

Kant on the Content of Cognition

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Abstract. I present an argument for an interpretation of Kant's views on the nature of the 'content [Inhalt]' of 'cognition [Erkenntnis]'. In contrast to the one of the longest standing interpretations of Kant's views on cognitive content, which ascribes to Kant a straightforwardly psychologistic understanding of content, and in contrast as well to the more recently influential reading of Kant put forward by McDowell and others, according to which Kant embraces a version of Russellianism, I argue that Kant's views on this topic are of a much more Fregean bent than has traditionally been admitted or appreciated. I conclude by providing a sketch of how a better grasp of Kant's views on cognitive content in general can help bring into sharper relief what is, and what is not, at stake in the recent debates over whether or not Kant accepts a particular kind of cognitive content – namely, non-conceptual content.

§1. Introduction

In what follows, I present an argument for a certain interpretation of Kant's views on the nature of the 'content [Inhalt]' of 'cognition [Erkenntnis]'. I will focus on Kant's use of 'cognition' in a broad sense, according to which both intuitions and concepts are cognitions (cf., B376-77) and also according to which cognitions can be both true and false (cf., B83, B737).¹ This contrasts with a narrower use of 'cognition', according to which it means something closer to knowledge, and so is restricted in its application to things that are

¹ For further passages in which Kant classifies both concepts and intuitions as cognitions, see *Jäsche Logic* §1 (9:91), *Pölitz Logic* (24:510 and 565), *Vienna Logic* (24:904), as well as numerous fragments ('*Reflexionen*' ('R')): R1694 and R1695 (16:86), R1704 and R1705 (16:88), and R2836 (16:538-9). For further passages in which Kant speaks of 'false cognitions', see *Pölitz Logic* (24:548 and 554), *Vienna Logic* (24:832), and R3707 (17:246).

A note on the citations and translations: Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* will be cited according to the B-edition pagination, using the now-standard convention ('B#'), except in cases where the relevant text is only to be found in the A-edition (= 'A#'). For convenience, Kant's other works will be cited according to their titles and the now-standard pagination in the *Akademie Ausgabe* of Kant's collected works (Kant 1902-), which can be found in the margins of the Cambridge Edition translations of Kant's works into English (Kant 1991-). Whenever possible, I have consulted, and usually followed, the Cambridge Edition, though I have silently modified these translations where needed; in all other cases, the translations are my own. In the case of Frege's works, I will cite the pagination from the standard English translations, but I have also silently modified the translations when called for, in consultation with the standard German editions of his works.

true.² I will argue that Kant's views on the content of cognition are of a much more *Fregean* bent than has traditionally been admitted or appreciated.

My argument will face challenges on two main fronts. On the one hand, I will need to clear the ground for my reading by providing a critique of the most prominent competing opinions of Kant's views on content. On the other hand, I will need to provide direct positive support for the interpretation of Kant's representational semantics that I favor. Let me say a bit more about each in turn.

The current opinions on Kant's views on cognitive content trend in two directions. On the one side, there is a long and storied tradition of reading Kant as if he embraces a straightforwardly *psychologistic* representational semantics, such that content for Kant consists in some inner private introspectible feature of a mental state, perhaps akin to an image or picture. This interpretation was already floated by some of Kant's earliest critics, and has been endorsed more recently by (among others) A.J. Ayer, Lewis White Beck, Jonathan Bennett, Alberto Coffa, and Michael Potter.³ At the other end there are those, such as John McDowell and Jay Rosenberg, who put forward the increasingly more common – and increasingly more influential – interpretation of Kant as maintaining a broadly *Russellian* view

² For a discussion of these contrasting uses of 'cognition' in English, see G.E. Moore 1903: 83.

³ See Ayer 1946: 78; Beck 1956: 170-1; Bennett 1966: 7-8; Coffa 1991: 18-21; Potter 2000: 37-38. This reading of Kant emerged within the first decade after the publication of the first *Critique*, as it was made by J.G. Maaß, one of Kant's early critics; see Allison 1973: 174-5.

A variant of the straightforwardly psychologist reading is provided by James Van Cleve in Van Cleve 1999. Van Cleve's view is more sophisticated, in that he takes Kant to view content as a particular 'adverbial' modification of an individual mental act of representing. Nevertheless, Van Cleve's desire to keep Kant's views amenable to a fairly radical empiricism ultimately leaves Van Cleve in the same predicament as the psychologist reader, insofar as the adverbial modification itself is ultimately an idiosyncratic property of the individual subject (cf., op.cit. 93). (For a general criticism of the empiricist leanings of Van Cleve's reading, see Ameriks 2003.) As I will argue below, no radically empiricist psychologist interpretation will have sufficient resources to account for Kant's commitment to the objectivity of the contents of cognition, in the sense of their being publicly shareable and communicable. Van Cleve's preferred version of the psychologist interpretation is in especially bad shape as it is almost entirely lacking in textual support. (Indeed, Van Cleve himself cites no passages that support his adverbialist reading directly, pointing instead only at 'hints' (cf., op.cit. 260n13).) Nevertheless, apparently at least one of Kant's earliest critics, F.H. Jacobi, was also drawn to the adverbialist interpretation – or perhaps better: reinterpretation – of Kant; compare Henrich 2003: 111-127.

of content, according to which the content of a cognition is the object to which it is related, and hence, nothing ‘psychological’ or ‘subjective’ at all.⁴

As I have already indicated above, I myself will defend a third interpretation, one according to which Kant identifies the content of a cognition, neither with some feature peculiar to any one individual mental state, nor with the object of the cognition, but rather with something much closer to what functions in Frege’s account as the components of ‘thoughts [Gedanken]’ – namely, what Frege calls ‘sense [Sinn]’.⁵ This is because Kant takes the content of a cognition to consist in the distinctive and objective way in which a cognition representationally *relates* the subject to a particular object. As Frege puts the point, the content of a cognition is the particular ‘mode of being given [Art des Gegebenseins]’ an object that pertains to the cognition.⁶

Now, I am not the first to suggest that Kant’s views on cognitive content should be interpreted along Fregean lines. Perhaps most notably, Wilfrid Sellars develops a reading of Kant in his 1966 Locke Lectures that explicitly aligns Kant’s notion of ‘content’ with Frege’s notion of sense.⁷ In this, Sellars has been joined by a handful of others⁸ – and appears, in fact, to have been anticipated by Frege himself, as I will show below. Unfortunately, however, such readers (including Sellars) have done very little to provide any positive textual support for their interpretation, let alone performing the negative task of ruling out the

⁴ Compare McDowell 1991, McDowell 2009, and Rosenberg 2007. See as well Pereboom 1988: 329, 333, 341; and more recently, Rosenkoetter 2009. I should say that I mean to use the label ‘Russellian’ here to pick out a position that the historical Russell did not in fact always hold, but that has in any case become common currency among philosophers of language to stand for a position that Russell did hold at various points throughout his career. (For this use, see, e.g., Kaplan 1975: especially 718 and 728-9.)

⁵ Cf., Frege, ‘On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*’, Frege 1984: 162.

⁶ Frege uses this phrase in ‘On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*’ (cf., Frege 1984: 157); compare as well ‘The Thought’, where Frege describes the sense of a proper name as ‘a matter of the way that which is designated is given [gegeben]’ (Frege 1984: 359).

⁷ Compare Sellars 1968: II §3 et seq (32f) and especially III §§1-14 (60-67).

⁸ Compare Knauss 1974: 71-76; Parsons 1983: 96; more recently, Hanna 2001: 137; and Greenberg 2001: 59n8, 64 and 65n9. For the converse claim – that Frege’s conception of ‘Sinn’ places his views in close accord with Kant’s own – see Dummett 2001: 13; for an interpretation of Frege’s work as a whole as deeply Kantian in spirit, see Sluga 1980.

alternative interpretive proposals mentioned above. This is particularly unfortunate, as the question of textual evidence is a rather pressing one, for, as I will show below, there are several texts in which Kant does appear to be endorsing one of the other conceptions of content. Until such texts and other interpretive matters are addressed, the existing gestures at a Fregean reading can only be judged to be programmatic at best. My task in what follows could thus be described, in part, as helping to transform what has hitherto been a sketch of a reading into an interpretation proper.

This brings me to the second, more positive task that I set for myself above – namely, to present both direct textual evidence as well as other more systematic considerations that demonstrate that Kant accepts a broadly Fregean view of cognitive content. At this point, it will be worth saying something more concrete about what I mean by ‘broadly Fregean’. I will count a view as broadly Fregean if it embraces the following six Theses:

- (1) The act/object distinction: Two different acts of cognition can represent one and the same object, which means that the object of a cognition cannot (in general) be identical with a particular feature of one individual mental act of representing.
- (2) The relation/object distinction: Two different cognitions that represent one and the same object can nevertheless each relate to it in different ways.
- (3) The ‘content-as-relation’ thesis: The content of any given cognition is the way in which it representationally relates to its object,

which, along with (2), implies:

- (4) The content/object distinction: The content of a cognition is not identical with its object.

- (5) The act/content distinction: Two acts of cognizing can represent one and the same object in one and the same way – i.e., can share the same content – which means that the content of a cognition cannot in general be indexed to a feature particular to one individual mental act of cognizing,

which, along with (1), implies:

- (6) The ‘objectivity of objects and contents’ thesis: neither the objects nor the contents of our cognitions have identities that are exhausted by the individual acts of representing that involve them, such that both the objects of our cognitions as well as the ways of relating to such objects (i.e., the contents of our cognitions) have a standing that is not (in general) dependent on any of our actual mental activity.⁹

Obviously there is more to Frege’s own conception of content than is contained in these Theses. Let me emphasize, first of all, then, that a view can count as ‘broadly Fregean’ in this sense *even if* it does not endorse *all* of Frege’s other commitments. Let me emphasize, secondly, that I *only* mean to be arguing here that Kant’s views are broadly Fregean in this respect. In particular, my main thesis is compatible with the existence of disagreements between Kant and Frege on other points.¹⁰

My positive task here will thus be completed if I can show that Kant is committed to these six Theses. And since Thesis (4) is incompatible with Russellianism and Thesis (6) is incompatible with a psychologistic semantics, to show that Kant is committed to these

⁹ For Frege’s commitment to Theses (1), (5), and (6), see especially ‘The Thought’; for his commitment to (2), (3), and (4), see especially ‘On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*’ (both in Frege 1984) – though each of these commitments are expressed repeatedly in Frege’s mature writings. (The parenthetical qualifications are due to what would be true of cases of self-reference.)

