fundamental representations of space and time, could ever arise.”²⁴⁰

The last synthesis – of recognition in the concept – rests on the consciousness of a rule, hence a concept, by means of which different representations have become synthesized. Without this consciousness it would be difficult to produce a

238 Ibidem, pp. 227-8 (A 97, emphasis mine).

239 Cf. ibidem, p. 210 (B 103).

240 Ibidem, p. 230 (A 102).

representation of a determinate kind – thus, the representation of a row of seven green dots would involve the concept of number and the concept of succession. Therefore, to the extent that intuitive representations result from acts of synthesis, concepts must accompany them: for a concept is “this one consciousness that unifies the manifold that has been successively intuited, and then also reproduced, into one representation.”²⁴¹

Now, it can be pointed out that the crucial argument for Kant’s conceptualism – i.e., the claim that concepts must accompany intuitions of objects – rests on a contentious assumption adopted by Kant. The assumption boils down to equating consciousness with self-consciousness, a move that some commentators, e.g. Paul Guyer, find illegitimate.²⁴² This means that, for example, if one wants to ascribe to S an experience of seven green dots arranged in a row, one can do so only if such an ascription has been or can be made by S herself. Thus, it does not suffice that S synthesize her representations in accordance with determinate rules (the concept of number and the concept of succession), she must also possess the concepts that are employed in the synthesis. In other words – and to use a distinction introduced in chapter 1 – for Kant, content conceptualism would imply state conceptualism.

How the assumption works in the section on syntheses in the A-edition of the *Critique* can be outlined in the following way. (1) Acquiring a representation of an object involves an act (or acts) of synthesis in accordance with a rule, or concept. (2) The act of synthesis presupposes transcendental apperception, or the a priori unity of consciousness, as its necessary condition,²⁴³ and it is only in the act of synthesis that we can become conscious of this unity of consciousness.²⁴⁴ (3) But by becoming conscious of the unity of consciousness, or self-conscious, we become at the same time conscious of an object that corresponds to it.²⁴⁵ (4) Therefore, since synthesis presupposes self-consciousness and since synthesis underlies a representation of an

²⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 231 (A 103).

²⁴² See: P. Guyer, “Kant on Apperception and ‘A Priori’ Synthesis,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 17 (3), 1980. Cf. also: P. Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987.

²⁴³ “Now no cognitions can occur in us [...] without that unity of consciousness that precedes all data of the intuitions, and in relation to which all representation of objects is alone possible. This pure, original, unchanging consciousness I will now name transcendental apperception.” I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit., p. 232 (A 107).

²⁴⁴ “Thus the original and necessary consciousness of the identity of oneself is at the same time a consciousness of an equally necessary unity of the synthesis of all appearances in accordance with concepts [...]; for the mind could not possibly think of the identity of itself in the manifoldness of its representations, and indeed think this a priori, if it did not have before its eyes the identity of its action, which subjects all synthesis of apprehension (which is empirical) to a transcendental unity, and first makes possible their connection in accordance with a priori rules.” Ibidem, p. 233 (A 108).

²⁴⁵ Thereby, apparently, Kant establishes the principle of the intentionality of consciousness: consciousness is, in principle, “consciousness of an object.”

object, it follows that a representation of an object presupposes self-consciousness. In particular, representing an object in intuition implies being conscious of one's representing an object in intuition.

In the light of these considerations, two issues emerge as worthy of closer examination: (i) Kant's possible conflation of what – following Dretske – can be called thing-awareness and fact-awareness and (ii) the difference between employing concepts as rules for synthesizing representations and employing concepts in (self-reflective) judgments.

One can be aware of an array of seven green dots – for instance, one can perceive or imagine an array of seven dots, or think of it – without at the same time being aware *that* there is an array of seven dots in the physical space. And it is only fact-awareness that implies a judgment; and only a judgment based on the awareness of a fact involves reference to the subject of experience, or self-ascription of an experience (such as, e.g., *I can see that* there are seven green dots arranged in a row). Also, only self-ascription of an experience requires that the subject possess the concepts that should be employed in characterizing the experience. But it is far from obvious why self-ascription of experiences, or at least the ability to ascribe experiences to oneself, would have to be presupposed by any conscious experience of an object; in this way, of course, many creatures lacking this ability but nevertheless apparently capable of conscious perception (human infants and non-rational animals such as dogs) would have to be excluded from the category of conscious perceivers.

