

Is perception concept-dependent according to Kant?¹

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In the contemporary analytic philosophy of mind, one can recognize a tendency, supported by the force of arguments of John McDowell, to read Kant as a philosopher who gives succour to some ideas of the so-called conceptualists, most importantly the idea that epistemically valuable representational content involves only conceptual content. This reading is based mainly on one “slogan” from the opening passages of Kant’s *Transcendental Logic* and also, perhaps, on a specific understanding of several claims formulated in the transcendental deduction of the categories. What McDowell deems his “Kantian background” results, as I think, from a rather one-sided reading of Kant’s theory of experience, although, it seems, passages may be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason* which also confirm the conceptualist interpretation. What I would consider McDowell’s misreading resembles, to a degree, the Hegelian one. Hegel also, in my opinion, mistakenly draws attention, as in *Glauben und Wissen*², to the fact that intuition and understanding are but two aspects or functions of *one* faculty, which is reason appearing in the sphere of empirical consciousness as transcendental imagination. In this way, he nullifies the methodological and epistemological importance of Kant’s distinction between two, mutually irreducible, sources and forms of knowledge.

In this paper, I want to discuss some arguments in support of the following interpretative theses: (i) Kant did *not* identify representational content with conceptual content; (ii) he distinguished a class of nonconceptual representations which necessarily underlie all representational content; and (iii) he did not explicitly state that, for experience to occur, conceptual capacities need to be brought into play. In a word, thus, to make use of present-day labelling, Kant would be more sympathetic to the claims of nonconceptualists, rather than those made by their adversaries. This conclusion entails that representations, in the Kantian sense, refer to objects, i.e. possess the characteristic of intentionality (object-

¹ This essay is a preparatory draft for a larger piece of work on Kant and perception. Part of the research I was able to carry out as a visiting student at the University of St Andrews in Spring 2007. I would like to thank Prof. Miłowit Kuniński, who supervises my PhD thesis at the Jagiellonian University, and Dr. Jens Timmermann, who supervised my research in St Andrews, for helpful advice and support for my endeavors in the field of Kant studies.

² Cf. Hegel [1986] pp. 17-18, 20.

directedness), irrespective of their being of a conceptual or nonconceptual nature, in other words, that perceiving an object does not come down to forming a belief concerning that object, or a disposition to do so.

Although it is by no means easy to provide a unitary characteristic of conceptual, and hence also nonconceptual, content³, some criteria of the former might be brought out⁴. It is assumed that, for experiential content to be considered conceptual, all of the criteria must be jointly satisfied. The criteria in question involve:

- (a) Compositionality: conceptual content (CC) is functionally determined by its constituents; to put it differently, it is a function of a composition of more basic elements;
- (b) Cognitive Significance: (i) weak: State *m* has conceptual content *c* if subject *S* undergoing state *m* believes, or is able to believe, that *c* (in normal epistemic conditions). For example, John's seeing a red tomato has conceptual content if John can form a belief that the tomato is red; (ii) strong: CC must obey the principle of contradiction: subject *S* cannot undergo state *m* with conceptual content of the form *F and non-F*. Cognitive Significance in its strong version might otherwise be dubbed a rational constraint criterion, for it stipulates that sense experiential content is liable to the same kind of limitations which are imposed on all meaningful thought (and speech)⁵;
- (c) Reference Determinacy: CC has a semantic value understood along the lines of the Fregean principle that sense of an expression (*Sinn*) determines its reference (*Bedeutung*). Metaphorically speaking, concepts provide tools by means of which rational subjects "grasp" mind-independent entities.

The structure of the paper is as follows: in Section I, I briefly consider McDowell's conceptualist interpretation, hinting at some corollaries of this reading, which, apparently, do not quite apply to Kant. In Section II, I introduce some basic Kantian notions, such as representation (*Vorstellung*) and concept (*Begriff*), and distinctions, such as that between intuition and concept, sensibility and understanding, spontaneity and receptivity. What McDowell downplays is the fact that the distinction between the faculties of sensibility and understanding, in most

³ Cf. Frege [1952] pp. 42-43. Frege refrained from providing a definition of concept, as he doubted whether such a definition would be possible.

⁴ Cf. Gunther [2003] – the Introduction.