¹⁰ In a note to the final section, I take up one such point of at least *prima facie* disagreement concerning Kant’s belief that a mental act of synthesis or ‘combination [Verbindung]’ is involved in many, if not all, cognitions (cf., §15 of the first *Critique*).

theses will contribute directly to the negative task as well, as it will demonstrate the inadequacy of the competing interpretations.

One of the payoffs of winning through to a more accurate view of Kant's conception of cognitive content will be to remedy the surprising neglect of this topic by most of Kant's commentators. For though many of Kant's readers make use of phrases like 'the content of a representation' when explaining Kant's texts, surprisingly few ever state explicitly or precisely what they themselves mean by 'content', let alone say whether any of Kant's own terms has a significance that lines up with the one they are ascribing to 'content', or say, in particular, whether the words that get translated as 'content' in Kant's texts have this (or, for that matter, any other determinate) significance.¹¹

Having a better grasp of Kant's views on cognitive content in general also promises to help bring into sharper relief what is, and what is not, at stake in one of the more energetically debated issues in Kant-interpretation as of late – namely, the question of whether Kant accepts *non-conceptual* cognitive content in particular.¹² In the concluding section I sketch how the interpretation I have developed here might help to better frame this debate.

¹¹ A particularly striking example of this is Dickerson 2004. Dickerson uses 'content' multiple times on almost every other page, yet without either ever explaining what he himself means by the term, identifying the term or terms of Kant's that he is translating by 'content', or pausing to explain what Kant himself might have meant by the (German) terms. What is more, even those that I have identified above as putting forward Russellian and psychologistic readings of Kant – indeed, as I have noted above, even those who have indicated their sympathy for the Fregean reading itself – have confined themselves largely to a handful of assertions rather than devoted themselves to anything like sustained textual analysis.

In fact, the terms 'content' and 'Inhalt' have not been singled out to receive entries in two of the more influential dictionaries and lexicons of Kant's writings; cf., Eisler 1930: 273; and more recently Caygill 1995: 131. (Eisler's omission has been noted by Rosenkoetter 2009: 205n14.)

¹² See the works cited below in note 55.

§2. Acts and objects of representations

Let me begin to build my case for reading Kant as a Fregean by noting two features that Kant ascribes to every ‘representation [Vorstellung]’, and so *a fortiori* to the species of representation – namely, *cognition* – that we will be focused upon here.¹³ First, Kant believes that all representations are, in some sense, mental *acts*.¹⁴ Second, like Descartes before him and Brentano after him, Kant also takes there to be something about representations that serves to relate or direct the mind or the subject to some further object. Kant’s way of putting this is that ‘all representations, as representations, have their object’ (A108) – where ‘have’ here is used in what is now called an ‘intentional’ sense of this term.¹⁵

To be sure, this last point might seem to be denied by Kant at certain moments, where he seems to speak as if certain representations can be ‘without’ objects.¹⁶ Here, though, it is worth noting the breadth of the scope of Kant’s use of ‘object’ in the context of objects of representation. Consider, for example, what Kant calls ‘practical’ representations, such as imperatives. Kant takes all of these representations to ‘have’ objects as well; indeed, he devotes a whole section of the second *Critique* to the concept of an object of pure

¹³ Kant classifies ‘cognition [Erkenntnis]’ as a species of ‘Vorstellung überhaupt’ in the passage commonly known as the ‘Stufenleiter’: ‘The genus is *representation* as such (repraesentatio). Under this stands representation with consciousness (perceptio). A *perception* that is related merely to the subject as a modification of its state is *sensation* (sensatio), an objective perception is *cognition* (cognitio). This is either intuition or concept (intuitus vel conceptus)’ (B376-77).

¹⁴ In particular, representations are acts in the sense of being actualizations of a certain ‘capacity [Vermögen; Fähigkeit]’ or ‘power [Kraft]’ possessed by our minds (cf., B34, B51, B129-30, B150). Kant also puts this point by saying that all representations are ‘modifications’ or ‘inner determinations’ of ‘the mind [Gemüt]’ or ‘the state [Zustand] of the subject’ (cf., B242, B376, B50).

¹⁵ Kant himself does not use ‘intentional’ in the sense made familiar by Brentano and his followers, which pertains to all acts of representation. Rather, Kant uses this term and its cognates (‘intentional’, ‘Intentionalität’, ‘absichtlich’) to distinguish activity that is teleological and so end-directed from activity which is merely mechanical (cf., *Critique of Judgment* §§72-73, though this usage is continuous throughout the ‘Critique of Teleological Judgment’). In *this* sense, it is fairly clear that Kant would *not* claim that, say, the having of sensations or intuitions is an ‘intentional’ rather than ‘mechanical’ activity. For this reason, I think that both Sellars and Husserl are right to caution against taking the language of ‘acts’ in these contexts to have the significance of (deliberative) ‘action’ or ‘activity’, pointing instead to the older Aristotelian tradition’s use of ‘act’ in the broader sense of ‘actualization’; compare Sellars 1968: ch. III §§37-38; and Husserl 1900-1: 5th Inv., §13. In this I disagree with McDowell, who appears to take the language of spontaneity to signal an identification on Kant’s part of understanding and practical freedom; compare McDowell 1996: lectures I-II.

¹⁶ In the first *Critique*, cf., B75, 348; in the second *Critique*, cf., 5:135 and 143.

practical reason (cf., 5:57f). This is so, despite the fact that not one of these practical objects (i.e., what is good or evil (5:58)) might ever ‘exist’ in nature (cf., B830), and so could not be experienced by us. In fact, Kant even takes the representation expressed by ‘nothing [Nichts]’ to have an object, albeit a peculiar one – namely, an ‘empty object [leerer Gegenstand]’ (cf., B349).¹⁷

This implies that Kant must have a specific kind of object in mind when he claims that certain representations are ‘without objects’. Given the contexts of these claims, the natural gloss would seem to be that not all representations have *real* objects or objects that can also be *intuited* or *experienced* by us.¹⁸ Kant’s maintaining that not all representations have the same *kind* of object, however, is surely compatible with the initial claim about the intentionality of all representations.

§3. Acts and objects of cognitions

Now, as I noted above, my focus here will be on the particular species of representation that Kant calls ‘cognition [Erkenntnis]’. Cognitions in general are one of the species of representations that are ‘with consciousness’, the other being ‘sensations [Empfindungen]’ (B376). Kant takes there to be, in turn, two species of cognitions. On the

¹⁷ On representations of non-existent objects, see Pereboom 1988: 333f. This point about the generality of the sense of ‘object’ in this context should also be kept in mind as well when Kant says, as he often does, particularly in the third *Critique*, that ‘sensations [Empfindungen]’ and especially ‘feelings [Gefühle]’ contrast with concepts and intuitions, and cognitions more generally, in that only cognitions are related to objects, while sensations and feelings relate instead to the subject doing the representing (cf., *Critique of Judgment* §1 (5:203-4) and §3 (5:206)). Here again Kant’s point would ultimately not seem to be that there is no object whatsoever to which these representations are related, but rather that there is no such ‘outer’ object, no object distinct from the subject itself. Even so, in these cases there *is* a very special object to which we are related by such representations – namely, *ourselves*, the subject of the representation itself. Compare B376-77: ‘A perception that is related [bezieht sich] merely to the subject as the modification of its state is a sensation (*sensatio*)’. This characterization of sensation comes up quite frequently in his lectures on logic; compare *Busolt Logic* (24:620), *Pölitz Logic* (24:519 and 565), *Dobna-Wundlacken Logic* (24:702 and 730), and *Vienna Logic* 24:805 and 904. Even so, this construal of Kant’s doctrine of sensation has not been without its critics; for an alternative interpretation which denies all intentionality to sensations, see George 1981.

¹⁸ Indeed, as the contexts of the passages cited in the previous note make clear, Kant’s point in these cases is that it is this particular kind of object that the relevant representations fail to have (i.e., one that can be intuited or experienced by us) and not that the representations fail to have an object of any sort whatsoever.

one hand, there are ‘concepts [Begriffe]’, which relate to their objects ‘mediately, by means of a mark [Merkmal] that can be common [gemein] to many things’ (B377). On the other hand there are ‘intuitions [Anschauungen]’, which are cognitions that are ‘singular’ and relate to their objects ‘immediately’ (B377).

The key feature that Kant takes to distinguish cognitions in general from sensations is that they are ‘objective’ representations, or representations that ‘are related [beziehen sich] to an object’ and not ‘merely to the subject’ (B376-77). What Kant seems to have in mind in emphasizing the ‘objectivity’ of cognitions is the fact that the objects they ‘have’ (or are intentionally directed toward) are objects that are available to be the object of *other* acts of cognition as well. Now, if this were true, then since an object of cognition itself could not thereby be identical with any of the acts of cognizing that represent it, it would follow that Kant endorses the act/object distinction, or what I have identified above in §1 as Thesis (1).