As regards the second issue: readers of the late Wittgenstein would find it obvious that one can follow a rule without being able to account for this process himself;²⁴⁶ the same would be claimed by the advocates of the conception of “tacit knowledge” or “knowledge-how,” such as Michael Polanyi or Gilbert Ryle.²⁴⁷ Also, commentators, such as H. Ginsborg²⁴⁸ or B. Longuenesse, distinguish the two senses of concepts applied by Kant: one in which concepts are considered as rules for synthesizing representations and the other in which concepts are considered as constituents of judgments; and it seems, at least *prima facie*, that concepts could be operative in experience in the first of these senses while not being employed in the second one. If applying concepts as rules presupposed self-ascription of experiences, there would not be much save a merely conceptual distinction between the two senses.

At this point it becomes more evident why McDowell has taken Kant as an ally. If, for Kant, undergoing an experience were to entail the ability to ascribe the experience

246 Cf. C. Wright, *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Duckworth, London 1980; “Rule-Following without Reasons: Wittgenstein's Quietism and the Constitutive Question,” *Ratio (new series)* 20 (4), 2007.

247 M. Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2009; G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1949.

248 H. Ginsborg, “Was Kant a Nonconceptualist?” *Philosophical Studies* 137, 2008.

to oneself, experiences would serve as reasons for beliefs in McDowell's sense. For the subject of experience would possess such reasons, they would be *his* reasons. Since it is prerequisite for the self-ascription of an experience that one form a judgment on the basis of one's experience, and judgments are structured by concepts, perceivers must possess appropriate concepts in order to entertain content-laden perceptual experiences. Therefore, conflating consciousness with self-consciousness would encourage state conceptualism (I described the position in chapter 1).

4.3 Non-Conscious Spontaneity? Schematism and the Transcendental Imagination

It may seem quite puzzling why, following the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories, in both editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant inserts a short chapter on the schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding. This is because the goal Kant undertakes in that chapter does not significantly differ from the goal he undertakes in the Deduction. The latter is to show that the involvement of the categories in experience is necessary since only due to them can objects be represented in intuition. For example, in § 20 of the Deduction, Kant sets off to prove that "all sensible intuitions stand under the categories, as conditions under which alone their manifold can come together in one consciousness."²⁴⁹ And the conclusion from § 26 reads:

"Consequently all synthesis, through which even perception itself becomes possible, stands under the categories, and since experience is cognition through connected perceptions, the categories are conditions of the possibility of experience, and are thus also valid a priori of all objects of experience."²⁵⁰

Thus, clearly, Kant deals with the relation between concepts and intuitions in the Deduction. But in the chapter on schematism the problem recurs. This may be because, despite the argument in the Deduction, Kant has still not explained how two intrinsically heterogeneous kinds of representations can be combined together. The doctrine of schematism can thus be considered as an attempt at such an explanation that appeals to basic cognitive processes which constitute of the content of cognition.

These basic cognitive processes are syntheses as a result of which transcendental schemata emerge. Kant calls the latter "mediating representations" and describes

²⁴⁹ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit., p. 252 (B 143).

²⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 262 (B 161).

them as sensible and intellectual at the same time.²⁵¹ Schemata are products of the imagination,²⁵² which Kant calls “a blind though indispensable function of the soul, without which we would have no cognition at all, but of which we are seldom even conscious.”²⁵³ The inscrutable nature of the transcendental imagination is the focus of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, where Heidegger argues that the imagination constitutes the unknown “root” of sensibility and understanding.²⁵⁴ On W. Waxman’s interpretation, the transcendental imagination constructs the a priori representations of space and time,²⁵⁵ hence it conditions the possibility of both empirical and pure cognition. Hegel offers a similar reading in *Faith and Knowledge* and identifies the imagination with reason as operating within the sphere of the empirical consciousness.²⁵⁶

Transcendental imagination could be regarded as spontaneity without consciousness. It is spontaneous since it *produces* representations – schemata – by combining more primitive representations, that is, concepts and intuitions, or, more specifically, the categories and the pure intuitions.²⁵⁷ It operates without consciousness since its operations are more fundamental than entertaining conscious representational states, or experiences, and explanatory of the latter.

If the imagination produces representational content, entertaining a content-laden representational state does not have to implicate a judgment in which a subject self-reflectively ascribes an experience to himself. Rather, the subject’s experience can be conceptually structured without the requirement of concept-possession being satisfied. Against this background, though the analogy is limited in scope, the operations of the transcendental imagination can perhaps be likened to cognitive states that arise on the so-called subpersonal level of cognition. Subpersonal states, as much as the workings of the Kantian imagination, would play an explanatory role in an account of cognition, inaccessible on the level of the phenomenological analysis of experience.²⁵⁸ As indicated, the analogy is limited in scope, which

251 Ibidem, p. 272 (A 138/B 177).

252 Ibidem, p. 273 (A 140/B 179).

253 Ibidem, p. 211 (A 78).

254 M. Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, translated by R. Taft, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1997.

