Intuition, Concepts and Spatial Representation in Kant

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Abstract: I argue that the nonconceptualist reading of Kant's theory of intuition, according to which concepts are not required to have intuitions of objects, is false. Instead, we should accept Weak Conceptualism, a form of conceptualism that commentators have failed to distinguish from the position that usually figures under the label 'conceptualism' in debates about Kant's theory of intuition. The latter, which I call Strong Conceptualism, holds that intuitions depend on the application of concepts in judgment. By contrast, Weak Conceptualism says that intuition depends on the application of concepts, not in judgment, but in the distinct act of sensible synthesis. I argue for Weak Conceptualism by showing why Nonconceptualism, as recently defended by Lucy Allais, fails. Allais argues that Kant's doctrine of the spatial form of intuition should take centre stage in an account of the intentionality of intuition. I accept this and argue that, when fully thought through, it shows that Kant is a Weak Conceptualist. This follows from Kant's views on spatial representation. The central idea is that spatial representation requires a grasp of the distinctive part-whole structure of space. This in turn requires the application in sensible synthesis of certain concepts.

1. The recent debate over whether the content of perceptual experience is conceptual or nonconceptual has a parallel in Kant-scholarship.[1] The claim by a major proponent of conceptualism, John McDowell, that this position captures a central thought of Kant's has prompted a number of commentators to argue that, on the contrary, Kant is a nonconceptualist about perception.[2] My first aim in this paper is to assess this claim, as developed in recent work by Lucy Allais, and show that it is false. This will require me to draw a distinction between two versions of conceptualism, which have not been kept distinct in the debate. While Allais has good arguments against one of these, she does not succeed in refuting the other. My second aim in this paper is to develop and defend the second version of conceptualism, the availability of which has not been sufficiently recognized. Showing that Kant holds the second version

[1] See Gunther, *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, and Speaks, 'Nonconceptual Content', for an overview of this debate.

[2] See Hanna, 'Kant and Non-Conceptual Content', Hanna, 'Kantian Non-Conceptualism' and Allais, 'Non-Conceptual Content'. – The connection with Kant has been emphasized consistently in McDowell's writings on the topic since McDowell, *Mind and World*.

of conceptualism not only promises to advance the debate; it will also shed new light on the general issue of precisely how Kant conceives the relation between understanding and sensibility, the two basic cognitive capacities he recognizes.

Since the precise content of the claim that Kant is a conceptualist about perception is part of what is at issue, it will be useful to begin with a sufficiently generic version of this claim. Kant famously draws a distinction between two basic cognitive capacities and argues that cognition requires the cooperation of both: 'Without sensibility, no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind' (A51/B75).[3] This is often taken to imply that in the absence of concepts intuition does not possess objective purport; it is not about anything. Accordingly, the thought goes, it is Kant's view that the ability to enjoy non-blind intuitions requires the possession of concepts. On this view, then, the objective purport of intuitions depends on the possession of concepts. Call this Generic Conceptualism.

Allais characterizes the conceptualist position she opposes as the view that, according to Kant, to perceive an object that is *F* one must judge the object to be *F*.[4] It might seem that this position is implied by Generic Conceptualism, and this is how Allais seems to take it. However, since I will argue that there is no such implication, I wish to distinguish the two positions from the start. Let us use the label Strong Conceptualism, then, for the position Allais regards as her opponent. So we get a distinction between

> *Generic Conceptualism:* The objective purport of intuitions depends on the possession of concepts.
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> and
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> *Strong Conceptualism:* To have an intuition of an object that is *F* one must judge the object to be *F.*

[3] As is customary, I treat 'empirical intuition' as equivalent to 'perception'. This has been questioned recently by Tolley, 'Non-Conceptuality'. But since my opponent in this paper also adheres to it, I do not need to take a stand on the issue here.

[4] As Allais puts it (the issue regarding conceptualism is 'whether, according to Kant, […] a subject must have the concepts of roundness, redness and particularity to perceive a round, red particular' (Allais, 'Non-Conceptual Content', 386n9).

Against Strong Conceptualism, Allais offers a number of objections. The one most relevant to my concerns runs as follows: According to Allais, what Kant is concerned with in the passage just quoted is full-blown empirical *cognition* rather than (what she calls) mere intuition. So what the cooperation of sensibility and understanding is required for is cognition. As Allais rightly observes, cognition for Kant consists in judgements. Judgement clearly requires the possession of concepts. But according to Allais this says nothing about what is required for mere intuition. On the contrary, in her view proper attention to Kant's discussion of sensibility in the Transcendental Aesthetic reveals that intuition is in no way dependent for its objective purport on the application of concepts. Rather, what accounts for its objective purport according to Allais is the fact that intuition is object-dependent; that is, that an intuition is the immediate presence to consciousness of an object such that, if the object were not affecting the subject's sensibility, there would be no intuition of it. Central to this characteristic of intuition, according to Allais, is its spatiality. Therefore, an essential ingredient in Kant's account of the intentionality of perception is in his theory of spatial representation. But, Allais argues, since for Kant spatial representation is nonconceptual, the central importance of the spatial character of intuition gives no support to conceptualism. On the contrary, it supports Nonconceptualism, which can be defined as follows:

> *Nonconceptualism:* The objective purport of intuitions does not depend on the possession of concepts.

