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Aspects of Objectivity and Objective Reference in Kant's Transcendental Idealism

Matti Saarni



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**ASPECTS OF OBJECTIVITY AND OBJECTIVE REFERENCE
IN KANT'S TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM**

Matti Saarni



**UNIVERSITY
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SERIES EDITORS:

Olli Koistinen

Juha Räikkä

Department of Philosophy

University of Turku

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Written by

Matti Saarni

Doctoral Programme of Social and Behavioural Sciences, University of Turku,
Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy, Contemporary History and
Political Science

Supervised by

Professor Olli Koistinen

University of Turku, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy,
Contemporary History and Political Science

Doctor Hemmo Laiho

University of Turku, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy,
Contemporary History and Political Science

Reviewed by

Associate Professor Marcel Quarfood

University of Umeå

Doctor Kari Väyrynen

University of Oulu

Opponent

Doctor Marcel Quarfood

University of Umeå

Chairperson (custos)

Professor Olli Koistinen

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Abstract

This study analyzes and lays out different aspects of Kant's account of the concept of objectivity and objective reference in the broad view, as well as their conditions, to show the relevance of Kant's view to contemporary philosophy, and to answer some of the criticisms expressed toward Kant, which criticisms often seem to be based on misguided readings of his doctrines. I aim to show that Kant's philosophy is not – contrary to what is often claimed – overly subjectivistic with the expense of losing objectivity. Rather, his theory of objectivity and objective reference is both coherent and relevant as a philosophical theory today. Furthermore, Kant's account of objectivity, as well as subjectivity, is essential in understanding the origin and meaning of the modern concept of objectivity, which concept is crucial to science in general.

In the beginning chapters I outline the most important philosophers and traditions which Kant was both using and criticizing. After this I show how Kant's transcendental idealism along with its notion of *a priori* forms of intuition and *a priori* concepts of the understanding proved to be requirements for objective reference. The key of objective reference lies in the necessary agreement of the categories to the objects of experience. However, these formal conditions are not the only conditions of proper, actual objective reference, as we also need to materialize the forms and concepts by both senses and language, which offer us sensations and words for judgments. Thus I argue that a more full list of the conditions of objective reference in Kant's case would consist of the purely formal conditions of experience, that is, the forms of intuition and the categories as the concepts of an object in general, and most of all the capacity to unite representations in the act of apperception, and what I have called the material or empirical conditions of objective reference, that is, our actual senses, as well as a language by which we can materialize judgments.

This work hopefully contributes first of all to the study of Kant's theoretical philosophy. In addition, the work is related to such fields as philosophy of science and conceptual history, because of the historical role of the concept of objectivity. Furthermore, the study may prove relevant to discussions in philosophy of language, and finally the discussion concerning the interpretation of Kant's philosophy among the contemporary speculative realists.

Tiivistelmä

Tutkimus analysoi ja esittelee Kantin objektiivisuuden ja objektiivisen referenssin käsitteiden eri aspektoja ja ehtoja, ja pyrkii osoittamaan Kantin näkemyksen merkittävyyden nykyfilosofialle. Samalla tutkimus vastaa joihinkin Kantia vastaan esitettyihin kritiikkeihin, jotka usein perustuvat puutteellisille tai virheellisille tulkinnoille Kantin opeista. Pyrin näyttämään, ettei Kantin filosofiaa ole syytä pitää kaiken objektiivisuuden kadottavan subjektiivisuuden filosofian esikuvana, kuten valitettavan usein tunnutaan oletavan. Sen sijaan Kantin teoria objektiivisuudesta ja objektiivisesta referenssistä on sekä koherentti että merkityksellinen nykyajan filosofian ja tieteen kannalta. Lisäksi Kantin käsitys objektiivisuudesta ja subjektiivisuudesta on olennainen pyrittäessä ymmärtämään nykyaikaista objektiivisuuden käsitettä, joka on keskeinen tieteelle ylipäänsä.

Ensimmäisissä luvuissa hahmottelen Kantin filosofista kontekstia suhteessa niihin filosofeihin ja oppeihin joita Kant itse sekä hyödynsi että kritisoi. Tämän jälkeen osoitan miten Kantin oppi transsendentaalisesta idealismista, mukaan lukien sen keskeiset käsitteet intuition *a priori* -muodoista ja ymmärryksen *a priori* -käsitteistä, onnistuu perustelemaan objektiivisen referenssin mahdollisuuden, jonka ydin on ymmärryksen peruskäsitteiden (kategorioiden) ja kokemuksen kohteiden (objektien) välisessä välttämättömässä yhteensopivuudessa. Nämä muodolliset *a priori* -ehdot eivät kuitenkaan yksinään riitä todelliseen objektiiviseen referenssiin, johon tarvitsemme myös empiriisiä elementtejä, kuten aisteja ja kieltä. Näin ollen väitän, että kattavampi luettelo objektiivisen referenssin edellytyksistä sisältää muodollisten *a priori* -elementtien (intuition ja ymmärryksen muodot) lisäksi myös materiaalisia, empiriisiä ehtoja, kuten aistit ja näiden tuottamat aistimukset, sekä kielen, jonka avulla arvostelmat on mahdollista materialisoida.

Tutkimuksella on toivottavasti annettavaa useammalle kuin yhdelle filosofian tutkimuskentälle, mutta lähtökohtaisesti se kuuluu filosofian historian tutkimukseen ja Kantin teoreettisen filosofian tutkimukseen. Työ sivuaa myös sellaisia filosofian aloja kuin tieteenfilosofia ja käsitehistoria, ennen kaikkea objektiivisuuden käsitteen historiallisen merkittävyyden takia. Lisäksi työllä saattaa olla relevanssia kielifilosofialle sekä lukuisille Kantiin liittyville kiistoille tämänhetkisten spekulatiivisten realistien piirissä.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Kant and the Problem of Objectivity

Why inquire about Kant and objectivity? Is Kant not the prototype of a ‘philosopher of the Subject’, who turned even metaphysics into a study of the human faculties? Indeed, while perhaps admitting Kant’s tremendous impact on philosophy, many thinkers after Kant, especially in the twentieth century, have held the view that Kant’s philosophy was overly subjectivistic and idealistic.¹ After all, he himself thought to have achieved a kind of *Copernican turn* in philosophy, by which he meant that our minds do not conform to the objects of the world but rather objects to the forms of our cognition:

Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us. This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when he did not make good progress in the explanation of the celestial motions if he assumed that the entire celestial host revolves around the observer, tried to see if he might not have greater success if he made the observer revolve and left the stars at rest.²

What exactly this conforming of objects to our cognition means is a question still debated, and for a reason, since the matter is complex enough. It may still seem

¹ For example, Frederick Beiser’s (2002) book *German Idealism* – which begins with Kant and then follows some of the immediate reactions to Kant’s philosophy – is subtitled *The Struggle against Subjectivity, 1781-1801*, and Dennis Schulting’s recent (2017) book is titled *Kant’s Radical Subjectivism*.

² B xvi.

puzzling how differing the interpretations of Kant's critical philosophy have been, and on how different arguments his philosophy is supported or rejected.³ The accusations concerning Kant's subjectivism and idealism began already in the notorious Göttingen review⁴, but they have seen an uprise both in the 20th Century and now in the 21st, for example in the form of such contemporary philosophical movements as *speculative realism*⁵ and *object-oriented ontology*⁶, the proponents of which have criticized Kant for trying to make philosophy simply a study of the subject, thereby being forgetful of the actual world with its variety of objects and their properties.⁷ These criticisms and debates are part of the interpretive context of the study at hand, but I try to show that they are often misrepresentations of Kant's actual position, which I attempt to sketch out, claiming Kantian objectivity to be essentially object-relatedness or object-referentiality. My task is to clarify this notion, or, 'strip it to the bone', to reveal a sort of Kantian 'skeleton' of objectivity and the nature of objects. This, I hope, will be beneficial for better understanding Kant's own questions and claims, as well as the debates and criticisms around him.

In this work I want to analyze and lay out the core along with different sides of Kant's conception of objectivity, in such a fashion which is historically correct, and allows us to keep Kant's distinction of 'objective' and 'subjective' as a valid and useful distinction of concepts. In my reading of Kant, the notion of objectivity does not carry the problematic implications which nowadays are often attributed to it, such as complete impartiality or absolute truth(fulness). Rather, I want to show that for Kant, 'objective' in the simplest sense means something which is directed to an object or about an object, whereas 'subjective' is something which is about the subject. My work illuminates what this reading of objectivity means in different contexts, and with regard to such notions as (the synthesis of) empiricism and

³ See e.g. Allison 2004; Heidegger 1997; Longuenesse 1998; Meillassoux 2007; Schulting 2011; Strawson 1966.

⁴ See e.g. Cassirer 1981, 219-221.

⁵ E.g. Meillassoux 2008

⁶ E.g. Harman 2010.

⁷ I discuss these two movements in chapter 7 of this work. Accusations concerning subjectivity and other problems in Kant's philosophy can nevertheless be found in countless criticisms. In light of this, it seems almost ironic that in fact Kant played a major role in the appearance of the modern conceptualization of objectivity and subjectivity in the first place.

rationalism, the difference between objectivity and objective validity⁸, the difference between objective and subjective sensations and senses, the possibility of ontology (as a general doctrine of objects and their properties) and the possibility of making objective judgments⁹. My work attempts to lay out what Kant took to be the ingredients or conditions of objectivity as proper object-referentiality, and illuminate the implications of Kant's account from various aspects.

I emphasize the fact that many of the central concepts which Kant uses, nowadays carry meanings, associations or implications very different from Kant's use. Examples of this are the notions of 'experience' and of 'objectivity'. As I will try to show, *experience* (*Erfahrung*), for Kant, did not mean what it nowadays often means, that is, feelings, sensations, or other 'subjective representations', as I think Kant might have put it.¹⁰ Kant's 'experience' is not subjective, but strictly objective, that is, universally valid cognition of objects. Likewise, the word 'objectivity' nowadays has some rather vague but still identifiable meanings which somewhat differ from both Kant's meaning, and especially the scholastic meanings used before Kant. In fact, the word *objectivity* (*Objektivität*), in the substantiated form, was never used by Kant himself, or others, during Kant's active years in philosophy.¹¹ Of course, Kant did speak e.g. of the 'objective validity' of concepts and distinguished between 'objective' and 'subjective' judgments.¹² It is indeed part of the aim of this study to show how Kant used the concepts of objective and subjective, to appreciate his role in the modern conception of objectivity, and the fact that the meaning of 'objectivity' became a question in the first place, as before

⁸ I elaborate on this in chapter 4.

⁹ See chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁰ I discuss Kant's notion of experience in Chapter 2.

¹¹ According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the word 'objectivity' was used for the first time in 1803. I am unsure whether this only applies to this exact word in English language, but it is nevertheless sure that Kant never used the word *Objektivität* anywhere in his texts or lectures.

¹² As a note, for example J. Michael Young, in his 1979 paper 'Kant's Notion of Objectivity', seems to identify 'objectivity' with 'objective validity'. This obviously cannot be definitive, because a reference to objective validity cannot explicate the meaning of objectivity itself. It is curious, however, that none of the commentators who write of Kant's account of objectivity, such as Dieter Henrich (1994), J. Michael Young (1979) and A.B Dickerson (2007), fail to mention that Kant indeed never used the word objectivity (*Objektivität*) in the substantive form.

Kant the words objective and subjective had a remarkably different meaning than after Kant. I take it that this is not a coincidence.

