

KANT'S THEORY OF ABSOLUTE SPONTANEITY

BY

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ABSTRACT

The basic aim of this dissertation is to show that epistemic objectivity is only possible through the absolute spontaneity of the understanding. I spell out Kant's concept of spontaneity as it appears in the *Critique*, and then sketch the implications both for Kant interpretation as well as contemporary accounts of objectivity in epistemology and philosophy of mind.

In the first chapter, I do two things: (1) I spell out what it would mean for the spontaneity of the understanding to be absolute, and (2) I argue that Kant's own view is that the understanding is absolutely spontaneous. I take the spontaneity of the understanding to be absolute when it has no outer boundary. Thus, the absolute spontaneity thesis rejects the view that there is anything external to what Kant calls the transcendental 'I': everything is, in some sense, *internal* to it. What we discover is that virtually every modern account of Kant's theory of spontaneity assumes that there is something external to the 'I', and therefore virtually every modern account of spontaneity is a version of the relative spontaneity thesis. But, Kant's theory of spontaneity is absolute, which can be understood through his claim that the 'I think' must be able to accompany all my representations.

In the second chapter, I attempt to show why all versions of the relative spontaneity thesis fail the test that Kant has given us. As chapter one demonstrates, knowledge is essentially self-conscious. This implies that there is no judgment of reality that could take reality to be external to our self-conscious judging of it. Each version of the relative spontaneity view—including naturalism and functionalism about judgment—tries to allow for the kind of externality that Kant's view does not permit, and so should be discarded.

In the third chapter, I argue that the absolute spontaneity of the understanding is not inconsistent with the idea that our knowledge relies on a manifold given in sensibility.

Understanding this point requires seeing how our sensible capacity can be internal to the understanding, and thus to the I of self-consciousness. We look at a view that attempts to make sense of this thought: the *spontaneous-receptivity* view.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, we see that the spontaneous receptivity view is insufficient to account for Kant's theory of absolute spontaneity. Understanding this point requires an examination of the nature of what McDowell calls the "unboundedness" of the conceptual. This, in turn, requires answering two related questions: what exactly does it mean for the conceptual to have no outer limit? And, what could it mean for something to be given to us in experience without limiting our knowledge? I argue that our dependence on sensibility is not the same as a limitation *from* sensibility. This allows us to consider Kant's account of human epistemic finitude. I then suggest a possible answer to the worry that absolute spontaneity implies absolute idealism.

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Dedicated to Megha, with love

Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen,
die sich über die Dinge ziehn.
Ich werde den letzten vielleicht nicht vollbringen,
aber versuchen will ich ihn.

Ich kreise um Gott, um den uralten Turm,
und ich kreise jahrtausendlang;
und ich weiß noch nicht: bin ich ein Falke, ein Sturm
oder ein großer Gesang.

-Rainer Maria Rilke, *Das Studienbuch* (I 2, 1899-1903)

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CHAPTER 1: THE ABSOLUTE SPONTANEITY OF THE UNDERSTANDING

§1 Spontaneity: Theoretical and Practical, Relative and Absolute

Knowing that *p* involves judging that *p*. And we understand judgment to be a kind of act, something we do.¹ Even if we are sometimes merely passive in cognition—for example, to what we encounter through the senses, we think of *judgment* as something we are responsible for. Take this as a very rough initial distinction between cognitive passivity and cognitive activity. Sensation is, in some sense, passive; judgment is, in some sense, active. This is the basis for understanding Kant's claim in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (hereafter: first *Critique*) that the faculty for judging (the understanding) is a capacity to bring about representations from itself.² I will argue in what follows that Kant takes the understanding to be such a faculty precisely because when I judge, I take my judgment to be something for which I am responsible, something which belongs to me in a way that other of my states do not. If so, then the only way to fully comprehend human knowledge is through comprehending this special relation of belongingness.

This rather simple sounding thought is also perhaps the most important thought underlying Kant's critical philosophy. The first *Critique* is famous for its many distinctions: pure/empirical, intuition/concept, sensibility/understanding. But the distinction that is perhaps the most deeply pervasive throughout and central to Kant's critical philosophy as a whole, and the one underlying all the previous distinctions, is that between spontaneity and receptivity. While this pair of concepts may carry some intuitive weight in a reading of the first *Critique*—say, when we contrast the thought of sensibility being *affected* by objects with the thought of the

¹ Since this dissertation seeks to understand what sort of act this is, we cannot yet define it.

² A51/B75

understanding actively *judging* what is given—it is far from clear on its face exactly how to understand them. This is particularly evident when we read Kantians and interpreters of Kant, from all the way back to Fichte, who took the I of judgment to “posit itself”³ (a potentially mysterious-sounding notion), through to contemporary figures, like Patricia Kitcher, who has sought a naturalistic and cognitive science-friendly understanding of the act of judgment. This shows that, on its face, the notion of judgment as something *active* as opposed to *passive* is highly ambiguous.

Kant himself acknowledges in the second *Critique* that we must distinguish between the spontaneity of a mere automaton (a Leibnizian “turnspit”) and that of a free rational being. The mere automaton can be called active in the sense that, when it is thrust into motion, it then moves itself according to some internal mechanism. The activity of a free rational being, however, can only be properly understood *through itself*, and so not through anything given, such as an innate mechanism or program.⁴ Now we might ask: how would these thoughts bear on a reading of the faculty of *understanding* as spontaneous? Is the understanding—the faculty of theoretical judgment—a mere automaton, or something more? Or, are these even exhaustive of the logical space of explanatory possibilities?

Ultimately, in this dissertation I will argue for a particular conception of the spontaneity of the understanding. I will argue, with Kant, that the understanding and its paradigmatic exercise of judgment are spontaneous in being acts of self-consciousness, understood in a certain way. In particular, we have to see that this self-consciousness cannot be circumscribed or limited in ways characteristic of many interpretations of Kant. What follows from this, then, is what we

³ Fichte (1994, 46)

⁴ Though, as we will soon see, this hardly exhausts the notion of what it is to be a free rational being. For now, this will help us begin to see the relevant distinctions.

will call an *absolute* conception of spontaneity, according to which the self-consciousness of the understanding is all-encompassing—nothing escapes this self-consciousness in the sense that nothing that could belong to cognition is intelligible independently of it. But this absolute spontaneity is also, in virtue of its being absolute, not a limitable substance, force, property, or anything else *in the world*. To begin to see how this works, it will be helpful to first compare and contrast the role that spontaneity plays in Kant’s practical and theoretical philosophy. This will, among other things, help us to get an initial grip on what it could mean for spontaneity to be absolute, and what an alternative vision of this spontaneity looks like.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (the second *Critique*), our transcendental freedom (“absolute spontaneity”, or ability to generate our actions from reason itself) is taken to follow from the moral law—a “fact of reason.”⁵ For Kant, then, acts of both theoretical knowledge (from a *Vermögen der Erkenntnisse*⁶) and practical knowledge (from *Wille*) are acts to be characterized as spontaneous. The understanding is a theoretical capacity, or one whose object (in regard to its existence) is given to it from elsewhere. The will is a practical capacity, the existence of whose object is brought about from itself. It is therefore impossible to understand knowledge in either its theoretical or practical employment except through an understanding of the sense in which those employments are employments *of spontaneity*.

But what it means for these acts to be spontaneous has been the subject of much debate.⁷ Owing to the predominantly practical understanding of spontaneity, it is commonplace to characterize spontaneity (whether in its theoretical or practical employment) as a kind of freedom. McDowell writes that spontaneity (“conceptual activity”) takes place in the “realm of

⁵ KpV, AA 5:30

⁶ KrV, B137

⁷ In recent decades, see Sellars (1970), Pippin (1987), Kitcher (1990), Allison (1990), Allison (1996), Valaris (2013), Kohl (2015), Boyle (2016).

freedom.”⁸ Allison⁹ interprets Kant as holding that the understanding is “absolutely spontaneous,” which Kitcher¹⁰ in turn takes to mean “transcendentally free.” And recently, Kohl¹¹ argues that Kant’s notion of the spontaneity of the understanding is a notion of freedom in empirical judgment. It is correct, in some sense, to think of spontaneity as a kind of freedom if by ‘freedom’ we mean something suitably general. Kant himself, albeit without explicit reference to spontaneity, claims in the *Prolegomena* that we are always *free* to judge as we see fit, regardless of what it is that we are given in intuition.¹² But, if it is insisted that we characterize spontaneity as a kind of freedom, then it is important to distinguish between our theoretical freedom (the freedom of the understanding) and our practical freedom (the freedom of the will). Even though the first *Critique* concerns itself with what the Dialectic calls “transcendental freedom” or “absolute spontaneity,” I believe that Kant’s primary interest here is in the spontaneity of the understanding, or the spontaneity of theoretical judgment. To see this, consider that Kant introduces the concept of spontaneity in two basic ways:

⁸ McDowell (1994, 5)

⁹ Allison (1996, 57)

¹⁰ Kitcher (1990)

¹¹ Kohl (2015)

¹² For our purposes, it is worth quoting this passage in depth: “When an appearance is given us, we are still quite free as to how we should judge the matter. The appearance depends upon the senses, but the judgment upon the understanding; and the only question is whether in the determination of the object there is truth or not. But the difference between truth and dreaming is not ascertained by the nature of the representations which are referred to objects (for they are the same in both cases), but by their connection according to those rules which determine the coherence of the representations in the concept of an object, and by ascertaining whether they can subsist together in experience or not” (Prol., §13 Remark III).

Kant’s reference to free judgment in this passage could be taken to mean that the understanding is spontaneous insofar as it can *step back* from what is given and evaluate it according to normative rules of judgment (logic). But I think it can equally support the conception of spontaneity which (as we will come to see) concerns this dissertation—namely the sense in which the understanding brings forth its exercises (knowledge) from itself. This latter sense does not necessarily involve “stepping back” and deliberating about what to think; it is the sort of spontaneity involved in all judgments of experience, including those that we don’t spend time deliberating over. In the third chapter, we will see that the “stepping back” (*deliberative*) conception of spontaneity is in fact derivative of the more primary sense in which we will be interested.

(1) Initially, as the spontaneity of the understanding, or the faculty of “bringing forth representations from itself.”

(2) Later, as the spontaneity of transcendental freedom, or the ability to begin new causal chains:

An absolute causal spontaneity beginning from itself a series of appearances that runs according to natural laws, hence transcendental freedom [...]¹³

A faculty of absolutely beginning a state, and hence also a series of its consequences.¹⁴

He also calls this “freedom in the cosmological sense”:

By freedom in the cosmological sense, on the contrary, I understand the faculty of beginning a state from itself, the causality of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the laws of nature.¹⁵

The spontaneity of understanding and the spontaneity of transcendental freedom must be related in some deep way (both are capacities for bringing about something from themselves), but it is not clear from what Kant has said that they are identical. In fact, they are importantly distinct. Transcendental freedom is, in a most general way, an ability for a causal series of appearances to begin from itself, to be unconditioned. The idea of transcendental freedom, in the Dialectic, arises from the question whether there can be an uncaused cause. But notice that such a question is not properly directed at the understanding if what we have in mind, with Kant in the Third Antinomy, is the question whether what is caused is a chain of appearances. The exercises brought forth from the understanding are exercises of judging. As such, acts of the understanding are not primarily *objects to be known*, but acts of knowing objects.¹⁶ It follows from this that

¹³ KrV, A446/B474

¹⁴ KrV, A445/B473

¹⁵ KrV, A533/B561

¹⁶ This is not to say that there is no sense in which judgments themselves can be thought of as appearances. The thought here is simply that insofar as we agree that judgment is an act of knowing an object, and so an act of consciousness, it is not itself primarily an object of knowledge. I hope it will become clearer later on why we should think that judgment is not any kind of causal effect.

when Kant discusses transcendental (and cosmological freedom), he is discussing, specifically, a *causal* capacity to bring about its own exercises. This already rules out the possibility that the spontaneity of understanding could be the same as transcendental freedom. From this, two points must be emphasized: first, that transcendental freedom and the spontaneity of the understanding are separate notions; second, that both notions are nevertheless species of a more general concept of an ability to bring something about from itself.

In the first *Critique* Kant says that “it is this transcendental idea of freedom on which the practical concept of freedom is grounded [...]”¹⁷ Then, in the second *Critique*, Kant discusses this practical concept of freedom *as* transcendental freedom: “which alone is practical a priori [...]”¹⁸ Transcendental freedom itself, we can now see, is ambiguous between *freedom of the will* (*Wille*) and *cosmological* freedom: the former practical and the latter theoretical, but both conceived as faculties of beginning causal chains from themselves. As I have noted, Kant also sometimes uses the terms ‘transcendental freedom’ and ‘absolute spontaneity’ interchangeably.¹⁹ It is no surprise, then, that in discussions of these notions in the secondary literature, the latter is often identified with transcendental freedom. But, as we have just seen, this is a mistake in the realm of theoretical judgment. From all of this, it should become clear that any debate over the function of ‘spontaneity’ in Kant’s critical philosophy should first inquire into what sort of relationships hold between the various distinct uses of the term throughout Kant’s writings. When Allison and Kitcher, for example, engage in debate over whether Kant thinks the spontaneity of the understanding is “absolute” or “relative” (notions we elucidate below), the

¹⁷ A533/B561

¹⁸ AA 5:96-97

¹⁹ See, e.g., A446/B474.

debate remains in darkness until we know whether “transcendental freedom” is a notion that can even be fruitfully applied to the understanding. It seems that it cannot.

Now we can ask whether it is possible for the capacities of willing and understanding to be spontaneous, and if so, what this activity could be. In this dissertation my interest is in the capacity of understanding. Thus, I am focused on the following two related issues: whether a capacity of knowledge the existence of whose object must be given to it from elsewhere can nevertheless bring about its exercises from itself; and if so, in what sense. Specifically, at A51/B75, Kant writes that the spontaneity of cognition is “the faculty for bringing forth representations itself” and identifies this with the faculty of the understanding. Call this the *spontaneity thesis*. But the thought that our understanding can bring forth its own representations is one that needs to be unpacked further, and Kant says very little else in the way of clarification. I aim to unpack this in a way that helps us to understand just what the nature and scope of this spontaneity amounts to. This chapter on its own will not be able to answer the major challenges waiting on the horizon. My aim here is twofold: (1) to present the basics of a theory of absolute spontaneity, which can then be taken up further in the remaining chapters; and (2) to carefully spell out, with Kant, how we might begin to see this theory at work in his theoretical philosophy. To do this, I will introduce the idea of absolute spontaneity in two ways: through the notion of the *internality* of self-consciousness to judgment generally, and then more specifically through Kant’s notion of an internal *principle* of judgment.

§2 Interiority, Exteriority, and the I of Judgment

We have noted that Kant calls transcendental freedom “absolute spontaneity.” In what sense is the spontaneity of transcendental freedom absolute? In the first *Critique’s* Transcendental Dialectic, Kant discusses his own use of the term absolute:

The word **absolute** is now more often used merely to indicate that something is valid of a thing considered **in itself** and thus **internally**. In this meaning, “absolutely possible” would signify what is possible in itself (internally), which is in fact the **least** one can say of an object.²⁰

The word ‘absolute’, generally, signifies what is valid (or true) of a thing completely in itself, not in relation to something *outside* of it. In this sense we can think of absolutivity in opposition to what is merely relational. Now, we can apply this to judgment via Kant’s notion of the validity of judgment. Judgment can valid subjectively or objectively. Mere subjective validity may belong to a judgment (e.g., what Kant calls a “judgment of perception” in the *Prolegomena*²¹) when its representations are related by a rule of association (or “custom”, to put it in Humean language). But this is insufficient for knowledge, which requires that judgment’s representations be related “in virtue of the necessary unity of apperception in the synthesis of intuitions.”²² Kant even goes so far as to virtually identify judgment with objective validity:

Only in this way does there arise from this relation **a judgment**, i.e., a relation that is **objectively valid**, and that is sufficiently distinguished from the relation of these same representations in which there would be only subjective validity, e.g., in accordance with laws of association. In accordance with the latter I could only say “If I carry a body, I feel a pressure of weight,” but not “It, the body, **is** heavy,” which would be to say that these two representations are combined in the object, i.e., regardless of any difference in the condition of the subject, and are not merely found together in perception (however often as that might be repeated).²³

²⁰ A324/B381-A326/B382. I retain Kant’s own bold lettering for emphasis.

²¹ AA 4:298

²² B142

²³ Ibid.

It is only through the necessary synthetic unity of apperception that representations could be related in the form of a judgment, which in turn is a determination of the object in a way that excludes any contingent differences between judging subjects. According to this reading, a merely *subjectively* valid judgment is really no judgment at all, properly speaking.²⁴ A subjectively valid judgment, that is, involves an awareness of the relation of some object to my particular way of cognizing. So, in a subjectively valid judgment I say “If I carry a body, I feel a pressure of weight,” which is no more than an awareness of how the concepts {body} and {weight} figure in my perception: I perceive body, and that is followed by the representation of weight. Objectively valid judgment, by contrast, excludes “any difference in the condition of the subject.” That is, an objectively valid judgment is a judgment about the object without reference to any of the judging subject’s contingent properties; it is a judgment of what is true.

Now, we said that something holds absolutely when it is true of that thing internally, and not by a relation to something outside of it. What we can see is that subjectively valid judgment is subjective in that it refers to contingent properties of the one who judges. But this is to refer to something external to the combination of representations itself. Therefore, we might say that the validity of a subjective judgment is not had absolutely. Objectively valid judgment, by contrast, does have its validity absolutely. To judge objectively is simply to combine representations *in the object*, as Kant says. So, objectively valid judgment is nothing but the consciousness of what is true in my judgment—that is, without reference to any of the properties of me in particular. Here it is important to note an ambiguity that often occurs in the use of the term ‘object’. The object of judgment is that which judgment is aimed at. We speak of this object as, for example, *the table in front of me* about which I judge, that which is given to me in sensibility. But we must

²⁴ Proper by the standards of what Kant calls *determining* judgment. Reflecting judgment, as the topic of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, must be understood differently.

be careful. The object of my judgment can be understood as both what is given to me in sensation (that which affects my sensible capacity) and what is grasped in the judgment (in this case, the relative location of the table). Kant says that the *matter* of an intuition is “that in the appearance which corresponds to sensation”.²⁵ And sensation is “the effect of an object on the capacity for representation”. We are affected by an “object” which we call the matter of thought. But the being-as-matter of an object is not what a judgment is *aimed at*, for in judging the object is understood to possess the *form of judgment*. The judgmental form of an object is its *veritative* being—its being-as-true. When we judge, we combine representations in the object, which is just to say that we determine the being-as-true of the object.²⁶

If this is right, then the validity of objectively valid judgment is absolute, as it does not rely on anything external to itself as judgment. An objectively valid judgment is, to use Kant’s way of speaking, internally valid. As it is internally valid, it is in some important sense *unrestricted*, because its validity relies on nothing external to it. We may say, that is, that the absolute validity of objective judgment is not conditioned by something beyond itself as judgment.²⁷ Whether my judgment is valid or not, then, would not depend on the validity or truth of something external to the judgment itself. It follows that knowledge—as it is objectively valid judgment—must be internally valid, and thus in some sense unrestricted. In fact, this is what we will go on to reveal as the absolute spontaneity of the understanding.

When Kant goes on in the Transcendental Dialectic to discuss transcendental freedom as *absolute* spontaneity, he means an activity the proper exercise of which belongs to itself,

²⁵ A19/B34

²⁶ See Kant’s remark at B125 that representation (in theoretical cognition) “does not produce its object as far as its **existence** is concerned” but “is still determinant of the object *a priori* if it is possible through it alone to **cognize something as an object**.”

²⁷ This is not to deny that we judge *under conditions*, and thus that judgment is conditioned by sensibility in the sense that it would have no content except under conditions of sensibility. What we are denying here is that the validity of what is judged is conditioned by anything external to the act of judging itself.

internally and without restriction. This understanding of absolutivity involves a negative and a positive aspect, both of which will be important going forward into our discussion of the spontaneity of the understanding. Unrestrictedness is, first, a negative condition of the absolute, one which says what the absolute *is not*: it is not limited or restricted by anything external to it. But also, for judgment to be unrestricted is for it to determine itself, and thus to determine the boundaries of its own use. If judgment is unrestricted, then whatever boundaries there are for judgment—that is, those conditions that determine what cannot be the object of judgment—are not imposed on the act of judging like a barrier. If there are no imposed limits to judgment, then there is nothing that, properly speaking, *escapes* the scope of judgment; that is, there is nothing that cannot be judged simply because it happens to lie out of judgment’s reach. So, the negative condition of absolutivity is *limitlessness*, and the positive condition of absolutivity is that nothing escapes it, or that it is *total*. We will look more closely at these two notions in thinking about the I of practical reason.

§2.1 The Practical I as Absolute Spontaneity

We will first look at what absolute spontaneity is for transcendental freedom, since for many it is the more obvious and readily available case.²⁸ This will prepare us to see how the spontaneity of the understanding is also absolute. Now, to see why transcendental freedom is absolute spontaneity, we must see why Kant thinks that it is limitless and total. The causality of

²⁸ Sellars (1970), for instance, recognizes transcendental freedom to be absolute spontaneity. His worry is only with theoretical knowledge, where the object must be given to us from elsewhere. The fact that it is our receptivity that threatens to downgrade theoretical spontaneity to a *relative* form of spontaneity has been the cause of some muddling of the relevant concepts in the literature. Sometimes it is implied, for instance, that the difference between absolute and relative spontaneity lies in that the former is completely free while the latter is only free to an extent. While this may be one apt characterization of the difference, as it stands it is a rather ambiguous and unclear way of putting the point, for the difference is much greater than one of degree. For this sort of conception of the difference, see Sgarbi (2012) and Hanna (2017).

transcendental freedom is an uncaused causality. For practical reason this means that there can be nothing *outside* the legislation of the moral law which explains the validity of its legislation.

Kant says:

But it is requisite to reason's lawgiving that it should need to presuppose only *itself*, because a rule is objectively and universally valid only when it holds without the contingent, subjective conditions that distinguish one rational being from another.²⁹

Kant says that reason's legislation of the moral law must be understood through reason itself.

Indeed, the *validity* of the moral law, a law of reason, must be understood through reason itself.

This could only make sense if the legislation is self-legislation (reason's legislation to itself), and if this self-legislation is at the same time a self-consciousness of its own validity. Knowledge of what it is good to do is determined by the moral law *not* as some routine behavior might be determined by a principle of habit; it is determined by the moral law *through our knowledge of it*.

Thus, Kant famously holds that "duty is the necessity of an action *from* respect for law."³⁰

Similarly, the moral law itself must be valid through our knowledge of it. This follows from the fact that, for Kant, the thought of the moral law is just the thought of the form of lawfulness, which in turn is universality as such.³¹ When we think the moral law as valid, it is only through the thought of universality, or the categorical *I must*.³² This is the self-consciousness of practical judgment. And because this self-consciousness of the moral law is a legislation of reason unto itself, it is practical spontaneity.

²⁹ KpV AA 5:21. As with the B142 passage above, the objectivity of the law consists in its being self-legislated *independently* of contingent differences among particular subjects.

³⁰ *Groundwork* AA 4:400, emphasis added.

³¹ *Groundwork* AA 4:421

³² The idea that Kant really proves the validity of the moral law itself will be disputed by some Kantians. In part, this will rest on what we understand the content of the moral law to be. On my view, the moral law is (on its own) empty, acquiring content only under sensible conditions. If so, then my explanation is plausible, as we will not have to think that the moral law is already equipped with any particular content.

One way in which this spontaneity is properly considered *absolute* is that its successful exercise is *unencumbered*—its exercise is entirely imputable to itself qua rational capacity. Kant says of transcendental freedom that it

must be thought as independence from everything empirical and so from nature generally [...] without this freedom (in the latter and proper sense), which alone is practical a priori, no moral law is possible and no imputation in accordance with it.³³

Transcendental freedom in the practical sense is absolute in that it alone determines its own acts; when it acts, it does not do so under the guidance or restriction of anything else. Transcendental freedom is in this sense *limitless*; it succeeds precisely when nothing *else* explains its activity. What it does, and what it can and must do, can be determined only through its understanding of its own acts as valid. Now, we can also see that for practical freedom limitlessness is a *normative* condition; it says that the self-legislating authority of practical reason is an authority internal to the I.

Transcendental freedom is also *total* in our sense—that is, given that there is nothing to explain the moral law’s valid legislation outside of reason’s self-legislation, we may say that what it is possible to judge as good is already within the sphere of reason’s self-legislation. Our way of putting this point will be to say that the objects of practical reason are internal to the activity of practical reason. The *I must* (the practical I) does not encounter otherwise foreign conditions, conditions that could be intelligible independently of being thought as conditions to be made good. As such, we can say, practically, that there is nothing outside of the I of practical reason—the I which gives itself the law. Totality, then, is in a sense an *ontological* claim; it says that the being of practical reason’s objects is internal to the I of practical reason.³⁴

³³ KpV 5:97

³⁴ Of course, the normative and the ontological are not strictly separate notions here, but inextricably bound up with one another.

The totality condition may sound particularly controversial. In its defense, we should begin by drawing on some important points made by Engstrom, who argues that there is a generic form of self-determining knowledge which unifies theoretical and practical reason. According to Engstrom, it is wrong to assume that the difference between theoretical and practical reason is characterizable in terms of a direction of fit between judgment and object. The ‘direction-of-fit’ theory holds that while theoretical knowledge conforms to a given object, practical knowledge is that to which its object conforms.³⁵ This should obviously be rejected by Kant, whose Copernican revolution purports to show that in theoretical knowledge the object conforms to our knowledge of it. So, it must be true for *both* theoretical and practical knowledge that the object conforms to the judgment of it. The difference, as Kant puts it, is that theoretical reason determines its object as far as its *form* is concerned whereas practical knowledge determines even the *existence* of its object.³⁶ The determination of practical knowledge—thus the production of its object—must be understood, as we saw, as a form of self-consciousness. I may perform a good action only when I *at the same time* know that I am correctly applying the law.

With Engstrom we can say that the self-conscious form of knowledge generally is such that all objects of knowledge, whether theoretical or practical, are to be understood as always already bearing the form of reason’s self-consciousness. To put it our way, everything is internal to self-consciousness—the self-conscious I that figures in the theoretical ‘I think’ and the practical ‘I must’. But what of practical *sensibility*? In what way can we say that the sensibility which “commissions” us to become happy (in such a way that we “cannot refuse”) is internal to the practical I?³⁷ To be sure, we have requirements *qua* finite beings—most notably to seek

³⁵ Engstrom (2002)

³⁶ A92/B125

³⁷ KpV AA 5:61

happiness in proportion to virtue. But, to the extent that the pursuit of this happiness has moral form, it does already belong to the I of practical reason. And presumably, the origin of such a commission is our finite sensible form. While practical reason produces its object—the good—it does not produce our sensible conditions. This is to say that our sensible conditions have their *existence* independently of the will, though to say anything about the *value* of those conditions is to understand them as already belonging to practical self-consciousness.³⁸ So, any *authority* that happiness has in our moral considerations is internal to the I of practical reason, and any *value* (being-as-good) is likewise internal.

We have now given a (very) brief account of why Kant calls transcendental freedom absolute spontaneity; it is because it meets the conditions of limitlessness and totality. And both of these conditions, in turn, are unified by the single condition that we are calling *internality*. The I of practical reason is limitless and total because everything is internal to the form of its activity; that is, there is nothing in rational human life of which we can say that it is not a proper object of our concept of the good. With no exterior, and thus no outer boundary, it would be incoherent to speak of the practical I as limited by anything other than itself. Now I want to make a similar case for the I of theoretical self-consciousness, though in a way which preserves the theoretical/practical distinction which we have outlined.

³⁸ There is, of course much left to be said. A more complete answer will be available by the end, at which point we will have at least gestured at the relation between the finite and the infinite intellect in Kant's philosophy. Now, perhaps what we are saying here will sound trivial: everything that has determinate practical significance belongs to practical self-consciousness. I think this worry calls for two brief responses. First, I do not think the view I am espousing here is trivial in the sense that it requires no serious argumentation. That so many want to resist the thought that our knowledge of the good is nothing but practical self-consciousness would already be good enough reason to lay out the arguments. Second, once we have seen this view spelled out, I do hope that the reader will see that sometimes it is the most "trivial" of truths that get overlooked or ignored.

§2.2 The Theoretical I as Absolute

To transition to a discussion of the I of theoretical reason, we must first see that there are not two I's—the I of practical reason, and the I of theoretical reason—but one I with two forms of employment. The difference between theoretical and practical reason, as we have seen, is a difference in how they relate to their respective objects. But, it is also important not to overstate the distinctness of the true and the good. The morally good life is one that necessarily synthesizes theoretical and practical knowledge. As such, their objects must overlap. Practical knowledge makes use of theoretical propositions, and theoretical knowledge makes use of practical propositions; each requires the other.

The difference in their respective objects would appear to show that the practical sphere is wider than the theoretical. Transcendental freedom is an object of practical knowledge, while for theoretical reason it is only an idea. Additionally, practical reason can make use of the transcendental ideas of God and immortality in ways that theoretical reason on its own could not. Nevertheless, the objects of moral faith (God, immortality) are *theoretical propositions*. Consider the following passage from the second *Critique* on the primacy of practical reason:

But if pure reason of itself can be and really is practical, as the consciousness of the moral law proves it to be, it is still only one and the same reason which, whether from a theoretical or a practical perspective, judges according to a priori principles; and then it is clear that, even if from the first perspective its capacity does not extend to establishing certain propositions affirmatively, although they do not contradict it, *as soon as these same propositions belong inseparably to the practical interest* of pure reason it must accept them—indeed as something offered to it from another source, which has not grown on its own land but yet is sufficiently authenticated—and try to compare and connect them with everything that it has within its power as speculative reason, being mindful, however, that these are not its insights but are yet extensions of its use from another, namely a practical perspective; and this is not in the least opposed to its interest, which consists in the restriction of speculative mischief.³⁹

³⁹ KpV AA 5:121

While practical reason makes a different use of these propositions, both uses of reason share a relation to the same objects. We can see here that Kant takes practical reason to *extend* the use of theoretical reason by accepting certain judgments that theoretical reason could not accept. This means that practical reason can know more than theoretical reason. But it does not follow from this that those judgments make use of ideas that do not belong *in any way* to theoretical reason. Think, for instance, of the way in which theoretical reason knows nature and the way in which practical reason knows it. On one hand, the knowledge of nature as such belongs to theoretical reason; on the other hand, the knowledge of nature as a domain of resources and obstacles belongs to practical reason.