Is this true? Kant clearly believes this to hold of our intuitions: the objects of our empirical intuitions are objective in this sense, insofar as they are publicly available for perception, encounterable by any of us, located in one and the same space and time that we all inhabit, and so on.¹⁹ Kant also believes this to be true of our concepts, at least those that are ‘objectively valid’ in the robust sense of this term, since this notion of ‘objective validity’ is something Kant spells out precisely in terms of the cognition being one that is valid ‘for *everyone* and me at *all* times’ (cf., among other places, *Prolegomena* §19, 4:298-99).²⁰ This implies (at the very least) that it will be valid for *one and the same* thing to be represented whenever and by whomever.

¹⁹ This is what Pereboom calls ‘the recognition-transcendent character’ of objects of cognition; cf., Pereboom 1988: 336. For further emphasis on this point, see Hanna 2001: 65, 76, and 154f; see also Collins 1999, and Bird 2006.

²⁰ Kant’s use of this term fluctuates to some degree; Kant identifies objective validity with truth at A125 and B816. More frequently he identifies objective validity with ‘reality [Realität]’ (B44, B52). At other times Kant appears to give it an even broader connotation; at Bxxvi-n, for example, he identifies objective validity instead with ‘real [reale] possibility’.

Of course, Kant does not think that all concepts *are* objectively valid in the robust sense of being true of something real, or corresponding to something actual. Even so, Kant also draws this distinction even in the case of concepts that are not valid of anything or thoughts that are not true of anything. To see that Kant does so, we can look to his explanation of what distinguishes true from false thoughts or concepts.²¹ Kant takes truth to be a feature or property that can be exemplified by the *relation* between an object and a cognition – namely, one that is exemplified in cases where the relation at issue is one of correspondence or agreement. This is something that emerges in the most important discussion of truth in the first *Critique*, in one of the many places where Kant tells us that he accepts the traditional definition of truth: ‘the nominal definition of truth – namely, that it is the correspondence [Übereinstimmung] of cognition with its object – is here granted and presupposed’ (B82).²²

What is of equal relevance to us, however, is that Kant here also makes clear that he takes *falsity* as well to be a feature or property of a cognition’s relation to an object. To be sure, in the case of falsity, the relevant relation will not be one of agreement, but instead one of *opposition*. As Kant puts it, a cognition that is false ‘does not agree with [nicht übereinstimmt mit] the object *to which it is related* [worauf sie bezogen wird]’ (B83; my ital.), such that false cognitions actually ‘contradict [widersprechen] the object’ to which they are

²¹ Kant takes truth and falsity (‘error’) to pertain paradigmatically to cognitions that involve concepts, such as judgments or thoughts (cf., B350), though at times he also applies them to concepts directly (cf., B670).

²² Kant repeats this definition in the ‘Second Analogy’ (‘the agreement [Übereinstimmung] of cognition with the object [Object] is truth’ (B236)) and at many other places throughout his work. Further instances in the first *Critique* include B196-7, B296, B670, B848; elsewhere, see *Prolegomena* §5 (4:279); *Jäsche Logic* §VII (9:50f); R2155 [late 1770’s, early 1780’s] (16:254); *Dohna Wundtackten Logic* 24:709; *Busolt Logic* 24:627; *Wiener Logic* 24:823. I am not convinced, therefore, by Gerold Prauss who argues that Kant’s acceptance of the traditional definition at B82 is only rhetorical or temporary, given the particular point in the argumentative dialectic that we have reached in the text; cf., Prauss 1969. I am also not convinced by attempts by Kemp Smith 1918 and Windelband 1884 to argue that Kant actually rejects the traditional correspondence theory in favor of a coherence theory. For an early criticism of the latter interpretation, see Franz Brentano’s 1889 ‘Über der Begriff der Wahrheit’, reprinted in Brentano 1930. For further discussion of Kant on truth, see Tolley 2012: §2.

related (B84). Even so, this should not cover over the fact that a false cognition *is still related to* an object – and, moreover, is related to one and the same object it would have been related to, were it to be true. We can conclude, therefore, first, that even false cognitions are related to objects that are objective or public in the sense that they can be objects of further cognitions; at the very least, their objects can also be the objects of correlative true cognitions.

In fact, Kant's doctrine of truth and falsity not only confirms Kant's commitment to our Thesis (1), it also confirms Kant's commitment to our Thesis (2) above as well, concerning the distinction between a cognition's relation to its object and the object itself. The example of correlative true and false judgments it shows that Kant clearly allows for two cognitions to 'have' (i.e., be related to) one and the same object, but yet differ as to the *kind* of relation that they bear to this object (agreement vs. opposition).

Of course, Kant also allows for two cognitions that are both true or valid of the same object to relate to their objects in distinct ways. Kant allows, for example, that we can have two different *intuitions* of the same object: one and the same ship on a river can be perceived first upstream then downstream, and that one and the same house can be perceived from different angles (cf., B236-38). Kant also allows for two *concepts* to represent the same thing. This follows from Kant's account of what he calls 'convertible concepts [Wechselbegriffe]', such as <necessary> and <unalterable>, which 'have one and the same sphere' of things to which they apply (*Dohna-Wundlacken Logic* 24:755).²³ Finally, Kant also clearly allows that we can both *conceive* of (think) and *intuit* one and the same object – when, say, I see an individual house and then go on to think of it in terms of its sharing a 'mark' in

²³ See also *Jäsche Logic* §12 (9:98). Other examples of convertible concepts are <objective validity> and <necessary universal validity for everyone> (cf., *Prolegomena* §18), as well as <freedom> and <the will's own law-giving> (cf., *Grundwerk* 4:450); for a few more, see R2886 (16:561). (Throughout I will use angle-brackets to refer to the concepts expressed by words they enclose.)

common with other objects – i.e., that of being a house.²⁴ In the first case, my cognition (intuition) is related to the house immediately, while in the second case my cognition (thought, concept) of it is related to it only mediately; nevertheless, in both cases, it is the same house being represented. All of these cases confirm that the particular relation that any cognition bears to its object cannot be identical with the object itself, and so establish that Kant embraces Thesis (2).

§4. Content as object?

So far we have identified three of Kant's commitments concerning cognitions. First, cognitions (like all representations) are mental acts; second, (also like all representations) they possess intentionality in that they are related to objects; and third, their objects are 'objective' in the sense that they can be represented by multiple different acts, by multiple different subjects, via different kinds of relations. We have not yet, however, indulged in any talk of the 'content' of cognition, and in particular have not identified the content with any of the features so far enumerated.

As I noted at the outset, an increasing number of Kant's recent readers have been drawn to what I called above a 'Russellian' account of cognitive content, according to which the content of a cognition simply *is* its object.²⁵ Often such interpretations take as their starting point the first distinction that we have focused on above, that between acts of representing and their objects, typically with reference to Wilfrid Sellars' well-known way of drawing attention to a distinction in this neighborhood. Sellars notes that an '-ing/-ed' ambiguity lies in the term 'representation' and its German correlate, 'Vorstellung', pointing out that this term is used as often to refer to a mental act of representing (*das Vorstellen*) as it

²⁴ Cf., 'On a Discovery' (8:218n), and *Jäsche Logic* §V (9:33).

²⁵ See the works cited in note 4 above.

is to what is represented (*das, was vorgestellt ist*) in such an act.²⁶ Yet unlike Sellars himself, who is careful to *distinguish* between what is represented in such acts and their objects, these other readers *identify* what is represented in a representation with the object of that representation. This identification is particularly common in discussions of the contents of intuitions,²⁷ though at times it is extended to concepts, thoughts, or even to all representations as well. In *Mind and World*, John McDowell, for example, notes that ‘thought’ can be used to mean ‘the act of thinking’ as well as ‘the content of a piece of thinking’ (28), and goes on to claim that, on the Kantian view, ‘reality’, or the empirical world itself, ‘is precisely not outside the sphere of thinkable content’, nor is it outside of what ‘we take in’ in sense-perception (41).²⁸ In *Accessing Kant*, Jay Rosenberg extends this point to all representations, claiming that, for Kant, ‘a ‘representation’...might be either a representing (act) or a represented (object)’ (63).²⁹

²⁶ See (among other places) Sellars 1968: II §7 (34). This ambiguity inherent in the term ‘Vorstellung’ was already emphasized by several authors writing in the immediate wake of Kant’s texts. In §2 of his broadly Kantian *Grundriß der allgemeinen Logik*, L.H. von Jakob, for example, insists that we separate ‘das Etwas, welches vorgestellt wird’ from ‘das Vorstellen selbst’, and identifies the former with ‘der Inhalt, das Object, oder die Materie’ (Jakob 1788: 2). For similar remarks on the same distinction, compare C.G. Bardili 1800: 77f; and Herbart 1808: 217.

²⁷ Pereboom, for example, claims that, for Kant, ‘the central notion of an object is that of the content of an intuition’ (Pereboom 1988: 341); it is unclear, however, whether he also thinks Kant understands the content of concepts to also consist in objects.

²⁸ McDowell claims that the ‘content’ of both acts of thinking as well as veridical acts of perceiving consists in ‘an aspect of the layout of the world’ (McDowell 1996: 26), a ‘perceptible fact’, such that ‘facts in general’, and with it, the world, are ‘capable of being embraced *in* thought’ as well as in perception (op.cit. 27-28; my ital.; cf., 33).

²⁹ Rosenberg later applies this analysis specifically to the case of intuitions, claiming that an ‘intuition’, too, ‘can be either the act of intuiting some item or the intuited item that is the object of such an act’ (Rosenberg 2007: 97); to my knowledge, he does not, however, explicitly make the same claim concerning concepts or thoughts. For an earlier version of this interpretation, compare Kemp Smith 1918: 79. (It is worth noting, however, that at one point Kemp Smith suggests that Kant does mean to draw a distinction between ‘Inhalt’ and ‘Gegenstand’ used in the strict sense’ (cf., op.cit. 167n8) – even if Kemp Smith then goes on to claim that Kant ends up failing to keep to such a distinction (cf., op.cit. 174).) Kant’s awareness of the ‘-ing’/‘-ed’ ambiguity is something acknowledged by Van Cleve as well (cf., Van Cleve 1999: 7), though this acknowledgement occurs prior to Van Cleve’s proposal for the ultimate elimination, on Kant’s behalf, of the second dimension of representations, in favor of a construal of a represented object as merely ‘virtual’, such that this concept is eliminable in favor of the concept of an adverbial modification of the act of representing.

