

The non-conceptuality of the content of intuitions: a new approach

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ABSTRACT:

There has been considerable recent debate about whether Kant's account of intuitions implies that their content is conceptual. This debate, however, has failed to make significant progress because of the absence of discussion, let alone consensus, as to the meaning of 'content' in this context. Here I try to move things forward by focusing on the kind of content associated with Frege's notion of 'sense [Sinn]', understood as a mode of presentation of some object or property. I argue, first, that Kant takes intuitions to have a content in this sense, and, secondly, that Kant clearly takes the content of intuitions, so understood, to be distinct in kind from that possessed by concepts. I then show how my account can respond to the most serious objections to previous non-conceptualist interpretations.

§1. Introduction

There has been a lively debate as of late concerning whether or not Kant thinks that non-conceptual representational content is possible. It is agreed on all sides that Kant accepts that there are representations that are not concepts themselves. Perhaps most notably, Kant recognizes that, besides concepts, there are 'judgments [Urteile]', 'inferences [Schlüsse]', 'intuitions [Anschauungen]', and 'sensations [Empfindungen]'.¹ Since Kant explicitly says that judgments are composed out of concepts (cf., B322) and that inferences are composed out of judgments (cf., B359f), there has been no serious debate about whether their content is conceptual. Sensations have also been left to one side, as there have been persistent worries about whether or not Kant takes sensations to possess *any* content, or even any intentionality, at all, whether conceptual or otherwise (cf. George 1981). The debate has primarily focused, therefore, on whether the distinction between concepts and

¹ See, among other places, B376-77 and *Jäsche Logic* ('JL') §1 (9:91), §17 (9:101), and §41 (9:114). Throughout I will refer to Kant's works besides the first *Critique* by the standard convention of providing the *Akademie Ausgabe* (Kant 1902-) volume number and pagination. For the first *Critique* I will cite by B-edition pagination alone, save for cases where passages only appear in the A-edition. Where available, I have consulted, and usually followed, the translations in (Kant 1991-), though I have silently modified them throughout.

intuitions in particular corresponds to a distinction in the kinds of contents of two sorts of representations.²

Since these questions concern a distinction that lies at the very heart of Kant's system of theoretical philosophy (concepts vs. intuitions), sorting out their answers is of much more than 'merely' interpretive significance, as it will set much of the course for how we should understand the rest of Kant's project in the first *Critique*. And since Kant's distinction between intuitions and concepts has shaped, and continues to shape, much of the discussion in contemporary philosophy of perception and cognitive semantics (cf. Hanna 2005 and Hanna 2008), getting clearer on what approach to non-conceptual content Kant in fact holds also promises help clarify what is at issue in the broader debate over conceptualism itself.

What, then, is the shape of this debate? Robert Hanna, Lucy Allais, Peter Rohs and others have argued that the way Kant distinguishes intuitions from concepts in the early sections of the first *Critique* demonstrates that he thinks that the content of intuitions is non-conceptual in nature (cf. Hanna 2005, Hanna 2011, Allais 2009, and Rohs 2001). Against these 'non-conceptualist' interpreters, 'conceptualist' interpreters like the neo-Kantian Paul Natorp, and more recently, Hannah Ginsborg, John McDowell, and others have argued that, however things might appear early on, Kant's strategy in the Transcendental Deduction and beyond shows he ultimately takes intuitions to involve concepts and to do so essentially (cf. Natorp 1910, McDowell 1991b, McDowell 2009, and Ginsborg 2008).³ The mistake of the non-conceptualist readers is, therefore, to take at face-value Kant's first passes over certain distinctions, and to fail to appreciate the extent to which Kant eventually either 'takes back' (Pippin 1989: 30) or 'corrects' (Natorp 1910: 276) what gives the initial impression that the

² For an exception concerning sensations, see (Watkins 2008).

³ See also (Sedgwick 1997); (Abela 2002); (Wenzel 2005); (Engstrom 2006); most recently, (Griffith 2010).

distinction is as sharp as one might otherwise suspect. Once such a corrected view of Kant's project has been achieved – it is argued – it becomes clear that Kant's considered position requires that the content of intuitions be essentially conceptual as well.

While this debate has surely brought a good deal of light to many dimensions of Kant's thought, progress on the key issue itself has been unnecessarily hampered by a failure to address head-on a preliminary though very important question – namely: *what is the sense of 'content' that is at issue?* Are we asking, for example, whether Kant accepts that intuitions have what might now be called a phenomenal character or raw feel, a 'what it's like' to be undergone, which is distinct in kind from that of conceiving? Or are we asking whether Kant accepts that intuitions represent objects that cannot also be represented by concepts? Or are we asking instead whether Kant accepts that the way or manner in which intuitions represent their objects is distinct in kind from that of concepts? Or are we asking about something else altogether?

The near absence of discussion about the meaning of 'content' at issue is striking.⁴ How are we to know what is under debate in the first place, prior to knowing the significance of such a central term?⁵

My hope here is to advance this debate by explicitly focusing on only one of these specific meanings of 'content', and then asking whether Kant accepts that the content of intuitions (understood in this way) is distinct in kind from that of concepts. The sense of 'content' I will focus on is the third of those mentioned above – namely, an intuition's *manner or way of representing* its object. In other words, I will be focusing on something akin to

⁴ One partial exception is Hanna; cf., (Hanna 2008: 52-53). I criticize Hanna's interpretation below in notes to §4 and §6.

⁵ Though, if Jeff Speaks is correct, in this respect, the interpretive debate about Kant might simply mirror a lack of consensus about what sense of 'content' is at issue in the broader debate about non-conceptual content in contemporary philosophy; cf. (Speaks 2005: §1).

what Frege calls an object's 'mode of being given or presented [Art des Gegebenseins]' to the mind, what Frege identifies as the 'sense [Sinn]' of linguistic expressions, as opposed to what Frege calls their 'reference [Bedeutung]'. I will begin by saying more about this sense of content in §2.

My main thesis in what follows will be that, at least with respect to 'content' understood in this way, Kant clearly accepts that the content of intuitions is non-conceptual. Demonstrating this will require, first of all, that we find something that plays the role of Fregean sense both in Kant's account of 'cognition [Erkenntnis]' in general and in his account of intuitions and concepts in particular, as the main species of cognition (cf., B376-77) under discussion here. What I will show in §3 is that what Kant himself refers to as the 'content [Inhalt]' of a cognition closely parallels Fregean sense in key respects, most notably in picking out something that consists in the representational '*relation* [Beziehung]' to an object that a cognition involves, rather than the object itself.

With this alignment in mind, we can then better appreciate an important consequence of the familiar ways in which Kant repeatedly characterizes the difference between intuitions and concepts. As I remind us in §4, Kant famously claims that intuitions *relate* us to their objects immediately, in a way that depends on the presence and existence of their objects, a way that involves the object's 'appearance [Erscheinung]'. Concepts, by contrast, can relate us to objects only mediately, in a way that does not depend either on the presence or even the existence of their objects. Because intuitions representationally relate us to their objects in a way that is different in kind from the way that concepts do so (since intuitions allow objects themselves to 'appear' immediately), and because the relation in question *just is* the content at issue (in the sense of 'content' that we will be focusing on

here), I conclude that that Kant would accept that the content of an intuition is non-conceptual.

Having presented the core of my positive argument for a non-conceptualist interpretation, I will then turn to the defense of my account against the series of textual and systematic considerations that conceptualist interpreters have taken to point in the opposite direction. In §5 I canvass what I see as the three most substantial challenges to non-conceptualist interpretations generally – challenges, therefore, that my own account must address, and challenges, moreover, that have not yet been properly dealt with by the previous non-conceptualist interpretations. These are (1) a set of claims in the Transcendental Deduction about ‘the synthesis of apprehension *in* intuition’ that might seem to suggest that conceptual synthesis must be involved in the very having of intuitions, (2) remarks about what the Transcendental Deduction is to accomplish, which might seem to suggest that its success rests upon showing the non-conceptualist thesis to be false, and (3) a series of passages that can appear to suggest that the involvement of concepts is necessary for a representation to have any relation to an object whatsoever.

In §6 I will argue that we can defuse the force of all of these challenges by recognizing that, in each case, Kant is not actually addressing what his conceptualist interpreters take him to be addressing. More specifically, a closer look at the passages at issue shows that Kant is not, in fact, meaning to spell out what is constitutive of an intuition or its relation to an object *as such*. Instead, Kant is concerned only with the conditions on an intuition’s subsequently becoming an object of *further* kinds of representations, such as what Kant calls ‘perception’ and ‘experience’, representations in which we *reflect* upon an intuition. Yet while Kant clearly accepts that these further reflective representations ‘determine [bestimmen]’ the content of intuitions by explicitly representing an intuition’s relation to an

object as one that shows that the object should be represented as falling under one or another concept, this in no way entails that concepts are already involved in mere having of an intuition in the first place. This restores the room for intuitions per se to be concept-free and to have non-conceptual content.