1.2 Kant and the Concept of Objectivity

The concept of objectivity is undoubtedly one of the most central concepts in both modern philosophy and science in general.¹³ Nevertheless, the concept seems at times to be used vaguely, without much reflection on its meaning or definition. *The Cambridge Dictionary* defines objectivity as “the fact of being based on facts and not influenced by personal beliefs or feelings”,¹⁴ and the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as “the quality or character of being objective : lack of favoritism toward one side or another : freedom from bias”.¹⁵ I find that these definitions – both of which emphasize impartiality or unbiasedness – lack something with regard to both the contemporary use of the concept and especially Kant’s use of the word ‘objective’. So, even though Kant never used the word *Objektivität*, I would gladly credit him for problematizing the notion in his critical philosophy; I maintain that Kant’s understanding and use of the concept ‘objective’ (as well as that of ‘subjective’) has been a notable factor for the modern concept of objectivity, and for this reason studying Kant’s account of objectivity contributes to our understanding of the phenomenon and concept of objectivity in general.

The renowned historians of science Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have traced the history of the concept of objectivity, and show that there indeed was a remarkable shift in the use of the word, roughly around the beginning of the 19th Century. In this shift the meanings of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ somewhat took each other’s places. Whereas the old, scholastic terminology, which has its origin in Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, understood ‘objective’ to refer to things “as they are presented to consciousness”, and ‘subjective’ to refer to the “things in themselves”, the new meanings almost completely seemed to reverse this.¹⁶ Key

¹³ On the history and significance of objectivity, and their relation to science in general, see Daston & Galison 2007.

¹⁴ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/objectivity>

¹⁵ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/objectivity>

¹⁶ Daston and Galison 2007, 29.

factors in the emergence of the new sense of the concepts were Kant's philosophy and its reception. Daston and Galison write:

The words objective and subjective fell into disuse during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and were invoked only occasionally, as technical terms, by metaphysicians and logicians. It was Immanuel Kant who dusted off the musty scholastic terminology of "objective" and "subjective" and breathed new life and new meanings into it. But the Kantian meanings were the grandparents, not the twins, of our familiar senses of those words. Kant's "objective validity" (*objektive Gültigkeit*) referred not to external objects (*Gegenstände*) but to the "forms of sensibility" (time, space, causality) that are the preconditions of experience. And his habit of using "subjective" as a rough synonym for "merely empirical sensations" shares with later usage only the sneer with which the word is intoned. For Kant, the line between the objective and the subjective generally runs between universal and particular, not between world and mind.

Yet it was the reception of Kantian philosophy, often refracted through other traditions, that revamped terminology of the objective and subjective in the early nineteenth century.¹⁷

I am willing to support Daston & Galison's claim about Kant breathing new life and meanings into the distinction of objective and subjective, and thereby contributing on a major level to how we have understood and used the notion thereafter.¹⁸ However, their description of Kant's distinction leaves room for some

¹⁷ Daston & Galison 2007, 30.

¹⁸ Daston & Galison (2007, 31) further write: "Starting in the 1820s and 1830s, dictionary entries (first in German, then in French, and later in English) began to define the words "objectivity" and "subjectivity" in something like the (to us) familiar sense, often with a nod in the direction of Kantian philosophy. In 1820, for example, a German dictionary defined *objektiv* as a "relation to an external object" and *subjektiv* as "personal, inner, inhering in us, in opposition to objective"; as late as 1863, a French dictionary still called this the "new sense" (diametrically opposed to the old, scholastic sense) of word *objectif* and credited "the philosophy of Kant" with the novelty. [...] Sometime circa 1850 the modern sense of "objectivity" had arrived in the major European languages, still paired with its ancestral opposite "subjectivity." Both had turned 180 degrees in meaning."

doubts. According to my thesis, Kant's primary – and perhaps sole – meaning of 'objective' is about object-relatedness, or object-referentiality. This means that the meanings nowadays often attributed to objectivity, such as 'impartiality', 'intersubjectivity', 'agreement', or 'correctness' are not the very primary meanings of the concept – at least in the Kantian sense – but rather they result from the primary possibility of objectivity, that is, the primary possibility of the object-relatedness of representations. Thus, a claim to objectivity is not first and foremost a claim to correctness, truth, or validity, but a claim to be about objects.¹⁹ I support the view that this property of object-relatedness, or something very much like it, can in different contexts also be called 'intentionality' or 'aboutness'.²⁰ I take it that Kant's use of the concept 'objective' within his theoretical philosophy has played a major role for the modern conception of objectivity, and by studying Kant's account, we can gain knowledge and better analyze the general contemporary concept of objectivity.

1.3 General theme, Aims and Questions

The aim of this study is to analyze and lay out Kant's account of the concept of objectivity and objective reference in the broad view, as well as their conditions, to show the relevance of Kant's view to contemporary philosophy, and to answer some of the criticisms expressed toward Kant, which criticisms often seem to be based on misguided readings of his doctrines. I aim to show that Kant's philosophy is not – contrary to what is often claimed – overly subjectivistic with the expense of losing objectivity. Rather, his theory of objectivity and objective reference is both coherent and relevant as a philosophical theory today. Furthermore, Kant's account of objectivity, as well as subjectivity, is essential in understanding the origin and

¹⁹ For this reason I argue, mostly in Chapter 4, for a clearer distinction of 'objectivity' and 'objective validity', which, as I claim, are not, generally taken, interchangeable notions. An exception of a kind is the case of the categories, in which case what is called the objectivity of the categories very nearly equals what can be called the objective validity of the categories.

²⁰ See e.g. Taylor 2016, 15.

meaning of the modern concept of objectivity, which concept is crucial to science in general.²¹

I read Kant's transcendental idealism, as presented especially in the first *Critique* and the *Prolegomena*, to be essentially an answer to the *problem of objective reference*, as presented for the first time in the famous letter to Marcus Herz in 1772.²² This problem concerns the relation of our representations to (their) objects. I attempt to show that the problem of objective reference in the Herz letter was for Kant very closely connected to what he called the *Humean problem*. Both of these concern – not only, but essentially – the application and validity of a *priori*/pure/intellectual concepts to objects, which, at least for Kant, seems to be a requisite for empirical objective reference.²³ Thus I read the problems as essentially the same, and take the answer to both problems to be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason's* doctrine of transcendental, or formal, idealism. Within this doctrine Kant lays out what he takes to be the conditions of *experience*, as well as of objectivity. For both, the notions of *universality* and *necessity* are crucial.²⁴

My first claim concerning *objectivity* is that for Kant objectivity means simply a representation's or a judgment's property of relating or referring to an object. Thus, an objective judgment is one that claims or says something *about* an *object*, e.g. "there is water in the lake", whereas a subjective judgment claims something only of the subject, e.g. "the water feels cold". The difference here is that the first judgment claims something about the objects in a way which makes it possible to communicate the content of the judgment as such to others, and to debate whether or not the claim is objectively true. The subjective judgment, on the other hand, only makes a claim or a statement about sensations that the subject has. This characterization of objectivity as object-relatedness does not in my view only

²¹ Reiss & Sprenger write: "Many central debates in the philosophy of science have, in one way or another, to do with objectivity: confirmation and the problem of induction; theory choice and scientific change; realism; scientific explanation; experimentation; measurement and quantification; evidence and the foundations of statistics; evidence-based science; feminism and values in science. Understanding the role of objectivity in science is therefore integral to a full appreciation of these debates."

²² *Br.* 10:130-132. In this letter the problem is presented as a question concerning the nature of the relation of representations to their objects, and the ground of that relation.

²³ See *Br.* 10:130-131.

²⁴ In addition, some Aristotelian elements, which were not present in Kant's pre-critical philosophy, find their use in Kant's critical/formal/transcendental idealism. The most relevant of these elements to this study is the distinction of *matter* and *form*.

pertain to judgments but to all representations, which is to say, to the concept of objectivity in general.²⁵

Now, if objectivity indeed does mean the property of a representation of relating or referring to an object, then the question becomes: how does this relating or referring happen, and what are its necessary conditions? In his 1772 letter to Herz, Kant asks this very question: “What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call ‘representation’ to the object?”²⁶ In this study I attempt to lay out the very basic elements of Kant’s answer to this question. Obviously I do not aim to give an entirely novel reading of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, let alone of Kant’s theoretical philosophy in general. An immense amount of work has already been done and continues to be done on these subjects. I have not structured my work as to be a defence or an attack of a given established view in the many on-going debates in Kant scholarship. Rather, the aim is to lay out a sort of skeleton of Kant’s notion of objectivity, to which skeleton these questions and debates can then be related.²⁷

As I already stated, it is increasingly my understanding that the key issue of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to answer the very question posed in the letter to Herz in 1772. This question concerned the relation of our representations to their

²⁵ For example, what Kant calls ‘an objective sensation’ is indeed related to the object *as part of cognition of it*, whereas ‘a subjective sensation’ is only an effect or modification of the subject, contributing nothing to cognition of objects, and thus not being about an object. See *KrU*, 5:206.

²⁶ *Br.* 10:130-132.

²⁷ Studies focusing especially on the Kantian notion of objectivity are few in number. Still, I would like to mention Henrich (1976), Young (1979), Dickerson (2007) and Brinkmann (2011). In addition, I obviously do not seek to dismiss the many important and relevant on-going debates which somewhat relate to the topics of this study, such as the debate between *conceptualism* and *nonconceptualism* (See e.g. Schulting 2016.), or the more general discussion of one-world vs. two-world theories. I attempt to address these debates in ways that are relevant to the objective of the study, to clarify concepts and give credit where it is due, but this study is not positioned within these debates. As for interpreting how Kant framed the relation of objects as *appearances* and objects as *things-in-themselves*, we nowadays can, with more or less justification, make a distinction of two main camps: the *one-world theory*, often coinciding with what can be called an epistemological two-aspect-view, and the *two-world theory*, often coinciding with what can be called a metaphysical view. Supporters of an epistemological view are e.g. Henry Allison and Gerold Prauss, while supporters of a metaphysical view are e.g. Paul Guyer (1987) and Karl Ameriks, with many interpreters such as Lucy Allais (2007), Beatrice Longuenesse (1998) and Michael Oberst (2015) falling somewhere in between. For more on the two views, see e.g. Oberst 2015, Schulting 2011, 1-25, or Quarfood 2004, 16-65.

objects, and to be more specific, the ground of this relation. Thus, when I say that the *Critique* is an answer to this question, I mean in it as severely as possible. That is, I do not intend to say that the *Critique* happens to give an answer to this question as well as many others, even though it obviously does give answers to more questions. Rather, I mean that the key aim of the work is to present a solution to this exact problem, the nature of which is not as simply understood as one might think.

Kant himself writes in the *Prolegomena* that the core question of the *Critique* is: “*How are synthetic propositions a priori possible?*”²⁸ I support the view that this is the next step of the question posed in the Herz letter concerning the ground of the relation between representations and objects. Kant has found that the ground of this relation lies in a certain transcendental (non-empirical, and non-changing) activity, which makes it possible for intellectual concepts²⁹, even though not possibly derived empirically from objects, to still pertain to empirical objects. It is Kant’s view that only if we have this *a priori* way of formally cognizing something in the objects (and thereby have the concepts of objects in general), can we have objective cognition or knowledge at all, because otherwise all perceptions and so-called experience would be subjective, contingent, and thereby without universality and necessity.³⁰ This would result in something like mere estimations and guesses, or to be more precise, in speculation which cannot be verified because everything involved is subjective and contingent. This seems to be the fear brought about by Hume. Metaphysics, as an intellectual or *a priori* science of reality, would then have to be admitted empty speculation, and mathematics, as well as the principles of natural sciences, could lose any firm ground they were supposedly built on. The above said, I presuppose that the *Critique* and Kant’s transcendental idealism are essentially, even though not only, an explication of the mechanisms of objective reference.

