

# Kantian Conceptualism

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Whether or not perceptual content is conceptual, and what it means to say that it is, have been much-debated questions in recent philosophy of perception. A striking fact about this debate is that Kant has been invoked on two opposing sides of it. Thus, some advocates of conceptualism – the view that the content of a perceptual experience has the structure of a proposition and must therefore involve the application of concepts – have traced their position back to Kant’s theory of intuition.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, some proponents of nonconceptualism – the view that the content of perception is not propositional in structure and does not involve the application of concepts – have argued that, on the contrary, Kant’s theory of intuition is a forerunner of their own position.<sup>2</sup>

A natural reaction to this is to think that at least one side of the debate is mistaken about Kant and that careful examination of Kant’s texts will show this. In this paper, I want to combine an exegetical inquiry of this sort with an assessment of the philosophical merits of the positions staked out in this debate. This project is motivated by the following consideration: Assuming that neither side has been reckless in claiming that it incorporates a central insight of Kant’s theory of intuition, the very fact that this theory can be invoked with *some* justification to support both these opposing positions should itself be a cause for philosophical reflection and lead us to ask what it is about this theory that makes

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- 1 The most prominent advocate of this position has been John McDowell. See McDowell (1996), as well as the first three essays in McDowell (2009).
  - 2 A prominent advocate of this position is Robert Hanna who wants to defend a “Kantian theory of the semantic structure and psychological function of non-conceptual content” (Hanna (2008), 42) and who claims that Kant did in fact hold a theory of this kind: “[...] Kant is most accurately regarded [...] as the founder of *non-conceptualism*” (Hanna (2008), 45); see also Hanna (2005). – What it is for the content of a mental state to be nonconceptual (or, for that matter, conceptual) is itself a question on which there are various different views; see Speaks (2005) for discussion. For the purposes of this paper, the gloss given in the text will be sufficient.

such a situation possible. It is reasonable to expect that Kant's theory combines elements which bear some affinity to those that figure in the contemporary debate. Each side, we may suppose, emphasizes one such element at the expense of the other. If this is right, it suggests that a proper understanding of Kant's theory might be able to show how it is possible that this theory can so much as seem to combine elements whose counterparts in the contemporary debate appear to be incompatible. And this, in turn, should lead us to ask whether Kant's own view, when properly interpreted, might not itself yield a third alternative – a position that cuts a middle path between conceptualism and nonconceptualism, revealing a way of integrating commitments that at first blush appear to exclude one another, yet, when properly thought through, can be shown to be in fact compatible.

I shall argue that Kant's theory of intuition does in fact cut such a middle path because it combines both a conceptualist and a nonconceptualist element. As a consequence, a proper appreciation of its merits will put us in a position to see that there is a genuine insight on the conceptualist side, yet there is also a kernel of truth in the nonconceptualist position. The assumption that the forced alternative with which we seem to be faced (of having to choose between conceptualism and nonconceptualism about perception) must be rejected. It is based on an inaccurate representation of the available options. Rather, a third option is available – one which combines the advantages of both positions, but avoids their shortcomings. I shall be concerned to show that Kant's theory of intuition points the way towards this third option.

I proceed as follows. I begin by arguing that Kant's interest in the structure of perceptual content is motivated by a different question than the contemporary debate (§1) and explain what makes this question urgent for Kant (§§2 and 3). I then consider the answer that those nonconceptualists who explicitly draw on Kant – the Kantian Nonconceptualists, as I call them – are committed to ascribing to him and show that this answer fails (§4). Next, I turn to a version of contemporary conceptualism that I call Propositionalism and that likewise takes itself to offer an updated version of Kant's theory of intuition. I argue that Propositionalism runs into equally serious problems (§§5 and 6). After pausing to reflect on what the failure of Propositionalism shows us about the nature of the problem with which Kant is concerned (§7), I go on to outline my own reading of Kant and show how his position contains the materials for a third alternative, which I call Kantian Conceptualism

and which avoids the problems of Kantian Nonconceptualism and Propositionalism respectively (§8).

## 1. The Content Problem and the Question of Objective Purport

My goal in this paper is to argue that Kant can be understood as articulating a kind of conceptualism that is in important ways different from the conceptualist position that figures in the contemporary debate about perceptual content. Kant's brand of conceptualism makes it possible to be a conceptualist while also appropriating some of the insights that motivate contemporary nonconceptualism. This alternative construal of conceptualism becomes available because Kant's overriding concern with regard to perception is distinct from the concern that is often taken to be at the center of the contemporary debate.

The contemporary debate centers on what I call the *Content Problem*, while Kant's overriding concern is with what I call the *Question of Objective Purport*.<sup>3</sup> The Content Problem concerns the similarities and dissimilarities in structure between the content of conceptual thought, on the one hand, and that of perceptual experience, on the other.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the Question of Objective Purport seeks to identify the conditions that must be satisfied for perceptual experience to have a content in the first place.

Two considerations serve to illustrate the kinds of issues I am grouping here under the heading of the Content Problem. One of these concerns the relative determinacy of perception and conceptual thought respectively; the other concerns classificatory awareness. The first serves as the point of departure for a line of argument that has led some philosophers to adopt a nonconceptualist view of perceptual content. The sec-

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3 This claim about the contemporary debate needs qualification. McDowell, the primary advocate of conceptualism, has, I think, from the start been concerned with the Question of Objective Purport as well. But since his work has been read as being primarily addressed to the Content Problem, it is fair to say that this is where the focus of the debate has been. See Boyle (2012) for helpful discussion.

4 It should be noted that it has been disputed whether perceptual experience so much as has a content; see, for instance, Brewer (2006). I will not address this question in this paper, but simply follow the philosophers whose views I am discussing in assuming that perceptual experience does have content.

ond has led other philosophers to conclude that some form of conceptualism must be true. Let us consider each of these in turn.

The first consideration begins with the observation that perception appears to be more determinate than conceptual thought in a sense brought out by the following example: When I perceive something as red, I do not perceive it as merely having some shade of red or other, but as having a *particular* shade of red. Among the color-concepts I have, there are a number of concepts of different shades of red – such as ‘crimson,’ ‘maroon,’ ‘scarlet,’ ‘vermillion’ – but reflection shows that each of these can be further differentiated. Each of these concepts of a shade of red itself covers a whole range of more determinate shades. This means that even if I introduce a concept of a shade of red (for instance, the concept ‘crimson’), this concept will still not suffice to single out the *particular* shade of red that I am perceiving *hic et nunc*. This concept, inasmuch as it is the concept of a (further determinable) shade, will still not be able to isolate *the* (fully determinate) shade of red I see here and now from an indefinite number of similar yet distinct shades. Concepts are, as this is often put, too coarse-grained to capture the fine-grained content of our perceptual experience.<sup>5</sup> From this one might conclude that, since the content of any color experience involves a single fully determinate shade, that content cannot be conceptual in nature. Considerations of this sort lead some philosophers to attribute to perception a distinctly nonconceptual kind of content.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, perception seems to involve sortal awareness; for instance, awareness of things *as* red. And this might lead one to think that perception involves classification and, therefore, concepts. Thus, to perceive something as red involves (so the argument goes) an application of the concept ‘\_\_ is red’. It may involve other things besides this, but if my perception is a perception of something as red, then the concept ‘\_\_ is red’ is part of its content. Considerations such as this

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5 See, for instance, Peacocke (1998). The formulation seems to go back to Evans (1982), 229.

6 Although this consideration is an important motivation for nonconceptualism, it is not the only one that figures in the debate. Arguments in favor of nonconceptualism about perception also appeal to, among other things, the distinctive situation-dependence of perception; the ability of perception to provide information to memory in a distinctive way; and the fact that perception is something that humans share with animals. For an overview, see Speaks (2005) as well as the essays collected in Gunther (2003).

motivate conceptualists to attribute to perception a content that is of the same sort as the content of propositionally-structured thought.

A concern with issues of this sort – the determinacy of perceptual experience as well as its classificatory character – lies at the heart of what I call the Content Problem. As I said, the contemporary debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists in the philosophy of perception is to a large extent focused on this problem. By contrast, Kant's discussion of perception in the *First Critique* is primarily motivated by a different kind of problem, what I call the Question of Objective Purport. The Question of Objective Purport concerns the conditions that must be satisfied for perception to be about objects – or, as we might also say, to have representational content – in the first place. This question asks for a specification of what must be the case for perception to have any representational content at all, whether it is conceptual or non-conceptual in nature. In a different idiom, this is the familiar question of intentionality or “aboutness,” applied to the specific case of perception.

In a straightforward sense, the Question of Objective Purport is logically prior to the Content Problem. For the latter can only arise if it is presupposed that the former can be answered. To argue about the *nature* of perceptual content is to presuppose that perception *has* a content. The Question of Objective Purport concerns the conditions that must be in place for this to be the case. Put differently, for perception to so much as have a content (about whose nature one might then argue), we must ascribe to perception whatever characteristics are necessary to its being a contentful state. In seeking to identify these characteristics, the Question of Objective Purport is thus concerned with what must be the case for the Content Problem to arise in the first place.

Since the Question of Objective Purport is in this sense prior to the Content Problem, consideration of the former may have consequences for how we must approach the latter. Thus, it may turn out that ascribing objective purport to perceptual experience forces us to conceive of its content in a particular way. In other words, our answer to the Question of Objective Purport may already constrain the range of options available for addressing the Content Problem. I shall argue that this is indeed so. More precisely, I shall argue that a full appreciation of the Question of Objective Purport will force us to recognize a new sense of ‘conceptual content,’ one that is different from the sense commonly attached to this phrase in the contemporary debate. Specifically, the claim is that we are entitled to attribute objective purport to perceptual experience only if we ascribe to it a content that is conceptual in this

new sense. Recognizing this will allow us to see that the prevailing alternative between conceptualism and nonconceptualism does not exhaust the space of available options for solving the Content Problem.

## 2. The Heterogeneity of Thought and Perception

Kant notes that there are certain fundamental differences between thinking and perceiving. We can bring these out by contrasting thought and perception with regard to three different aspects.

Thought is essentially conceptual; it is what Kant calls discursive.<sup>7</sup> This means that (1) concepts are *general* (as opposed to singular) representations; (2) concepts are *classificatory*: employing a concept in thought (or as Kant will say, in judgment) involves sorting things – that is, it involves thinking of something as being an instance of a general kind, which can, in principle, have other instances; (3) conceptual thought is *logically articulated*, where this means that it has a kind of structure that enables a thought to figure in inferences.<sup>8</sup>

By contrast, perception (what Kant calls intuition) according to him has the following three features: (1) Perception is *singular*: it is of individual objects, rather than of general kinds.<sup>9</sup> (2) Perception is *fully determinate*: it presents objects to us whose properties are determinate, rather than determinable, in the sense brought out above by the example about color. (3) Perception is *spatio-temporally structured*: the objects we perceive have a location in space and time.