255 W. Waxman, *Kant’s Model of the Mind. A New Interpretation of Transcendental Idealism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 1991.

256 G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, translated by W. Cerf and H. S. Harris, SUNY Press, New York 1977.

257 On the notion, role and importance of spontaneity in Kant’s system see a recent monograph: Marco Sgarbi, *Kant on Spontaneity*, Continuum, London 2012.

258 Cf. J. L. Bermúdez, “Nonconceptual Content: From Perceptual Experience to Subpersonal Computational States,” *Mind and Language* 10 (4), 1995; “What is at Stake in the Debate on Nonconceptual Content?” *Philosophical Perspectives* 21 (1), 2007. The term “subpersonal states” has been introduced to the philosophy of mind in: D. C. Dennett, *Content and Consciousness*, Humanities Press, New York 1969.

is because it may blur the sense in which the operations of the imagination are spontaneous – since they defy an explanation in causal-theoretical terms. Indeed, the analogy fosters a naturalistic reading of the “non-conscious spontaneity,” an issue I return to in chapter 6.

4.4 The “I think” of the Transcendental Apperception

In the B-edition Deduction, Kant makes a statement which apparently undermines the nonconceptualist reading:

“The I think must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me.”²⁵⁹

Consider the arguments from the richness or fineness of detail of perceptual content. If the “I think” must be able to accompany all representational states, there cannot be a state, such as seeing a particular shade of green, which cannot be related to the capacity of thought. Hence perceptual experience, though at times it may outstrip subjects’ conceptual repertoire, must potentially be apt for conceptualization. One may currently lack the right concept for this particular shade of green and hesitate about whether John’s jacket and the carpet in one’s room have the same or only similar shade of green. But it is in principle possible to acquire and employ the concept of this particular shade of green – as a last resort one may avail oneself of a perceptual demonstrative like “that shade,” to recall McDowell’s suggestion.

I think, however, that the claim made by Kant in the B 132 passage does not pose an insuperable challenge to the nonconceptualist interpretation. Before I say why, let me consider two possible ways of reading the “I think” passage – and their shortcomings.

(1) The “I think” could be construed along the lines of the Cartesian *Cogito* from the fourth part of the *Discourse on Method* and the Second Meditation from the *Meditations on First Philosophy*. The Cartesian *Cogito* is a subject of mental acts such as “doubting, understanding, denying, being willing, being unwilling, and also imagining and having sensory perceptions.”²⁶⁰ In all such acts, by definition directed at their corresponding objects, equated by Descartes with ideas, the thinking subject is present; that is, it is conscious of the acts it performs. Clearly, this kind of conscious presence of the subject is not restricted to, or dependent upon, the employment of concepts. The “I think,” or self-consciousness, could be likened to a shaft of light cast

259 I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit., p. 246 (B 132).

260 R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy. With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, edited by J. Cottingham, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, p. 19.

upon the objects within the field of its comprehension. In this sense, the “I think” may also accompany nonconceptual representations; indeed, for this reason, Kant identifies intuitions as *conscious* singular representations of objects.²⁶¹

Read in this way, Kant’s claim about the “I think” which “must be able to accompany all my representations” indicates that there cannot be mental representational states that would be utterly non-conscious; states that would be inaccessible to the consciousness of the subject of experience or thought. To entertain such states would mean to entertain mental representational states that one could not regard as one’s own. Obviously, this entails a contradiction, and accordingly Kant’s claim must be analytic. But if this reading of the “I think” passage is correct, it becomes unclear whether the operations of the imagination may count as mental states at all, and whether the products of these operations can be construed as representations. In particular, the cognitive status of schemata would be in question, and, if we follow the constructivist reading, defended by Heidegger, Melnick, and Waxman, also the status of the pure forms of intuition, space and time, themselves pure intuitions and therefore representations, as Kant contends.

(2) But the B 132 statement can also be read in a different way, which builds, to an extent, upon the previous interpretation saying that all one’s representations must be at least potentially self-conscious. For “I think” would, as a rule, be followed by a that-clause. The “I think” would thus be a tag for fact-awareness. We usually say: “I think that thus and so is the case.” Since facts are captured by propositions and propositions are conceptually structured, Kant’s statement could be taken as implicating that all representations must be able to adopt the structure of a proposition; or that all representations must be at least potentially structured by concepts.