The general concept of spontaneity of which both theoretical and practical spontaneity are species can be understood as the very idea of a capacity bringing forth something from itself. As such, there is not yet any notion of *restriction* in the general concept of spontaneity. This general concept of spontaneity, then, is the concept of an absolute spontaneity—one that suffers no restriction, one that begins its states from itself and nothing else. But, according to the self-professed relative spontaneity theorists, it remains to be seen whether the understanding retains absolute spontaneity.

From the above, we can see the relation between theoretical and practical spontaneity in the following way:

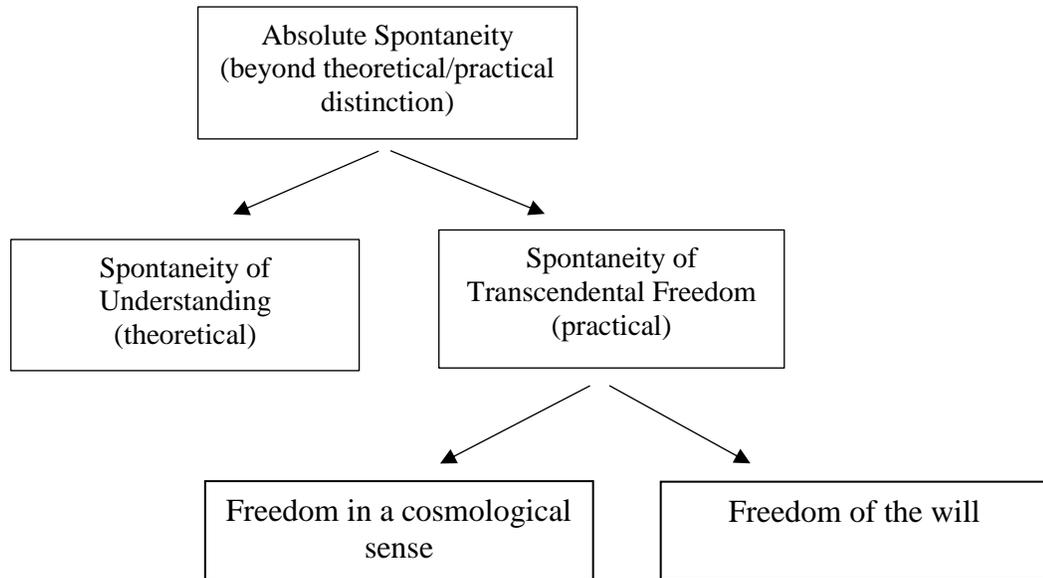


Figure 1

To reiterate, in this dissertation I focus on the capacity of understanding. As such, I am focused on the following two related issues: whether a capacity whose object must be given to it from elsewhere can nevertheless bring about its cognitions of those objects from itself; and, if so, in what sense.

One way to begin to grasp Kant's thought about the spontaneity of the understanding is to note that it is an expression of a kind of control that subjects have over their representations. Because we exercise some control over our representations, according to Kant, we are in some sense epistemic agents. (In fact, this is one Kantian lesson that many contemporary philosophers have begun to take very seriously.⁴⁰) I will now begin from this thought so that we may develop from it an account of the spontaneity of the understanding.

⁴⁰ Boyle (2011, 2); McDowell (1994); McDowell (2009); Brandom (1994)

§3 Two Senses of “Mine”

I am the thinker of my thoughts. This is to say that my thoughts belong to me; they are mine.

This is in one sense trivial, but in another sense non-trivial. It is non-trivial if we understand the mineness of my thoughts to be a special kind of mineness. Here is one way of seeing this special kind of mineness: to say that my thought is mine is to say that I am the source of my act of thinking. This much seems to be captured in Kant’s spontaneity thesis. His claim, that is, is that the faculty of understanding brings forth its own representations.

But Kant’s spontaneity thesis also entails a second sense of mineness: that my representations are mine in the sense that I am responsible or accountable for them. When I judge that P, I take my judgment to be valid. In taking my judgment to be valid, in turn, I am taking myself to have a right to issue the judgment. And I can only take myself to have a right to issue my judgment on the grounds that I am accountable for it. To gloss it in Brandomian-Sellarsian terms, judging is an activity of giving and asking for reasons. When I judge, I make a claim in a way such that I am prepared to answer a challenge of justification, or a question “why?”.

To say that my thought is mine in the first sense, then, is to say that I am accountable for my thought because I am thinking it. If the ‘I’ to which my thought belongs is being considered qua empirical I (the individual person), then there is a contingent relation between the I and its thought. For anyone *may* think what I am thinking. Even more importantly, thoughts as such can belong to me in the weak sense that they are entertained by me—i.e., are not truly judged.⁴¹

⁴¹ If we are thinking from the perspective of objectively valid *judgment*, then a thought belongs to the transcendental I, in which case it excludes any particular differences among individual thinkers. As such, it would belong to the transcendental I necessarily.

To say that my thought is mine in the second sense is to say that I am accountable for my thought because I endorse it. The endorsement of a thought is straightforwardly a judgment that p, and so a claiming of the thought as belonging to me. This second sense of mineness also comes with a deeper sense of “freedom”: because in issuing a judgment I am prepared to answer a question “why?”, I am free with respect to it in a way that I am not in possessing, say, a knee-jerk belief. Furthermore, I am responsible for what I judge *through* my act of judging it. This is because when I judge, I do it on the basis of some reason, of which I am at least implicitly conscious. Judgment, that is, is *not* a mere belief, the latter of which might stick to me even when I explicitly judge it to be false (e.g., in having a phobia). In judging, we might say, I bind myself to what I judge. I am responsible for what I judge because I am self-conscious in the act.

If it is right to attribute these thoughts to Kant, then the spontaneity of judgment is the self-consciousness of judgment. So, to understand what spontaneity is, we have to understand what self-consciousness is. I will begin by spelling out the two basic interpretations of Kant’s spontaneity thesis: a strong interpretation (*absolute spontaneity*) and a weak interpretation (*relative spontaneity*). Then, I will show that Kant gives us reasons to think that self-consciousness belongs to the understanding in a way that excludes the weak interpretation. I will end by introducing the basic anxiety that the rest of the dissertation will attempt to alleviate.

§3.1 The Spontaneity of the Understanding as Self-determination

By identifying the ‘spontaneity of cognition’ with the faculty of ‘understanding,’ Kant tells us that spontaneity is a capacity to bring forth representations from itself. So, according to Kant, the understanding is a capacity that can be the source of its own representations. The understanding is the birthplace of certain representations (e.g., the categories, and the judgments that make use

of them).⁴² This birth takes place through “self-activity” (*Selbsttätigkeit*),⁴³ which is to say that the representations are “self-thought” (*selbstgedachte*),⁴⁴ which is a notion left unexplained. Despite the lack of explanation, we can sketch a plausible account of what it is for certain representations, like judgments, to be self-thought.

Kant explains that judgment is an act of determination. So, because the understanding is the source of judgment, it is thereby also the source of acts of determination. We will say that this makes the understanding a *self-determining* capacity. The notion of self-determination can be understood in two different ways, only one of which I will concern myself with here. First, we can give a negative characterization of the self-determination of judgment: my judgment that the Cubs will win the World Series is not implanted in me or put into my head, so I judge it for myself. Second, we can give a positive characterization of the self-determination of judgment: my judgment that the Cubs will win the World Series is an act from an awareness of that act’s own grounds. This positive characterization of self-determination in judging corresponds to the second sense of mineness above—the sense in which my judgment is endorsed by me, self-consciously. To get a more complete sense of this kind of self-determination, we will need to examine the concepts ‘determination’ and ‘capacity.’ First, consider the concept of determination.

According to Kant, to judge that S is P is to *determine* S as P, which in turn is equivalent to predicating P of S. Kant writes:

Anything one likes can serve as a logical predicate, even the subject can be predicated of itself; for logic abstracts from every content. But the determination is a predicate, which goes beyond the concept of the subject and enlarges it. Thus

⁴² A66/B90

⁴³ B130

⁴⁴ B167

it must not be included in it already.⁴⁵

So, to determine something to be the case is to fix to some subject concept a predicate that goes beyond the subject concept (is not already contained in it). Even more clearly, the pre-Critical Kant writes:

To determine is to posit a predicate while excluding its opposite. That which determines a subject in respect of any of its predicates, is called the ground.⁴⁶

Thus, the judgment that the table is brown is a *determination* of the table as something brown, which in turn is to *predicate* brownness of the table by *excluding* from it the predicate ‘not brown.’

Now consider the concept of the understanding as a *capacity*. What the capacity does is judge, or determine something to be the case.⁴⁷ As such, a particular act of judgment is an act of determination – it says of a thing *S* that it is a *P* by fixing to *S* a predicate *P*, excluding not-*P*. And exclusion is non-accidental. To exclude, Kant says, is to determine a subject on the ground of some reason. To say that acts of determination are acts of exclusion is to say that they exclude *on some ground*. When I judge that the table is brown, I do so from the presumption that what I judge is true – the table *is brown*, not *not-brown*. And when I take myself to be judging truly, I take myself to be judging on sufficient grounds.

Accordingly, the determination of a judgment is determination from a principle. Just as we would say that the capacity to get a hit in baseball is governed by some *standard* for what counts as getting a hit (for instance, hitting a pitch rather than hitting it from a tee), we would say

⁴⁵ A598/B626

⁴⁶ AA 01:391

⁴⁷ Kant says that all acts of the understanding can be traced back to judgments (A69/B94). He later says that the *first pure cognition* of the understanding is the principle of the original synthetic unity of apperception (self-consciousness) (B137). This means that while the understanding is a capacity to determine judgments, so that its *determinate acts* are acts of judgments, it determines through a pure cognition of self-consciousness, something self-determined.

that the capacity to judge is governed by some standard for what counts as judgment. By ‘standard’ I have in mind an explanatory principle. All capacities are aimed at some telos, which governs the exercises of the capacity in the sense that it *explains* its exercises.⁴⁸ The standard of judgment is the telos of the capacity of judgment, which tells us when we have succeeded or failed at forming a judgment.⁴⁹ In addition to being a standard for what counts as successful judgment, the principle of the capacity to judge is to be thought of as the *source* of judgment.

Kant writes:

I would therefore call a “cognition from principles” that cognition in which I cognize the particular in the universal through concepts. Thus every syllogism is a form of derivation of a cognition from a principle. For the major premise always gives a concept such that everything subsumed under its condition can be cognized from it according to a principle.⁵⁰

In every syllogism, we derive cognition—the conclusion—from a principle. To judge correctly, then, is not only for that judgment to be held to some standard, but for that standard to be at the same time the origin of the judgment. I judge from a consciousness of some principle for judging. This is therefore an instance of rule-following in which we understand the rule as a conscious ground from which the judgment is brought about.

The notion of a principle of the capacity to judge may be further clarified by remarks Kant makes in his logic lectures. In the *Blomberg Logic* it is stated that an “absolutely unprovable” judgment is one that is “immediately certain” rather than proven mediately or inferentially. These immediately certain judgments are what he calls *principles*:

All these *principia* are either *material*, namely, insofar as they have a *medius terminus*, or *formal*, which have no *medius terminus*. These latter have no determinate *predicate*, but instead they are concerned merely with the *relation* of

⁴⁸ To be clear, it may be the case that some capacities do not have their own distinctive telos, but they are nevertheless aimed at *a* telos (e.g., the capacity to raise my arm is aimed at the telos governing human animal life).

⁴⁹ While the analogy helps explain what I mean by ‘principle’, the way in which we are governed by a principle in hitting a baseball is, of course, different from the way in which we are governed by a principle in judging.

⁵⁰ A300

predicates to subjects in general. These include the *principium contradictionis* and the *principium identitatis*. For these there is, namely, no determinate subject or predicate, or no determinate case[;] instead, it can be applied to any subject and predicate. Now in our judgments we have two forms, namely, *synthetic* and *analytic* form[;] the *principium contradictionis*, now, is only analytic.⁵¹

The notion of a formal principle is the notion of a generic formal judgment “concerned merely with the relation of predicates to subjects in general.” Further, we have two forms of judgment—synthetic and analytic. The principle of analytic judgment, as stated here in the *Blomberg Logic*, as well as in the first *Critique*, is the principle of contradiction.⁵² The principle of synthetic judgment, on the other hand, is the principle of sufficient reason.⁵³ While Kant specifically identifies these two basic principles as the principles of each form of judgment, he also clearly indicates that there is a *highest* principle of judgment: the original synthetic unity of apperception. In §16 of the Transcendental Deduction (TD), Kant states both that the unity of apperception is the supreme principle of the whole of human knowledge, as well as that “this principle is [...] thus an analytical proposition” which “declares as necessary a synthesis of the manifold given in an intuition.” This is how I am “conscious *a priori*” of the necessary synthesis of my representations. Following this, Kant says in §17 of the TD that the original synthetic unity of apperception “is the supreme principle of all use of the understanding.” What does he mean by this? If we look at what he says in this section, together with what he says in §16, it becomes clear that the supreme principle, identified as the original synthetic unity of apperception itself, is a kind of consciousness:

The supreme principle of all intuition in relation to the understanding is that all the manifold of intuition stand under conditions of the original synthetic unity of apperception.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *Blomberg Logic* §313

⁵² A151/B190

⁵³ A201/B246

⁵⁴ B136

That all the manifold of intuition stand under the original synthetic unity of apperception is not, Kant thinks, any sort of natural or *given* principle. We do not just happen to judge in this way. I know this because when I judge, I do it from an awareness that my representations must be synthetically unified. What we are now in a position to see is that the supreme principle of the understanding is a *consciousness* of the necessity of the synthetic unity of my representations. When he speaks of the principle of the understanding, he is speaking of a generic, formal “proposition” or consciousness that informs all else that I judge. And this consciousness is nothing but the unity of apperception—self-consciousness. Why he thinks this we will now unpack further.

So far, we have said that judgment is necessarily a form of determination from a principle, and that the highest principle of judgment is the synthetic unity of apperception. We can now unpack this further by explaining how self-consciousness is, for Kant, a principle of unity *internal to* the capacity of understanding. In addition to the thought that judgment is governed by a principle that acts as a standard and a source of judgment, we must think of this principle as a principle of unity. Judgment is no arbitrary collection of representations, such as [{cat}, {mat}]. Rather, judgment is a non-accidental (i.e., *necessary*) unity of representations: {the cat is on the mat}. This tells us that judgments are governed by a rule for bringing representations together as one.

The principle of unity governing acts of judgment, as the principle of a capacity, must be internal to the capacity. This is because capacities are given form by their principles. We identify a range of behaviors as falling under one act—say, getting a hit in baseball—by identifying a principle for distinguishing between successful and unsuccessful instances of getting a hit. The

capacity for getting a hit in baseball is constituted by its principle—likewise for the capacity of judgment.

By spelling out the understanding as a capacity for judgment in accordance with an inner principle, we can now see how it is possible to call the understanding a capacity of *self-determination*. The act of judging, for Kant, is an act of determination governed by a principle that is nothing but the consciousness of the necessary synthesis of all my representations—nothing but self-consciousness.

§3.2 Kant on Two Kinds of Self-Determination

Now that we understand judgment as an act of a capacity governed by a principle of unity, we can look more closely at Kant's own understanding of the different ways in which the principle of a capacity can belong to that capacity. An important passage from the *Metaphysik Pölitz*, which has informed the debate over relative and absolute spontaneity, helps to bring out the importance of this consideration for our topic:

But now the transcendental concept of freedom follows; this means absolute spontaneity, and is self-activity from an *inner principle* according to the power of free choice. Spontaneity is either absolute or without qualification, or qualified in some respect. –Spontaneity in some respect is when something acts spontaneously *under a condition*. So, e.g., a body which is shot off moves spontaneously, but in some respect. This spontaneity is also called automatic spontaneity, namely when a machine moves itself according to an inner principle, e.g., a watch, a turnspit. But the spontaneity is not without qualification because here the inner principle was determined by an external principle. The internal principle with the watch is the spring, with the turnspit the weight, but the external principle is the artist who determines the internal principle. The spontaneity which is without qualification is an absolute spontaneity.⁵⁵

Here we get two conceptions of spontaneity: (1) self-activity from an inner principle that is determined by an external principle [qualified spontaneity], and (2) self-activity from an inner

⁵⁵ *Metaphysik Pölitz*, AA 28:267-268

principle according to the power of free choice [absolute spontaneity]. Clearly, in this particular passage, Kant has in mind a distinction between two kinds of *practical* spontaneity. But we can just as well apply this distinction to the activity of the understanding. As we have seen, Kant describes the understanding as “self-active” in the Transcendental Deduction.⁵⁶ Now we must ask whether the spontaneity of the understanding is absolute or qualified. By ‘qualified spontaneity’ Kant means an activity governed by an inner principle which is itself determined by an external principle. By ‘absolute spontaneity’ Kant means an activity governed by an inner principle which is not in turn determined by an external principle. If the understanding is spontaneous in a qualified sense, then we might say that its manner of self-determination is understood in relation to something outside its activity. If the understanding is spontaneous absolutely, then its manner of self-determination can only be understood through itself, and so it is inconceivable that it is only *a manner* of self-determination; rather it would be the only manner of judging at all.⁵⁷ Following this qualified/absolute distinction, and a similar distinction drawn in the second *Critique*,⁵⁸ interpreters have divided themselves into two camps: those who argue that Kant takes the spontaneity of the understanding to be absolute, and those who argue that Kant takes it to be qualified or “relative.”⁵⁹

We might now step back and look at the spontaneity of the understanding in an even more general sense. Kant holds that the understanding is active not only in issuing particular judgments, but, more broadly, in acts of the imagination and in intuition itself:

But insofar as its synthesis [imagination] is still an exercise of spontaneity, which is determining and not, like sense, merely determinable, and can thus determine the form of sense *a priori* in accordance with the unity of apperception, the

⁵⁶ B130

⁵⁷ I take this to be what Kant calls “original acquisition” in “On a Discovery...”, AA 8:221

⁵⁸ KpV, AA 5:97, where Kant contrasts transcendental freedom with the freedom of a turnspit.

⁵⁹ Those in the ‘absolute’ camp include Pippin (1987) and Allison (1990); those in the ‘relative’ camp include Kitcher (1990) and Sellars (1970).

imagination is to this extent a faculty for determining the sensibility *a priori* [...] ⁶⁰

The imagination, as spontaneity, is activity in accordance with the unity of apperception. The unity of apperception, in turn, is the highest act of the understanding. ⁶¹ This unifying act is also at work in intuition, as evidenced by Kant's remark that "the supreme principle of all intuition in relation to the understanding is that all the manifold of intuition stand under conditions of the original synthetic unity of apperception." ⁶²

It follows from what Kant says that the understanding, while a capacity for judgment, is even more broadly a capacity that brings objective unity to all of cognition. For our purposes, then, we can define the relevant types of spontaneity as follows:

Relative spontaneity (RS) = self-consciousness that understands itself in terms of something outside itself.

Absolute spontaneity (AS) = self-consciousness that understands itself only through itself.

This brings us back to our discussion of the *internality* of all judgment to the I that judges. As a kind of trial run, we looked at why we might think that the objects of practical reason are internal to the I of practical judgment. Now we might begin to see how this works for the I of theoretical judgment. To say that self-consciousness understands itself in terms of something outside itself is to say that there is something external to the I of judgment, and to say that self-consciousness understands itself only through itself is to say that there is nothing external to the I of judgment. Clearly, I wish to defend the latter position. Now that we have spelled out two different interpretations of Kant's spontaneity thesis, we can ask which one Kant gives us reason to

⁶⁰ B151-152; see also B136.

⁶¹ B134n.

⁶² B136

endorse. This means that we must explain what the nature of the understanding's principle is. To this I will now turn.

§4 The Nature of Spontaneity's Principle

We have explained the capacity of the understanding as being governed by a principle, which serves as both a standard and a source of the understanding's activities. We have also explained that the most basic activity of the understanding is the activity of determining the unity of cognition generally. This activity, from §17 of the Transcendental Deduction, is the principle of the original synthetic unity of apperception (OSUA). Now it is incumbent upon us to say in more detail what the OSUA is and why it is the supreme principle of the understanding. I will take on each of these tasks in turn.

The understanding is a spontaneous capacity. It is the capacity to bring forth representations from itself. But Kant also writes, as we have just seen, that this is the capacity to bring all representations under the unity of self-consciousness. That is, the *principle of spontaneity* is that the subject's representations are brought under the OSUA.⁶³ Kant has in mind a single capacity of understanding. He must therefore think that the two characteristic functions of this capacity are one and the same. The act of bringing all representations under a unity of apperception is the same as the capacity bringing forth representations from itself. Turning to the relation between these two ideas will shed light on what it means for the principle of the understanding to be the OSUA.

First, we must consider Kant's complicated thought that the understanding is a capacity for bringing representations under the unity of self-consciousness:

⁶³ B136; and at B134n. Kant writes that the faculty of self-consciousness is the understanding itself.

Thus all manifold of intuition has a necessary relation to the I think in the same subject in which this manifold is to be encountered. But this representation is an act of spontaneity, i.e., it cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility. I call it the pure apperception, in order to distinguish it from the empirical one, or also the original apperception, since it is that self-consciousness which, because it produces the representation I think, which must be able to accompany all others and which in all consciousness is one and the same, cannot be accompanied by any further representation.⁶⁴

The representation ‘I think,’ the absolute subject of every judgment,⁶⁵ is an act of spontaneity, and thus of the capacity of the understanding. When I judge that S is P, my judgment has the form “I think S is P.” That is, to judge “S is P” is already to judge that I think it. The representation ‘I think’ is therefore an expression of my spontaneity. The only way ‘I think’ could express the spontaneity of judgment is if in judging I am always already conscious of what I judge – that is, judgment must be *self-conscious*.

Now, how are we to understand this complicated thought: that it is in self-consciousness that I bring ‘I think’ to what I think? It might seem more natural to say that ‘I think’ *precedes* self-consciousness, which in turn would be a second-order representation, such as ‘I think of myself thinking.’ Kant gives us a clue to this puzzle by pointing out that the self-consciousness at issue cannot be empirical – that is, it is not a second-order observation of my first-order conscious states. This is because all thought is already accompanied by ‘I think’.⁶⁶ Because all thought has the form ‘I think,’ all thought is already self-conscious. It does not become self-conscious through a second act. This is why all empirical self-consciousness presupposes yet a higher kind of self-consciousness: because self-consciousness in its most basic form is already contained in any act of judgment. In order to be empirically self-conscious—to observe myself thinking—I must already be self-conscious in what I think. So, Kant says, the ‘I think’ is a

⁶⁴ B132

⁶⁵ Kant calls the ‘I’ the “absolute subject of all my possible judgments” (A348)

⁶⁶ B131-132

representation that cannot be accompanied by any further representation. This “pure self-consciousness,” then, is no second-order representation of a first-order judgment, since first-order judgment is already an act of (pure) self-consciousness. We might say that because all judgment is always already purely self-conscious, self-consciousness is internal to all judgment.

So far, Kant has established that all judgment is already purely self-conscious—always already self-conscious—and so all judgment presupposes an *original* self-consciousness.

Furthermore, this pure self-consciousness is the unity under which all representations must stand:

I also call its unity [the unity of pure apperception] the transcendental unity of self-consciousness in order to designate the possibility of *a priori* cognition from it. For the manifold representations that are given in a certain intuition would not all together be my representations if they did not all together belong to a self-consciousness; i.e., as my representations (even if I am not conscious of them as such) they must yet necessarily be in accord with the condition under which alone they can stand together in a universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not throughout belong to me.⁶⁷

Pure self-consciousness is a condition of the possibility of all knowledge, because no representation at all could belong to me as a thought without already belonging to self-consciousness. Through intuition we are given a manifold of representations—singular, immediate representations of objects. These representations must belong, together, to a single self-conscious subject (a universal self-consciousness), because nothing at all could be thought by *me* independently from an awareness of *myself* thinking it.⁶⁸ Thus, Kant takes himself to have established that all knowledge belongs to a self-conscious *unity*—that is, one self-consciousness.

To bring cognition under the unity of self-consciousness (under one self-consciousness) is, in turn, to recognize that all acts of cognition are acts belonging to me, the ‘I think’, the

⁶⁷ B132, brackets mine

⁶⁸ And there is no consciousness of myself as a diversity of representations, or else those representations would have to be united *as myself*.

absolute subject of judgment.⁶⁹ If this is right, then we can see why Kant says that the understanding is both a capacity to bring forth representations from itself *and* a capacity to bring cognition under a unity of self-consciousness. For, to bring representations forth from itself is *nothing other than* bringing those representations under the unity of self-consciousness. All my judgments are representations that necessarily belong to one self-conscious unity. And my judgments belong to this unity by themselves being necessarily self-conscious. So, it is through self-consciousness that I form judgments.

The self-consciousness of my judgment contains, moreover, a double-faceted unity. On the one hand, when I am given an intuition I am conscious of the manifold of representations given to me as belonging to one ‘I’—this is what Kant calls the *analytic unity* of apperception.⁷⁰ On the other hand, my consciousness of an identical ‘I’, to which all my representations must attach, presupposes a synthesis of representations—a *synthetic unity* of apperception:

Therefore it is only because I can combine a manifold of given representations in one consciousness that it is possible for me to represent the identity of the consciousness in these representations itself, i.e., the analytical unity of apperception is only possible under the presupposition of some synthetic one.⁷¹

The consciousness of my representations as belonging to one ‘I’ therefore, is at one and the same time a consciousness of the ‘I’ as common to all my representations *and* a consciousness of a synthesis of representations belonging to one and the same ‘I’. Since in order to be conscious of an ‘I’ common to all my representations I must be conscious of a synthetic unity of representations that has this ‘I’ in common, this synthetic unity “is the highest point to which one

⁶⁹ B134

⁷⁰ B132

⁷¹ B133

must affix all use of the understanding, even the whole of logic and, after it, transcendental philosophy.”⁷²

To say that the principle of all use of the understanding is the OSUA, then, is to say that all acts of the understanding are acts of *my* synthesizing a manifold of representations through a consciousness of their *belonging to me*—that is, self-consciously. Judgment, then, is an act of synthesis which is at the same time aware of itself as such.⁷³

So far, we have characterized the OSUA as a principle of synthetic unity by saying that I synthesize *a manifold* of representations self-consciously. But it would be misleading to leave off here, for Kant does not see the representation of a synthetic unity as just a unity of any arbitrary collection of representations. For Kant, the representation of synthetic unity in apperception is a representation of a single body of possible knowledge. A single body of knowledge must be both a *totality* as well as a necessary and universal unity of judgment. It must be a totality, since the self-consciousness from which I judge is the self-consciousness of knowledge as such, and so it is not a unity with respect to a particular set of judgments. It must be a unity that is necessary and universal because the objective validity of judgment (non-accidentally *true* judgment) consists in judgment’s universal and necessary agreement with all other judgments—again, truth is internal to the standard of judgment, which in turn is nothing but the principle of the unity of self-consciousness. To grasp this, we can look at two passages – one from the B Deduction, the other from the A Deduction.

First, the B Deduction passage. Kant says of the relation between the act of combining (synthesis) and unity:

⁷² B134n.

⁷³ This is what it means to be conscious of the I. It is consciousness of my act of synthesis. On my view, ‘I’ here is not a referring expression, although that will only become clearer later.

Combination is the representation of the synthetic unity of the manifold. The representation of this unity cannot, therefore, arise from the combination; rather, by being added to the representation of the manifold, it first makes the concept of combination possible.⁷⁴

What we take from this is the idea that in combining representations we already represent a synthetic unity (it “cannot, therefore, arise from the combination”). This is to say that the representation of a synthetic unity precedes any *non-arbitrary* act of combination. As long as it is no accident that I combine A with B, then the act of combining A with B is done from a consciousness that A and B really do belong together in one representation. To know that A and B really do belong together in one representation is to already represent a unity, prior to actually bringing them together as one.

This passage makes a point that Kant had already made, in a slightly different way, in the A Deduction:

But that empirical rule of association, which one must assume throughout if one says that everything in the series of occurrences stands under rules according to which nothing happens that is not preceded by something upon which it always follows – on what, I ask, does this, as a law of nature, rest, and how is this association even possible? The ground of the possibility of the association of the manifold, insofar as it lies in the object, is called the affinity of the manifold. I ask, therefore, how do you make the thoroughgoing affinity of the appearances (by means of which they stand under constant laws and must belong under them) comprehensible to yourselves?⁷⁵

Kant calls the ground of the possibility of laws of association – laws that say “when A, represent B” – the “affinity” of the manifold of appearances (objects of possible knowledge). Through their affinity, appearances “must belong” and “stand under constant laws.” Clearly, then, the affinity of appearances at the very least entails that they belong together in a unified way. So, all

⁷⁴ B130-131

⁷⁵ A112-113

objects of possible knowledge belong—prior to any act of combination—to a synthetic unity.

Kant goes on in the next paragraph to make this point very clearly:

On my principles it is easily comprehensible. All possible appearances belong, as representations, to the whole possible self-consciousness [...] All appearances therefore stand in a thoroughgoing connection according to necessary laws, and hence in a transcendental affinity, of which the empirical affinity is the mere consequence.⁷⁶

All appearances stand together under necessary laws, which is to say that they belong together in a unified body of possible knowledge. If they didn't belong together in this way, then we would only be capable of possessing a "swarm of appearances", but not experience (a type of knowledge). Knowledge, as distinct from mere perception, involves an act of determination, of taking something for true (*Fürwahrhalten*).⁷⁷ And in taking something for true, we must already implicitly take our representations to be synthesizable, which in turn requires that we take all appearances to belong together, much like pieces of one large puzzle. Appearances belong together necessarily and universally—that is, it is no accident that they belong together as they do, and all rational beings should have the same judgments.

This is a complicated series of thoughts to which full justice can only be done in a much lengthier project, but we can capture Kant's basic insight with a single thesis. Call it the *internality thesis*.

The Internality Thesis: In the act of judging S is P, as I am already implicitly conscious of S and P as belonging to a total synthetic unity judgment.