⁵ The criterion in question is challenged in Crane [1988], analyzing a waterfall illusion example. According to Crane, this sort of illusions testify for nonconceptuality of sense experiential content. Crane's argument is addressed in Gunther [2001].

of the cases, runs along the same lines as the distinction between receptivity and spontaneity. Therefore, the thesis that “conceptual capacities” operate at the very “lowest” level of “taking in” sense impressions turns out rather exaggerated, if not altogether false. In Section III, I develop an argumentation for what might be called Kant’s nonconceptualism, based on the Transcendental Aesthetic, and some pre-Critical writings, such as the Inaugural Dissertation and the 1768 essay on the differentiation of regions in space. Most importantly, it is to be shown that Kant’s theory of the pure forms of intuition and pure intuitions themselves, i.e. time and space, allows to further a claim that underlying *all* cognitive content are nonconceptual representations of an embodied subject’s location in one spatiotemporal framework.

I. McDowell’s Kant

What McDowell identifies as his “Kantian background”⁶ comes down to emphasizing Kant’s famous statement from the introductory passages of the Transcendental Logic, i.e. a remark about thoughts without intuitional content being empty and intuitions without concepts (unconceptualized intuitions) being blind⁷. McDowell interprets the remark as expressing what might be called a Cooperation Thesis (in short, CT), which I shall formulate as stating that:

CT: Neither sensibility, nor understanding (“conceptual capacities”), when taken alone, are capable of providing representational content: in order that such content be delivered, intuitions and concepts must be combined together, or, in the Kantian parlance, synthesized into a representation (in other words, they must cooperate to form a representation)⁸.

CT entails that no perceptual content can be obtained without conceptual capacities operating at the level of taking in the information provided by the senses, unless it is to lack representational properties. What I call “representational properties” of mental content can be understood as object-directedness of that con-

⁶ Cf. McDowell [1994] p. 4.

⁷ Cf. Kant [1998] A 51/B 75.

⁸ Cf. McDowell [1994] p. 9: “The original Kantian thought was that empirical knowledge results from a co-operation between receptivity and spontaneity”. See also McDowell [1998] p. 471: “This picture of *visual experiences as conceptual shapings of visual consciousness* [italics added – A.T.] is already deeply Kantian, in the way it appeals to sensibility and understanding so as to make sense of how experiences have objective purport”. Also *ibid.*, p. 488: “Kant suggests an understanding of thoughts having objective purport that centres on the immediate presentness of objects to conceptual consciousness in intuition”.

tent. One represents an object, in thought, imagination, or sense-experience, if one's thought, imagination, or sense-experience is *about* that object. Surely, what one's thought etc. is about is the content of one's thought etc. If content lacked representational properties, it would be, so to speak, cognitively empty; in other words, it would have no semantic value and it could not provide a basis for judgments.

As obvious as the above argument stands, it is less evident whether its formulation is Kantian in spirit. When Kant stated that "thoughts without content are empty", he indeed meant content delivered by the faculty of intuition (sensibility), but he did not mean to imply that such thoughts are necessarily *meaningless*. On the contrary, they do not have objective validity (they do not refer to an object) but they *may* have meaning (the Fregean *Sinn*). Such thoughts result from the application of unschematized categories in judgments, that is, from not restricting the scope of these judgments to objects of the senses. Thus, they are empty in the sense that they have no empirical application, and thereby deliver no *empirical* cognition. I am not entirely sure whether this also makes them deprived of any semantic value whatsoever and insensitive to truth-valuation.

Now, let me take a look at the other part of Kant's "slogan", namely that "intuitions without concepts are blind"⁹. For McDowell, this means that nonconceptual, or unconceptualized, intuitions lack representational content, and therefore they are like "bare presences" which "cannot be a ground of anything"¹⁰, more specifically, they cannot figure as reasons, or justifications, for empirical beliefs, and so they have no cognitive significance. But it is not so obvious that Kant would agree to the statement that unconceptualized intuitions are deprived of *representational* content. Recall an example he gives in his *Logic*, of a "savage" who "sees a house in the distance, the use of which [s]he does not know"¹¹. The difference between her and a person who knows the purpose of the object presented lies in the form of her knowledge, rather than its matter (object), which is in both cases the same: both persons can see a house. Whereas the savage's "form of knowledge" consists in intuition alone, the other person's "form of knowledge" is "intuition and concept combined"¹². And intuition itself, albeit unconceptualized, does,

⁹ This part of the "slogan", as understood by McDowell, is applied in his rendering of Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument. Cf. McDowell [1994] pp. 18-23. According to McDowell, the central idea of the argument is that "a bare presence cannot be a ground of anything" (p. 19) and it aims at "a general rejection of the Given" (p. 18).

¹⁰ See the footnote above.

¹¹ Cf. Kant [1992] p. 24.