§2. Content as Fregean sense (mode of presentation)

Let me begin by saying a bit more about the sense of ‘content’ that I will be focusing on in what follows. This is what Frege identifies with the ‘sense’ expressed by a word or sentence, in contrast with the expression’s ‘reference’.

We can get a feel for the relevant notion by looking to Frege’s own writings and to the ways in which his analysis has been extended by others. In his early *Begriffsschrift*, Frege for the most part worked with the simple distinction between mental acts like thinking and judging and the ‘content [Inhalt]’ of such acts.⁶ By the time of ‘On Sense and Reference’, however, Frege realized that he needed a more sophisticated treatment of the content of such acts, one which recognizes the difference between (a) the individual object or property or state of affairs that is being referred to through such acts, or what Frege identifies with its reference (e.g., the planet Venus), and (b) the particular ‘mode’ or ‘manner’ in which such referent is ‘being given’ in such acts, its *Art des Gegebenseins*, or what Frege identifies with its sense (e.g., the presentation of the planet as morning star and evening star).⁷

One of Frege’s chief motivations for making this further distinction was his reflection on informative statements of identity. Because we can recognize an object when it is presented in one way, but fail to recognize the very same object when it is presented in another way, we can learn something by assertions expressed by sentences of the form: ‘A =

⁶ Though the seeds for further distinctions were already present in his discussion of what is involved in judgments of identity; compare (Kremer 2010: 220 and 236-40).

⁷ See especially (Frege 1984: 157f); compare (Kremer 2010: 257).

B', because we can learn that it is the same thing x that is being presented in two different ways (via the sense associated with 'A' and the sense associated with 'B'). If the only thing we allowed to function as the content of an expression were the item to which it referred (i.e., object x itself), then we would not be able to make sense of how statements like 'The morning star is identical to the evening star' could be informative when we are already familiar with relevant object (here: the planet) by way of one of these ways of its being presented.⁸

What the notion of sense allows us to keep track of, therefore, are not differences at the level of the objects of our discourse and thought but differences in the ways of being given or presented with these objects. Frege takes this to imply, first, that objects (and references more generally) form no proper 'part' of what is contained 'in' the senses through which they are given or presented to us.⁹ Frege takes this to imply, secondly, that it is this way of being given an object – and hence, a sense – that is directly 'grasped [erfaßt]' in mental acts like thinking and judging, rather than its reference (Frege 1984: 355-56). In other words, senses, rather than referents, are the 'immediate object' of mental acts such as thinking, despite the fact that this immediate object is itself a representational *relation* to something else, a 'mode of being given' some *further* object (the reference).¹⁰

Now, Frege himself uses the distinction between sense and reference primarily in the analysis of our discourse about the abstract objects of logic and arithmetic. Even so, those writing under the influence of Frege's theory of content have readily extended the analysis to comprise both references that are concrete objects as well as ways of being given or presented with concrete objects that concern perception rather than thought (cf. McDowell

⁸ For references and further discussion, see (Kremer 2010: 253-58).

⁹ See his November 13, 1904 letter to Russell (Frege 1980: 163).

¹⁰ For the description of thoughts in this context as the 'objects' of acts of thinking, compare (Dummett 1997: 242-43).

1984, McDowell 1986, McDowell 1991a, and more recently, Schellenberg 2011). Indeed, many of Frege's own examples suggest just such an extension: the planet Venus is surely a concrete object, and the distinction between the sense of 'morning star' and that of 'evening star' rests on the different times of day at which the planet can be perceived.¹¹

Continuing along these lines, it has also been argued that there is room in this broader Fregean account to single out certain kinds of sense that can be grasped *only* when the relevant reference is concrete (and existent) and stands in a certain relation to the mind. A sense grasped in veridical perception, for example, would be a strong candidate for such an 'object-dependent' sense (cf. McDowell 1986: 233). I cannot be veridically perceptually related to an object that is not there; nor can I grasp this particular relation if my mind is not, in fact, concretely connected to the relevant object.¹²

To be sure, to remain broadly Fregean, even cases like this, in which the sense at issue is object-*dependent*, will still nevertheless not be cases of object-*involving* or object-*containing* senses, since, for a Fregean, the object (referent) itself is *never* a part ('constituent') of the sense.¹³ Nevertheless, due to its special relation to its reference, such a sense will be different in kind both from those grasped in purely conceptual reasoning as well as those grasped in fictional discourse.

¹¹ See also Frege's discussion in his correspondence with Philip Jourdain of the senses associated with perceiving the same mountain from two directions; cf. (Frege 1980: 78-80).

¹² As McDowell puts it, our grasp of these senses 'depends essentially on the perceived presence of the objects' (McDowell 1984: 219), such that this sort of 'mode of presentation is not capturable in a specification that someone could understand without exploiting the perceived presence of the [object] itself' (McDowell 1991a: 266). This is not to deny that we could still *refer* to these perceptual senses in thought, without 'grasping' them immediately. Referring to a sense, however, is different than grasping it. Recognition of this difference is key to recognizing that Frege's own account of sense does not entail that he is a 'descriptivist' about senses, despite the influential way that his views have been portrayed by Saul Kripke and John Searle; compare (McDowell 1986: 233-34) and (McDowell 1991a: 268-69). Below (in §6.3) I will argue that the conceptualist interpreters have failed to recognize that Kant makes use of a parallel distinction, between 'intuiting' (as directly grasping an appearance) and reflectively 'apprehending' an intuition in perception or experience.

¹³ Recall Frege's letter to Russell (cited in a previous note); compare (McDowell 1991a: 265 and 268).

§3. Kant on the content of cognitions in general and intuitions in particular

With this analysis of content-as-Fregean-sense in hand, we can now ask: is there something in Kant's account of cognitions in general, and intuitions in particular, that, on the one hand, is associated with the distinctive way or manner in which an object is being given or presented by this representation, and, on the other hand, is distinguished from the represented object itself? That is, is there something in Kant's account that plays the role of content, so understood?

What is striking – though this has gone largely unnoticed – is that we find just such an aspect of cognitions being referred to *by Kant himself* as 'content [Inhalt]'. More specifically, Kant aligns the content of a cognition with the distinctive representational 'relation [Beziehung]' that it bears to its object, rather than with the object itself. At the outset of the *Transcendental Analytic*, for example, Kant aligns the 'content [Inhalt]' of a 'cognition [Erkenntnis]' with its 'relation [Beziehung]' 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)

This alignment is repeated elsewhere in Kant's writings as well.¹⁴

As cognitions are species of 'representation [Vorstellung]' (cf., B376-77), the 'relation' that is at issue here is the relation of intentionality, the distinctive way it 'stands or places [stellt]' the object 'before [vor]' the mind.¹⁵ And since, in general, the relation that a something A bears to another thing B is something distinct from both A and B themselves,

¹⁴ See also B189 and B298; at B300, Kant aligns the 'relation to the object' possessed by a cognition with its 'significance [Bedeutung]'.

¹⁵ Kant claims that '*all* representations, *as* representations, have their objects' (A108; my ital.).

the representational relation that a cognition bears to its object – that is, its content – should also be viewed as something that is distinct from both the cognition qua act or mental state and the object itself. In both of these key respects, then, Kant’s ‘*Inhalt*’ parallels Frege’s ‘*Sinn*’.¹⁶

Turning now to intuitions in particular, we can see that Kant endorses the same view of their contents as well. Consider the following passage at the end of the Transcendental Aesthetic:

[O]uter sense can also *contain* [enthalt] in its representation only the *relation* [Verhältniß] 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.)

Here Kant claims explicitly that inner and outer intuition do not ‘contain’ the object they are representing or anything that is ‘internal’ to it. Instead, they have as their content the distinctive ‘relation’ between a subject and some object.¹⁷

This account of the contents of intuitions receives further support once we incorporate Kant’s doctrine of *appearances* into our analysis. For Kant, the particular way that an intuition representationally ‘relates’ us to its object consists the intuition’s allowing that object to ‘appear [erscheinen]’ to us. What is striking, for our purposes, is that he also identifies the appearance itself with what is ‘contained’ in an intuition:

The predicates of appearance can be attributed to the object itself in relation [Verhältniß] to our sense, e.g., the red color or fragrance to the rose... [...] What is not to be encountered in the object in itself at all, but is always to be encountered *in its relation* to the subject and is inseparable from the representation of the object, is appearance. (B69-70fn; my ital.)