The internality thesis tells us that the unity of apperception is the form of all thought. This means that not only is all thought internal to self-consciousness, but this self-consciousness is the highest form, subordinate to nothing. Notice, then, that we have an understanding of self-

⁷⁶ A113-114

⁷⁷ Prol, AA 04:296

consciousness only through itself. So, there is no sense to be made of the thought that there is anything judged that does not already belong to one and the same self-consciousness. Kant's conception of the objective validity of judgment, together with the internality thesis, yields the thought that objective truth is internal to judgment. This rules out the possibility that truth consists in a relation of correspondence between what is judged and some fact external to the act of judging.⁷⁸

Now, the internality thesis gives us a way of placing Kant's specification of spontaneity as a self-active principle into our original way of describing spontaneity as internality-to self-consciousness. What we have seen is that to understand OSUA as the supreme principle of the understanding is to understand self-consciousness as that through which everything is thought. And as it is that through which everything is thought, the OSUA is itself only intelligible through itself. The specification of the principle is always through an understanding of itself. Or, we can say, we understand all the objects of thought as internal to this self-consciousness. From this, Kant's double-faceted unity of apperception can be reconstructed. In the act of determining S as P, I am already conscious of myself as judging that S is P in the sense of being conscious of the thoroughgoing identity of the 'I' to which my representations are attached. I am simultaneously already conscious of myself as judging that S is P in the sense of representing a total synthetic unity of representations, making it possible to determine S as P. What is judged is internal to the unity of self-consciousness (both its analytic and synthetic unity).

⁷⁸ It can be stated at this point that the metaphor of internality, like all metaphor, is limited. One possible concern arising from its use is that the "internal to" relation may appear to work in both directions: from self-consciousness to judgment and judgment to self-consciousness. As we have seen, to judge is to be self-conscious of the validity of what one judges. So, we can say that judgment is internal to self-consciousness in the sense that judgment always already *belongs to* self-consciousness. When we say this, however, we seem equally to mean that judgment always already *contains* its own self-consciousness—that self-consciousness is contained in every act. Both of these are right, perhaps in two somewhat different senses.

We also said, in line with Kant, that a relative spontaneity would be considered as qualified, or valid only in some respect. We then saw that for Kant this means that the self-consciousness of judgment would be understood relative to something beyond itself. And to put this in our terms, this would mean that the I of self-consciousness has an outer boundary or conceives of at least some of its objects as lying outside itself. We are now in a position to see how these come to be the same thought. In order for RS to be true—that is, in order for the I of self-consciousness to conceive of any of its objects as lying beyond itself—it has to be the case that this self-consciousness is not *that through which* all is thought. This would make judgment's principle incapable of accounting for itself merely through the thought of itself. If judgment cannot account for itself through the thought of itself alone, then it does so by thinking itself in relation to something else. If the OSUA is understood merely through the thought of itself (if the principle of judgment is “self-thought”), then its principle is thereby conceived *not* as one principle among others, but as *the* principle of judgment.⁷⁹ If, by contrast, the OSUA is understood in relation to something else, then its comprehensibility requires something in addition to the thought of itself, something that we do not give to ourselves through thought, and therefore something given to us. This is therefore the thought of the principle of judgment as something given. This givenness would make the self-consciousness of judgment into a principle of judging among others, because it would thereby become a principle we think not as constitutive of thought itself, but as the way *we* happen to think. If the principle of our judgment is even possibly only one among others—say, a rule of combination that might be one way for us and another way for some other form of life—then we necessarily think that it has an external boundary, for this is required in order to think the possibility of other forms of judgment.

⁷⁹ Rödl's (2018) can be seen as, in part, an extended argument for this idea. His way of putting it is to say the science of judgment is the science *without contrary*, or the science *überhaupt*.

In line with this way of thinking, we can reconstruct our understanding of AS and RS as follows:

AS = there is no outer boundary to the I of self-consciousness

RS = there is an outer boundary to the I of self-consciousness

What we set out to discover is whether the spontaneity of the understanding is absolute or relative. We said that this can be discovered by identifying the nature of the OSUA as a principle: by identifying whether the OSUA is given or self-thought, or (what is the same thing) by saying whether the 'I' has an outer boundary or not. Kant's answer, which I hope to have begun to make a plausible case for, is that the understanding is absolutely spontaneous.

Before I move on to introduce the basic remaining problems for the dissertation, I would like to explain why I think that even the most prominent defense of AS, Henry Allison's, turns out to be a form of RS. This will enable us to diagnose at least one crucial problematic assumption in Kant scholarship that prevents us from seeing Kant's point.

§5 Relative Spontaneity

Now that I have spelled out the beginning of what I take to be Kant's account of the absolute spontaneity of the understanding, I will argue that the standard view, even including the more prominent attempt by Allison to argue for AS, makes Kant's spontaneity out to be relative. In the next chapter I will discuss in full why each of these types of relative spontaneity fails the standard Kant has set here. But, in preparation for that task, it is important to outline why I take even those who claim to be absolutists to be relativists about spontaneity. Doing this will lay down some general necessary features of both kinds of account so that later we might see how both approaches have an effect on our understanding of Kant's philosophy as a whole.

There are not many who have explicitly defended the absolute spontaneity account. But

both Pippin and Allison have defended it against Sellars and Kitcher.⁸⁰ Pippin and Allison have taken similar approaches, though Allison has been more explicit in his rejection of RS. So, I will spell out Allison's account of AS, and then I will argue that his view makes key assumptions that do violence to what we have already seen Kant to establish about the understanding. Among these are: the assumption of a broad form of naturalism, and the assumption of a distinction between force and content that Kant does not accept. When we see this, we will be in a position to see that the absolute spontaneity interpretation has so far been inadequately defended.

Allison sees Patricia Kitcher as adopting an unacceptably naturalistic interpretation of Kant according to which the spontaneity of the understanding can be understood in broadly functionalist terms. What Allison finds so problematic about Kitcher's defense of RS is that it does not capture the normative dimension of judgment. Below I will examine a few short passages from Allison that help to bring out his worry.

[...] to judge is just to take some intuitively given item or set thereof as a determinate something. In the simplest case, an indeterminate something = x is taken as an F . Apart from or prior to this conceptual determination, there is no content for thought [...] the main point is that [in] all cases of taking as, no matter how complex, the mind must not only combine its representation in a single consciousness, it must also be conscious of what it is doing.⁸¹

Allison lays out judgment as an act of 'taking as'. When I judge that x is F , I (from a first-person standpoint) *take x as an F* . And to take x as an F is just to be aware of my taking it to be so. So, as we can see, Allison so far agrees with us that all judgment is already self-conscious, and that this fact is what Kant's spontaneity thesis comes to. He goes on:

Moreover, precisely because recognition cannot be understood simply as having another belief or, in Kitcher's terms, as being in a "cognitive state," it is not something that one can coherently take oneself as caused to do, not even if the cause is thought to lie in one's antecedent state. Beliefs, cognitive states and the like can easily be thought of in causal terms; thus, as long as cognition is viewed

⁸⁰ Pippin (1987), Allison (1990), Sellars (1970), Kitcher (1990)

⁸¹ Allison (1995, 346)

as essentially a matter of producing the appropriate cognitive state, a merely relative spontaneity is all that one need assume.

Allison here agrees with Kitcher that if “recognition” (taking as) can be understood in causal-productive terms, then a relative spontaneity is adequate. But, he thinks this is not possible. Since judgments as acts of ‘taking as’ “are acts that the subject must perform for itself (self-consciously) if they are to take place at all, it follows that we must assume an absolute and not merely a relative spontaneity in order to conceive of their possibility.”⁸²

He then states what he takes the relativist’s main concern to be at this stage of the debate:

It is just at this point, however, that the Kantian position is most open to misunderstanding. Thus, contrary to what one might suppose, the “critical” Kant expressly refrains from drawing any ontological conclusions regarding the absolute spontaneity of the self from his epistemological analysis. The spontaneity-claim concerns rather the way in which the thinking subject must be conceived (or conceive itself) *qua* engaged in cognition. In other words, spontaneity functions in the technical Kantian sense as [an] idea in light of which the act of thinking must be conceived in order to retain its normative status; but this does not license an inference to the absolute spontaneity of the “thing which thinks.”⁸³

The anticipated worry, a version of which Kitcher herself seems to have in mind,⁸⁴ is that the necessity of “assuming” an absolute spontaneity would contradict Kant’s claim in the first *Critique* that transcendental freedom cannot be (theoretically) known. Allison’s proposed solution is that we are only required to assume absolute spontaneity as *an idea* under which we judge, which does not thereby license any metaphysical conclusions about the nature of the self as free. I will now examine one last passage, quoted at length because of its importance in spelling out precisely what I take to be problematic about this defense of AS:

⁸² Allison (1995, 348)

⁸³ Allison (1995, 349)

⁸⁴ (1990). Kitcher’s worry is a bit subtler, actually. She says that even if Kant didn’t have to admit the reality of transcendental freedom under these conditions, he still would have seen the assumption of absolute spontaneity as a big step in that direction.

Moreover, far from opening the floodgates for transcendental freedom, as Kitcher seems to fear, this “critical” modesty has its precise parallel in the practical sphere, where Kant insists that we can act only under the idea of freedom, while at the same time denying that this amounts to a theoretical proof of the reality of freedom. Accordingly, Kant grants the epistemic possibility that we might not be genuinely spontaneous beings. What he denies is that we could ever be in a position (say as the result of scientific developments) to deny our spontaneity while still affirming our status as genuine cognizers and agents. In this respect, then, the notion of spontaneity is built into, indeed, constitutive of, the first person standpoint itself. And, as Kant continually points out, this is perfectly compatible with the possibility of fully naturalized accounts of both thinking and acting considered as event-types in the phenomenal world. From Kant’s point of view, it is not that a naturalized account of these activities is either impossible or incoherent; it is rather that it is inherently incomplete, that it lacks the closure which only the idea of spontaneity can give to it.⁸⁵

Let me examine each part of this claim. First, Allison ties the ‘taking as’ account to Kant’s insistence that we can act only under the idea of freedom. This is of course a controversial passage, and it must be said that Allison’s interpretation of it is by no means the obvious one. If Allison is correct, Kant holds that by acting under the idea of freedom, we simply possess a (perhaps in some sense necessary and normatively-loaded) perspective of ourselves as free. To obey the moral law, and so to judge that I must perform some action, is already to take oneself to be responsible for it and thus free. But Allison’s Kant says that we must take this perspective without affirming the theoretical reality of freedom. That is, Allison holds that acting under the idea of freedom, and thereby recognizing the norms that would govern free rational beings, is insufficient to affirm the reality of our freedom. Indeed, it is true that we cannot theoretically know ourselves to be free, but it is taken to be a practical reality by the time of the second *Critique*. And, on my view, it is taken to be a practical reality as an implication of our knowledge of the moral law (a “fact of reason”). So, we know ourselves to be practically free through our own act of moral self-legislation. What exactly practical knowledge of freedom comes to is, of

⁸⁵ Allison (1995, 349)

course, a difficult and thorny issue on its own. But, it is unclear why Allison thinks that Kant (in theoretical or in practical reason) leaves it open whether we are “genuinely spontaneous”. At the very least, a plausible case could be made to the contrary.

Next, Allison claims that despite acting *under the idea* of our absolute spontaneity, we leave it open whether we really are absolutely spontaneous thinkers. Again, the source of this is Kant’s claim that we cannot (theoretically) know our freedom. He believes that it follows from this that we leave open the epistemic possibility that we are not truly absolutely spontaneous. Indeed, he goes on to say that by leaving it open that we are not truly absolutely spontaneous, we acknowledge that it is possible to have a fully naturalized account of thinking *so long as* we are not “affirming ourselves as genuine cognizers and agents.” So, it is only from the *epistemic perspective* of first person judgment that we must regard ourselves as absolutely spontaneous. But we can also regard our judgment from a third person perspective, and from here there is nothing barring a fully naturalized conception of the understanding. So, a naturalized (here, specifically, a functionalist) account of the understanding is not incoherent, but simply incomplete.

I now want to spell out what I understand to be a key assumption underlying Allison’s view, which threatens its standing as a version of AS. Allison’s insistence that the spontaneity of self-consciousness (‘taking as’) is necessary as an *epistemic perspective* is telling. Allison sees that he must find a coherent way for Kant to hold both of the following claims: (1) that we must judge under the idea of absolute spontaneity (‘taking as’), and (2) that it is nevertheless left open, as a *metaphysical* issue, whether we really are absolutely spontaneous or not. This is murky territory that itself warrants its own lengthy treatment, which I cannot hope to supply here. In the following chapter I will more closely examine why I take Allison’s view to be problematic. But

let us simply note for now why we should see Allison's view as a version of RS.

First, Allison begins from the assumption that our epistemic perspective and metaphysical reality (truth) are, in some sense, outside one another. That is, it is crucial for his view that we see our 'taking as' as a mere perspective, and that we be able to call into question whether that perspective tracks reality.⁸⁶ Putting aside various issues that I will explore in more depth soon, we can note that this assumption entails that the self-consciousness of judgment and the truth of what we judge are two different matters. So, on Allison's interpretation, the I of self-consciousness has an outer boundary; the truth is something with which our judgment either matches or does not match. And in the case of the idea of our absolute spontaneity, our judgment cannot match what it judges. I judge myself to be absolutely spontaneous from the first-person perspective, but whether or not I really am absolutely spontaneous is a matter to be settled outside of the first person (if it could be settled at all). This means that Allison's conception of the spontaneity of the understanding does not take the self-determination of self-consciousness to be total and limitless. Rather, it is only a perspective. Indeed, it is only one perspective among others, since he seems to believe that we can equally well explain judgment from a naturalistic (third person) perspective.⁸⁷ As we have just seen, this is exactly what is characteristic of RS: it holds that the principle of our judgment, even if we are stuck with it, is possibly one among others. So, it holds that judgment is only *relatively* internal to its self-consciousness.

Because RS takes judgment to be only relatively internal to self-consciousness, it holds that truth and knowledge are relative to our manner of being self-conscious. This places

⁸⁶ Note that he also states that the idea of absolute spontaneity is *constitutive* of judgment. I will argue in chapter two that this (correct, I think) understanding of judgment would actually spell trouble for Allison while strengthening my view.

⁸⁷ Allison is a bit unclear about this in the passage quoted. He qualifies this by saying that we could know judgment *as* an "event type in the phenomenal world." I agree that we can know the event types in the phenomenal world that correspond to judgment, but I disagree with the thought that this would be any kind of knowledge of judgment.

Allison's view in a category with Sellars's own version of RS. What is common to the two views is the thought that whatever the objective perspective on the world is, it is external to the first-personal character of self-consciousness. Moreover, to say that knowledge is relative to something is the same as to say that in knowing, I grasp what I judge not entirely through the judgment itself, but through the judgment's relation to something else, something given. It is in this sense that RS admits of a kind of passivity which AS does not. The passivity involved in RS also *circumscribes* self-consciousness within a broader context of the world. That is, to say that we judge with respect to a given inner principle is to say that judgment (and so the self-consciousness of judgment) belongs, in some sense, inside the world. This is what I mean when I say that RS is a broadly naturalistic view of judgment.

By accepting this broadly naturalistic picture, RS also accepts a form of the force-content distinction, according to which what is objectively true is prior to the judgment of it as such. This renders judgment and judgment's object two distinct elements of cognition. Here we can find a nice way to classify the versions of RS we have briefly looked at so far. The form of RS that is associated with Kitcher's functionalism can be thought of as a kind of metaphysical interpretation of spontaneity—that is, one which describes how judgment is responsible for its acts through an appeal to occurrent mental states. This is why the computer metaphor in Sellars is often seen as an endorsement of the same view (whether it is or not). For, it makes it easy for us to identify spontaneity with some mechanism or process in the world. On the other hand, the form of RS we are associating with Allison is, as we have already called it, fundamentally *epistemological*. It is the circumscription of self-consciousness within the world that explains how RS can fall on either side of this divide. And, I hope we will see by the end of the dissertation why we should not accept such a strict division between the metaphysical and

epistemological.

I point all of this out here not yet to wage an argument against Allison, but to show that a carefully considered reflection on what the spontaneity of the understanding amounts to results in an account that is not well-represented among Kantians.

§6 Introducing the Absorption Problem

In thinking through these difficult issues with Kant, we can see that there is no view of the object of knowledge (the truth at which judgment is aimed) except as always already being objects of the transcendental I—the I of self-consciousness. If so, then the I is thought to be absolute in the sense we have sketched thus far.

But now that we have sketched the account of absolute spontaneity, we must consider a deep worry waiting on the horizon. It is, after all, significant that so many distinguished Kantians have either not explicitly considered the possibility of AS, or have rejected it outright. The central worry with AS is that it either fails to overcome mere subjectivity in judgment, or it seeks to reach well beyond Kant to the tradition of absolute idealism. Both of these worries stem from the thought that AS takes the internality of self-consciousness to judgment *too* seriously. In fact, if taken seriously enough, perhaps the world becomes swallowed up or absorbed into the I. Call this *the absorption problem*. The basic thought is that a *relative* spontaneity would have something important going for it—namely, that the activity of judgment would be grounded in something *other* than itself.

The absorption problem has at least two distinct manifestations. The first, examined in chapter three, is the problem of solipsism. If Kant holds the understanding to be absolutely spontaneous, then he holds that nothing is external to the transcendental I. But then we might

wonder whether AS leaves us so absorbed in self-consciousness that we fail to have any way to understand the possibility of knowing something *other* than the I. The feared picture is one resembling a windowless monad, a world unto itself in which the only comprehensible manifold arises from our own conceptual division. Famously, Kant himself argues, against Leibniz, that our form of spatial intuition allows us to comprehend the *numerical* difference between two otherwise *qualitatively* identical objects (e.g., two qualitatively identical drops of water). In line with this thought, some Kantians wish to argue that our faculty of sensibility is *sufficient* for delivering objective awareness of the world. This would be to say that our sensibility is, in some sense, external to the transcendental I.

Second, we may also worry that AS leaves us so absorbed in the I that we lose all sight of the *finitude* of human knowledge. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is an attempt at drawing the *limits* of the human intellect. But how could cognitive limits be established at all in AS, a theory which holds that knowledge is not to be thought of as constrained from the outside? If we are to hold on to the idea that the I is absolute, and therefore that nothing limits or escapes it, then what is the source of cognitive limits? This takes us into the territory of absolute idealism, which says that we *can* know the infinite by knowing beyond the bounds of our apparent human cognitive limitations. In chapter four we will look at how Kant may respond to the charge of absolute idealism by looking at the significance of his distinction between *thinking* the bounds of knowledge and *knowing* them.

CHAPTER 2: THEORIES OF RELATIVE SPONTANEITY

In Chapter One we laid down the basic positions and remaining questions of the dissertation. For one, we wanted to explore the following two related issues: whether a capacity whose object must be given to it from elsewhere can nevertheless bring about its exercises from itself; and if so, in what sense. Thus far we have provided a partial answer. What we are aiming at is the thought that the understanding, as the capacity of knowledge, must bring about its exercises *absolutely* from itself. But then the activity of absolute spontaneity must also be distinguished from two common conceptions. The spontaneity of the understanding is not to be circumscribed within the world. If it is, then we are inclined to see spontaneity as *something* in the world, like a force or process or mechanism (the metaphysical interpretation), or like an epistemic *perspective* (the epistemological interpretation). As we have seen, it is essential to emphasize Kant's rejection of any sharp distinction between what is objectively true and what is judged as such, between what reality is like and what we judge it to be. Kant's conception of self-consciousness as we have spelled it out eliminates this possibility. In so doing, it also reveals the above interpretations of spontaneity to be versions of the relative spontaneity thesis, which says that whatever the activity of judging is, it must be restricted by something outside of its activity. In saying this, relativized notions of spontaneity give us a picture of truth and knowledge as relative to some given manner of thinking.

However, we also saw that in accepting AS we would have to contend with a serious worry, which is what we are calling the absorption problem. We need to be able to say whether AS threatens to land us in either a form of solipsism or absolute idealism. And, if not, then we need to know how to make sense of both the thought that in objective knowledge we know

something *other* than the I, and the thought that we can draw limits to our capacity to know. We have so far suggested that, in fact, the only conception of the objectivity of knowledge is one we get through the idea of the absolute spontaneity of the understanding. Now, in order to make a case for this, against RS, we must first look more closely at RS as a contender to our position. We need to see precisely why RS cannot make sense of the objectivity of knowledge.

§1 A Brief Note on Scholarly Background

The literature on Kant's notion of spontaneity is often quite unclear about just how a relative/absolute distinction should be drawn. As we have already seen, often the theoretical/practical distinction is elided in this discussion. It is also often the case, with the exception of the discussion that was spurred on by Pippin and Allison, that spontaneity is not explicitly tied to self-consciousness. Kitcher's early view has been criticized for this. But even in contemporary discussions it is unclear how self-consciousness is supposed to be related to the understanding's activity. This can be seen by noting that RS is often taken to be sufficiently explained by reference to one or both of the following ideas:

(1) The spontaneity of the understanding is relative in the sense that it requires an object to be given to it from elsewhere.

(2) The spontaneity of the understanding is relative in the sense that it is automatic in following a set routine.

Indeed, Sellars (1970) claims that RS is the conjunction of (1) and (2). In a recent book, Marco Sgarbi (2012) claims that these are two distinct kinds of relativity: first, the relativity of requiring an object for cognition, and second the relativity of following a set routine or disposition.⁸⁸ We might worry, though, that only the second sense captures a notion of relativity. If AS is right as

⁸⁸ Sgarbi (2012, 7)

we have so far spelled it out, then there is not yet any sense in which our knowledge is *relative* to objects given in sensibility. This is certainly a possibility we must go on to consider, but for now what we need to know is why we would have to see the given object as *constraining* what we judge of it rather than simply being available for our judgment. That view will require some argumentation, which is often left out. We can see this in the following passage from Sgarbi:

If spontaneity of the understanding in the subject is related to sensibility, it is possible to state that the subject is a cognizer and that the spontaneity of the understanding is always tied to the object that experience offers. In fact, for cognition two components are required, ‘first, the concept through which an object is thought at all (the category), and second, the intuition, through which it is given’. This is what Ameriks calls the ‘concurrence thesis’, according to which ‘there must be some kind of role for our receptivity, so that there is not mere pure spontaneity.’ The spontaneity of the understanding is, therefore, always a relative spontaneity because it requires the concurrence of receptivity.⁸⁹

There appears to be an assumption at work in his spelling out of Ameriks’s concurrence thesis: that in thinking of the subject *qua cognizer*, we are already thinking of her as “tied to the object that experience offers.” But, of course, everything here hangs on what is meant by “tied to the object”. The verbiage “tied to” signals that it is meant that in relying on there being given objects in experience, we are thereby constrained by those objects in our judgment of them. This idea of constraint, if it is what is meant by “tied to”, is normatively-loaded. It means that the given object has an authority to guide or direct judgment to the truth.

I hope to not make such an assumption about RS in this chapter. Instead, I want spell out a variety of ways in which a kind of constraint on judgment is thought to be necessary by defenders of RS. Then, we will be in a better position to see what I think is Kant’s plausible thought: that it is only through rejecting RS and accepting AS that the objectivity of judgment comes into view.

⁸⁹ Sgarbi (2012, 48); See Ameriks (1991) for more on his view of spontaneity.

We will begin again with the thought that Kant's spontaneity thesis expresses a kind of control that subjects have over their representations. Because we exercise some control over our representations, according to Kant, we are in some sense epistemic agents. This is one Kantian lesson that many contemporary philosophers have taken very seriously, although (as we will see) not always in our way.⁹⁰ The question we are to consider is whether the OSUA is a *given* principle or a *self-thought* principle. That is, we must ask whether RS or AS is true. I will argue in this chapter that RS fails to capture Kant's claim that self-consciousness is internal to judgment, and thus fails as an account of the capacity of the understanding. We shall see that it fails to show how judgment as an exercise of that capacity (the I to which we have said everything is internal) is internally self-conscious. To show this, I will first examine two versions of RS that Kant rejects in the Transcendental Deduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Then, I will show that the contemporary version of RS put forth most famously by Sellars and Kitcher also fails in the same way. Finally, we will look more closely at how Allison's purported attempt to argue for AS fails, leaving us with yet another relativized notion of spontaneity.

§2 RS and the Internality Thesis

In the Transcendental Deduction, Kant rejects what he calls a 'preformationist' account of the understanding, according to which we come equipped with pre-determined ("implanted") rules for judging.⁹¹ The preformationist account of the understanding would not be sufficient to account for the necessity and universality of our judgments, because it would make our judgments merely *subjectively* universal and necessary – that is, I would only be able to say that I

⁹⁰ See, e.g., Boyle (2011, 2); McDowell (1994); McDowell (2009); Brandom (1994)

⁹¹ B167

must judge that *P* because I happen to be so constituted as to judge that *P*. But we are capable of objectively universal and necessary judgments – that is, we are capable of saying that *P* must be judged by all rational thinkers.

The empiricist’s account of the rules of judgment is also insufficient, since it too must hold that if there are such rules, they are merely habits of association, and thus only subjectively necessary and universal. The empiricist can account for how we become aware of the relation of representations in perception, but not how we can say *of the object* that it is thus-and-so.

According to both preformationism and empiricism, judgment is determined in accordance with a principle that is itself determined externally. By rejecting these views, we are left with the thought that judgment is self-determined—that is, determined by the understanding itself, and thus through a self-determined principle.

Those who support RS could attempt to explain this self-determination of judgment in one of several ways, but will usually hold in any case that RS is not empiricism of the sort that Kant criticizes. Both Sellars and Kitcher, who have famously defended RS, hold that they are being true to Kant’s project of overcoming the limitations of Hume and the classical empiricists.⁹² They take RS to be a more sophisticated position, according to which the activity of a distinct capacity of understanding is necessary in the determination of judgment. If RS is true, then while the principle of the understanding is not ultimately self-determined, the determination of judgment must be considered a cooperative affair of the internal activity of the understanding *alongside* an external constraint or guide. According to RS, judgment *is* in a way self-determined for just this reason. But, as Sellars himself notes, the activity of judging is not pure activity, but an active/passive hybrid of sorts:

⁹² Sellars (1997) famously rejects the “Myth of the Given,” which might be ascribed to classical empiricism, and Kitcher (1990) takes her account of the understanding to show how Kant improves upon Hume’s psychology.

...the spontaneity of which we are conscious is, though not *sheer* passivity, nevertheless *a* passivity in that the inner development is set in motion by a foreign cause and follows a routine. In the awareness of noumenal activities of synthesis we would encounter simply another example of a cause the causality of which is caused.⁹³

So, in line with Kant's early definition of spontaneity, RS holds that the spontaneity of the understanding is a *spontaneitas automatica*, or one whose inner principle of determination is itself externally determined.⁹⁴

Setting aside the rejected preformationist account, if we wish to understand Kant's claims about the spontaneity of the understanding, then we must take this more sophisticated version of RS seriously. I will first look at two versions of RS that Kant already hopes to have refuted, both of which may be associated with classical empiricism: what we will call reductive causal-mechanism and natural teleology, respectively. We will see that what Kant takes to be the central flaw in both is that they rule out his internality thesis. This will require that we look even more closely at what Kant says about the nature of self-consciousness, and it will require some further explication of what the internality thesis comes to. By seeing how this is the case, we will later be able to see how it is also, in an important way, true of the more sophisticated version of RS supported by Sellars and Kitcher. Finally, we will see how Allison's purported version of AS also does not fully capture Kant's internality thesis.

§2.1 Habit and Self-Consciousness

One version of RS is the view that judgment is the result of habits of association. According to this view, judgments are formed on the basis of a principle of association: when I represent A, it

⁹³ Sellars (1970, 23-24)

⁹⁴ Metaphysik Pölitz, AA 28:267

is followed by representation B. This is a possibility that Kant considers and rejects as inadequate for understanding the self-determination of judgment.⁹⁵ Kant first describes the need for a “subjective ground” or principle of association:

Since, however, if representations reproduced one another without distinction, just as they fell together, there would in turn be no determinate connection but merely unruly heaps of them, and no cognition at all would arise, their reproduction must thus have a rule in accordance with which a representation enters into combination in the imagination with one representation rather than with any others. This subjective and empirical ground of reproduction in accordance with rules is called the association of representations.⁹⁶

If experience is to be more than “unruly heaps” of representations, those representations must be able to be reproduced in accordance with rules. This much was recognized by Hume, who says that such rules are acquired through habits. In turn, habits are themselves developments in accordance with some principle. Kant’s interpretation of Hume says that through habits of association, we learn to combine certain representations with a kind of necessity.⁹⁷ Hume’s explication of his own view includes remarks in the *Treatise* that we learn such habits of association through the relative degrees of *enlivenment* afforded to us through particular acts of perception.⁹⁸ That is, according to Hume, perceptions of constancy, resemblance, and regularity are enlivening perceptions – ones that make us more likely to reproduce them in the future. Now we might ask why it is enlivening to perceive constancy, resemblance, and regularity. It is enlivening either through brute causal-mechanistic force or through an agreement with the consciousness of the perceiving subject. First consider the latter view. Call this account the *natural teleological* account of judgment (NT):

⁹⁵ At B5 and B19-20, he tells us that Hume’s associationism fails to account for the strict universality of judgments like those in mathematics; at B123n.b, he tells us that a subjective or implanted necessity (habit) would not prove the strict necessity of the relation between cause and effect; at B127-28, he similarly suggests the need to see beyond the limited perspective of Hume, i.e., beyond mere subjective necessity derived empirically through habit.

⁹⁶ A121

⁹⁷ B5

⁹⁸ Hume (1978, 1, 86)

NT: The rational human, a kind of animal, develops habits of association (and thus judgments) through a recognition of what is good for it.⁹⁹

Thus, the habits that account for the association of representations in a judgment would be developed through a kind of self-consciousness – a consciousness of what it is good for one to do or think. This, in turn, is a consciousness of something given to us – our animal nature. It might seem that this is enough to capture Kant’s internality thesis. That is, NT claims that a kind of self-consciousness is already internal to acts of judgment.

But while Kant agrees with Hume that there is a subjective ground of the principle of association, he explains that the principle of association is incapable of accounting for objective judgments (and it is therefore insufficient for knowledge):

But now if this unity of association did not also have an objective ground, so that it would be impossible for appearances to be apprehended by the imagination otherwise than under the condition of a possible synthetic unity of this apprehension, then it would also be entirely contingent whether appearances fit into a connection of human cognitions [...]