¹² *Ibid.*

according to Kant, present an *object*. One might compare Kant's distinction between these two forms of knowledge to F. Dretske's distinction between thing-awareness and fact-awareness¹³. Dretske thinks that it is not necessary, for a subject of experience, to be in possession of a given concept in order to be aware of (consciously represent) a thing this concept refers to: for example, a mouse can smell *a burning toast* without ever being capable of forming a belief *that the toast is burning*, this specific awareness exerting an impact on the mouse's behaviour. The mouse and the savage are conscious, though not self-conscious, in the Leibnizian sense which requires the capability of forming a judgement for an individual to be ascribed the possession of self-consciousness.

One may wonder what made the conceptualist interpretation seem true to some philosophers¹⁴. I think that one could be inclined to enter McDowell's interpretative route first and foremost on the basis of a general notion of the purpose of Kant's transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding, in particular – the famous statement about the “I think”, which “must be able to accompany all my representations” (B 132), endowing unity on the manifold of experiential content and bringing it under the rule of the categories; and also a less famous but a bit ambiguous statement from paragraph A 97 of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which reads in the original: “Diese Begriffe nun, welche *a priori* das reine Denken bei jeder Erfahrung enthalten, finden wir an den Kategorien” (“Now these concepts, which contain *a priori* the pure thinking in every experience, we find in the categories.”). If all experiences “contain” the categories as their necessary conditions and if all experiences, or representations, involve self-awareness (“I think”), then indeed for Kant all representational content would be identical with conceptual content, and an ascription of experience to a subject would automatically entail an ascription of a belief (or a disposition to belief), formed on the basis of the experience, to her. Insofar as experience is to provide information about its objects, its content must be conceptually structured and remain exposed to constant “rational scrutiny” by the subject of experience. Perhaps, then, one may do justice to the reading promoted by McDowell – though, for some reasons or other, he makes no reference to the passages mentioned – in that one distinguishes two strands present in Kant's theory of empirical cognition: the above outlined “transcendental-philosophical” strand, and a “psychological” one, which I hinted at when cit-

¹³ Cf. Dretske [1993].

¹⁴ Noteworthy, in the Introduction to an anthology of texts on nonconceptualism, Gunther [2003] identifies a Kantian inspiration behind conceptualism of McDowell, B. Brewer, S. Sedivy and others.

ing the example with the savage and which I will elaborate on in the forthcoming sections. The first one involves a normative claim in that it makes it possible to sort out non-empirical (a priori) principles inherent in our idea of empirical cognition, whereas the second one focuses on a description of what happens in cognitive processes.

However that might be, conceptualism is quite a contentious standpoint itself, according to some authors, too “coarse” to account for some phenomenological intricacies of experience, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, resulting in a conception of experience which makes its scope limited to adult human beings: for surely one cannot ascribe possession of conceptual capacities to human infants or non-linguistic animals. Does then any conception of experience apply to them at all? How can they be treated as learning and developing their cognitive skills? Two kinds of arguments: from phenomenology of experience and from developmental psychology are most frequently adopted by the defenders of nonconceptualism. The first group of arguments focuses on a generic distinction between perceptual and conceptual content, the former being “richer” or more “fine-grained” than the latter. F. Dretske¹⁵, e.g., distinguishes between digital and analogue informational content which corresponds to the conceptual vs. nonconceptual (perceptual) content distinction. Perceptual content is analogue, and hence nonconceptual, since no judgement formulated on its basis conveys the whole information encoded in the content. In fact, conceptualization of perceptual content entails loss of information, much like abstraction on some accounts of concept-formation.

The second group of arguments derives from developmental psychology and psychology of animals. According to J. L. Bermúdez, “theories of nonconceptual content offer promising ways of dealing with problems in several areas of scientific psychology. It seems, from work both in animal learning theory and developmental psychology, that a form of *intentional explanation* is required to account for the behaviour of creatures which it is not appropriate to describe as concept-using. Such explanations clearly require the ascription of states with nonconceptual contents”¹⁶. The hypothesis of nonconceptual representational content helps, e.g., to explain why babies “grasp” the principle of object permanence – they perceive *objects*, rather than sense impressions in disarray, or how Bermúdez puts it, “a booming, buzzing confusion of sensations”¹⁷ – even though they have no mastery of the concept of object at the very early stage of their growth (and the theorist

¹⁵ Cf. Dretske [1981].

¹⁶ Bermúdez [1995] pp. 336-7 (italics added – A.T.).

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 337.

does not want to become committed to nativism!). As shown by dishabituation experiments¹⁸, babies behave *as if* they were making inferences requiring the employment of the concept of object. They cannot make inferences, however, since making inferences requires a wide range of capacities which infants do not possess, such as formulating judgements, providing justifications for them, attributing a logical value to them etc. Therefore, they must represent the object in a certain way; otherwise, they would not react with surprise to its seemingly losing, in the experiment, some of the properties constitutive of its being an object. The infants' way of representing (perceiving) objects must be, on this cognitive-psychological hypothesis, other than conceptual.