To register these three fundamental (and interrelated) differences between thinking and perceiving, I will speak of their heterogeneity. Thoughts and perceptions, or, in Kant's terms, judgments and intuitions, are heterogeneous to one another. Kant aims to do justice to their heterogeneity by attributing them to different capacities of the mind, which he calls understanding and sensibility respectively. The un-

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7 See Kant (1998), A68/B93. Henceforth, all references to Kant (1998) will give only the pagination of the first (A) and second (B) editions. I have tacitly modified Guyer/Wood's translation where appropriate.

8 See Kant (1998), A320/B376 f, as well as Kant (1992), §1.

9 An appreciation of this point is compatible with the claim, which is widely held, that perception involves classificatory awareness, hence concepts. As conceptualists will agree, acknowledging the singularity of perception in no way decides the issue in favor of nonconceptualism.

derstanding is the capacity for thought. Sensibility is the capacity for intuition.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Intuitions Have Objective Unity

Conceptualists and Nonconceptualists about perception – at least those who regard themselves as Kantian – agree that perception is not merely a matter of having sense-impressions. Perception purports to be of objects. If by an impression we mean something momentary and perspectival, the agreed upon claim is that perceptual representations of objects cannot be just a matter of the momentary and perspectival affections of sensory consciousness that are afforded by impressions. Rather, the idea of an object is the idea of something that essentially outstrips such perspectival representations. An object is something that, for instance, can be perceived from a variety of different spatial and temporal vantage points, which are, moreover, systematically related to one another. We can express this point by saying that an object exhibits a certain kind of spatio-temporal unity. If perception is to be of objects, so the Kantian thought runs, it must contain a consciousness of this unity. That is, it must in some (perhaps implicit) way be part of the content of perception that what it represents are enduring three-dimensional objects. For instance, when I see a tomato in front of me, there is a sense in which my sensory impression is confined to the side of the tomato that is facing me. If what I perceive is indeed a tomato, however, the content of my perception is not just a surface. It is a solid, three-dimensional object, which (in the normal course of things) existed prior to my perceiving it and will continue to exist afterwards. And this is, at least implicitly, part of my perceptual consciousness. In perceiving the tomato, we might say, I am aware of perceiving a three-dimensional object with a temporal history. I do not take myself to be perceiving a mere surface.<sup>11</sup>

10 See e.g. Kant (1998), A19/B33 and A50 f/B74 f. It is worth noting that Kant takes it to be among his deepest insights to have properly appreciated the heterogeneity of perception and thought, as is indicated by his quip that Leibniz's chief mistake was to "intellectualize" the senses, while Locke's mistake was to "sensualize" conceptual thought. Cf. Kant (1998), A271/B327.

11 We might put the point by saying that I perceive the tomato in virtue of having, among other things, impressions of its facing surface. To explain how this is possible, that is, how the perception of, for instance, a facing surface enables the perception of the object whose surface it is, ranks among the central tasks of the philosophy of perception.

When Kant characterizes an intuition as the singular representation of an object and distinguishes intuitions from mere sensations, this point, suitably elaborated, is what he has in mind.<sup>12</sup>

We can capture the central point here by saying that intuitions characteristically exhibit a certain kind of unity. Let us call this the *objective unity* of intuitions. This term is meant to capture the fact that intuitions must have the kind of unity, whatever it is, which enables them to be perceptual representations of objects. The thought then is that the objective unity of an intuition is not simply a function of the impressions the mind receives. There must be another element, over and above the impressions. And because impressions are what results from the mind's being affected, this other element cannot in turn be a product of the mind's being affected. It must have a different source.

For the purposes of orienting ourselves in the discussion that is to follow, it will be helpful to have a concise overview of these Kantian commitments. This will enable us to revisit these commitments at crucial junctures of this paper and assess how our understanding of them has evolved. Let us summarize Kant's view of perception, to the extent that it has come into view so far, by means of the following three theses:

- (1) The Sensibility Thesis: Intuitions are the representations of sensibility.
- (2) The Objective Unity Thesis: Intuitions have objective unity.
- (3) The Anti-Empiricist Thesis: Objective unity is not given.

The Sensibility Thesis registers the fact that the ability to enjoy intuitions – that is, perceptions – requires a sensible capacity. A sensible capacity is a capacity to have representations of an object in virtue of having one's senses affected by it. It is thus what Kant calls a receptive capacity.<sup>13</sup> Saying that a sensible capacity is required implies that the capacity for intuitions is specifically distinct from the capacity for thought and judgment, which Kant characterizes as intellectual and thereby as non-sensible.<sup>14</sup> Second, the Objective Unity Thesis expresses the point that intuitions, as perceptions of objects, are distinct from mere impressions in that they exhibit a kind of unity that mere impressions do not have. Finally, the third thesis makes the point that this unity, which accounts for the objective purport of intuitions, does not itself

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12 For Kant's insistence that intuitions are distinct from mere sensations, see Kant (1998), A320/B376 f.

13 Cf. Kant (1998), A19/B33 and A50 f/B74 f.

14 Cf. *ibid.*

result from affections of the senses. In some yet to be determined sense, it has its source in the mind itself, “prior” to the senses’ being affected. I call it the Anti-Empiricist Thesis simply to register that it sets Kant’s position apart from a traditional Empiricism that seeks to account for perception wholly by reference to the affections of sensibility.

The obvious question that must be answered by any theory of perception that is committed to these three theses is this: what is the source of the objective unity that intuitions exhibit? This is accepted on both sides of the debate between those contemporary conceptualists and non-conceptualists who seek to trace their positions back to Kant. Disagreement arises over what the correct answer to this question is. And it is precisely on this point that, as I shall argue, these two groups of contemporary Kantians are not only equally mistaken about Kant, but also each face their own philosophical problems. In the following, I shall consider in turn these attempts to inherit Kant and identify the problems that each of them raises.

#### 4. Kantian Nonconceptualism

A distinctive feature of Kant’s position is the view that sensibility, the capacity for intuition, has a pure form, which is constituted by what Kant calls the pure intuitions of space and time.<sup>15</sup> This view contains a claim about the metaphysical nature of space and time, but I shall not be concerned with that aspect of it. Rather, I will focus on the account of our perceptual capacities that is implicit in it.

It suffices for our present purposes to emphasize the following three characteristics of Kant’s position: First, by speaking of a form of sensibility, Kant has in mind certain features that are constitutive of all exercises of this capacity. That is, he is talking about features that are characteristic of intuitions as such: all possible intuitions exhibit these features. Second, to say that this form of sensibility is pure, or a priori, is to say that it does not derive from experience and is thus independent of any particular perceptions.<sup>16</sup> It is, therefore, something that does

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15 This view is famously elaborated in the part of the *First Critique* called the Transcendental Aesthetic.

16 Kant does not use the terms ‘pure’ and ‘a priori’ synonymously, but for our purposes we can abstract from their difference. See Kant (1998), B2 f. for a statement of this difference.

not result from, or depend on, impressions. Third, when Kant introduces the idea of a form of intuition, he characterizes it as something in which sensory impressions can be “ordered in certain relations”<sup>17</sup>. As the *Transcendental Aesthetic* makes clear, these are spatio-temporal relations: in virtue of being given in the pure form of intuition, empirical intuitions – that is, perceptions – stand in spatio-temporal relations.<sup>18</sup> This point can also be put by saying that the form of intuition confers on empirical intuitions a certain kind of unity, viz. spatio-temporal unity.

Given these three characteristics of Kant’s position, one might think that the pure form of intuition is a suitable candidate for the role of that which accounts for the objective unity of intuition: It is in virtue of the pure form of intuition that perceptions exhibit spatio-temporal unity. The spatio-temporal framework Kant regards as the form of intuition both allows and suffices for sensory impressions to bear the kinds of systematic relations to one another that are necessary for impressions to enable representations of objects. It appears therefore that the form of intuition accounts for the objective unity of intuition.

That this is indeed Kant’s position is the central claim of a view I call Kantian Nonconceptualism.<sup>19</sup> According to Kantian Nonconceptualism, what accounts for the objective unity of perceptions is precisely the pure form of sensibility. Thus, Robert Hanna holds that the pure forms of intuition account for a subject’s ability to locate objects in space and time. This ability in turn grounds the objective purport of perception, the fact that it is about objects.<sup>20</sup>

On Hanna’s view, the capacity to locate objects in space and time is a sensible capacity. It belongs to what Kant calls sensibility. Since for

17 Kant (1998), A20/B34.

18 More accurately, it is what is perceived, rather than the perceiving of it, that exhibits spatio-temporal relations and is represented as exhibiting such relations. Acts of perceiving only have temporal, but no spatial properties, for Kant.

19 This view has been articulated forcefully by Robert Hanna; see the references in fn. 2. Hanna combines an exegetical claim about Kant with a philosophical claim addressed to the contemporary debate about perceptual content – the latter claim being that Kant’s view, as interpreted by Hanna, is the correct view about perceptual content. A similar exegetical view is defended in Waxman (1991) and, more recently, in Allais (2009).

20 See Hanna (2005), 273: “[...] Kant is saying that what determines our cognitive reference to the uniquely individual material objects of empirical [...] intuition-al representations, are the spatiotemporal features of those representations alone.”

Kant sensibility is distinct from – indeed heterogeneous to – the understanding, it appears that this capacity does not in any way involve, or depend on, the understanding. And indeed, this is precisely Hanna's view. He is explicit that the capacity for locating objects in space and time is independent of the understanding. According to Hanna, it is present even in creatures that do not possess a faculty of understanding.<sup>21</sup>

Since in a Kantian framework all conceptual representation must be attributed to the understanding, a representation of objects that does not involve any exercise of the understanding must be nonconceptual. Accordingly, the content of intuitions is, for Hanna, nonconceptual content: "intuitional cognitive content in Kant's sense and nonconceptual cognitive content are identical [...]." <sup>22</sup> This claim is not meant to rule out that concepts can be brought to bear on intuitions, giving conceptual articulation to what Hanna characterizes as an intuition's phenomenal content. But the point is that by themselves empirical intuitions – that is, perceptions – do not involve concepts. Accordingly, Hanna speaks of "Kant's thesis about the cognitive autonomy of non-conceptual spatiotemporal representation [...]." <sup>23</sup>

In what follows I shall argue that Kantian Nonconceptualism faces serious difficulties, both exegetically and philosophically. The main objection is that this view does not succeed in accounting for the objective unity of intuition. We can see why this is so if we reflect on the notion of objective unity. When I introduced this notion in §2, above, I said that intuitions exhibit objective unity because they are not just sensory impressions, but rather sensible representations of objects. Kant conceives of intuitions in this manner because he assigns a particular epistemic function to them. He characterizes this function as "giving objects to the mind" and contrasts it with the epistemic function of concepts, which is to "think objects."<sup>24</sup> And he makes it clear that the giving of objects is connected to knowledge of existence: in having an intuition of some object *a*, I know that *a* exists. I take this to imply, roughly, the

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21 Thus, Hanna (2005), 260, claims that "it is possible to intuit an object while lacking concepts either globally or locally." See also the suggestion, made in Hanna (2008), 58, that "[...] we should think of the representation of space and the representation of time as the necessary a priori subjective forms of ego-centrally centered human *and non-human animal* embodiment" (emphasis added).