I will argue that while Allais is right in drawing our attention to Kant's theory of spatial representation, she is mistaken in thinking that this theory supports Nonconceptualism. Rather, I will be concerned to show that this theory itself supports a conceptualist reading. However, as we shall see, this will be a version of Generic Conceptualism that is distinct from the Strong Conceptualist position Allais opposes. Under the genus Generic Conceptualism, then, we need to distinguish two different species: Strong Conceptualism, on the one hand, and a position I call Weak Conceptualism, on the other. For now, Weak Conceptualism can be characterized as the

view that to perceive an object one must apply concepts in sensible synthesis, where sensible synthesis is a way of applying concepts that is different from judging.[5]

I proceed as follows: I begin by briefly discussing what is at stake philosophically in the debate between conceptualist and nonconceptualist readers of Kant. Next, I discuss Kant's thesis that the representation of space is an intuition, not a concept, and offer a proposal about why he holds this. Since the concept of a magnitude is central to this proposal, I go on to analyse a section of the *First Critique* entitled Axioms of Intuition, in which Kant discusses this concept and argues that all intuitions are magnitudes. I argue that an argument given in this section shows that, for Kant, the ability to have intuitions requires possession of the concept of a magnitude. This puts me in a position to articulate Weak Conceptualism (at least partially) and defend it against objections.

2. The question whether the content of perceptual experience is conceptual or nonconceptual is at bottom a question about how to conceive the relation between two distinct sets of capacities typically possessed by adult human beings, and this is where I take its philosophical significance to lie. These are, on the one hand, capacities for perceptual, sense-based interaction with the world and, on the other, capacities associated with the power to engage in conceptually-articulated thought and inference. In more traditional terms, it is a question about how to conceive the relation between the animal aspect and the rational aspect of a rational animal.

Given this framing, the two sides of the debate can be characterized as follows: Nonconceptualists hold that the perceptual, or animal, capacities of a rational animal can in principle be accounted for independently of its rational capacities. Although most nonconceptualists are happy to concede that, as a matter of fact, the presence of rational capacities in adult human beings shapes their perceptual powers in various ways, they insist that, in principle, one could possess the latter without the former. By contrast, conceptualists about perception are committed to the view that the perceptual capacities of rational animals are not self-standing in the way envisioned by the

[5] Throughout this paper I use the term 'judgement' in Kant's wide sense, where this means that a judgement need not be assertoric, but may be what Frege would call the mere grasping of a thought. – Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge,* also stresses the distinction between judgement and sensible synthesis, but her argument for this claim differs from mine. Moreover, she does not discuss the significance of this distinction for the debate over Kant's alleged conceptualism.

nonconceptualist. They depend for their intelligibility on the presence of rational capacities. So on this view one could not possess perceptual powers without also possessing rational capacities. [6]

Conceptualists do not want to deny, of course, that non-rational animals also possess perceptual powers. But they think that the relation between their perceptual powers and ours is of a different kind than the nonconceptualist thinks: *generically*, they say, the perceptual powers of rational animals are identical to those of non-rational animals. But *specifically* they are different, because in the one case these powers depend on conceptual capacities, while in the other they do not. So conceptualists hold that the notion of a perceptual power, just as such, is generic and that perceptual powers come in two fundamentally different kinds: the merely animal kind and the rational animal kind.

In short, nonconceptualists conceive the relation between perceptual capacities and rational capacities as an *additive* one: Adult human beings have the former, and in addition they also possess the latter, though possession of the first does not imply possession of the second. Conceptualists, on the other hand, conceive the relation as a *transformative* one: The presence of rational capacities in the case of rational animals transforms the perceptual capacities they have into kinds of perceptual capacity that only rational animals have.[7]

The general question whether rationality transforms perceptual capacities or is merely additional to them is implicated in a number of otherwise distinct philosophical problems. One such problem, which is often discussed in the contemporary debate about the content of perception is whether perceptual experience provides reasons for belief, and if so, what structure this requires us to attribute to experience.[8]

In the context of Kant interpretation, however, the question is usually not framed in these terms. Rather, it is framed in terms of how to account for the intentionality of intuition; that is, of how to account for the fact that intuition purports to be about (or as

[6] Note that it is assumed on both sides of this debate that non-rational animals do not possess concepts (in the relevant sense). This is an assumption one need not share.
[7] I borrow these terms from Boyle, 'Additive Theories', which provides a very helpful discussion of the issue.
[8] See e.g. Brewer, *Perception and Reason*. For a different problem of this kind see the debate about embodied coping documented in Schear, *Being-in-the-World*.

Kant would say: represents) objects.[9] This issue, in turn, is connected to a number of exegetical questions about which there has been debate among commentators: First, if intuitions without concepts are blind, exactly what does it take for intuitions not to be blind: do intuitions represent objects only if the are 'taken up' into judgement or is that too strong a requirement? Second, what is the relation between the kind of unity that Kant attributes to intuitions and the kind of unity he attributes to judgements? Third, how does Kant argue for the objective validity of the categories and what is the role of sensibility in this argument; in particular, does Kant argue that the categories are valid of objects in part because they play a role, not just in judgement, but also in intuition? Since these questions are central to the *First Critique* as a whole, the debate over Kant's account of the intentionality of intuition has far-reaching implications.[10]

3. Allais regards as her primary opponent the position I have labeled Strong Conceptualism. It is not necessary here to rehearse the arguments she offers against this position. Rather, what I wish to do is to accept two central features of the alternative view she defends and argue that, when properly thought through, these features support a version of Generic Conceptualism, rather than the Nonconceptualism Allais takes them to articulate. Again, though, this is not the Strong Conceptualism Allais rightly opposes, but a distinct version of Generic Conceptualism.

The two features of Allais's view are the following:

(i) Intuition represents objects independently of the application of concepts in judgement.

(ii) The spatial form of intuition is central to the way in which intuition represents objects and therefore must figure centrally in an account of its intentionality.[11]

[9] This is not, however, simply a separate issue. According to McDowell, *Mind and World*, the intentionality of both belief (and thought more generally) and perception depends on the ability of perception to provide reasons for belief.

[10] I will address the first two, but not the third, of these questions in this paper.