Though most of these authors do not provide us with textual evidence that Kant held a Russellian view of content,³⁰ there are, in fact, some passages which might be taken to support this interpretation. In a fragment from the 1760s-1770s, for example, Kant writes that ‘logic...does not treat cognitions according to content [Inhalt] (object), but rather merely the form of understanding, i.e., according to the thinking in them’ (R1721, 16:93). To be sure, Kant more frequently identifies the object with the ‘matter [Materie]’ of a representation.³¹ Yet at times Kant also appears to identify the content of a representation with its matter. At B83-84, for example, Kant speaks more generically of ‘the content’ or ‘matter’ of a ‘cognition’, saying that he himself ‘has named the content of a cognition its matter’.³² By transitivity, then, the passages aligning the matter with the object would seem to so align the content as well, which means that these texts would also seem to support the Russellian interpretation.

³⁰ Surprisingly, neither McDowell or Rosenberg cite any passages as evidence of their views. Pereboom, by contrast, does at least attempt to provide some textual support for his thesis, though he does not refer to any of the passages I mention below. Unfortunately, the two passages that Pereboom does point to as supporting the identification of ‘content’ do no such thing. Pereboom refers to B236 and a January 20, 1792 letter to J.S. Beck (10:314) (cf., Pereboom 1988:329 and 348-49n10), but in both of these passages, what Kant actually identifies with the object of a representation is what he calls a ‘collection [Inbegriff] of representations’. For some reason, Pereboom renders as ‘Inbegriff’ as ‘content’ of representations.

³¹ The vast majority of these identifications are found in the notes and fragments (*Reflexionen*) Kant made on logic: cf., R1694 [1770s] (16:85-6); R2324 [1780s] (16:315); R1620 [1780s] (16:40); R1628 [1780s] (16:45); R1627 [1790s] (16:43); R6350 [1797] (18:677). We find traces of this in Benjamin Jäsche’s 1800 *Immanuel Kants Logik*; §2: ‘the matter of concepts is the object’ (9:91). Care must be taken with Jäsche’s text, however, since, though the work often referred to as ‘Kant’s logic’, it represents Jäsche’s attempt to fashion a textbook out of the notes and fragments on logic that Kant had collected over his career as a lecturer on logic, and there is no evidence whatsoever that Kant had any first-hand acquaintance with Jäsche’s text at any stage of its composition or publication; cf., Young 1991. In any case, the latter appears to have been taken by Jäsche more or less directly from an early Reflexion; cf., R2834 (1760s): ‘The matter of all concepts is the object’ (16:536).

The only places that I am aware of in the published works where Kant comes close to making this identification both occur within the first *Critique*: the first is at B87, where Kant appears to align ‘matter’ with ‘object’, in his claim that experience is what ‘alone can give us the matter (objects) [Materie (Objecte)] to which those pure concepts of the understanding can be applied’; the second is at B318, where Kant suggests that ‘content [Inhalt]’ of a concept has to do with the ‘things[Dinge]’, as opposed to the concept’s form.

³² For this alignment, see as well B87, B9, and, beyond the first *Critique*, also R3070 (1790s): ‘the matter of concepts, i.e., their content [Inhalt]’ (16:641). Hanna claims that Kant tends to use ‘content [Inhalt]’ when discussing the content of a concept or thought, and uses ‘matter [Materie]’ when discussing the content of an intuition or an appearance (cf., Hanna 2001: 18). While there are some texts that do seem to point in this direction – for example, B34, B60, and B74 – the passages cited above which unqualifiedly identify the *Inhalt* with the *Materie* of a cognition show that Kant’s usage is not fixed. (Here it is worth recalling that both intuitions and concepts are classified as cognitions (in the broad sense) at B376-7.)

Such an interpretation is also not without systematic or conceptual motivation, especially in the case of the content of intuitions. As we have seen, Kant takes one of the distinctive features of intuitions to be that they, and they *alone*, are cognitions that are related to their objects ‘immediately’ (cf., B33, B93, and B377). Kant also claims repeatedly that what is ‘given’ to us by way of this immediate relation is precisely an object (cf., B33 and B74). Finally, at least with respect to empirical intuitions, Kant takes such cognitions to ‘presuppose the actual presence [die wirkliche Gegenwart] of the object’ they are representing (B74).³³ For all of these reasons, then, it might seem that the only thing that *could* function as the content of an intuition, for Kant, could be its object.³⁴

§5. Content as ‘relation to an object’

As we have emphasized throughout, however, intuitions are not the only kind of cognitions that Kant recognizes. Nor are the above texts the only passages in which Kant speaks about the content of cognition. In fact, as I will now show, there is textual evidence from the first *Critique* itself that points us away from Russellianism and directly toward the broadly Fregean picture I sketched in §1. Such texts strongly suggest that Kant’s considered view is that the content of a cognition should be identified, not with its object, but rather with the ‘*relation* [Beziehung; Verhältniß]’ that a cognition bears to its object – and therefore shows that Kant accepts our Thesis (3) above.

More importantly, this textual evidence is readily supplemented and confirmed by more systematic considerations, as I will show in the next section (§6). There I will argue that central features of Kant’s account of concepts actually prohibits him from maintaining a

³³ Compare *Prolegomena* §8: ‘intuition is a representation of the sort which would depend immediately on the presence of an object’ (4:281).

³⁴ Pereboom’s identification of the contents of intuitions with their objects, for example, seems to be especially motivated by his desire to remain consistent Kant’s commitment to the immediacy of intuitions; cf., Pereboom 1988: 333f.

Russellian view of their contents, and likewise point fairly straightforwardly in the direction of the Fregean position. After this (in §7), I will return to the considerations presented at the end of §4 concerning intuitions in particular, to show that there are good systematic reasons for thinking that Kant actually accepts a Fregean account of the contents of intuitions as well.

First, though, some textual evidence. Kant's most straightforward assertion of a commitment to Thesis (3) – the 'content-as-relation' Thesis – comes at the outset of the *Transcendental Analytic*, where Kant identifies the content of a cognition with its relation to an object no less than three times:

General logic abstracts from all content [Inhalt] of cognition, i.e., from any *relation* [Beziehung] of it to the object.... (B79)

It is clear that, in the case of [a general criterion for truth], one abstracts from all content [Inhalt] of cognition (relation [Beziehung] to its object).... (B83)

No cognition can contradict [the transcendental analytic] without it at once losing all content [Inhalt], i.e., all relation [Beziehung] to an object. (B87)³⁵

To be sure, these passages occur at the outset of the *Transcendental Logic*, and so it might be worried whether Kant means for this characterization of content to apply specifically to the representations of understanding – i.e., concepts. To assuage this worry, we can note that the same sort of characterization of what is 'contained in' intuitions of outer and inner sense can be found in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* as well:

[O]uter sense can also *contain* [enthalten] in its representation only the *relation* [Verhältnis] of an object to the subject, and not that which is internal to the object in itself. It is exactly the same in the case of inner sense. (B67; my ital.)

Taking these texts together, Kant's view on cognitive content would seem to be straightforward enough: the *Inhalt* of a cognition (what is contained in it) is to be identified with its *Beziehung* (*Verhältnis*) to an object.

³⁵ See also B189 and B298.

Even so, we have just been provided with a series of texts in the previous section which seem to suggest the opposite position. Hence, if we going to be able to provide Kant with a consistent position,³⁶ it is hard to see how we could avoid explaining away one or the other batch of texts. How should we then proceed?

In general, it would seem to be a much more promising approach (a) to view the texts from the notes and fragments as ones in which words were omitted due to haste, leaving only a kind of short-hand, rather than (b) to insist upon striking out words from texts that were actually prepared for publication. This approach would allow us to see the *prima facie* ‘Russellian’-leaning texts taken from the notes and fragments presented in the previous section – ones that appear to identify the content with the object – as ultimately elliptical. That is, in such texts we can take Kant’s chief aim to be noting that the content of a representation is essentially connected to (even if not reducible to) its object – roughly: content pertains to the object-side of things, as it were – rather than being merely a feature of a representation that is related solely to the subject-side of things – e.g., to the representation’s standing as an act or modification of a subject’s mind. Such an approach would also keep the center of interpretive gravity where it should be, other things being equal – namely on the published texts rather than on Kant’s unpublished notes and fragments.

What is more, if we look more closely at many of the unpublished passages in which Kant does appear to identify the matter of a cognition with its object, what we find is that Kant is actually aiming to draw more or less the same distinction that is of primary concern to the Fregean – namely, the distinction between the object of a cognition and the *way* in

³⁶ To make the inconsistency explicit: if it is plausible to think that the relation that a something A bears to another thing B is something distinct from B itself, then from this it would follow that the relation that a cognition bears to an object is something that is distinct from the object itself. But then this would mean that Kant would be identifying the content of a cognition with two distinct things.

which the object is being represented. Indeed, in these passages what Kant contrasts with the matter or object of a cognition is ‘the *way* in which [die Art, wie] we represent the object’, what Kant here calls the *form* of the cognition (*Jäsche Logic* §V, 9:33; my ital.).³⁷ Moreover, the most typical contrast among forms (in this sense) that Kant is interested in drawing is that between the form of representing an object *conceptually* and the form of representing an object *intuitively*.³⁸ Relative to such a distinction, the contrast between form and matter might be sufficient to get out one of Kant’s central theses concerning the difference between concepts and intuitions. This is his claim that, though one and the same object – say, this house in which I am sitting – can be represented both conceptually and intuitively, these two ways (“forms”) of representing the object are nevertheless distinct *in kind*, since in the one case, the house is being represented immediately, while in the other, it is only being represented mediately.