22 Hanna (2005), 260.

23 Hanna (2005), 280.

24 See Kant (1998), A19/B33 and A50/B74.

following account of the epistemic function of intuition: Thought, just as such, is constrained only by the laws of logic – it must be consistent. But, obviously, not just any consistent thought amounts to knowledge. Knowledge is fundamentally the representation of what is, that is, of actuality.<sup>25</sup> But what is actual, for Kant, cannot be known through mere thought. It requires, rather, intuition. It requires the act of sensibility, the receptive cognitive capacity. It follows that no characterization of the conditions of valid thinking can by itself amount to a characterization of the conditions sufficient for knowledge of objects. Rather, the conditions of having objects given to one in intuition must be included among the latter.<sup>26</sup>

If the function of intuition is to enable us to cognize the existence of objects about which we make judgments, then it must be possible for the very same object to be both an object of judgment and an object

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25 Of course, there can be knowledge of what *can* exist, i. e. of possibility, as well. But knowledge of possibility is knowledge of possible *existence*. And it is one of the Critical Kant's most deeply held commitments that the conditions of existence, both possible and actual, are independent of the formal-logical conditions of thought. This commitment sets Kant apart from Rationalists like Leibniz and Wolff, for whom the principles governing possible existence – most fundamentally, the Principle of Noncontradiction and the Principle of Sufficient Reason – are part of the formal-logical conditions of thought.

26 As comes out in a number of places throughout the *Critique* (e. g. Kant (1998), B135, B138 f., A235 ff/B298 ff.; see also §§76 and 77 of Kant (2000)), Kant's conception of our cognitive capacities is everywhere informed by an implicit contrast with the idea of an infinite mind. To an infinite mind the distinction between understanding and sensibility, or spontaneity and receptivity, does not apply. Kant therefore characterizes such a mind variously as an intuitive intellect and as a capacity for intellectual intuition. His point is that in an infinite mind the act of thinking itself supplies not just the representation of the general, but also of the particular falling under the general; that is, the representation of that for which finite minds like ours need sensible intuition. Put differently, the act of the infinite mind at once cognizes both a concept and its instances. It is therefore not dependent on a separate act for knowing that a given concept is instantiated. Since, in such a mind, the act of thinking an object is identical with the act of cognizing the object's existence, the infinite mind is, for Kant, a creative mind: it creates the objects of its knowledge in the act of knowing them. Against the background of this idea it becomes apparent that it is a fundamental mark of human finitude that the objects of our knowledge exist independently of being known by us. It is because the objects of our knowledge have independent existence that we are dependent, for such knowledge as we can have, on a receptive capacity, that is, on sensibility. For an illuminating discussion of this point, see Engstrom (2006).

of intuition.<sup>27</sup> Put differently, if perception is to serve the function of providing objects for thought, then what can be perceived must be such that it can also be thought. We can express this point by saying that the formal object of perception must be identical to the formal object of thought. This locution is meant to indicate that the claim is general: it is not about particular objects of thought or perception, but about the characteristics of an object of thought or perception *as such*, or of an object of thought (or perception) *insofar as* it is an object of thought (or perception); or, to use Kant's preferred locution, about an object "in general" (*überhaupt*).

Moreover, not only must thought and perception have the same formal object, but it must also be no accident that they do. Thought and perception, or judgment and intuition, must be, as it were, made for each other. If, on the contrary, it was merely a contingent fact that in a given case an object of perception is also an object of thought, then perception could not have an epistemic function. For the concept of knowledge, as Kant understands it – viz. as the non-accidental, or "necessary", agreement of a belief with its object<sup>28</sup> – implies that it is precisely not an accident that what is given in perception is an object of knowledge; that is, something that can be the content of objectively valid judgments.

Part of the point here is that on Kant's view intuition is not merely a causal antecedent of judgment. Rather, in virtue of supplying what we might call the material condition of knowledge intuition stands in a rational relation to judgment. Using this terminology, the point of the preceding paragraph can be expressed by saying that it must be in the *nature* of thought and perception that particular judgments stand in rational relations to particular intuitions.

I said above that for intuitions to be of objects at all they must exhibit a certain kind of unity, which I called objective unity. We can now

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27 Throughout this paper, I use the terms 'judgment' and 'thought' interchangeably. Thus, these terms do not carry the senses familiar from Frege's distinction between judgeable content, on the one hand, and assertoric force, i. e. Fregean judgment, on the other. Kant does not recognize Frege's way of drawing the distinction between force and content. Rather, for Kant, every act of entertaining a propositional content is an act of judgment. What corresponds, in Kant's classification of mental acts, to Frege's notion of merely entertaining a thought is the notion of problematic judgment; cf. Kant (1998), A74 f/B99 f. For Frege's distinction, see Frege (1998), §§2–5, as well as Frege (1993).

28 Cf. Kant (1998), B166.

see that what makes the unity of intuition *objective* is the fact that it is identical to the unity of thought. What makes the content of a perception an *object* is the fact that this very thing can also be a content of belief and knowledge. This, at any rate, is Kant's view, which I take to be encapsulated in his theory of the categories, or pure concepts of the understanding. Kant is explicit that intuitions have objective unity only to the extent that they exhibit the unity articulated by the categories.<sup>29</sup> It follows that, when he speaks of that unity of an intuition in virtue of which it is the representation of an object, the sense of 'object' at issue is that of a formal object of thought.<sup>30</sup> Intuitions, then, have objective unity to the extent that the formal object of intuition is also the formal object of thought.

In light of these considerations, it is clear what the core of the objection to Kantian Nonconceptualism should be: If one locates the source of the unity of intuition in the pure form of intuition, then there is no reason to think that this unity is the objective unity Kant requires. This is because, as I have been concerned to show, what Kant means by objective unity is the unity of thought. In terms of Kant's terminology of basic mental capacities, this is a unity that has its source in the understanding. Kantian Nonconceptualism, by contrast, traces this unity to sensibility. But this means that, at the very least, we would need an additional argument showing that the unity exhibited by the pure form of sensibility is the same as, or conforms to, the objective unity that has its source in the understanding. Kantian Nonconceptualists do not provide such an argument. Indeed, they do not feel the need for such an argument, because they hold that the unity of the form of intuition – spatial unity – is a self-standing kind of unity and is sufficient

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29 Cf. e.g. Kant (1998), B143.

30 In a nutshell, the point here is this: The categories articulate the unity of an object in general. Only a representation that exhibits the unity articulated by the categories is a representation of an object in this sense. What sense of 'object' is this? The answer lies in the idea of a pure concept of the understanding (that is, a category), as Kant construes this notion: The categories are pure, or non-empirical, concepts because they derive from the nature of the understanding. This means that they are constitutive of thought as such. The reason for this is that the function of the categories is to characterize what falls under them as a formal object of thought; that is, as something that can, in principle, be the content of a thought. This is, I take it, the upshot of Kant's notorious claim that the categories derive from the logical forms of judgment. The sense of 'object' at issue, therefore, is 'formal object of thought'. – I develop this interpretation of the categories in detail in chapter 2 of Land (2010).

to account for the essential characteristics of intuition. However, as I have been concerned to argue, not only is this not Kant's view; it also involves a fundamental misunderstanding of the philosophical motivation of the requirement that intuition exhibit unity. It involves a misunderstanding, that is, of the motivation for what in the previous section I labeled Kant's Anti-Empiricist Thesis, the thesis that objective unity is never given.

It is instructive to relate this point to Sellars' famous attack on the so-called Myth of the Given.<sup>31</sup> For our purposes, the following characterization of the Myth will do.<sup>32</sup> A conception of perceptual experience is committed to the Myth of the Given if it combines the following two features: On the one hand, it attributes to sensory experience an epistemic role, that is, it ascribes to experience the capacity to stand in relations of warrant or justification to belief; in short, the capacity to stand in rational relations. Yet, on the other hand, it does not attribute to experience the kinds of features that are constitutive of the capacity to stand in rational relations. In other words, a conception of experience is mythical if it ascribes a role to experience for which this conception does not equip experience.

Anyone who wants to put forth a conception of perceptual experience that avoids the Myth of the Given, therefore, must opt for one of the following two alternatives: Either (1) concede that perceptual experience has an epistemic role, in which case it must be conceived as something that can stand in rational relations – as something that, in Sellars' image, has standing in the logical space of reasons; or (2) conceive of perceptual experience in a way that explicitly precludes it from standing in rational relations – for instance, by conceiving it in merely causal terms. In the latter case, experience cannot play any epistemic role. It is not an option to describe perceptual experience in, for instance, merely causal terms, but then go on to attribute an epistemic role to it. To do this is precisely to fall into the Myth of the Given.

Kantian Nonconceptualism does just this. That is, Kantian Nonconceptualism falls prey to the Myth of the Given because it seeks to combine features of both (1) and (2). On the one hand, it attributes an epistemic role to intuition. In particular, it wants to appropriate Kant's no-

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31 See Sellars (1997).