¹⁶ I present a more sustained argument for this parallel in (Tolley 2011).

¹⁷ Compare the Transcendental Logic: ‘It comes along with our nature that intuition can never be other than sensible, i.e., that it contains [enthält] only the way [Art] in which we are affected by objects’ (B75). Since being the ‘effect [Wirkung]’ of its affection just is the peculiar relation that our (empirical) intuition bears to its object (as cause; cf., B34), here, too, an intuition is being said to contain only the relation we bear to the affecting objects.

The representation of a body in intuition...*contains* [enthält] nothing at all that could pertain to an object in itself, but merely the *appearance* of something and the way [Art] in which we are affected by it. (B61; my ital.)¹⁸

Rather than the appearing *object* itself being ‘contained in’ the intuition, the intuition instead contains only the *way* this object appears, i.e., the *appearance-relation*.¹⁹

Keeping in mind the fact that an appearance itself is a relation (i.e., one of appearing and (conversely) being appeared to) helps to make sense of Kant’s description of appearances as ‘ways’ or ‘modes [Arten]’ of representing or perceiving objects, rather than as ‘things’ in their own right (cf., A372, B59; *Prolegomena* 4:293). It also helps to make sense of what Kant has in mind when he describes appearances themselves as ‘representations’ (cf., A104), and then claims that, as representations, appearances ‘in turn have their object’ (A109).²⁰ Indeed, this further object of an appearance – what might be called the ultimate reference of an intuition – is something that Kant says ‘cannot be further intuited by us’ and something (at times) he identifies with ‘the transcendental object = X’ for a given intuition (A109).

Now, it must be acknowledged that at times Kant writes as if appearances are *themselves* the ‘objects’ of our empirical intuitions (B34), even going so far as to characterize them as the ‘*only* objects that can be given us *immediately*’ through intuitions (A108-9; my ital.). How is this characterization of appearances to be made compatible with foregoing? What could Kant mean by claiming that these relations, or ‘ways’ of perceiving – items

¹⁸ Compare A252: ‘[T]he word ‘appearance’ must...indicate a *relation* [Beziehung] to something the immediate representation of which is sensible.... (my ital.). See as well *Prolegomena* (4:289) and *Metaphysics Vigilantius* (29:972).

¹⁹ Here I mean to agree with (Langton 1998) in emphasizing the relationality of appearances, though I also agree with recent criticisms of Langton for all but leaving out their representational dimension. For ‘relationalist’ approaches that do better in this regard, see (Allais 2009) and especially (Rosefeldt 2007).

²⁰ Compare the Second Analogy, where Kant again distinguishes between appearances ‘insofar as they are (as representations) objects’ and appearances ‘insofar as they designate [bezeichnen] an object’ (B234-35).

which ‘have’ their own object – are nevertheless themselves the ‘objects’ that we are ‘acquainted with’ in intuition (B59)?

Here I think the analogy with Frege’s distinction between sense and reference can actually be of further use, by helping to sort out what Kant may have been getting at. The relationship Kant ultimately takes to obtain between (a) the act of intuiting and (b) the appearance or way of perceiving that it involves, seems to be better modeled on the relationship between (a*) what we saw Frege calling the act of ‘grasping [erfassen]’ a sense and (b*) the sense itself that is grasped, rather than corresponding to the relationship between (a*) an act of grasping and (c*) the ultimate *object* (Fregean reference) represented by (or ‘given’ through) the sense grasped. An appearance would seem to be the ‘object’ of an intuition only in the same way that, for Frege, when we grasp a thought in an act of thinking, the thought itself might be described as the ‘immediate object’ of the thinking.²¹ This is so, despite the fact that, on Frege’s account as well, what is being grasped in this act is a relation to something else, a ‘mode of being given’ some *further* object. Similarly for Kant: in virtue of being what is ‘grasped’ in an intuition, an appearance can be considered as the immediate object of the intuiting. Yet in grasping this appearance, we are thereby representationally related to some further object (a ‘something = X’). Appearances, therefore, function as the ‘contents’ of intuitions, in Kant’s own sense of the term.²²

²¹ For the description of thoughts in this context as the ‘objects’ of acts of thinking, compare (Dummett 1997: 242-43).

²² This point often overlooked, because of Kant’s frequent description of appearances as ‘objects’ of the senses. Even so, appearances are not the ultimate intentional objects of intuitions, but are instead the ways in which these objects are given. This helps bring out the way in which appearances are not the *Brentanian* ‘Inhalt’ of an intuition, as is suggested by (Vaihinger 1892: 34), among others; for some discussion, see (Aquila 2003). For an interpretation that is closer my own here, compare Rohs: ‘intuitions are not purely qualitative feelings, nor are they mere sense-impressions; rather, they are directed immediately to objects only as the having [Haben] of a singular sense’, where it is implied that Rohs means something like Frege’s ‘sense’ (Rohs 2001: 224; cf. 217f). Michael Dummett has used this analogy in the opposite direction, to help explain Frege’s notion of sense by appeal to Kant’s conception of intuition; cf. (Dummett 2001: 13) and (Dummett 1997: 242-43).

§4. The non-conceptuality of the content of intuitions

In the previous section, I argued that Kant accepts that cognitions in general, and intuitions in particular, incorporate something along the lines of Fregean ‘sense’. In addition to the *object* to which we are related in a cognition, each cognition also has a particular *way of being* representationally *related* to this object. I argued, furthermore, that this relation (rather than the object) is what Kant calls the ‘content’ of a cognition. I suggested, finally, that what serves as the content of an intuition in particular is the appearance of an object, since Kant aligns this appearance itself with the distinctive representational relation that the subject comes to bear to some object (‘= X’) in the act of intuiting.

Now, there is, of course, much more that would need to be said, both about intuitions, and especially about the appearance-relation they contain, for the account we are developing to be comprehensive. Nevertheless, we have enough on the table for the purposes at hand. For what we must now determine is: with respect to *this* sense of content – i.e., with respect to the representational relations that they contain – does Kant think that intuitions have a content that is non-conceptual?

Once we have been accustomed to associating a difference in representational relation with a difference in ‘content’ in this sense, the answer, I think, can be seen fairly directly from two well-known passages in which Kant distinguishes between intuitions and concepts:

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.)

As these texts, and many others besides, demonstrate (cf. B33, B41, A109, *Prolegomena* §8 (4:281), (20:266)), the intuition/concept distinction is drawn by Kant precisely in terms of the difference in the type of ‘relation [Beziehung]’ that each type of act bears to its object. A concept ‘relates’ to its objects ‘by means of [vermittelt]’ the mark (general or common property) that it (the concept) represents (cf., B377), whereas intuitions themselves do not take such an ‘indirect’ route, but simply ‘relate’ to their objects ‘straightaway [geradezu]’ (cf., B33). But since the content of a cognition (in the sense of ‘content’ we have been working with) simply *consists* in this representational relation, it follows straightaway that Kant’s distinction between immediate and mediate ways of relating to objects is at once a distinction in kind among cognitive *contents*, so understood. This shows that Kant accepts that an intuition has a content – indeed, in Kant’s own sense of this term – that is distinct in kind from the content of concepts.

Kant’s commitment to the non-conceptuality of the content of our intuitions becomes even more evident once we unpack two key aspects in terms of which Kant cashes out the distinctive immediacy of our intuitions’ representational relations to their object. The first aspect is that our intuitions entail the *existence* of their objects. Our intuitions are ‘dependent [abhängig] on the existence [Dasein] of the object’ that we are intuiting because intuition ‘is possible only insofar as the representational capacity of the subject is *affected* by it’, i.e., by the object (B72; my ital.). This is why Kant calls our type of intuition ‘sensible’ rather than ‘original [ursprünglich]’, as would be the intuition had by God (ibid.). This leads to the second key aspect of our intuition’s immediacy – namely, that it entails the *presence* to mind of its object: ‘intuition is a representation of the sort that would depend [abhängen]

immediately on the presence [Gegenwart] of the object' to the mind (*Prolegomena* §8, 4:281; my ital.).²³

In our case, at least, intuiting therefore requires being affected by the presence of an existing object upon our sensibility, which in turn yields an appearance of the object. This makes both the act of intuiting and the appearance that is its content 'object-dependent'.²⁴ This is so, even if the appearance is not object-*involving*, since it does not 'contain' the intentional object to which the appearance ultimately relates us.²⁵

The content of a concept, by contrast, is something that Kant thinks is *not* uniformly dependent upon either the existence of its object or its presence to the mind. The independence from existence follows from the fact that we can form concepts of various kinds of 'nothing [Nichts]', some of which Kant describes as 'mere invention [Erdichtung]

²³ Compare *Inaugural Dissertation* §3, where Kant defines sensibility as the possibility 'for the subject's own representative state to be affected in a definite way by the *presence* [praesentia] of some object' (2:392; my ital.).