[...] For only because I ascribe all perceptions to one consciousness (of original apperception) can I say of all perceptions that I am conscious of them. There must therefore be an objective ground, i.e., one that can be understood *a priori* to all empirical laws of the imagination, on which rests the possibility, indeed even the necessity of a law extending through all appearances, a law, namely, for regarding them throughout as data of sense that are associable in themselves and subject to universal laws of a thoroughgoing connection in reproduction. I call this objective ground of all association of appearances their affinity.¹⁰⁰

Our ability to combine representations into an objectively valid judgment – that is, one capable of predicating something of the object (viz., *what is true* of it) – is necessarily governed by a

⁹⁹ I do not intend to interpret Hume as rejecting a merely causal-mechanistic account of cognition in favor of some form of natural teleology. I merely understand NT as one manifestation of RS that can be constructed from the materials given to us in Hume’s *Treatise* together with Kant’s treatment of empiricism in the Transcendental Deduction. Additionally, I regard NT as a charitable reconstruction of a Humean empiricism. For more on a teleological interpretation of Hume, see Baier (1991).

¹⁰⁰ A122

principle that goes beyond the merely subjective and empirical ground of the principle of association. To be sure, we can associate representations in the Humean manner, and thereby combine them through habit in accordance with how we have learned to bring representations together in the past (thus entirely empirically, subjectively, and with only “comparative universality”¹⁰¹).

But this would not be judgment, and the reasoning goes something like this. It is no accident that appearances – the undetermined objects of experience – “fit into” or have a place in a single unity of knowledge. If they did not fit into one unity of knowledge, then they could not all belong to one consciousness. To put it another way, if appearances did not necessarily fit into one unity of knowledge, then we would thereby confess that while some appearances may be objects of my knowledge, others are objects of my knowledge*, where ‘*’ indicates a distinct unity of knowledge. But we would not say that *I* know that *P* unless it were in agreement with all *my* knowledge as *one* unity. The very fact that we have this ability suggests that all representations that could be thought by me must thereby belong to one unity of consciousness. Indeed, Kant famously states:

The I think must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me.¹⁰²

If I judge an object – that is, if I purport to say something true of it – I necessarily represent that object as belonging to a single unity of thought. And indeed, when I hold something to be true of objects, I represent them as agreeing with all the other possible objects of knowledge. I could not hold that some objects that I know fit together or agree with some other objects of my

¹⁰¹ A92 and B3-4; see also “judgments of perception” vs. “judgments of experience” in the *Prolegomena*.

¹⁰² B131-132

knowledge, while some objects that I know *don't*, for this would be to think a contradiction. This is why Kant says that in order to explain a priori knowledge – knowledge of what is necessarily and universally true – I must also think that what is known fits together with everything else that can be known, not in a hodgepodge manner, but necessarily. But if this is the case, it fits *for some reason*. Thus, we need a principle that explains and organizes this unity, and that principle is what Kant calls pure apperception.

If all we had at our disposal were a principle for associating representations, then while some representations might belong to one unity of knowledge, others might belong to an entirely distinct unity of knowledge. This would make knowledge subjective, as “I would have as multicolored, diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious.”¹⁰³ It would make knowledge subjective, that is, because it would allow knowledge to be bound to particular subjects (or kinds of subject). I might know that *P* here and now, and *I** might know that *Q* there and then. But then what is known – what is the case – is carved up into what-is-the-case-for-*I*, what-is-the-case-for-*I**, and so on. This sort of view is not straightforwardly incoherent, but it could not account for objective knowledge, which, as Kant says, combines representations “in the object, i.e., regardless of any difference in the condition of the subject”.¹⁰⁴

§2.2 Process Accounts of Self-Consciousness, pt. 1: RS as Causal-Mechanism

We have looked at one empiricist account of self-consciousness that Kant rejects. Let us briefly turn to another kind of empiricist account of self-consciousness that Kant has equally good reason to reject.

¹⁰³ B134

¹⁰⁴ B142

Assuming that the world behaves in accordance with causal-mechanistic laws, it may seem natural to look to causal-mechanism as a possible explanation of self-determination in judgment. The causal-mechanistic account, understood broadly, states that what I judge is causally necessitated by my antecedent mental states together with the laws of nature (hereafter CM).¹⁰⁵ Below I examine a problem for CM.

As some commentators have pointed out, our naïve understanding of judgment poses a problem for CM.¹⁰⁶ In order for CM to provide an account of self-determination in judgment, it must be possible for us to attribute to ourselves a causal explanation of judgment. But, in order to be able to conceive of myself as mechanically *caused* to think (even if indirectly), I must have the capacity of identifying a mechanical cause and attributing it to my capacity for judgment. That is, I must be able to think “I am caused to judge that *P*.” But in making such a causal attribution, I am already aware of myself as deciding that the causal attribution is valid. The capacity of self-consciousness is already presupposed by any attempt to provide oneself with a purely causal-mechanical explanation of how one judges. So, a causal explanation will inevitably fail to fully explain the activity of judgment *as a self-conscious activity*.

This argument may sound suspicious. For, it may sound as though the suggestion is as follows: because we necessarily think of ourselves as judging independently of causal-perceptual impingements on the senses, we cannot be caused to judge in this manner. But this would be akin to arguing that, for example, because I necessarily see the stick in the water as bent, it cannot be the case that the stick is not actually bent. This is clearly a bad argument. I think, however, that the argument can be shown to be convincing once it is more carefully examined.

¹⁰⁵ RS is sometimes taken to be a version of CM. See, e.g., Allison (1996)

¹⁰⁶ Pippin (1987, 46-47)

As Kant has argued, for a representation to be *my* representation is for it to be available for my use in accordance with my capacity for judging. To judge that *P* is to judge in accordance with a principle or rule for forming the judgment. But to judge in accordance with a rule, according to CM, is an act that we can understand as external to consciousness. By its own lights, this must be true for CM. For, while consciousness may accompany the causally-related mental states, the causal relations themselves do not have to be understood through any kind of consciousness.

CM may allow us to explain rule-following of a sort. For example, it may be that CM can account for the way in which a ball is governed by a mechanical rule when it breaks the glass. There is perhaps a sense in which the ball accords with, and thus “follows” a rule. But it does not allow for an explanation according to which something consciously acts *from* a rule. To allow for this possibility, CM would have to build into its account of judging some non-causal condition, a condition of self-consciousness which is itself not couched in causal terms.

Self-consciousness, according to CM, is therefore something that merely *accompanies* the power of mechanical causation. Kant’s internality thesis, however, requires that acts of judgment are always already self-conscious acts – that is, *internally* self-conscious.

§2.3 Two Kinds of Internality of Self-Consciousness

What we have seen is that a plausible account of judgment rests on a plausible account of self-consciousness in judging. Furthermore, while NT’s account of judgment does make judgment intrinsically self-conscious *in some sense*, it is not in the way that is required for rational subjects.

This reveals there to be two distinct kinds of internality for self-consciousness, only one of which can fully capture Kant's thought. First, consider what appears to be Kant's view, based on our discussion above:

(1) Judgment is always already self-conscious of one unity of knowledge (the understanding).

According to this view, judgment is intelligible only as being internal to one unity of self-consciousness. Now consider the view of NT:

(2) Judgment is always already self-conscious of a unity of my representations as they agree with my consciousness (or, are good for me).

According to NT, judgment is in a real sense internally self-conscious, but only *relative to* the kind of subject I am (viz., relative to a particular form of life).

(1) and (2) in turn map onto two kinds of internality:

(1) to ***Objective Internality***: judgment's internality to self-consciousness is not a relation of its act to a given manner of thinking. The validity of judgment does not consist in its relation or agreement with a principle conceived as possibly one among others; instead, the act of judging is the awareness of the validity of its act through the idea of its necessarily belonging in one unity of knowledge. This is just to say that it is self-consciousness of itself as valid simpliciter.

(2) to ***Subjective Internality***: judgment is aware of itself as valid relative to its given nature—that is, relative to what kind of subject it is.¹⁰⁷ The subjective internality of judgment to self-consciousness entails that the validity of which I am conscious is not validity simpliciter (or, in Kant's words, "of the object"), validity-with-respect-to such and such principle.

¹⁰⁷ In turn, we can say that objective and subjective internality correspond to different kinds of unity. Objectively internal self-consciousness is a seamless unity – i.e., not unified out of some antecedent elements or parts, but prior to them; subjectively internal self-consciousness is an aggregated unity – i.e., unified out of some antecedent elements or parts. This is not unlike the distinctions drawn recently by Conant (2017) and Boyle (2016) between additive and constitutive accounts of rationality. The additive account of rationality is an account of the unity of rationality that takes it to be aggregated out of separate elements, and the constitutive account of rationality is an account of the unity of rationality that takes it to be seamless or prior to its parts.

Note that the subjective internality of self-consciousness is something even non-rational animals are capable of (of course, without its being judgmental in nature). In perception, the animal moves itself in accordance with a principle. The dog, perhaps, moves itself in accordance with the principle of finding food. When the dog encounters the food, its consciousness of the food is also a self-consciousness, since it finds that food agreeable with its principle. In this way, non-rational animals have a kind of perceptual self-consciousness, and even follow rules. But their rule-following is not through an awareness of itself as valid simpliciter. The objective internality of self-consciousness to judgment requires that, in combining my representations, I do so not only through an awareness of its being proper to combine, but through the concept of the truth of what I judge.¹⁰⁸

Given Kant's explanation of the internality of self-consciousness, Kant's internality thesis requires us to think of the rational subject *not* as one with a given principle of thought – a given nature – but as judging in accordance with a self-determined principle. If it were the case that we judged in accordance with a given principle, then it would be inexplicable how we judge through a concept of *what is true* rather than a concept of what is valid for me now, what is valid for me* then, etc.

The distinction between objective and subjective internality of judgment to self-consciousness is one way of spelling out, from the resources in the first *Critique*, a point made convincingly by John McDowell in his “Knowledge and the Internal” (1995). In this paper, McDowell argues against a certain reading of Sellars's invocation of a “space of reasons”. Sellars's idea of a space of reasons is a version of internalism, according to which experience can

¹⁰⁸ Hannah Ginsborg (2011) speaks of a kind of “primitive normativity” that resembles what I am speaking of here.

justify only as it is already informed by our conceptual capacities (the understanding).

McDowell's goal is to dispel the idea that Sellars's internalism implies a kind of *interiority* of the space of reasons, which would place the space of reasons inside the mind, and the *truth* external to this space. Placing the truth outside the space of reasons renders truth a "gift from the world". If we have to rely on the truth to be given to us by the world, then knowledge is unacceptably accidental. To know is to exclude our being lucky in getting things right. Thus, we must avoid any picture according to which our rational activity is separable from what is true. We can see our argument against the subjective internality of judgment to self-consciousness as aligned with an important element of McDowell's argument. McDowell argues against the idea that rational activity is confined to an interior state, outside of which lies the truth that it seeks. He argues against this on the grounds that a proper account of knowledge would not make truth accidental, a gift from the world (knowledge excludes luck). The subjective internality of judgment to self-consciousness would render the validity of judgment accidental in an analogous way. If my judgment is valid only as it relates to a given principle for judging, then my judgment is not valid only through the rational activity that figures in my act of judging, but through the accidental fact of my possessing this manner of thinking together with my being given representations that agree with this manner of thinking. Thus, we can object to the subjective account of internality on the grounds that it does not really make sense of what it is for judgment to be objectively valid. It excludes the possibility of objectively valid judgment.

§2.4 Process Accounts of Self-Consciousness, pt. 2: RS as Functionalism

I have outlined Kant's arguments against two empiricist explanations of self-determination in judgment. He rejects the view according to which self-consciousness (our self-conscious unity of

knowledge) is merely subjectively internal to the subject. Now I will argue that even a contemporary version of RS, a functionalist account of the understanding, falls victim to the same sort of criticism.

§2.4.1 Sellars and Kitcher on RS

The version of RS put forth by Sellars and Kitcher can be understood as a form of what contemporary philosophers of mind call ‘functionalism’ – the view according to which the basic elements of cognition can be understood in terms of their functional roles within a system.

In Sellars’s important essay, “...This I or He or It (the thing) which thinks...”, he compares the activity of synthesis to the processes of a computer. That is, we can understand judgment to be the combining of representations in accordance with rules given to the judging subject, triggered into action by an external input. According to this model of judgment, the judgment is produced by combining previous states of the system into a new one.¹⁰⁹

Kitcher understands Kant in basically the same way, and explicitly categorizes him as a kind of functionalist:

What Kant offers...is an account of judgmental states remarkably like that defended by contemporary functionalists. Functionalism is the theory that the identity conditions for mental states are given in terms of their causal connections to stimuli, responses, and other (internal) states.¹¹⁰

Both Sellars and Kitcher thus support a kind of functionalism about the activity of the understanding (judging), which we can call RSF:

RSF: judgments are mental states produced out of antecedent mental states in accordance with certain rules of production.

¹⁰⁹ Sellars (1970, 23)

¹¹⁰ Kitcher (1982, 66)

This is a version of RS, according to our definition, because the principle of synthesis (here, rules of production) is not a self-thought principle. As RSF's principle of synthesis is not self-thought, it assumes that there is something outside the I of thought which grounds its activity or makes it connect to what is true. As noted earlier, the defenders of this view make it clear that they take themselves to be giving a plausible account of Kant's view of spontaneity, and so one that reaches beyond the forms of empiricism rejected by Kant in the Deduction. In order to accomplish this, RSF must be a better account of self-consciousness in judgment than CM and NT.

Kitcher takes RSF to be superior to the empiricist accounts of judgment because it accounts for the causal connections between our mental states. Indeed, for Kitcher, judgment cannot be the product of a subject who merely tends to associate representations on the basis of a habit. The empiricist is committed to such a view because the empiricist begins by looking at the impact of various impressions on a subject—i.e., with experience. But Kitcher, through Kant, begins with the conditions of the possibility of experience. Such conditions include among them a principle of causation, according to which the mind must be taken to be capable of causally organizing its perceptions in accordance with rules for forming judgments. Kitcher takes this to be Kant's way of overcoming the empiricism of Hume.¹¹¹

Sellars takes RSF to be superior to the empiricist accounts of judgment because it avoids the Myth of the Given. By assigning to the mind a set of dispositions *through which* perceptual inputs are taken up and informed, we do not have to think of impressions ("experience" for the empiricist) as a kind of basic point of departure for judgment. Rather, experience is always already informed by the dispositions through which perceptual inputs are taken up. This, like

¹¹¹ Kitcher (1990, 97). Smit (1999) points out that Kitcher nevertheless adheres to a problematic empiricism.

Kitcher's project, helps to highlight a central insight of Kant's – namely, that it is only *through* some internal activity of the mind that we can make sense of what is given in experience.¹¹²

Despite moving past the empiricism of Hume, RSF comes to be criticized by Henry Allison and Robert Pippin on the grounds that it fails to do justice to the epistemic role of the 'I think' in Kant's doctrine of pure apperception.¹¹³ We can break their shared worry down into the following basic point: if it were the case that synthesis were merely combinations of antecedent mental states in accordance with given principles of cognition, then judgment would not necessarily be an act of what Allison calls "taking as." As Allison says:

Reducing a long and complex story to its barest essentials, to judge is just to take some intuitively given item or set thereof as a determinate something...the main point is that [in] all cases of taking as, no matter how complex, the mind must not only combine its representations in a single consciousness, it must also be conscious of what it is doing.¹¹⁴

If judgment is "taking as", then it is explanatorily insufficient to define judgment in purely functionalist terms, because those terms leave out the necessary first-personal component of judgment. As Pippin puts it, even if we tried to understand judgment as a mere process of combination, it would still be necessary for me to first-personally *take* my representations to be synthetically connected with others. So, no functionalist account of judgment is complete.

I am sympathetic with these concerns. But, to fully appreciate them, we need to see how they fall into the same category of anxieties that Kant had about the empiricist accounts of the understanding. Self-consciousness, according to RSF, remains *subjectively internal* to the judging subject. Now I will spell out more fully why I take this to be true.

¹¹² Sellars (1997)

¹¹³ Op. Cit., Pippin & Allison

¹¹⁴ Allison (1995, 346)

§2.4.2 The Subjective Internality of Self-Consciousness in RSF

One thing we have seen in the explication of Kant's view is that pure self-consciousness is a condition on all a priori knowledge because it grounds necessity and universality. Nothing, that is, could be taken as *objectively* necessarily or *objectively* universally known unless it were related to pure self-consciousness, since pure self-consciousness is that consciousness of what I must think that excludes my particular subjective constitution. And NT failed to capture this thought because it was only capable of explaining a subjective necessity and a subjective universality in judgment.

Likewise, RSF only guarantees a subjective necessity and universality in judgment. This is because it does not conceive of pure self-consciousness as an awareness of a single unity of knowledge. Instead, it conceives of pure self-consciousness as an awareness of the contentual interdependence of my actual states of judging. I will show why these are two different thoughts, and why Kant's internality thesis relies on the former.

Kitcher takes Kant to be saying that when I judge, I am aware of the fact that my representations are all synthetically connected, for this is exactly how it is possible for me to judge in the first place (i.e., by bringing the content of my representations [e.g., {red} + {ball}] together in various ways in order to produce judgments). The model Kitcher uses to explain the unity of self-consciousness is, as we have seen, a functionalist model along the following lines:

States M1 and M2 are combined in accordance with a rule to produce state M3, which is the synthetic product (a judgment).

On Kitcher's view, Kant needs only to be able to say that the unity of self-consciousness—the single awareness of all my judgments as belonging together—is the result of a synthetic process. But a synthetic process such as the one just described does not require an awareness of a totality. Kitcher writes:

Kant's contention was that subjects accepted representations as the basis for objective judgments just in case they could be fitted into their existing beliefs in a particular way: they were consistent with (or extended or coherently revised) their beliefs about the basic constituents of reality and their causal interrelations. Bringing a representation to the "objective unity of self-consciousness" would be a matter of determining its coherence with existing beliefs along the categorial dimensions of substance and cause, that is, "according to the principle of the objective determination of all representations."¹¹⁵

So, according to Kitcher's functionalist interpretation of self-consciousness in judgment, the unity of self-consciousness that Kant speaks of is a unity of existing beliefs or judgments. The picture, then, is one according to which self-consciousness emerges with judgment: as I judge, I become aware of my (actual) judgments as cohering with my other (actual) judgments.

Now we can recall the motivation for Kant's principle of pure self-consciousness: that all objects of knowledge necessarily fit, like pieces of a puzzle, into one body of knowledge. To be purely self-conscious is to be aware, in all acts of judging, that my representations belong to me and all my other possible acts of knowing (and belong to 'me' qua universal I). We can also recall the problem faced by NT: that their conception of self-consciousness in judgment is a merely subjective conception, or one that says that what we are aware of is how I must judge *given my particular constitution* as a subject belonging to a particular form of animal life.

But this is *not* Kant's view, which is that all judgments presuppose an awareness of a single unity of knowledge, which unity is both necessary and universal. The reason why Kant takes pure self-consciousness—an awareness of a single unity of knowledge—to be the ground of objectivity in judgment is that it is an awareness of a totality. Or, in other words, the reason why Kant takes pure self-consciousness to be the ground of objectivity in judgment is that it is an awareness of my judgment as valid for any thinker, because it is a judgment of the way things are. But this requires a consciousness of a totality that precedes the combination of my actual

¹¹⁵ Kitcher (1999, 374)

judgments. We can sum up this point by pointing out that for Kant there is, in general, a need to distinguish between the merely logical unity of judgment from the real unity of judgment. In other words, while I am under the directive to unify my judgments qua empirical I, such a unity is not sufficient for the *logical* unity of judgment which constitutes the synthetic unity of apperception. Agreement among my existing judgments is not the same as the agreement of my judgments qua universal I, the capacity from which truth is determined. For, my judgments might agree more or less accidentally, and may thereby also more or less accidentally agree with the object. This does not rise above the mere subjective unity of self-consciousness that we see in NT.

To see this point more clearly, consider another objection to the functionalist. Arthur Melnick criticizes functionalist interpretations of Kant by suggesting that Kant could not have held that self-consciousness is the product of anything *sub-personal*.¹¹⁶ The functionalist interpretation, he thinks, is sub-personal in two senses: first, because it holds that the unity of our various states and functions is not literally the subject itself; and second, because it holds that these states and functions do not consciously belong to the subject. While it does not seem to me that the functionalist necessarily believes the latter, the former does express a worry similar to mine. My worry might be seen as an expansion on Melnick's. I hold that even if RSF gave up on the view that pure self-consciousness were an emergent product of sub-personal processes—that is, even if it conceded that it is no product at all, but that self-consciousness is always already attached to every act of judgment—the account would still be unacceptably sub-personal in an important sense. While the functionalist might hold that self-consciousness and judgment are inextricably bound to one another, she still holds that it is through acts of synthesis that self-

¹¹⁶ Melnick (2009, 70)

consciousness becomes intelligible. But, if I am right, then for Kant it is the other way around: it is through self-consciousness that acts of synthesis become intelligible.

Finally, I want to suggest that it is no accident that RSF holds the view that pure self-consciousness is merely a consciousness of the unity of my actual judgments. It is no accident because it is a process account of self-consciousness. The product of a process of combination is a unity through its parts. We understand M3 by first understanding M1 and M2, the states that produced M3. If self-consciousness is intelligible through synthesis, as it is for functionalists, then the character of self-consciousness is determined by an actual combination of states. So, it makes sense for the functionalist to hold that the self-consciousness internal to judgment is a self-consciousness *relative* to the actual judgments of an individual subject.¹¹⁷

§3 Allison's Epistemicism

Now that we have looked at a few examples of RS, it should be clear that I am criticizing their tendency to relativize the validity of judgment *to* something external to judgment. Similarly, in chapter one, we saw that Allison's attempt to overcome RS fails insofar as it preserves the idea that the I of pure apperception is bounded on the outside. I would now like to briefly take a closer look at Allison's proposal for overcoming RS and demonstrate precisely why I think it is unsuccessful, paying special attention to the implications this has for the relation between spontaneity and truth.

¹¹⁷ I should point out that I do not deny that our cognition *can* be merely relatively spontaneous in some of its exercises. For example, some of our judgments are only subjectively necessary, such as those that Kant in the *Prolegomena* calls judgments of perception. The mere subjective necessity of my associating the representations [sun], [stone], and [warmth] can have a natural teleological basis or even a causal-mechanistic basis. What I deny, however, is that the paradigm case of judgment – what Kant in the *Prolegomena* calls a judgment of experience – can be relatively spontaneous. Judgments of experience, as they are objectively valid, are acts of rational self-determination.

According to Allison's interpretation of Kant, when I judge that S is P, I *take* S to be P. This rather simple-sounding observation is nevertheless crucial, Allison thinks, for making sense of how judgment can come to have objective significance. On his characterization of Kitcher's view, he says that all RS requires for judgment is a series of causal connections between occurrent mental states. And, even if the causal connection is a reliable one (say it "tracks" the truth), outputting consistently true judgments, it does not amount to knowledge. For, in knowing that S is P, I do not merely have the appropriate mental state as the result of a certain causal process; I know it only if I self-consciously *take* it to be knowledge. Only in taking ourselves to know in judgment can judgment be the sort of thing that has normative import.

On Allison's view, as we saw, our spontaneity is a strictly epistemic activity. This epistemic activity is characterized as our 'taking-as' in judgment. We can say that it is merely epistemic for Allison because he takes Kant's spontaneity thesis to concern "rather the way in which the thinking subject must be conceived (or conceive itself) *qua* engaged in cognition" and "as an idea in light of which the act of thinking must be conceived in order to retain its normative status," but without licensing "a metaphysical inference to the absolute spontaneity of the "thing which thinks.""¹¹⁸ This view is, of course, related to Allison's famous "epistemic interpretation" of Kant's transcendental idealism. As Allison notes, his epistemic interpretation can be understood in terms related to Michael Dummett's concept of "warranted assertibility."¹¹⁹ The idea is that Kant should be understood as showing that there are certain conditions under which we are permitted to conceive of ourselves as free, and this permission can come independently of any metaphysical truth of freedom.

¹¹⁸ (1996, 64)

¹¹⁹ Allison (2004, 48)

Allison's view is, I think, right to note that our 'taking-as' (self-consciousness) in judgment does not warrant "metaphysical" conclusions, where these are understood to concern a substance. In this way, Allison's view comports with Kant's critique of rational psychology. However, it seems to me that there is a difference between the following two ideas: (1) that we cannot have theoretical knowledge of the I as free, and (2) that whether the I is free or not is in some way an open question that cannot be answered. On my view, Kant holds (1), but not (2). Allison seems to oscillate between these interpretations. On the one hand, he seems to attribute (2) to Kant, at least in some places. For instance, he notes that Kant, in a *Reflexion*, distinguishes between "logical" and "transcendental freedom" (R 5442 18: 183), and then claims that "the significance of this distinction [...] raises the possibility of a global agnosticism regarding rational agency [...]".¹²⁰ The idea of a global agnosticism regarding rational agency would seem to imply that the question of metaphysical freedom is left open.

On the other hand, he seems to recognize the problematic nature of (2). He writes, for instance:

[...] the illusion is not that we are free, or, for that matter, that we are causally determined. It lies rather in the assumption that we must *really be* one or the other in some ontologically privileged, context-independent sense. Such an assumption is unavoidable for transcendental realism with its theocentric paradigm, but it is precisely what is called into question by Kant's "Copernican revolution."¹²¹

Here, Allison recognizes that the problem really is in assuming that the truth is "ontologically privileged" and "context-independent" (where 'context' refers to either the practical or theoretical perspective). This view may come with its own issues, but we can for now take a look at the former tendency to interpret our epistemic stance as one that leaves open the question of the truth.

¹²⁰ Allison (1996, 62-3)

¹²¹ Allison (2004, 49)

What we are calling the epistemicist view captures the normative significance of self-consciousness in judgment. That is, it accounts for judgment as *constitutively* the sort of act that is responsible for what it judges. And, in virtue of capturing the normative significance of self-consciousness, it seems to block the attempts by various figures to reduce spontaneity to something passive. But there is a problem. In making self-consciousness into a (normative) perspective on our judging activity, it does not fully recognize Kant's internality thesis. It does not yet do away with the thought, found in other versions of RS, that our form of self-consciousness in judgment is relative to what is *true*. The epistemicist view holds that the truth is external to the transcendental I. In particular, as we have spelled it out in this chapter, epistemicism does not recognize the objective internality of self-consciousness to judgment. As a result, we must see that AS requires that we do not make spontaneity into a perspective that is set over against the truth.

In holding that absolute spontaneity is a self-conscious perspective taken in judging, Allison hopes to answer Kitcher's concern that such an affirmation of our spontaneity would purport to give us illicit metaphysical knowledge of transcendental freedom. The thought is that we can avoid claiming any such metaphysical knowledge by holding that this self-consciousness is a perspective from which we could not judge what is actually metaphysically true of us as cognizers. This is to say (again, just to repeat Allison's claim) that, for all we know, we really are automata. Allison wins a kind of normativity in judgment, but at a cost. The cost is that he still buys into the assumption that underlies both Sellars's and Kitcher's versions of RS—namely, that what we take ourselves to be in self-consciousness and what is true of us may be two different matters. Or, in other words, the perspective of objectivity is external to the first-personal character of self-consciousness.

The view of AS, following Kant, is that truth is only accessible from within the judgment of it, while error is only accessible from a point of view external to the judgment in question. Kant says of truth that while he accepts the “nominal definition” according to which truth is the agreement of judgment with its object, it is not possible to give a general criterion of truth. To give a general criterion of truth would require that we be able to compare judgment, in general, with its object. This would require an ability to step outside of judgment, which of course is absurd. Truth is only available from within judgment. But, if Allison is right in his response to Kitcher, then it is possible that even though we must *take ourselves to be* absolutely spontaneous in judging, it could nevertheless turn out, not simply that our spontaneity is not a matter of metaphysical speculation, but that we are wrong. So, the epistemicist account of spontaneity does not capture what it is to judge truth, as it circumscribes self-consciousness within the world. That is, it says of judgment that in order to make objective claims about the world it must find itself related to something beyond itself.

§4 Conclusion

We have considered four distinct versions of the RS thesis. In each case there is a relativizing of the activity of judging to something given, and as such there is a relativizing of truth and knowledge. If this is right, then it looks like we must accept AS, as the notion of objectively valid judgment seems to require that we find our knowledge *within* the act of judgment itself, rather than in a comparison of judgment with something given.

Now that we have laid out the case against RS and for AS, we can begin to consider the two manifestations of what in chapter one we called the absorption problem. Chapter three will begin by examining the charge of solipsism.

CHAPTER 3: THE ABSORPTION PROBLEM

§1 Absolute Spontaneity and the Threat of Solipsism

At the end of chapter one we encountered the motivation behind what we are calling the absorption problem: that what we have been calling objectively valid judgment should not be so firmly embedded within the first-person perspective that it reveals itself to be mere subjectivity. Historically, one manifestation of this worry culminates in the demand that one transcend the first-person perspective all together. So, according to Nagel, objective knowledge could only be had from a “view from nowhere.”¹²² This thought is rooted in the idea that a judgment from the first-person perspective is a *merely subjective* judgment. If it were possible to reach the view from nowhere, he thought, we should shed the first-person perspective all together. It is not possible to do this, however, and so Nagel took fully objective knowledge to be impossible (though a worthy regulative idea for judgment).

But this worry can arise even from within the first person, if we think that first-personal objective knowledge must be supplemented with (or “track,” or reliably connect to) something the truth of which is external to the first-person perspective. In other words, the worry does not require us to chase the idea of judgment that sheds the first person; we need only to desire a way of first-personally grasping what is itself beyond the first-person perspective. If it is an externalism of this sort that we crave, then the absorption problem can also be framed as a worry about sliding into solipsism. We have said that RS makes knowledge relative, and thus merely subjective. If so, then we must accept AS, which holds that objective truth can only be conceived as already belonging to the transcendental I, and thus to the self-consciousness of judgment.