[11] The following three passages jointly express Allais's endorsement of (i) and (ii):

> In contemporary debates, one of the purposes for which non-conceptual content is invoked is that of […] accounting for the object-directed nature of perceptual experience. It is argued that there must be conscious representational states that are prior to thought, to which we can appeal

Allais concludes from this that no application, or indeed possession, of concepts whatsoever is needed to account for the intentionality of intuition. I will argue that this conclusion is not warranted. While (i) is correct, it does not entail that no possession or application of concepts is required.[12] This is shown by proper attention to (ii). For, as I shall argue, careful consideration of Kant's theory of spatial representation reveals that for him spatial representation in intuition involves a special kind of concept-application. To be sure, this is not the predicative employment of concepts in judgement that is the focus of Strong Conceptualism. It is, rather, the employment of concepts as rules of a certain kind of non-judgemental synthesis. While not predicative in structure, this kind of synthesis is still an exercise of spontaneity and ought therefore to count, at least within Kant's framework, as an act of concept-application. Consideration of the spatial form of intuition thus reveals, not that Kant is a nonconceptualist about intuition, but rather that he subscribes to Generic Conceptualism, though in a version that is distinct from Strong Conceptualism.[13]

To make the case for this, I will first focus on the spatial form of intuition, with a view to isolating that feature of intuition which makes intuitions distinct in kind from concepts. I will argue that this feature consists in the possession of a distinctive logical structure, which I call strict logical homogeneity. This will put me in a position to argue,

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> in explaining how it is that we have thought of an object. It seems to me that this is the role for which Kant invokes intuition; he says that there must be an ingredient in cognition that is essentially distinct from concepts, involves the presence of the experienced object, is prior to thought, and is necessary for us to be presented with the objects about which we think. (Allais, 'Non-Conceptual Content', 391f)
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> [For Kant], it is the spatiotemporality of perception that enables it to present us with particulars […]. (Allais, 'Non-Conceptual Content', 413)
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> [Kant] thinks that representing objects spatially involves representing them with some degree of determinateness (as located, as having size, shape, and spatial relations to each other) and he says that our primary representation of space is not conceptual, which surely means that these determinations are not primarily conceptual. We do not need concepts in order to represent objects as located; rather, this requires ordering the input of the senses in terms of a framework provided by the (non-conceptual) a priori intuition of space. (Allais, 'Non-Conceptual Content', 399)

[12] To be precise, on my reading (i) is correct only when interpreted as saying that intuition represents objects independently of the *actual* application of concepts in judgement. But since the ability to have intuitions depends on the ability to make judgements, it would be false to say that intuition represents objects independently of the *possible* application of concepts in judgement.

[13] For the purposes of this paper I will simply assume that Strong Conceptualism is false. I argue for this in [Author Ref].

in a subsequent step, that the actualization of the spatial form of intuition (that is, the perceptual awareness of something as spatial) for Kant requires a special act of synthesis and that this amounts to an act of concept-application. The central idea is that spatial representation for Kant essentially involves a kind of structure that is nonconceptual in the sense that concepts alone could not account for it, but that the way in which this structure is involved in spatial representation is nonetheless dependent on the application of concepts.

The point will become clearer if we introduce a distinction between two senses in which an intuition is not a conceptual representation. Call these the strong and the weak sense of 'nonconceptual', respectively. An intuition is *strongly nonconceptual* just in case it does not depend on any act of spontaneity whatsoever. By contrast, an intuition is *weakly nonconceptual* just in case it does not depend on a particular act of spontaneity; the act, namely, that confers on the intuition the predicative structure Kant takes to be characteristic of judgement.[14] I will argue that Allais's position entitles her to claim only that intuition is weakly nonconceptual, but not that it is strongly nonconceptual. Strong nonconceptuality, however, is what she would need to establish in order to refute Generic Conceptualism. By eliding this distinction, the nature of Kant's position is obscured.

Let us turn, then, to the question of what makes intuitions distinct in kind from concepts. A natural place to start would be the well-known characterization of intuition as a singular, immediate representation.[15] But for my purposes it will be more fruitful to focus on Kant's discussion of what he calls the original representation of space. The original representation of space is, famously, an intuition, not a concept, and considering Kant's arguments in support of this claim promises to shed light on why intuitions in general are distinct in kind from concepts.[16]

This strategy is recommended by Kant's claim that the representation of space functions as the form of sensibility. The notion of form here is an Aristotelian one. It goes with a contrasting notion of matter and has its place in a particular explanatory

[14] 'Conferring predicative structure' is to be understood broadly, so as to allow both for the possibility that an intuition has internal predicative structure and the possibility that an intuition functions as a subject of predication. I take no stand on which of these would be more plausible.
[15] See e.g. A320/B377. Allais rightly focuses on this characterization in her argument against Strong Conceptualism. In a fuller account, I would wish to explain how it relates to the feature on which I focus here.
[16] I will drop the qualification 'original' from now on and use 'the representation of space' as shorthand for 'the original representation of space'.

paradigm that Kant employs. A central idea of this explanatory paradigm is that the form of a thing is that which makes it the kind of thing it is. Since sensibility is the capacity to have a certain kind of representation, viz. intuitions, what this idea comes to in the present context is that the form of sensibility is that on account of which an intuition is an intuition. Put differently, possession of the form of sensibility is what makes an intuition the kind of representation it is. It follows from this that consideration of the form of sensibility ought to tell us something about the distinguishing characteristics of intuitions.[17]

Let me turn, then, to Kant's discussion of the representation of space. In the Transcendental Aesthetic, he gives two arguments explicitly intended to support the conclusion that this representation is an intuition rather than a concept. Here is the first half of what is known as the Third Space Argument:

> Space is not a discursive or, as we say, general concept of relations of things in general, but a pure intuition. For, in the first place, we can represent to ourselves only a single space; and if we speak of diverse spaces, we mean by that only parts of one and the same unique space. (A24f/B39)

And here is the relevant portion of the Fourth Space Argument:

> Now, every concept must be thought as a representation which is contained in an infinite number of different possible representations (as their common mark), and which therefore contains these *under itself*; but no concept, as such, can be thought as containing an infinite number of representations *within itself*. It is in this latter way, however, that space is thought; for all the parts of space coexist ad infinitum. (B39f)

In both passages, Kant ascribes a certain kind of part-whole structure to the representation of space. In the first passage, he literally says that space is a whole made up of parts. In the second passage, he connects this point with a claim about the logical structure of concepts and argues that, since it is impossible for a concept to exhibit the kind of part-whole structure that the representation of space possesses, the representation of space is not a concept.