²⁴ Hanna (2005: 257f) also points to 'immediacy' and 'object-dependence' as essential features of intuitions, but then takes this to show that intuitions have a 'referential directedness' that is independent not only of 'any sort of descriptive content' but also of 'any *other* sort of representational content' (Hanna 2005: 258; my ital.). I agree that intuitions enjoy the former sort of independence, but fail to see why we should think they do not have *any* representational content. For all their immediacy, intuitions are, after all, still kinds of *representations*. Moreover, since two different intuitions can be equally immediately 'of' the same object and equally dependent on that same object without being identical – since, e.g., they each provide glimpses of an object represented from a different point in space – we have reason for carving out a distinct content-dimension for intuitions as well, something on the order of what Rohs calls 'a singular sense' (Rohs 2001: 217). If not, then it would be hard to block the conclusion drawn by Marcus Willaschek that while intuitions *per se* are dependent on the existence and presence of their objects, this implies only that they relate to objects in a *causal*, but not intentional, manner (cf. Willaschek 1997: 546f and 560). It is therefore not clear what 'content' Hanna himself thinks that intuitions could still possess, once he has rejected all 'representational content'. Hanna seems to reject the idea that intuitions could possess content in the Fregean sense of the term, but appears to do so only because he wrongly associates Frege's conception of content-as-sense exclusively with descriptivism (cf., Hanna 2011: 352).

²⁵ As we have seen, Kant thinks that an intuition 'contains *nothing at all* that could pertain to an object in itself' (B61; my ital.). For this reason, I think Allais goes too far in (Allais 2007) when she tries to portray Kant as being committed to a 'direct or non-representative theory of perception' (Allais 2007: 464), one which does not involve any 'mental intermediaries' but which is closer to a form of direct realism that nowadays gets called 'austere relationalism' and is associated with John Campbell and Charles Travis, according to which the object itself is a 'constituent' of the intuition (Allais 2007: 468). This would have the effect of making the content of intuitions (and hence appearances themselves) include their object in a way that Kant explicitly rules out. The account I have sketched above fits better in this regard with Kant's clear commitment to a transcendental *idealism* about appearances, while nevertheless respecting Kant's equally clear commitment to their object-dependence.

and so ‘concepts without an object’ (B347-48; cf., A96).²⁶ Presence, therefore, is likewise (and a fortiori) not required. Indeed, Kant claims explicitly that at least some concepts – the ‘pure’ concepts or ‘categories’ of understanding – are the sort of representations that we can form and entertain them ‘*without* our finding ourselves in an immediate relation [Verhältniß] to the object’ that is being represented (4:282; my ital.).

In fact, in the case of the pure concepts (‘ideas’) of reason, Kant thinks that we have concepts of objects that we know we cannot intuit and so know we cannot have present before the mind: ‘nothing congruent to [the idea] could ever be given *in concreto*’ (B384; cf., B393). Because these are cases where our concepts are, for us, ‘without intuition’, Kant thinks that these cognitions ‘remain completely empty [leer]’ for us, in the sense that, so far as we know, they ‘lack objects’ (B87). Even so, Kant thinks we can still analyze these concepts in order to become conscious of what is ‘contained in’ them – and so sort out what differentiates the thought of one supersensible object from the thought of another – despite the fact that all of this content ends up consisting solely in pure or ‘transcendental predicates’ (cf., B401).

To be sure, the difference in content does not exhaust the differences that Kant takes to hold between concepts and at least our human kind of intuitions. One often noted difference is the contrast that Kant draws between the quantity of the objects of intuitions and concepts: while all intuitions are ‘singular [einzeln]’ representations, Kant takes concepts to be ‘general [allgemeine]’ (cf., B376-77; JL §1, 9:91). A second difference lies in

²⁶ This implies that the phrase ‘relation to an object’ that Kant uses to spell out the meaning of cognitive ‘content’ in general should not be taken to be restricted in its significance to ‘relation to an *existent* or *real* or *actual* object’. Concepts can be ‘without objects’ in the sense of being related to no existent object and yet possess some sort of content nonetheless. This is shown by the fact that Kant takes there to be various analytically distinct ways of thinking about nothing, despite the fact that, in each case, the objects at issue do not really or actually exist (cf., B347f). Though we are thinking about nothing, no actual object, there is still something – some intensional content – that we are thinking, something akin to grasping a Fregean sense that has no actual referent.

the metaphysical origin of the two kinds of acts: while all human intuitions depend upon our mind's being 'affected' in a certain way for their coming about, Kant thinks that our mind can 'bring about [hervorzubringen]' concepts 'of itself', or 'spontaneously' – at the very least, it can do so with respect to the pure concepts that arise from the nature of understanding itself (B75; cf. B93). For our purposes, we can even grant that the differences in quantity of object and metaphysical origin might well be equally fundamental marks of the difference between the two kinds of cognitions. What is crucial for our purposes is simply that, in addition to these further differences, Kant *also* takes there to be a distinction in kind between the nature of their *contents*.

It is arguable, however, that the difference in content is not only as fundamental, for Kant, as either the difference in quantity of object or the metaphysical difference in origination, but is perhaps even more basic.²⁷ Furthermore, it is the difference in content, rather than the other differences, that would seem to be ultimately decisive in Kant's

²⁷ For one thing, Kant seems to allow that certain concepts also necessarily pick out ('determine') an individual, if they pick out anything at all. The foremost example of this is the pure concept of God or the 'ideal', which Kant claims explicitly is 'the representation of an individual', despite being a concept (B604). For another, Kant explicitly allows for there to be a 'singular use' of any concept we like, in judgments like 'this house is red' (cf., VL 24:908-9; see also JL §1n2 (9:91) and §11n (9:97)). For further discussion, see (Parsons 1992: 64f). Both of these suggest that an appeal to the so-called 'singularity criterion' will not be sufficient to distinguish conceptual representations from intuitions.

Other considerations point against taking the spontaneity/passivity contrast to be sufficient either. Kant accepts that the aforementioned 'originary [ursprüngliche]' representation that the divine mind would enjoy of its objects would be both an intuition and yet not passive (cf., B71-72). This speaks against approaches, such as McDowell's, that depend on the 'appeal to the distinct passivity' of intuition, over and against the 'exercises of spontaneity' in 'acts of thinking and judging', to capture *all* that is necessary to underwrite the distinction between the two kinds of acts (cf., McDowell 1991b: 26-29). Of course, as a conceptualist, McDowell cannot place the difference between representations in their content; to the contrary, he insists that both kinds of acts involve one and the same 'thinkable content'.

Engstrom, by contrast, concedes that the distinction between spontaneity and receptivity appears to be introduced by Kant to capture the fact that, in the case of minds like ours, the difference in the source of our representations is correlative with a 'difference in source in respect of their *content*' (Engstrom 2006: 5; cf., 19). Engstrom does not explain what he means by 'content' here, but it emerges that he at least means for the 'content' of a representation to be something like a 'matter' which requires some 'form', only in combination with which can any representation be achieved. Engstrom then argues that, in the case of intuitions, this form must be something supplied by spontaneity itself (cf., Engstrom 2006: 18f). This implies that, for Engstrom, while receptivity does supply a distinct kind of 'content', it is not self-sufficient to supply a distinct kind of representation that includes this content, since it cannot, from itself, give this content any form. I return to Engstrom's analysis below, in §5.3, and then criticize it in §6.3.

rejection of the rationalist's account of the nature of our cognition in mathematics. Kant famously holds that the fundamental truths of arithmetic and geometry cannot be known through the analysis of the relevant concepts, but requires 'hurrying immediately to intuition' (B743). Part of Kant's point here is, of course, that we cannot know the *truth* of certain judgments simply on the basis of such analysis, but the deeper point is that we cannot even know what is *meant* by certain terms in mathematics except for our familiarity with the ways objects are given in intuition – i.e., familiarity with the contents distinctive of our intuitions. This would seem to be true of the terms 'space' and 'time' themselves (cf. B39 and B47-48), as well as what it means to be 'oriented' within such frameworks (cf., 8:134-35 and *Prolegomena* §13 4:285-86; see Hanna 2008: 53f). This intuition-dependence is further confirmed by Kant's account of the logical structure of conceptual contents themselves, since these simply do not allow for mathematical relations to objects to be represented ('constructed') through concepts alone (cf. Friedman 1992: Chapters 1-2, and Anderson 2004).