As to the motivations and structure of Kant’s question and answer, I take it that he found both the empiricist and rationalist philosophers before him to have wrongly set the question, thus resulting in differing but similarly unsatisfactory answers. These problematic accounts Kant deals with e.g. in the section of the first

²⁸ *Prolog.* 4:276.

²⁹ Or “intellectual representations”; See *Br.* 10:130-131.

³⁰ On the question of why we need *a priori* elements for objectivity and objective validity, Kant writes specifically in e.g. B167-168. I try to lay out Kant’s view throughout this study.

Critique titled ‘On the Amphiboly of the Concepts of Reflection’.³¹ To put it bluntly, Kant saw that for objective representation, we need both passivity and activity on behalf of the subject, or cognizer. One of the perspectives from which I approach Kantian objectivity is precisely Kant’s doctrine of our passive and active faculties, as a synthesizing approach to empiricism and rationalism.³² In addition, one of my themes is to tie the analysis of Kant’s notions of objectivity and experience rather tightly together. I emphasize that for Kant experience is essentially objective, which insight is beneficial for analyzing both the concepts of objectivity and of experience.

The interrelated key questions and aims of the study are:

(1) What is Kantian objectivity? That is, what did Kant mean by his notions and distinction of ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’? According to my thesis, we may describe Kantian objectivity as object-relatedness, object-referentiality, or object-aboutness. Thus, to be objective is to be about an object, whereas to be subjective is to be about the subject. Taken this simply, objectivity does not yet imply being (universally) correct or (necessarily) true, but rather only that a representation such as a judgment, is actually *about* or *directed toward* an object. For this reason I emphasize, contrary to some commentators, that the ‘objectivity’ and ‘objective validity’ of representations are not identical notions.³³ Thus the possibility of objectivity of representations is a basic precondition for the truth (objective validity) of objective judgments. This description, however, is hardly sufficient to explain the full nature of objectivity. Still, it should be kept in mind that this, according to my reading, is the essence of the distinction, which is a significant matter both to inquiring historically into the genealogy of the concept of objectivity, and to the understanding of Kant’s theoretical philosophy. So, if objectivity simply stated means object-relatedness, or object-referentiality, the next question is:

(2) What are the conditions that make objective reference possible? What does it consist in? Answering this question requires discerning the conditions of

³¹ A260-289/B316-346.

³² A way to describe the starting situation is that the empiricist phenomenalism found in e.g. Hume’s philosophy did not properly account for the activity that is a necessary condition of cognition, whereas the rationalism of Leibniz did not properly account for the nature of the passivity required for objectivity.

³³ I argue for this in Chapter 4.

our capacity of making judgments that can even potentially have truth value. These conditions can, in my view, be divided into transcendental and empirical conditions. To meet the aforementioned demand, the judgments must obviously relate to something other than mere subjective representations or their subjective combination, as supposedly in the case of Hume. I try to illuminate how it is so that some representations do, according to Kant, in fact relate to objects, and thus have objective validity, while others do not. It should be shown that there are certain universal and necessary conditions in the structure of that relation of subject and object, within which structure experience itself and thereafter objective judgments are possible.

(3) What does the explication of the possibility of objective reference and Kant's transcendental ontology imply with regard to our knowledge concerning empirical objects – what kind of constraints are imposed on possible objects? That is, what kind of entities can qualify as proper objects, and why are some of their properties, as well as some of our senses, more objective than others? Finally: what does Kant claim that we can know *a priori* about these objects and the nature of their properties? I approach the above described problems from various perspectives which serve to illuminate different sides and implications of Kant's theory of objectivity.

1.4 The Structure and Content

The structure of the work is built as follows. I begin, in Chapter 2, by analyzing the notions of *objectivity* and *experience* – and their relation – in the context of Kant's relation to Hume, and especially what was already by Kant called 'Hume's problem', the expansion and solving of which Kant stated to be essential to his *Critique of Pure Reason*.³⁴ In this process I describe basic assumptions and conceptualizations in Locke's and especially Hume's empiricism, as well as their accounts of *experience*, and relate those to Kant, to illuminate what the thinkers and accounts agree upon, and where they most crucially differ. I show that when

³⁴ "I fear that the *elaboration* of the Humean problem in its greatest possible amplification (namely, the *Critique of Pure Reason*) may well fare just as the *problem* itself fared when it was first posed. It will be judged incorrectly, because it is not understood" (Kant, *Prologomena*, 4:261.).

compared to e.g. Locke, Hume's account of experience is more complex, and can be seen to make way for Kant's account.³⁵ Nevertheless, even though Hume impacted Kant heavily, from a Kantian perspective Humean phenomenalism cannot account for proper objectivity. Kant does get from Hume the insight that many of our most important notions or concepts, such as necessity, causality and substance, are never directly encountered or perceived in objects or events and thereby these ideas do not seem to originate as something simply passed onto us from objects in experience.³⁶ The Humean answer, however, namely that these notions/ideas originate in customary connection, or habit, is wholly insufficient for Kant. He finds that we need and use these concepts universally for objective reference, and yet in Hume's phenomenalism their origin would only be a contingent product of experience, and their validity would only be subjective validity. Part of the problem is that while some subjects happen to create these connections, others may not. Even if everyone happened to create and use a concept like this, or even if some of us could derive these notions from objects and events, i.e. from experience, they would still only have subjective validity. But Kant is not looking for psychological necessity (i.e. "to think in this or that way"), but rather a necessity which is objectively valid, that is, something which indeed is in the objects and their relations. Therefore Kant claims that there must be a universally shared *a priori* structure to experience, and precisely this is the origin of those crucial concepts which Kant, in his famous letter to Herz, calls 'intellectual representations'.³⁷

³⁵ I approach the problem called the *Humean problem* via the concept of *experience*, which was a central but rather loosely defined notion for the empiricists, here mainly John Locke and David Hume. I try to show a sort of lineage from Locke's position, via Hume, to that of Kant's.

³⁶ As is well known, Hume heavily criticized such metaphysical notions as necessity, substance and causality, to which criticism Kant responded, yet famously crediting Hume for waking him up from his "dogmatic slumber" (See *Pröl.* 4:260).

³⁷ See *Br.* 10:130-131. I agree with commentators such as Stang () and Laiho (), who emphasize the fact that Kant's 'experience' is always objective, that is, universally valid cognition of objects. Nevertheless, I disagree with Stang on how we should see the relation of Kant and the empiricists. However evident it may seem, I find that we should emphasize the fact that Kant indeed follows the empiricists in saying that all objective cognition starts with experience. But it is Kant's emphasis that experience itself has *a priori* conditions which must be placed under scrutiny. I defend the view that Kant's theory manages to explicate the objectivity of experience, as well as the objective validity of such crucial concepts as causality and necessity.

In chapter 3 I discuss rationalist ontology and objectivity in relation to Kant. I relate Kant's view to his own closest philosophical traditions, that is, the Leibniz-Wolffian rationalism, and the Aristotelian scholasticism found in Königsberg at Kant's time.³⁸ This relating is essential in explicating what happens to ontology, as a doctrine concerning the most general predicates of objects³⁹, or the concepts of an object in general⁴⁰, when it is 'narrowed down' to transcendental philosophy (of subject and object). Here I discuss in what sense only can we preserve the name and task of ontology after Kant's critical, "Copernican" turn in metaphysics. As part of this, I present a distinction of formal and material aspects of objectivity. If in Chapter 2 I wanted to present why and how Kant thought that we need to have certain *a priori* structures to achieve objective experience, in Chapter 3 I want to illuminate the way in which Kant thought that a purely rational ontology is not fully objective in the sense that it does not alone provide cognition of objects.⁴¹ Kantian transcendental ontology, however, can be said to be formally objective, as presenting the formal conditions of cognizing any objects whatsoever.

In chapter 4 I discuss Kant's notions of *object* and *objectivity*, and his doctrine of *faculties* as part of a theory of objective reference, and attempt to relate these to his criticism and synthesis of empiricism and rationalism, dealt with in the previous chapters. I attempt to explicate why Kant thinks we need to be in possession of *a priori* concepts, namely the categories, and must use them for judgments, to have a relation to an object, that is, to have objective experience.⁴² On Kant's account it is necessary that we have *a priori* concepts of objects in general⁴³, which concepts cannot be derived from experience, but which, on the contrary, make experience

³⁸ See Sgarbi 2010 & Sgarbi 2016. As a remark, it is only in the critical stage of his philosophy that Kant adopts so many Aristotelian elements into his philosophy. Perhaps the most crucial is the distinction of *matter* and *form*, which is not to be found in Kant's pre-critical philosophy, but which is essential to critical/transcendental idealism. It is precisely the form (of intuition and of understanding, and thereby of their objects, respectively) that is *a priori*, necessary and universal. Matter is, however, also necessary, but only in the sense that there must be some matter for anything to exist as object.

³⁹ See Koistinen 2012, 125.

⁴⁰ See e.g. A11-12.

⁴¹ In my reading of Kant's ontology, I am more in line with Koistinen (2012) than e.g. Ameriks (2003), who claims that Kant's metaphysics essentially remains rationalist. I find this too strong a claim, even though it is clear that Kant's ontology with its *a priori* elements owes a great deal to the rationalists.

⁴² See B167-168.

⁴³ See A11-12; A111.

possible in the first place.⁴⁴ I read Kant's account of *experience* as part of his answer to Hume's problem, as Kant in a way 'reduces' the whole notion of experience exclusively to such representational, unified activity which is objective, and can thus be used to produce cognition. Kant thereby does not turn away from experience as the beginning of cognition, but shows both that we have representations which are not objective and that there are, then, conditions, to what can properly be called experience. Furthermore, learning these conditions is not an empirical enquiry.

For Kant, the question is not only how objects can create representations in us, but how we consciously can relate to objects and thereby make valid objective judgments in such a lawful, categorical fashion which is necessarily the same to everyone. To answer this Kant attempts to show that all cognition requires both passivity and activity in co-operation. With regard to the first, there obviously first must be something/objects, and we must then be capable of being affected by these objects. Our capacity to do (or be) this is what Kant calls the receptivity of impressions, and it is the task of our faculty called sensibility. This alone does not, however, amount to cognition, nor to objectivity. For these, an activity which Kant calls the spontaneity of concepts, is needed, and this is the task of the understanding, and more precisely, the active faculty Kant calls *transcendental apperception*.⁴⁵ My claim in relation to Kant's doctrine of judgment is that the possibility of objective reference basically means the possibility of making such universal and communicable judgments of sensibly given empirical objects which can and must belong together in relation to the objective unity of apperception. In other words, the original unity of apperception, by the categories relates itself to the object through the representations Kant calls appearances. This is what I take to be the essence of Kantian objectivity. Related to this, I attempt a clarification and a

⁴⁴ A112: "All attempts to derive these pure concepts of the understanding from experience and to ascribe to them a merely empirical origin are [...] vain and futile."