What is of interest to me here is that Kant ties the intuitional nature of the representation of space to its having a particular part-whole structure. Specifically, we should take note of the claim that any talk of numerical diversity in connection with

[17] I will abstract in what follows from the fact that time is also a form of sensibility. Nothing turns on this.

space is really talk about different parts of one and the same thing. And although Kant does not make it explicit in these passages, he thinks that these parts are qualitatively identical. This comes out in the following passage:

> The concept of a cubic foot of space, wherever and however often I think it, is in itself *completely identical*. But two cubic feet are nevertheless distinguished in space by the mere difference of their locations (*numero diversa*); these locations are conditions of the intuition wherein the object of this concept is given; they do not, however, belong to the concept but entirely to sensibility. (A282/B338, my emphasis)

What Kant says here is that every instance of the concept 'cubic foot of space' has exactly the same intrinsic properties. According to the Identity of Indiscernibles, as espoused in the Leibnizian tradition to which Kant is reacting, this would make all these instances numerically identical. But in fact, they are numerically distinct from one another. For they are different parts of space.

The same point is supported by the example Kant uses in his criticism of the Identity of Indiscernibles in the Amphiboly-chapter. Let two raindrops, Kant says, have all the same intrinsic properties. Yet it is a sufficient reason for regarding them as numerically distinct that they occupy different locations in space. This claim is then justified as follows:

> For one part of space, although completely similar and equal to another part, is still outside the other and for this very reason is a different part from that which abuts it to constitute a greater space. And this must hold of everything, which simultaneously occupies the different locations in space, however similar and equal it may otherwise be. (A264/B320)

Again, what Kant says here is that space is made up of parts, which are 'completely similar and equal' to one another, and yet numerically distinct. If this is true of all parts of space, then the fact that two objects occupy distinct locations in space is sufficient for their being numerically distinct, whatever their qualitative determinations.

4. I have argued that a particular part-whole structure is an essential characteristic of the representation of space, in Kant's view. The feature that matters above all else here is that space is represented as containing a manifold of parts, which

are qualitatively identical, yet numerically distinct. Following recent work on Kant's philosophy of mathematics, I will call this the *strict logical homogeneity* of space.[18] This term is defined as follows:

> *Strict Logical Homogeneity*: A whole *w* is *strictly logically homogeneous* iff, for every *x* and every *y*, if *x* and *y* are parts of *w,* then there is no monadic concept *F* such that *F* is instantiated by *x* but not by *y*.

So, to say that space is strictly logically homogeneous is to say that every part of space is qualitatively identical to every other part of space, yet a different part, and thus numerically distinct. This, I maintain, is what the distinctive logical character of the representation of space consists in for Kant: it represents space as exhibiting strict logical homogeneity.

Having identified this logical character puts us in a position to understand why the representation of space is an intuition rather than a concept. For, as I will now argue, strict logical homogeneity cannot be represented by concepts, on the theory of concepts that Kant espouses.

More precisely, strict logical homogeneity cannot be represented by conceptual means alone, but always requires a representation that is different in kind from concepts.[19] The reason is that according to Kant's theory of concepts, the content of a concept is defined by the subordination-relations in which it stands to other concepts. Roughly, the idea is that concepts can be ordered in a genus-species hierarchy, and that the content of any given concept is determined by the concepts that are above it in the hierarchy (that is, the concepts to which it is subordinate).[20] It follows from the rules that govern such genus-species hierarchies (in particular, from the requirement that every division of a concept into subordinate concepts be exclusive and exhaustive) that in this framework numerical diversity can be represented only by means of qualitative diversity. For instance, I can represent a multiplicity of animals only by drawing a distinction between different *kinds* of animal; e.g., between rational and non-rational

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[18] See Sutherland, 'Kant's Philosophy of Mathematics', 164-168.
[19] That is to say, Kant accepts that there are concepts which serve to represent something as exhibiting strict logical homogeneity; for instance, the concept of a line. But such concepts exist only because they are parasitic on a nonconceptual representation from which they, as it were, inherit their content. As Kant puts it at one point, a concept of this type 'contains a pure intuition in itself' (A719/B747).
[20] For elaboration see Anderson, 'Wolffian Paradigm'.

animals. For this reason, it is impossible to represent strict logical homogeneity by means of concepts alone.

This gives us a purchase on the specifically intuitive character of the original representation of space and, since space is the form of sensibility, on the intuitive character of sensible representations generally, including empirical intuitions.[21] Having such a purchase is significant because it serves to lay the ground for my argument to the effect that for Kant intuition is only weakly nonconceptual, not strongly nonconceptual. For, as I will now argue, the kind of concept-dependence of intuitions that I wish to defend is tied to the very characteristic on account of which intuitions are distinct in kind from concepts.

5. The property of being strictly logically homogeneous is what Kant calls the property of being a magnitude.[22] So a magnitude is a whole of parts that are qualitatively identical, but numerically distinct. Now, the concept of a magnitude figures among the categories, or pure concepts of the understanding, that Kant famously recognizes.[23] In the course of establishing the objective validity of the categories – that is, of arguing that anything that can be given to us in perception instantiates these concepts – Kant appears to argue that spatial representation, just as such, requires bringing what is represented under the concept of a magnitude.