§5. Objections to non-conceptualist interpretations

Having presented the direct positive textual and systematic support for my interpretation, let me now defuse the three most substantial challenges made to previous versions of non-conceptualist interpretations. The first objection concerns what might be called the *ontology* of intuitions, insofar as it consists in an argument that the involvement of concepts are required for the mere 'having' of an intuition to be possible. The second, more *systematic*, challenge concerns the crucial role that this thesis of the necessary dependence of intuitions on concepts is thought to play in the Transcendental Deduction. The third concerns the *semantics* of intuitions more directly, as it consists in an argument that concepts must be involved for intuitions to enjoy any representational relation to objects whatsoever.

In this section I will present the core of these challenges; in the next section (§6) I will show how they can be overcome. This will also let me further differentiate my own account from previous non-conceptualist interpretations.

5.1 The ontology of intuitions. Conceptualist interpreters place a considerable amount of weight on certain claims in both versions of the Transcendental Deduction that seem to suggest that Kant thinks that the very having of intuitions is not possible, but for certain acts of synthesis or ‘combination [Verbindung]’. This is taken to point toward conceptualism about intuitions because Kant claims explicitly that ‘*all* combination is an action of the understanding’ (B130; my ital.; cf., B134-35). Insofar as the understanding itself is defined by Kant to be primarily the capacity for thinking, understood as ‘cognition through concepts’ (B94), its combination would seem to involve concepts as well – at least the pure concepts or categories (cf., B105). If intuiting necessarily involved such combination, it would be constituted, in part, by concepts, and then the candidate ‘vehicle’ of the non-conceptual content would be shown to be a vehicle for conceptual content after all (cf. Ginsborg 2008: 66 and 69; Griffith 2010: §5, 9; and Engstrom 2006: 17).

That Kant thinks synthesis or combination *is* required for intuition is thought to follow from Kant’s discussion in both editions of the Transcendental Deduction of what he calls the ‘synthesis of apprehension *in intuition*’ (cf., A98f and B160f). In the A-Deduction Kant describes this synthesis as follows:

Every intuition contains a manifold in itself.... [...] Now in order for unity to come from this manifold..., first the running through [Durchlaufen] and then the taking together [Zusammennehmung] of this manifold is necessary, which action I call the *synthesis of apprehension*, since it is aimed directly at the intuition, which, to be sure, provides a manifold, but which can never effect this as such, and indeed as contained *in one representation*, without the occurrence of such a synthesis. (A99)

Here Kant can seem to be claiming that, in order to have an intuition – i.e., in order to have something that has the unity that a single intuition has – a synthesis is required.

Kant's description of this same synthesis in §26 of the B-Deduction can seem to make all the more evident his commitment to the dependence of our having an intuition upon this synthesis – and, dependence, in particular, upon the involvement of the pure concepts or categories.²⁸ And if we add to these passages Kant's often-cited claim from the *Leitfaden* that it is 'the pure concept of understanding' that both 'gives unity to the different representations in a judgment' *but also* 'gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations *in an intuition*' (B105), Kant's commitment to the involvement of concepts in the having of intuitions might seem to be demonstrated beyond doubt.

5.2. *The Transcendental Deduction.* The second main objection to the non-conceptualist interpretation points to the specific context of the previous set of claims – namely, to the fact that they arise at key points in Kant's 'Transcendental Deduction' of the objective validity of the pure concepts. If Kant were a non-conceptualist, it is suggested, Kant's strategy in the Transcendental Deduction would not only have no hope of succeeding, but would make no sense whatsoever (cf. Ginsborg 2008: 68-69, and Griffith 2010: §4, 8).

The conclusion Kant is aiming at in the Deduction is often taken to be expressed in §26 of the B-edition:

[E]verything that may ever come before our senses *must* stand under the laws that arise apriori from the understanding alone. [...] Now since all possible perception depends [abhängt] on the synthesis of apprehension..., all possible perceptions, hence everything that can ever reach empirical consciousness, i.e., all appearances of nature, as far as their combination [Verbindung] is concerned, stand under the categories.... (B164-65)

As the conceptualist interpreters see it, in order to reach this conclusion, Kant's strategy is to show that the very 'unity' of what is given through the senses – i.e., the unity of an intuition itself – is something for which the understanding is responsible via the synthesis of

²⁸ The key passages from §26 are at B160-61 and especially B164-65. The latter is quoted in §5.2, and is what Griffith identifies as 'perhaps the most explicit statement' of the dependence of intuition on the categories (2010: §10.3, 22).

apprehension. Indeed, they urge, it is precisely this that is the larger point of the claims about apprehension presented above. It is only because Kant can show that the very being, as it were, of an intuition is constituted by understanding – so the argument goes – that he can remove the worry that the understanding’s concepts might not be valid of what is given in intuition, i.e., that appearances might not ‘stand under’ the categories.

If, by contrast, the non-conceptualist were right to think that Kant’s considered view was instead that concepts are *not* involved in the very having of intuitions – i.e., if Kant really thought that it is *not* of the essence of intuitions and appearances themselves to involve (and ‘depend on’) concepts – then Kant could not conclude apriori that they do *and must* ‘stand under’ the categories. In effect, the second objection is that, if the first objection fails, then so too must the Deduction itself. If the non-conceptualist interpretation is correct, then Kant’s strategy in the Transcendental Deduction is hopelessly confused.

5.3. *The semantics of intuitions.* The third challenge is perhaps the most direct one, as it specifically targets the nature of the content of intuitions. This arises from texts that seem to suggest that, regardless of whether Kant thinks that concepts must be involved for intuitions to be had or not, Kant thinks that intuitions – indeed, representations of any sort – do not acquire any ‘relation to an object’ *at all* until synthesis through concepts has given them such a relation. Since, on my account, the particular representational relation to an object that a representation bears just *is* its content, this would imply that a representation simply does not have any content – really, any intentionality – until concepts become involved and introduce the requisite relation. This third challenge, therefore, poses the following dilemma: either intuitions without concepts simply do not have a content in the relevant sense – they are ‘empty’, as it were – or, if it is constitutive of intuitions to have a content (as it seems to be), then intuitions themselves, and their contents, *must* be constituted by

concepts (cf. Willaschek 1997: 560; Griffith 2010: §5, 9 and §10.4, 22; and Engstrom 2006: 18-19).²⁹

This theme is also one that is thought to flow throughout both versions of the Deduction. In the A-Deduction, for example, when Kant asks: ‘what does it mean if one speaks of an object corresponding to and therefore also distinct from the cognition?’, he answers as follows:

[O]ur thought of the relation [Beziehung] of all cognition to its object carries something of necessity with it...since insofar as they are to relate to an object, our cognitions must also necessarily agree with each other in their relation to it, i.e., they must have that unity that constitutes the *concept* of an object. (A104-5; my ital.)

This might be taken to imply that the very having of a relation to an object is something that requires that ‘the concept of an object’ be involved in a given cognition.³⁰

A similar claim can seem to be found in the B-Deduction as well. In §17, for example, Kant writes as if ‘an object’ *just is* ‘that in the *concept* of which the manifold of a given intuition is united’ (B137; my ital.). He then goes on to claim that ‘the unity of consciousness’ that pertains to such ‘uniting’ according to a concept is ultimately ‘that which alone *constitutes* [ausmacht] the relation of representations to an object’ (B137; my ital.). And still other texts from the first *Critique* might be taken to point toward a similar conclusion (cf. B242-44, A250, B304, and 11:52).

²⁹ For earlier versions of this thesis, see (Kemp Smith 1918: 222); (Sellars 1968: I, §59, 23); and (Pippin 1982: 33). Similar interpretations are provided in (Prauss 1971) and (Dickerson 2005), both of whom see intuition per se as providing only something which must be given an ‘interpretation [Deutung]’ by our understanding if it is to represent any object (Prauss), something which supplies only a ‘medium in which’ we can ‘see’ or ‘picture’ objects thanks to acts of understanding (Dickerson).

³⁰ Kant seems to say as much shortly thereafter, writing that the ‘relation to an object’ is ‘is nothing other than the necessary unity of consciousness, thus also of the synthesis of the manifold through a common function of the mind for combining [verbinden] it in one representation’ (A109; my ital.). Kant’s thesis can seem to be that the very ‘relation’ of a cognition to its object is constituted (‘provided’) by the unity of a synthesis or combination, according to a ‘common function’, i.e., a pure concept.

§6. Replies to objections

Let me now reply to each of these objections in turn.

6.1. Before we look again at the particular texts at issue in §5.1, the first thing to note is that even if conceptualist interpreters are right in their claim that Kant thinks that synthesis and concepts are essentially involved in every intuition, this would not, by itself, *necessarily* show that Kant must think that the *content* of intuitions is thereby conceptual.³¹ At the very least, determining how exactly this first objection supports the conceptualist interpretation will have to wait until more is said about how *they* mean for ‘content’ to be understood in these circumstances.

