

## Conclusion

One way of characterizing the project Kant undertakes in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is by saying that he seeks to articulate a plausible conception of what it is to be a finite rational subject of knowledge. From this perspective, the guiding question of the project is what kinds of capacities such a being must possess in order to count as a subject of states that are properly classified as cognitive states (paradigmatically, belief and knowledge), and indeed as the cognitive states of a rational animal. The task, then, is to identify the relevant capacities correctly and to give adequate characterizations of them. Kant accords utmost importance to this task, as is indicated by the fact that he repeatedly assesses the intellectual achievements of other philosophers in relation to it. This is true of the philosophical giants of the Early Modern period – in particular, Descartes, Leibniz, Locke and Hume – just as much as it is true of the less well-known German philosophers that were Kant's contemporaries – figures such as Wolff, Lambert, Tetens, or Crusius. By Kant's lights, the characterizations that these philosophers gave of human cognitive capacities are all inadequate. When thought through, they do not make it intelligible that the relevant capacities are in fact *cognitive* capacities (that is, capacities for having knowledge of an objective world), while at the same time being the capacities of a rational animal (that is, of a creature that is possessed of both rational and sensible capacities).

In terms of the familiar distinction between Empiricism and Rationalism, the charge here can be described in a slightly more determinate way as follows. According to Kant, both Empiricists and Rationalists fail to provide an adequate characterization of human cognitive capacities because they fail to appreciate the heterogeneity of sensible and intellectual capacities.

To say that these capacities are heterogeneous (and thus to spell out the content of what I have been calling the Heterogeneity Thesis) is to say, at least at a first approximation, that an independent set of conditions on cognition derives from each.<sup>1</sup> Thus, there are intellectual conditions on cognition, and there are sensible conditions on cognition. Neither set of condition can be derived from, or reduced to, the other. But both have to be satisfied for cognition to be possible, and an adequate account of human cognitive capacities has to show that, and how, they are satisfied.

When described in this way, the respective shortcomings of Rationalism and Empiricism (as Kant understands them) can be seen to be complementary. In Kant's view, Rationalists illegitimately assimilate sensible capacities to intellectual capacities and fail to see that there is an independent set of sensible conditions on cognition. Conversely, Empiricists illegitimately assimilate intellectual capacities to sensible capacities and fail to see that there is an independent set of intellectual conditions on cognition.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, neither side manages to give an account of human cognitive capacities that shows that the acts of these capacities satisfy the conditions on cognition (at least in principle, if not on every occasion).

With regard to the topic of sensible synthesis, which has been my main concern, the shortcomings of Empiricism are of particular interest. A useful way of spelling out what it means to say that Empiricists fail to appreciate that the intellect is heterogeneous to sensibility is as follows. To begin with, the Heterogeneity Thesis entails that the understanding is a distinct capacity from sensibility, which accounts for its own distinctive representations. At bottom, these representations are the pure concepts of the understanding, or categories. To say, as Kant

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<sup>1</sup> See the discussion in Chapter One, §1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the famous passage at A271/B327 quoted at the opening of the Introduction, according to which Leibniz intellectualized appearances, while Locke sensualized the concepts of the understanding.

does, that the categories originate solely in the understanding just is to say that these concepts can in no way be accounted for (indeed, involve no contribution from) by sensibility. In “sensualizing the pure concepts of the understanding,” or assimilating the understanding to sensibility, Empiricists in effect treat the categories as if they were empirical concepts.<sup>3</sup>

According to Kant, the categories articulate the concept of an object of cognition in general. Since the categories are the representations of the understanding, this entails that the kind of cognition at issue here is specifically rational cognition; that is, the kind of cognition characteristic of a rational animal, as opposed to a non-rational animal. Following a long tradition Kant holds that both rational and non-rational animals have sensible capacities. Rational animals are distinctive in that they are also possessed of rational (or intellectual) capacities. Unlike a mere animal, a rational animal has not just sensibility but also understanding. For this reason Kant regards the understanding as the “higher cognitive faculty” (*oberes Erkenntnisvermögen*), whereas sensibility is the lower cognitive capacity. It follows from this that the kind of cognition characteristic of a rational animal is one which depends on the understanding, or intellect. Therefore, to say that the categories, the pure concepts of the understanding, articulate the concept of an object of cognition in general is to express this dependence: the object of (finite) rational cognition as such instantiates the categories.