The argument I have in mind is presented in the following passage:

> All appearances contain, as regards their form, an intuition in space and time, which grounds all of them a priori. They cannot be apprehended, therefore, i.e., taken up into empirical consciousness, except through the synthesis of the manifold through which the representations of a determinate space or time are generated, i.e., through the composition of that which is homogeneous and the consciousness of the synthetic unity of this manifold (homogeneous). However, the consciousness of the manifold homogeneous in intuition in general, insofar

[21] That the distinction between concepts and intuitions is tied to a difference in internal structure has also been argued recently by McLear, 'Two Kinds of Unity', who takes this point to support Nonconceptualism. If my argument here is on the right lines, this conclusion is not warranted.
[22] See B203; for discussion see Sutherland, 'Kant's Philosophy of Mathematics', and Sutherland, 'Axioms of Intuition'.
[23] A magnitude is a manifold (plurality) of homogeneous parts (unity) considered as forming a whole (totality). Accordingly, Kant sometimes speaks of the concept of magnitude as a pure concept of the understanding, that is, a category; see, e.g., A142/B182. Consider also the following passage from one of the Lectures on Metaphysics: 'The category of magnitude, for instance, as a manifold of homogeneous parts that together constitute a one – this cannot be comprehended apart from space and time' (Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften,* XXIX: 979).

> as the representation of an object first becomes possible through it, is the concept of a magnitude (*quanti*). Therefore, even the perception of an object, as appearance, is possible only through the same synthetic unity of the manifold of a given sensible intuition, through which the unity of the composition of the manifold homogeneous is thought in the concept of a magnitude. (B202f)

Since the passage is rather dense, I will go through it step by step. In the first sentence, Kant reiterates his contention that the representations of space and time function as forms of intuition, which is to say that anything apprehended in empirical intuition (that is, all appearances) is represented as being in space and time; more precisely, as located at, and taking up, a particular location in space (abstracting from the case of time from now on). He then claims that it follows from this that appearances can only be apprehended by means of the same kind of synthesis through which a determinate space is represented. This synthesis is then characterized as an act of composition of a homogeneous manifold. Moreover, this synthesis involves what Kant calls the consciousness of the synthetic unity of a manifold of homogeneous parts. But this consciousness just *is* the concept of a magnitude. It follows, Kant argues, that the perception of an object requires a synthesis in accordance with the concept of a magnitude.

In slightly simplified form, the argument can be summarized as follows: We can only apprehend what is given to us in perception by representing it as occupying a determinate space. Representing a determinate space, however, requires 'the consciousness of the synthetic unity of [a] homogeneous manifold' (B202f). But this phrase simply picks out the concept of a magnitude. It follows that representing a determinate space involves bringing it under the concept of a magnitude. Accordingly, the representation of objects in space, though crucially dependent on sensibility, is equally dependent on the application of concepts.

If this is right, Nonconceptualism is false. For the upshot of the argument is that the application of concepts is required even for mere intuition. It is required, that is, not just for full-blown cognition, as Allais contends, but also for mere intuition; that is, for the sensible apprehension of an object in perception.

However, several questions and objections immediately arise. First, does the passage actually show that the concept of a magnitude is necessary for *mere intuition*, as opposed to full-blown cognition? Consideration of commonly held interpretations of the

Axioms of Intuition might lead one to think that it is the latter rather than the former. But if that is the case, the passage does not support my argument.

Closely related to this is an objection proponents of Nonconceptualism such as Allais might raise. They might argue that the view I find adumbrated I the passage is not compatible with Kant's commitment to the heterogeneity of sensibility and understanding; that is, with the claim that intuitions are distinct in kind from concepts.[24] In requiring the application of concepts in intuition, the thought is, this view in effect turns intuitions into a sub-species of concepts. But to do that is to fail to appreciate the nature of Kant's heterogeneity claim and thereby to jettison one of the central pillars of the Critical philosophy.[25]

Finally, we simply need a better understanding of what Kant is saying in the passage. In particular, we need to know more about what it is to apply the concept of a magnitude in the kind of synthesis Kant has in view here. Does this synthesis consist in making judgements in which the concept of a magnitude figures? If not, what else does it consist in? And on account of what are we entitled to think of this other kind of application as an application *of a concept*, given that our grip on the notion of concept-application seems to depend on the notion of judgement?

In the remainder of this paper, I will address these worries in turn. Doing so will serve to articulate and defend the position I take to be supported by the passage from the Axioms, viz. Weak Conceptualism.

6. The first question is prompted by the observation that the section entitled 'Axioms of Intuition' is frequently taken to address the question whether mathematics is applicable to experience. This question in turn is taken to concern the issue of whether, and on what basis, certain kinds of judgements can be made about what is given in experience; in particular, judgements involving quantitative claims.[26] In light of this, one might take a synthesis in accordance with the concept of a magnitude to be a judgement of this kind. If this is right, then what the passage shows is that the concept of a magnitude is required for a certain type of cognition rather than for mere intuition, as

[24] Allais calls this calls this the 'fundamental duality of sensibility and understanding' (Allais, 'Non-Conceptual Content', 404).
[25] Here I develop a line of thought Allais hints at in her discussion of Beatrice Longuenesse's account of Kant's theory of spatial representation. See Allais, 'Non-Conceptual Content', 403.
[26] For examples see Brittan, *Kant's Theory of Science,* 96-97; Guyer, *Claims to Knowledge*, 191f.

my interpretation claims. Accordingly, the argument against Nonconceptualism, which rests on the latter, fails.[27]