However, this reading generates a puzzling problem. As mentioned in (1), Kant defines intuitions as conscious objective *representations*, but intuitions, by definition, are *not* conceptually structured. Strictly speaking, some structuring is endowed upon intuitions by space and time. So, intuitions must be spatiotemporally structured. This is clear on the basis of Kant’s arguments presented in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* and the *Inaugural Dissertation* written a decade earlier. Also, Kant’s Heterogeneity Thesis (KHT, discussed in chapter 3) precludes that intuitions have the same kind of structure as conceptual representations. Thus, reading the “I think” passage in terms of fact-awareness makes Kant’s theory of empirical cognition inconsistent.

We have seen that, on the basis of both (1) and (2), Kant could be charged with an inconsistency. But this is not the conclusion one would readily embrace unless one wants to bring one’s considerations to a halt. Let us then read a bit further:

²⁶¹ See the so-called *Stufenleiter* passage: I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit., pp. 398-9 (A 320/B 377).

“That representation that can be given prior to all thinking is called intuition. Thus all manifold of intuition has a necessary relation to the I think in the same subject in which this manifold is to be encountered. But this representation is an act of spontaneity, i.e., it cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility. I call it the pure apperception, in order to distinguish it from the empirical one, or also the original apperception, since it is that self-consciousness which, because it produces the representation I think, which must be able to accompany all others and which in all consciousness is one and the same, cannot be accompanied by any further representation.”²⁶²

There is a way to accommodate both Kant’s account of intuition as a nonconceptual kind of representation and the requirement that the “I think” accompany all of one’s representations. The interpretative maneuver is fairly simple and may be reminiscent of Gareth Evans’s “two-tier” theory of perception, referred to in chapter 1. On this theory, the nonconceptual content of intuition could be described as “the input to a thinking, concept-applying and reasoning system.”²⁶³ The “I think” requirement would then boil down to saying that all representations, including intuitions, must be poised for conceptualization and, accordingly, underlie perceptual judgments. Kant’s requirement that the nonconceptual content of intuition be eligible for conceptualization does not have to lead to an inconsistency. For such a requirement does not imply, without further premises, that intuitions themselves, singular representations of objects, must be conceptually structured.

4.5 Syntheses and Intuitions: Are Space and Time “Given” or “Constructed”?

How to represent space was an issue for eighteenth-century philosophers and philosophical psychologists, as it is an issue for cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind today. In particular, early modern optics purported to address the question of the representation of distance and, accordingly, the three-dimensionality of objects, relying on physiological data and geometry. Geometrical optics would be challenged by the empiricists, in particular George Berkeley in his *New Theory of Vision*, primarily because it located the process of perceiving spatial properties outside the conscious

²⁶² Ibidem, pp. 246-7 (B 132).

²⁶³ G. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, edited by J. McDowell, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1982, p. 158. More specifically, Evans discusses conditions that should be met by informational states if they are to be classified as conscious experiences. As he claims, this can be the case provided that an informational state “serves as the input to a thinking, concept-applying and reasoning system; so that the subject’s thoughts, plans and deliberations are also systematically dependent on the informational properties of the input. When there is such a link we can say that the person, rather than some part of his brain, receives and processes the information.” Ibidem. See also: F. Macpherson and J. L. Bermúdez, “Nonconceptual Content and the Nature of Perceptual Experience,” *Electronic Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 6, 1998 (<http://ejap.louisiana.edu/EJAP/1998/bermmacp98.html>, accessed on 5th July 2013).

mind of the subject of experience. Berkeley explained perception of distance in terms of the empirical association of different ideas: visual, tactile, and kinesthetic. Thus, as Lorne Falkenstein suggested, we may call him a constructivist with regard to perception of spatial properties. Conversely, Kant would be an intuitionist because he thought that the representation of space (and time) was not a result of any more basic cognitive process or processes. Briefly, on Kant's account, space (and time) would be "given" rather than "constructed." Here is Falkenstein's characteristic of the two positions:

"If you believe that a certain output is already contained in the input to a processor, so that it does not require any process (other than transmission or attention) to become known, then you are what I call 'an intuitionist' with regard to that output. Aristotle, for example, gives an intuitionist account of colour perception in *De Anima*, II vii. According to this theory, colours exist in objects, and when a transparent medium between the object and the eye is activated by light, the colour imposes its form on the eye. This account is intuitionist, because the colour ultimately cognized by the soul is thought to be already contained in the sensory input, and nothing needs to be done to it by the senses or the soul other than to transmit and attend to it [...]. If, in opposition to both sensationism and non-sensationist intuitionism, you believe that a given output is *not* already contained in the input to the cognitive system, but needs to be worked up out of that input by some process such as association, inference, comparison, abstraction, combination, or composition, then you are what I call 'a constructivist' with regard to that output. Berkeley's NTV [*New Theory of Vision*] is the classic constructivist work on the cognition of visual spatial depth."²⁶⁴