From Kant’s point of view, Empiricists fail to appreciate this. They assimilate the cognition of a rational animal too closely to the cognition of a non-rational animal. This is the

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<sup>3</sup> Since for Kant all concepts are subordinate to the categories, one might wonder whether by Kant’s lights Empiricists are entitled to talk of concepts at all. In terms of the distinction between the logical and the real use of the understanding, which I discussed in Chapter Four, the situation can be characterized as follows: Empiricists recognize at most a logical use of the understanding, but not a real use. However, as Kant’s claim that the synthetic unity of apperception is the “highest point” even of Pure General Logic (cf. B134) suggests, he appears to hold that the logical use of the understanding is dependent on its real use. If this is right, then by Kant’s lights Empiricists are not even entitled to speak of the logical use of the understanding; hence, they are not entitled to any talk of concepts at all.

result of Empiricists' failure to respect the heterogeneity of sensibility and understanding; more specifically, of their attempt to assimilate the latter to the former.

A different way of putting the same point is to say that Empiricists by Kant's lights think they can get the notion of an object for free. Since the Empiricist admits only one source of representations, viz. sensibility, all representations are treated by the Empiricist as sensible representations, in the sense that they derive either directly or indirectly from sensibility. This will be true of sensations (representations that derive directly from sensibility) just as much as of more complex representations such as are, for instance, generated by means of operations on sensations (representations that derive indirectly from sensibility).

By Kant's lights, the Empiricist also treats the concept of an object in general as a sensible representation; and this means that the Empiricist operates with a conception of cognition that ignores the special nature of rational (as opposed to non-rational) cognition. On Empiricist premises, merely sensible capacities ought to be sufficient for cognition. As a consequence, for the Empiricist the cognition that rational animals enjoy differs from that of non-rational animals only in degree, not in kind.

On the other hand, if like Kant one is committed to the Heterogeneity Thesis, then one is committed to the thesis that the concept of an object in general (more precisely, the concept of an object of finite rational cognition) is a pure concept of the understanding. And this has consequences for how one must conceive of sensibility. For sensibility can now no longer be regarded as self-standing, in the sense that the cognitive role of sensibility could be intelligible independently of the understanding. The cognitive role of sensibility is to furnish sensory representations of the putative objects of our knowledge – or, as Kant puts it, to give objects to

the mind. And this entails not only that the objects of which sensibility furnishes representations must instantiate the pure concepts of the understanding, but also that this must be part of the content of sensible representations. That is, if sensibility is to play the cognitive role of giving objects to the mind, then sensible representations must involve a consciousness, at least implicitly, of the fact that the objects of such representations instantiate the pure concepts of the understanding; or, what is the same, that they fall under the concept of an object in general. And this is to say that intuitions, the representations of sensibility, must exhibit categorial unity.

Moreover, it follows that it must be no accident that intuitions exhibit categorial unity. If sensibility is to be a cognitive capacity, then it is part of the very concept of this capacity that its representations exhibit categorial unity. That they do so is not a fact that may or may not obtain. It is not contingent. Rather, if sensibility is a cognitive capacity – more precisely, a cognitive capacity possessed by a rational animal – then of necessity its representations exhibit categorial unity. If they do not exhibit this unity, then sensibility cannot coherently be conceived as the cognitive capacity of a rational animal. Call this the Unity Requirement.

Kant's objection to Empiricism can now be put by saying that an Empiricist account of human cognition does not have the resources to meet this requirement. It is not in a position to make intelligible that intuitions necessarily exhibit categorial unity. Even if we grant for the sake of argument what is doubtful, viz. that such an account could make the very idea of categorial unity intelligible, it would still not be able to explain that sensible representations non-accidentally exhibit this unity. At best, an Empiricist account would be able to show that *as a matter of fact* the sensible representations of human beings (as far as we have so far encountered) exhibit categorial unity.

Perhaps the Empiricist could also identify a mechanism that accounts for this fact. This would put her in a position to claim that sensible representations always – and so, in a sense, necessarily – exhibit categorial unity; at least as long as the relevant mechanism is in working order. But this alleged necessity would be of the wrong kind. It would amount to the claim that we cannot help having certain representations; in particular, that we cannot help having sensible representations that exhibit categorial unity. It would thus amount to the claim that it is part of our nature to have these kinds of representations.