This leaves it open, however, that Kant would ultimately recognize a further distinction in the course of a more fine-grained analysis of cognitions. In fact, such a distinction is required by a fact that we have already met with above (§3) – namely, the fact that he allows for two distinct cognitions with the same ‘form’ in *this* sense (e.g., two distinct concepts or two distinct intuitions) to have one and the same object. In the next two sections, I will show that it is precisely this further varying aspect of the cognitions at issue that Kant means to identify with their content.

³⁷ Jäsche appears to have taken this example more or less directly from one or another of the transcripts of Kant’s logic lectures to which he seems to have had access. Here is Jäsche’s text: ‘In jeder Erkenntniß muß unterschieden werden Materie, d.i. der Gegenstand, und Form, d.i. die Art, wie wir den Gegenstand erkennen’ (9:33). Now compare *Pölitx Logic*: ‘In jedem Erkenntniß muß unterschieden werden, Materie, d.i. Gegenstand, und Form d.i. die Art wie wir den Gegenstand erkennen’ (24:510); compare as well *Busolt Logic*: ‘Materie ist der Gegenstand des Erkenntnißes, Form, die Art, wie wir die Gegenstände erkennen’ (24:609); and *Vienna Logic*: ‘In allem Denken ist Materie und Form. Materie betrifft den Gegenstand, und Form die Art der Behandlung’ (24:790); compare, finally, the *Dobna-Wundlacken Logic*, in which the point is made by using ‘content’ instead of ‘matter’: ‘Der Inhalt einer Erkenntnis ist das Objekt oder die Materie und wird von der Form unterschieden’ (24:693).

³⁸ See the context of the passages from the previous note.

§6. Content vs. object in Kant's doctrines of truth and synthetic judgments

Let me show, first, how Kant explicitly appeals to the act/content/object distinction in his doctrine of concepts. This distinction is something that underwrites two key components of Kant's mature thought about concepts. The first is one that we have already touched upon above – namely, Kant's doctrine of truth and falsity. The second is Kant's doctrine of synthetic judgments.

Recall from §3 that Kant takes both truth and falsity to be features or properties that can be exemplified by the representational *relation* between an object and a concept, thought, or judgment – namely, ones that are exemplified in cases where the relation at issue is one of correspondence (agreement) or opposition, respectively (cf., B83). Now, we have just seen in the previous section (§5) that Kant uses 'Inhalt' to refer to exactly this relation. Hence, the fact that Kant explains the distinction between truth and falsity in terms of a difference in the kind of relation that the relevant conceptual cognition can bear to their objects suggests that Kant will also take the difference between truth and falsity to be a difference that pertains to the *contents* of cognitions.

In fact, this is exactly what Kant does claim in the very discussion of truth in the first *Critique* we cited above. This discussion itself contains one of the passages in which Kant explicitly identifies 'the content [Inhalt] of cognition' with its 'relation [Beziehung] to its object' (B83). What is more, here Kant claims equally explicitly that 'truth concerns *precisely* this content [gerade diesen Inhalt angeht]' of cognitions (B83; my ital.), and then asks after 'the mark of the truth *of this content* of cognition' (B83; my ital.).

It is hard to see how the Russellian reading can accommodate this feature of Kant's views. Because Kant allows for both true and false cognitions to have the same object, were he to be Russellian, Kant would have to accept that both true and false cognitions have the

same content. As we have now seen, however, Kant is quite clear that this is not the approach he means to take. Instead, Kant takes the difference between true and false cognitions to ‘pertain precisely to content’, understood as the relation of the cognition to its object.

The same conclusion follows perhaps even more directly from Kant’s account of the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments. Consider the following two judgments: the one expressed by ‘ $7+5 = 12$ ’ and the one expressed by ‘All bodies are extended’. In *Prolegomena* §2, Kant takes the first to be synthetic, while he takes the second to be analytic (cf. 4:266f). Nevertheless, Kant also takes both ‘ $7+5$ ’ and ‘ 12 ’, as well as ‘body’ and ‘extended thing’, to express pairs of concepts that ‘have’ or intend one and the same object. The latter two each relate to one and the same ‘mark [Merkmal]’ or property³⁹ (being extended) (cf., B12), albeit covertly in the case of ‘body’, while the first two each relate to one and the same number (the number twelve) (cf., B15).⁴⁰

What is most significant for our purposes, however, is the way in which Kant goes on to mark the difference between the two types of judgment in *Prolegomena* §2. Kant states quite clearly that the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments is one that is to be drawn ‘according to the *content* [Inhalt]’ of the cognitions involved in the judgment (4:266; my ital.). In the analytic case, Kant claims that ‘nothing is added to the *content* [Inhalt] of the cognition’ functioning as the subject by the predicate-concept, whereas in the synthetic case,

³⁹ Compare R2278 (1770s): ‘Each concept always represents a general mark of certain things’ (16:297). In R2886 Kant identifies <extension> and <body> as ‘convertible concepts’ (16:561).

⁴⁰ Kant makes this same point again, though in slightly different terms, in his November 1788 letter to Johann Schultz: ‘I can form a concept of one and the same magnitude through many different kinds of composition and separation..., such that each concept is objectively identical...even though they are very different subjectively, according to the way of composition that I think in order to arrive at each concept’ (10:555). From this Kant concludes that though ‘in an arithmetical judgment, i.e., in an equation, the two concepts $3+4$ and 7 must be entirely objectively identical and thoroughly reciprocal concepts’ (10:556), it is nevertheless true that ‘my thought [Gedanke]’ of the first ‘did not at all include’ my thought of the second (10:555).

the content of the predicate-concept ‘augments’ the subject-concept’s content (ibid.; my ital.).

This is why Kant thinks that, in the case of synthetic judgment, we have to go beyond what is ‘already thought [gedacht] *in*’ either cognition, or – as he also puts it – what is ‘contained [enthaltend] *in*’ them, to something that is ‘*not at all* already thought *in*’ them (B10-11; my ital.), in order to see that the judgment is true. In this way synthetic judgments are ‘ampliative’ or ‘expansive [erweiternd]’ of our cognition in a way that analytic judgments are not (*Prolegomena* 4:266). Yet since it is the same object that is thought *of* in each of the cognitions involved on the two sides of the synthetic judgment of identity, it follows that the *object* of the second cognition cannot be what it is that ‘augments’ the first, for if this were so, the object would have to augment itself.⁴¹ Rather, what provides the augmentation is the different element that is thought *in* the second cognition alone.⁴²

⁴¹ This is worth emphasizing. The fact that Kant describes the difference between synthetic and analytic judgments as one between judgments that ‘expand’ our initial cognition and ones that merely ‘explicate’ it (cf., *Prolegomena* §2, 4:266; B10-11) is a description that only makes sense so long as we focus on the *content* of the cognition at issue and not on the object. For if we were to focus on the object, there is a sense in which synthetic judgments, too, are merely explicative, though explicative *of the object itself* – namely, by showing that the same *object* can be validly thought of in a different way. Analytic judgments, by contrast, do not explicate the object of our thought in any sense, but focus solely on the relations between contents (relations between relations to objects). In fact, Kant claims at one point that since an analytic judgment ‘is occupied only with that which is already thought in the concept’, it ‘leaves it undecided whether the concept in itself even has any relation [Beziehung] to objects’ – here: relation to any actual or existent objects – such that ‘it is enough for [the judge] to know what lies in its concept’, whereas ‘what the concept might pertain to is indifferent to him’ (B314). As Kant puts the point in a *Reflexion*, in an analytic judgment, what else might be true of the particular object that is ‘thought through’ the given cognitions is something that can ‘fall away’ from consideration, as whatever it is will be entirely ‘equivalent [gleichgültig]’ from the point of view of the judgment at issue (R4674 (1773-5), 17:645).

⁴² Kant makes this point about the identity and difference of what is thought ‘in’ such judgments quite explicitly: ‘In the analytic judgment I remain with the given concept in order to discern something about it. If it is an affirmative judgment, I only ascribe to this concept that which is already thought in it [was in ihm schon gedacht war]; if it is a negative judgment, I only exclude the opposite of this concept from it. In synthetic judgments, however, I am to go beyond the given concept in order to consider something entirely different from what is thought in it, as in a relation [Verhältniß] to it, a relation which is therefore never one of identity [Identität]’ (B193-4). Compare as well the Introduction: ‘Analytic judgments (affirmative ones) are those in which the connection of the predicate is thought *through* identity [durch Identität gedacht], but those in which this connection is thought *without* [ohne] identity are to be called synthetic judgments’ (B10-11; my ital.). For further uses of ‘identity’ in this context, compare also *Jäsche Logic* §36 (9:111), as well as R3136 from the late 1770s or 1780s (16:674) and R3043 from the 1770s (16:629).

What, then, is this non-identical something that (a) differentiates what is ‘thought’ or ‘contained’ in each case (and so that in virtue of which the two cognitions are distinct) and yet that is nevertheless also (b) not identical with the object that is being thought of? It would be natural to think that the difference in what is *contained* in the two concepts is one that pertains to their *contents*. This is, in fact, Kant’s view, as he makes clear in his lectures on logic: in general, when ‘we look to the set of representations that are *contained in* [enthaltten in] the concept itself, we are ‘considering the concept as to the *content* [Inhalt]’ (*Wiener Logic*, 24:911; my ital.). But then this simply confirms what we have already seen – namely, that Kant takes the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments to be drawn ‘according to content’.