That space and time are "given" rather than "constructed," according to Kant, clearly follows from the analysis of the concepts of space and time in their "metaphysical expositions" in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, where Kant maintains his views on space and time formulated in the *Inaugural Dissertation* over a decade earlier. Thus, about space he claims that it "is not an empirical concept that has been drawn from outer experiences;"²⁶⁵ that it is an a priori, hence necessary, representation that underlies all intuitions;²⁶⁶ that it is "not a discursive or [...] general concept of relations of things in general, but a pure intuition;"²⁶⁷ and that it is represented as infinite, that is unbounded.²⁶⁸ But we have seen that the *Transcendental Deduction of the Categories* allows us to challenge these views. Let us summarize the arguments that it can furnish against the intuitionist account of space and time, or against the claim that space and time are "given" rather than "constructed."

²⁶⁴ L. Falkenstein, *Kant's Intuitionism. A Commentary on the Transcendental Aesthetic*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2004, pp. 7-8.

²⁶⁵ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit, p. 157 (A 23/B 38).

²⁶⁶ Ibidem, p. 158 (A 24/B 39).

²⁶⁷ Ibidem, p. 158 (A 25).

²⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 159 (A 25).

1. Representations in general, and intuitions in particular, are complex mental “items”, results of syntheses of a manifold in accordance with rules. The rules are provided by concepts: empirical and pure (i.e. the categories) in the case of empirical representations and only pure in the case of the a priori (i.e. non-empirical) ones. Insofar as space and time are intuitions, hence representations, albeit singular, they must be the result of the act of synthesis. In other words, if all intuitions emerge as a result of synthesis – putting together simple mental items into a complex and unified one – also the pure intuitions must emerge in this way.
2. All representations are, of necessity, related to the unity of consciousness, or the transcendental apperception. That unity of consciousness, which in fact is self-consciousness, consists in the consciousness of the activity of synthesizing the manifold of representations in accordance with rules. Hence, insofar as space and time are representations, they must be related to the unity of consciousness and we may cognize them only “in” the activity of putting together the manifold of intuitions in accordance with concepts. Since self-consciousness implies (the possibility of) judgment, our cognition of space and time would be dependent on (the capacity of) making judgments, which involves the categories. Importantly, this is the purport of the Analogies of Experience, the part of the Transcendental Analytic in which Kant shows in what way the categories operate in various principles constitutive of empirical cognition.²⁶⁹
3. The transcendental apperception furnishes representations, including singular representations (intuitions), with unity by means of concepts, rather than the forms of intuition. Since concepts are constitutive of singular representations, intuitions cannot be “given” but must be “constructed”, in the acts of conceptualization and/or judgment. Apparently, this idea has been encapsulated in the following, quite cryptic, footnote passage from the B-edition Deduction:

“Space, represented as object (as is really required in geometry), contains more than the mere form of intuition, namely the comprehension of the manifold given in accordance with the form of sensibility in an intuitive representation, so that the form of intuition merely gives the manifold, but the formal intuition gives unity of the representation. In the Aesthetic I ascribed this unity merely to sensibility, only in order to note that it precedes all concepts, though to be sure it presupposes a synthesis, which does not belong to the senses but through which all concepts of space and time first become possible.”²⁷⁰

269 Cf. the Second Analogy. *Ibidem*, pp. 304-316 (A 189/B 232 – A 211/B 256).

270 *Ibidem*, p. 261 (B 160-1).

This is one of the notoriously difficult passages in the First *Critique*.²⁷¹ Kant distinguishes here the forms of intuition and formal intuitions. The forms of intuition enable the manifold of intuition to be given. But the formal intuitions account for the unity of the manifold. The unity of representation requires synthesis. Synthesis cannot be the function of sensibility, which is merely receptive. But the unity pertaining to formal intuitions does not originate from the understanding either; rather, it “belongs to space and time.” Perhaps this implies a division into a kind of lower-level and higher-level unity, one that can be attributed to representations as such and the other that can be attributed to the representations of objects.

Formal intuitions provide that unity which underlies “all concepts of space and time.” Since unity requires synthesis, all concepts of space and time must rest on a certain kind of synthesis. Synthesis is a function of the spontaneous faculty of the mind, the understanding and/or imagination. Formal intuitions must, therefore, be products of the higher faculty of cognition.