⁴⁵ See A50-51/B74-75. By (transcendental) apperception Kant is usually understood to mean something like self-awareness or self-consciousness. I find this description a bit misleading with regard to contemporary notions, for reasons I explicate in Chapter 4. E.g. Dickerson (2007, 81) argues that rather than meaning something like self-awareness or self-reference, for Kant, apperception is "the reflexive act whereby the mind grasps its own representations as representing, and is thus an essential part of all thought and cognition."

clearer distinction of the notions of objectivity and objective validity with regard to certain commentators.⁴⁶

In chapter 5 I address Kant's notion of objectivity in relation to our senses and sensations. I discuss Kant's claim that some of our senses and sensations are more objective than others, and claim that the issue becomes clearer when one keeps in mind the bare meaning of objectivity as object-relatedness. I present a picture of Kant's account of empirical objectivity in which the 'primary qualities' of objects make up what can be called the *empirical thing in itself*⁴⁷, which is the object of those representations which Kant calls empirically objective. These are contrasted to such subjective representations as color and smell, which can be called 'secondary qualities' of objects as appearances.⁴⁸

In the sixth chapter I discuss Kant's notion of judgment in relation to language and communication, and ask whether Kant would have thought that language or communication are prerequisites for making judgments or not. I claim that in Kant's view the most basic transcendental conditions of thinking are independent from language and its use, but to materialize cognitions as judgments we must be in possession of actual, social language, and be able to communicate these objective judgments to others to test their truth. Thus I suggest that language should be considered as a sort of empirical condition to actual objective reference. I briefly relate Kant's view more over to that of Hume's and other empiricists, emphasizing that in essence, language is not wholly empirical and contingent, but

⁴⁶ I agree with both Schulting (2017) and Hanna (2018) on many matters, but I must present a disagreement with them on their general reading of Kant's notions of objectivity and objective validity. See Chapter 4.

⁴⁷ See A29-30/B45: "[...] things like colors, taste, etc., are correctly considered not as qualities of things but as mere alterations of our subject, which can even be different in different people. For in this case that which is originally itself only appearance, e.g., a rose, counts *in an empirical sense as a thing in itself*, which yet can appear different to every eye in regard to color." (Italics added.)

⁴⁸ In the *Critique of Judgment* Kant speaks of 'objective sensations', which are often seen a problematic notion within Kant's context, taken that in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant states that sensations are always subjective, whereas only cognitions are objective. It seems apparent that a refined theory, which takes into account Kant's both uses of the term objectivity, is needed. Here I present such a view, relating it to Kant's view that some of our senses themselves are more objective, and some more subjective, than others. I here use the famous distinction of primary and secondary qualities, also found in Kant, to analyze and illuminate the matter.

rather necessarily categorical, by which property we are able to use it to materialize universal objective judgments.

In the seventh chapter I bring Kant into conversation with such contemporary critics of his as Quentin Meillassoux and Graham Harman, who represent the field of *speculative realism*, or *object-oriented ontology*⁴⁹, and who claim precisely that Kant started the subjectivization of philosophy which has led to a dominance of views according to which we cannot even theoretically know the real objects of the world. I show that these accusations are often misguided and to some extent plainly false. From a Kantian point of view, speculative realism falls into the exact problems which Kant's critical philosophy was trying to solve, and thus speculative realism cannot secure such things as the objectivity of causality, mathematics, or objective reference in general.

This work hopefully contributes first of all to the study of Kant's theoretical philosophy.⁵⁰ In addition, the work is related to such fields as philosophy of science and conceptual history, because of the historical role of the concept of objectivity. Furthermore, the study may prove relevant to discussions in philosophy of language, and finally the discussion concerning the interpretation of Kant's philosophy among the contemporary speculative realists.

⁴⁹ I presume that already the name of this movement should be read as a criticism of Kant's philosophy, as stating that if Kant supplied an ontology at all, it is only concerned of the thinking or experiencing subjects, and not at all of objects. I try to show that a criticism stated like this will not move Kant's position anywhere, but only shows that either Kant's thought has not been understood properly, or that this thought is not taken seriously.

⁵⁰ As such, the work at hand can perhaps be taken to belong firstly to a subfield of philosophy called history of philosophy, and perhaps secondly to be at some level relevant to metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of mind.

2 The Humean Problem and Experience

2.1 The Humean Problem

What is the Humean problem, and how is it related to Kant? Let us begin with what Kant himself wrote about the relation of Hume's philosophy to that of his own:

I freely admit that the remembrance of David Hume was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy. I was very far from listening to him with respect to his conclusions, which arose solely because he did not completely set out his problem, but only touched on a part of it, which, without the whole being taken into account, can provide no enlightenment.⁵¹

But I fear that the *elaboration* of the Humean problem in its greatest possible amplification (namely, the *Critique of Pure Reason*) may well fare just as the *problem* itself fared when it was first posed. It will be judged incorrectly, because it is not understood; it will not be understood, because people will be inclined just to skim through the book, but not to think through it; and they will not want to expend this effort on it, because the work is dry, because it is obscure, because it opposes all familiar concepts and is long-winded as well.⁵²

The above passages from the *Prolegomena* do not leave it unclear that Hume's philosophy has a very special place with regard to Kant's philosophy. According to Kant, it was Hume's setting of the problem of metaphysics, especially with regard to causality, that made the impact, but failed to produce the results. As is shown in

⁵¹ *Prol.*, 4:260.

⁵² *Prol.*, 4:261.

the latter passage, Kant even identified the *Critique of Pure Reason* with the task of elaborating and answering the problem hinted at by Hume.

Ernst Cassirer writes of Kant's early relation to Hume that "He [Kant] says in his letter to Herder dating from 1768 that he now feels closer to Hume in his entire intellectual orientation; Hume occupies the highest place among the teachers and masters of the true philosophical 'state of mind.'"⁵³ Accordingly, it is often enough that one sees mentions of Kant's indebtedness to Hume, as Kant himself credited Hume of waking him from his dogmatic slumber. Nevertheless, it seems almost as often that one finds this relation of Hume and Kant not quite properly acknowledged, and at times even to some extent dismissed as a real driving force in Kant's critical philosophy.⁵⁴ I have no intention of claiming that Kant's philosophy is essentially Humean, rather at some level on the contrary, but I do claim that one, if not the, great problem(s) of the first *Critique* was to tackle the problem discovered by Hume, although for the great "skeptic", by which name Kant referred to Hume, mainly in relation to causality.⁵⁵ And it is indeed the problem of causality, discovered by Hume, which Kant wants to answer, but also generalize it in such a way that the answer has far wider implications.⁵⁶

The problem itself is revealed by Hume's extreme empiricism, according to which we have no innate ideas, and no *a priori* concepts, but all our ideas, thinking and knowledge is based on what Hume calls impressions and their reflection, and thus have an empirical origin in experience.⁵⁷ Below I offer a more careful consideration, but bluntly put the Humean problem is that there seems to be no legitimate way to acquire the concept of *causality*, as we cannot sense causality itself, no more than we can sense the *necessity* inherent in a connection between something as *a cause* and something else as *an effect*. Nevertheless, we think of

⁵³ Cassirer 1981, 90.

⁵⁴ Of course there are exceptions, such as Waxman (2005), De Pierris & Friedman (2013), and Longuenesse (1998). Still, often Hume is dealt with as mainly an opponent, whose problematic views Kant wants to fix, especially in the Second Analogy (see e.g. Allison 2004, 261).

⁵⁵ Wayne Waxman (2005) does present a well-argued interpretation in which the similarities between Hume and Kant seem greater than the differences.

⁵⁶ For a thorough investigation of Kant and Hume on causality, see Watkins 2005.

⁵⁷ Hume's empiricism led him to claim, not only that such ideas (or their referents) as 'causality', 'substance' or 'the self' can never be perceived, but even that there simply are no such things at all. According to Hume mathematics is a kind of *a priori* knowledge as necessary relations of ideas, but the ideas themselves still have an empirical origin.

things and events as causally related, and the relation of cause and effect as something necessary. Beatrice Longuenesse writes that

Kant calls the problem posed by the concept of cause "Hume's problem," but he claims credit for its generalization: there are many other concepts besides that of cause which cannot have been acquired by mere empirical generalization, which we nevertheless use in our cognition of empirical objects, and which moreover constitute the framework of a metaphysics that purports to proceed by means of pure reasoning, independently of any experience.⁵⁸

With all this said it must be noted that obviously Kant cannot be taken to be a follower of either the Humean empiricist account, or its rationalist counterpart, the Leibniz-Wolffian school, but in the end they both served to produce the background setting, starting from which Kant could begin to build his critical version of metaphysics. Kant saw that there is something deeply unsatisfying and wrong in both Hume's account of experience and thus his theory of knowledge, as well as with the rationalist account of objects and our knowledge of them. Both these accounts are, according to Kant, unable to give a satisfying explanation of how and why we can represent the world objectively, that is, make objective judgments that first of all refer to real objects outside us, and secondly are universally valid, thus, even potentially have truth value. I find it a fruitful approach and a necessary step in dealing with the matter at hand to both look at the mentioned accounts from Kant's perspective and to approach Kant's theory from the mentioned accounts. I attempt to carry out this task in both this and the following chapter.

The basic problem of the empiricists, here mainly Hume, with regard to experience and objective knowledge⁵⁹, seems from Kant's perspective to be that if all that experience is, was some sort of subjective being-affected-by-objects and thus reactively forming ideas and relating them to each other, then it seems that we

⁵⁸ Longuenesse 1998, 17.

⁵⁹ From Kant's perspective, insufficient accounts of objectivity and causality are obviously not the only shortcomings of Hume's philosophy, to which list we may easily add pretty much everything which Kant takes to be *a priori*, such as the concept of *substance* and what Kant calls *transcendental apperception*.

would have no criterion of the validity or objectivity of these ideas.⁶⁰ As Kant noted already in his famous letter to Marcus Herz from 1772 (which letter I will address later in the chapter), the existence of *representations caused by objects* is itself not a problematic assumption. It is easy to think of the relation of representations to their objects as such that the objects simply cause the representations in us. But in this case there is at first the problem of subjectivity, namely that what guarantee do we have that we do not represent the objects differently from each other, or even represent different objects? The bigger problem, however, is exposed when we realize that there are such concepts, which Kant in the letter to Herz calls *intellectual representations*, and later *the categories*, which *cannot be of empirical origin*, at least in the sense of something that is or has been directly perceived. So, if these representations, such as causality, substance and accident, originate not in the objects or events themselves, but in us, why should they pertain to objects?

The problem does not end, however, with the validity of the ideas of causality and substance (etc.), but has to do with the overall possibility of objective reference. Kant saw that *we need to have these intellectual representations*, (the validity of which we also desire to show,) to be able to represent any objects at all. Thus the problem turns into the problem of the possibility of *a priori* cognition, upon which the possibility of objective reference and all of metaphysics rests. Here I will first approach this problem from the viewpoint of the possibility of experience.

⁶⁰ See e.g. A2/B5: "Now what is especially remarkable is that even among our experiences cognitions are mixed in that must have their origin *a priori* and that perhaps serve to establish connection among our representations of the senses. For if one removes from our experiences everything that belongs to the senses, there still remain certain original concepts the judgments generated from which must have arisen entirely *a priori*, independently of experience, because they make one able to say more about the objects that appear to the senses than mere experience would teach, or at least make one believe that one can say this, and make assertions contain true universality and strict necessity, the likes of merely empirical cognition can never afford."