In order to make sense, then, of the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, Kant needs to be able to draw the distinction between the content and the object of the concepts at issue. In this respect, Kant’s acceptance of this distinction goes hand in hand with his rejection of the Leibnizian account of the truth of all judgments, according to which the truth of any predication must be grounded in something already contained ‘in’ the subject-concept. If the Leibnizian were right, all true judgments would be analytic judgments in Kant’s sense, since what would be thought ‘in’ the predicate-cognition would ultimately be something identical to what is already thought ‘in’ the subject-cognition. For Kant, such a doctrine is ‘based on the presupposition that if a certain distinction is not to be found *in* the *concept* of a thing as such, then it is also not to be found in the *things* themselves’ (B337; my ital.). This is the presupposition that there could be nothing in the objects of our concepts that is not already contained or thought in our concepts of these objects – i.e., in their contents. In Kant’s eyes, however, such a presupposition is entirely without grounds:

Since, in the mere concept of any thing abstraction is made from many necessary conditions of an intuition [of that thing], it is with peculiar haste that that from

which abstraction has been made [i.e., the thing] is taken as something that is not to be encountered *at all*, and nothing conceded to the thing *except* what is contained [enthaltен] in its concept. (B337-38; my ital.).

Kant's commitment to the anti-Russellian distinction between what is 'contained in' a concept of an object, as the concept's content, and what is contained 'in' the object itself, is therefore something that runs quite deep. In fact, it lies at the very heart of Kant's anti-Leibnizianism.

§7. Content vs. object in Kant's account of intuitions

Because the Russellian account cannot do justice to Kant's account of the content of concepts, it cannot be accepted as an account of the essence of *all* cognitive content. Nevertheless, as I noted above (in §4), there are several philosophical motivations for thinking that, at least in the particular case of intuitions, the Russellian interpretation will fare much better – indeed, will perhaps be required – despite the texts cited above which point in the opposite direction. In particular, Kant's commitments to the 'immediacy' or 'givenness' of the object in an intuition, and also to the dependence of the intuition upon the 'actual presence' of the object, seemed to rule out Kant characterizing the content of intuition as anything but the object. Perhaps, then, Kant is simply committed to a disjunctive account of cognitive content, one that is Fregean with respect to conceptual content, yet Russellian with respect to intuitional content?

Closer reflection, however, will show that the aforementioned commitments are actually not *sufficient* to require that Kant endorse the Russellian picture of content even for intuitions. Recall once again (from §3) that Kant thinks that two distinct intuitions can have one and the same object. To return to an example we have already encountered, Kant allows for one and the same thing to be intuited from different angles (again, cf., B236-38). Let's consider a coin viewed edge-wise and then viewed heads-wise. Now, in each case, it is

one and the same coin that is immediately given to the mind. Nevertheless, *something* has surely changed about ‘what is intuited’ – namely, the perspective from which the coin is being viewed. What is more, what it is like to see a coin from each angle is *sensibly* different; the coin just *looks* different from the different angles. The natural thing to say here, I think, is that the difference in the point in space from which the intuition affects the very *content* of the intuition at issue – despite the fact that the object perceived has not changed in the slightest.

In fact, saying this would seem to fit perfectly well with Kant’s use of ‘content’ in the first *Critique*, since it is precisely the (spatial) *relation* to the object that has changed across the two intuitions (everything else being held fixed by hypothesis). As we saw above in §5, it is precisely this relation that Kant says in ‘contained in’ the intuition itself. What is important for us now is that this way of putting things is more than compatible with those features that were taken to motivate the Russellian interpretation in the first place (cf., end of §4): in each case, the relation to the coin is equally ‘immediate’, through each the same object is ‘given’, and each intuition depends on the actual presence of the object. What is different is merely *which* of the many possible distinct immediate relations of givenness is enjoyed.

One might worry about assigning the spatial features of an intuition to its content, since Kant frequently describes space as a *form* – e.g., as the form of appearances of outer sense (B42). To be sure, what is determined about an intuition by the spatial perspective that it contains *is* itself something that can be filled in, so to speak, in a variety of ways, depending on the kinds of *sensations* that one undergoes (whether, for example, one senses the coin, from that perspective, as particularly shiny or as uniformly colored, etc.). It is in this respect that the spatial perspective is ‘that within which sensations can be ordered and placed in a certain form’ (B34). Even so, in another respect, this form (what pertains to the

perspectival relation to the object) is itself ‘contained in’ the intuition as a whole, and so part of its content in the relevant sense.

Such a construal is also strongly suggested by two further points about intuitions. First, Kant frequently makes it sound as if at least some, if not all, of the contribution that sensation makes to an intuition is not of the right sort to be classified as part of the genuinely *cognitive* content of the intuition. This follows from Kant’s descriptions of sensations as representations that do not relate to an object *at all*, but instead ‘relate merely to the subject as a modification of its state’ (cf., B376). Now, this cannot be the whole story, in light of the much more straightforwardly cognitive and objective role that sensations are given in the Analytic of Principles, in relation to the categories of reality (B207f) and actuality (B266f).⁴³ Yet however it is that sensations might contribute to the distinctly cognitive content of an *empirical* intuition, we should recall, secondly, that Kant also thinks there are *non-empirical*, or *pure*, intuitions, intuitions ‘in which *nothing* is to be encountered that belongs to sensations’ (B34; my ital.). Such intuitions are surely cognitions, and so should have contents as well as objects, and yet (by definition) cannot have sensations as their content. A natural candidate for their content would be the spatial (and/or temporal) perspective itself, emptied of any sensory determination.⁴⁴

⁴³ This would also seem to be the role that Kant has in mind when he talks about ‘objective’ sensations in §1 and §4 of the *Critique of Judgment*.

⁴⁴ There is, of course, much more to be said on the topic of the contents and objects of pure intuitions. I have suggested that their content is a spatial or temporal perspective. One possibility for their object would be what Kant refers to as ‘the manifold of pure a priori intuitions’ (B102), with the content of such intuitions then being *merely* the (‘formal’) spatial and temporal relations to this pure manifold. Kant might have something like this when he claims that the ‘representation’ of the ‘form of intuition’ is something that ‘contains [enthält] *nothing but* relations [Verhältnisse]’ (B67; my ital.). Kant’s talk of relations here is often treated by Kant’s readers as if he had in mind only the relations among the objects of such intuitions and not the relation of these objects to the subject, though this claim itself follows directly upon Kant explicitly noting that it is ‘the relation [Verhältniß] of an object *to the subject*’ that he is concerned with (B67; my ital.).

§8. The objectivity of cognitive content

Our recent focus on the distinction between the objective cognitive content of intuitions and the subjective aspects of sensations leads quite nicely to the last topic on our agenda: the objectivity of the contents of intuitions and concepts in general. For what still remains to be shown, to complete our positive task, is that Kant also shares Frege's commitment to the distinction between individual acts of cognizing and the contents of cognition (Thesis (5)) as well as Frege's belief in the objectivity of cognitive content (Thesis (6)). Demonstrating these aspects of Kant's position will also help us complete our negative task, by pointing up the shortcomings of the second main alternative interpretation of Kant's semantics that I identified above: the straightforwardly *psychologistic* reading.

Let me begin with the content of concepts. We have already established Kant's commitment to the objectivity of the objects of our conceptual cognitions in our above discussion of Kant's conception of objective validity (cf., §3). There we saw that Kant accepts not only that the objects of any one act of representing might be the object of another, but also that the same objects can be represented both by me at many times as well as by everyone else. Now, a bit more reflection on what would have to be true for *synthetic* judgments in particular to have objective validity will show us that Kant also takes the *contents* of concepts to be things that are objective in the sense of being able to remain identical across, and so function as one and the same content in, distinct acts by distinct subjects.

Recall that synthetic judgments themselves are such as to connect concepts whose objects are (in some sense) the same, despite the fact that what is being thought 'in' each of these concepts is entirely distinct (cf., end of §6 above). But then, since what it is for any judgment to be objectively valid is for it to be valid for everyone else and for me at all times, and since the distinction between content and object is, so to speak, written into every

synthetic judgment, what would therefore be required for synthetic judgments in particular to be objectively valid would be not only that we can all represent the same object on multiple occasions, but also that we can all represent the same object in the same pair of distinct ways, via one and the same pair of distinct contents, on multiple occasions. For two people to be able to make ‘the same’ synthetic judgment, what is required is not just that the same object is in view to be judged about (i.e., that the object itself being thought *of* is public), but also that the very same contents are being thought *in* the judgment itself, and hence that the contents themselves are public, shareable – and so, ‘objective’ in this sense – as well.

What about intuitions? Here matters are a bit more complicated, due to the aforementioned involvement of sensations in intuitions. As we noted above, Kant very frequently classifies sensations as ‘subjective’, as particular to ‘my’ consciousness or ‘my’ mental state, and so not necessarily (and possibly necessarily not) shareable (cf., *Prolegomena* §19). Even so, as we also noted above, for this very reason such merely subjective sensations – and with them, the merely subjective aspect of the intuitions into which they might be incorporated – would not be of ‘cognitive’ significance in the sense we have been working with, since they do not, on their own, function as representations with consciousness of the relation they might bear to their object, but instead ‘relate only to the subject’ (cf., B376).

Yet as we have also already seen, there is more to an intuition than the sensations that are included in it. There is also the spatio-temporal perspective from which the object is being perceived (given). Now, this difference in how things look from different perspectives is not *itself* a difference that Kant would classify as one that pertains to mere ‘feeling’, and so something merely ‘subjective’ (say, in the sense of two wines tasting differently to two

tasters, or two surfaces feeling harder or softer, depending on the one touching). Rather, one and the same difference between, e.g., spatial perspectives will be present to *any* two viewers' experiences, regardless of their sensations, since the difference at issue is based on purely geometrical relations. The perspectival aspect of an intuition is as objective as the space from within which it is delineated, and hence something that is, at least in principle, 'objectively' available for *anyone* to take up.