32 Giving an adequate characterization of the Myth of the Given is no easy task, since, as Sellars himself indicates, the Myth can take on a variety of different guises; see Sellars (1997), 14.

tion of intuition as the immediate, singular representation of an object. Yet on the other hand, Kantian Nonconceptualism conceives of intuition in a way that precludes it from standing in a rational relation to belief. It does this by locating the source of what it claims is the objective unity of intuition exclusively in sensibility. Since sensibility is construed, on this view, as a non-rational capacity, this amounts to an attempt to give an account of a notion that has its home in a rational capacity – viz. objective unity, the unity of an object of thought and knowledge – in terms that are intelligible independently of any reference to rationality.<sup>33</sup>

To bring this point into sharper focus, it might be useful to contrast Kantian Nonconceptualism with two different views, both of which manage to avoid the Myth of the Given. One of these pursues the first of the two alternatives canvassed a moment ago; the other opts for the second alternative. The first view is what I shall argue is Kant's actual view. Kant avoids the Myth of the Given by offering a conception of episodes of perceptual experience that gives them standing in the space of reasons. We are already in a position to see the outline of this conception: Kant, on my view, holds that the objective unity of intuition, in virtue of which it has epistemic standing, has its source in the capacity for thought and knowledge, that is, the understanding. How this outline is to be filled in is what I am concerned to show, at least in rough outline, in the remainder of this paper.

By contrast, the second view avoids the Myth of the Given by denying that perceptual experience plays any epistemic role at all. This is the view of Donald Davidson, as encapsulated in his slogan that “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief.”<sup>34</sup> Following Sellars, Davidson agrees that for experience to play an epis-

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33 In Kant's view, this position amounts to a form of skepticism. Indeed, it is, as he puts it, “what the skeptic most desires” (Kant (1998), B168). The reason is this: Since sensibility is here conceived as intelligible independently of the capacity of thought, the fact that objects of intuition exhibit the same unity as objects of thought can only be a contingent fact. It can only be a matter of how sensibility happens to function in human beings. But in Kant's view, this is incompatible with the idea of knowledge: if knowledge is possible, then it can be no accident that the very things that can be thought can also be perceived. It cannot be merely a contingent fact that the unity of an object of intuition is the same as the unity of an object of thought. I say a bit more about this issue in Land (2006).

34 Davidson (2001), 141.

temic role it has to be able to stand in rational relations to the beliefs based on it. However, he goes on to argue, the only way for experience to do this is for it to be tantamount to belief. But this would be absurd. For, as all parties to the debate agree, just by itself perceptual experience – a Kantian intuition – does not amount to belief. From this Davidson concludes that, therefore, experience does not have any epistemic role. Its relation to belief is merely causal.<sup>35</sup>

As this contrast brings out, the problem with Kantian Nonconceptualism is that it tries to have it both ways: on the one hand, it ascribes to intuition an epistemic role; yet, on the other hand, it conceives of that which is supposed to enable intuition to play this role – its unity – in terms that are essentially non-epistemic. As a result, Kantian Nonconceptualism falls prey to the Myth of the Given.

Seeing why Kantian Nonconceptualism fails in this regard is instructive. It should enable us to get a better sense of the nature of the challenge involved in avoiding the Myth. Since my goal in the remainder of this paper is to sketch a view that meets this challenge (and to argue that this is Kant's view) I want to end this section by articulating what the failure of Kantian Nonconceptualism teaches us about the nature of the problem we are confronted with.

At the end of the preceding section, I characterized Kant's view of perception by means of the following three theses:

- (1) The Sensibility Thesis: Intuitions are the representations of sensibility.
- (2) The Objective Unity Thesis: Intuitions have objective unity.
- (3) The Anti-Empiricist Thesis: Objective unity is not given.

I then introduced Kantian Nonconceptualism as a view that incorporates these three theses. The inadequacy of this view that has just come to light indicates that we must modify at least one of them. In particular, we must rule out that the resulting position collapses into the Myth of the Given. Properly modified, then, this triad of theses should yield a characterization, in outline form, of a Kantian view of perception which avoids the mistakes of Kantian Nonconceptualism. Since the problem with this position is that it locates the source of the objective unity of intuition in sensibility, while conceiving of sensibility as a ca-

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35 I have introduced Davidson's view here merely in order to provide a perspicuous overview of the options available at this point. But since my primary concern is with the Kantian views I have been discussing, I will have nothing further to say about Davidson who does not himself endorse a Kantian position.

capacity that is not essentially related to rationality, what we require is a modification of the thesis that addresses the issue of the source of objective unity. This is the Anti-Empiricist Thesis. As we are now in a position to see, this thesis, as it currently stands, is not specific enough. In its current formulation it merely says that the unity of intuition is not itself given in intuition. But this is compatible with saying that this unity has its source in the pure form of intuition. What we need to do, then, is to block this option. More precisely, we need a formulation of the Anti-Empiricist Thesis that makes clear that the unity of intuition has its source in the understanding. Only if the unity of intuition derives from the understanding will intuition have standing in the space of reason. This will have the twofold result that we desire: The attribution of an epistemic role to intuition will be vindicated and our Kantian theory of perception will avoid the Myth of the Given.

Kant characterizes the understanding as spontaneous. Since, according to him, this is its most fundamental feature, it seems most natural to formulate our modified version of the Anti-Empiricist Thesis in terms of a claim about spontaneity and to re-label it accordingly.<sup>36</sup> Our modified Kantian theory of perception thus issues in the following triad of claims:

- (1) The Sensibility Thesis: Intuitions are the representations of sensibility.
- (2) The Objective Unity Thesis: Intuitions have objective unity.
- (3') The Spontaneity Thesis: Objective unity has its source in spontaneity.

Jointly, these three theses contain the outline of a view of intuition that avoids the Myth of the Given. On this view, the unity of intuition, in virtue of which it is the immediate singular representation of an object, is the unity of thought. Because this unity has its source in the capacity for thought, it is precisely the kind of unity that is constitutive of rational relations. The challenge now is to fill in more of the details of such a view. In particular, we need an account of how a kind of unity that belongs to the intellectual capacity can come to characterize the exercises

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36 Space does not permit me to defend the claim that spontaneity is the most fundamental characteristic of the understanding. For an indication of how such a defense would go, consider that for Kant the infinite intellect is spontaneous but not discursive: it does not represent by means of abstract concepts. The discursivity of human understanding thus marks its specific difference from the infinite understanding, while its spontaneity reflects its membership in the genus 'understanding'. For further discussion of this issue, see Land (2006).

of sensibility, where, according to Kant, the latter is a distinct capacity from the intellect.

## 5. Propositionalism

I have argued that Kantian Nonconceptualism does not provide an adequate account of the objective unity of intuition because it does not locate the source of this unity in the right place. Kantian Nonconceptualism construes the objective unity of intuition as a unity that is intelligible by reference to sensibility alone. This unity can be made intelligible, the claim is, without any mention of the understanding. The argument in the preceding section has shown why this is mistaken. The objective unity of intuition must have its source in the understanding, the capacity for thought and knowledge, which Kant characterizes as spontaneous. The Spontaneity Thesis gives expression to this point.

Kant's famous slogan that intuitions without concepts are blind is often thought to make a closely related point.<sup>37</sup> It is taken to make the point that, without some involvement of concepts, that is, without the involvement of the understanding, intuitions cannot play an epistemic role. Now, concepts, Kant says at one point, can only be applied in judgment.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, Kant characterizes the understanding both as a capacity for concepts and as a capacity for judgment.

If the understanding is a capacity for judgment, it is natural to think that the objective unity we are interested in, and which we said must have its source in the understanding, is the unity of judgment. This thought in turn invites the thought that intuitions possess objective unity only to the extent that they exhibit the same unity as judgment. And this is taken to entail that we must think of an intuition as having the same structure as a judgment. I call Propositionalism any view that endorses this line of thought.

We can give a more precise characterization of Propositionalism if we introduce the notion of sensible synthesis. Sensible synthesis is Kant's term for the act of mind that is responsible for the objective unity of intuitions.<sup>39</sup> As he puts it, sensible synthesis unifies sensible

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37 Cf. Kant (1998), A51/B75.

38 "Of these concepts, however, the understanding can make no other use than to judge by means of them" (Kant (1998), A68/B93).

39 See e.g. Kant (1998), A77/B102: "However, the spontaneity of our thought requires that this manifold [i.e. the manifold of intuition, T.L.] first be gone

manifolds in such a way that they come to exhibit objective unity. Using this terminology, we can characterize Propositionalism as the view that the act of sensible synthesis is an act of judgment.<sup>40</sup>

Accordingly, Propositionalism can be thought of as the view that results when we supplement the three theses we reviewed a moment ago with a fourth thesis to the effect that the act of sensible synthesis is an act of judgment. This fourth thesis can also be expressed by saying that all acts of the understanding are acts of judgment. Propositionalism therefore amounts to the view that ascribes to Kant the following four claims:

- (1) The Sensibility Thesis: Intuitions are the representations of sensibility.
- (2) The Objective Unity Thesis: Intuitions have objective unity.
- (3') The Spontaneity Thesis: Objective unity has its source in spontaneity.
- (4) The Judgment Thesis: All acts of the understanding are acts of judgment.

As is apparent from this summary presentation, I use the label 'Propositionalism' for this view because it construes synthesis as an act of judgment and, as a result, ascribes the propositional structure of judgment to intuitions.

In the contemporary debate about perceptual content, the most prominent advocate of Propositionalism has been John McDowell.<sup>41</sup> Although an intuition is, according to McDowell, a distinct kind of episode from judgment, it exhibits the same structure as judgment: An intuition is like a judgment in that it is composed of concepts and therefore has the structure of a proposition. Since it has the structure of a

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through, taken up, and combined in a certain way in order for a cognition to be made out of it. I call this act synthesis." – Note that Kant recognizes more than one kind of synthesis. For instance, judgment for Kant is an act of synthesis. I use the term 'sensible synthesis' to pick out that type of synthesis which is responsible specifically for the unity of intuition.

- 40 By contrast, Kantian Nonconceptualism can be characterized as endorsing the following two claims: (i) sensible synthesis and judgment constitute distinct kinds of synthesis, and (ii) sensible synthesis is not an act of the understanding. As we have just seen, Propositionalism denies both of these tenets. Below, I will attribute to Kant a view that affirms (i), but denies (ii).
- 41 See the texts cited in fn. 1, above. In more recent work, McDowell has abandoned the view I am calling Propositionalism and endorsed a position that is much closer to the view I defend below; see, in particular, McDowell (2009b).

proposition an intuition expresses a thought.<sup>42</sup> However, in contradistinction to judgment, an intuition does not involve a commitment as to the truth-value of the thought it expresses.

We should note immediately that McDowell, in characterizing his position in this manner, uses the term 'judgment' in a different way than Kant does. McDowell uses the term in much the same way as Frege. In terms of the distinction between assertoric force and propositional content, a judgment for McDowell has both force and content. To judge, on this view, is to assert a content. It is thus to go beyond the sort of mere entertaining of a content that is independent of any commitment as to its truth-value. By contrast, for Kant, any act of entertaining a content with propositional structure is a judgment. Judgment, for Kant, does not necessarily carry assertoric force. Rather, Kant regards the mere entertaining of a content, which leaves open its truth-value and which McDowell (and Frege) would treat as distinct from judgment, as a case of what he calls problematic judgment.