This does not mean that Kant changes the status of space and time, which he characterized in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, from intuitions, singular representations of sensibility, to general or discursive representations of the understanding. Space and time, in the footnote quoted, are not to be construed as concepts. This is because, by “concepts of space and time,” one can understand “mathematical concepts,” that is, concepts employed in the cognition of mathematical objects. Now, certainly mathematical cognitions, as expressible in judgments, must be products of the synthesizing activity of the mind, and so one may think of the formal intuitions as of the pure intuitions: space and time – considered as the objects of mathematical cognition.

Some commentators, among them Wayne Waxman, object to reading the B 160 footnote as relevant to Kant’s account of mathematical cognition, directed at formal intuitions as its objects. Waxman suggests that the passage refers to the “metaphysical/transcendental” space and time.²⁷² Accordingly, space and time should be described as “*entia imaginaria*,” that is, objects of the transcendental imagination.²⁷³ Since, as

271 Waxman remarks that the passage has occasioned considerable controversy in the literature and that “some have even gone so far as to write it off as too obscure and convoluted to be made sense of.” W. Waxman, *Kant’s Model of the Mind: A New Interpretation of Transcendental Idealism*, op. cit., p. 80.

272 “As I read it, the footnote, by making clear that *metaphysical/transcendental* space and time are the result of a synthesis and a unity not belonging to the senses, buttresses his claim in the text that they are *intuitive* embodiments of the same synthetic unity of apperception of which the categories are the *conceptual* embodiments [...]; accordingly, formal intuitions provide just the bridge between appearances and the categories that Kant was seeking in section 26.” Ibidem, p. 83.

273 “Of all the passages in the *Critique of Pure Reason* relating to the pure space and time of the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, none comes closer to an explicit, unequivocal statement that they are products of a synthesis of the imagination than the footnote at B 160, in section 26 of the second-edition version of the *Transcendental Deduction of the Categories*.” Ibidem, p. 79.

Kant emphasizes, the synthetic unity of apperception must be prior to the analytic one,²⁷⁴ there are operations of the mind which underlie the application of concepts in judgments. The transcendental imagination performs these operations. Thus, on Waxman’s reading, Kant’s account of space and time, developed in the *Analytic* does not contradict the account of space and time one can find in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*.

Waxman purports to offer a solution to the problem of the “common root”²⁷⁵ of the representations of sensibility and the understanding. But whether such a solution can be given remains contentious. Many philosophers, Hegel and McDowell included, complained that Kant’s theory of space and time is evidence that he had not set himself entirely free from the empiricist way of thinking about the human mind, as at least partly receptive, or “constrained from outside.”²⁷⁶ But it is far from clear why the forms of sensible intuition, limiting cognition to appearances, the objects of sensibility, would have to be regarded as external rather than internal constraints – constraints originating from the constitution (or nature) of the subject. Only because these critics conceive of the embodied receptivity as external to the subject’s mind can they claim that constraints come “from outside.” However, such an assumption does not withstand all criticism.

It is also worth to note that if the imagination were to account for all representations of the mind, as their “common root,” it would be difficult to see why Kant insists on the distinction between sensibility and understanding, and their corresponding kinds of representations: intuitions and concepts. Waxman’s interpretation downplays the importance of KHT and, consequently, it ignores the role the distinction between the faculties plays in the key Kantian doctrine: transcendental idealism, a topic to be discussed in chapter 5.

274 “Therefore it is only because I can combine a manifold of given representations in one consciousness that it is possible for me to represent the identity of the consciousness in these representations itself, i.e., the analytical unity of apperception is only possible under the presupposition of some synthetic one.” I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit., p. 247 (B 133-4). And further, in a footnote: “And thus the synthetic unity of apperception is the highest point to which one must affix all use of the understanding, even the whole of logic and, after it, transcendental philosophy; indeed this faculty is the understanding itself.” Ibidem.

275 In the Introduction to the *Critique*, Kant writes: “[T]here are two stems of human cognition, which may perhaps arise from a common but to us unknown root, namely sensibility and understanding, through the first of which objects are given to us, but through the second of which they are thought.” Ibidem, p. 152 (A 15/B 29-30).

276 See: J. McDowell, “Hegel and the Myth of the Given,” op. cit.. According to McDowell, Kant “sees our cognitive freedom as constrained, from outside, by the specific forms of our sensibility, which he leaves looking like a mere brute fact about the shape of our subjectivity.” Ibidem, p. 85.

4.6 Non-Cognitive Perception

What kind of objects can be perceived? Does perception require a special faculty of the mind? Are there special objects of perception? Is perception always focused on the *cognition* of objects? Such questions perplexed philosophers in the past and they continue to do so. The debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists, whose main tenets and arguments I outlined in chapter 1, brings back old issues in a new verbal guise.