For the sake of argument, however, let us assume that there is a valid inference somewhere nearabouts. At this point, the most common strategy adopted by non-conceptualist interpreters so far has been to try to find a way to break the link between synthesis, on the one hand, and understanding and concepts, on the other.³² As their critics have been quick to point out, however, this strategy faces a straightforwardly uphill battle if it hopes to ever accommodate the sequence of texts we have cited above (cf. Ginsborg 2008:

³¹ For one thing, it is at least conceivable that concepts could be involved in representations in ways that do not fully or completely transform their content into something that is thorough-goingly conceptual – into something, that is, that has no non-conceptual remainder. Perhaps concepts can serve to unify various non-conceptual contents without thereby rendering these contents conceptual at all. Perhaps the content of so-called ‘demonstrative concepts’ (like *this-such*) are at least not completely conceptual in nature, but something more of a hybrid. (Compare (Hanna 2008: 56f) and (Peacocke 2001: 244f).) Note that even Sellars – who is the interpreter most responsible for introducing the form ‘this-such’ into the analysis of Kant’s doctrine of intuitions – concedes that what he means to express by the word replacing ‘such’ in ‘this-such’ (e.g., ‘cube’ in ‘this-cube’) is *not* what this word typically expresses, because it is not meant to express anything general: ‘in the representation: this-cube, *cube* is not occurring as a *general* at all. The hyphenated phrase ‘this-cube’ expresses a representing of something *as a cube* in a way that is conceptually prior to *cube* as a general or universal representation’ (Sellars 1968: I.§15, 6-7).

³² Allais, for example, tries to find room for a distinction between ‘synthesizing that is conceptualizing’ and synthesizing that is not, in order to allow for synthesis to be necessary for intuition but to block the implication that intuitions are concept-involving after all (cf., Allais 2009: 395-6 and 406-7). Like Allais, Rohs takes the synthesis of apprehension mentioned above to be just such a ‘non-conceptual’ synthesis (see Rohs 2001: 220-21; cf., Allais 2009: 396). In a similar fashion, while Hanna, too, concedes, that intuition must involve a kind of synthesis, he insists that it is one that is brought about by a ‘lower-level spontaneity’ possessed by the imagination, independently of the understanding, which in turn makes the relevant acts of synthesis distinct in kind from those that pertain to the understanding (2008: 62).

68f; and Griffith 2010: §10.2, 19f). In particular, it is hard to see how this sort of approach will ever be able to square with Kant's explicit claim (cited above) that '*all* combination' is an act of *understanding*.³³ These passages, and others besides, seem to stifle any hope for carving out space for a kind of synthesis that does not involve concepts. We would do well, therefore, to look for another way around this objection.

Such an alternate route opens up if we take a closer look at the passages cited above in §5.1. What a closer look reveals is not that Kant thinks that intuitions involve some *non*-conceptual synthesis, but rather he thinks they do not involve *any* synthesis *at all* – contrary to the way these passages have been read by the partisans on both sides of this debate. What is at issue in these passages, for Kant, is not what is required for the mere *having* of an intuition, but rather what is involved in the reflective *representing* of an intuition *as* being constituted in a certain way, *as* providing us with a certain determinate relation to an object.

We can begin to see that it is the representation of intuitions, and not intuitions themselves (*per se*), that is Kant's true topic in these passages by first filling in a key ellipse from the A-Deduction quote above:

Every intuition contains a manifold in itself, which however would not be *represented as such* [my ital.] if the mind did not distinguish [unterschiede] the time in the succession of impressions on one another; for *as contained in one moment*, no representation can ever be by anything other than absolute unity. (A99)

Here Kant signals that he means for there to be a clear distinction between (a) an intuition's *being* a unity, and *containing* a manifold, and (b) that intuition *being represented as* a unity, or *being represented as* containing a manifold. Kant also makes clear that the former two features of an intuition (being a unity, containing a manifold) belong to it *per se*, prior to and independent of any further acts of mind. That some unity pertains to an intuition *per se* follows from

³³ At several points Kant even asserts that the spontaneity of imagination is 'one and the same with' that of understanding (cf., B162n), which would seem to block the escape-route we saw Hanna float above.

Kant's claim that a single intuition 'as contained in one moment' has 'an *absolute* unity' (A99; my ital.). What is more, Kant's use of 'absolute' here points to the fact that *this* unity is one that has *no* further ground whatsoever, let alone one in any act of synthesis.³⁴ That containing a manifold also pertains to an intuition per se follows from Kant's claim that this manifold is already there to be 'distinguished by the mind' and subsequently 'represented as manifold', prior to these acts actually coming about.³⁵

With this distinction in mind, it also becomes quite clear which unity it is that Kant is taking to be dependent on the 'synthesis of apprehension in intuition', in the remainder of the passage at A99: it is precisely the unity that 'comes from' the manifold by the manifold 'being run through' and 'taken together', due to a synthesis that is 'aimed at the intuition' – i.e., our (b) above and *not* our (a), not the 'absolute unity' that already pertains to the intuition simply as 'providing the manifold'. Kant's point here is thus that the synthesis of apprehension is required only if we wish to 'apprehend' an intuition *as* containing a particular, determinate manifold – that is, only if we wish to represent a particular manifold *as* 'contained in one representation'. It is *not* that such synthesis is required for the mere having of the intuition in the first place, or the mere having of a representation that does in

³⁴ Note that Kant's claim here is that it is a *manifold* that has an absolute unity 'in one moment', and not that this absolute unity is 'simple' (or 'atomic'). If Kant had claimed the latter – as Paton, for example, seems to think (cf., Paton 1936: I.358) – then it would be hard to make sense of the idea that there could be further acts of 'distinguishing' and 'running through' what is given in this moment.

The significance of this earlier 'absolute unity' in sense, something present pre-'apprehension', is something that has been overlooked by most of Kant's interpreters, not just the conceptualists. Both Paton and Kemp Smith rightly distinguish the synthesis of apprehension from what is responsible for 'yielding the manifold' in the first place (cf., Kemp Smith 1918: 226f; Paton 1936: I.347), something that both think we should attribute to what Kant calls the '*synopsis* of the manifold apriori through sense', at the outset of the A-Deduction (A94) – though neither properly connects the synopsis with Kant's claim that that it is not *just* a manifold that is provided prior to apprehension, but one that is given in 'absolute unity'. (Indeed, Paton explicitly rejects this connection.) A more careful analysis of this point can be found in (Allison 2004: 113-14).

³⁵ A related distinction is present at A97, where Kant distinguishes the 'synopsis' of sense, which is what characterizes sense insofar as 'it contains a manifold in its intuition', from the 'synthesis' that '*corresponds* to this', the first component of which is the synthesis of 'apprehension of the representations *as* modifications of the mind in intuition' (my ital.). The synthesis of apprehension 'corresponds' to the synopsis in that it takes what is provided by the synopsis as its object, in order to run through and represent it *as* a manifold of modifications of mind of a certain sort. The original belonging-together of a manifold, by being contained in an intuition, however, is something that is present prior to this synthesis.

fact contain a manifold. In other words, while the synthesis of apprehension ‘in intuition’ is surely a synthesis that is ‘*aimed* at intuition’, it is not at all one that makes up or puts together an intuition, or puts something ‘in’ intuition, in the first place.

The very same distinction can be found in the B-Deduction. Kant here also distinguishes ‘the manifold of representations’ that ‘can be given in an intuition’, on the one hand, from, on the other hand, ‘the combination of the manifold in general’ as something that ‘can never come to us through the senses’ (B129). Kant goes on to clarify, however, that what he means to be designating by ‘combination’ or ‘synthesis’, as ‘an act of understanding’, concerns again our ability to ‘*represent* something *as* combined [als verbunden vorstellen]’ (B130; my ital.).³⁶ But then, just as in the A-Deduction, Kant need not be seen as claiming here that synthesis or combination by our understanding is necessary for us to *have* representations that *are* unities of a manifold. Rather, synthesis is only necessary for us to consciously *represent* (‘apprehend’) these representations *as* unities, *as* giving us something that contains a manifold, *as* containing this or that determinate manifold that is unified in this particular way rather than that.

As Kant frames the issue in §17, what he is concerned with here are the conditions under which intuitions must stand ‘in order to *become* an object for me’ (B138; my ital.) – i.e., in order for the intuitions themselves (and their content (appearances)) to become the objects of *further* representations. This becoming an object of some further representation, however, is a concern distinct from the conditions that intuitions must meet in order to themselves already represent or relate to an object. The kind of representation at issue here in the B-Deduction is therefore something that is distinct from any intuition itself; it is,

³⁶ This sharper focus is reiterated later in the same section: ‘only through [this act of understanding] can something have been given *as* combined [als verbunden] to our power for representation’ (B130; my ital.).

rather, something over and above intuitions, since it is a representation that has an intuition (or several) as its object.