However, this is not the kind of necessity that the Unity Requirement demands. Rather, what needs to be shown is, first, that it is part of the concept of finite rational cognition that sensible representations necessarily exhibit categorial unity; and, second, that it is because sensibility is the cognitive capacity of a rational animal (and is constituted accordingly) that its representations exhibit categorial unity. To be sure, on Kant's account too there is a sense in which we cannot help but have sensible representations which exhibit this unity. But the point is that this is not the end of the story. That is, it is not just a brute fact about us that we have such representations. On the contrary, this fact is part of an account that does two things: first, it shows why cognition demands that sensible representations exhibit categorial unity; second, it provides an account of our cognitive capacities which makes it intelligible that it is part of the essence of sensibility that its representations have this shape – that sensibility would not be a cognitive capacity (hence not properly be entitled 'sensibility') if this was not the case. Such an account confers a very different kind of intelligibility on the structure of our sensible representations than the Empiricist account just sketched.

To say that the representations of sensibility necessarily exhibit categorial unity is just another way of saying that the sensible capacity of a rational animal must not be conceived as self-standing in the sense that it would be intelligible as the kind of capacity it is independently of its relation to the animal's rationality. Rather, meeting the Unity Requirement entails that sensibility must be conceived from the start as the sensible capacity characteristic of a rational animal. What is ruled out by this requirement is an account on which sensibility can be accounted for independently of its relation to intellectual capacities, as a self-standing stratum of cognitive machinery that may or may not be paired with rational faculties.<sup>4</sup>

Kant's strategy for meeting the Unity Requirement is to argue that the understanding – equivalently, for the purposes of this discussion, reason – is itself involved in sensibility. What accounts for the fact that intuitions exhibit categorial unity is an act of the understanding, viz. the act of sensible synthesis. This implies that sensibility as Kant conceives it is not self-standing in the sense just outlined. On Kant's view, for a creature not possessed of an understanding it is not possible to have intuitions. As we might also put it, since the categorial unity of intuitions is due to the understanding, the representations of sensibility already bear the mark of rationality, in the sense that they are essentially the sensible representations of a rational animal.

This consideration explains why Kant claims that the understanding is involved in sensibility. However, it has not been explained how we are to make sense of this claim. Any attempt to do so will be faced with what I have been calling the Unity Problem. This is the problem of giving an account of the understanding (of the spontaneity of the mind) which makes

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<sup>4</sup> It is not an objection to the picture sketched here to point out that sensibility is something that is shared by rational and non-rational animals. An account that meets the Unity Requirement is free to admit this, while insisting that the sensible capacities of a non-rational animal are specifically (though not generically) distinct from the sensible capacities of a rational animal. Developing such an account is a central theme in the work of John McDowell; see, for instance, McDowell, *Mind and World*.

it intelligible that this capacity can be exercised in two distinct ways. One is what we might call the exercise of the understanding in its paradigmatic act, viz. judgment. The other is the kind of act by means of which the understanding accounts for the categorial unity of intuition; that is, its exercise in sensible synthesis. If the Heterogeneity Thesis is to be preserved, it is clear that these must be distinct in character. So the question is how it is possible for a single capacity to be exercised in two distinct ways, one that has a distinctively sensible (or intuitive) character and one that has a distinctively intellectual (or discursive) character.

In response to this question I have argued that at the most fundamental level the understanding must not be characterized as a capacity for judgment. Rather, there is a characterization of it that is more fundamental, in the sense that this new characterization makes it intelligible how the understanding can be both a capacity for judgment and a capacity for sensible synthesis. I have argued that this characterization is contained in the doctrine of apperception, the centerpiece of the Transcendental Deduction of the categories.

Accordingly, the Unity Problem can be solved if we conceive of the understanding as a capacity for apperceptive synthesis. A capacity for apperceptive synthesis is a self-conscious capacity for combination. It is a capacity to effect the representation of a unified manifold of representations by means of a consciousness of its own form. The form of a capacity for combination is what I have been calling a mode of combination. The logical forms of judgment Kant distinguishes in the Table of Judgments are examples of such modes of combination. Since for Kant the capacity to judge is a capacity to combine concepts by means of the consciousness of the logical forms of judgment, the capacity to judge is a capacity to combine representations

by means of a consciousness of its own form. Judgment can be understood, therefore, as an act of the capacity for apperceptive synthesis.