2.2 What is Experience?

2.2.1 Objectivity and Experience

First, I would like to point out that the notion of *experience* has been central to many philosophers from Locke and Hume to e.g. Husserl and Heidegger. We should not, however, take it for granted that all of these philosophers mean the same thing with the notion. With regard to the empiricists, Hume's account of experience seems more complex than Locke's, but it was Kant who made the notion central in another sense by inquiring into what conditions might this thing called experience depend upon. I stress, once more, that we must be careful when comparing e.g. Hume's and Kant's accounts of experience, because there may be differences not only in how they describe or explain experience, but also in what is thought to be experience. At this point I would only like to note that for Kant e.g. our feelings in themselves are not experience, because for him, the notion of experience (*Erfahrung*) includes the concept of objectivity. This is shown e.g. in the *Prolegomena*'s distinction between judgments of perception (which are subjective) and judgments of experience (which are objective). Thus the notion of experience does not for Kant mean, say, all sensations brought about in a living creature (by the world). Rather it means something like a (self-)conscious, objective and intentional relation to the world.

According to Kant, experience as something objective, that is, as relating to actual objects, is not possible without certain pre-given conditions which guarantee a sort of universal necessity to it, and make possible the unity of the experience. That is, there must be one, identical experience (rather than many), which validly relates to the object or objects, and not only (other) subjective representations.⁶¹ As e.g. Longuenesse and Dickerson emphasize, the *unity* of self-consciousness⁶² (and thereby of concepts, judgments and experience) is a central issue for Kant, who claims that no cognition of objects could arise purely passively, but rather there must be an element of unifying spontaneity involved in cognition, in order for there to be this unity and thus objectivity.⁶³ In my view, it is above all the

⁶¹ See e.g. A110.

⁶² '*Einheit des Selbstbewußtseins*'.

⁶³ See Dickerson 2007, 80-98. Dickerson (80) writes that "Kant is in fact concerned with a problem that is the representationalist equivalent of the problem debated in the nineteenth

synthesizing activity of the mind in the act of apperception and judgment which is missing from Hume's account, and which Kant labours hard to explicate. He writes in the first *Critique*:

Unity of synthesis in accordance with empirical concepts would be entirely contingent, and, were it not grounded on a transcendental ground of unity, it would be possible for a swarm of appearances to fill up our soul without experience ever being able to arise from it. But in that case all relation of cognition to objects would also disappear, since the appearances would lack connection in accordance with universal and necessary laws, and would thus be intuition without thought, but never cognition, and would therefore be as good as nothing for us.⁶⁴

The “transcendental ground of unity” which Kant mentions, is, according to my reading, the faculty of ‘transcendental apperception’, which I discuss more closely in chapter 4. I read Kant to claim that this unity is necessary for relating representations to objects at all, and this is precisely what Kant means by objectivity. From Kant's perspective no cognition or experience could take place, were it not for something that unifies the experience and gives the cognition *universality* and *necessity*, which are according to Kant the two secure characteristics of *a priori* cognition.⁶⁵ These cannot be created empirically by contingent experience, but still are inherent in experience. Furthermore, we have, and use, other such concepts which we could never have simply received in or from experience, and which then must have another source: “All attempts to derive these pure concepts of the understanding from experience and to ascribe to them a merely empirical origin are therefore entirely vain and futile.”⁶⁶ This was also acknowledged by Hume, with regard to causality (or the “necessary connexion of

and twentieth centuries as the problem of the ‘unity of judgment’ or the ‘unity of the proposition’. Kant argues that if we are to make sense of the unity possessed by complex representations then we cannot think of representing objects as a purely passive, or receptive, affair, but as one that must also involve some element of spontaneity.”

⁶⁴ A111.

⁶⁵ B3-6.

⁶⁶ A112.

cause and effect”), which he thinks is an idea we have built based on constant, subjective conjunction, that is, custom.⁶⁷

For Hume, we have no innate ideas and no *a priori* knowledge or concepts, but everything we have concerning the world is based on empirical impressions, sentiments and reflections. As Hume famously illustrated it, we can see a billiard ball moving and touching another ball which then starts to move, but we cannot sense the causality or the necessity which we seem to suppose when thinking or describing the event. This insight does not cause Hume to abandon his empiricist doctrine, but rather forces him to find a solution to this problem of the origin of these concepts. This he does by explaining that there indeed is a sentiment which gives birth to the idea of a “necessary connexion”. This sentiment arises customarily in experience when certain events are repeated multiple times, after which we at some point feel this new sentiment, telling us that these events are connected.⁶⁸

But if concepts such as substance and causality only exist as subjective customs, and therefore contingently, it is hard to see how we can build any knowledge or proper objectivity into our judgments, since concepts such as substance and causality seem to be conditions for making objective judgments at all. Rather than building our judgments upon subjective and contingent ‘experience’, there should be some kind of necessity and universal applicability to our concepts and judgments if we really claim them to be objective. Furthermore, the concept of necessity itself has been revealed problematic, as it is clearly not a sensible property of objects of the world. Still, we use or apply it, and perhaps must do so, to make any sense of causality, among other things. Thus Kant holds that the problem of causality and necessity is primarily one concerning their origin, not of their applicability.⁶⁹ He gladly gives merit to Hume for understanding the nature of the problem, as one concerning the question of whether necessity is based solely on reason, independently of all experience, but it is Hume’s answer which Kant found unsatisfying.⁷⁰ So whence do we indeed get these concepts and how can they be valid of objects if they do not originate in the objects (of experience)?

⁶⁷ See Hume 2007, 43-45 (*EHU* 5.5-6/43-45).

⁶⁸ See Hume 2007, 71 (*EHU* 7.30/78).

⁶⁹ *Prolog.* 4:258-9.

⁷⁰ See *Prolog.* 4:258-9. As Kant claims, the precise nature of Hume’s problem seems to have been misunderstood by many, thus causing only debates which are rather useless for solving the original problem. I find that the same can be claimed about certain contemporary thinkers, such as Meillassoux (2008) and Badiou (2008), who, in my view, see

2.2.2 The Letter to Herz

It is well-known and frequently commented upon that in a letter to Marcus Herz dating in 1772 Kant presented an important metaphysical problem which he saw yet to be unanswered, and which may be taken to be the first formulation of Kant's take on the problem of objective reference. I see the problem presented in the letter as essentially connected to the problem he saw in Hume, and in fact leading to his doctrine of transcendental, or formal, idealism.⁷¹ This question is obviously dependent on and related to such questions as what is objectivity in general, what are objects in general and what makes certain concepts and judgments objectively valid. In the Herz-letter Kant approaches the problem as that of how our representations (can) relate to their objects. In the letter Kant seems to take it for granted that we are in possession of, and use, concepts which cannot be derived from experience. These "representations" Kant calls "the pure concepts of understanding", or the categories, upon the origin and objective validity of which the fate of ontology and the whole of metaphysics depend. Pure or intellectual representations are such that they have not been produced in us by objects, but we obviously also are in possession of representations which have been brought about in us by the objects. The problem then concerns the application and validity of the pure concepts, as well as their relation to the empirical ones, for the application of which the pure ones seem to be required. He writes:

I noticed that I still lacked something essential, something that in my long metaphysical studies I, as well as others, had failed to consider and which in fact constitutes the key to the whole secret of metaphysics, hitherto still hidden from itself. I asked myself this question: What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call "representation" to the object? If a representation comprises only the manner in which the subject is affected by the object, then it is easy to see how it is in conformity with this object, namely, as an effect accords with its cause, and it is easy to see how this modification of our mind can *represent* something, that is, have an

and present the Humean problem incorrectly, and thus also fail to fully appreciate the Kantian answer to it. I return to this topic in Chapter 7.

⁷¹ I am not alone in observing this connection; see e.g. Longuenesse 1998, 17-33.

object. Thus the passive or sensuous representations have an understandable relationship to objects, and the principles that are derived from the nature of our soul have an understandable validity for all things insofar as those things are supposed to be objects of the senses. Similarly, if that in us which we call "representation" were active with regard to the object, that is, if the object itself were created by the representation (as when divine cognitions are conceived as the archetypes of things), the conformity of these representations to their objects could also be understood. [...] ⁷²

Kant here presents two alternatives for the relation of object and representation. In the first case the objects produce the representations and in the other the representations produce the objects. But the problem now seems to be that the pure concepts cannot have been produced by the objects, but it would also seem very peculiar to think that the representations produce the objects. We should remember that the letter predates the first *Critique* by almost a decade, and thus at this point Kant had probably not yet reached his critical conclusion. It is my claim that, in the conclusion, the second alternative, in which the representations are indeed causes of the objects, is taken to be the right one, although with serious restrictions, namely that the pure concepts can be said to be *formal conditions* or even *formal causes for appearances*, even though not for the things in themselves. Going back to the Herz-letter, Kant continues to explicate the problem:

In my dissertation I was content to explain the nature of intellectual representations in a merely negative way, namely, to state that they were not modifications of the soul brought about by the object. However, I silently passed over the further question of how a representation that refers to an object without being in any way affected by it can be possible. I had said: The sensuous representations present things as they appear, the intellectual representations present them as they are. But by what means are these things given to us, if not by the way in which they affect us? And if such intellectual representations depend on our inner

⁷² Br. 10:130.

activity, whence comes the agreement that they are supposed to have with objects - objects that are nevertheless not possibly produced thereby? And the axioms of pure reason concerning these objects - how do they agree with these objects, since the agreement has not been reached with the aid of experience? [...]⁷³

As I have stated, I take it that at the time of writing these passages, Kant had not yet constructed all of his theory, including the essential part of it known as the transcendental deduction (of the categories), in which he would come to claim why and how there indeed is, and must be, an agreement between representations and the objects (which haven't produced the representations). He thus continues the letter by glossing at previous answers as to the question of the source of the pure concepts:

Plato assumed a previous intuition of divinity as the primary source of the pure concepts of the understanding and of first principles.⁷⁴ [...] As I was searching in such ways for the sources of intellectual knowledge, without which one cannot determine the nature and limits of metaphysics, I divided this science into its naturally distinct parts, and I sought to reduce transcendental philosophy (that is to say, all the concepts belonging to completely pure reason) to a certain number of categories, but not like Aristotle, who, in his ten predicaments, placed them side by side as he found them in a purely chance juxtaposition. On the contrary, I arranged them according to the way they classify themselves by their own nature, following a few fundamental laws of the understanding.⁷⁵

I have already stated that the passage is generally recognized for its importance, and I see Kant's critical theoretical philosophy essentially as an answer to the main question of the passage, which, once more, is "What is the ground of the relation of

⁷³ *Br.* 10:130-131.

⁷⁴ Here Kant refers to Plato's thesis of *anamnesis*, which I take to be the reason for e.g. Heidegger calling Plato the true originator of the *a priori* (See Engelland 2017, 175.).

⁷⁵ *Br.* 10:130-132.

that in us which we call "representation" to the object?"⁷⁶ Besides laying out the approaches that will not give satisfactory results, he already here refers to his discovery of the role of the categories, and "a few fundamental laws of the understanding"⁷⁷. What we should note here is that Kant is not simply inquiring about the relation of objects to representations, but of the *ground* of that relation. I take it to imply that he had started to form the answer later found in the *Critique*, according to which we need the categories, not just to use them by themselves, but in all objective reference.