II. The Kantian notion of representation

There have already been formulated statements in which the concepts of representation and representational content were employed without, however, making clear whether these concepts, as used today, have much in common with their counterpart (i.e. *Vorstellung*) used by Kant. Now before I take a look at how Kant employs the concept of representation, let me try to briefly characterize the contemporary context in which it occurs. In some areas of scientific and philosophical psychology, the concept of representation serves as a useful tool for the explanation of behaviour of not only rational human beings, but also non-linguistic animal creatures. Within the past decade, one of the issues dominating in the philosophy of mind and perception was whether representational content-ascriptions can be performed on the subpersonal level of explanation on which no belief-ascriptions can be made¹⁹. Representations would then have to play a role of intermediaries in explaining why two different creatures can react differently to the same set of stimuli in (qualitatively) identical circumstances.

On the account provided by F. Dretske, in *Naturalizing the Mind*²⁰, representation is defined as a physical carrier of information. Accordingly, the carrier becomes distinguished from the content (information). Representations are states endowed with representational functions, i.e. functions of indicating certain contents. Dretske divides representations into conceptual and perceptual, associating

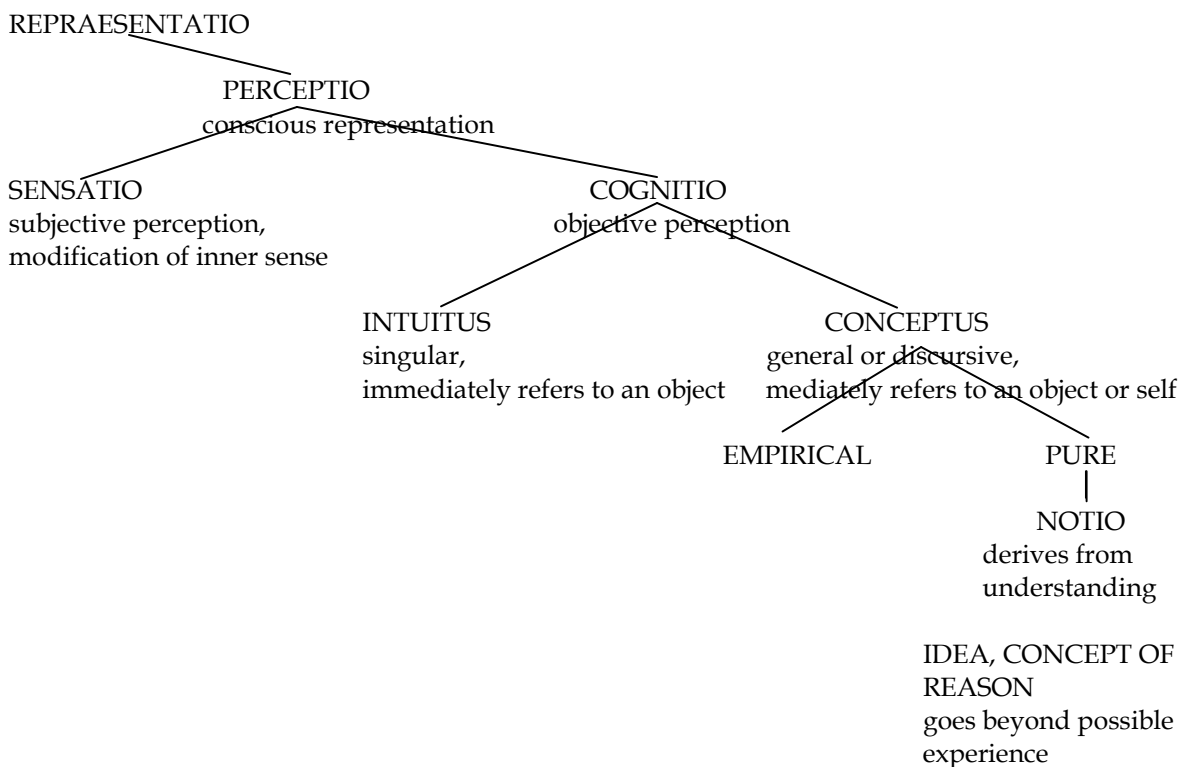
¹⁸ Bermúdez mentions a "drawbridge experiment" in which infants behave *as if* they possessed the concept of the impenetrability of an object – they show surprise when a rotating screen seems to pass through an object placed behind it; cf. *ibid.*, p. 338.