When McDowell says that an intuition has the same structure as a judgment but does not itself amount to a judgment, he is employing these terms in the Fregean way just indicated. If we translate the claim into Kant's terminology, then we have to say that, on this view, what McDowell calls an intuition is a problematic judgment, while that which McDowell calls 'judgment' is an assertoric judgment.

Notwithstanding the difference in terminology, however, it should be clear how McDowell's view bears on the problem with which we are concerned. An intuition, according to McDowell, involves an exercise of concepts, and it is this which confers on it objective purport. The way in which concepts are exercised in intuition is, as far as its logical structure is concerned, exactly the same as in judgment. The position thus amounts to a form of Propositionalism, since what confers objective unity on an intuition here is the very fact that it exhibits the structure of a judgment. This means that McDowell is committed to the claim that sensible synthesis is a kind of judgment, using this term in Kant's way.

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42 McDowell frequently puts this point by adapting a locution from Sellars, according to which we should think of perceptual experience as "so to speak, making [...] a claim"; see, for instance, McDowell (2009a), 10. Sellars' original formulation is found in Sellars (1997), 39.

## 6. Problems for Propositionalism

I introduced Propositionalism as an alternative to Kantian Nonconceptualism which offers a solution to the problem I raised for the latter view. Propositionalism appears to be more plausible both as an interpretation of Kant and as a view about perceptual content. However, as we shall see, the solution that Propositionalism offers is purchased at a cost. For, as I am about to argue, the characteristic feature of this view (the thesis that sensible synthesis is identical to judgment) itself leads to serious difficulties. I will first present two exegetical difficulties. Discussing these will set the stage for consideration of the philosophical problems raised by Propositionalism.

Before considering the textual difficulties faced by Propositionalism, however, it is worth pausing briefly to note that there is also textual evidence that can make this view look exegetically attractive. I have in mind, in particular, a passage from the so-called Metaphysical Deduction, which is frequently quoted by McDowell, as well as a passage from the B-edition version of the Transcendental Deduction. Towards the end of the Metaphysical Deduction, Kant says:

The same function which gives unity to the different representations *in a judgment*, also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations *in an intuition*, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of the understanding.<sup>43</sup>

This passage can seem to be saying that the same act that unifies representations in a judgment also accounts for the unity of an intuition. The act that unifies representations in a judgment is the act of judgment. The implication seems to be that the synthesis that accounts for the unity of an intuition is likewise an act of judgment.

In the Transcendental Deduction Kant appears to be making a similar point. Once again employing the notion of a mental function,<sup>44</sup> Kant says the following:

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43 Kant (1998), A79/B104 f.

44 Kant defines a function as “the unity of the act of ordering different representations under a common one” (Kant (1998), A68/B93). Although it is not fully clear what this means, the context in which the definition is given, as well as the passages quoted in the text above, suggest that the notion of a function is closely related to the idea of a mental act that accounts for unity among representations.

That act of the understanding, however, through which the manifold of given representations (whether they be intuitions or concepts) [is unified], is the logical function of judgments.<sup>45</sup>

Again, the claim can appear to be that judgment is the act that is responsible for, among other things, the unity of an intuition; in other words, that the act of sensible synthesis is an act of judgment. These passages, then, can appear to lend textual support to Propositionalism. We will return to them after we consider the problems faced by Propositionalism.

To begin with, there are the following two textual problems. Kant repeatedly characterizes intuition as “that representation which can be given prior to all thought.”<sup>46</sup> If judging is a kind of thinking, as Kant clearly holds, this claim entails that intuition can be given prior to judgment. And this is in direct conflict with Propositionalism. The Propositionalist holds that judgment is constitutive of intuition. But this implies that intuition cannot be given prior to judgment. Accordingly, the Propositionalist reading is in tension with the text.

A second instance of direct textual evidence against Propositionalism comes from a passage at the opening of the Transcendental Dialectic in which Kant discusses error and illusion. He expresses his allegiance to the traditional view that the senses never err and explains that the reason for this is that error is only in judgment, and that the senses do not judge. Kant says, “In a representation of the senses (because it contains no judgment at all) there is no error, either”<sup>47</sup>. If an intuition, that is, a representation of the senses, does not contain judgment, then the act of synthesis that is responsible for the objective unity of intuition cannot be an act of judgment. Again, the textual evidence is in conflict with the Propositionalist view.<sup>48</sup>

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45 Kant (1998), B143.

46 Kant (1998), B132.

47 Kant (1998), A294/B350.

48 A Propositionalist might respond to both of these points by saying that, on his view, an intuition does not itself amount to a judgment; it merely has the same structure as a judgment. But this response rests on a Frege-inspired use of the term ‘judgment’. Since, as I pointed out in the preceding section, for Kant, anything that has propositional structure is a judgment, this move is not open to the Propositionalist once we use the term ‘judgment’ in Kant’s sense. Obviously, this is the sense that ought to matter in interpreting the textual evidence I just cited.

In addition to these textual problems, Propositionalism faces the following philosophical problem. Propositionalism ascribes to perception a content that is thoroughly conceptual. As we saw in §1, a general characteristic of at least some concepts of sensible properties is that they are determinable. For instance, as I also discussed in §1, color-concepts such as ‘\_\_ is red’ are determinable because they leave room for further specification of the color at issue. Colors come in shades, but the concept ‘\_\_ is red’ does not specify which shade of red is at issue. Perception, on the other hand, is a sensible representation of an object. Objects have determinate properties. This holds, in particular, of an object’s color: No object can be red without exhibiting a particular shade of red. The content of perception, therefore, appears to be more determinate – more fine-grained, as this is often put – than conceptual representation allows for. And if this is right, it would be a mistake to think of perceptual content along Propositionalist lines.

Some Propositionalists have sought to address this worry by appealing to the notion of a demonstrative concept. Let us call the resulting position Demonstrative Concept Propositionalism. This position holds that we can conceptually represent, say, the determinate color of an object by forming a concept that exploits the perceptual presence of the object to fix the identity of the property it denotes. The linguistic expression of such a concept would involve a demonstrative expression; as, for instance, in the sentence ‘The cube in front of me has *that* color’, which we should imagine as being accompanied by a pointing gesture. Whether or not this concept gets expressed in language, the perceptual presence of the object makes it possible for the perceiver to form such a concept. And this allows her to represent conceptually the degree of determinacy possessed by perceptual experience. We can put the point by saying that the content of such a concept is fixed, not descriptively, but demonstratively.<sup>49</sup>

Let us grant for the sake of argument that demonstrative concepts succeed in capturing the determinacy of perceptual content. Still, in the context of our discussion, this idea is problematic. It is problematic because it is not clear whether the Demonstrative Concept Propositionalist is entitled to it if she wants her position to remain a species of Prop-

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49 This response to the fineness-of-grain objection was first proposed by McDowell in his (1996), 56–60, and refined in response to an objection by Peacocke in McDowell (1998b). It is also deployed by Brewer (1999).

ositionalism.<sup>50</sup> More specifically, there is reason to believe that a view which incorporates the notion of a demonstrative concept no longer counts as Propositionalism in the sense introduced above. For recall that Propositionalism is characterized in part by its commitment to the thesis that the act of sensible synthesis is an act of judgment. For Kant, an act of judgment is, paradigmatically, an act of predicating one concept of another.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, Kant holds that concepts are essentially determinable. There is no such thing, in his view, as a concept that has a maximal degree of determinacy.<sup>52</sup> Rather, Kant holds that complete determinacy can be represented only by means of intuition, not by means of concepts. This is an aspect of Kant's commitment to the heterogeneity of sensibility and understanding.<sup>53</sup>

It follows that Kant would regard a demonstrative concept as a representation that is not purely conceptual, but rather involves intuition. Taken by itself, this conclusion does not necessarily present a problem for the Demonstrative Concept Propositionalist. Indeed, the Demonstrative Concept Propositionalist might represent herself at this point as simply in agreement with Kant. If she takes this line, then the whole point for her of introducing demonstrative concepts is to have a device that exploits the determinacy of perception but, nonetheless, functions as a concept. In the dialectical context of our discussion, how-

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50 In light of McDowell's commitment to demonstrative concepts, it might be argued that his position is not adequately classified as a version of Propositionalism. To decide this issue we would need to determine whether those aspects of McDowell's view that lead him to endorse demonstrative concepts have deeper roots in his philosophy than the aspects of his view that commit him to the thesis that the act of sensible synthesis is an act of judgment. I do not take a stand on this here. It suffices for my present purposes to bring out what is problematic about the Propositionalist aspects of McDowell's position, especially because these have been most influential in the reception of his work.

51 This means that Kant's conception of judgment differs in important respects from a modern, post-Fregean conception of thought and judgment. On the modern view, a judgment is paradigmatically a compound of a Fregean object and a Fregean concept; something whose form is *Fa*. On the modern conception, the idea that, in its basic form, a judgment involves predicating a concept of *another concept* does not make sense. By contrast, Kant's conception of judgment is a version of the traditional model, according to which a judgment is, or expresses, a "comparison of ideas." For a statement of this model, see, e. g., Arnauld/Nicole (1996), 82. I give a more detailed discussion of this issue in Land (forthcoming).

52 See Kant (1992), §§11 and 15.

53 See §1, above.

ever, the fact that a demonstrative concept is now being held to be something that essentially involves intuition represents a problematic departure from the original terms of the debate. It represents a problematic departure because it undermines the characteristic Propositionalist claim that sensible synthesis must be understood as an act of judgment. The following consideration brings out why this is so.

The notion of a demonstrative concept exploits the fact that intuition is fully determinate. In so doing, it exploits one of the features that make sensibility heterogeneous to the understanding: complete determinacy cannot be represented by conceptual means alone, according to Kant. This brings out something important about the manner in which the Demonstrative Concept Propositionalist is committed to thinking about sensible synthesis: on the one hand, sensible synthesis is conceived as an act of judgment, that is, an act of the understanding; yet, on the other hand, because sensible synthesis is construed as essentially involving demonstrative concepts, it is thereby conceived as an act that exhibits specifically sensible features. It is, therefore, an act that combines characteristics which, for Kant, belong to two heterogeneous capacities. The problem with this is that it is not at all clear how such a thing is possible. Given the heterogeneity of understanding and sensibility, it seems that an act must either have the characteristics of the one or the characteristics of the other. But it cannot have both. To say that it does amounts to denying the heterogeneity of these two capacities.