My response to this is as follows: While the section entitled 'Axioms of Intuition' as a whole does indeed address the question of the applicability of mathematics to possible objects of intuition, this does nothing to show that the application of concept of a magnitude discussed in the quoted passage concerns a particular type of cognition rather than mere intuition. To begin with, Kant explicitly talks about perception in the passage and says *of it* that it requires the apprehension of the synthetic unity of a strictly logically homogeneous manifold and thus application of the concept of a magnitude. Secondly, while the application of mathematics to experience may indeed yield a certain kind of cognition, Kant's being concerned in the Axioms to make a point about the former in no way requires him to be talking about this type of cognition (as opposed to mere intuition) when he talks about that synthesis of the manifold through which the representation of a particular space is generated. Indeed, it appears that Kant's argument for the applicability of mathematics in fact rests on the claim that all intuitions are magnitudes; which in turn rests on the claim that intuition, in virtue of its spatial form, depends on a synthesis in accordance with the categories of quantity.[28] Thirdly, note that this last point is also made in a number of other passages; and again quite explicitly. Consider, for instance, the following passage:

> […] if, e.g., I make the empirical intuition of a house into perception through apprehension of its manifold, my ground is the necessary unity of space and of outer sensible intuition in general, and I as it were draw its shape in agreement with this synthetic unity of the manifold in space. This very same synthetic unity, however, if I abstract from the form of space, has its seat in the understanding, and is the category of the synthesis of the homogeneous in an intuition in general, i.e., the category of quantity, with which that synthesis of apprehension, i.e., the perception, must therefore be in thoroughgoing agreement. (B162)

Here, too, it seems quite clear that the passage concerns the perception of objects in space, rather than the kind of consideration of space at issue in, say, measuring the

[27] Although Allais has not, to my knowledge, discussed the passage from the Axioms, she makes the same sort of point against appeals to the famous footnote at B160n, which some advocates of conceptualism take to support the claim that for Kant spatial representation depends on concepts; see Allais, 'Non-Conceptual Content', 404f. So she would likely argue that the passage from the Axioms, too, concerns a specific kind of judgement rather than mere intuition.

[28] For fully adequate support, this point would need to be backed up by detailed interpretation of the text of the Axioms. This is more than I can provide here.

size of an object. And here, too, Kant makes the point that perceiving an object in space requires application of the category of quantity because spatial representation in general requires the representation of the 'synthetic unity of the manifold in space'; the representation, that is, of the distinctive part-whole structure of space, its strict logical homogeneity.[29]

I am now in a position to offer a slightly more precise characterization of Weak Conceptualism. Central to the passage from the Axioms is the notion of a 'synthesis of the manifold through which the representations of a determinate space […] [is] generated,' which is a synthesis of a manifold that exhibits strict logical homogeneity. This is a synthesis that concerns mere intuition, as opposed to cognition, which means that it is a synthesis that does not consist in judging. I call it *sensible synthesis*. According to the passage, sensible synthesis is an act of concept-application; in this case, of the concept of a magnitude. The notion of sensible synthesis therefore enables us to formulate a version of Generic Conceptualism that is distinct from Strong Conceptualism. So we can define Weak Conceptualism as follows:

> *Weak Conceptualism:* The objective purport of intuition depends on the application of concepts in sensible synthesis.

While this definition will be sufficient for my argument against Nonconceptualism, it would need to be made more precise for a full defense of the view. For the idea of a kind of concept-application distinct from judgement (that is, sensible synthesis) is only one of two main features of Weak Conceptualism. Since it is the one

[29] Note also that Kant holds that the kind of synthesis required for the geometrical construction of a concept in pure intuition, which is essential to mathematics on Kant's conception, is *identical* to the kind of synthesis involved in empirical intuition; that is, in perception. Consider the following passage (as well as a similar passage at A165f/B206):

> It may look, to be sure, as if the possibility of a triangle could be cognized from its concept in itself (it is certainly independent of experience); for indeed we can give an object to it entirely a priori, i.e., we can construct it. But since this is only the form of an object, it would still always remain only a product of the imagination, the possibility of whose object would still remain doubtful, as requiring something more, namely that such a figure be thought solely under those conditions on which all objects of experience rest. Now that space is a formal a priori condition of outer experiences, *that this very same formative synthesis by means of which we construct a figure in imagination is entirely identical with that which we exercise in the apprehension of an appearance* in order to make a concept of experience of it – it is this alone that connects with this concept the representation of the possibility of such a thing. (A223f/B271, my emphasis).

most relevant to the argument of this paper, it is the one I focus on here. The other is this: In contrast to Strong Conceptualism, which in effect says that to have an intuition of an object one must apply *all* the concepts that characterize the content of one's intuition, Weak Conceptualism requires only that one apply (in sensible synthesis) *some* of the concepts that characterize this content. Precisely which concepts these are is a complex issue, which requires much more detailed discussion that I can give it here. At a first pass, we can say that they are the concepts that articulate the concept of an object of intuition in general; that is, the pure concepts of the understanding, or categories, which Kant identifies. Here I focus on only a subset of these, viz. the categories of quantity, because these are most directly connected with the spatial form of intuition.[30]

Moreover, it is not clear whether *only* the categories are required or also other concepts. For instance, one might think that the application in sensible synthesis of the concept of a magnitude also requires the application of certain spatial concepts, say, certain shape-concepts or the concept of location. One reason to think so would be that the representation of determinate spaces involves determinate configurations of spatial manifolds rather than the bare idea of the synthetic unity of a spatial manifold in general. For now, however, I will put this issue to one side and focus on the notion of sensible synthesis. For present purposes, then, the defining feature of Weak Conceptualism is that it requires the application of certain concepts in sensible synthesis. As I said, this is enough to distinguish it from both Strong Conceptualism and Nonconceptualism.

7. The second worry I raised concerns the heterogeneity of intuitions and concepts and takes the form of an objection; viz., that the account I am offering in effect makes intuitions out to be a sub-species of conceptual representation, since it requires the application of concepts in intuition itself, and thereby fails to preserve one of Kant's most central commitments.