With respect to both concepts and intuitions, then, there are compelling reasons to think that Kant should be read as sharing Frege's anti-psychologism about contents, and so should be read as distinguishing, as Frege does, between what is peculiar to any individual, dateable, unrepeatable episode or state of cognizing in an individual's mind, on the one hand, and the public, (in principle) repeatable content being thought or intuited in the cognitive act, on the other. Since the straightforwardly psychologistic interpretation of Kant's cognitive semantics does not leave any room for this feature of Kant's views, it must be ruled out as inadequate.

This is not to say, however, that Kant always conveys this feature of his views with the utmost of clarity, or even that there are no texts which might seem to point in the direction of psychologism. In fact, with respect to textual grounding, the psychologistic interpreter might seem to be in an even stronger position than the Russellian, since there are several passages in which Kant describes representations (and so cognitions) themselves as things that 'are' or 'occur in us' (cf., A107, B242), or with perhaps even more psychologistic coloring, 'in me' (cf., Bxxxix-n, A375). For another, as we have already seen above, Kant frequently identifies the content of cognitions with what is 'thought in' them (cf., as well B11, B193, B315), which might be (and has been) taken to psychologize these contents. Finally, there are texts in which Kant appears to insist that even the paradigmatic case of the

objects of our cognitions – what Kant calls ‘appearances’ – are also things that are ‘in us’ or ‘in me’ (cf., B59, A129, *Prolegomena* 4:288-89 and 319). From all of this it might seem to be a short step to the conclusion that, for Kant, *everything* about our representations must be something intrinsically and entirely internal to an individual mind in the sense of being introspectible by its subject alone.

In reply to this sort of challenge, we can begin by noting that the psychologistic interpretation makes a very strong and very questionable assumption about how we are to understand Kant’s use of personal pronouns. There is no reason why we are forced to see Kant’s use of ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘my’, ‘us’, ‘our’, etc. as intending to refer to any particular empirically existent subject or mind. In fact, given Kant’s emphasis in his Critical period on the subject of ‘consciousness *as such* [überhaupt]’,⁴⁵ it is much more plausible to take Kant to be using the personal pronouns entirely *schematically*, as has been argued by many of Kant’s interpreters.⁴⁶ Continuing down this line, for Kant to say that the contents and objects of cognition are ‘in us’ or ‘in me’ could plausibly be taken instead to amount to nothing more than saying, first, that they are in the sphere of things accessible to *any* being with a mind like ours, and, secondly, that the identity of such contents and objects is in some sense bound up with the *possibility* of being grasped and represented by minds like ours. Such intersubjective availability would accord to such contents considerably more objectivity. Moreover, this way of construing such terms links up quite naturally with the continual indications that Kant

⁴⁵ Cf., B143 and *Prolegomena* §22. This point is made especially clear in *Prolegomena* §20, where Kant distinguishes between what I have in mind ‘when I merely compare the perceptions [I have] and connect them in a consciousness of *my* state [Zustand]’, on the one hand, and what I have in mind, on the other hand, ‘when I connect them in a consciousness *überhaupt*’ (4:300; my ital.). It is only in the second case that I can properly be said to be making a judgment that purports to have ‘objective validity’, whereas in the former case, I am merely apprehending something that has only ‘subjective validity’, as it is ‘merely a connection of perceptions within *my* mental state’ (ibid.; my ital.). Of course, Kant’s own description here of what happens in judgments of perception is *itself* meant to have objective validity, in the sense of being what ‘a consciousness *überhaupt*’ would judge *about judgments of perception*. This is just another way of saying Kant’s uses of ‘I’ and ‘my’ here do not mean to refer (exclusively) to Kant himself.

⁴⁶ For an interpretation of Kant’s entire Critical project that centers squarely upon this feature of Kant’s views, see Keller 1998.

gives of the particular level at which he is developing his analysis. Kant's inquiry is one in which cognitive contents and the representations that contain them are considered as things that 'the *I think*' – and *not* 'my *I think*' (i.e., Kant's), or anyone else's, in particular – 'must be able to accompany', as Kant famously puts the point in the B-Deduction (B131-32; my underlining; cf., 157n).

This also puts us in the right perspective for how we should hear Kant's identification of the content of cognitions with what is thought 'in' them. Here again there is no question of what any *one* empirically existent person *happens* to have in mind in a given case, but rather what *must* be contained in one's mind by *anyone* if a given cognition is to be had in mind at all. Indeed, as recent research has shown,⁴⁷ careful attention to Kant's historical context shows that phrases like 'what is thought in a cognition' were routinely given a fairly precise and non-psychologistic significance in the writings on logic by Kant's predecessors. When we add to this the foregoing considerations internal to Kant's own texts, it becomes evident that Kant, too, means to be using these phrases in a similarly non-psychologistic fashion.

§9. Concluding remarks and a note about non-conceptual content

In this paper I have argued against the two most common and influential views of Kant's conception of the content of cognition. I have argued, first, that Kant is not a Russellian, because he accepts that there is a distinction between the content of a cognition and its object, insofar as he accepts that the same object can be represented by cognitions with different contents. I have argued, secondly, that Kant does not hold a psychologistic view of cognitive content because he accepts that such content is objective, in the sense of being available (at least in principle) to function in many distinct acts of representing by

⁴⁷ For this, see especially Anderson 2005, as well as De Jong 1995.

different subjects on different occasions. In their place I have developed a reading according to which Kant maintains a view of content that is broadly Fregean in the sense captured by the six theses I spelled out on in §1.

Though, at present, this conclusion has not yet been widely embraced, there is reason to think that Frege himself would have been sympathetic to my interpretation.⁴⁸ This is because Frege himself recognized that there are close parallels between his views on content and Kant's own. In fact, it is precisely Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments that Frege himself refers to when he sets out to introduce his own distinction between content ('sense [*Sinn*']) and object (as 'reference [*Bedeutung*']) in his famous 1892 essay.⁴⁹ What is more, one of the primary motivations that Frege gives for the necessity of introducing this distinction is one of Kant's own – namely, that only the distinction between content and object can make sense of how different kinds of judgments of identity can be of different 'cognitive value [*Erkenntniswert*']', since some 'contain very valuable extensions [*Erweiterungen*] of our cognition', despite the fact that no new object is being referred to or designated by the second half of the identity-judgment.⁵⁰ And once Frege has introduced this distinction, he too makes clear that objects themselves form no

⁴⁸ An even earlier recognition of the important role that the content/object distinction plays in underwriting Kant's analytic/synthetic distinction can be found in Bolzano's *Wissenschaftslehre*, cf., Bolzano 1937: §65.

⁴⁹ See 'On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*', Frege 1984: 157. There Frege is arguing for the necessity of the introduction of a distinction between 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' *within* what, in his *Begriffsschrift*, Frege himself had called simply 'conceptual [begrifflicher]' or 'judgeable content [beurteilbarer Inhalt]' (cf., Frege 1879: §§2-3). In fact, already in the *Begriffsschrift*'s treatment of identity in §8, Frege anticipates this distinction in certain ways, by acknowledging the possibility of an 'identity of content' (here used with a meaning closer to closer to 'Bedeutung') despite differences in 'ways of determining' this content (i.e., something close to what will later be called 'Sinn'). Here, too, Frege draws upon Kant's distinction to elucidate what he himself has in mind (cf., Frege 1879: §8).

It is worth noting here, to head off possible confusion, that the main theoretical commitment that these references to Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments is being used by Frege to track is *not* the one that is at issue in Frege's arguments *against* Kant in the *Grundlagen* to the effect that arithmetical judgments are analytic rather than synthetic. In that work, Frege's main concern is whether something can be shown to follow from logical definitions and laws alone (cf., Frege 1884: §3), and not whether arithmetical identity-judgments (or even logical ones, for that matter) can convey non-trivial information and so be of significant 'cognitive value [*Erkenntniswert*]', as he puts the point in his later writings (cf., 'On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*', Frege 1984: 157; and Frege 1980: 78-80).

⁵⁰ 'On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*', Frege 1984: 157.

part of what is contained ‘in’ the thoughts that represent them.⁵¹ Finally, in his *Grundlagen*, Frege also seems to end up taking much the same approach to the genuinely cognitive content of outer intuitions that I have attributed to Kant above (in §7) – namely, one that abstracts from the role that subjective sensations play in them and focuses instead on the geometrical relations at issue.⁵²

Of course, this is not to say that there would not be a limit to the parallels that Frege would (or should) accept as obtaining between his views and Kant’s on content. Let me emphasize one again that I myself don’t mean to claim – and in any case have surely not shown – that Kant’s views on *Inhalt* accord exactly with Frege’s understanding of *Sinn* on all fronts.⁵³ Indeed, this is what I have meant to signal throughout by calling the view at issue ‘broadly Fregean’. Yet no matter how a comparison between the two thinkers on further points plays itself out,⁵⁴ the fact remains not only that there is substantial overlap between

⁵¹ Frege makes this point at various places, perhaps most famously in his correspondence with Russell; cf., his November 13, 1904 letter to Russell: ‘Mont Blanc with its snowfields is not itself a component part of the thought that Mont Blanc is more than 4000 meters high. [...] The sense of the word ‘moon’ is a component part of the thought that the moon is smaller than the earth. The moon itself (i.e., the *Bedeutung* of the word ‘moon’) is not part of the sense of the word ‘moon’; for then it would be a component part [Bestandteil] of that thought’ (Frege 1980: 163). To which Russell responds: ‘I believe that in spite of all its snowfields Mont Blanc itself is a component part of what is actually asserted in the proposition ‘Mont Blanc is more than 4000 meters high’ (op.cit., 169).