But one can also rely on one's linguistic intuitions, however philosophically unwarranted they may ultimately turn out to be, to try to answer these questions. Thus, for example, one can say that one perceives colours, sounds, and textures, but also cats, trees, and books in the cabinet. One can also say that one perceives the beauty of the nearby lakeside and joy in a friend's tone of voice. And it seems right to say that one perceives the goodness of an action. All in all, it seems to make sense to claim that an object which can be perceived may belong to one of the following categories: (a) sensible qualities, (b) physical objects in space and time, (c) ethical and aesthetic properties or values, (d) feelings. I do not insist that the list is comprehensive and cannot be further expanded.

Now, regarding the faculties requisite for perception of objects falling under one of the four categories in the above list: properly functioning senses should suffice to receive sensible qualities, but the grasp of physical objects in space and time would at least presuppose a synthesis of various sensible features of the objects or a judgment (belief) about their existence,²⁷⁷ and so it would involve faculties like the Kantian imagination and understanding. It becomes, however, markedly more difficult to specify the kind of faculty that would account for perception of ethical and aesthetic properties or values, and feelings. According to Kant, morality is the domain of practical reason, and aesthetics – the doctrine of the beautiful – is the domain of the faculty of judgment. Both ethical and aesthetic experiences contain non-cognitive concept-independent components, such as a (rational) feeling of reverence for the moral law and a feeling of pleasure in contemplating a beautiful object.²⁷⁸

If this is the case, then it is clear that cognition does not constitute the main end of perception. Besides, perception restricted to proper objects of the senses, sensible qualities, apparently fails to produce any cognition – for cognition requires the involvement of the capacity to judge. Cognition, therefore, is not essential to perception and a non-cognitive model of perception could perhaps be built on the basis of Kant's ethical and aesthetic considerations. But it may also be the case that perception,

²⁷⁷ Such is the view of, e.g., Thomas Reid, an eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher, representing the so-called school of common sense.

²⁷⁸ These "rational" feelings become introduced in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, respectively.

which involves the faculty of sensibility, is of hardly any importance to the latter: the feeling of reverence for the moral law and the capacity to distinguish between morally right and morally wrong actions, manifested both by children and adults, originates from reason in its practical application.²⁷⁹ Likewise, the feeling of pleasure in contemplating a beautiful object originates from the aesthetic judgment.²⁸⁰ Within the current framework, at issue is the kind of perception that involves sensibility and produces intuitions, in accordance with their forms. Thus, consistency would require that we investigate to what extent *sense perception* is constitutive of the non-cognitive kinds of mental content.

Certainly, the senses provide the most basic kind of information about the objects one may perceive as exemplifying some general features, or about the objects one may further identify as moral agents,²⁸¹ the so called “rogue objects,” to use Robert Hanna’s term,²⁸² or bearers of aesthetic properties. More specifically, perceptual states convey information about the spatial and/or temporal location of objects. This is precisely the kind of information that makes it possible to refer to objects, and keep track of them within the field of one’s conscious experience and in the course of one’s engaging with objects as cognizer, moral agent, and contemplator of beauty. And this is also the kind of information that theorists would be prone to characterize as

279 In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant gives an example of a 10-year old boy who, though without a highly sophisticated ethical idiom, is able to see that lying against an innocent person, even in the case in which one’s life is under threat, would be morally corrupt. To moral intuitions Kant refers also when discussing the example with a poor depository, obliged to pay his debts to his rich benefactor even after the latter’s death. See: I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, translated by W. S. Pluhar, Hackett Publishing Co., Cambridge/Indianapolis 2002, p. 195 (5:156).

280 “Now this merely subjective (aesthetic) judging of the object, or of the representation through which the object is given, precedes the pleasure in it, and is the ground of this pleasure in the harmony of the faculties of cognition.” I. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, translated by P. Guyer and E. Matthews, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York, Cambridge 2002, p. 103 (5:218). For pleasure arises from the “free play” of faculties: imagination and understanding. A “judgment of taste,” based on this feeling, does not “presuppose a determinate concept,” and so no cognition of the contemplated object. *Ibidem*, p. 103-2 (5:217-18).

281 For example, Patrick Kain remarks that the Kantian moral agents must be both persons, that is rational entities equipped with a will, and perceptible objects, that is objects given in experience. Towards an imperceptible person it would be impossible for us to act and therefore we could not have any duties towards such a “person.” Equally, an imperceptible person could not be morally obligated towards us. “Kant’s Defense of Human Moral Status,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47 (1), 2009.