It is also worth observing that Kant takes the existence of what he calls 'intellectual representations' completely for granted. Thus some might oppose, saying that there is no problem, because there are no intellectual representations. This is a battle which Kant does not take part in the letter in question, but which is nevertheless so severely addressed elsewhere in Kant, that I permit myself to postpone the answer, which will become evident later, after having viewed Kant's theory on a larger scale. However, Kant does refer to Plato and many others as also finding the existence of the intellectual representations completely evident. So, for Kant, it is not their existence which is the question, but it is their origin, and thereby their validity and objectivity. Now, if philosophers since Plato have thought that there are these non-empirical intellectual representations, not originating in the objects, and have tried to explain them by referring to miracles or forgotten divine knowledge etc., then what is so revolutionary in Hume and his account? It is not the realization that there are ideas, concepts or representations which seemingly have no empirical origin, but it is the claim that these indeed have a completely empirical and subjective origin, which means that they themselves are contingent and subjective, and thereby not necessary, universal and objective.

2.2.3 Hume and Kant on the Unity of Experience

From Kant's perspective the Humean phenomenalist approach, let alone the Lockean version of empiricism, is inadequate to lay out the way our representations refer to their objects, what exactly these objects and their existence are constituted

⁷⁶ Ibid. In addition, I interpret certain sections of the first *Critique* to make direct reference to the question of the Herz-letter, mainly A 258/B 314, A 92-93/B 124-126 and A 128-130.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

on, and how it is that our concepts and judgments can be objectively valid, that is, can have objective reference. The reason why Hume is important in this matter is that he himself, as Kant observed, noticed this problem, albeit with regard to only a few concepts, or ideas as Hume called them. Most importantly Hume struggled with the idea of causality, or a necessary connection of cause and effect. Hume saw that we cannot perceive these ideas as such, which for Hume is to say that they cannot be simple ideas. How is it, then, that we come about such ideas? Hume writes:

When we look about us towards external objects, and consider the operation of causes, we are never able, in a single instance, to discover any power or necessary connexion; any quality, which binds the effect to the cause, and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other. We only find, that the one does actually, in fact, follow the other. The impulse of one billiard-ball is attended with motion in the second. This is the whole that appears to the outward senses. The mind feels no sentiment or inward impression from this succession of objects: Consequently, there is not, in any single, particular instance of cause and effect, any thing which can suggest the idea of power or necessary connexion.⁷⁸

What Hume stresses in the passage is that at no single instant do we sense or perceive causality, but rather impressions followed by other impressions. I take it that in this matter Kant would somewhat agree. But how, then, does the idea of a ‘necessary connexion’ come to be? Hume’s answer is that indeed it does not come about at any particular instance, but after customary repetitions we learn to anticipate things to behave in a certain way. Thereby a new (subjective) sentiment also arises, but only in the course of a long “uniform experience”. Hume’s lengthy conclusion thus follows:

This connexion, therefore, which we feel in the mind, this customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant, is the sentiment or impression from which we

⁷⁸ Hume 2007, 59 (*EHU* 7.6/63).

form the idea of power or necessary connexion. Nothing farther is in the case. Contemplate the subject on all sides; you will never find any other origin of that idea. [...] Every idea is copied from some preceding impression or sentiment; and where we cannot find any impression, we may be certain that there is no idea. In all single instances of the operation of bodies or minds, there is nothing that produces any impression, nor consequently can suggest any idea of power or necessary connexion. But when many uniform instances appear, and the same object is always followed by the same event; we then begin to entertain the notion of cause and connexion. We then feel a new sentiment or impression, to wit, a customary connexion in the thought or imagination between one object and its usual attendant; and this sentiment is the original of that idea which we seek for. [...] The first instance which we saw of motion communicated by the shock of two billiard balls (to return to this obvious illustration) is exactly similar to any instance that may, at present, occur to us; except only, that we could not, at first, infer one event from the other; which we are enabled to do at present, after so long a course of uniform experience.⁷⁹

As this illustration shows, Hume thought of the concept or idea of causality to be the result of us feeling “a new sentiment or impression”, or a “customary connexion in the thought or imagination”. This suggests that the origin of the conception is indeed empirical, but also subjective. Who knows how many times an event must be repeated for each person to come up with the sentiment and idea, if it happens at all? Laid out like this, it seems unavoidable that the arising of the idea of necessary connection, if not the content of the idea itself, is wholly contingent. What in addition is relevant to our matter at hand is the end of the passage where Hume refers to a long “course of *uniform experience*”⁸⁰ as a condition for creating this idea of necessary connection. This shows that experience for Hume is not simply particular sensations, but rather has temporal character and uniformity. Now, before engaging in the battle between Hume and Kant, I ask the reader to

⁷⁹ Hume 2007, 69-72 (EHU 7.28-30/75-79).

⁸⁰ Italics added.

accompany me on what might seem a detour. By this I mean tracing the empiricist conception of experience from Locke via Hume to Kant, to see and appreciate the role of this conception for all of these philosophers.

2.3 The Empiricist Account of Experience

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke writes:

§2. Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it, with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from *experience*: in that, all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation employed either about *external sensible objects*; or about the *internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves*, is that, which supplies our understandings with all the materials of *thinking*. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.⁸¹

Here we have an articulation of the classical empirical account of mind, experience and knowledge, in which Locke presents mind as *tabula rasa*, and ideas as resulting from two sources, that is, either directly from sensation or reflection upon these. Now, the account of experience that Locke has in mind is not here fully explicated, but in the following we can see that Locke did not mean by it everything that we are conscious of, but rather the events that bring about the simple ideas:

Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a man's own mind. Can another man perceive, that I am conscious of anything, when I perceive it not myself? No man's knowledge here, can go beyond his experience.⁸²

⁸¹ Locke, *Essay*, II.i.2.

⁸² Locke, *Essay*, II.i.19.

The simple ideas we have are such, as experience teaches them.⁸³

Now, what is absolutely essential is that experience is the one event that is at the heart of the production of all ideas and knowledge. Still, as is observed by Roger Woolhouse, “[w]hat experience immediately provides is not knowledge as such, but its ‘materials’, the ‘ideas’ of which the *Essay* talks so much. This means that the *content* of all our thoughts must be ultimately traceable back to experience.”⁸⁴ Thus experience does not, for Locke, mean what it sometimes nowadays can mean, e.g. all that we feel and perceive etc., but rather simply the events that begin the formation of ideas and knowledge.

The reason for taking up Locke here is to show, firstly, that his account of experience as teacher and the beginning of knowledge is highly relevant and influential to Kant. For instant validation of my claim, without a deeper interpretation at this point, I refer to what Kant writes in the Introduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

Experience is without doubt the first product that our understanding brings forth as it works on the raw material of sensible sensations. It is for this very reason the first teaching, and in its progress it is so inexhaustible in new instruction that the chain of life in all future generations will never have any lack of new information that can be gathered on this terrain.⁸⁵

As is apparent, in Kant’s account experience only comes after sensations, as it is “brought forth” by the understanding. Secondly, I want to show that from Locke’s account we can, in a way, retrospectively trace a route to that of Kant’s, but through Hume, whose notion of experience already somewhat differs from that of Locke’s, even if he also considered experience to be the beginning of knowledge. If, for Locke, experience consists in the first events that give rise to simple ideas, for Hume the account seems to have been a bit more elaborated, since he did not consider single perceptions as such to be experience, but only when these are combined with

⁸³ Locke, *Essay*, II.iv.6.

⁸⁴ Woolhouse 1997, xii.

⁸⁵ A1.

others through certain acts. Stephen Buckles notes, regarding Hume's conception of experience, that Hume did not regard all of our representations, perceptions or ideas to be experience, but only those that are already somehow connected to other representations:

The a priori is what is prior to experience; Hume's use of the term reflects the Aristotelian conception of experience as the fruit of sensations and memories over time. Individual sense-perceptions are thus not experience, which explains why he treats the attempt to draw conclusions from such individual perceptions as a priori reasoning. (The modern meaning of a priori to mean prior even to sensation derives from Kant.)⁸⁶

Leaving Buckles' comment on Kant's use of *a priori* here uncommented, I wish to refer to what I noted a couple of pages earlier, that is, Hume's reference to the uniformity of experience. For something like a perception to qualify as, or become, experience, it needs to be put in context with other perceptions. Now, it is exactly this uniformity and the necessary acts that are relevant with regard to Kant, as I hope to show in the following.

At this point I again must note that in no way do I want to present Kant as essentially Humean. Still, it is obvious that the thinkers share many views, and there can just as obviously be no question of the direction of the presumed influence. In the following passage from the *Enquiry* we find a striking resemblance to what Kant later would write of the dangers of unrestricted reason, that is, rationalist metaphysics, as well as a clear statement of the view and answer which Kant saw to be so problematic. That is, that there should be no *a priori* at all, and causality itself, even though it lies at the heart of our "reasonings concerning matter of fact"⁸⁷, can only be said to be a subjectively produced idea, of which we have many:

Nothing, at first view, may seem more unbounded than the thought of man, which not only escapes all human power and

⁸⁶ Buckles 2007, 30, Footnote 6.

⁸⁷ Hume 2007, 29 (*EHU* 4.4/26).

authority, but is not even restrained within the limits of nature and reality. To form monsters, and join incongruous shapes and appearances, costs the imagination no more trouble than to conceive the most natural and familiar objects. [...] What never was seen, or heard of, may yet be conceived; nor is anything beyond the power of thought, except what implies an absolute contradiction.⁸⁸

Now, this far everything seems to be in line with Kant's views. In the following passage, however, we start to see the difference between Hume and Kant:

5 But though our thought seems to possess this unbounded liberty, we shall find, upon a nearer examination, that it is really connected within very narrow limits, and that all this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience. When we think of a golden mountain, we only join two consistent ideas, gold, and mountain, with which we were formerly acquainted.⁸⁹

What Hume here calls "the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience" is precisely the focus of Kant's transcendental philosophy, as he wants to show that the actions Hume here describes can and should be analyzed, in order to arrive at a ground and criteria of how these (synthesizing) actions of the mind can be truly universally objective. Thus the obvious difference between Hume and Kant is the view concerning *a priori* reasoning, or a *priori* rules of synthesizing, which Kant claims to be, not a result of experience, but rather a necessary condition for experience. Hume's stand becomes clear in the following passage:

4 All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of cause and effect. By means of that relation alone we can go beyond the evidence of our memory and senses. If you were to ask a man, why he believes any matter of fact, which is absent;

⁸⁸ Hume 2007, 15 (EHU 2.4/18).

⁸⁹ Hume 2007, 15-16 (EHU 2.5/19).

for instance, that his friend is in the country, or in France; he would give you a reason; and this reason would be some other fact; as a letter received from him, or the knowledge of his former resolutions and promises. A man finding a watch or any other machine in a desert island, would conclude that there had once been men in that island. All our reasonings concerning fact are of the same nature. And here it is constantly supposed that there is a connexion between the present fact and that which is inferred from it. Were there nothing to bind them together, the inference would be entirely precarious. [...]

5 If we would satisfy ourselves, therefore, concerning the nature of that evidence, which assures us of matters of fact, we must enquire how we arrive at the knowledge of cause and effect.

6 I shall venture to affirm, as a general proposition, which admits of no exception, that the knowledge of this relation is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings a priori; but arises entirely from experience, when we find that any particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other.⁹⁰

I have already presented how Hume attempted to solve the problem; his only resort was to refer to a new sentiment or feeling, and our subjective thought of a customary connection hence brought forth. From this we can finally move back to Kant, whom we find thinking along the same lines as Hume, with regard to experience not meaning all of our representations, but rather only those representations that are connected to each other in a certain, unified manner. I argue that it is precisely this certain, unified manner which Kant analyzes differently and more profoundly than Hume, thus resulting in a claim concerning the unity of apperception and the forms of intuition as well as the categories as *a priori* conditions of all possible experience, and ultimately, even the objects of that experience. However, as the purpose of this chapter is only to frame the question, I will not here attempt to explicate Kant's solution of the problem, but only rather briefly take a preliminary look at Kant's account of experience and how he saw it in relation to Hume, leaving the details and argumentation for the following chapters.