If this is right, then the point we have now reached in the argument of this paper can be characterized by saying that Propositionalism faces a dilemma: Either the Propositionalist operates with a conception of judgment that is straightforwardly intelligible as an act of the understanding and thus respects the heterogeneity of understanding and sensibility. In this case, she cannot appeal to the idea of a demonstrative concept. As a result, she cannot account for the determinacy of perception. Alternatively, the Propositionalist tries to enrich her position in the manner envisaged by the Demonstrative Concept Propositionalist, trying to account for the determinacy of perception by appeal to the notion of a demonstrative concept. But in this case she helps herself to a conception of judgment that undermines the heterogeneity of understanding and sensibility. Within a Kantian framework, there seems to be no room for such a conception of judgment.

As long as Propositionalism seeks to represent itself as a species of Kantianism, it is obvious that neither horn of the dilemma is acceptable. Nonetheless, there is an important insight here. This can be brought out

if we attend to the way in which Propositionalism, in its unmodified form, construes sensible synthesis. Recall that sensible synthesis, for Kant, is the act of mind that is responsible for the objective unity of intuition. Originally, Propositionalism's distinctive commitment was supposed to consist in the claim that this act is an act of judgment. This commitment is motivated by the lesson learned from the failure of Kantian Nonconceptualism, viz. that the objective unity of intuition must be construed as having its source in the understanding, the capacity of thought. Against this background, we can extract from the dilemma faced by Propositionalism the following requirement for a more promising solution to our problem: We need something that plays the role of a demonstrative concept without undermining the heterogeneity of judging and perceiving. That is, we need something that (i) is an act of the understanding, (ii) captures the complete determinacy – hence the distinctly sensory nature – of an intuition, and (iii) preserves the heterogeneity of understanding and sensibility. Although it may seem impossible to meet all three requirements simultaneously, I want to suggest that this impression depends on the central Propositionalist commitment. If sensible synthesis is identical to judgment, then it is indeed impossible to meet all three requirements. But if this commitment is given up, then the prospects are not quite as bleak. Giving up the central commitment of Propositionalism opens up the conceptual space for thinking of judgment and sensible synthesis as distinct acts. If we can find our way to a conception of sensible synthesis that preserves this thought, but at the same time makes sensible synthesis intelligible as an act of the understanding, then we have at least a candidate for the role of something that meets the three requirements.

To be sure, for this to be so much as a coherent possibility, we require an account of the understanding that allows for exercises of this capacity which do not take the form of judgments. And we have as yet no idea whether such an account is available. But the very fact that this is now our question suggests that we have attained a deeper grasp of our problem. This grasp can be articulated by saying that Propositionalism overreaches in its reaction to the failure of Kantian Nonconceptualism. Although it is motivated by the right insight – the objective unity of intuition must have its source in the understanding – it goes too far when it takes this to imply that sensible synthesis is identical to judgment. The proper way to develop this insight is, rather, to find a way of holding on to it while also acknowledging that sensible synthesis is distinct in character from judgment.

## 7. The New Shape of the Problem

At the outset of this paper I observed that a central characteristic of Kant's conception of intuition lies in the fact that an intuition is the representation of an object – rather than, say, a mere impression – and therefore exhibits a distinct kind of unity. A number of contemporary philosophers of perception who see themselves as working in a Kantian tradition defend a view of perception that incorporates this feature. Moreover, these philosophers also appeal to Kant in arguing that the objective unity of intuitions does not itself have its source in intuition. In other words, it is a shared feature of these views that the kind of unity on account of which a perception is the representation of an object is not itself something that is given in perception.

There is disagreement, however, on how to characterize this unity and, as a result, on where to locate its source. Kantian Nonconceptualism construes the objective unity of intuitions as something that can be accounted for entirely by the resources provided by sensibility. On this view, the unity of an intuition is a spatio-temporal unity, which does not itself derive from perception because it has its source in what Kant calls the pure form of intuition. At the same time, having its source in the form of intuition makes this unity independent of conceptual thought. Since it originates in sensibility, the objective unity of intuitions is something that, in the view of the Kantian Nonconceptualist, is intelligible without any reference to understanding or reason. I objected that a view of this kind is not entitled to treating the unity of intuition as objective. It is a central aspect of Kant's view that the unity exhibited by intuition must, in the relevant respect, be the same as the unity of thought. More precisely, it must be the unity that characterizes an object of cognition as such. By locating the unity of intuition in sensibility, Kantian Nonconceptualism fails to meet this requirement.

To meet the requirement, the source of intuitional unity must be located in the understanding, i. e. the capacity for thought. Propositionalism does this. According to Propositionalism, an intuition has objective unity because it has the same structure as judgment. We found, however, that there are serious objections to Propositionalism. In essence, Propositionalism fails to preserve the heterogeneity of sensibility and understanding.<sup>54</sup> The result we have now reached can be summar-

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54 My discussion of this in §6 focused on the determinacy of perceptual content, which is one aspect of its distinctively sensory character. But similar objections

ized by saying that while Kantian Nonconceptualism keeps perception too far removed from thought, Propositionalism moves perception and thought too close together.

In Kantian terminology, the result of my discussion of Propositionalism was that sensible synthesis, the act that accounts for the objective unity of intuition, must not be construed as a species of judgment. To do so is the fundamental mistake of Propositionalism. If we want to avoid this mistake, however, we are confronted with a serious problem. The criteria of adequacy on a viable Kantian philosophy of perception that we have thus far uncovered require us, on the one hand, to ascribe sensible synthesis to the understanding, and yet, on the other hand, to regard sensible synthesis as distinct from judgment. This is a problem because the understanding seems to be defined by Kant as the capacity for judgment – and indeed it seems eminently plausible to see the capacity for conceptual thought as closely tied to the notion of judgment. If this is what the understanding is, but if, at the same time, sensible synthesis is distinct from judgment, then what grounds do we have for regarding sensible synthesis as an act of the understanding?

It can look as if there is no room to maneuver here. Our discussion of the shortcomings of Kantian Nonconceptualism showed that it is an essential feature of Kant's position that intuition exhibits the same unity – in the relevant respect – as thought. The familiar Kantian claim that there is a set of pure concepts, which are valid of objects, amounts precisely to this. Any view, therefore, that is genuinely Kantian must locate the source of the unity of intuition in the understanding. And this entails that it must regard synthesis as an act of the understanding. Call this the Objective Unity Requirement. On the other hand, we just saw in the discussion of the shortcomings of Propositionalism that a plausible Kantian account of perception must preserve its distinctively sensible features and thereby make room for a robust sense of the heterogeneity of perception and thought. Call this the Heterogeneity Requirement. Jointly, these two requirements generate the problem I have been delineating: They demand an account of sensible synthesis, on which this synthesis is an act of the understanding, but at the same time distinct from judgment. Sensible synthesis must preserve the distinctively sensory nature of intuition, yet be traceable to the capacity for conceptual thought.

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to Propositionalism could be developed by reference to other aspects of this character, for instance, the fact that perceptual content is not articulated in the way in which propositions are.

Above I said that the distinctive feature of Propositionalism lies in its commitment to the following thesis:

- (4) The Judgment Thesis: All acts of the understanding are acts of judgment.

We can now succinctly express the challenge that my discussion of Propositionalism has raised by adding to this the following two theses:

- (5) The Synthesis Thesis: Sensible synthesis is an act of the understanding.  
 (6) The Distinctness Thesis: Sensible synthesis is not an act of judgment.

Jointly, these three theses are inconsistent. As I have already indicated, to remove the inconsistency we should focus on (4) and on the conception of the understanding it expresses.

In the remainder of this paper, I shall argue that Kant does not view the understanding exclusively as a capacity for judgment and that, therefore, (4) ought to be rejected. Rather, judgment must be conceived as only one type of act among several of which the understanding is capable. More specifically, judgment and sensible synthesis must be conceived as two types of act that are *specifically* distinct, but *generically* identical. A conception that exhibits this structure makes it possible to see both judgment and synthesis as acts of the same capacity, while allowing that they each have different characteristics. And this opens up the logical space for arguing that sensible synthesis is an act of the understanding which is distinguished from judgment by the fact that it exhibits distinctively sensible characteristics. However, such a conception will be available only if it is possible to give a plausible characterization of the common genus. Thus, what this solution demands is a different characterization of the understanding: a characterization that is at once more abstract than the characterization ‘capacity for judgment’ *and* that makes it possible to see judgment as one specific kind of exercise of the understanding.

## 8. Sketch of a Solution

I will now offer a sketch – indeed, a very rough sketch – of an account of the understanding, on which this capacity can plausibly be seen as admitting of two distinct kinds of exercise, one in judgment, the other in sensible synthesis. The central contention of this account is that Kant’s

characterization of the understanding as a capacity for judgment ought *not* to be taken to constitute the most fundamental characterization he wishes to give of this capacity. Rather, Kant himself offers a more fundamental characterization; and this characterization makes it possible to see judgment as only one of two kinds of exercise of which the understanding is capable.

An account of the understanding along these lines conceives of this capacity as having a structure analogous to that of a genus which contains two distinct species. The first task in establishing the viability of such an account, therefore, is to explain what entitles us to attribute to the understanding a structure of this kind. I will say more about this in a moment. For now let me point out that the second task is to show that one of the two species, viz. sensible synthesis, exhibits distinctively sensible features. My focus here will be on the first task.

The question we confront, then, is how to think about what the understanding is. Both Propositionalism and Kantian Nonconceptualism are committed to the view (expressed in the Judgment Thesis) that our hold on the notion of understanding is through the notion of judgment. That is, the understanding is, at bottom and most fundamentally, a capacity for judgment. This means that every act of this capacity must be conceived as a judgment of some kind (though perhaps a defective, merely purported judgment). By contrast, the proposal I am about to make asks us to think of judgment as one of two distinct acts of the understanding. Clearly, on such a view it will not do to say that the understanding is a capacity for judgment. We need a different characterization, one that allows us to see both judgment and sensible synthesis, conceived here as distinct from judgment, as acts of a single capacity. And Kant, I think, shows us what such a characterization might look like.

In working my way towards this characterization, I want to begin by pointing out a number of passages in which Kant himself appears to ascribe to the understanding a structure of the kind I have indicated, that is, the structure of a genus containing two distinct species. The first of these passages was quoted above, in §6.<sup>55</sup> It is the well-known passage from A79/B104 f, in which Kant says that the same function accounts for both the unity of a judgment and the unity of an intuition. Whatever one's preferred interpretation of the passage, it is undeniable that we have here an instance of the structure I have described.