However, according to the interpretation I have developed, the capacity for apperceptive synthesis can also be exercised in a distinct act of specifically sensible synthesis. In support of this claim I have argued, first, that sensible synthesis is modeled on the construction of a concept in geometry. Kant thinks of the construction of a geometrical concept as a rule-governed procedure for generating pure intuitions. The rules that govern this procedure can be understood as specifically sensible modes of combination. Accordingly, the capacity to construct geometrical concepts is a capacity to generate the representation of a unified intuitional manifold by means of the consciousness of a mode of combination. It is therefore a self-conscious capacity for combination, hence a capacity for apperceptive synthesis.

Since sensible synthesis in general is modeled on geometrical construction, this shows that sensible synthesis in general can be understood as an act of the capacity for apperceptive synthesis. If this is right, then the characterization of the understanding as a capacity for apperceptive synthesis is the fundamental characterization of this capacity. It is the fundamental characterization because it allows us to comprehend that this capacity admits of two distinct exercises, judgment and sensible synthesis.

I defined the Unity Problem as the problem of making it intelligible that a single capacity, the understanding, is capable of being exercised in two different ways. Understood in this way, the Unity Problem is solved once the characterization of the understanding as a capacity for apperceptive synthesis is available. To develop this solution, and thus to address the Unity Problem, was my primary goal. For this reason, the aim of the interpretation developed here can

also be described as that of producing the conceptual tools for making sense of the idea that the understanding can be exercised in two distinct ways. Absent a characterization of the understanding along the lines I have proposed, it is impossible even to articulate this idea coherently.

At the same time, putting in place the conceptual tools for providing a coherent articulation of this idea does not by itself constitute an adequate defense of the conception of the understanding and its relation to sensibility that is expressed by it. Although I have taken some steps towards defending this idea, more work needs to be done. While I have presented arguments in support of the claim that both judgment and sensible synthesis can be construed as acts of the capacity for apperceptive synthesis, these arguments in effect provide what might be described as the scaffolding for a more fully worked-out interpretation of Kant's conception of the understanding. This is especially true of the account of sensible synthesis that I have offered. This account puts in place the conceptual framework for thinking of sensible synthesis as an act of apperceptive synthesis, but a number of details have yet to be filled in.

In particular, there are four issues that a fully worked-out account of sensible synthesis along the lines proposed here will need to address. These are (i) the relation between geometrical construction and spatial representation in general, (ii) the relation between the categories of quantity and the remaining categories, (iii) the role of empirical concepts in sensible synthesis (and their relation to the categories), and (iv) the doctrine of inner sense. In conclusion, I briefly want to comment on each of these.

I argued in Chapter Five that Kant treats the construction of a concept in intuition which is employed in geometrical reasoning as a model for spatial representation in general, including

empirical intuition. More specifically, the act of synthesis responsible for the categorial unity of empirical intuition (which Kant calls the synthesis of apprehension) is conceived on the model of the act of synthesis involved in geometrical construction (which Kant calls figurative synthesis). In Chapter Five I gave ample textual evidence for showing that this is Kant's view. What remains to be done, however, is to determine exactly which features of geometrical construction carry over to the synthesis of apprehension and which do not. There clearly must be some difference between the two. After all, geometrical construction concerns pure intuition, while the synthesis of apprehension concerns empirical intuition.

Among other things, the difference between geometrical construction and synthesis of apprehension has to do with differences among the individual categories. As I discussed in Chapter Five, Kant regards space as a magnitude. The pure spatial intuitions employed in geometry are representations of magnitudes. They instantiate the categories of quantity, but no other categories. Accordingly, the synthesis involved in geometrical construction is guided by the categories of quantity but does not involve any other categories. By contrast, the synthesis of apprehension, which accounts for the empirical representation of things in space, concerns all categories. So the question is how the account of quantitative synthesis that I have extracted from Kant's theory of geometrical construction is to be extended to include the categories of quality and, in particular, the categories of relation and modality.