⁹⁰ Hume 2007, 29-30 (EHU 4.4-6/26-27).

The aim at this point is to present the direction which Kant thought we must take, to be able to arrive at a firm and lasting answer concerning “the ground of the relation of that in us which we call ‘representation’ to the object”.

2.4 Kant’s Account of Experience in Contrast to Hume

To emphasize what can be taken as Kant’s partial allegiance to the empiricist tradition, let’s see what Kant writes in the beginning of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

There is no doubt whatever that *all our cognition begins with experience*; for how else should the cognitive faculty be awakened into exercise if not through objects that stimulate our senses and in part themselves produce representations, in part bring the activity of our understanding into motion to compare these, to connect or separate them, and thus to work up the raw material of sensible impressions into a cognition of objects that is called experience? As far as time is concerned, then, *no cognition in us precedes experience, and with experience every cognition begins.*⁹¹

Again, this seems to be rather much in line with the Humean empiricist account. However, this is not at all where the story ends. I find it convincing to think that the above passage (the opening of the B-edition of the first *Critique*) was written to acknowledge the empiricist claim of the essentiality of experience as the starting point of knowledge. Still, the reference of no cognitions *temporally* preceding experience should already give us the clue to what is to come, that is, that Kant wants to inquire into another kind of preceding of experience. This preceding will be of utmost importance, as it will be shown that experience itself has *a priori* conditions which we should explicate. Thus the passage continues:

But although all our cognition commences **with** experience, yet it does not on that account all arise **from** experience: For it could well be that even our experiential cognition is a composite of that

⁹¹ B1, italics added.

which we receive through impressions and that which our own cognitive faculty (merely prompted by sensible impressions) provides out of itself, which addition we cannot distinguish from that fundamental material until long practice has made us attentive to it and skilled in separating it out.

It is therefore at least a question requiring closer investigation, and one not to be dismissed at first glance, whether there is any such cognition independent of all experience and even of all impressions of the senses. One calls such cognitions *a priori*, and distinguishes them from empirical ones, which have their sources *a posteriori*, namely in experience.⁹²

Here we see how the question is now posed simultaneously as the question of the existence of *a priori* cognition and the question of the conditions of (objective) experience itself. From Kant's writings in both the first *Critique* and *Prolegomena* it seems that he conceived the conception of experience as an explication and a part of the answer to the problem he saw in Hume's account. That is, Kant's thought was that we cannot either perceive or derive concepts such as causality, or even space, from experience, but yet we need these concepts⁹³ to have experience of objects and events in the world. If our most general and basic concepts (the categories) were not valid of objects but were only subjective rules, it would make all experience contingent and subjective. But this is not the case if it can be shown that the categories have objective validity and reality, and that they are necessary elements of any possible experience in general. This is part of what Kant writes in the following passage, along with his famous formulation of the conditions of experience being the conditions of the objects of experience:

The *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience. Now I assert that the categories that have just been adduced are nothing other than the conditions of thinking in a possible experience, just as space and time contain the conditions of the

⁹² B1-2.

⁹³ Or the rules represented in them. See e.g. B145.

intuition for the very same thing. They are therefore also fundamental concepts for thinking objects in general for the appearances, and they therefore have *a priori* objective validity [...]

⁹⁴

I will not here deal with all of the implications of this important passage, since my aim for now is only to lay out the basics of Kant's account of experience, and the claim that it is essentially objective, and essentially has an *a priori* form, by which it is conditioned. Still, we can note that when Kant speaks of space and time as conditions of intuition, and the categories as conditions of thinking, he means them properly as forms and rules by which objective experience is united.⁹⁵ It is not entirely obvious in the passage why the categories as conditions of *thinking* are conditions for any possible experience, but a clue is given in the end, when Kant says that the categories thus are “fundamental concepts for thinking objects in general for the appearances”. This seems to imply that appearances as representations need a thought object, for the existence of which the categories are a necessary condition.

So, even if Kant thought that experience is where cognition begins, for him experience was not something subjective, say, subjective combining of perceptions, even if it were done according to well-learned custom or habit.⁹⁶ In the *Prolegomena* Kant indeed writes reminiscently of Hume that “experience itself is nothing other than a continual conjoining (synthesis) of perceptions”.⁹⁷ However, the crux of the matter is that Kant wants to show that certain universal and necessary conditions must be fulfilled for this experience to arise. That is, the aforementioned synthesis or continual conjoining of perceptions must follow rules, or even universal and necessary laws. The difference between Hume and Kant with regard to experience

⁹⁴ A111.

⁹⁵ B144-148.

⁹⁶ Hannah Ginsborg (2006) notes, to my knowledge very appropriately, that Kant's own presentation of his conception of experience is at times hard to follow and explicate. Given that the matter is extremely relevant to his critical philosophy, Kant's conception of experience is rather clearly understudied, as Ginsborg also notes. Without proper arguments I don't want here to engage in dialogue, but I only note that, to me, Ginsborg's own view still seems inadequate and problematic as it does not seem to acknowledge the role of the categories as rules in experience.

⁹⁷ *Prolog.* 4:275.

and causality then can be described as follows: according to Hume we learn to associate perceptions in a certain way, thus building up experience and the concept of causality, or the idea of a necessary connection, from the custom of relating two things to each other, which Hume calls constant conjunction. However, we can never observe the necessity either in the relation of the objects, or in the objects themselves, and indeed there it does not, according to Hume, reside.⁹⁸ This means that even though causality is a universal way of relating ideas to each other, it is essentially a subjective idea or concept, which we are accustomed to use, but which in the end cannot be said to originate in or pertain to empirical objects.

Kant, on the other hand, sees this account as deeply problematic, and wants to show that causality indeed can validly be applied and actually pertains to empirical objects, even though Kant agrees with Hume that we can never directly perceive or abstract the necessity, which is inherent in causality, from experience. The basic idea then becomes that causality (among other categories) must be objectively valid of empirical objects, or objects of experience, exactly because we need this *a priori* concept to have experience in the first place. Representations need to be joined with each other and related into the original unity of apperception according to necessary laws, or we would never have any pertaining, on-going and even potentially objective experience, but only some flux of subjectively combined representations.

The radicality of Kant's position in relation to that of Hume's was to say that there are universal and necessary conditions of experience, which do not arise from the experience itself. Of course, this much is well-known. What needs to be acknowledged, however, is the fact that when Kant now started to search for and analyze these conditions of experience, he was not analyzing the conditions of the totality of our representations, feelings, judgments etc., but primarily that relation which can be said to be objective, and thereby useful for us in producing knowledge. For Kant, experience is a conscious, objective and intentional relation to the world. And what Kant will show to be a condition of objective representing of objects, that is, experience, has to do with universal necessity in the representing of the objects. This is a crucial distinction, the misunderstanding of which could lead to a misconception of Kant's critical project. In the *Prolegomena* Kant writes:

⁹⁸ See Fieser 2018, 3c.

The possibility of experience in general is thus at the same time the universal law of nature, and the principles of the former are themselves the laws of the latter. For we are not acquainted with nature except as the sum total of appearances, i.e., of the representations in us, and so we cannot get the laws of their connection from anywhere else except the principles of their connection in us, i.e., from the conditions of necessary unification in one consciousness, which unification constitutes the possibility of experience.⁹⁹

In the following chapters I attempt to show in more detail how Kant solved the Humean problem with his Copernican turn of philosophy, partly relying on his new conception of experience and its *a priori* conditions, most importantly the necessary unification of representations in one consciousness, as a guiding line.

I state once more that, for Kant, by no means are all of our representations or contents of the mind what he calls *experience*. Were this the case, then Kant's claim would have to seem very strange or even pointless. Rather, the case is that Kant's overarching way of proceeding is to show that we need to have universal and necessary forms and rules, that is, the *a priori* intuitions and concepts, and *a priori* synthesizing activity, for self-conscious and objective experience to be possible. The essential, new strategy is to point out and validate the transcendental conditions, not primarily of all representing, but of objective empirical cognition, that is, experience, the possibility of which rests on our unifying synthesis of appearances:

The possibility of experience is therefore that which gives all of our cognitions *a priori* objective reality. Now experience rests on the synthetic unity of appearances, i.e., on a synthesis according to concepts of the object of appearances in general, without which it would not even be cognition but rather a rhapsody of perceptions, which would not fit together in any context in accordance with rules of a thoroughly connected (possible) consciousness, thus not into the transcendental and necessary unity of apperception.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *Pröl.*, 4:319.

¹⁰⁰ A156/B 195.

And:

There is only one experience, in which all perceptions are represented as in thoroughgoing and lawlike connection, just as there is only one space and time, in which all forms of appearance and all relation of being or non-being take place. If one speaks of different experiences, they are only so many perceptions insofar as they belong to one and the same universal experience. The thoroughgoing and synthetic unity of perceptions is precisely what constitutes the form of experience, and it is nothing other than the synthetic unity of the appearances in accordance with concepts.¹⁰¹

These passages make it clear that subjective feelings and perceptions are for Kant not experience but rather there is only one universal experience which is brought about by “the synthetic unity of appearances in accordance with concepts”. How this unified experience, its synthetic unity of appearances and its objective reference is in more detail constructed, will be examined in the following chapters. In the fourth chapter I also return explicitly to the Humean problem and the Herz-letter, as well as to the A-deduction’s rather direct answer to the question Kant posed in the letter to Herz. I will not quote the passage here in full, but only as a glimpse:

If the objects with which our cognition has to do were things in themselves, then we would not be able to have any *a priori* concepts of them at all. For whence should we obtain them? If we take them from the object (without even investigating here how the latter could become known to us), then our concepts would be merely empirical and not *a priori* concepts. If we take them from ourselves, then that which is merely in us cannot determine the constitution of an object distinct from our representations, i.e., be a ground why there should be a thing that corresponds to something we have in our thoughts, and why all this representation should not instead be empty. But if, on the contrary we have to do everywhere only with

¹⁰¹ A110.

appearances, then it is not only possible but also necessary that certain *a priori* concepts precede empirical cognition of objects. For as appearances they constitute an object that is merely in us, since a mere modification of our sensibility is not to be encountered outside us at all.¹⁰²

So, how can we have *a priori* concepts or cognition of objects? And why does our experience of these various kinds of objects seem so unified and affine? The case is not as simple as Hume suggested, namely that there really is no *a priori* cognition of any kind, but we learn all we learn from experience, which just happens to have the uniformity which it obviously has. Rather, claims Kant, there is a form to all experience, which form then is a condition of the experience and the objects within the experience, and by which form we can thus have *a priori* cognition of the objects of experience. Kant would here agree with Hume on two things, namely that (1) by pure reason alone, we cannot cognize any objects, and that (2) all empirical cognition starts with experience. Nevertheless, Kant disagrees with Hume about the possibility and necessity of *a priori* cognition. This is so because the *a priori* cognition, which concerns the form of experience and thus objects in general, does not concern the things in themselves but rather only the appearances, for which the forms of experience indeed are a *formal cause*.¹⁰³

2.5 Additional Remarks on the Kantian Notion of Experience

Experience, for Kant, does not mean what it nowadays often means, that is, feelings, sensations, or other ‘subjective representations’, as I think Kant might have put it. In other words, experience is not subjective, and something which is subjective is not experience, but experience is something objective, that is, something about

¹⁰² A128-129.