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<sup>55</sup> See p. 218.

Another passage occurs in a footnote appended to §26 of the B-edition version of the Transcendental Deduction:

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.<sup>56</sup>

Kant does not literally speak here of two species of the understanding. Rather, he characterizes imagination and understanding as species, respectively, of spontaneity. Nonetheless, the passage supports my proposal. For, first, it supports the structural point: Kant speaks of a genus containing two distinct species. Secondly, there are a number of reasons for thinking that he uses the term ‘understanding’ here in a narrow sense, in which it refers to the use of concepts in judgment, while using ‘spontaneity’ as referring to the understanding in the wide sense, that is, the capacity which can be exercised in both judgment and sensible synthesis. The first two of these are textual: Kant elsewhere characterizes spontaneity as being coextensive with understanding.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, when he first introduces the notion of imagination at issue in the quoted passage, he characterizes it as “an action of the understanding on sensibility”.<sup>58</sup> Both of these passages suggest that the passage from B162n should not be taken to imply that the imagination is *not* a species of the understanding.

The third reason is philosophical and concerns the argumentative context of the passage. The passage occurs at the end of the Transcendental Deduction, where Kant is concerned to argue that nothing can be given to the senses which does not fall under the categories. His argument turns on the claim that intuition itself, simply in virtue of its spatio-temporal form, requires an act of synthesis in accordance with the categories; an act he calls ‘synthesis of apprehension.’ And this act of synthesis is precisely what he characterizes as an act of the imagination

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56 Kant (1998), B162n.

57 Cf. e.g. Kant (1998), A51/B75: “[...] the capacity to bring forth representations from itself, however, or the spontaneity of cognition, is the understanding.”

58 Here is the full passage: “Now since all our intuition is sensible, the imagination [...] belongs to sensibility. But insofar as its synthesis is still an exercise of spontaneity, which is determining and not, like sense, merely determinable, [...] the imagination is to that extent a capacity for determining sensibility a priori; and its synthesis of intuitions, in accordance with the categories, must be the transcendental synthesis of imagination. This synthesis is an action of the understanding on sensibility [...].”(Kant (1998), B151 f., emphases omitted).

in the passage from B162n.<sup>59</sup> Arguably, this maneuver can establish the conclusion that the synthesis of apprehension confers categorial unity on intuition only if it is an act of the capacity whose pure form the categories articulate: that is, of the understanding.<sup>60</sup>

Both of the passages I have quoted, then, provide evidence for the claim that the understanding for Kant possesses a complex structure, which can be characterized by analogy with a genus containing two distinct species. My goal here is to argue that we should conceive of the capacity of judgment as constituting one of these species, and the capacity for exercising concepts in perception as the other species. It is clear, however, that such a proposal will be viable only if we can give a plausible characterization of the common genus. In particular, such a characterization must make it possible to comprehend what makes both species so many different ways of employing concepts. In other words, the characterization of the genus should put us in a position to form a conception of what it might be to apply concepts in perception in a way that does not consist in the entertaining of a proposition.

Again, my aim here is merely to provide an outline of such a characterization. It will be useful to begin with Kant's conception of judgment. Central to this conception is the claim that a judgment is "[a function] of unity among our representations".<sup>61</sup> It is essential to judgment, for Kant, that this act unifies representations. My proposal is that this feature of Kant's conception of judgment provides a foothold for a characterization of the understanding that is independent of the notion of judgment, at least to the extent that we can make sense of the idea of an exercise of the understanding which does not take the form of a judgment. So the idea is that we can characterize the understanding as a capacity for the representation of a certain kind of unity, and that

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59 The full text of the footnote runs as follows: "In this manner it is proved: that the synthesis of apprehension, which is empirical, is necessarily in accord with the synthesis of apperception, which is intellectual and wholly contained a priori in the category. 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" (Kant (1998), B162n.).

60 This claim is based on an interpretation of the argument of the Transcendental Deduction that I cannot defend here. For discussion, see Land (2010), 280–288.

61 Kant (1998), A69/B94. It is a measure of the centrality of this claim that Kant's derivation of the Table of Judgments (and thus also, indirectly, the derivation of the Table of Categories) depends on it. See Wolff (1995) for discussion.

this idea is sufficiently abstract for it to provide the needed independence from judgment.<sup>62</sup>

It is crucial that the notion of unity at issue here is a very specific one. As Kant makes explicit in the Transcendental Deduction, a judgment is a function of not just any kind of unity among representations, but, specifically, of the kind of unity he calls the synthetic unity of apperception:

[...] a judgment is nothing other than the manner of bringing given cognitions to the objective unity of apperception.<sup>63</sup>

Saying precisely what the synthetic unity of apperception is would require an account of Kant's doctrine of apperception, and that is not something I can provide here. Instead, my strategy is to pick out one central feature of this doctrine and to argue that this provides enough of a foothold for making the case that a characterization of the understanding is available which has the required independence from judgment.

In the B-edition version of the Transcendental Deduction, Kant motivates his discussion of apperception as follows: The understanding is, most fundamentally, a capacity for combining representations in a certain way. In particular, it is a capacity for combining representations by means of a prior representation of unity. And this prior representation of unity is the synthetic unity of apperception.<sup>64</sup>

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62 The following point of clarification is essential: My strategy is not to argue that we can extract from Kant a conception of the understanding according to which this capacity is intelligible in complete independence from the notion of judgment. The claim I seek to establish is weaker: It is only to argue that Kant provides us with a characterization of the understanding that allows for a kind of exercise of this capacity which does not take the form of judgment. This claim is compatible with the claim (to which I take Kant to be committed) that it is essential to the understanding that one of the ways in which it can be exercised *is* judgment. In terms of the terminology of genus and species which I have been employing, this point can be put as follows: The characterization of the genus may well be such that, in the final analysis, it is not fully intelligible in isolation from the fact that one of its species is judgment. But again, this is compatible with the claim that such a genus contains another, distinct species besides judgment.

63 Kant (1998), B141. Although he speaks of 'objective unity' rather than 'synthetic unity' in the quoted passage, it is clear that these expressions are equivalent; cf. Kant (1998), B139 f.

64 See, in particular, the following two passages: "Combination [...] is solely an operation of the understanding, which is itself nothing further than the faculty

Since in the present context ‘combination’ is just another word for ‘synthesis’, we can extract from this the claim that the understanding is, fundamentally, a capacity for a kind of synthesis which proceeds by means of a prior representation of unity. And it is this characterization, I suggest, that serves as the genus of which both judgment and sensible synthesis can intelligibly be seen to be species. As the preceding paragraph suggests, it is Kant’s view that the prior representation of unity is the synthetic unity of apperception. A full account of Kant’s conception of the understanding would have to explain what this means. But for present purposes, we can abstract from this feature of the view and work with the idea that the understanding is a capacity for synthesis by means of a prior representation of unity.

A full account would also need to explain what the connection is between this kind of synthesis and the possession of concepts. Although I attribute to Kant a conception of the understanding on which this capacity can be exercised in an act that is distinct from judgment, I also think that Kant is committed to thinking of the understanding as the capacity of concepts. Every act of this capacity, therefore, is an act of concept-use. Consequently, a full account would need to show that the idea of a synthesis by means of a prior representation of unity is the idea of a kind of concept-use. However, I will not be able to provide such an account here.

I shall now argue that the characterization of the understanding as a capacity for synthesis by means of a prior representation of unity is sufficiently independent from the notion of judgment to provide the logical space for the idea of an exercise of the understanding which does not take the form of judgment. In other words, I shall argue that the characterization of the understanding as a capacity for synthesis by means of a prior representation of unity provides us with the tools needed to reject the Judgment Thesis. My argument has two stages. In the

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of combining a priori and bringing the manifold of given representations under the unity of apperception [...]” (Kant (1998), B134 f.); “But in addition to the concept of the manifold and of its synthesis, the concept of combination also carries with it the concept of the unity of the manifold. Combination is the representation of the *synthetic* unity of the manifold. The representation of this unity cannot, therefore, arise from the combination; rather, by being added to the representation of the manifold, it first makes possible the concept of combination” (Kant (1998), B130 f.). The final sentence of the second passage clearly says that combination requires a prior representation of unity. For discussion, see Land (2010), 206–215.

first stage, I argue that judgment can be seen as a species of this capacity. In the second stage, I argue that sensible synthesis can be comprehended as a distinct species of this capacity.

A central element of Kant's conception of judgment is the idea that there are a number of elementary logical forms of judgment, which are catalogued in the so-called Table of Judgments.<sup>65</sup> This Table is presented by Kant as a characterization of the very capacity for judgment. To possess this capacity, he holds, is to be able to make judgments exhibiting these logical forms. This obviously requires some grasp, however implicit, of these forms themselves. It requires a grasp, for instance, of the fact that a judgment of the form 'All *F* are *G*' is contradicted by a judgment of the form 'Some *F* are not *G*' as well as the fact that two judgments of the form 'All *F* are *G*' and 'All *G* are *H*' jointly entail a judgment of the form 'All *F* are *H*'.

That judging requires a grasp, in this sense, of the elementary logical forms of judgment shows that judgment satisfies the description of a synthesis by means of a prior representation of unity. For, first, we can take for granted that judgment is a kind of synthesis. Secondly, if it is appropriate to say that the elementary logical forms of judgment constitute a representation of unity, then the fact that the ability to make judgments requires a mastery of these forms shows that this representation of unity is a *prior* representation of unity. That is, it is a representation of unity that is presupposed by any exercise of the capacity to judge. Finally, the elementary logical forms of judgment collectively constitute a representation of unity in the following sense: In virtue of their logical form, judgments stand in inferential relations to one another, as the example in the preceding paragraph shows. And in virtue of being inferentially related, judgments form a kind of whole.

Furthermore, Kant famously correlates the categories with the elementary logical forms of judgment. His view seems to be that every judgment, in virtue of its logical form, represents its object as falling under the categories. But the categories articulate the concept of an object in general.<sup>66</sup> A judgment, therefore, represents its object as an instance of the concept of an object in general. If this is right, we can say that the elementary logical forms of judgment constitute a representation of unity in the sense that everything that is represented through them is represented as falling under the concept of an object in general.

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65 See Kant (1998), A70/B95.

66 See Kant (1998), B128.

This is only a very quick sketch. But I hope it has become clear how one might argue that judgment can be understood as a species of the capacity to unify representations by means of a prior representation of unity. Now, the same abstract structure is exemplified, I think, in Kant's theory of spatial representation.<sup>67</sup> Spatial representation, too, can be understood as a species of synthesis by means of a prior representation of unity.