¹⁹ Cf. Bermúdez [1995], Dennett [1996], McDowell [1994a].

²⁰ Cf. Dretske [1995].

the former with whatever kind of thought (belief, judgment etc.)²¹, and the latter – with the deliverances of sensibility. Perceptual representations, and perceptual representational content, are independent from the conceptual ones but not vice versa, hence, to recall an earlier distinction, fact-awareness is built upon thing-awareness.

The first thing which may strike one as evident, when comparing the above account with the Kantian one, is that it does not demand that representation be attributed to a self-conscious mind, as a specifically mental function; there may be extra- or non-mental representations either (such as in pressure gauges or speedometers). Besides, Kant seems not to draw a clear borderline between the act of representing and the object (as) represented, that is between a mental function and the content it points at. Little wonder, then, that the early readers and students of Kant tended to grant representation (*Vorstellung*) with a partly subjective and a partly objective status²². Kant's division of representations is presented in paragraph A 320/B 377 of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, as illustrated by the diagram below:



²¹ How can thought be physical in nature? What, supposedly, is at stake here is a distinction between a content and an underlying state: physical (material) states may provide a basis for non-physical contents in the sense that if no such state occurred, no contents could be given.

²² For a discussion of the concept of representation see, e.g., S. Maimon's letter to Kant (September 20, 1791) in Kant [1967].

Thus, intuitions belong to the class of knowledge-delivering representations (*cognitiones*). Noteworthy, Kant narrowed the notion of concept (*conceptus*, *Begriff*) to general or discursive conscious objective representation. In *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma ac principiis*²³, though, he would rather stick – at least, nominally – to the Wolffian understanding of *Begriff*, as is evident from his talking about the *concept* of time and the *concept* of space. According to Wolff, a concept (*Begriff*) relates to “whatever representation (*Vorstellung*) of things in our thoughts”, either by an image (*im Bilde*), or by a word (*im Worte*), or by means of signs (*durch Zeichen*)²⁴. Thus, Wolff identifies representations with concepts: to represent means, for him, to conceive. For Kant, in the Critical period, however, the notion of representation gains priority over the notion of concept. Representation, in the most general sense, relates to the whole class of mental functions and/or their contents, and conception – only to a sub-class of them.

What is the relation between concepts and intuitions in Kant’s epistemology? Do they have anything in common²⁵? What kind of “cognitions” (informational content) do they deliver? Are they, as “forms of knowledge”, mutually dependent, mutually independent or is one class of conscious representations dependent upon the other? Again, terminological distinctions may prove instructive. Both at the beginning of the Transcendental Aesthetic and in the opening passages of the Transcendental Logic, Kant distinguishes sensibility, the *lower cognitive faculty*, which is merely receptive and which delivers intuitions, and understanding, the *higher cognitive faculty*, which is spontaneous and which delivers, or produces, concepts – as sources of two disjunctive and complementary classes of conscious objective representations²⁶. The intuitive mode of cognition requires that sensations be structured by the pure forms of sense perception: time and space. Since the structuring is not done by the higher – spontaneous – cognitive faculty, it does not involve conceptualization. And since it is done by receptivity, the very structure by means of which sensations become ordered has to be already there instead of being made out of the given material (which Kant calls a “manifold”).

²³ In Kant [1968].

²⁴ Cf. Wolff [1910] p. 9.

²⁵ These questions are by no means naive. Suffice it to say that the very intuitions vs. concepts (*resp.* sensibility vs. understanding) dualism is not an innocent conception at all, i.e. a conception which would not implicate any disputable presuppositions. For one may ask: why (on what grounds) is thinking distinguished from perceiving? Cannot perceiving be spontaneous, active, rather than passive? According to Kant, it cannot; as I read him, unlike Berkeley, he is no constructivist as regards sense perception. More on that issue in Falkenstein [2004].

²⁶ See also Kant [1992] pp. 26-27.

On the basis of the above statements, let me formulate the following Heterogeneity Thesis (in short, HT):

HT: Intuitions and concepts derive from two different, mutually irreducible sources: sensibility and understanding. Sensibility is receptive, understanding is spontaneous and they cannot exchange their functions.

From the HT, it seems to follow that information processing takes place only in the understanding, and that it involves concepts. Are then perceptual states non-informational? Not necessarily. One should avoid making inferences about the kind of content from the kind of cognitive act directed at that content. It would be rather odd to suppose that the particular dog I see at a particular moment *must* be different from the one I think about at the very same moment, and so that it is only by reference to cognitive acts that one can individuate their content (what these acts are about).