¹²² Nagel (1986)

Perhaps, our opponent could say, AS demands so much in its internality thesis that it allows the I to swallow up anything recognizably objective about the world. Perhaps, they might say, the internality of self-consciousness to judgment could not render anything comprehensible beyond absolute unity itself. When the absolutist says about the objective world that it is already inside the transcendental I, then it might begin to look dubious that we could ever account for the emergence of difference—that is, our knowledge of a manifold, of empirical reality. How is the I, if empirical reality always already belongs inside it, not simply a windowless monad? How could it allow for interactions with anything but itself? If the I were a windowless monad, then it would not only be absolutely spontaneous, but it would be the *only thing*—pure unity that recognizes no difference. As Kant says, “through the I, as a simple representation, nothing manifold is given; it can only be given in the intuition, which is distinct from it”.¹²³ Thus, if we conceive of even *the manifold* as internal to the I, we seem to risk a reduction of difference to unity.¹²⁴

This seems to place us in a precarious position. After all, Kant begins the first *Critique* by demonstrating the transcendental ideality of space and time. By showing that space and time are nothing but our forms of sensible intuition, Kant shows that space and time cannot be fully comprehended through an articulation of concepts—general representations that are common to many things. In fact, the unity of space and time as forms of intuition is distinct from the unity of a concept. As Kant says of Leibniz in the *Amphiboly*:

He compared all things with each other solely through concepts, and found, naturally, no other differences than those through which the understanding distinguishes its pure concepts from each other. The conditions of sensible intuition, which bring with them their own distinctions, he did not regard as

¹²³ B135

¹²⁴ This is not so different from the predicament which Hegel refers to as the “night in which all cows are black” (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, Preface §16). Hegel warns against any tendency to ascend from difference to absolute unity, lest knowledge be “reduced to vacuity”—that is, pure emptiness.

original; for sensibility was only a confused kind of representation for him, and not a special source of representations; for him appearance was the representation **of the thing in itself**, although distinguished from cognition through the understanding in its logical form, since with its customary lack of analysis the former draws a certain mixture of subsidiary representations into the concept of the thing, from which the understanding knows how to abstract. In a word, Leibniz **intellectualized** the appearances [...]¹²⁵

According to Kant, Leibniz's mistake was to concern himself with only one type of representation: concepts. But the sensibility brings with it its *own distinctions*, and thus the sensibility is a source of its own kind of representation: intuition. But even more importantly, by comparing things solely through the use of concepts, Leibniz could discover no difference apart from conceptual difference. And this turns out to be a big problem for Leibniz, on Kant's account:

Of course, if I know a drop of water as a thing in itself according to all of its inner determinations, I cannot let any one drop count as different from another if the entire concept of the former is identical with that of the latter. But if it is an appearance in space, then it has its place not merely in the understanding (under concepts), but also in the sensible outer intuition (in space), and since the physical places are entirely indifferent with regard to the inner determinations of the things, a place = *b* can just as readily accept a thing that is fully similar and equal to another in a place = *a* as it could if the former were ever so internally different from the latter.¹²⁶

If all that I can do in knowing a drop of water is to think all its inner determinations, then any other drop of water with the same inner determinations must be thought as identical with it. That is, Leibniz only recognizes difference insofar as it can be articulated through the concepts of things. But this is only a recognition of qualitative difference. For Leibniz, to be numerically different requires being qualitatively different. In Kant's case we are imagining two drops of water that are qualitatively *identical*, and yet numerically *different*. Kant's problem with Leibniz

¹²⁵ A270/B326-A271/B327

¹²⁶ A272/B328

(at least, one way of putting it) seems to be that he does not actually allow for numerical difference. Consider what Kant says more specifically about the two drops of water:

Thus, in the case of two drops of water one can completely abstract from all inner difference (of quality and quantity), and it is enough that they be intuited in different places at the same time in order for them to be held to be numerically different [...] since [appearances] are objects of sensibility, and the understanding with regard to them is not of pure but of empirical use, multiplicity and numerical difference are already given by space itself as the condition of outer appearances. For a part of space, even though it might be completely similar and equal to another, is nevertheless outside of it, and is on that account a different part from that which is added to it in order to constitute a larger space [...]¹²⁷

Here Kant is very clear that awareness of numerical difference necessarily involves the sensibility. Again, assuming two drops of water which are qualitatively indistinguishable, no amount of conceptual division would be sufficient to differentiate between the two of them and get us to an articulation of them *as* individual and thus distinct objects. But if we are incapable of doing this, then we cannot have empirical knowledge. To have empirical knowledge is to have knowledge of an object that exists independently of the one who judges it. If we can think an object that has independent existence, then we can think it as individuated. Empirical knowledge already requires the ability to know numerical difference. To secure this possibility, Kant says, we need to see that the water drops are spatially distinct objects. And since conceptual division is insufficient to account for their spatial difference, we must see that an awareness of their spatial difference is found only in spatial *intuition*—that is, in a representation with non-conceptual form.

If this is right, then it may seem as though what is required for comprehending numerical difference, and thus for having empirical knowledge, is a form of representation external to the transcendental I. For, if we are to escape the thought that the world we know is always already

¹²⁷ A263-4/B319-20

internal to judgment, it may seem that we have to give some independent objective authority to a non-judgmental capacity—namely, the sensibility. In other words, it may look as though Kant has shown that the solution to Leibnizian solipsism lies in holding that the sensibility alone is sufficient for delivering to us an objective awareness of spatial difference. Without such a capacity, it is thought, we could only have confused conceptual representations of a sensible manifold, but we would not have contact with space as objective. We would be stuck in the I with no view to the outside.

Let us, then, look more closely at this proposal which seeks to free our Kant from the purported solipsism of AS. In looking at this view I will argue that while the sensibility is *necessary* for an awareness of numerical spatial difference, it is not sufficient for that awareness. This, we will see, comes to the thought that space must be in some sense internal to the I. Thus, my view will be that the answer to the solipsism worry will not involve positing any objective representation external to the transcendental I. In fact, objective spatial representation is only intelligible as it is involved in the original unity of apperception.

§2 A Sensibility First View of Cognition

The view I have recommended is that the objectivity of what I think—that is, judgment’s character as being true independently of any particular nature of the thinking subject—is absolutely internal to the self-consciousness of judgment (the transcendental I). The opposing views that I now have in mind are views that do one of two things: (1) locate the source of objectivity external to the transcendental I; or (2) locate the source of objectivity within the transcendental I, but external to the act of judging. In this chapter we will focus on (1).¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Views of type (2) offer, I think, the most sophisticated challenge to AS. We will look at one of them more closely in the final chapter.

The issue of how objectivity comes into the picture for Kant is complicated, and right at the center of a number of debates in Kant scholarship, including the contemporary debate over whether to understand Kant as a conceptualist or a non-conceptualist, or more generally whether to understand Kant as giving pride of place in theoretical cognition to either the understanding or the sensibility.¹²⁹ Kant famously says:

The pure understanding separates itself completely not only from everything empirical, but even from all sensibility. It is therefore a unity that subsists on its own, which is sufficient by itself, and which is not to be supplemented by any external additions. Hence the sum total of its cognition will constitute a system that is to be grasped and determined under one idea, the completeness and articulation of which system can at the same time yield a touchstone of the correctness and genuineness of all the pieces of cognition fitting into it.¹³⁰

This passage suggests that the objective validity (“correctness or genuineness”) of judgment depends on a “touchstone” which lies in the system of the pure understanding itself, which system is self-articulated and self-sufficient. We may thus be inclined, as I am, to read Kant as saying that the objectivity of knowledge is determined by the understanding. But, many clearly do not agree with this interpretation. Those who disagree might look to a passage like the following:

But since the mere form of cognition, however well it may agree with logical laws, is far from sufficing to constitute the material (objective) truth of the cognition, nobody can dare to judge of objects and to assert anything about them merely with logic without having drawn on antecedently well-founded information about them from outside of logic [...] ¹³¹

This passage will be taken by some to suggest that the “touchstone” of the objectivity of knowledge lies beyond logic—that is, beyond thinking. For instance, without directly citing this

¹²⁹ My own view is that the existing debate about conceptualism and non-conceptualism is misguided and in serious need of clarification regarding what the source of the debate is. It seems to me that the source of the debate, in its various manifestations, lies in some basic assumptions that themselves are at the center of contention in Kant interpretation and Kantian philosophy. One of these issues is what I take up here: the question of what for Kant is the nature of knowledge’s objectivity. We will see in the following pages how this issue connects up to the debate.

¹³⁰ A65/B90. Kant insists on this throughout the *Critique*, for instance at A425/B453 and A647/B675.

¹³¹ A60/B85

passage, Tolley (2014) claims that there is evidence in the first *Critique* for the view that Kant is a proto-Fregean who believes that the objective validity of a judgment lies in whether it correctly corresponds to an independently-specifiable object. This view is taken on the grounds that in the section from which the above passage is quoted, Kant is supposed to have argued for a correspondence theory of truth.¹³² I raise these points just to demonstrate that there is real contention among Kantians about what the source of knowledge's objectivity is.

Now, to see the motivation for a Kantian to adopt a view which locates the source of objectivity external to the I of pure self-consciousness, consider the following famous passage from the first *Critique*:

Without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is thus just as necessary to make the mind's concepts sensible (i.e., to add an object to them in intuition) as it is to make its intuitions understandable (i.e., to bring them under concepts).¹³³

This is one of the most contentious passages from the first *Critique*, understandably, because on its own it seems ambiguous enough to admit of radically different interpretations. One might take Kant to be saying, for instance, that concepts and intuitions cannot operate independently of one another. If this is right, then there is no possibility that we either think empty concepts or have anything given to us in sensibility that we have no concept for. On the other hand, one might take Kant to be saying that while both empty concepts and blind intuitions are perfectly possible on their own, there would simply be no knowledge independently of the joint involvement of concepts and intuitions. Those who adopt the first view might be called *strong conceptualists*, since they hold that all cognitive acts bring concepts into play. Those who adopt the second view are more difficult to characterize, because they can in turn belong to two classes

¹³² Tolley (2014, pp. 10-11)

¹³³ A51/B75

of views: on the one hand, the view that while intuitions need not (all) involve concept-application, all intuitions must be capable of being conceptualized (*state non-conceptualism*); on the other hand, the view that some of what we cognize in intuition is *essentially* non-conceptual (*essential non-conceptualism*).¹³⁴

Now, non-conceptualist Kantians (whether state or essential non-conceptualists) may argue that it is best in line with Kant's overall view to hold that the sensibility, on its own, affords us with objective awareness. This thought can be unpacked as follows:

The role of intuition in Kant's philosophy is to enable us to have a connection with reality. As Kant says, intuition is the only sort of representation that immediately relates to its object, while concepts only relate to objects mediately, through judgment.¹³⁵ But, the reasoning goes, Kant shows us not that we have cognitions only of mental representations *in the mind*. He shows us that we have cognitions of the way the world is outside our representations. There is no guarantee of such a connection to the truth if we only ever mediately cognize objects. So, intuition is our direct route to objective reality. And, as Kant says, the sensibility and the understanding cannot switch their functions: the sensibility intuits and the understanding judges.¹³⁶ So, the view goes, objectively true judgments owe at least part of their objectivity to intuition.

Non-conceptualist Kantians, so far, can hold that knowledge is *constrained* by objective deliverances of sensibility, since intuition is cognition's anchor to *material truth*.¹³⁷ If judgment is truth-directed, then it must *listen to* what intuition tells it, so to speak. The objective

¹³⁴ See Hanna (2015) for a taxonomy of these views.

¹³⁵ A68/B93

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ I want to emphasize that they *can* hold that sensibility grounds the objectivity of knowledge, even though they are not required to. McDowell (2009) is considered by some to be a state non-conceptualist (e.g., Hanna 2015). If he is (and I take no stance on that here), then he must be a state non-conceptualist who does *not* think that sensibility grounds epistemic objectivity, since his view is that sensibility already properly belongs to the understanding.

deliverances these non-conceptualists have in mind are both external to particular acts of thinking (since no conceptualization is required in order for the content to be objective) and external to the ‘I’ of transcendental apperception, in the sense that the sensibility is thought to be, on its own, a special source of material truth.¹³⁸

This is one way of characterizing what Robert Hanna (2015) has called a *sensibility first* picture of rational human cognition (hereafter, SF).¹³⁹ The thought is that sensibility’s direct connection to material truth provides us with a kind of primitive (theoretical) cognitive normativity. When we are directly sensibly aware of some object, we have a *veridical sense perception* or what Hanna calls “world-connectedness and world-situatedness”.¹⁴⁰ And this world-connectedness could never be secured *except* through essentially non-conceptual means.

To quote Hanna at length:

The bottom-up theory I am proposing, then, is that essentially non-conceptual content and non-conceptual cognition are not only presupposed by all conceptual content and concept-driven cognition, but also that the former grounds the latter in the strong metaphysical sense that the essentially non-conceptual partially constitutes the conceptual. Otherwise put, my claim is that the conceptual side of human mindedness cannot secure directly referential veridicality or world-connectedness and world-situatedness on its own, so the essentially non-conceptual independently and autonomously does this for it.¹⁴¹

So, according to Hanna, material truth in empirical knowledge has its source in essentially non-conceptual content. The details here are vast, complex, and would take us well beyond the scope of this project. But, if we look at one more passage, we can get a better sense for *why* Hanna thinks that we are world-connected and world-situated in this essentially non-conceptual manner:

¹³⁸ In his logic lectures, Kant says that while the self-agreement of judgments is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of theoretical truth, nevertheless *material truth* does not meet the conditions of universality and necessity. Material truth, he says, is an agreement between “the character of the object in respect of the senses” (Dohna-Wundlacken Logic, 719). This suggests that material truth is associated with subjectively valid cognitions.

¹³⁹ Another version of SF is found in McLear (2015), who argues that intuition is objective independently of the understanding.

¹⁴⁰ Hanna (2015, 25)

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

As Kant argues in his fascinating pre-Critical essay, ‘Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Directions in Space’, and again in his equally fascinating late Critical essay, ‘What is Orientation in Thinking?’, all three-dimensional spaces represented by creatures like us necessarily have ‘centered’ or egocentric axes for right-left, front-back, and up-down directionality (*DS* 2: 381-383) (*OT* 8: 134-135). So according to Kant it is possible for me to cognize the enantiomorphic incongruence between my right and left hands *nonconceptually*, despite their being exact one-to-one analytical counterparts and thus indistinguishable conceptually, merely by possessing an outer sense (*P* 4: 285-286).¹⁴²

On Hanna’s reading of Kant, it is only possible to cognize, say, the difference between our left- and right-handedness *non-conceptually*—that is, the content of this sort of knowledge is essentially non-conceptual. This is because, harkening back to our earlier discussion of Kant’s response to Leibniz, the left and right hands are “exact one-to-one analytical counterparts and thus indistinguishable conceptually”. And as we have seen, if two objects are conceptually (qualitatively) indistinguishable, then they can only be numerically distinguishable through the representation of space as a form of intuition.

So, SF is one way of trying to understand Kant’s response to Leibniz. The response, to put it simply, is to say that Kant rejects the idea that the I is a windowless monad by giving it windows in the form of an independent capacity for sensible awareness. And, crucially, the sensibility can perform this function *only because* it is not, as AS holds, always already inside the I. The windows here are provided as a means of escaping the I, and we thereby avoid Leibnizian solipsism. Now, I take the two most important implications of SF to be:

- (1) material truth is secured in sensibility via intuition, and
- (2) we are *guided and mediated by* that directly referential and essentially non-conceptual cognitive content.

¹⁴² Hanna (2005, 281)

So, according to SF, the sensibility is the anchoring point of all cognition, which is why Hanna refers to this as a “sensibility first” view of cognition.¹⁴³ Sensibility comes “first” in the sense that its content alone is the basis upon which an act of judgment could rise to the level of knowledge. So, SF holds that the ‘I think’ is guided by a source of objectivity external to itself. But this isn’t just to say that the source is external to the individual act of judgment; it is to say that the source is external to the ‘I’ of pure apperception qua capacity. But could this be true? I will argue that it cannot be. In order to do this, we must first get clearer about what it means, on the SF view, for sensibility to be a source of objectivity. It has been said that intuition anchors us to the world veridically, and that “sensibility” as a capacity does this. So, what is the relation between intuition and sensibility such that the capacity of sensibility could be the source of such intuitions?

What I hope to show is that by more clearly mapping the landscape of the SF view onto the landscape of Kant’s cognitive faculties, we can see exactly why Kant had good reasons to think that objectivity is internal to the *understanding*. Thus, we will see why SF is false. But even more importantly, we will see that a proper understanding of Kant’s view about the relation between understanding and sensibility will reveal that the latter must be conceived as, in some sense, internal to the former. Specifically, while space is indeed *necessary* for any objective cognition of numerical difference, it is not *sufficient* for it. If I am right, then an objective cognition of numerical difference can only be had from within the transcendental I.

¹⁴³ Hanna (2015, 38)

§2.1 The Source of Objectivity as Pure Imagination

So far, we have seen that SF introduces an alternative to AS in order to get around the threat of a Leibnizian solipsism. But what, more specifically, does SF look like as a theory of objective cognition? First, I want to briefly spell out SF as an account of cognition which holds that objectivity is internal to the pure imagination as the form of sensibility.

Regarding SF, Hanna states:

The cognitive capacities generating and supporting non-conceptual content are consciousness-based, perceptual, imaginal, and more generally characteristic of human *sensibility*. On the other hand, the cognitive capacities generating and supporting conceptual content are self-consciousness-based, judgmental or propositional, logical, and more generally characteristic of human *discursivity* (i.e., human linguistic and intellectual activity).¹⁴⁴

So, non-conceptual cognitive acts are characterized as involving conscious perception and imagination, *but not* self-consciousness or judgment. As such, SF appears to hold that the imagination is fully specifiable, and thus is what it is independently of any act of understanding. This follows one way of understanding Kant's famous claim that "Without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (A51/B75). According to SF's reading of Kant, as Hanna points out, intuitions and concepts must come together to make objectively valid judgments, but they can also operate independently from one another outside of the context of judgment. So, Hanna says that it is "perfectly possible for there to be directly referential intuitions without concepts ('blind intuitions', e.g. someone's first cognitive encounter with a

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

tree), and also to have thinkable concepts without intuitions ('empty concepts', e.g. concepts of things-in-themselves)."¹⁴⁵

This conception of the imagination as operative independently of the understanding requires SF to hold that the understanding is not the seat of epistemic objectivity. That is, according to SF's account of judgment, when we make a non-accidentally true judgment, it is not the understanding's own activity which renders that judgment *objective* rather than a mere subjective association of concepts. It is not the understanding which secures the relation between the judgment and the object. For, according to SF, there is directly referential (objective) intuition independently of the operations of the understanding. Thus, Hanna argues, the activities of sensibility can possess their own *autonomous* normative content: "Essentially non-conceptual content in this sense expresses *the body's own reasons* [...]"¹⁴⁶

Again, this can be understood simply as the embodied subject's being world-connected and world-situated—viz., in space and time. In being so connected and situated, the subject is both (1) poised to make empirical judgments about this environment, and (2) already objectively placed in space and time such that those judgments are enabled to "track" truth.¹⁴⁷ Note that the claim is not simply that we must have spatiotemporally-situated bodies in order to be able to make empirical judgments. The claim is stronger: that this spatiotemporal situatedness is our being *objectively* spatiotemporally situated so that judgment can have the sort of empirical meaningfulness required for objective knowledge.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Hanna (2011, 334)

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 327. In his (2015), Hanna calls this the proto-rationality of the body.

¹⁴⁷ Hanna (2015, 26)

¹⁴⁸ Hanna (2017) says that judgment's objective validity is its empirical meaningfulness. Note that this diverges from our discussion of objective validity from chapter one, where we characterized it as the non-accidental truth of judgment.

Now, turning to Kant, in the A Deduction Kant distinguishes between three moments of synthesis: the synthesis of apprehension in the intuition, the synthesis of reproduction in the imagination, and the synthesis of recognition in the concept.¹⁴⁹ Two of these belong to the sensibility: (1) the synthesis of apprehension, and (2) the synthesis of reproduction. Both kinds of synthesis are acts of imagination, which is “the faculty for representing an object even without its presence in intuition.”¹⁵⁰ And these acts of synthesis are possible, Kant says, only under the presupposition of a *pure* or *transcendental* faculty of the imagination—one that is involved in synthesizing the pure manifold of space and time. For, there must be a rule that grounds our ability to lawfully empirically associate one representation with another, and this ground of association must therefore be non-empirical, i.e., pure. Now let us walk through this line of thinking more carefully.

Generally-speaking, the synthesis of apprehension involves holding together a manifold into a unity of intuition:

Now in order for unity of intuition to come from this manifold (as, say, in the representation of space), it is necessary first to run through and then to take together this manifoldness, which action I call the synthesis of apprehension, since it is aimed directly at the intuition, which to be sure provides a manifold but can never effect this as such [...]¹⁵¹

Kant is saying that the unity of the manifold consists in our holding together the parts of the manifold as a unity. It may seem that the example of space is misleading, for space is a unity *preceding* its parts. But even in pure intuition, Kant thinks, a manifold is unified (so not *mere* manifoldness) through our act of holding that manifold together as one. Because this—the *pure* synthesis of apprehension—is the unifying act that makes space and time possible, it is the

¹⁴⁹ A98-110 (the threefold synthesis).

¹⁵⁰ B151

¹⁵¹ A99

highest act of the sensibility.¹⁵² Thus, even the most basic act of intuition takes place with reference to the synthesis of apprehension. For, “every intuition contains a manifold in itself” that must be taken together as one.¹⁵³ Since all intuition necessarily involves the pure synthesis of apprehension, all intuition relies on the pure (productive) imagination—what Kant also calls the *figurative synthesis* of imagination. This pure synthesis is, through apprehension and reproduction,¹⁵⁴ what determines the manifold given in sensibility.¹⁵⁵

Given this understanding of what Kant says about imaginative synthesis, Hanna’s view (in tying this to Kant’s theory of cognition) must be that the objectivity of world-connectedness and world-situatedness is not *simply* given to us in intuition. Rather, sensible objectivity is itself an act of spontaneity—the spontaneity of the imagination. But what is the spontaneity of the imagination? We have focused on spontaneity as it figures in judgment as an objectively internal self-conscious act, but we have also considered (see Ch. 2) the possibility of views according to which spontaneity is either not self-conscious or else self-conscious in some lower sense. As we have seen, Hanna sees SF as essentially “imaginational” in Kant’s sense.¹⁵⁶ And, in turn, he also sees the pure (productive) imagination as embodying its own form of spontaneity, “lower-level spontaneity.”¹⁵⁷

If SF is to correspond with the forms of imaginative synthesis laid out in the Deduction, then it must hold that the source of epistemic objectivity lies in the pure synthesis of the

¹⁵² A102

¹⁵³ A99

¹⁵⁴ At *least* through apprehension and reproduction. Kant repeatedly states in the B Deduction that the figurative synthesis is a result of the *understanding’s* effect on sensibility (B152-54). But we can set aside this controversy for the sake of argument.

¹⁵⁵ B154

¹⁵⁶ (2015, 38)

¹⁵⁷ (2015, 106)

imagination. If this much is clear, then we can begin to see where SF goes wrong.

§3 A Problem with SF's Account of Epistemic Objectivity

I will now consider one way in which I believe that SF fails as an account of epistemic objectivity. In particular, we will see that a proper accounting of the nature of imaginative synthesis *qua cognition* reveals that such cognition must already have a relation to conceptual form. Out of this it will become clear that there is no thought of objective spatial awareness except as already belonging to the unity of apperception. And, as this gives objective spatial awareness conceptual form, SF is not a viable alternative to AS for dealing with the solipsism worry.

SF, I believe, misconstrues just what it is for the understanding to be a conceptual capacity. More specifically, it misconstrues what a concept is in the most general sense. The reason that SF rejects any view of cognition according to which the understanding is “first” (in being the source of material truth) is that, on their view, only intuition could secure a direct relation to the truth. So, for SF, even if conceptual and logical structure is the structure of *formal* rather than *material* truth, its function is still to a large degree “guided and mediated by” material truth in the sense that it is always aimed at tracking that objective reality that is already partially revealed to us in sensibility. But I want to show that this is a mistaken picture of even non-judgmental acts of sensible cognition. For, as Kant helps us to see, we cannot make sense of what it is to cognize objectively in sensibility without already appealing to the conceptual form of the understanding. If this is right, then there is no connection to material truth independent of understanding's conceptual form. Let us begin here by revisiting how Kant understands the objectivity of judgment:

All our judgments are at first merely judgments of perception; they hold good only for us (that is, for our subject), and we do not till afterward give them a new reference (to an object) and desire that they shall always hold good for us and in the same way for everybody else; for when a judgment agrees with an object, all judgments concerning the same object must likewise agree among themselves, *and thus the objective validity of the judgment of experience signifies nothing else than its necessary universal validity.*¹⁵⁸

First, a judgment of perception, which refers to a state of the judging subject rather than the object, acquires “a new reference (to an object)” in becoming a judgment of experience. Thus, we can characterize the difference between A and B below in this way:

A. When the sun shines on the stone, it grows warm.

B. The sun warms the stone.

The judgment A refers to the state of the subject. It tells me only that I perceive a connection between these representations in myself: when the sun shines, I feel the warmth of the stone. The judgment B, on the other hand, acquires an object: the stone. As Kant says, “if I would have it called a judgment of experience, I require this connection to stand under a condition which makes it universally valid I desire therefore that I and everybody else should always connect necessarily the same perceptions under the same circumstances.”¹⁵⁹ The object is acquired as we bring to the perception a pure concept, cause, which brings with it necessary connection and universal validity. Thus, when I say that *the sun warms the stone*, I no longer represent merely how representations are connected in my perception, but how things are. And in representing how things are, I represent it as both *necessary* (no arbitrary connection of concepts) and *universal* (applicable to all thinkers in the same way). And, in §19 of the Deduction, Kant says:

I find that a judgment is nothing other than the way to bring given cognitions to the **objective** unity of apperception. That is the aim of the copula **is** in them: to distinguish the objective unity of given representations from the subjective. For this word designates the relation of the representations to the original

¹⁵⁸ Pröl. §18, emphasis added

¹⁵⁹ Pröl. §19

apperception and its **necessary unity**, even if the judgment itself is empirical, hence contingent, e.g., “Bodies are heavy.” By that, to be sure, I do not mean to say that these representations **necessarily** belong **to one another** in the empirical intuition, but rather that they belong to one another **in virtue of the necessary unity** of the apperception in the synthesis of intuitions, i.e., in accordance with principles of the objective determination of all representations insofar as cognition can come from them, which principles are all derived from the principle of the transcendental unity of apperception.¹⁶⁰

Again, the objective validity of even a contingent judgment consists in a *necessary relation* of representations, in the sense that those representations are held together in the necessary unity of apperception in accordance with its principles. And the copula ‘is’ relates the representations to the unity of apperception and its necessary unity. We can recall that for Kant the mark of an objectively valid judgment is that it combines representations *in the object*. So, what could it mean that this copula both combines representations in the object *and* relates those representations to the necessary unity of apperception? How, that is, can we understand that the act of synthesis is *at the same time* a synthesis as of the object and as of the unity of apperception? The answer helps reveal Kant’s deep insight into the nature of epistemic objectivity.

In Kant’s view, there is no agreement between judgment and its object independently of the agreement between judgment and all other judgments. We have seen a glimpse of this in the Prolegomena passage above, where Kant tells us that when a judgment agrees with an object, all judgments concerning that object must also agree among themselves. This seems clear enough, as it seems to say nothing more than that if there is a true judgment of an object, then all other judgments about that object ought to be logically consistent with it.

But notice that judgment’s agreement with its object is not an agreement between judgment and an independent fact, so it is not what most philosophers now think of as a

¹⁶⁰ B141-42

correspondence theory of truth. The object of judgment is not the matter of mere sensation (that which originally affects the sensibility), but that which is brought to the unity of apperception.

To see more clearly what this means, consider what Kant says in the A Deduction about the object of knowledge. First, Kant asks:

What does one mean, then, if one speaks of an object corresponding to and therefore also distinct from the cognition? It is easy to see that this object must be thought of only as something in general = *X*, since outside of our cognition we have nothing that we could set over against this cognition as corresponding to it.¹⁶¹

Kant has in mind that since all possible objects of experience are appearances (and thus already related to knowledge as what *can be known*), the only thing we could say about an object completely distinct from our cognition is that it is the concept of something in general. He goes on to say:

It is clear, however, that since we have to do only with the manifold of our representations, and that *X* which corresponds to them (the object), because it should be something distinct from all of our representations, is nothing for us, the unity that the object makes necessary can be nothing other than the formal unity of the consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of the representations. Hence we say that we cognize the object if we have effected synthetic unity in the manifold of intuition.¹⁶²

These A Deduction passages are controversial, because it is here that Kant could be taken as stating that the real object of knowledge is what is beyond any cognition we could have of it. But I do not read it this way, and I think we can see how this passage can help us to see what the object of judgment is. Kant says that we only have to do with representations (appearances, or objects that could be known), and that whatever thing = *X* that we may think *beyond* appearances is nothing but the concept of something that is only knowable in itself. As such, we cannot take ourselves to have a relation to such an object in our knowledge. The object that we relate to is

¹⁶¹ A104

¹⁶² A105

one with respect to which we take our judgments to be necessary and universally valid, and since the thing = *X* is nothing to us, the cognition of an object consists in nothing but the formal unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of appearances. Finally, he goes on to say:

The pure concept of this transcendental object (which in all of our cognitions is really always one and the same = *X*) is that which in all of our empirical concepts in general can provide relation to an object, i.e., objective reality. Now this concept cannot contain any determinate intuition at all, and therefore concerns nothing but that unity which must be encountered in a manifold of cognition insofar as it stands in relation to an object. *This relation, however, 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 it in one representation.¹⁶³

What comes to light in this passage is that the pure concept of the thing = *X* is that in which all empirical concepts provides a relation to objective reality. But, since this concept is *empty* (contains no determinate intuition at all), it concerns nothing but unity in the manifold of cognition. And it is this necessary unity of consciousness that is the relation of judgment to an object. This indicates that the object of judgment is, primarily, nothing but the informed matter of judgment.¹⁶⁴

Now, it is worth briefly noting that for Kant objectivity is always tied to judgment—objective validity is had by judgment.¹⁶⁵ But that does not mean that it doesn't reveal to us anything about objective awareness generally and outside individual acts of judging. This is because, as I hope it will become clear, objective awareness in sensibility has its objective character in relation to the form of the understanding, and so the form of judgment.