This is made explicit again in §26, where Kant contrasts the mere having of an intuition with a separate ‘empirical consciousness’ of the intuition itself, something he calls ‘*perception*’. What is more, Kant here also explicitly describes the ‘synthesis of apprehension’ as that through which this special kind of awareness of a manifold becomes possible: this synthesis is that ‘through which *perception*, i.e., the empirical *consciousness* of [the manifold] (as appearance), becomes possible’ (B160; my ital.). This fits quite naturally with our above analysis of the A-Deduction’s description of apprehension: a certain act of understanding (here, ‘composition [Zusammensetzung]’) is necessary for a special kind of consciousness – namely, ‘perception’, or the consciousness of the manifold *as* manifold, or *as* this or that appearance. In fact, we can now see that Kant already makes use of this terminological distinction in the A-Deduction itself: ‘the first thing that is given to us is appearance, which, *if* it is combined with consciousness, is called *perception*’ (A120; my ital.). Yet once this terminological distinction is recognized, we can see that it does not follow from any of Kant’s remarks about apprehension ‘in intuition’ (as that which yields perception) that such activity is *also* required for the mere having of an intuition per se, or the being given an appearance per se.³⁷

In fact, once we are sensitive to Kant’s intention to draw a distinction between intuition (appearance) and perception as the ‘apprehension’ of an intuition in a further representation, it becomes apparent that this is a distinction that Kant returns to again and

³⁷ Indeed, in §26 as well, we find Kant describing only what transpires ‘*if* I make the empirical intuition of a house into a perception through apprehension of its manifold’, again explicitly distinguishing what pertains to intuition per se, and what pertains instead to the ‘synthesis of apprehension, i.e., perception’, as what ‘makes’ something *else* out of the original intuition (B162; my ital.).

again throughout the rest of the *Transcendental Analytic*.³⁸ We can also see it at work elsewhere in the Critical writings, and anticipated in pre-critical writings as well.³⁹

What follows, therefore, from Kant's discussion of the synthesis of apprehension in the Deduction (and elsewhere) is *only* that synthetic acts of understanding are necessarily involved in a kind of representation that pertains to intuitions. More specifically, they are required for certain kinds of 'empirical consciousness' (perception) *directed at* intuitions, representations that take intuitions as their objects. This point, however, does nothing to show that such synthesis is necessarily involved already in the intuitions themselves. To the contrary, all of the passages under discussion are compatible with, and some even directly suggestive of, an account of intuitions in which our being given an appearance does *not* need any synthesis whatsoever to take place.⁴⁰ Hence, even if the taking of an intuition as an object in its own right might very well require what might be called a 'reflective' consciousness of our intuitions and their contents, this would not entail that the original

³⁸ It is used most perspicuously to differentiate what elements are to be synthesized in the first two sections of the Principles (Axioms of *Intuition* vs. Anticipations of *Perception*). And within the Axioms of Intuition, we find Kant distinguishing an appearance and the correlative intuition from what must be true *if* these are to be 'apprehended, i.e., taken up into empirical consciousness', all the while clearly associating the 'synthesis' and 'composition [Zusammensetzung]' of the manifold in an appearance with the latter act (B202-3). Whereas 'every appearance as intuition *is* an extensive magnitude', such that 'all appearances are already *intuited* as aggregates (multitudes of antecedently given parts)', Kant claims that a different act is required for an appearance to be 'cognized' or 'represented and apprehended by us *as* extensive' (B204; my ital.). Similarly, in the Second Analogy, Kant speaks of 'appearances *in contradistinction to* the representations of apprehension', since appearances are to function as 'the object that is distinct from them', i.e., the latter (B236; my ital.).

³⁹ It appears to underlie the *Prolegomena's* distinction between what is involved in mere intuition, on the one hand, and what pertains to judgments of perception and of experience on the other (cf. *Prolegomena* §§18-22), though this discussion is notoriously vexed. Compare as well *Inaugural Dissertation* §5 (2:394).

⁴⁰ Here is the place to take up a further iteration of this objection, according to which the Deduction allegedly asserts a necessary role for the pure concepts to play already in the *pure intuitions* of space and time, with the key passages being A99, A102, B136n, and B160-61. Again, a closer look shows Kant's topic to be what is necessarily involved in the formation of the *concepts* of space and time, on the basis of these intuitions, not the conditions for the original intuitions of space and time *per se*. At A107, for example, Kant explicitly identifies the 'concepts' of space and time as what is at issue, noting, moreover, that these concepts are what arise when intuitions are put in relation to transcendental apperception (understanding), which presupposes that these intuitions are already there in the first place. A similar distinction seems to be implicit at B160n-61n, though (as many have noted) the text of this footnote is extraordinarily dense. At the very least, more would need to be shown that, despite the explicit mention of 'concepts' of space and time, these texts *must* be read as making claims about the conditions of pure intuitions (rather, say, than conditions of their 'apprehension').

intuiting itself requires anything more than the conscious ‘living through’, as it were, of a case of being immediately related to some object.⁴¹

6.2. With this distinction in hand, we can disarm the second objection in quicker fashion. For we can now see that the summary of one of Kant’s aim in the Deduction at the end of §26 (cited in §5.2) is quite specific in its characterization of its subject-matter. It is *only* ‘perception’ in the sense spelled out above – i.e., only something that involves the conscious ‘apprehension’ of an intuition as an object, by way of acts of distinguishing and comparing – that the Deduction aims to show is ‘made possible’ by synthesis, and consequently ‘stands under’ the categories (B164-65).⁴² Some other evidence, therefore, would be required to show that Kant’s aim for the Deduction is what the conceptualist interpreters claim it to be: that he means to show that simply being given an appearance in an intuition is already an act that *also* ‘stands under’, and is only ‘made possible’ by, the categories.

In fact, when we look at what Kant himself identifies as the ‘principle toward which the entire investigation must be directed’, in the ‘Transition’ to the Deduction (in what should have been numbered ‘§14’), what we find is that he does *not* put forward a thesis concerning the necessary concept-dependence of intuitions or appearances at all, but instead only one concerning the concept-dependence of ‘*experience* [Erfahrung]’: ‘the transcendental deduction of all apriori concepts has a principle, ...namely: that [pure concepts] must be

⁴¹ My use of ‘reflective’ here is meant to pick up on Kant’s description of concepts themselves as ‘reflected representations’ in his notes on logic (cf. JL §1, 9:91). In *Inaugural Dissertation* §5, Kant also points to ‘reflection’ as precisely what is required for the transition from the mere having of appearances to full-fledged experience: while ‘that which precedes the logical use of the understanding is called appearance’, ‘experience’ is ‘the *reflective* cognition [cognitio reflexiva] which arises when several appearances are compared by the understanding’, with the result being that ‘there is no way from appearance to experience *except by reflection* in accordance with the logical use of the understanding’ (2:394; my ital.). I return to the distinction between appearance and experience below in §6.2.

⁴² Indeed, with this distinction in mind, we can also see that in the concluding summary from §26 as well, Kant clearly means to target, not appearances *per se*, but rather appearances ‘*as far as their combination is concerned* [ihrer Verbindung nach]’, as that which he takes to have shown to ‘stand under the categories’ (B164-65).

recognized as apriori conditions of the possibility of *experiences*' (B126; my ital.). What is more, immediately prior to this, Kant spells out a distinction between merely being an intuition and being an experience, one that he takes to be marked by nothing other than the involvement of *concepts*: 'all experience contains [enthält], in addition to the intuition of the senses, through which something is given, a *concept* of an object that is given in intuition or appears' (B126). But then while Kant here surely affirms that *experience* is concept-dependent, this shows nothing about intuition because experience (like perception) involves something over and above mere intuition.

Indeed, Kant's remark here about the 'addition' of concepts would make little sense if intuitions *already* contained concepts. It fits quite well, by contrast, with other remarks that have been rightly emphasized by previous non-conceptualist interpreters: Kant's explicit assertions of the concept-*independence* of intuition and appearance at the very outset of the Deduction (in §13). Most notably, Kant there claims that 'the categories of understanding...*do not at all* represent to us the conditions under which objects are given in intuition' (B122; my ital.), and that 'intuition by no means requires the functions of thinking' (B123). Kant also claims explicitly in this passage that 'objects *can indeed* appear to us without necessarily having to be related to functions of understanding, and therefore without the understanding containing their apriori conditions' (B122; my ital.).