The picture which emerges from the above considerations may seem not to be quite consistent, though. For it has been said, on the one hand, that intuition alone can provide cognition of objects (see the diagram with the distinctions from the passage A 320/B 377 of the *Critique*) but, on the other hand, the Cooperation Thesis (see Section I), which says that only intuitions combined, or synthesized with concepts can deliver empirical cognition, still obtains. Besides, HT entails a problem: how is that “cooperation” of sensibility and understanding possible? What power, or cognitive faculty, motivates the synthesis of the two kinds of heterogeneous cognitions? I would venture a bold answer: none. CT and HT *do* go very well together. The former expresses that (i) knowledge has to be mediated in judgments and (ii) experience provides foundations for knowledge, in other words, something without which we, human beings, could not start off as subjects of cognition. HT, on the other hand, suggests that human mind possesses a sort of “architectonic” structure: its functions are built upon one another, with the most fundamental one(s) at the bottom.

Does perception of an object, then, occur at the level of intuition or does it occur no sooner than after all the “manifold” has been brought together by the “synthesizing” activity of the understanding? On the reading outlined, according to Kant, perceiving an object requires no more than intuition, and *cognition*, which culminates in forming a judgment based on perception of the object, would be possible at the level of self-consciously processing the contents of perception. In some notes which help understand his “mature” thought, Kant talked about degrees of knowledge, of which he enumerated the following: (i) an idea (*Vorstellung*); (ii) a conscious idea – perception; (iii) knowledge of a thing as related to

other things – identification and differentiation; (iv) conscious knowledge of a thing – cognition. In particular, he admitted that “animals know objects but do not cognize them”; (v) conception – cognition “by the understanding by means of concepts”; (vi) rational cognition, which is perspicuous; and (vii) rational a priori comprehension, which is adequate²⁷. As one can clearly see, the degrees are ordered into a hierarchy, so that a lower degree precedes a higher one and a higher degree presupposes, or is built upon a lower one but not the other way round. For instance, a subject may have a conscious idea of (perceive) a thing (ii) without even perceptually recognizing the thing as this or that (iii, iv), let alone forming a conception of it (v), but the stage of conception implicates the earlier stages of being sensibly affected by an object, becoming conscious of it, grasping it on the background of relations with other objects, and consciously knowing it as this or that.

Concluding: I have provided some textual evidence undermining McDowell’s claim to the effect that the “picture of visual experiences as conceptual shapings of visual consciousness is already deeply Kantian”²⁸. I have also given textual support to the claim that there is no point denying that Kant considered representations as being about objects (regardless of the “form” of the representations). Now time has come to ground my claims in the original Kantian arguments throwing more light on the textual evidence gathered.

III. Cognitive significance of nonconceptual content

To form an adequate picture of the role of intuition in Kant’s epistemology, it is indispensable to see how his ideas developed in the late 1760s. and the early 1770s. ending up in the theory we find in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Within more than a decade Kant was building up arguments which were to become the cornerstones of his “Copernican revolution” and transcendental philosophy. The arguments I intend to examine may be divided into the following groups: (1) arguments for a *subjective* character of the intuitions of space and time; (2) further determination of the character of space and time: *non-discursive* (concept-independent) forms of intuition and pure intuitions themselves; (3) arguments for the cognitive significance of time and space as providing a *basis for all conceptual cognition*, and in particular guaranteeing synthetic a priori status to judgements of geometry and mechanics (science of motion).

²⁷ Cf. Kant [1992] pp. 55-56. One may draw attention to the Cartesian terminological heritage present in these expressions.

²⁸ Cf. McDowell [1998] p. 471.

As to the first group of arguments, a range of them can be found in Kant's 1768 essay *Concerning the ultimate foundation of the differentiation of regions in space*, where, against the Leibnizians, Kant sets out to argue for the absolute character of space. In fact, however, what he demonstrates is that the representation of space, including all possible spatial relations, finds its source in the embodied subject of cognition. Subject- or body-relative are spatial determinations, such as up-down, left-right, back-front, and spatial directions, since their reference could not be established otherwise than by reference to a subject's locatedness in *some* "point" in space. "The most accurate of heavenly charts", Kant writes in the essay on the regions, "no matter how accurately I have it in mind, would not in the end enable me to know from the known region, for example from the north, on which side of the horizon I should seek the rising sun, if, apart from the position of the stars to each other, the regions were not determined by the position of the sketch in relation to my hands"²⁹. Spatial relations are not abstracted from relations between objects, nor from experiences of the relations within the objective realm, because such relations and such experiences already presuppose a spatial framework in which they become established. But this "spatial framework" is also not something given in itself: it originates from a subject endowing her experiences with a unique structure. In other words, by means of the pure forms of intuition, the subject organizes, and constantly re-organizes, her perceptual field. To give an example: a row of signs read from my left to the right does have a determinate significance (meaning), unlike the very same row read from my right to the left, and so the signs "in themselves" have no meaning unless given a specific structure. According to Kant, space and time cannot be "constructed" out of some more basic material – sensations; they could not retain their a priori status then. On this account, one should say that the subject does not estimate a distance between two perceived objects on the basis of her judging what tactile and visual sensations she would have if she changed her position in space; rather, on the basis of her estimation of a distance, the subject may predict what sensations she would receive if her position altered. This intuitive grasp of spatial (and temporal) relations allows the subject to guide her behaviour towards (empirical) objects.