¹⁶³ A109, emphasis added

¹⁶⁴ See also B137, where Kant says that “the unity of consciousness is that which alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object, thus their objective validity, and consequently is that which makes them into cognitions and on which even the possibility of the understanding rests.”

¹⁶⁵ To be sure, Kant sometimes speaks as though an intuition can have objective validity, e.g. ##, but I think we have to understand this as an appeal to ...

All of this, it seems, is to be contrasted with what we have been calling the sensibility first picture of cognition, for it seems that for Kant the only way of securing a relation to the object is through necessity and universal validity in the unity of apperception—i.e., through the understanding. But we have not yet addressed the worry of Leibnizian solipsism, and we have not yet said why SF should be rejected as a proposed solution to it. Why, then, think that what Kant says in these passages is correct? Or, why not try to find an alternative account, as some Kantians do, according to which Kant’s considered view rejects the thought that objectivity has its home in the understanding? To see why, we will consider how *conceptuality* is different for Kant than it is portrayed by SF.

§3.1 The Conceptual Form of Sensible Awareness

A concept, as Kant explains, is a representation of universality.¹⁶⁶ A concept in general is “a universal representation, or a representation of what is common to several objects, hence a representation *insofar as it can be contained in various ones*.”¹⁶⁷ Hanna, in defense of SF, provides his own careful and thorough analysis of what it is to be a concept.¹⁶⁸ Unfortunately, I think his analysis falls short because it does not capture a crucial aspect of Kant’s theory of concepts—namely, just what it is for them to be universal representations.

First, Hanna stipulates that concepts are a kind of mental content. Mental content is:

The individuating, normatively guiding, cognitive or practical information about objects, locations, events, actions or performances, other minded animals, or oneself, that is contained in a mental representation—aka an intentional act, state, or process—insofar as that representation is an intersubjectively shareable type that is also tokened in and directly cognitively accessible to individual minded

¹⁶⁶ JL §1

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., n. 1

¹⁶⁸ Hanna (2015, pp. 60-69)

animals on particular occasions and in particular contexts.¹⁶⁹

Specifically, a concept is “an essentially descriptive, more or less general, categorizing mental content with inherent linguistic and logical form.” There is already much to debate here. For instance, does the idea of a concept as a “more or less general, categorizing mental content” cohere with Kant’s theory of concepts? The characterization of concepts as *categorizing* and as *mental content* are both potentially problematic ways of thinking, for reasons that I will unpack. To do this, though, we must first also understand what he means by the qualifier “more or less general.”

Hanna recognizes two basic classes of concepts: first-order *material* concepts and second-order *formal* concepts. A somewhat simplified accounting of this distinction is as follows:¹⁷⁰

First-order (material) concepts are those concepts like {horse}—universals under which we classify intuitions.

Second-order (formal) concepts are those concepts *about* our first-order material concepts. So, first-order material concepts are the matter of second-order concepts.

According to this taxonomy (which he calls “conceptual dualism”), types of concepts are differentiated not only by their level of generality, but also according to their order of being; the higher the level of generality, the more abstracted the concept is from our world-connectedness and world-situatedness. Concepts are always ways of categorizing what is given immediately and non-conceptually, but specifically *formal* concepts exist at an even higher level of abstraction, since the material concepts become the matter of formal ones. In this way, the application of logical concepts is, for Hanna, like being self-conscious in a meta-representational

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 60

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

way.¹⁷¹ That is, he holds that in thinking and judging, we are always (second-order) representing our (first-order) representations in accordance with normative logical principles. Because all concepts are inherently collectively governed by normative principles of inference, it follows that even concepts of the highest order are taken to exist together in an inferential network. For our purposes we can sum up this part of Hanna's view as follows:

- (1) There are two orders of concepts: material (first-order) and formal (second-order) = *conceptual dualism*
- (2) Formal (second-order) concepts, like logical concepts, exist together in an inferential network = *conceptual inferentialism*

I believe that this theory of concepts misconstrues the conceptual landscape all together. For, according to Kant's theory of concepts, we cannot divide them into two basic kinds, and there is a kind of conceptual representation which is not properly thought of as a *member* of an inferential network of concepts. To tackle both conceptual dualism and conceptual inferentialism, consider the following passages from the *Jäsche Logic*:

Concepts are called *higher* (*conceptus superiores*) insofar as they have other concepts under themselves, which, in relation to them, are called *lower* concepts. A mark of a mark – a *remote* mark – is a higher concept, the concept in relation to a remote mark is a lower one. (§9)

The higher concept, in respect to its lower one, is called genus, the lower concept in regard to its higher one *species*. (§10)

The *highest* genus is that which is not a species (*genus summum non est species*), just as the *lowest* species is that which is not a genus (*species, quae non est genus, est infima*). (§11)

To distinguish higher concepts from lower concepts is to distinguish genus from species. So, for instance, *man* is a lower concept than *animal*, but a higher concept than *Socrates*. And while there is no *lowest* species concept, since further determinations can always be added, there is a

¹⁷¹ Hanna notes that the capacity for self-consciousness is a capacity to have conscious meta-representational states (ibid., 98-99).

highest genus. In the note to §11, it is stated that “In respect to the determination of species and genus concepts, then, the following universal law holds: *There is a genus that cannot in turn be a species, but there is no species that should not be able in turn to be a genus.*” It sounds, then, like there should be a highest concept—one under which all other concepts fall. And indeed, Kant says in the Amphiboly that the highest concept for us is “the concept of an object in general” (A290/B346), or the category. But the line of reasoning that leads Kant to this highest concept can also tell us something about that which is higher than the category. If we think through the idea of the highest genus, we have to think of what the genus of the category could be. Kant says there is no genus of the category, because it is the concept of an object in general. But if we ask ourselves whether there is yet something higher than the concept of an object in general, it seems that we can think *conceptuality* or *universality* itself. Thus, there is no higher genus than the category because the only thought that is higher than the category is the thought of universality as such, and this is not *a concept*, but rather that which is presupposed by any concept. So, there is a sense in which, if we try to think the genus of the category, we think universality as such, but it turns out to be no *genus* at all. For, to be a genus, something would have to count as a species of it. But universality as such is empty; there is nothing in particular that falls under it.

What we can see from this is that a proper understanding of the notion of a concept leads to the thought of universality as such. Call this *conceptuality*. We can say that one thing Hanna’s picture does not take into account is the thought of conceptuality as such, which of course is not *a concept* and as such belongs to no inferential network.¹⁷² But what is the significance of conceptuality?

¹⁷² Indeed, since this thought applies to no finite set of objects, there is no sense in talking about its scope of application. In this sense, the I—universality—is empty. For it is a concept of absolute universality, and as such it has no (finite) satisfaction conditions. But it is also *in potentia* entirely filled (*unconditioned*), for the same reason.

In the Paralogisms, Kant notes that ‘I’ is not *a concept*: “At the ground of this doctrine we can place nothing but the simple and in content for itself wholly empty representation **I**, of which one cannot even say that it is a concept, but a mere consciousness that accompanies every concept” (A345-6/B404). I think what he says here is instructive. Kant’s claim is not that ‘I’ is a non-conceptual representation, but that it is not a concept in the sense that it cannot be placed alongside other concepts. This goes hand-in-hand with his claim that the ‘I’ cannot be grasped through the categories, because it is presupposed by the categories: the ‘I’ is not *a concept* because it is not categorial, but higher than any category (B422).¹⁷³ It seems, then, that Kant is here identifying ‘I’ with what we are calling conceptuality/universality as such. So, insofar as the ‘I’ is the expression of the original unity of apperception, we must hold that the original unity of apperception is conceptuality.

Now, to harken back to an earlier theme, no representation would belong to me if it weren’t capable of being accompanied by the ‘I think.’ In order to be capable of being accompanied by the ‘I think,’ all of my possible representations must in some sense already belong to the unity of apperception. For if they did not, then it is unclear how they could ever be brought to it. That is, all possible representations already have a place in the totality of knowledge, and their having such a place could only be determined through their relation to the I that thinks. And, as we have already established, such a unity is not cobbled together out of an aggregate of representations; it is already presupposed by any individual representation. So, the original unity of apperception is not just a general representation, but *the* general representation to which all my representations are necessarily related.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ We may, with Kimhi (2018), call the ‘I’ *syncategorematic* as opposed to *categorematic*.

To see more clearly how we should think through this, let us return to the syntheses of imagination. The synthesis of reproduction is “a merely empirical law in accordance with which representations that have often followed or accompanied one another are finally associated with each other and thereby placed in a connection [...] in accordance with a constant rule.”¹⁷⁵ As a law of association, it is absolutely central to cognition, but also “inseparably combined with” the synthesis of apprehension. We can see why this is so through Kant’s own example:s

Now it is obvious that if I draw a line in thought, or think of the time from one noon to the next, or even want to represent a certain number to myself, I must necessarily first grasp one of these manifold representations after another in my thoughts. But if I were always to lose the preceding representations (the first parts of the line, the preceding parts of time, or the successively represented units) from my thoughts and not reproduce them when I proceed to the following ones, then no whole representation and none of the previously mentioned thoughts, not even the purest and most fundamental representations of space and time, could ever arise.¹⁷⁶

The thought is that acts of cognition, as spatial and temporal, require both holding together a manifold as one in an intuition *and* as situated in a temporal relation to other of my representations such that I do not lose track of the progression of my sensible act. But even more importantly, what Kant wants us to see is that anything we could count as an act of *cognition* must be, as a matter of course, *systematic*. Cognition (*Erkenntnis*), Kant says, is “a whole of compared and connected representations.”¹⁷⁷ This applies not just to objectively valid judgments themselves; it must apply to anything that could recognizably count as belonging to our cognitive lives in a meaningful way. The recognition of numerical difference in space, for example when we become aware of our hands as enantiomorphically-related, is correctly recognized by SF as a significant element of our cognitive lives. As such, it must be systematically relatable to the rest

¹⁷⁵ A100

¹⁷⁶ A102

¹⁷⁷ A97

of our rational cognition. Kant's way of explaining how this systematicity is possible is through the transcendental I.

Objective knowledge through the understanding's determination of imagination is possible. Granting this, how do we account for this possibility? Kant's answer, to again return to an earlier theme, is that the necessary and universal validity of judgment (which constitutes knowledge) requires the original synthetic unity of apperception: the representation of the total unity of our possible knowledge, and the thought of universality as such. This unity of apperception—pure self-consciousness—is the awareness of our grounds in judging. The synthesis of imagination—holding together the manifold of space and time in our sensible acts of intuition—is not, on its own, a consciousness of its own grounds. If it were, it would already be knowledge, as it would comprehend itself through a conception of what it does. Since it requires this higher self-consciousness in its coming to be knowledge, the form of imagination must be thought by us as already belonging to self-consciousness. If it did not already belong to pure self-consciousness, it is unclear how it could ever come to belong.

Recently, Williams (2017) has convincingly argued along similar lines. Her claim is that there is an 'original' synthesis of the faculties of understanding and sensibility which accounts for how the sensibility can be understood to belong already to the unity of apperception. She agrees with critics of what she calls the Standard Conceptualist view, according to which the unities of space and time as formal intuitions is the result of acts of categorial synthesis. The critics argue: (1) that the unity of space is not given through figurative synthesis via the categories, because space as formal intuition (as the all-encompassing space) is a whole preceding its parts; and (2) that figurative synthesis as a successive act could not yield the unity of space as an infinite given magnitude. But she disagrees with these critics that the solution to

Standard Conceptualism is to argue that space and time must have their unities and objective purport independently of the understanding. Williams argues, by contrast, that according to Kant “there is a holistic dimension to all acts of synthesis that stems directly from the OSUA”, and therefore that there is a more basic unifying act, through apperception, of the understanding and sensibility. Consider an important and difficult footnote in the B Deduction, where Kant claims that the unity of apperception is to be found *in intuition*:

Space and time and all their parts are **intuitions**, thus individual representations along with the manifold that they contain in themselves (see the Transcendental Aesthetic), thus they are not mere concepts by means of which the same consciousness is contained in many representations, but rather are many representations that are contained in one and in the consciousness of it; they are thus found to be composite, and consequently the unity of consciousness, as **synthetic** and yet as original, is to be found in them. This **singularity** of theirs is important in its application (see §25).¹⁷⁸

Intuitions contain in themselves a manifold. That is, any singular representation is itself divisible into a manifold. As such, intuitions are distinct from concepts, which are contained *in a* manifold. That is, a general representation is general in its being contained in many different things. From this observation, Kant thinks, we can see that the OSUA is to be found *in* intuitions. This is supposed to follow, I believe, because the only way in which a manifold could be *contained in* an intuition is for the manifold to be united *in a consciousness of its unity*. The *containment* of a manifold is the manifold’s being united in the intuition. As Williams says: “space and time are not composites in the sense of being put together out of parts,” but they *are* composite “in the sense that ‘they are many representations that are contained in one’, where being ‘contained in one’, for Kant, is a function of apperception. Thus, space and time are not concepts, but their unity, like that of concepts, depends on the unity of consciousness.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ B136n

¹⁷⁹ Williams (2017, 13)

This idea will, I hope, become clearer in the next chapter when we discuss more specifically the distinction between conceptual and intuitional unity. But, for now, consider what such a consciousness of the unity of the manifold within intuition must look like. Revisiting the synthesis of apprehension, Kant says:

Every intuition contains a manifold in itself, which however would not be represented as such if the mind did not distinguish the time in the succession of impressions on one another; for **as contained in one moment** no representation can ever be anything other than absolute unity. Now in order for **unity** of intuition to come from this manifold (as, say, in the representation of space), it is necessary first to run through and then to take together this manifoldness, which action I call the **synthesis of apprehension**, since it is aimed directly at the intuition, which to be sure provides a manifold but can never effect this as such, and indeed as contained **in one representation**, without the occurrence of such a synthesis.¹⁸⁰

As contained in one moment no representation would be anything but absolute unity. But insofar as we distinguish the time in the succession of impressions in sensible acts of cognition, we must account for how the manifold is “taken together” as a unity, and not simply dispersed and fleeting. The synthesis of apprehension is aimed at this task, together with the synthesis of reproduction (in both their empirical and pure forms). And, in connection with the B136 footnote, it is no accident that these syntheses are taken by Kant to, in turn, presuppose the synthetic unity of apperception. For none of that lower cognitive activity could yet account for the objectivity of judgment, which, as we have seen, requires a consciousness of its own grounds through the OSUA.

Now, if the OSUA is the necessary condition for the possibility of the systematicity of sensible cognition insofar as it can become knowledge, then we must ask ourselves whether the form of that systematic cognition is different for knowledge than it is for non-judgmental acts of sensible cognition. Do we want to say, that is, that these considerations apply only as we are

¹⁸⁰ A99

concerned with knowledge, but not when we are concerned with what sensible cognition is like when we aren't judging? I think this would be a problematic route to take. To this we now turn.

I hope it is uncontroversial now to point out that SF must hold one of the following accounts of the unity of non-conceptual cognition:

(a) the unity of non-conceptual cognition—the pure synthesis of imagination—is only one principle of objectivity in addition to the principle of the synthetic unity of apperception in the understanding.

(b) the unity of non-conceptual cognition—the pure synthesis of imagination—is the sole principle of objectivity.

Option (a) is similar to what Conant and Boyle have recently called “layer-cake” or “additive” theories of rationality, according to which the unity of apperception is simply tacked onto the imagination to account for the difference between rational beings like us and those beings that are merely equipped with sensibility.¹⁸¹ The problem with this option is that the unity of apperception would have to be considered either as a kind of imposition on sensibility (since it would have to be added to the sensibility in rational beings), or it would be a mystery how to account for any cooperation between the two capacities. And regarding option (b), if the imagination accounted for objectivity on its own, then it would already be conscious of its own grounds, in which case it would already have conceptual form.

All of this is to point out that SF has missed Kant's crucial point that all my cognition, insofar as it can be said to be mine, is already informed by my conceptual capacity in virtue of belonging to the original synthetic unity of apperception. This is missed by SF because it does not take the OSUA to be conceptual *in our sense*, but only in the sense that it involves the application of the categories to intuition. But belonging to the OSUA does not require actively bringing intuitions under any particular concepts *or* under any particular moments of the unity of

¹⁸¹ Conant (2017), Boyle (2016)

apperception (the pure categories). So, two mistakes are being made: (1) to assume the thesis of conceptual dualism, and (2) to assume that to be informed by the conceptual capacity is to belong in some way to a particular concept or conceptual order.

If what I have said so far is correct, then the sensibility-first picture is false. In fact, we must conclude that all our cognition, in virtue of its belongingness to us, is rooted in our conceptual capacity—the understanding. Thus, we might say, SF is false and the *understanding-first* picture is true.

To see this from a somewhat different perspective, consider that the very idea of knowledge rests on the idea of self-conscious spontaneity, but *not necessarily* on the idea of receptivity. Engstrom nicely makes this point in the following way:

Just as our conception of mere animal consciousness, where there is sensory awareness but no cognition, reflects our understanding that the bare capacity to acquire representations through being affected by things (even if it includes a capacity to acquire habits of associating such representations) is not *sufficient* for cognition, so the idea of infinite cognition shows that, so far as we can tell from the notion of cognition in general, such affection is also not *necessary*.¹⁸²

Kant's (and our) project is to understand *human knowledge*, which is discursive and finite. As such, human knowledge requires both spontaneity and receptivity. But, knowledge per se does not require the notion of receptivity. A being with the capacity for intellectual intuition is a knower, but also very clearly not receptive in any way. Knowing is therefore *fundamentally* an act of self-conscious spontaneity. It is only by descent into finite forms of knowledge—say, human knowledge—that sensibility enters the picture. And even then, to say that human knowledge rests on sensible conditions is not to say that human knowledge is fundamentally an act of sensibility. Rather, it is to say that the successful act of self-conscious spontaneity—knowing—is incomplete except under sensible conditions.

¹⁸² Engstrom (2006, 9)

So, SF relies on a mischaracterization of conceptualism (or, at least, the possibility of a conceptualism, even if it isn't one actively endorsed in the literature now). Because SF misconstrues conceptualism, it misses the fact that its own conception of spontaneity is too weak to do what Kant requires of it. Moreover, it does not see how it might be possible, from within AS, to satisfy its skeptical concerns. To this I will now turn.

If SF is false in the way that I am suggesting, then we must think that sensibility belongs to thought, not thought to sensibility. If this is right, then SF provides no solution to the worry about solipsism. That is to say, it provides no windows from which one could escape the I. And what we have now seen is that such an escape is impossible. Moreover, to escape the I is not even to be wished for, since we must accept that the objectivity of spatial awareness is only intelligible as it belongs to the original unity of apperception. In this sense, we can also see now that the worry about a Leibnizian solipsism is misguided. The internality of objectivity to the transcendental I does not require us to think that objective spatial awareness is unintelligible.

What, then, to make of the claim of Kant's with which we began this chapter—namely that “through the I, as a simple representation, nothing manifold is given; it can only be given in the intuition, which is distinct from it”? I propose that the issue here is more difficult than simply whether to externalize sensibility to the I or internalize it to the I in such a way that the two become indistinguishable. We must try to see how it is possible for there to be difference within unity. We are, that is, *given* a manifold. But we must try to see this givenness as itself inseparable from the informing activity of the I. To introduce this way of thinking, we can turn to McDowell, who will so far be sympathetic to what we have said: that sensibility is in thought, not thought in sensibility. Or, that epistemic objectivity is compatible with the thought that nothing escapes the I. Once we have briefly sketched the McDowellian picture, we can see both

how it helps us to locate space within thought and how it still seems to fall short of what the spontaneity of the understanding requires of an account of judgment.

§4 Sensibility's Internality to Thought and the McDowellian View

Despite the above discussion, it may sound strange to attribute to Kant the idea that space is in thought, not thought in space. The strangeness is due to the claim, which even Kant has seemed to endorse, that the only way in which we could encounter a manifold in experience is by having forms of intuition external to the I. McDowell has famously argued for a Kantian picture according to which the conceptual realm is “unbounded” on the outside.¹⁸³ Clearly, this would imply that even the forms of sensibility are internal to our conceptual capacity—the understanding. For McDowell, this is intelligible by accounting for the compatibility between the ideas of external constraint on judging and that constraint being itself an exercise of the understanding. Thus, for McDowell, insofar as the deliverances of sensibility act as constraints on judgment, they can also at the same time be understood as acts of spontaneity. How does this work?

Since we cannot risk becoming fully immersed in McDowell's rich and complex account, we will have to sketch his view in a way that can at best be characterized as *McDowellian*. In doing this, I do not mean to pin McDowell down on every point, but merely to take various of his claims as points of departure for understanding how to construct a picture that could do what we require of it. What I will sketch is a picture according to which what McDowell calls our “conceptual capacities” (the understanding) is identical to what he calls the “logical space of reasons” (after Sellars¹⁸⁴). According to the McDowellian view, then, the transcendental I *is* just

¹⁸³ McDowell (1994, 24)

¹⁸⁴ Sellars (1956)

the space of reasons in which individuals judge. And, moreover, this space of reasons is rational human activity as a form of life.

CHAPTER 4: THINKING BEYOND THE SPACE OF REASONS

If we understood Kant's theoretical philosophy, we would understand how to think about the limits of intelligibility—the bounds of sense, in one interpretation of P.F. Strawson's intentionally ambiguous title. That would put us within reach of an insight only glimpsed, I think, by Kant himself: that those limits are not well conceived as a boundary, enclosing a territory by leaving other territory outside it.

— McDowell, *Having the World in View*, p. 108

Our reason is not like an indeterminably extended plane, the limits of which one can cognize only in general, but must rather be compared with a sphere, the radius of which can be found out from the curvature of an arc on its surface (from the nature of synthetic *a priori* propositions), from which its content and its boundary can also be ascertained with certainty. Outside this sphere (field of experience) nothing is an object for it; indeed even questions about such supposed objects concern only subjective principles of a thoroughgoing determination of the relations that can obtain among the concepts of understanding inside of this sphere.

— Kant, A762/B790

§1 Spontaneous Receptivity and the Self-Limitation of the Understanding

We left off in Chapter Three with the following two ideas: first, that while we do require something in addition to the understanding for comprehending numerical difference—namely, a faculty of sensibility—that is not to say that we require reference to something external to the transcendental I, or pure self-consciousness. For, as we have seen, the sensibility is to be comprehended as internal to the I. Second, more briefly, we considered how this view might have something in common with what we will here call the *spontaneous receptivity* view (SR), according to which one and the same act of judgment is both an act of spontaneity as well as an openness to external constraint. According to SR, the receptivity of sensibility always already belongs to the act of spontaneity, which in turn is the actualization of conceptual capacities in the human form of life. What we will do now is look more closely at this proposal. Doing so will enable us to see the shortcomings of SR's conception of the self-limitation of spontaneity, and

then to distinguish it from the superior conception of AS.

Specifically, I will propose that SR is still insufficient for Kant's account of spontaneity, as it does not accurately place the understanding's self-limiting activity in the realm of conceptuality. That is, SR does not fully respect Kant's critical formal distinction between concept and intuition. SR makes the mistake of identifying the unity of self-consciousness (the I) with the "logical space of reasons." However, as Kant argues, we must come to see that a *critique* of pure reason, which will fully determine the boundaries of the understanding, requires thinking *beyond* any such "space" of relations. As such, it requires a rejection of the thought that the unity of self-consciousness has a spatial form. To reject this thought is, in essence, to reject a thought that some Kantians have inherited from a tradition of Kant interpretation from Evans and Sellars through today: that thought is situated in space and/or time. In fact, we will see that our reflections on spontaneity require that the I be beyond any of the limits it sets for its own activity. We shall then see that this presents us with an apparent dilemma: (1) on the one hand, we do not want to find the I stuck *inside* its own limits (as it is in SR); but (2), on the other hand, we do not want to go so far as to say that by always being beyond its limits the I recognizes no limitation, and thus no finitude, at all. The reason for (1) to be avoided is, as we have seen, not just that it does not respect Kant's own distinction between concept and intuition, but specifically that *for this reason* it fails to overcome RS and the relativity of knowledge, as (1) conceives of the limits of the understanding as in some sense given (or, we're in some sense passive to them). (2) is equally bad insofar as we wish to maintain the thought that our understanding is discursive and thus finite. We will discuss how Kant is able to argue against the two specific forms of relativity that accompany (1), and then we will gesture at a future project elaborating on a solution to (2).

§1.1 The Limits of Spontaneous Receptivity

In line with our suggestion in chapter three, SR holds that the forms of sensibility are internal to the I. The activity of the I, McDowell says, is the activity of a form of life:

Exercises of spontaneity belong to our mode of living. And our mode of living is our way of actualizing ourselves as animals. So we can rephrase the thought by saying: exercises of spontaneity belong to our way of actualizing ourselves as animals. This removes any need to try to see ourselves as peculiarly bifurcated, with a foothold in the animal kingdom and a mysterious separate involvement in an extra-natural world of rational connections.¹⁸⁵

The project of *Mind and World* is to show that it is possible to reconcile a Kantian notion of spontaneity with the (for McDowell, highly desirable) idea of an external constraint on judgment. To do this, McDowell thinks, we must find room for nature within the scope of our conceptual capacities, rather than our conceptual capacities within the scope of nature. So, as he says here, the exercise of spontaneity—judgment—belongs to our way of actualizing ourselves *as animals*.¹⁸⁶ We are of course not mere animals, but rational animals. As such, we are the sort of animal that comes to be inducted into a form of rational life. This form of rational life is our second nature—that activity we actualize through a process of *Bildung*, a kind of enculturation. On this picture, judgment is the exercise of a spontaneous capacity which is *sui generis*, not part of what is given in mere first nature. Nature, then, is expansive on this view (liberated, we might say, from mere mechanical law). As McDowell puts it, we are to avoid a *bald naturalism* according to which the activity of judgment belongs merely to the “realm of law,” but retain the notion of a second-nature naturalism to avoid a radical “coherentism” that leaves our spontaneity

¹⁸⁵ McDowell (1994, 78)

¹⁸⁶ And this spontaneity is, like we have been understanding it, essentially a kind of self-consciousness: “The objective world is present only to a self-conscious subject, a subject who can ascribe experiences to herself; it is only in the context of a subject’s ability to ascribe experiences to herself that experiences can constitute awareness of the world [...] It is the spontaneity of the understanding, the power of conceptual thinking, that brings both the world and the self into view” (1994, 115).

ungrounded in the worldly facts.¹⁸⁷ To choose the path of ungrounded conceptual activity would leave the mind's activity a "frictionless spinning in a void."¹⁸⁸

But, friction for SR and friction for SF are not of the same kind. For McDowell, friction in the form of an external constraint on judgment is not outside the I of judgment—that is, not outside our conceptual capacities. Friction itself is an actualization of our spontaneity in the form of a kind of *self*-limitation. In this way, McDowell's version of SR rejects SF's attempt to place external constraint outside the I of judgment, but finds a place for external constraint *within* the I. He puts it in the following way:

We seem to need rational constraints on thinking and judging, from a reality external to them, if we are to make sense of them as bearing on a reality outside thought at all [...] In the conception I am recommending, the need for external constraint is met by the fact that experiences are receptivity in operation. But that does not disqualify experiences from playing a role in justification, as the counterpart thought in the Myth of the Given does, because the claim is that experiences themselves are already equipped with conceptual content.¹⁸⁹

Experience, then, is spontaneity in being an actualization of the understanding (i.e., experiences are already conceptual) but receptivity *in operation* (i.e., not itself necessarily an act of judging¹⁹⁰):

In the picture I recommend, although the world is not external to the space of concepts, it is external to exercises of spontaneity. Although we are to erase the boundary that symbolized a gulf between thought and the world, the picture still has an in-out dimension.¹⁹¹

There is no boundary between thought and the world, because the world is always already conceptually-shaped, but there is a boundary between the *exercise* of judgment and the world.

¹⁸⁷ McDowell cites Donald Davidson's coherence theory of knowledge as a prime example of the troubling view he has in mind.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 11

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 25

¹⁹⁰ McDowell (2009, 71) criticizes the way that Kant speaks of all experience as "action" precisely because he thinks this implies that even operational receptivity in experience would lack true receptivity.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 146

This enables us to place the world that is judged inside the ‘space’ of concepts, but outside acts of judgment. We will call this, independent of McDowell’s particular set of views, the *spontaneous receptivity* view of judgment (SR), to be elaborated below.

Now, one way to characterize SR is to say that while exercises of judgment are performed within the logical space of reasons, the logical space itself is the mere capacity for such exercises. As we have seen, when I judge I do so from a conception of the validity of that judgment, and thus from a conception of it as being justified through a reason. The very possibility of such exercises lies in there being a place for those judgments to stand together in a unity, and similarly a place for those judgments to come into conflict with each other when reason so dictates. To put it simply, the exercise of empirical judgment requires the idea that what I judge stands in some relation to other judgments, excluding conflicting judgments. So, according to this view, the capacity for exercises of judgment is that which constitutes the space of reasons as such. The I is identical with the space of reasons. Or, as we might also say, the unity of self-consciousness is the unity of the space of intelligibility, within which judgments are taken up and given justifications. As judgment plays out *in* this space, it plays out in second nature as our form of life. In a way, SR takes the I to be *a form of life writ large*: the space within which reasons move, so to speak. And, as such, we not only retain the ideas of spontaneity and external constraint, but we gain the idea that external constraint is a form of *self*-constraint. Our passivity in experience is not a passivity to a foreign authority, but to our own capacity of judgment.

To rehearse, SR holds that thought is constrained from outside particular acts of thinking, but not from outside our conceptual capacity itself. So, McDowell holds that the self-

determination of spontaneity is not primarily in the *act* of thinking,¹⁹² but in the capacity of thought as distinguished from its exercises. And, therefore, acts of thinking can be constrained from outside, by objects that already have conceptual form in virtue of their conforming to our shared capacity to know. The virtue of SR, it may be thought, is that it preserves both the self-determination of spontaneity as well as spontaneity's inextricability from external constraint.