The first thing to say in response to this is that I agree with Allais that this objection has bite against Strong Conceptualism. In holding that one can have an intuition of an *F* only by thinking of it *as* an *F*, the Strong Conceptualist in effect ascribes

[30] How other categories figure in sensible synthesis would require detailed discussion of the sections on the Schematism and the Pure Principles of the Understanding.

the predicative structure characteristic of judgements to intuition. If the heterogeneity of intuitions and concepts entails that intuitions do not exhibit predicative structure, then Strong Conceptualism fails to preserve heterogeneity.

However, the Weak Conceptualism I recommend avoids this charge. Its characteristic commitment is that intuitions depend on a kind of concept-application that does not confer predicative structure on intuitions. On the contrary, this is a kind of concept-application which is required for the representation of a different kind of structure, viz. the strict logical homogeneity that I have argued is distinctive of intuitions. Far from undermining heterogeneity, this kind of concept-application preserves it because it first makes possible the representation of the structure on account of which intuitions are distinct in kind from concepts.

To make this clearer, I suggest that we should think of the heterogeneity claim as pertaining to intuitions, on the one hand, and judgements, on the other. It is, after all, in judgement that concepts find their primary application.[31] We can then distinguish two aspects of the heterogeneity claim, one concerning the occurrence of the relevant act, the other concerning its distinctive structure. With regard to the first aspect, intuitions and judgements are heterogeneous in that the one can occur without the other. That is, the capacity for having an intuition can be actualized without the capacity for judging being thereby actualized (and vice versa).[32] With regard to the second aspect, intuitions exhibit a distinctive kind of structure and judgements exhibit a different, but equally distinctive kind of structure. Intuitions are manifolds of strictly logically homogeneous parts, while judgements have predicative structure (which on Kant's conception of concepts entails that their parts are not strictly logically homogeneous). The kind of concept-dependence of intuitions postulated by Weak Conceptualism preserves heterogeneity in both these aspects. It allows for intuitions to occur independently of judgements. And it allows for a fundamental difference in structure between intuitions and judgements.

[31] See A68f/B93f.

[32] But note that on this way of individuating the relevant capacities, the capacity for judgement is not identical to the capacity for concepts. We need to distinguish between the capacity for concepts in general (spontaneity) and two distinct species of it: the capacity for judging and the capacity for sensible synthesis. Both are species of concept-employment, hence distinct ways of actualizing spontaneity. But neither can be reduced to the other.

8. This response makes it urgent to ask exactly what the kind of concept-application I have in mind consists in, and why we should think of it as a kind of *concept*-application in the first place. This brings me, then, to the third concern raised above, which says, in a nutshell, that even if my interpretation of the passage from the Axioms is correct, we need a better understanding of what sensible synthesis is, in what sense it involves concepts, and what Kant's motivation is for accepting that there is such a thing. Since a full answer to these questions would require detailed discussion of the doctrine of synthesis, the unity of apperception, and Kant's theory of concepts, my aim here is only to explain what the central idea is.

Let me begin by describing the structure of the view I am advocating. The central commitment of Weak Conceptualism is that Kant distinguishes between two fundamental ways of actualizing spontaneity. One of these is the application of concepts in judgement. The other is sensible synthesis, which, unlike judgement, is itself implicated in actualizations of sensibility. Importantly, this entails that we must think of the spontaneous capacity of the mind as having the structure of a genus containing two species. Generically, judgement and sensible synthesis are identical; they are both exercises of spontaneity. And if spontaneity is the power of concepts, then they constitute so many ways of applying concepts. But specifically, they are distinct, so that neither can be understood as a version of the other. If this is right, it follows that we should not think of the way in which concepts are employed in sensible synthesis on the model of judgement. We should not, therefore, think of sensible synthesis as exhibiting predicative unity. This will not be the mark of conceptuality here.

What we need, then, is a grip on the idea of a concept that is more abstract than the idea of a predicate of judgement. Kant's texts suggest the notion of synthetic unity. While more would need to be said about what he means by this, we can employ this term for now to make the structural point I am concerned with: Spontaneity, the power of concepts, is the power to represent synthetic unity.[33] But then, a distinction between two types of synthetic unity will furnish us with the means to distinguish between two kinds of ways in which spontaneity can be exercised; equivalently, two kinds of ways in which concepts can be employed. The notion of strict logical homogeneity supplies the means for drawing such a distinction. On the one hand, there is the synthetic unity of

[33] By contrast, what we might call mere sensibility is the power to represent sheer manifoldness. Mere sensibility is sensibility considered in abstraction from its interaction with the intellect and according to my reading is a mere abstraction; that is, not a self-standing power to represent anything.

concepts in a judgement, central to which (at least in Kant's mind) is the idea of predication. Call this predicative unity. On the other hand, there is the synthetic unity of a manifold of strictly logically homogeneous parts, which we might call sensible unity. Here, the notion of predication gets no grip. Instead, what we get is the idea of a kind of unity that could not even be represented if all we had at our disposal was the application of concepts in judgement.

It might be objected that it is hard to see how sensible unity can be something that depends on actualizations of spontaneity if, according to my own proposal, sensible unity cannot be represented by conceptual means alone. We can see why this objection misfires if we attend more closely to the mereological structure of sensible representations. For what we can say is that the nature of the parts of any such representation (viz. their strict logical homogeneity) depends on sensibility, but that the actual occurrence of a representation of this kind nonetheless depends also on spontaneity. Kant, I think, is concerned to make this very point when he says that the mere form of intuition accounts only for sheer manifoldness, but does not itself amount to a sensible representation. For any such representation in addition involves unity of the manifold, which depends for its occurrence on an act of spontaneity.[34]

Abstractly speaking, the idea is that of a passive power familiar from the Aristotelian tradition. For this tradition, a power in general is the capacity to take on a certain range of determinations. What this range is depends on the nature of the power. But if the power is a passive power, then its actualization (that is, its taking on a particular one of these determinations) depends on something external to it, viz. another power's acting on it.[35]