The second group of arguments deals with the non-discursive character of space and time. Conscious objective representations may be either singular, or general and discursive. But neither space, nor time is a general (or discursive) representation³⁰. That is because: (i) one cannot think of many "spaces" ("times") in-

²⁹ Kant [1992] p. 39.

³⁰ Cf. Kant [1998] A 25, B 40, A 32, B 48; also Kant [1968] pp. 63-64, 68-69.

stantiating the concept “space” (“time”); whatever “space” (“time”) one would try to “cut out” from the whole, it is but a limitation of the all-encompassing representation of space (time). The relation of particular “spaces” (“times”) to the all-encompassing space is, therefore, not that of “falling under”, as is the case with particulars and concepts which the former exemplify; (ii) space is represented as an “infinite magnitude”, and time – as “limitless”. This means that they contain an infinite multiplicity of representations “in” them. To understand what Kant might have in mind here, one could imagine that one carries out an analysis of the “concept” of space or time. Whereas by analyzing a genuine concept one would come to a finite set of features composing the concept (i.e. to other concepts), from space and time one would not be able to analyze out any set of features. Pure intuitions are not composed in any way, they are simple. Empirical content does not constitute the content of the representations of space and time. Do they have any content then? If not, then why does Kant call them not only forms of intuition, but also pure intuitions? If they are representations, what do they represent? A natural answer would be: the mind, since they are ways in which the mind intuits objects (or organizes its perceptual field). A plausible hypothesis is that this mind has to be embodied, one of its a priori representations including space, itself necessary to structure the “manifold” data derivable from outer senses and depending on the location and movement of the experiencing subject.

The above arguments are meant to show that time and space are singular representations. But in order to demonstrate that they are intuitions, one should also prove their immediacy. In what sense can time and space be understood as immediate representations of objects? One can say that a representation refers immediately to an object if no other representation is required for the object-reference to be secured. As pure forms of intuition, time and space are necessary for any representation to occur, but it is necessary to make sure whether they are also sufficient for that. This requires an employment of the third group of arguments – the arguments for cognitive significance of the pure forms of intuition. Here Kant shows that time and space lie at the ground of all our cognition.

To demonstrate the cognitive significance of pure intuitions, Kant points out cases in which by merely conceptual means the subject of cognition would not arrive at a particular kind of knowledge. These are cases in which thinking cannot replace intuiting, because concepts are – as one would say today – too coarse-grained to render distinctions which might be represented in intuition, itself sufficient to present us with an object. In his essay on the regions, as well as in the Inaugural Dissertation, Kant gives examples of incongruent counterparts which illustrate the point. On Kant’s definition, an incongruent counterpart is an “object

which is completely like and similar to another, although it cannot be included exactly within the same limits"³¹. The examples delivered comprise: two spherical triangles, human left and right hands, and a human hand and its reflection in a mirror. Kant thinks that a complete description of such objects would not make it possible for us to individuate them. It is only in intuition that their – numerical – difference can be spotted. The examples and the argument they further may easily be found unconvincing, however. For, it can be noticed, “my (e.g.) left hand’s being reflected in a mirror” is a predicate by means of which I can distinguish one possible world (in which there is my left hand reflected) from another (in which it is not). I think a defender of Kant might argue on the following lines (on the basis of her commonsensical insights, rather than knowledge of geometry, in this case): there is nothing in the description of a hand and its reflection in a mirror – even in a description in terms of Cartesian coordinates – that would make me ascribe the predicate “left” to one of them. Besides, I *see* that my left hand is my right one in the reflection. How can I account for that? I do not know any laws of geometry which explain this phenomenon, nor do I infer this judgment from another one. Thus, my knowledge has to be immediate, hence intuitive.