Now, to spell out why we call this view *spontaneous receptivity*, we might also express McDowell's point by saying that all constraint is at once passive and spontaneous. That is, even constraint *on* what is thought always already has conceptual form—i.e., is already within the 'I' of pure apperception. Though different in important respects, the essential unity of spontaneity and receptivity is reminiscent of what Heidegger calls “the primordial, non-composite unity of receptivity and spontaneity”¹⁹³:

If a rule exercises its function only in the receptive act which lets it rule, then the “idea” as the representation of rules can itself represent only in the mode of receptivity. In this sense, pure thought is in itself—not merely accessorially—pure intuition. Consequently, *this spontaneity, which in the very unity of its structure is receptive*, must have its origin in the transcendental imagination in order that it can be what it is.¹⁹⁴

According to Heidegger, spontaneity is already involved in receptivity and vice versa. To be receptive is to comport oneself in such a way that one can be appropriately passive. This also nicely accords with McDowell's own understanding of the role of spontaneity in Kant.

McDowell holds that the importance of spontaneity is that it allows us to step back from what is given to us in sensibility. So, for McDowell, spontaneity is about having the rational *space* that allows one to freely acknowledge rational norms—the rational space of deliberation, of making

¹⁹² Though, the recognition (in judgment) of the authority of the norms independent of judgment is, McDowell says, a recognition of our spontaneity (2009, 105).

¹⁹³ Heidegger (1962, 160)

¹⁹⁴ Heidegger (1962, 160-61), emphasis added

up one's mind.¹⁹⁵ According to this view, the unity of spontaneity and receptivity lies in the particular constitution of our mode of receptivity as rational human animals. Our receptivity is such that it inherently draws upon our conceptual capacities. Of course, this by itself does not sufficiently distinguish SR from what we have been calling AS. On both accounts it may be said that the act of thought in general requires the givenness of a sensible manifold, and so spontaneity and receptivity never *in actuality* come apart. However, on this account there is, as Heidegger seems to put it, a certain pride of place that receptivity has over spontaneity. While spontaneity and receptivity are essentially unified in our cognition, it is receptivity that dominates the pair. Here he says that pure thought is in itself "not merely accessorially" pure intuition. This suggests quite strongly that judgment is not merely in need of the enabling conditions of sensibility, but *is* at least in part a kind of receptivity. And, as Heidegger puts it in the *Kantbuch*, all thought is in the service of intuition.¹⁹⁶

The spatial metaphor used to describe SR is, it seems, appropriate.¹⁹⁷ McDowell says that our conceptual capacity is our *mode of living*, and our mode of living our *way of actualizing ourselves as animals*. And this mode of living is not some "extra-natural" realm of rationality, leaving us "bifurcated" between the natural animal world and some noumenal realm. So, our shared rational capacity (the I) is not to be thought of as anything over and above the unity of the acts which give shape to our lives. As McDowell puts it: "To see exercises of spontaneity as natural, we do not need to integrate spontaneity-related concepts into the structure of the realm of law; we need to stress their role in capturing patterns in a way of living."¹⁹⁸ Of course, our

¹⁹⁵ McDowell 2009

¹⁹⁶ Heidegger (1962, 28)

¹⁹⁷ It should be emphasized that it is a metaphor insofar as we are taking logical space to be something like real space, and thus structurally similar. But in another sense it may not be metaphorical at all to speak of logical space *as a space* of some kind.

¹⁹⁸ McDowell (1994, 78)

patterns of living are patterns of rational behavior, such as taking a position on something in a social setting. The pattern of rational behavior thus constitutes a realm of forces (acts of thought) and contraries (positions that are held and excluded). And the notion of external constraint makes good sense on this conception of spontaneity:

If self-legislation of rational norms is not to be a random leap in the dark, it must be seen as an acknowledgement of an authority that the norms have anyway. Submitting to that authority is not handing over control of the relevant areas of one's life to a foreign power. What controls one's life is still oneself, in whatever it is about one that enables one to recognize that the norms are authoritative. But their authority is not a creature of one's recognition [...] The norms that constitute the content of empirical concepts are determinations, responsive to the specifics of the world as it presents itself to us, of norms that are internal to thinking as such. So the external constraint I have been talking about, constraint by objects, is authorized from within the practice of thinking, by norms that are constitutive of the practice.¹⁹⁹

Here we can see the idea of external constraint and, with it, the relevance of the spatial metaphor of spontaneity. Our spontaneity—the self-legislation of rational norms—is understood to be a “submitting to authority” and an “authorization.” McDowell’s suggestion, as I understand it, is that our power of spontaneity lies in our ability to make the right “calls” in judging, so to speak. It is our ability to have a kind of *distance* from what is given in experience, a distance which enables us to do the important deliberation involved in judging. According to this passage, we have control over ourselves insofar as we have the ability to *recognize* the authority in norms—an authority those norms possess anyway, independently of our recognition of it. Our self-control, according to this way of thinking, lies in our ability to affirm what is the case anyway. This might in turn be understood as the ability to be properly poised, ready to affirm what is given to us in experience (to be spontaneously receptive).

¹⁹⁹ McDowell (2009, 105)

The spatial metaphor should be somewhat clearer now. McDowell's understanding of spontaneity involves his taking over Sellars's idea of a "space of reasons." What the idea of spontaneity-as-rational-space implies is that different perspectives may be taken up from within this space—namely, the perspective of *the one who judges* and the perspective of *the correctness of what is so judged*. It is, moreover, a view according to which judgment is the act of an individual *within* this rational space.

The concern, then, is about preserving a notion of spontaneity in judging that allows for a responsible intellectual life, and so of one's unity as an embodied subject in the world.²⁰⁰ So, for McDowell, the thought that our spontaneity consists in our ability to recognize or endorse an authority that norms have independent of any judgment of it is the thought of a thinker simultaneously finding herself bound by and also affirming the bindingness of rational norms on her thought.²⁰¹

The very idea that spontaneity allows one to step back and evaluate what is given in experience implies a difference between the act of judging that something is the case and the reality of its being the case or not. And, we might well run up against the reality of things not being the way we judged them to be. But the reality we run up against, for SR, is not a *bare given* reality; it is one that already has conceptual form. As it already bears conceptual form, the constraint on judgment is a constraint from our own capacity to judge. In this sense, SR is structurally akin to (although also importantly different from) what Kant describes in §24 of the *Deduction as self-affection*:

²⁰⁰ Cf. Gareth Evans's notion of self-consciousness as grounded in spatial embodiment (1982)

²⁰¹ This picture would already be distinct, in one way, from the picture of AS we have sketched, according to which judgment is first and foremost an act of the transcendental (universal) I. In our picture of AS, to judge is not (at least not primarily) to exercise control over one's life, but to determine what is true. This reflects a difference between two kinds of spontaneity: a kind of "freedom in thought" which is concerned with our ability to step back and deliberate, and the spontaneity of judgment as we have been describing it, which cannot be located *in* a world at all.

We cannot think of a line without **drawing** it in thought, we cannot think of a circle without **describing** it, we cannot represent the three dimensions of space at all without **placing** three lines perpendicular to each other at the same point, and we cannot even represent time without, in **drawing** a straight line (which is to be the external figurative representation of time), attending merely to the action of the synthesis of the manifold through which we successively determine the inner sense, and thereby attending to the succession of this determination in inner sense [...] The understanding therefore does not **find** some sort of combination of the manifold already in inner sense, but **produces** it, by **affecting** inner sense.²⁰²

Kant argues that the determination of inner sense by the understanding always involves an act of self-affection. The understanding, that is, affects inner sense to produce a combination of the manifold already lying within it. If so, then all objectively valid judgment involves, in addition to the act of judgment itself (which is no act of inner sense, and no experience at all²⁰³), the experience of being affected in inner sense. And this experience of affection is an experience of self-affection. The I of transcendental apperception affects the I of empirical apperception.

Now, this understanding of self-affection may help us to see what it is, on SR, for judgment to be constrained by its objects. As we have seen, SR holds that the constraint is not one from a bare reality independent of the actualization of our conceptual capacities. So, it is in a sense *self*-constraint. But it must be a self-constraint from within the space of reasons. What does the constraining is always outside of any particular act of judging, but also always already has its form as it relates to our conceptual capacities. And the object's constraint on us is a kind of affection to the extent that it is passive. Again, SR wants to retain the *passivity* of experience without falling into the Myth of the Given. But the thought that what limits judgment is passive constraint is the thought that what limits judgment is not already known in the judgment itself, but outside of it. We then must conceive of the act of judging as one determinate act (an act of assertion) to be kept apart from another determinate state—namely, the conceptually-informed

²⁰² B154-55

²⁰³ See, for instance, *R* 5661

think-able content. When there is agreement or friction between these two elements, a constraint is recognized, and then presumably “authorized” by us.

The inclination to read spontaneous receptivity as a kind of self-affection makes sense, moreover, because judgment *does involve* self-affection at the level of the empirical I. As we have seen, one and the same judgment is, from the perspective of the transcendental I, absolutely spontaneous, and from the perspective of the empirical I, self-affection. The self-affection Kant is speaking of is that which occurs in inner sense. As such, the kind of self-affection Kant has in mind seems to be a relatively private affair—I, qua empirical self, affect myself in time. Of course, this is not what SR envisions as external constraint. That is, SR does not have in mind a mere subjective self-affection. Nevertheless, the self-activity it does have in mind has an analogue in empirical self-affection. And it is this analogy that spells trouble, I want to argue.

Having spelled out SR, I want to argue that according to SR the realm of spontaneity is, qua space of reasons, self-limiting in a way that mirrors Kant’s explanation of spatial limitation. Thus, we now need to return to the idea of spontaneity as self-limitation. The separation of the act of judgment from the truth of that judgment suggests that within the realm of spontaneity, we are in some sense passive to our limits. But this mischaracterizes the formal differences between understanding (conceptuality) and sensibility (intuition); it *sensibilizes* the understanding. To see this, we will examine the nature of spatial unity, which in turn will shed light on the distinction between the understanding’s form of limitation and spatial limitation.

§2 Concept and Intuition: Passive and Active Forms of Limitation

We have characterized SR as holding that the world is internal to the I (it is always given to us as bearing conceptual form). We have also said that SR holds the I to be the logical space of

reasons within which exercises of judgment occur. We will agree with SR that the objectivity of spatial awareness is internal to thought; but we will disagree with SR's claim that the I to which space belongs is itself a *logical space* within which acts of spontaneity occur.²⁰⁴ What should emerge is an account of the difference between SR's conception of the self-limitation of spontaneity and AS's conception of the same.

In the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, Kant argues that space is a form of intuition because it is an immediate singular a priori representation. One upshot of this is that the pure intuition of space is a representation the whole of which precedes its parts:

[...] first, one can only represent a single space, and if one speaks of many spaces, one understands by that only parts of one and the same unique space. And these parts cannot as it were precede the single all-encompassing space as its components (from which its composition would be possible), but rather are only thought in it. It is essentially single; the manifold in it, thus also the general concept of spaces in general, rests merely on limitations. From this it follows that in respect to it an *a priori* intuition (which is not empirical) grounds all concepts of it.²⁰⁵

Particular spaces are *parts of* one representation of (infinite) space. But those parts couldn't be merely cobbled together into the representation of this singular whole. The mere aggregate of a number of particular spaces would be, Kant says, a *creature of our imagination* (A40/B57). The existence of particular parts of space—the spatial manifold—is the result of limitations on the whole of space. The unity of the pure intuition of space, then, is a unity preceding its parts. As Kant says, the unity of pure intuition is one that contains its manifold.

The unity of space as a whole is what Kant refers to as the *formal intuition* of space.²⁰⁶

Kant says of the formal intuition:

²⁰⁴ An analogous case must be made for time. This is an even more formidable task, and one I cannot properly take up here. For more on the internality of time to the I, see Rödl's *Categories of the Temporal: An Inquiry into the Forms of the Finite Intellect* (2012).

²⁰⁵ A25/B39

²⁰⁶ As opposed to the *form of* intuition, which is the manner in which I am given a manifold (B160-61n)

In the Aesthetic I ascribed this unity merely to sensibility, only in order to note that it precedes all concepts, though to be sure it presupposes a synthesis, which does not belong to the senses but through which all concepts of space and time first become possible. For since through it (as the understanding determines the sensibility) space or time are first **given** as intuitions, the unity of this *a priori* intuition belongs to space and time, and not to the concept of the understanding.²⁰⁷

The unities of space and time as wholes precede all concepts, but *presuppose a synthesis* which does not belong to the senses. As he goes on to clarify, this presupposed synthesis is that between the understanding and the sensibility, *through which* space and time are first given as intuitions. Nevertheless, this unity belongs to space and time, not to the understanding. This is an incredibly difficult passage. Still, we can glean from it that, according to Kant, space and time could not be *given* as formal intuitions independently of an original synthesis of understanding and sensibility. We could have no formal intuition of space (and time) through the sensibility alone. Why does Kant think this?

Kant thinks the formal intuition cannot be given through sensibility alone because to grasp space *as a whole* is to already be, in some sense, beyond space. Before getting into the complex details of Kant's view, we can make sense of this idea rather commonsensically. As Heidegger puts it in *The Origin of the Work of Art*: "A stone is worldless. Plant and animal likewise have no world; but they belong to the covert throng of a surrounding into which they are linked. The peasant woman, on the other hand, has a world because she dwells in the overtness of beings."²⁰⁸ The distinction between merely belonging to a world and having a world is marked off by the fact that having a world requires a consciousness of one's place in it. Rational beings, Kant likewise thinks, do not merely belong to a nexus of spatial relations; rather, they place themselves in that nexus through a consciousness of their so belonging to it.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ (1993, 170)

Consider the faculty of the imagination as it would operate independently of the understanding. As a faculty belonging to sensibility, the imagination would find itself limited spatially and temporally. It would be trapped, so to speak, within the expanses of space and time. As such, the imagination would not be able to find its way to getting a glimpse of the whole of space or time. We do have a grasp of what space and time are as wholes, since we place ourselves *in* space and time, as opposed to merely occupying them. This consciousness of the empirical self as in space and time is thus a consciousness that is not limited spatially.

How is it that we grasp space and time as wholes? It is only possible, Kant thinks, through the unity of apperception. In a famous footnote to B136 Kant argues that because we can represent intuitions *as* singular, they must already contain within them the higher unity of apperception:

Space and time and all their parts are **intuitions**, thus individual representations along with the manifold that they contain in themselves (see the Transcendental Aesthetic), thus they are not mere concepts by means of which the same consciousness is contained in many representations, but rather are many representations that are contained in one and in the consciousness of it; they are thus found to be composite, and consequently the unity of consciousness, as **synthetic** and yet as original, is to be found in them. This **singularity** of theirs is important in its application (see §25).²⁰⁹

As we have seen, the wholes of space and time contain their manifolds. As such, their parts are many representations contained in one (self-conscious) representation. All singular representations, whether they be parts of space or the pure intuition of space itself, are thus determined according to the unity of self-consciousness. Or, in other words, every consciousness of intuition as something singular is a consciousness of that singular representation's belonging to the whole of space or time. If Kant is correct, then as beings who judge only under sensible conditions, we grasp the formal unity of the wholes of space and time. This implies that the

²⁰⁹ B136n

limitation of our cognition to sensible conditions is not a limitation of being stuck inside those sensible conditions.

SR, as we have seen, conceives of the self-limitation of the understanding in a way that mirrors Kant's notion of self-affection. The notion that in judging I am passive to constraints internal to my capacity to judge is remarkably similar to the form of limitation internal to space.²¹⁰ Thus, let us take a closer look at this similarity and its consequences for SR as a conception of the spontaneity of the understanding.

It is important for Kant that space and time themselves cannot be perceived. He says in the Anticipations of Perception:

Perception is empirical consciousness, i.e., one in which there is at the same time sensation. Appearances, as objects of perception, are not pure (merely formal) intuitions, like space and time (for these cannot be perceived in themselves).²¹¹

Perception is always consciousness involving sensation, which in turn corresponds to the effect that some object has on our sensible capacity. Thus, there is no perception except of what affects us. As a result, space and time themselves are not perceived, as they are not themselves alterations of our sensible capacity, but its very form. Kant goes on to say:

Space and time are *quanta continua*, because no part of them can be given except as enclosed between boundaries (points and instants), thus only in such a way that this part is again a space or a time. Space therefore consists only of spaces, time of times. Points and instances are only boundaries, i.e., mere places of their limitation; but places always presuppose those intuitions that limit or determine them, and from mere places, as components that could be given prior to space or time, neither space nor time can be composed. Magnitudes of this sort can also be called **flowing**, since the synthesis (of the productive imagination) in their

²¹⁰ Kant is explicit in the Transcendental Deduction that he thinks of time in terms of self-affection, but he does not explicitly refer to space in the same section (B153-55). However, the limits internal to spatial representation are drawn through the self-affection of time [as in drawing a line and cutting it into segments]. Moreover, what is important for me here is not that we identify SR's conception of self-limitation with that of the pure intuition of space, but that we see how there is an *analogue* between SR's conception of self-limitation and the passive self-limitation belonging to sensibility generally.

²¹¹ A166/B207

generation is a progress in time, the continuity of which is customarily designated by the expression “flowing” (“elapsing”).²¹²

In addition to the thought that space and time are not themselves perceived, Kant is here arguing that the parts of space and time are only ever given *as enclosed* in boundaries. Moreover, “places” always presuppose intuitions that limit or determine them. Kant seems to be arguing that we are only ever aware of spaces and times through their being marked off by boundaries of one space and one time, which are not themselves given in perception. And the boundaries of space and time are marked off through the perception of something which affects us. For instance, the place of the room in which I now sit is intelligible to me only as it is marked off by its walls. In this example, all that is given in sensation are the walls marking off the place. The space itself is intelligible only as it is bounded by something which affects me in sensation.

As such, *absences* are not themselves directly perceived. I notice an absence of space, for instance, only as I am affected by something with a positive magnitude. Thus, I notice absence only through perceiving my encountering something that is not an absence. The existence of an absence is determined through a kind of encounter, and thus passively. Though, to be sure, this passivity is not *mere* passivity. It is a passivity, in some sense, to my own sensible capacity. For, as we have seen, space is limited from within. I necessarily represent my encounter of the wall marking off the edge of a space by its contrast with the broader emptiness of space. And the broader emptiness of space, in turn, is nothing but a representation. If my thought were *inside* the limits of space and time, then it would be subject to the same kinds of limitation as space and time. In this case, as we see, thought would be subject to a kind of passivity; not a pure passivity, but one that has the character of self-affection—that is, of being constrained from within one’s own capacity.

²¹² A169-70/B211-12

The logical space of reasons as a kind of space within which thought takes place can now be seen as directly analogous to what we have said about space itself. If this version of SR is right to hold that acts of spontaneity take place within a space of reasons, then it must also agree that those acts are constrained (relatively passively, as we have said), within the structure of this space. Now we must determine whether it is true that acts of spontaneity take place within a logical space of reasons.

§3 Passive Self-Limitation and Judgment as a Relation in SR

We have just argued for an analogy between the logical space of reasons and the structure of space as passive to its own limits. Now we must determine whether acts of spontaneity take place within a logical space of reasons, as SR holds, or not. And, if not, what is the alternative picture? In this section we will argue that SR must conceive of judgment as a kind of relation, and that the idea of judgment as a relation is opposed by what we already know about the nature of the spontaneity of the understanding. As such, we will see, the judging I is no relatum and so must be conceived as beyond its limits, not stuck inside them.

I will now spell out in what way SR conceives of judgment as relational. One consequence of the view that acts of spontaneous judgment are constrained within a logical space of reasons is that acts of judging are constrained *by* some authoritative content external to the acts themselves. The act of judging is not itself fully determinative of what it judges, as the act itself must conceive of itself as relating to something beyond itself. Recall in our earlier description of SR that it conceives of judging as bound to norms outside of itself (norms that are there “anyway”), and its spontaneity consists in its being poised to recognize the authority of such norms. One way of thinking of the bearer of such norms is that they lie in that part of reality

which stands in relation to an act of affirmation or negation (a force). According to this view, when I judge that the dog is brown, my judgment is constrained by my perceptual experience of the dog's being brown. The dog's being brown is not independent of our shared conceptual capacities (the I), but it is as it is independently of my judging it to be so. As such, an objectively valid judgment, on this view, is a relation between an act of judging and a judgeable ('thinkable') content.²¹³

This is a view of judgment according to which the act of judging in some sense exists alongside what is judged. Thus, it is a relational view of judgment: what sets the limits to judgment's validity is conceived of as beyond the act of judging itself. We can now see that SR faces, albeit in a new and interesting way, the same sort of relativism worry that versions of RS face. Recall that RS must think of knowledge as relative to some given manner of combining representations. As such, RS must hold that knowledge is in a significant sense accidental: it is not through our consciousness of what we judge that we know our judgment to be valid, but through a connection with some given way of thinking. Now SR faces a similar problem. According to SR, it is not through my consciousness of what I judge that I know my judgment to be valid (and thus come to know), but through a connection between my conscious act of judging and something alongside that act.

Now, clearly my concern is that the thought of the I as conceptual unboundedness is by itself insufficient to capture what AS needs to capture. And the thought of the I as a form of life writ large is equally insufficient. Both of these characterizations of the spontaneous character of judgment miss the absolute or objective internality of judgment to self-consciousness. I propose that SR misses Kant's crucial point because it *sensibilizes* the understanding by giving it a form

²¹³ For McDowell's version of this, see his essay "Intentionality as a Relation" (2009, p. 46): "[...] we can take this need for external constraint to be met by perceived objects themselves."

of passivity to itself. But this is not the right way of thinking about my consciousness of my own judgment as valid. We have described as passive the way in which space comes to be articulated into “places” through limitations on the whole of space. But, from what we already know about the nature of judgment as intrinsically self-conscious, we also know that the articulation of conceptual representation is not passive in this way.

Recall that in synthetic judgment the act of determining a subject through a predicate is also the act of excluding all contrary predicates. In judging that the dog is brown, I exclude that the dog is red. But even more generally, to articulate a concept is to know what is excluded from that concept. Thus, in grasping the concept ‘brown’ I already know, in my act of thinking ‘brown’, what it is not—‘red’. This is to say that to think a concept is to know its determinate boundaries *in the act of thinking it*. The determination of spatial limitations, on the other hand, is not done through the act of thinking space; it is done through being passive to spatial limits *inside* space.

The act of judging is an act of conceptual determination. As we saw in Chapter Three, the unity of the understanding—the I of transcendental self-consciousness—is conceptuality as such. Thus, the acts of the I are not acts whose determinate boundaries are understood passively, but actively: *in its own activity*, or *internal to itself*. This means that judgment is not to be thought of as a kind of relation between an act and something external to the act. AS demands that we reach beyond the logical space of reasons as the locus of the I. But what does the alternative look like?

§4 An Apparent Dilemma

According to SR, the I is the logical space of reasons. And above we saw that conceiving of the I as the logical space of reasons is inapt insofar as it makes judgment into a kind of relation. The

suggestion is that we should reject SR in favor of a view that does not make the judging I passive to its limits.

But, perhaps such a view will not be seen as problematic. For McDowell, for instance, it is a virtue of SR that it recognizes an external constraint on acts of judging. Perhaps one reason for this is that the notion of an external constraint on judging is a natural way of preserving the thought that our reason is finite. Surely, the reasoning may go, what it means for the human intellect to be finite is precisely that it has limits that are not determined in its own acts of thinking. SR provides an account according to which the limits of the I are not *brutely* given in the sense that they are just there independently of our conceptual activity, but are also limits that are not determined through our thought of them. This may seem to strike a nice balance. If we are inclined to accept such a picture, then we are accepting a picture according to which the I does not know its *determinate boundaries*, for knowing a determinate boundary involves the thought of something beyond that boundary. For SR, though, this might seem unnecessary and even unintelligible.

As an example, according to McDowell it is problematic for Kant to hold that we can think *beyond* the sensible to the supersensible:

Now there are familiar features of Kant's thinking that can help explain why he is attracted by the idea of an unknowable supersensible reality, *apparently in violation of his own standards for what makes sense*. The transcendental framework gives the appearance of explaining how there can be knowledge of necessary features of experience. And Kant thinks acknowledging the supersensible is a way to protect the interests of religion and morality.²¹⁴

This brief statement points to a (Strawsonian) concern about noumena—namely, that an appeal to noumena would be nonsensical. Traditionally, the reason for this view is that any appeal to noumena would necessarily involve applying the categories, which can only be applied to

²¹⁴ McDowell (1994, 96)

phenomena. Thus, on this view, appeals to noumena are contradictory and useless.²¹⁵ So long as McDowell accepts some version of this thought, it would appear that he does hold that an attempt to know the limits of space and time threatens nonsense. For, to know the limits of space and time would require knowing *beyond* space and time, beyond the life activity of the one who judges. This can be compared with Wittgenstein's claim in the *Tractatus*:

The book will, therefore, draw a limit to thinking, or rather—not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts; for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought).

The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense.²¹⁶

According to Wittgenstein, we cannot draw a limit to thought, since we would thereby have to *think* the other side of that limit, and then thought would be beyond itself. However, we can (and must) draw a limit to our *expression* of thought in language. And because to know the limit of the expressible would be to know the inexpressible, we can only *show* but not *say* what those limits are.

The Strawsonian and Wittgensteinian points concern the very intelligibility of thinking (and of course knowing) beyond the realm which is thought's proper place. It might seem that this point works in favor, not against, one of the crucial Kantian insights that SR hopes to capture: namely, the insight that the spontaneity of judgment and the finitude of human reason are compatible, not at odds with one another. Perhaps SR will hold that AS confronts a dilemma:

Either:

- (1) The I is inside its limits, and thus passively self-limiting. Or,
- (2) The I is beyond its limits, and thus fails to recognize its own finitude.

²¹⁵ Strawson (1966, 264-65)

²¹⁶ Wittgenstein (1999, 27)

Perhaps (1) has some undesirable consequences. For instance, if the I recognizes limits external to itself, then perhaps Kant's ultimate project of a critique of pure reason is not fully achievable. Kant holds that we *can* and *must* know the determinate bounds of knowledge. But this implies that we are capable of more than mere gesturing at what the limits of reason are; it means that we have those limits fully in view. And, as we have seen in our discussion of the formal differences between understanding and sensibility, to be inside the limits of some structure is to be in some sense stuck, incapable of getting a view of the whole. It can help to again look at a short passage from McDowell:

If we understood Kant's theoretical philosophy, we would understand how to think about the limits of intelligibility—the bounds of sense, in one interpretation of P.F. Strawson's intentionally ambiguous title. That would put us within reach of an insight only glimpsed, I think, by Kant himself: that those limits are not well conceived as a boundary, enclosing a territory by leaving other territory outside it.²¹⁷

What McDowell suggests here is that while Kant believes he can, in some sense, draw limits to intelligibility, he does not believe that he can draw what we have been calling a true *boundary*. Kant himself explains in both the first *Critique* as well as the *Prolegomena* that he uses “limit” and “boundary” to mean different things.²¹⁸ To establish a limit does not require thinking anything on the other side of it. And indeed, this is aligned with McDowell's claim about what Kant “glimpses”: that to know the limits of intelligibility is not to know any territory beyond the limit. McDowell also points out that the title of Strawson's *The Bounds of Sense* is ambiguous. Strawson is interested in two ways in which Kant can be said to draw such bounds—as a limit to sensibility and as a limit to intelligibility generally (what he refers to as the “lower” and “upper” bounds, respectively).²¹⁹

²¹⁷ McDowell (2009, 108)

²¹⁸ Pröl. 4:354

²¹⁹ Strawson (1966, 11-12)

Even if the *Critique of Pure Reason* only recognizes a *limit* to intelligibility generally, it does seek the determinate *boundaries* of knowledge. Kant is clear that those boundaries must be determined by reason (broadly) itself—i.e., self-consciously:

[the power of judgment] demands that reason should take on anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge, and to institute a court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims while dismissing all its groundless pretensions, and this not by mere decrees but according to its own eternal and unchangeable laws; and this court is none other than the **critique of pure reason** itself [...] a critique of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive **independently of all experience**, and hence the decision about the possibility or impossibility of a metaphysics in general, and the determination of its sources, as well as its extent and boundaries, all, however, from principles.²²⁰

The understanding must not only *have* boundaries, and it must not only be able to *think* those boundaries, but it must determine its boundaries. Kant's insistence on this point stems from the thought that no *critique* of a faculty would be possible without having the whole of that faculty in view.²²¹ As finite intellects, in order to know what the proper object of knowledge is, we have to exclude what is *not* the proper object. Without knowledge of the determinate boundaries of reason, Kant says, we would be treating reason as if it were a flat plane along which a constant search for such boundaries takes place. But he thinks this is the wrong picture of reason:

Our reason is not like an indeterminably extended plane, the limits of which one can cognize only in general, but must rather be compared with a sphere, the radius of which can be found out from the curvature of an arc on its surface (from the nature of synthetic *a priori* propositions), from which its content and its boundary can also be ascertained with certainty. Outside this sphere (field of experience) nothing is an object for it; indeed even questions about such supposed objects concern only subjective principles of a thoroughgoing determination of the relations that can obtain among the concepts of understanding inside of this sphere.²²²

²²⁰ Axi-xii

²²¹ Not properly as an object, for the self-knowledge of the transcendental I is not knowledge of an object.

²²² A762/B790

Kant says that reason is not like a flat plane, but rather like a sphere. The excursion of knowledge taking place on a flat plane would either go on reaching for its limits forever with no clear notion of where it must reign itself in, or fall over the edge of its plane, annihilating itself as knowledge of anything.

On the other hand, though, the Strawsonian or Wittgensteinian concern with drawing such a boundary can be a source of real anxiety about the possibility of (2). Putting aside the issue of whether it is indeed absurd to draw such a boundary, we might think that it puts into jeopardy Kant's plan to reconcile spontaneity with rational human finitude. Again, it might initially seem as though the finitude of our intellect *must be* a limit to which we are passive. If the transcendental I recognizes no limitations at all, then we seem to be wading into the territory of absolute idealism. Hegel's criticism of Kant's transcendental idealism is in part rooted in the fact that Kant divides the infinite intellect from the finite intellect:

By coming to consciousness of its own nothingness, the Enlightenment turns this nothingness into a system [...]²²³

Because the antithesis [between the infinite and the finite] is absolute, the sphere of the eternal is the incalculable, the inconceivable, the empty—an incognizable God beyond the boundary stakes of Reason. It is a sphere that is nothing for intuition since intuition is only allowed to be sensuous and limited.²²⁴

For Kant, the finitude of the I lies in our consciousness of its emptiness. On its own, the I furnishes no content; its acts are always understood in connection with something given in experience. This consciousness of the I's emptiness—its nothingness—is turned into a system. And, in this system, there is (as Hegel puts it) an absolute antithesis between the infinite intellect and the finite intellect. The infinite, for us, is confined to our consciousness of the I's emptiness; it is a consciousness of nothing. The infinite does not, as such, touch the finite. But, in Hegel's

²²³ *Faith and Knowledge*, 56

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 61

own view, this contrast can be overcome. For Hegel, the infinite and the finite are not absolutely opposed. Absolute or infinite knowledge consists in the completion of the self-consciousness of my finite knowledge. This is obviously a deeply complex issue.²²⁵ But we do not have to fully understand these issues here and now. We simply need to see what purportedly spoils a conception of the I as beyond its limits. What spoils it is supposed to be that in being beyond its limits, the I *has no limits*. And this would plainly be in conflict with the idea that there is something keeping the I from absolute knowledge.