282 “Rogue objects,” or “elusive objects,” are objects which do not fit into the framework outlined in the Analogies of Experience, which hence are “nomologically ill-behaved.” In this category Hanna includes: “objects of intuition that engage in systematically counter-nomological behavior (magic), purely random or indeterministic behavior (pure chance), or spontaneous goal-directed behavior (life, consciousness, freedom).” “Kant’s Non-Conceptualism, Rogue Objects, and the Gap in the B Deduction,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 19 (3), 2011, p. 409.

nonconceptual content, since its acquisition and possession do not necessitate the employment of conceptual capacities. Thus, nonconceptual content can be claimed to underlie perceptual states, both aimed at cognition and non-cognitive. That the acquisition of spatial (and temporal) information is concept-independent, on Kant's account, comes to be evident, for example, once we read the passages in which Kant claims that orientation in the spatial (or spatiotemporal) framework is rooted in a certain kind of feeling. One of these passages comes from an essay on the "orientation in thinking," and reads:

"Now if I see the sun in the sky and know it is now midday, then I know how to find south, west, north, and east. For this, however, I also need the feeling of a difference in my own subject, namely, the difference between my right and left hands. [...] If I did not have this faculty of distinguishing, without the need of any difference in the objects, between moving from left to right and right to left and moving in the opposite direction and thereby determining a priori a difference in the position of the objects, then in describing a circle I would not know whether west was right or left of the southernmost point of the horizon [...]. Thus even with all the objective data of the sky, I orient myself [...] through a *subjective* ground of differentiation [...]. But in fact the faculty of making distinctions through the feeling of right and left comes naturally [...] – it is a faculty implanted by nature but made habitual through frequent practice."²⁸³

Since, as Kant argued in his 1768 essay on directions in space, cited in chapter 2, it is determining the basic spatial relations, such as "to the left/right," "above/below," "in front of/behind," that allows one to locate objects in space and relate them to one another, and since the feeling which makes this structuring possible originates from the body of the subject, it follows that underlying the very basic ability to refer to objects in perceptual experience are not conceptual capacities but the skills of the human body, including sensorimotor skills. It is because Kant assumes that the space of our experience is egocentrically oriented, rather than a result of abstraction from the data of experience or construction from them, as Leibniz and Berkeley would contend, that we can attribute to him the claim that both cognitive and non-cognitive relatedness to objects is grounded in spatiotemporally structured nonconceptual content. The basic form of intentionality – in cognition, moral agency and aesthetic experience – consists in pre-conceptual relatedness to the realm of objects of an embodied, sensing subject, equipped also with faculties such as imagination, understanding, reason, and the capacity to judge.

I have argued, throughout this chapter, that even those passages in Kant's writings, which *prima facie* corroborate the conceptualist interpretation, can be read as compatible with the nonconceptualist reading. Thus, the B 105 passage from the

²⁸³ I. Kant, "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" in: I. Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, translated and edited by A. W. Wood and G. Di Giovanni, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 1996, pp. 8-9.

“Clue to the Discovery of All Pure Concepts of the Understanding,” about concepts that provide the same kind of structure to intuitions and judgments, is compatible with the claim that intuitions manifest also a more basic kind of structuring.

The doctrine of the three syntheses, developed in the A-edition Deduction of the Categories, leaves it open whether all representations, including the pure intuitions: space and time, result from the rule-governed operations of the higher mental faculty, called synthesis. (Admittedly, it is also not entirely clear what it means to *represent* space and time as pure intuitions.) But even if all representations are products of synthesis, carried out by an intermediary faculty – the transcendental imagination, which operates “blindly,” i.e. without the subject’s consciousness – there is still space for nonconceptual content as “material” used by the imagination and nonconceptual states as states which are governed by concepts, though without the subject’s ability to self-attribute the contents of these states in a judgment.

Furthermore, the B 132 “I think” passage is not any more helpful in establishing the conceptualist reading since it only states that all representations must be potentially suitable for conceptualization for the sake of forming a judgment on their basis. This conforms with a “two-tier” account of perceptual content, along the lines of Gareth Evans.

Finally, the B 160 footnote does not subvert the Kantian doctrine of pure intuitions, formulated in the *Inaugural Dissertation* and the *Transcendental Aesthetic*. This is because “formal intuitions” can be construed as mathematical objects, more plausibly than as space and time produced by the transcendental imagination. If all representations originated from one “common root,” with concepts and intuitions being only a kind of aspects of representational content, there would be no need to distinguish between sensibility and understanding, which Kant starts to do in his pre-critical writings and does consistently in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, building up the doctrine called transcendental idealism.