Returning to the question of our grip on the notion of a concept in Kant, I have suggested that the notion of unity is central here and that a distinction between kinds of unity furnishes the means for distinguishing between kinds of concept-employment. Explaining why the notion of unity is central would require discussion of the doctrine of apperception, and that lies beyond the scope of this paper.[36] But we can say something about the kind of unity involved in spatial representation. I take it that the unity of a

[34] Cf. B160n; there is controversy in the literature about what this footnote says. A defense of my reading would require more detail than I have space for here.
[35] In the case of the empirical employment of sensibility, there are in fact *two* other powers involved: the object affecting sensibility from outside the mind as well as spontaneity affecting it from the inside (in sensible synthesis – which Kant characterizes as 'an effect of the understanding on sensibility' at B152).
[36] But see Engstrom, 'Understanding and Sensibility', and Rödl, 'Single Act of Combination'.

spatial representation is part of its content in the sense that it is an aspect of what the subject enjoying the representation is aware of. If this is right, then the subject is in some sense aware of the way in which, say, different parts of space relate to one another. A good way of thinking about this is to say that the subject understands, perhaps in some fairly minimal and implicit way, that different parts of space are 'outside one another' (A23/B38), such that they stand in spatial relations to one another. Presumably, some such understanding is required for someone to count as representing an object as located.[37]

If it makes sense to think of this kind of understanding as pertaining to the mereological character of space such that, when brought to full reflective awareness, it would involve recognition of the strict logical homogeneity of space, then we can begin to see why Kant thinks that spatial representing involves spontaneity. For we can think of the way in which the concept of a magnitude is employed here as furnishing the subject with the kind of understanding of the nature of spatial relations that allows her to perceive an object as located or as having a determinate spatial extension. I take it that this is what Kant has in mind in passages such as the one from B162 (quoted above on p.16), where he speaks of drawing the shape of a house in agreement with the synthetic unity of the manifold in space and goes on to say that 'this very same synthetic unity […], if I abstract from the form of space, has its seat in the understanding, and is the category of the synthesis of the homogeneous in an intuition in general, i.e., the category of quantity, with which that synthesis of apprehension, i.e., the perception, must therefore be in thoroughgoing agreement.'

9. I have sought to defend Weak Conceptualism, the view that for Kant the objective purport of intuition depends on an employment of concepts, which does not consist in acts of judging. My argument for this view rests on Kant's theory of spatial representation. I agree with Allais that this theory is essential to understanding Kant's conception of the intentionality of intuition. I agree, further, that proper attention to it reveals the importance of the heterogeneity of sensibility and understanding. Allais is right, I think, to insist that Strong Conceptualist views fail to do justice to this. Although Nonconceptualism fares better on this score, it is based on the mistaken assumption

[37] Allais seems to agree with this: '[Kant] thinks that representing objects spatially involves representing them with some degree of determinateness (as located, as having size, shape, and spatial relations to each other) […]' (Allais, 'Non-Conceptual Content', 399).

that Kant's claim that the original representation of space is an intuition, as opposed to a concept, implies that spatial representing is strongly nonconceptual (that is, does not depend on any involvement of spontaneity).

To show that this assumption is mistaken I have argued, first, that the nonconceptual character of the original representation of space lies in its strict logical homogeneity. I have argued, second, that appreciating this allows us to see that in fact Kant's view is that spatial representation is only weakly nonconceptual (that is, depends on a non-judgemental exercise of spontaneity). For it allows us to understand the significance of Kant's claim that representing determinate locations in space requires a synthesis in accordance with the category of magnitude. I have interpreted this as saying that representing determinate locations requires a kind of concept-employment whose upshot is a grasp of the strictly logically homogeneous character of space, but which does not take the form of applying concepts in predicative judgements. Recognizing that Kant is committed to a kind of actualization of spontaneity which takes the form of a specifically sensible synthesis puts one in a position to see why Generic Conceptualism is true even though Strong Conceptualism is false. For it supplies the conceptual means for carving out a position that does not usually figure in the debate between conceptualist and nonconceptualist readers of Kant. This is the position of Weak Conceptualism I have sought to defend.

I wish to end with a brief comment on the shape of this debate. From the perspective of the Strong Conceptualist it may look as if the differences between Weak Conceptualism and Nonconceptualism are relatively insignificant. For both positions agree in rejecting the view that, for Kant, having an intuition of an *F* requires thinking of it as an *F*; both emphasize the heterogeneity of intuitions and concepts; and both claim that the spatial character of intuition is central to its intentionality. They disagree only about how to spell out this last claim. This impression on the part of the Strong Conceptualist might be reinforced by considering that Allais is happy to admit that there are passages in Kant which suggest that he recognizes a use of concepts as rules of synthesis, which is distinct in kind from the use of concepts in judgement.[38]

But it would be a mistake to take this impression at face-value. The distance between Nonconceptualism and Weak Conceptualism is considerable; the distinction

[38] See Allais, 'Non-Conceptual Content', 389; note, however, that she takes this to indicate that Kant is simply ambiguous in his use of the term 'concept'. This shows that Allais does not in fact consider Weak Conceptualism to be so much as a possible position (refuting which would require argument).

between additive and transformative conceptions of rationality, which I introduced in §2, serves to bring this out. Proponents of Nonconceptualism are committed to an additive conception of rationality, while proponents of Weak Conceptualism are committed to a transformative conception. For the former, sensibility is self-standing in the sense that its nature is independent of the presence of rationality. But this is precisely what any proponent of Generic Conceptualism, including the Weak Conceptualist, denies. For the Weak Conceptualist, the very ability to have intuitions of objects is dependent on the possession of conceptual capacities and cannot be made intelligible independently. Accordingly, Nonconceptualism and Weak Conceptualism take fundamentally different views of Kant's conception of the relation between sensibility and understanding.

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