Interestingly enough, Kant contends that the principle of contradiction – the very fundamental principle of all meaningful thought – cannot be properly understood without reference to time. In the Inaugural Dissertation, he remarks: “Indeed so far is it from being the case that anyone has ever yet deduced from elsewhere and explained the concept of time with the help of the reason, that rather the principle of contradiction itself has the same concept [i.e. time – A.T.] as a premise and bases itself on the concept as its condition”³². For predicating A and non-A of a thing amounts to no contradiction unless the condition of simultaneity is added, and simultaneity is one of the determinations of time. Therefore, since the principle of contradiction constitutes all thinking, one shall arrive at the conclusion that in the order of the conditions of cognition time-awareness, which “rests on an internal law of the mind”³³ comes before, and so constitutes the very first principle of thought. This seems to suggest that the temporally structured content of consciousness needs not be conceptual, or perhaps even eligible for conceptualization.

Last but not least, the arguments for synthetic a priori character of two scientific disciplines: geometry and mechanics, confirm the cognitive significance of

³¹ Kant [1968] p. 41.

³² Ibid., p. 67.

³³ Ibid.

pure intuitions in the sense that they grant them with the role of sources of a certain kind of cognition. The argument from geometry formulated in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* has also been recognized as Kant's first argument for transcendental idealism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in particular, the transcendental ideality of the pure forms of intuition. Kant claims that the laws of geometry cannot be inferred by way of a mere analysis of geometrical concepts. They cannot be formulated prior to (in the non-temporal sense of priority) and without presupposing the construction of a corresponding object in intuition. Thus, geometrical knowledge is not analytic but synthetic. It is also a priori, i.e. necessary and universally valid, to the extent that there can be no exceptions from a geometrical law³⁴. If there were, geometrical knowledge would be derivable from experience, and hence a posteriori, empirical rather than pure. Since geometry requires the intuition of space as underlying its laws, the very possibility of that discipline entails, on Kant's view, the necessity of a pure a priori intuition of space³⁵.

Concluding remarks

Although it is difficult to find in philosophical literature a unitary characteristic of nonconceptual content, the contemporary nonconceptualists, as R. Hanna remarked³⁶, owe a lot to Kant. Without exaggeration, one may indeed grant that the author of the three *Critiques* gave support to the kind of philosophical reflection which does not disregard the particularly human dimension of cognition, more specifically the fact that the subject of cognition is an embodied subject. Kant says that the idea of space and time is not inborn; it is rather a "law of the mind" governing its proper conduct and use in the environment. We are not born with the ideas of space and time, but we make use of them, so to speak, as part of our nature, on the very first encounter with the world, before we can employ any empirical and/ or reflective concepts.

³⁴ How can geometry be universally and necessarily valid while it in fact describes the way of functioning of the human mind? Would there be no geometry if human beings were equipped with a different kind of intuition or would there be a different geometry then? These are crucial questions but I have to delay addressing them on another occasion.

³⁵ It is, perhaps, quite a contingent fact that geometry, as a branch of knowledge, exists (a world without human beings, or without human beings engaged in geometrical investigations is easily conceivable), but it is necessary that, once it exists, it had a synthetic a priori, and thus necessary, character. Surely, Kant did not, and could not predict the 20th-century development of non-Euclidean geometries. On the other hand, his claims may perhaps remain in power when regarded on the appropriate level of generality.

³⁶ Cf. Hanna [2005] p. 248.

Recalling the criteria of conceptuality mentioned at the beginning, one shall note that, for sure, they are not satisfied by all kinds of representational content in Kant's theory of experience.

- (a) Pure intuitions thwart the Compositionality criterion: they are not a function of more basic elements, nor do they presuppose a synthesis of the experiential "manifold", rather they – being non-discursive and immediately referring to the object – make this synthesis possible.
- (b) The a priori intuitional content is cognitively significant in that it must precede belief-formation. Obviously, it does not provide the content for beliefs, but rather – in that it remains belief- or concept-independent – a basis for this kind of content (at least in the case of empirical knowledge, for "concepts without intuitions are empty").
- (c) Concepts do not suffice, in some cases, to individuate objects given in experience, and so the criterion of Reference Determinacy becomes undermined. In the case of incongruent counterparts, it is only in intuition that two objects can be distinguished from one another.

On such an interpretation of Kant's transcendental epistemology, granting intuition the prime role in the acquisition of experience and knowledge, McDowell's allegedly Kantian thesis about receptivity being impregnated with spontaneity throughout fades away as unconvincing, not only because it disregards the letter, but, most importantly, because it stifles the spirit of Kant's philosophical enterprise. For, as I have been trying to show, no matter if the arguments mentioned in Section III are themselves plausible and would withstand a thoroughgoing criticism or not, there is much evidence that, for Kant, it is rather spontaneity that is "impregnated with receptivity throughout": the objective world has its source in the a priori laws of sensibility.

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