⁵² Unlike the previous points, this point of agreement would probably not have been recognized by Frege himself, since in the relevant text, Frege takes himself to be voicing a disagreement with Kant; compare Frege’s critical remarks about Kant’s doctrine of intuition and appearance, along with his own description of sense-perception, in Frege 1884: §26. Compare as well Frege’s own discussion of the distinction between the objective components of perceptions and sense-impressions in ‘The Thought’ (Frege 1984: 360f).

⁵³ To take one important example of possible disagreement: while Kant’s explanation of the contents of (at least) conceptual cognition of objects by minds like ours is one that assigns a central role to the mental acts of synthesis (or as he also puts it, ‘combination [Verbindung]’ or ‘unification [Vereinigung]’) of a manifold into one unity of consciousness or ‘apperception’ (cf., the B-Deduction in the first *Critique*, §§15-17), Frege, by contrast, makes it quite clear that, on his view, concepts themselves are able to ‘unify’ a manifold without any reference to acts in anyone’s consciousness: ‘the concept has a power [Kraft] of collecting together far superior to the unifying [vereinigende] power of synthetic apperception’ (Frege 1884: §48, 61).

⁵⁴ Concerning the issue of synthesis mentioned in the previous note: one important thing to keep in mind here is the peculiarity of what Kant has in mind by his talk of ‘acts’ of synthesis in these contexts. Indeed, the context itself is peculiar, as it occurs within a ‘pure’ (non-empirical) transcendental analytic of cognition. For this reason, it is evident that the ‘acts’ of synthesis that Kant means to pick out are not to be identified with anything like a natural-psychological process that takes place in space or time. In fact, at one point, Kant describes the particular ‘act [Handlung]’ of synthesis that he is focused upon in the *Transcendental Analytic* as ‘one that must be originally unitary and equally valid for *all* combination’ (B130; my ital.). It is hard to see how

their positions on our central point of concern, but also that there is enough overlap for Frege himself to find it useful to draw it to our attention.

Let me conclude, then, by at least gesturing at what I hope will turn out to be a further payoff of recognizing the Fregean contours of what Kant means by the ‘content’ of a cognition. This concerns recent debates over whether Kant accepts a certain kind of cognitive content – namely, non-conceptual content.⁵⁵ For once cognitive content is understood along the lines developed here – that is, as the way in which a cognition relates the mind to its object – space opens up for a relatively straightforward argument for the conclusion that Kant *does* accept non-conceptual content, since he clearly allows there to be cognitions that relate to their objects in ways *distinct in kind* from the way concepts relate us to theirs, even when these might very well be the same objects.

Such an argument would pick up on the fact that it is precisely in terms of the distinct kinds of *relations* that they bear to objects that Kant marks the difference between concepts and intuitions:

any one individual mental act in space-time could play this role. Yet once we allow that Kant might have in mind some sort of non-‘natural’ (non-empirical) activity, the contrast between the two thinkers is weakened considerably, as it becomes less evident that what Kant has in mind here is anything more mysterious than what Frege describes as the ‘saturation’ of a concept with an object (cf., ‘Function and Concept’, Frege 1984: 140ff) – even if, to be sure, it is not any *less* mysterious. Compare Frege’s own efforts in ‘Compound Thoughts’ to make clear what he means by his own claims to the effect that ‘for logic in general, combination [Fügung] into a whole always comes about by the saturation of something unsaturated’ (op.cit., 390): as he claims in a footnote to this sentence, ‘it must always be remembered that this saturating [Sättigen] and combining [Fügen] are not processes in time’ (op.cit., 390n18). (Frege himself acknowledges at several points that his own use of this term is ‘metaphorical’; in addition to the passage from ‘Compound Thoughts’, compare ‘On Concept and Object’ (op.cit., 194), ‘Foundations of Geometry I’ (op.cit., 281), and ‘What is a Function?’ (op.cit., 292).)

⁵⁵ Recent attempts to show that Kant accepts non-conceptual content include Hanna 2005, Hanna 2008, and Allais 2009. The most influential recent conceptualist interpreter has surely been John McDowell, who has argued that, on Kant’s considered view, no purely non-conceptual content makes even a notionally separable contribution to representational content; see McDowell 1996 and the essays in McDowell 2009. (More recently, however, McDowell has made important concessions to non-conceptualism; see his ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’, the final essay in McDowell 2009.) For other conceptualist readings, see as well Sedgwick 1997, Abela 2002, and Ginsborg 2008. Pereboom also appears to maintain a fairly strong version of the conceptualist interpretation, insofar as he claims that, for Kant, not only are all ‘intentional relations’, including those that belong to intuition, are ‘irreducibly concept-dependent’ (Pereboom 1988: 341), but also the very fact of the ‘recognition-transcendence’ of the objects of intentional relations is something that is ‘accounted’ for by ‘apriori conceptual synthesis’ (op.cit. 339).

Cognition [Erkenntniß] (cognitio)...is either intuition or concept (intuitus vel conceptus). The former is related *immediately* to the object and is singular, while the latter is related *mediately*, by means of a mark that can be common to several things. (B376-7; my ital.)

Since *no* representation pertains to the object immediately [unmittelbar auf den Gegenstand geht] except intuition alone, a concept is thus *never* immediately related to an object [niemals auf einen Gegenstand unmittelbar bezogen], but is instead related to another representation of it (whether this be an intuition or itself already a concept). (B93; my ital.)

These passages (and many others besides)⁵⁶ make clear that Kant intends to distinguish concepts from intuitions primarily in terms of whether or not the *relation* that the cognition in question bears to its object is immediate or not.⁵⁷ Yet since, on the broadly Fregean model of cognitive semantics that Kant endorses, the content of a cognition simply *consists* in this relation, the distinction between immediate and mediate ways of *relating* to objects – relating to objects directly or ‘by means of marks’ – becomes at once a distinction in kind among cognitive *contents*.

It is also worth noting that, if Kant embraces the Fregean conception of content, the non-conceptualist interpreter would be able to take fully in stride one of the main points that McDowell in particular has insisted upon – namely, that, for Kant, the empirical world itself, the world that we intuit, does not lie beyond the reach of our concepts. For once the distinction between content and object has been recognized, this claim can be recast by the non-conceptualist interpreter as one about the fact that there is no feature of the world to which we relate immediately in intuition that is not also able to be cognized mediate (i.e., thought of) via concepts. That is, to use McDowell’s turn of phrase, the Fregean interpretation can agree that, for Kant, the sphere of the conceptual is ‘unbounded’ in the

⁵⁶ See, for example, the first *Critique* §1 (B33), §3 (B41), and the A-Deduction (A109); as well as *Prolegomena* §8 (4:281) and the later essay, ‘What real progress has metaphysics made...?’ (20:266).

⁵⁷ More specifically, a concept relates to the objects of intuitions ‘by means of [vermittelst]’ the mark that it (the concept) represents (cf., B377), whereas intuitions themselves does not take such an ‘indirect’ route, but simply relate to their objects ‘straightaway [geradezu]’ (cf., B33).

following sense: every aspect of the empirical world can be represented (at least in principle) both by intuitions as well as by concepts.⁵⁸

To be sure, there are still further considerations (both textual and systematic) that the conceptualist interpreter could bring to bear in reply at this point,⁵⁹ which is simply to say that the full-dress version of the argument from the Fregean interpretation of content to the non-conceptualist interpretation of the content of intuitions would require much more than I have begun to sketch here in closing. In any case, my hope is that the foregoing considerations will, at the very least, help to move this debate forward by sharpening our grip on Kant's own understanding of one of its key terms – namely, his understanding of 'content' itself.⁶⁰

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⁵⁸ A further point that the Fregean interpretation allows Kant to take in stride is what many have found to be the otherwise obvious phenomenological difference between the two kinds of mental acts – i.e., what is naturally cast as the difference between the content of my thinking about my house while abroad and that of my looking at it as I walk up its front steps. Though both acts are directed toward the same objects, Kant would thus be able to assert that the difference between the acts consists in the way each relates us to this object, in the sense of what is 'contained in' them. For two places where Kant shows that he accepts this point, see again 'On a Discovery' (8:218n) and *Jäsche Logic* §V (9:33). McDowell's analysis has focused instead on the causal origin of the acts – namely, whether I spontaneously relate to this object, or whether I am drawn into this relation passively – rather than on their contents. For critical discussion of this point see Allais 2009: 389f; and also De Vries 2006: 194f.

⁵⁹ The most important, perhaps, is Kant's explicit claim in the first *Critique* that 'intuition and concepts make up the elements of all of our cognition, so that neither concepts without intuition corresponding to them in some way, nor intuition without concepts, can yield a cognition' (B74; cf., Bxvii and B76). Some non-conceptualists have urged that in such passages Kant must mean 'cognition' in the narrower sense that the one with which we have been occupied here (cf., §1), such that Kant really means in these passages to be speaking about cognition in the sense of *knowledge* or justified and true (objectively valid) cognition; compare, for example, Hanna 2001: 202-3, and also Hanna 2005: 256-7. Much more, however, would need to be said in order to justify what would otherwise seem to be an ad hoc exception on the interpretation of 'cognition' in these cases. Another large issue is the role that many take Kant to assign to acts of synthesis – especially in the Transcendental Deduction – in the very bringing about or constituting of a single, unified intuition, since Kant also seems to attribute all synthesis to understanding, by way of the pure concepts (categories), which would seem to imply that at least the pure concepts are involved in every intuition. For this sort of argument in favor of conceptualism, see Ginsborg 2008 and more recently Griffith 2011.

⁶⁰ I would like to thank Lucy Allais, Michael Hardimon, Karolina Huebner, Tim Jankowiak, Samantha Matherne, James Messina, Eric Watkins, and the anonymous referees from this Journal for their very helpful feedback on previous versions of this paper.

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