What unites the two horns of this dilemma is the fact that they both reject the genuine possibility of a critical philosophy. SR does not enable us to know the determinate boundaries of our knowledge, while absolute idealism fails to recognize any limits to knowledge.

§5 Overcoming the Dilemma

Now it is left to us to determine whether this dilemma can be overcome. The position taken so far has been that the I—pure self-consciousness—must be beyond its limits. But if we are to avoid sliding into an absolute idealism, we must provide an account of how the I can be beyond its limits without recognizing no limits.

First, let us return to the first horn of the dilemma. There is a connection to be drawn between being inside of limits and the problem of the relativity of knowledge we saw in RS. We saw in chapters 1-2 that RS can be understood as, in a general sense, a thesis according to which the self-consciousness of judgment is recognized to be relative to something external to itself. This is to say that it recognizes a limit. But RS, as a thesis according to which that limit is external to the act of judging, conceives of the limits of knowledge as given. They are given for

²²⁵ See Rödl (2018) for an extended discussion of this issue, and a defense of the Hegelian alternative to Kant.

RS in the sense that they are not determined through the act of judging itself, but instead are recognized as something *in relation to which* judgment stands. For the I to be inside its limits is for it to not determine those limits through its own self-consciousness, but merely to recognize them in experience. We can see the close relationship that exists between the notions of relativity, in RS, and of being inside limits, in SF and SR. Now, it is here that we might encounter the rejoinder that relativity is essential to Kant's transcendental idealism. That is, we will need to respond to the deep-rooted thought that for Kant knowledge must be relative to (a) the forms of sensibility and/or (b) things in themselves. For now we will leave this aside, but we will take it up in the next section.

Returning to second horn: without providing a full response to the Hegelian, which would take another project entirely to carry out, it should be pointed out that Kant's AS need not, by avoiding the first horn, fall into the second horn. It need not be the case that by showing the I to be beyond its limits, we commit ourselves to the view that the I recognizes no limits at all. In particular, we need not commit ourselves to any version of the view that the liberation of the I entails the limitlessness of knowledge. To this I now turn.

When I judge, I recognize my act as discursive, which is to say that I recognize it as involving a synthesis of concepts. This is important, because in recognizing my judgment as discursive, I also thereby recognize it as limited. When I judge that the table is brown, I do so through an act of limitation—that is, through separating from it what it is not (red, green, and so on). So, I already implicitly take my judgment to be a limited, i.e. finite, act.²²⁶

This idea, that the recognition of judgment's limitation is internal to the act of judging, is a notion of self-limitation; it is the determination of our judgment through an act of negation, of

²²⁶ I also recognize my judgment as resting on a reason. An awareness of the need for a sufficient reason (justification) is an awareness of the finitude of my act of judging.

saying what is not the case. So, the thought of our intellect as finite is one we have through an act of negation. Moreover, this act of negation is distinct from mere self-affection. We do not encounter the limit of judgment passively in this case, but think it actively. As judgment is inseparable from acts of negation (as a separating of one concept from another), the spontaneity of judgment is only correctly understood through an understanding of this act by which we determine the finitude judgment. And, as we saw above, the way in which conceptual limitation is grasped is distinct from the way in which spatial limitation is grasped. If, as we have suggested, the form of spatial limitation corresponds to the kind of self-affection we see in SR, then in order to understand judgment's self-limitation, we have to understand it as distinct from the self-affection of SR.

Now, the implicit awareness of my judgment as finite necessarily involves Kant's distinction between mere thought and judgment. Kant says that we can think whatever we like as long as we do not contradict ourselves, but we may not judge whatever we like.²²⁷ The only constraint on thought as such is the principle of non-contradiction. When I judge that the table is brown, I exclude the table's being green, but I am free to think its being green. Indeed, in every judgment, as I recognize its finite character, I also think beyond what I judge. We know the limits of knowledge (and thought itself, though these are somewhat different matters) by always thinking *beyond* what is known in judgment. Every judgment as an act of self-conscious determination is also an act of exclusion. As such, every judgment is accompanied by the thought of what it is not—i.e., accompanied by an act of negation. And in an act of negation, we think what is not the case. To return to the point made above, our thought of what is not is, in every judgment, twofold: we exclude the contrary judgment (we are aware that other predicates

²²⁷ Footnote to Bxxvi

don't apply), and we also necessarily frame what we judge as finite. To recognize what I judge to be finite is just to recognize it as requiring, or possibly requiring, justification. It is based on a reason that we may be fully or only dimly aware of, but we are aware of the need of an answer to the question 'why?', which answer in turn will require a reason, and so on. This is the finitude of human knowledge.

Judgment is, on our view, objectively internal to self-consciousness (to harken back to the first half of this dissertation). Now we can see that the self-consciousness of judgment is also, in the same act, a consciousness of its finitude. The determination of what is true is at the same time an awareness of what I must not judge. And this awareness of what I must not judge is not a merely contingent accompaniment to my judgment. Insofar as I am capable of objectively valid judgment, I must recognize the finitude of my judgment. To return to what we said above, and ultimately to chapter one, the recognition of the finitude of my judgment is the recognition of my act of excluding contrary predicates from the subject of my judgment. And, in turn, this act of exclusion is not arbitrary, but done from an awareness of the necessity of so excluding. Thus, the recognition of the finitude of my judgment is also an awareness of my judgment's resting on some ground upon which I *can* exclude contrary predicates. All of this yields a conception of the finitude of our intellect as internal to the self-consciousness of judgment. So, not even the manner in which I am limited as a knower may escape the I of self-consciousness. Indeed, it seems that rational human finitude is only intelligible through the I of self-consciousness. This point, in turn, requires that we think the I from which nothing escapes as beyond its limits. The knowledge of knowledge's boundaries requires a thought beyond the boundary--an act of thinking that is not knowledge, but consciousness of what cannot *be* knowledge.

Our conclusion—that the I may be both beyond its own limits and finite—is not one that will be met without objections. For now, I simply want us to see that there is a determinate way forward out of the dilemma outlined above. This is a way of trying to capture, for instance, what Kant is saying in the Paralogisms when he argues that the I is beyond the categories as well as the forms of sensibility:

The unity of consciousness, which grounds the categories, is here taken for an intuition of the subject as an object, and the category of substance is applied to it. But this unity is only the unity of **thinking**, through which no object is given; and thus the category of substance, which always presupposes a given **intuition**, cannot be applied to it, and hence this subject cannot be cognized at all. Thus the subject of the categories cannot, by thinking them, obtain a concept of itself as an object of the categories; for in order to think them, it must take its pure self-consciousness, which is just what is to be explained, as its ground. Likewise, the subject, in which the representation of time originally has its ground, cannot thereby determine its own existence in time, and if the latter cannot be, then the former as a determination of its self (as a thinking being in general) through categories can also not take place.²²⁸

The shared ‘I’ of reason is never captured in any thought, and always presupposed by what is thought. It is always beyond what is thought. As it determines what can and cannot be known, the I of self-consciousness *stands next to nothing* which guides or aides it in its activity. It does not stand in a relation to anything, for that would imply that it is not *that through which everything is intelligible*. This is itself an unintelligible thought. We can’t think the I as standing in a relation to something else, because the I is ‘no thing’. It is nothing in the world, nothing determinate in relation to anything. It is *nothing*. Which is why Kant never tires of emphasizing that it is merely formal, empty, and logical, and beyond the categories and space and time. And this is not to make any sort of extravagant metaphysical claim, because there are no metaphysical claims to be made about the I. The I is a purely logical unity. This is therefore not to say: I am in some realm beyond other realms. As such, the fully articulated conception of AS falls into

²²⁸ B421-22

neither the metaphysical nor the epistemological (merely perspectival) views glossed in the first two chapters.

§6 Objections and Preliminary Replies

Finally, I want to point out that what we have showed so far does leave a number of issues open, and I cannot pretend to have any of them fully worked out yet. For instance, we have only as of yet opened up the possibility of determining precisely in what sense Kant takes the transcendental I to be empty or, in a sense, *nothing*.²²⁹ And, even though we have seen why rational human finitude is only intelligible through the transcendental I (which is itself beyond the limits it determines), we have not by any means said enough to fully alleviate anxieties related to, say, Wittgenstein's concern about the absurdity of drawing a limit to thought. More needs to be said. In this last section I will consider two basic forms of objection and try to point the way forward out of them. In so doing, I hope to have outlined a series of topics which, in exploring further, will enrich contemporary Kant scholarship.

§6.1 On Our Limits from Below

The first objection to be examined is one that naturally arises due to our earlier discussion about the relation between the absolute spontaneity of the I and the forms of sensibility. The objection is simple: doesn't the contingency of our forms of intuition make our knowledge relative to those forms? We have been urging that even the forms of sensibility are internal to the I. But, if the forms of space and time are in some sense contingent (since it is no contradiction to think the possibility of other forms of intuition), then it must also be that it is in some sense an accident

²²⁹ I suspect that it does not fall into any of the categories on Kant's table of nothing, presented at the end of the Amphiboly chapter, because the I is syncategorematic.

that we are given *these* objects as opposed to some that would conform to different sensible conditions. If so, this would seemingly place us back in the precarious position of RS—that is, in the position of holding that our knowledge (objectively valid judgment) is intelligible only in relation to something external to the act of judging itself.

This is, of course, an incredibly difficult issue. But something can be said against the objection. We can begin by noting that our previous understanding of what it means for the forms of sensibility to be internal to the I may need further refinement. As of now, there is an ambiguity between two ways that our sensible capacity can be internal to the I. This ambiguity, I will argue, rests on a deeper ambiguity about what it means for the forms of sensibility to be self-determined. As we have argued, in order for x to be *internal to* the I, x must be in some sense determined by the I, which is to say self-determined. But, on its face, the claim that the forms of our sensibility are self-determined can sound like the claim that the finitude of those forms is likewise the result of an act of thought. Thus, we might worry that the internality claim (regarding sensibility) implies that we are self-finitizing beings: we determine our limits by making ourselves into finite beings. But, of course, this would be precisely the sort of thought to avoid for a properly *critical* philosophy. The natural opposing thought is that instead of being self-finitizing beings, our finitude is *brutely given* (to use a McDowellian phrase). This may seem to put Kant in the position of accepting that, while the pure formal intuitions of space and time are internal to the I, the *forms of* intuition must be external to the I or brutally given. If so, then we would have to choose between accepting the thought that our “knowledge” is relative to some brutally given manner of receptivity, or the thought that by bringing everything inside the activity of the I we are overcoming critical philosophy in favor of some form of Hegelianism.²³⁰

²³⁰ This is in fact the position in which McDowell thinks we find ourselves (2009, “Hegel’s Idealism as Radicalization of Kant”).

But I want to argue that we are not in this position. We can see this by looking further into what would count as the self-determination of our forms of sensibility. It need not be the case that the internality of these forms to the I implies that their limits are the result of our activity of thinking. It is true that there are given sensible limits, in the sense that those limits are there independently of our thinking them. But it must also be true, given what we have said so far, that the character of those limits *as limits of human knowledge* is determined through our consciousness of them. What this means is that the existence of sensibility's limits is not established in self-consciousness, but the being of those limits as limits of knowledge *is* so established. This distinction turns on a distinction that Kant himself draws in several places between a mere empirical givenness and an *a priori* form of givenness. For instance, Kant says:

The *Critique* admits absolutely no implanted or innate *representations*. One and all, whether they belong to intuition or to concepts of the understanding, it considers them as *acquired*. But there is also an original acquisition (as the teachers of natural right call it), and thus of that which previously did not yet exist at all, and so did not belong to anything prior to this act. According to the *Critique*, these are, *in the first place*, the form of things in space and time, *second*, the synthetic unity of the manifold in concepts; for neither of these does our cognitive faculty get from objects as given therein in-themselves, rather it brings them about, *a priori*, out of itself.²³¹

Space and time are *acquired originally*, in that they are brought about through our sensible capacity itself. The reason that Kant does not simply call this an act of spontaneity is that the determination of these forms is not like the determination of the subject of concept of a judgment. When I judge that the table is brown, I fix to [table] a determinate predicate [brown], excluding other determinate ways that the table could be. But in the determination of our sensibility, this is not the case. In determining space and time, I do not exclude other specific manners of intuiting, because I have no conception of what such a manner could be like. Our

²³¹ 8:221

conception of space and time, then, is reliant upon forms of intuiting that are given to us—that is, which are not established through a consciousness of any rational ground upon which they rest. This is why Kant famously refers to the schematism as the “hidden art in the depths of the human soul”²³²: it is known, but only darkly or obscurely, for our comprehension of it relies on something outside of a spontaneous act of judgment. So, the form of our sensibility is given. But Kant has in mind a special kind of givenness which he is calling original acquisition. As he says above, this is an original acquisition “of that which previously did not yet exist at all, and so did not belong to anything prior to this act.”

To be sure, we require *some* form of brute empirical givenness, since the content of thought relies on matter given from elsewhere. Indeed, Kant goes on to say that while the representations of space and time are acquisitions, their ultimate *ground* is innate.²³³ If we were to specify the internality of sensibility to the I solely in terms of its positive determination, we would indeed be required to leave what Kant calls the “forms of intuition” (their manner of givenness) external to the I. But in the case of the forms of intuition, their belongingness to the I consists not in their positive determination, but in a certain kind of *negative* determination. We do not determine, through the thought of spatiotemporal givenness, the precise manner in which we are given objects. But we do determine these forms of intuition *as unknowable*. The character of *what is given* empirically is not itself given empirically. As Kant says, that character did not exist prior to the act of original acquisition. To see this, we can again reflect on the fact that the given limits of space and time will be different as they belong to the self-consciousness of a rational being. As they belong to a rational being, space and time are conceived of as wholes, allowing us to place ourselves *in* space and time. As they belong to a merely sensible being,

²³² A141/B180-1

²³³ 8:221

space and time do not have this character. As they belong to a merely sensible being, the unknowability of the limits of sensibility is not presented as unknowability; it is inexplicable to the dog why she has the forms of intuition that she has, but she does not know them to be unknowable. As they belong to a rational being, space and time have the character of being unknowable. But this character of unknowability is not merely a reflection of the limits which are there independently of our consciousness of them, since there are no limits of the knowability of space and time except through a consciousness of the role of space and time in knowledge. As such, as I rise from mere animal to self-conscious rational thinker by the act of thinking, my limits become self-determined. But they become self-determined without being created whole cloth. We are not as such *self-finitizing* intellects. At the same time, since the character of sensible limits for a merely sensible creature is not the character of the limits of knowledge, the self-determination of our sensible limits qua rational beings is not a form of *imposition* on some way that the limits are anyway. The movement from animal to rational is transformative, not impositional.

Again, there is also a difference between what is given merely empirically (brutely) and what is given in an a priori act of the capacity itself. The act in question may rest on this empirically givenness, but it brings forth something “which previously did not yet exist.” What is it that is brought forth which was not already there anyway? For Kant it is the manner of spatiotemporal givenness as it figures in knowledge. It is essential to Kant’s critical project for us to see that the acquisition of rational form does not remove their character as given.

The determination of the character of our sensible limits is a self-determination belonging to the I (as it relies on an original act of the understanding’s giving unity to sensibility). Now, the important point is that we can therefore understand even a form of givenness as internal to the

activity of the I. This opens the door to a way out of the previous dilemma. That is, we do not have to choose between the brute externality of forms of sensibility and the understanding as self-finitizing. We can recognize, instead, that there are forms of intuition internal to the I that are nevertheless forms of givenness—givenness that is not mere “brute” or “empirical” givenness, but a form of original acquisition. This form of givenness would not threaten the objectivity of our forms of intuition. It would not, that is, make our knowledge unacceptably relative. This is because the very act of spontaneity required for enabling objective validity is already at work in the act of original acquisition. The givenness of space and time as forms of intuition is not a givenness that is independent of the form of our pure self-consciousness.

So far, what can be said in defense of AS is that the objectivity of what is judged lies in the form of judgment itself, the self-consciousness of the understanding, and not in our sensible capacity. We have already seen that space and time as *formal* intuitions bear the unity of apperception. That is, space and time as wholes out of which particular places and times come to be divided bear the form of the transcendental I. Kant says that the *forms of intuition*—that is, the manner in which I am given the manifold in space and time—may be contingent in the sense that we can think the possibility of other such forms.²³⁴ But, to make headway with this issue, we have to at the very least recognize exactly what the forms of intuition are in relation to the formal intuitions. As there is something we must be given in sensibility, there is a manner of its being given that will not be fully intelligible except as already bearing the form of thought. Pippin astutely points this out as follows:

[...] Kant takes it as undeniable that all knowledge or empirical awareness of all kinds involves awareness of *some* unity or connection of content. A mere “this” with no properties or relations with other objects is ineffable and cannot be a content of consciousness. Even to respond to this with a name, if that is to be

²³⁴ Of course, we cannot *imagine* this possibility, as that would itself be an act from within the spatial and temporal perspective. But it is no contradiction to think the possibility.

more than the stimulated utterance of a sound (as it surely is in Kant), is to treat something as a thing, a unit, and that presupposes some internal complexity by virtue of which this has been distinguished from that.²³⁵

In other words, while we must be given some matter for thinking, no bare matter can be thought *as it is* independently of the form of thought. This is just because the very idea of bare matter is the idea of something that bears no form. There is no way that it is. While the forms of intuition are not *bare* matter, since there is a way that they are independently of the I, they nevertheless do not, independently of the I, already bear the form that knowledge requires of them.

Lastly, Kant is adamant that the touchstone of truth lies in the activity of the understanding. This means that it is through the activity of the understanding that what we are given in sensibility has any determination (through the pure categories). Independently of the understanding, and therefore of the unity of the formal intuitions of space and time (which are such unities because they bear the form of the understanding), there is no way of referring to any determinate manner of being. This is the same as to say that independently of the understanding, there is nothing true to be said of cognitive limits. On the flip side, whoever shares in the understanding also shares objective reality.

I hope so far to have made a clear case, both as a matter of Kant interpretation and as a matter of accounting for the objectivity of knowledge, that we are not to conceive of spatial and temporal givenness as ultimately lying outside the I of pure self-consciousness. As McDowell has insightfully pointed out, such a view would be disastrous for knowledge. Kant cannot hold that our knowledge is relative to the forms of sensibility, if by that it is meant that knowledge takes itself to rely on something beyond its own self-consciousness.

²³⁵ Pippin (1982, 40-1)

§6.2 On Our Limits from Above

The first objection we have dealt with involves the idea of the limits of knowledge as they are understood *from below*, so to speak. That is, we have so far dealt with what counts as a limitation of sensible knowledge, and what separates the rational sensible being from the merely animal sensible being. But we must also consider our cognitive limits as they are understood *from above*, so to speak. That is, we must consider the limit that separates rational sensible beings from an infinite intellect. The reason why we must consider this is that, just like the above objection, one might be inclined to worry that for Kant such a limit in fact relativizes human knowledge—this time to the knowledge of an infinite intellect. To see how to navigate this issue, we must first see how both our lower and upper limits are related to Kant's discussion of the noumenon as a *limiting concept*.

In the Phenomena and Noumena chapter of the first *Critique*, Kant calls the noumenon a limiting concept and proceeds to divide it into two species: the concept of the negative noumenon and the concept of the positive noumenon. The negative noumenon is the concept of something that is not an object of our sensible intuition, whereas the positive noumenon is the concept of something that is an object of a non-sensible intuition.²³⁶ Kant then writes:

Now the doctrine of sensibility is at the same time the doctrine of the noumenon in the negative sense, i.e., of things that the understanding must think without this relation to our kind of intuition, thus not merely as appearances but as things in themselves, but about which, however, it also understands that in this abstraction it cannot consider making any use of its categories, since they have significance only in relation to the unity of intuitions in space and time, and can even determine tis unity *a priori* through general concepts of combination only on account of the mere ideality of space and time.²³⁷

²³⁶ B307

²³⁷ B307-8

Why is the doctrine of sensibility the doctrine of the negative noumenon? It is because in knowing that we know only *appearances*, we must think the possibility of objects which do not correspond to our sensible intuition (the categories must reach beyond our sensible intuition, even if they cannot cognize beyond it). This is an act of negation or self-limitation—that is, an act which limits the pretenses of our sensible cognition. By reaching beyond our sensible capacity, we know the determinate boundaries of sensibility.

On the other hand, in thinking the spontaneity of the understanding we must also thereby think the idea of an infinite (intuitive) intellect. In order to understand our own mode of spontaneity, which rests on sensible conditions, we must understand the idea of a spontaneity which is sufficient for its cognition. The idea of an infinite intellect is the idea of an intuitive self-consciousness, one relying on nothing given whatsoever, and thus one that brings forth its own content. As this kind of self-consciousness knows everything merely through thinking itself (without receptivity), it knows the finite intellect merely through thinking itself. The infinite intellect would not know the finite intellect as it is anyway, because in thinking the infinite intellect we cannot think anything existing independently of it. Thus, from the thought of spontaneity as such, we think the finite intellect as the self-finitization of the infinite intellect. Now, this self-finitization is nothing other than the idea of the positive noumenon—the idea of an object of an infinite intellect. Thus, in thinking the nature of our finite intellect, we think our spontaneity as the self-finitization of the infinite intellect, even if we do not thereby pretend to *cognize* such a possibility. We do not, then, assert any such possibility, but merely think it.

If this is right, then we can begin to see how Kant avoids thinking that our knowledge is *relative* to that of an infinite intellect. Thinking the unknowability of our forms of intuition involves thinking the noumenon as a boundary concept. But thinking the noumenon as a

boundary concept is nothing but an act of negation—that is, of thinking what we cannot know, and thereby limiting our cognition. In and of itself, thinking what we cannot know is *not* thinking something that bears a standard of reality or objectivity which cannot be reached by us. I will finish by considering why this is the case.

Noumena are not, as it is sometimes supposed, objects of reality to which our sensibility simply fails to extend.²³⁸ Instead, following the original Greek, noumena are literally *beings of the understanding*.²³⁹ As such, noumena are those beings the knowledge of which could only be had by an intuitive understanding—an infinite intellect. We have no insight into the possibility of a being with intuitive understanding, but we can think it. As such, we can think the possibility of noumena. In fact, we *must* think noumena in order to limit the pretensions of sensibility. Kant says:

In the end, however, we have no insight into the possibility of such *noumena*, and the domain outside of the sphere of appearances is empty (for us), i.e., we have an understanding that extends farther than sensibility **problematically**. The concept of a noumenon is therefore merely a **boundary concept**, in order to limit the pretension of sensibility, and therefore only of negative use. But it is nevertheless not invented arbitrarily, but is rather connected with the limitation of sensibility, yet without being able to posit anything positive outside of the domain of the latter.

The understanding's limitation of sensibility through the concept of a noumenon does not involve the positing of anything positive beyond the domain of sensibility. The “domain” beyond the boundary is, for us, empty.²⁴⁰ Now, we must be especially careful here, because the terms “boundary” and “limit” have different meanings for Kant. In the *Prolegomena*, Kant is clear that he uses “limit” to denote the merely negative act of preventing judgment from going further than

²³⁸ Cf. Strawson (1966, 267), who takes Kant to hold that noumena are “objectively real” objects.

²³⁹ Interestingly, the following note appears in Kant's copy of the first edition of the first *Critique*: “*Noumena*: beings that themselves have understanding, also causality with regard to the objects of their understanding through the understanding itself [...]” (A235/B294).

²⁴⁰ In the *Prolegomena* Kant calls this “the void” or “empty space” (*Leeren*) (4:354).

it should; whereas he uses “boundary” to denote not something merely negative, but something that is also positive.²⁴¹ A boundary is more like a line, itself a space with another side to it. And it is not enough for us to merely *limit* sensibility. If we are to avoid both dogmatic rationalism and skeptical empiricism, we must know the determinate bounds of our knowledge.

The idea of a boundary, as Kant has noted, seems to imply that we can think what is on the other side of that boundary. Wittgenstein points to what he thinks is an absurd idea, that we could draw a boundary to *thought*. For, in drawing a boundary in thought, we should also have to *think* the other side of the boundary. As such, there is apparently no such boundary. But Kant’s claim is that we must draw a boundary, not to thought as such, but to knowledge. We *can* think the other side of the boundary in forming the concept of a noumenon. Moreover, in thinking beyond the boundary of knowledge, we are not thereby *extending the field of real objects*. So, as Kant immediately goes on to say:

The division of objects into *phaenomena* and *noumena*, and of the world into a world of sense and a world of understanding, can therefore not be permitted at all in a positive sense, although concepts certainly permit of division into sensible and intellectual ones; for one cannot determine any object for the latter, and therefore also cannot pass them off as objectively valid [...] Now in this way our understanding acquires a negative expansion, i.e., it is not limited by sensibility, but rather limits it by calling things in themselves (not considered as appearances) *noumena*.²⁴²

What Kant says here is instructive. We cannot divide *real objects* into phenomena and noumena, cordoning off the latter as unreachable for us. Rather, our understanding acquires a *negative expansion*, which is to say that it circumscribes sensibility so as to say: ‘go no further,’ but without *positing* a new class of objects. It is also important to note what Kant says in parentheses, which may at first sound trivial (of course; it would be a contradiction to call

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² B311-12

appearances noumena). He seems here to be warning us not to assume that when we speak of noumena, we are speaking of real objects existing independently of our form of knowledge. By assuming something of this sort, we would only be appropriating materials from within the sphere of experience:

Outside this sphere (field of experience) nothing is an object for it; indeed even questions about such supposed objects concern only subjective principles of a thoroughgoing determination of the relations that can obtain among the concepts of understanding inside of this sphere.²⁴³

We draw a boundary to knowledge (through the understanding itself) without thereby positing any real objects on the other side of that boundary. But, in a sense, we also do not posit any objects *at all*. The noumenon, for one, is not the object of a finite intellect. In thinking the noumenon, we are really reflecting on our finitude. So, even in the thought of something beyond the bounds of our knowledge, we are not thinking the idea of a class of objects from which we are cut off. Instead, we are thinking the boundary between the finite and the infinite intellect. It is important, then, to learn two things from these considerations: (1) our cognitive self-limitation is through an act of *negation*—that is, through thinking what is *not* (this means that the understanding has conceptual unity rather than a kind of spatial unity), and (2) the act of thinking a negation does not *expand* our knowledge, but only limits it. Kant says our understanding “acquires a *negative expansion*,” but by this he does not mean that it expands through negation; rather, he means that the expansion is not one of positing further objects.

As we have learned, the activity of understanding—spontaneity—is the most fundamental aspect of knowledge per se, whether in God or in human beings. Like God, we know spontaneously; but unlike God, we require the objects of knowledge to be given to us. Noumena, then, are beings only God could know, but they are not thereby beings alien to the

²⁴³ A762/B790

understanding. The understanding, as a human capacity, is limited; but it is not thereby *alien* to that of an infinite intellect.²⁴⁴

It is also important to return to the idea, explored earlier, that the perspective of empirical apperception is ineliminable. Because we are finite intellects, we know only under conditions of sensibility. Even if we do not know *from* sensibility, we always know *with* it, so to speak. And this is just to return to the very first sentence of the first *Critique*'s Introduction: that all knowledge *begins* with but does not thereby *arise* from experience. It is part and parcel of knowing *with* sensibility that our knowledge is accompanied by experience in inner sense. This surely contributes to the difficulty of being able to comprehend the idea that we are self-limiting, for we can never fully escape the limited view from empirical apperception. To put it another way, we are always at once the I of pure self-consciousness (the I that itself is limitless) and the I of empirical self-consciousness (the I that is inside the limits of space and time).

What we have just elaborated enables us to see two things. First, that knowledge is strife. This is in many ways the basic lesson of the first *Critique*: objective knowledge is really possible, but at the same time it always remains unsatisfied. And this is a strife we have to live with; it is the strife that is essential to the finite intellect. Second, we are enabled to see that this strife reveals our spontaneity to be both limitless and finite. As such, we must think our finite intellect as the self-finitization of the infinite intellect. But in thinking this, we must realize that we are only thinking *negatively*, and neither expanding the field of cognition nor placing true objectivity beyond our reach. It is only through this act of negation that we get the objectivity of our knowledge into view.

²⁴⁴ For Kant there are no "logical aliens," meaning that it is not possible to conceive of beings that have a different form of understanding. So, we do not have an understanding that is *alien* from God's, but merely one that is limited (finite, and as Kant says, "empty"). For more on this theme, see Conant (1991).

§7 Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to highlight one looming issue that needs much further discussion. The contention of AS was initially that nothing escapes the I of pure self-consciousness. It has emerged that in addition to this general requirement, we must not allow that anything escapes this I *qua act of thought*. This is seen in the rejection of SR's claim that while everything is internal to the I as our shared capacity for knowledge, there are objective constraints on our knowledge from outside particular acts of judgment. But there is much left to be said about this issue. I have in mind, for instance, the project of determining more precisely what it is for the understanding to be a *general form of activity*. We have partially addressed this here by arguing that it is the activity of self-consciousness. But, among the various debates that we have looked at, much hangs on determining exactly what it means for that self-consciousness to be an act that is not (merely) the act of an empirical I, but of a universally-shared I. And this is really nothing other than the question of how to understand the relation between the universal and empirical I such that they are *identical* and yet *different*. The pursuit of a full answer is going to require, among other things: (1) an analysis of the relation between judgment as an original act (or "generic" act as Engstrom has sometimes put it) that fundamentally gives unity to the two stems of knowledge (generic in that it is prior to any particular judgment), and as a particular act; and (2) relatedly, a more thorough treatment of the issue of the relationship between judgment and time—in particular, how judgment can be tensed without its truth being relative to or *inside* time.

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