Related to this is a question concerning the relation between categories and empirical concepts. According to the account of sensible synthesis developed in Chapter Five, sensible synthesis proceeds by means of the self-conscious employment of sensible modes of combination. I argued that these modes of combination are the schematized categories. However,

part of what it means to say that the categories are formal as opposed to material concepts is that for a category to become a cognition, it must be “enmattered.” In the case of geometrical construction, we can think of the categories of quantity as being enmattered in geometrical concepts such as, for example, the concept ‘triangle.’ But how must the relation of form to matter be conceived in the case of empirical sensible synthesis, that is, in the case of the synthesis of apprehension? What is it for the categories to “inform” empirically given matter, and to do so in the manner that is characteristic of sensible synthesis?

To make these questions more determinate, consider the parallel case of judgment. In Chapter Four I argued that, just like sensible synthesis, judgment is an act of apperceptive synthesis because it proceeds by means of the self-conscious employment of modes of combination. In the case of judgment these are the logical forms of judgment that Kant catalogues in the Table of Judgments. Here, too, the mode of combination is a form that can become cognition only if it is suitably enmattered. Thus, one makes a judgment by combining certain material concepts in accordance with (and by means of a consciousness of) a logical form of judgment. Taken by itself, a logical form of judgment is something generic, something like a sentence-schema. In any actual judgment, the schematic letters that we use to denote logical forms of judgment (e.g. ‘Some  $F$  are  $G$ ’) must be replaced by expressions for material concepts. So a logical form of judgment (a mode of concept-combination) is enmattered by being brought to bear on material concepts.

Again, the question is how the parallel case for sensible modes of combination ought to be conceived. Since the sensible modes of combination are the schematized categories, what we can say is that empirical synthesis – that is, perception – is informed by the categories. But what

is it for perception to be thus informed? For instance, is this kind of informing mediated by material concepts? Or is it conceivable that the only concepts involved in empirical synthesis may be pure concepts? And if the former, in what way do material concepts enter empirical sensible synthesis? According to the interpretation developed here, the Heterogeneity Thesis entails that sensible synthesis is distinct from judgment. So the way in which material concepts enter into sensible synthesis must be distinct from the way in which they enter into judgment. On the contrary, if the account I gave in Chapter Five is correct, the way in which material concepts enter into empirical sensible synthesis must follow the way in which pure geometrical concepts function as rules for construction. But exactly how are we to conceive whatever is the analogue to construction in empirical intuition? A fully worked-out account of the doctrine of sensible synthesis must answer these questions.

Finally, consider that Kant characterizes sensible synthesis, at least in one of its forms, as an act of the understanding by which the understanding determines inner sense with regard to its form.<sup>5</sup> Of this act Kant also says that it is an affection of inner sense by the understanding.<sup>6</sup> A comprehensive account of sensible synthesis needs to explain what this involves. Kant's doctrine of inner sense, then, and in particular the claim that the understanding determines inner sense by affecting it, constitutes another issue on which further work is needed. More specifically, what we need an account of is not just how we should think of the affection of inner sense by the understanding, but also how this kind of affection relates to the more familiar affection of outer sense by objects. As I have said repeatedly, sensibility is characterized by Kant as a receptive capacity, where this means that it is a capacity to have representations in virtue of being affected

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. B150-2.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. B152-6.

by something external to the capacity.<sup>7</sup> In the Aesthetic, Kant focuses on affection by objects external to us, that is, the affection of outer sense. However, as the doctrine of the determination of inner sense by the understanding suggests, just by itself the notion of affection leaves it indeterminate what the source of affection is. All that is required for the concept to have application is that the source of affection is external to the capacity being affected. Since the capacity in question is sensibility, this requirement is met in the case of affection by the understanding. So it is not inconsistent for Kant to recognize another kind of affection besides the affection of outer sense by objects. Still, a more substantive account is needed of how we are to construe the claim that the understanding affects sensibility, as it were, from the inside.

A comprehensive account of sensible synthesis, then, requires substantially more discussion, at least some of which I hope to provide in future work. My aim here was to make possible such an account by first making intelligible the very idea that the spontaneous capacity of the mind, as Kant conceives it, can be exercised in two different ways and thus operate under two different “titles,” as Kant puts it at the close of the Transcendental Deduction when he says that that “[it] is one and the same spontaneity, which in the one case, under the title of imagination, and in the other case, under the title of understanding, brings combination into the manifold of intuition” (B162n).

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<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Introduction, §1.