In §4, above, I discussed a number of features of Kant's doctrine that sensibility has a pure form, and that this pure form is constituted by the representations of space and time. One such feature is the idea that the representation of space serves to confer a certain unity on empirical intuitions (that is, perceptions). In virtue of being given in the pure form of intuition, empirical intuitions stand in spatial relations to one another.<sup>68</sup> We can say, therefore, that the representation of space is the representation of a certain kind of unity that empirical intuitions exhibit: In virtue of having spatial form, every empirical intuition is related to every other empirical intuition. Call this the spatial unity of intuition.

It is Kant's view that representing the spatial unity of an intuition requires an act of synthesis, which he calls synthesis of apprehension. As is apparent from Kant's characterization of this synthesis, it proceeds by means of a prior representation of unity. And this allows us to conceive of it as a species of a genus another species of which is judgment. However, before I can discuss Kant's characterization of the synthesis of apprehension, I need to introduce a bit of technical terminology. Kant thinks of space as a magnitude. A magnitude is a manifold of qualitatively identical parts. And what Kant calls the categories of quantity (unity, plurality, totality) jointly articulate the concept of a magnitude.

Now, as Kant argues in the *Axioms of Intuition*, the synthesis of apprehension proceeds in accordance with the concept of a magnitude and, for this reason, serves to confer on the manifold of intuition the synthetic unity of apprehension.<sup>69</sup> But this means that the concept of a

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67 The same holds for temporal representation. But I think for present purposes the case of spatial representation is more straightforward.

68 Again, by 'intuition' is meant here the content rather than the act of intuiting.

69 "[...] appearances [...] cannot be otherwise apprehended, that is, taken up into empirical consciousness, than through that synthesis of the manifold, whereby the representations of a determinate space or time are generated, that is, through the composition of the homogeneous and the consciousness of the synthetic unity of this manifold (homogeneous). The consciousness of the manifold homogeneous in intuition in general, insofar as the representation of an object first

magnitude here functions as a representation of unity; specifically, it serves as an abstract representation of the kind of unity that is characteristic of space, the unity of a whole of qualitatively identical parts. It follows from this that the synthesis of apprehension is a synthesis which proceeds by means of a prior representation of unity, viz. the concept of a magnitude.

Kant's doctrine of spatial representation, then – specifically, his theory of synthesis in accordance with the concept of magnitude – allows us to see the synthesis of apprehension as satisfying the description I proposed as Kant's most basic characterization of the understanding. And since the synthesis of apprehension is identical to what I have been calling sensible synthesis, this holds also for sensible synthesis. However, showing that sensible synthesis satisfies a description that is also satisfied by judgment does not amount to showing that sensible synthesis is a distinct kind of act from judgment. In other words, to establish the generic identity of sensible synthesis and judgment is not yet to establish their specific difference. This task, therefore, still remains.

Rather than discharging this task in full, however, all I can do here is to lay out a strategy for confronting it. As is emphasized by Kantian Nonconceptualists, Kant holds that the pure intuition of space is a non-conceptual representation. It is non-conceptual in the sense that it exhibits features that cannot be represented by means of concepts. Specifically, space is a manifold of qualitatively identical parts. This, as we have just seen, is what makes space a magnitude. And on the theory of concepts that Kant espouses, it is not possible to represent such a structure solely by means of concepts.<sup>70</sup> In particular, it is not possible to represent such a structure by means of applying concepts in judgment.<sup>71</sup> For this reason, the kind of synthesis that is responsible for the representation of spatial unity must be distinct from judgment.<sup>72</sup>

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becomes possible by means of it, however, is the concept of a magnitude (quantity)" ( Kant (1998), B202 f.). – For discussion of this passage and the Axioms of Intuition as a whole, see Sutherland (2005).

70 For discussion of this point, see Sutherland (2004).

71 This needs qualification: It is possible to represent such a structure by means of judgments which employ concepts that are derivative from the pure intuition of space. But such concepts depend for their very possibility on the availability of a synthesis in accordance with the concept of magnitude. For the purposes of this argument, therefore, we can exclude them from consideration.

72 Indeed, as we saw above on p. 33, Kant characterizes this synthesis as an act of the imagination. Imagination is the capacity to "represent an object in intuition

Although implementing this strategy would require significantly more work, it is apparent that the strategy draws on just those features of Kant's theory of sensibility that are emphasized by Kantian Nonconceptualists. And this is just as it should be. For the claim that there is an exercise of the understanding that is distinct from judgment is motivated by the desire to accommodate what I take to be the main insight of Kantian Nonconceptualism, viz. an appreciation of what above I called the Heterogeneity Requirement. The doctrine of sensible synthesis I have proposed here seeks to develop this insight in the context of a view that also attempts to do justice to the Objective Unity Requirement, and this necessitates the idea of an act of the understanding which exhibits specifically sensible features.

I have now provided an outline of the solution I take Kant to offer to the problem posed by his doctrine of sensible synthesis. Obviously, a lot more would need to be said to make this solution compelling. But we can at least see what shape it would take. This puts us in a position to see that those passages in the *Critique* that seem to support a Propositionalist interpretation do not in fact force such an interpretation on us. They are equally compatible with the reading I have just sketched. In §6, above, I quoted two such passages. In concluding this section, I want briefly to return to one of them and indicate how it supports my reading.<sup>73</sup> The passage at issue reads as follows:

The same function which gives unity to the different representations *in a judgment*, also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations *in an intuition*, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of the understanding.<sup>74</sup>

The Propositionalist takes this passage to be saying that the act that gives unity to the different representations in an intuition is judgment. But we can now see that the "same function" of which Kant speaks may be a function of the understanding without being thereby limited in its exercise to acts of judgment. Indeed, the passage precisely mirrors the structure of the view I have just outlined: to say that a single "function" accounts for the unity of two distinct kinds of representations is analo-

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even without its presence" (Kant (1998), B151). This, too, suggests that sensible synthesis exhibits a distinctively sensible character.

73 It will be apparent from what I am about to say how I think the other passage quoted in §6 (as well as other similar passages in the *Critique*) should be interpreted.

74 Kant (1998), A79/B104 f.

gous to saying that there is a single genus containing two distinct species. It follows that the passage lends at least as much support to the view that what Kant calls the “functions of the understanding”<sup>75</sup> can be exercised in two distinct ways as it does to the Propositionalist reading.

In §6 I also cited two passages that are in direct conflict with Propositionalism. The gist of these passages was that intuition can be given prior to judgment. In contrast to Propositionalism, the view I have just sketched can accommodate these passages, while still maintaining that the unity of intuition derives from the understanding. This gives it a clear advantage over Propositionalism on textual grounds.

## 9. Conclusion

According to the interpretation I have developed, Kant’s solution to the problem posed by his theory of synthesis depends on a number of other views he holds. Most importantly, it depends on his traditional conception of judgment, as well as his theory of spatial representation. Since these views diverge sharply from the views that participants in the contemporary debate about perception take on these matters, it is not clear that Kant’s solution to the problem he confronts can simply be incorporated wholesale into a position that aspires to be a serious contender in the contemporary debate. The historical distance is, after all, significant and should not be overlooked, even if there is much insight to be found in Kant’s position. I do not, therefore, claim that Kant’s position can advance the debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists in the philosophy of perception without further modification. But I do wish to claim that Kant’s position offers the resources for such a step.

In particular, Kant’s position brings out the significance of one aspect of the debate that tends to receive comparatively little attention. This is what I have called the Question of Objective Purport. The Question of Objective Purport concerns the conditions that perception must satisfy if it is to be conceived as a cognitive capacity. To say that perception is a cognitive capacity is to say that it is a capacity that has a role in the acquisition of knowledge. Following Kant, I have argued that there are, in particular, two requirements that perception must meet in this regard. First, what I have called the formal object of perception must – in the relevant respect – be the same as the formal object of

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75 Kant (1998), A69/B94.

knowledge: the kinds of things one can perceive must be the kinds of things that can be an object of knowledge. Only if this is the case can perceptual episodes legitimately be regarded as sensory presentations of objects and thus play the epistemic role Kant assigns to them. Second, a viable conception of perception must be such that it is no accident that the first requirement is met. I think it is here that Kant's distinctive contribution lies. In Kant's hands, this requirement takes the shape of developing a conception of how thought relates to perception which shows the capacity for thought to be responsible for the unity, or structure, that characterizes perception.

Propositionalism takes this requirement to heart. But, as we have seen, it does so in a manner that jettisons the distinctly sensory character of perception. In its hands, perceptual content is deprived of the very determinateness that is supposed to be its central characteristic. I have suggested that Kant's position avoids these mistakes. Kant seeks to meet his second requirement by recognizing a kind of act of the understanding that is not propositional in structure, yet is an act of the same capacity that is also responsible for judgment. Kant calls this act 'sensible synthesis,' and he holds that sensible synthesis determines sensibility to have the same unity as thought without thereby undermining its specifically sensory character.

A careful examination of Kant's position thus permits us to extract from it the following lesson for the contemporary debate about perception: The relation between the sensory and intellectual capacities must be conceived in such a way that the very nature of the sensory capacity of a rational being *itself* exhibits the fact that it is the capacity of such a being. This demand has two aspects, which correspond to the respective shortcomings of Kantian Nonconceptualism and Propositionalism: On the one hand, the perceptual capacities of a rational being must be conceived as distinct in kind from the perceptual capacities of a non-rational being. Only in a rational being can perception present objects that can also be the contents of conceptually articulated thoughts.<sup>76</sup> Put differently, perception in a rational being must not be conceived as intelligible in

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76 For the purposes of this discussion, I am assuming that the capacity for conceptual thought is tied to rationality. Thus, non-rational animals are not capable of conceptual thought. But this does not rule out that they may be capable of other ways of representing their surroundings. For all I have said, it may even be appropriate to say that some animals have knowledge of their surroundings, as long as we are clear that the type of knowledge at issue here must be distinct from the type of knowledge made possible by conceptual thought.

isolation from thought. On the other hand, the perceptual capacities of a rational being must preserve their sensory character. They must not be too closely assimilated to intellectual capacities. Perception is not itself a kind of thought, even if it exhibits the same unity as thought.

What Kant can teach us, then, is that in our philosophy of perception we must steer a middle course between the Scylla of making the objective purport of perception unintelligible and the Charybdis of intellectualizing the senses. It is in this that Kant's contribution to the debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists about perception lies. Accordingly, 'Kantian Conceptualism' ought to be the name, not of a view merely about the fine-structure of perceptual content, but rather of the character of the entire framework within which any viable version of such a view is to be located.<sup>77</sup>

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