The main strategy of the conceptualist interpreter has been to claim that Kant cannot *really* be asserting here what he otherwise seems to be clearly asserting.⁴³ My interpretation,

⁴³ For the reply that Kant cannot mean what he says in these sections preceding the Deduction, but instead means to introduce only a merely apparent difficulty, something 'counterfactual', see (Ginsborg 2008: 70f) and (Griffith 2010: §4, 7); in this Ginsborg and Griffith are anticipated by Paton (cf., 1936: I.324n3). As Allais has already argued convincingly, however (cf., 2009: 387n13), on grammatical grounds alone it is very difficult to maintain such a counterfactual reading of the passages I have cited above (unlike others in the neighborhood, e.g., at B123). Here I try to further the case for taking Kant at his word in these passages by focusing our attention on a distinction (intuition vs. perception and experience) that is at issue in them but that Allais does not herself discuss.

by contrast, provides us with sufficient textual and systematic support to allow us to take Kant's claims at face-value. It also allows for the same straightforward approach to the many other passages that also assert the independence of intuitions and appearances from the involvement of concepts (e.g., an intuition is a representation that 'can precede any act of thinking' (B67) and 'can be given prior to all thinking' (B132)).⁴⁴

6.3. To deal with the final objection, let me now show how this initial distinction between merely having an intuition, on the one hand, and this intuition's being apprehended by, or belonging to, further acts of consciousness (such as perception or experience), on the other, allows us to introduce a parallel distinction between two kinds of consciousness of the intuition's *relation* to its object as well, i.e., two kinds of consciousness of its *content*. This latter distinction, in turn, will open up room for us to see that Kant does not mean to claim that concepts play a necessary role in introducing all intentional relations to an object, but only a certain kind of *consciousness* of this relation – namely, one in which this relation itself is made 'determinate [bestimmt]' for consciousness itself.

We can see this if we look at the context of the passages cited in §5.3. In the A-Deduction, for example, Kant explicitly describes the role of concepts in relation to the manifold in intuition as precisely that of '*determining* [bestimmen]' this manifold according to a 'rule' (A105; my ital.). This 'determining' according to rule, however, consists in 'representing the necessary *reproduction* of the manifold of given intuitions' – i.e., as representing these intuitions *themselves* and their manifolds as needing to be ordered in a certain way, whenever they are *re*-represented in the future (A106; my ital.). This need not imply that it is involved in the original bringing-about or producing of the intuitions in the first place.

⁴⁴ For further textual evidence of this independence, see (Allais 2009: 387-88) and (Hanna 2005: 259f).

The same thought arises in the B-Deduction. In §17 Kant describes our understanding as the faculty for the ‘*determinate*’ relation of given representations to an object’ (B137; my ital.). In fact, Kant introduces the *concept* of an object, as ‘that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is *united*’ (B137), precisely in order to spell out what is required in order make the relation that is contained in a given representation a ‘determinate’ relation for our consciousness. The particular way in which the given manifold is ‘united’ in a concept is therefore what *determines*, for consciousness, what is given in intuition *as* something related to this object rather than that one. This act does not, however, *institute* this relation itself; rather, it makes us reflectively aware of the relation (makes the relation ‘determinate’ for consciousness). And Kant returns to this same point throughout the first *Critique* and in other writings.⁴⁵

Hence, while understanding is necessary for the transformation of our consciousness of an object by its appearance in an intuition into a consciousness of that object *as* one that is appearing in this and other appearances – i.e., a consciousness of this object *as* an object of experience – no such act is necessary for intuiting itself. It is only the constitution of experience out of intuitions, through the comparison and synthesis of appearances with one

⁴⁵ Compare A111, B125-26, B242, B314, and Kant’s unsent reply to a 1791 letter from J.S. Beck (11:310-11). Throughout Kant’s concern is distinguish how a given representation, simply as representation, ‘has’ an object to which it is related from what is required for *us* to *take* (‘determine’) what already relates us to an object *as* so related, to ‘posit’, ‘ascribe’, or ‘think’ an object for the appearance.

With the distinction between intuition, perception, and experience in mind, it is worth emphasizing the need to rethink what is at issue in the passages from the Second Analogy often cited as evidence for conceptualism (furnished in a footnote above in §5.3). As one might now expect, in the Analogies ‘of *Experience*’, Kant’s topic is how ‘perceptions’ come to be unified in the kind of ‘connection [Verknüpfung]’ that constitutes ‘experience’ (B218). Since the ‘perception’ at issue is that of an empirical consciousness (apprehension) of an intuition, and not the simple having of the intuition per se, and since ‘experience’ itself is something that necessarily ‘contains the concept of an object that is given in intuition or appears’ (B126), Kant’s primary topic in the Analogy (how we represent objects in experience) is actually *two* steps removed from the conditions on intuiting.

another in reflection, that requires acts of understanding and hence concepts, not the intuiting itself.⁴⁶

To be sure, without such acts of understanding, ‘without concepts’, Kant clearly thinks that we are, in an important sense, ‘blind’ as to what it is that we are intuiting, as the oft-cited passage has it (B75). Its crucial corollary, however, is that the absence of either these synthetic acts or the resulting ‘empirical consciousness’ need not *remove* or *eliminate* the original content of the intuition itself (cf. Hanna 2005: 257). Not only Kant does not claim that intuitions without concepts become ‘nothing’ at all, he does not even claim that become ‘empty’ or without content, which is what we would expect, were the conceptualist interpretation to be true. Rather, Kant says of such cases that we are ‘blind’ because we are not conscious of something that *is* there – namely, the particular features of the relation to an object that we already enjoy in the intuition. In the mere having of an intuition, we are simply conscious of some *object* by way of grasping its appearance. We are not, however, *also* conscious of this appearance-*relation* itself. For this latter sort of reflective consciousness, a further representation is required, one in which we no longer simply live through the intuiting but instead take it as an object of consciousness in its own right.⁴⁷

§7. Conclusion

In the first parts of this essay, I argued that, if we understand by ‘content’ something on the order of Fregean ‘sense’ – where this consists in a representation’s particular relation to an object (its ‘mode of presenting’ this object) – then it is clear that we should conclude

⁴⁶ Compare again *Inaugural Dissertation* §5: ‘that which precedes [antecedit] the logical use of understanding is called *appearance*; while the reflective cognition, which arises when several appearances are compared [comparatis] by the understanding is called *experience*’ (2:394).

⁴⁷ Here I think Allais is on exactly the right track in emphasizing the distinction between representing an object and representing it *as* an object or *as* anything at all for that matter (cf., 2009: 401 and 405). Compare as well Peacocke’s distinction between ‘content that is objective’ and ‘content which is not only objective, but which is also conceived of as objective’ (Peacocke 2001: 264).

that Kant accepts non-conceptual content. This is because Kant accepts that intuitions put us in a representational relation to objects that is distinct in kind from the relation that pertains to concepts. I argued, furthermore, that this is the meaning that Kant himself assigns to the term ‘content’. We should conclude, then, that Kant himself could assert, in his own voice, that intuitions have a non-conceptual content.

In the later parts, I then set out to defuse what I take to be the three most pressing objections from the side of the conceptualist interpreters. I hope to have shown that while the conceptualists have picked up on a genuinely persistent theme in the texts they marshal in their defense, they have done so at the neglect of another theme that is equally present in these same texts. Conceptualists are surely right to emphasize that Kant thinks that intuition without synthesis cannot give us a certain kind of consciousness (perception, experience) of the relation to an object that an intuition provides. As we have seen, without such synthesis (in reflection), we are ‘blind’ to the content of the intuition, in the sense that it will not be grasped ‘*as appearance*’, let alone as the appearance of any particular object. Conceptualists are wrong, however, to infer from this that Kant also thinks that intuition on its own cannot already put us into some immediate representational relation through which we are thereby conscious of an object. All of the passages they point to are not only compatible with, but are even often suggestive of, the contrary interpretation, according to which intuitions do possess an independent, non-conceptual content.

Now, even if I have succeeded on both the positive and defensive fronts, the account I have developed here is, of course, provisional in many respects, as must be any brief discussion of the nature of appearances or of the Deduction. What is more, because Kant’s accounts of intuition and appearance lie at the very heart of his transcendental idealism as a whole, there is good reason to think that the complete resolution of the present

debate will have to be a part of a more comprehensive proposal for interpreting transcendental idealism in general.

Even so, my hope is to have brought to the fore new systematic considerations on behalf of the non-conceptualist reading of Kant, while also helping to bring more sharply into focus certain neglected features of Kant's texts, and so, in this way, have helped to move this interpretive debate at least a few steps forward.⁴⁸

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