¹⁰³ The notion of a formal cause is a well-known Aristotelian notion. To the best of my knowledge, Kant, however, did not use this notion precisely in the context or meaning in which I am using it. Rather, I am introducing it as springing from Kant’s account of the nature of experience, and the objects thereof, in the sense that a formal cause is a form (of either intuition or understanding) which is a precondition for the existence of that to which it is a formal cause. I find this fitting for many reasons, one of which is the letter to Herz, where Kant writes about the relation of representations to their objects, inquiring into in which cases which – object or representation – might be considered a cause for the other.

objects. In addition it is something conceptual and of a cognitive nature, meaning the form of that universal cognition of objects which we all relate to in a similar fashion.

On this question I agree with e.g. Hemmo Laiho, who describes Kantian experience (*Erfahrung*) generally as objective, *empirical cognition*, and emphasizes that for Kant there is only one, unified experience. This means that experience is different from both *perceptions*, of which there of course may be many, and from such things as “lived” or “felt” “experiences” (*Erlebnis*), which are multiple, and come and go.¹⁰⁴

I am even willing to support, to some degree, Nicholas Stang’s defence of Hermann Cohen’s reading of Kantian ‘experience’.¹⁰⁵ According to Cohen, Kant developed a new concept of experience, which was hard to identify in the first edition of the first *Critique*, but rather clearly laid out in the second edition. Stang states about Cohen’s interpretation of Kant, that even though “Cohen’s reading of Kant was massively influential, it was, and remains, just as controversial. From the late nineteenth century to today, it has attracted everything from meticulous scholarly critique to brusque dismissal.” What was Cohen’s interpretation, then? As Stang writes, according to Cohen “experience is Newtonian mathematical natural science.” However curious this may appear to us, accustomed to our contemporary notion of experience, in which we are having experiences of this and that kind, and which may be very personal feelings etc., I find that Cohen’s interpretation of Kant’s experience, supported by Stang, does somewhat fit my reading of Kantian experience and objectivity. One should still be very careful with the nature of the claim, and I can only claim to reservedly support this interpretation if the identification of experience and natural science is not made too strongly. Stang continues:

While this equation of experience with mathematical natural science has few contemporary defenders, I believe it is substantially correct, with one important qualification. Kant uses the term

¹⁰⁴ See Laiho 2012, 184.

¹⁰⁵ On another matter, Stang states that he considers Kant’s phrase “things in themselves in the empirical sense,” to refer to “the fully contingent properties actually possessed by objects in space and time” (Stang 2018, 15.). I present my strongly differing interpretation in Chapter 5.

Erfahrung in a number of different senses in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [...] a central, and neglected, sense of that key technical term aligns with Cohen's reading; what Kant sometimes refers to as 'universal experience' (sometimes, simply 'experience') is, in broad outlines, correctly interpreted by Cohen as mathematical natural science.¹⁰⁶

I think that Stang is correct in claiming that Kant has different senses for *Erfahrung*. Stang, however, concentrates on one of these, which may hide the possibility that the different senses in question are not that far from each other. This, again, might mean that we could be able to group all the senses that Kant attributes to *Erfahrung* together, in which case the essence of the term might not be completely reducible to 'mathematical natural science'. I also find that even though I somewhat agree with Stang on the relevance of Cohen's interpretation of Kantian experience, I do not agree on a few other relevant matters with him. For starters, Stang claims the following:

Kant denied what Locke and Hume maintained, that, in Kant's words, all of our cognition "entspringt ... aus *Erfahrung*" (B1). In order to express this disagreement Kant needs a 'neutral' concept of experience, one that does not contain specifically Kantian assumptions about the nature of experience.¹⁰⁷

I think that the case is not as simple as this, and from a certain perspective it is almost contrary to what Stang claims. I find it obvious that Kant indeed expressed some likeness to the empiricist position, stating indeed that all cognition *starts with experience*, only with the important addition that it does not still all arise *from* experience.¹⁰⁸ So, yes, Stang is right to say that Kant's claim that all of cognition does not arise from experience is a sort of criticism of empiricism. However, this criticism should be read in context, namely acknowledging the fact that Kant has just prior to this statement claimed that all cognition begins with experience:

¹⁰⁶ Stang 2018, 13.

¹⁰⁷ Stang 2018, 16.

¹⁰⁸ See B1.

“There is no doubt whatever that all our cognition begins with experience”¹⁰⁹. This claim is what Kant begins the introduction of the B-edition of the *Critique*, and it is, I take it, where he gives credit to the empiricists rather than attacking them. It is only that after this statement, he expresses the reservation that even if all cognition begins *with* experience, as the empiricists claim, it does not all arise solely *from* experience.

¹⁰⁹ B1.

3 Kant's Copernican Revolution as the New Metaphysics

3.1 Introduction to Kantian Ontology

In the previous chapter I looked at what can be called the *Humean problem*, as a crucial motivation for Kant's critical philosophy. For Kant, the problem must be solved with reference to our *a priori* concepts – something that Hume could or would not accept. As Kant proceeded in his answer to the problem, it became crucial to claim that objects must conform to our cognition, and not vice versa, if we are to explain how concepts which are of intellectual origin and which are necessary for making objective judgments, can be perfectly valid of objects.¹¹⁰ This account, which builds on the *a priori* conditions of experience, is often called Kant's *Copernican revolution*. I now want to ask: what does this revolution mean with regard to the possibility of ontology, and how does this relate to objectivity? Was Kant doing ontology? If yes, was it *a priori* ontology?¹¹¹ In what way, then, was it different from the rationalists or the scholastics? And if Kant's categories were to be something like concepts for the most general predicates of objects in general¹¹², how does the Kantian view of categories and objects differ from its ancestor, namely the view of Aristotle?

I try to approach the matter by asking what is the relation of ontology and objectivity. Can ontology be objective and in what way? For Kant, ontology is part of metaphysics, which is a non-empirical science by definition, and thereby deals with non-sensible, *a priori* cognition. But what kind of ontology can we have in a purely *a priori* fashion, that is, purely rationally? Can we have *a priori* cognition of objects, that is, objective *a priori* cognition? I take it that Kant's answer is affirmative. And it is not only that we can, but we must have this *a priori* cognition

¹¹⁰ B xvi.

¹¹¹ I here only discuss Kant's ontology as a subsidiary question to objectivity, and do not want to give the impression of claiming any total truths concerning Kant's ontology. For a more thorough investigation of Kant's ontology, see e.g. Koistinen (2012), where Koistinen shows that Kant does make a distinction, stating that pure metaphysics consists of and can be divided into his [transcendental] ontology and the critique of pure reason; however, Kant is not consistent in this, and sometimes these two are not clearly distinct (See Koistinen 2012, 125.)

¹¹² See A11-12; B128; A246-247/B303; *V-Met/Mron*, 29:752; Koistinen 2012, 125.

in order to have *a posteriori* cognition, that is, sensible, empirical cognition of real objects. Kant's new revolutionary thought, however, in a way combines Aristotle with rationalism, and states that we can cognize *a priori* only the *form* of objects, or the form of experience, but the *matter* must be sensibly given to us. Thereby full objective cognition arises only *a posteriori* from experience. This means that the only objective *a priori* cognition that we can have concerns only the general form of objects, but is not in itself enough to produce a relation to real objects. Thus the only objective *a priori* cognition we have is objective only formally, but for full, empirical objectivity we also need material objects affecting our sensibility. Let us look at two short passages from Kant:

I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our *a priori* concepts of objects in general. A system of such concepts would be called transcendental philosophy.¹¹³

Transcendental philosophy is also called ontology, and it is the product of the critique of pure reason.¹¹⁴

In these passages we see Kant's project and his account of ontology rather clearly defined in relation to his notion of *a priori* concepts. This account of *a priori* concepts and *a priori* cognition of objects is nevertheless by no means a simple restatement of the tradition where the thought of *a priori* or innate concepts played a key role, that is, the differing thinkers who can be dubbed to propose various forms of rationalism. Rather, Kant was fairly critical in his reception of the rationalists, and came to share with Hume some of his starting points. Much in line with what Hume wrote some decades earlier¹¹⁵, Kant writes in the Preface to the first edition of the first *Critique*:

Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but

¹¹³ A11-12.

¹¹⁴ V-Met/K3E, 29:949.

¹¹⁵ Hume 2007, 26-27 (the passage I presented in 2.2.3.).

which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason. [...] But it thereby falls into obscurity and contradictions, from which it can indeed surmise that it must somewhere be proceeding on the ground of hidden errors; but it cannot discover them, for the principles on which it is proceeding, since they surpass the bounds of all experience, no longer recognize any touch stone of experience. The battlefield of these endless controversies is called **metaphysics**.¹¹⁶

However negative this passage may seem towards metaphysics, I want to defend the view that by no means did Kant want to be rid of metaphysics overall, rather on the contrary, but he did want to criticize the dogmatically rationalist view of metaphysics, and give it a critical, scientific form. What he wanted specifically was to give sensibility, or sensible intuition, its proper role as a condition of all objective cognition. This is obviously in opposition to any account of metaphysics which proposes to cognize objects or lay out truths about the world purely rationally. Thus, it seems to me impossible to arrive at a satisfactory conception of Kant's theory of objects and objectivity without taking on the rationalist account of metaphysics. But what can Kant's critical version of metaphysics and especially ontology amount to with regard to the nature of objects, if Kant says it is primarily concerned with "our *a priori* concepts of objects in general"? Is Kant's transcendental philosophy really at all concerned with ontology, and if yes, in what sense?

Below I examine some aspects of Kant's conception of ontology in relation to the Aristotelian-scholastic and the Leibniz-Wolffian rationalist doctrines of ontology, to understand what of these doctrines Kant approved and what he rejected. I attempt to illuminate the way in which Kant thought that a purely rational (*a priori*) ontology is not objective in the sense that it does not alone provide cognition of particular objects.

Ever since the first *Critique* Kant has been accused of rejecting the possibility of ontology altogether, of which an early example is Moses Mendelssohn calling Kant the "all-destroyer".¹¹⁷ Much of the negative early reception of Kant had to do

¹¹⁶ A vii-viii.

¹¹⁷ See e.g. Cassirer 1981, 369.

with Berkeleian or phenomenalist interpretations of Kant, which of course were soon accompanied or rivaled by more productive interpretations. Still, it seems a matter of debate to date, what Kant's stance toward ontology was, and what actually happens to ontology within the context of Kant's critical philosophy. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant stated that he wanted to deny the (at the time) classical notion of ontology, and replace it with an analysis of the understanding:

the proud name of an ontology, which presumes to offer synthetic *a priori* cognitions of things in general in a systematic doctrine (e.g. the principle of causality), must give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding.¹¹⁸

Nevertheless, it would be rather naïve to expect that Kant simply wanted to destroy the field of philosophy called ontology. At times it may seem as if he wanted to get rid of ontology and actually metaphysics overall, but a more credible depiction might be that he only wanted to reshape them.

Olli Koistinen has shown that even though Kant's attitude toward metaphysics is somewhat ambivalent, and critical of some aspects of rationalist metaphysics, the *Critique of Pure Reason* can, and perhaps should, be read precisely as a project of metaphysics.¹¹⁹ Koistinen humorously states that at a point Kant reported having fallen in love with metaphysics, but it is unclear whether this love lasted throughout Kant's philosophy. In any case, it seems clear that the relation was somewhat unhappy, and if the love lasted, it is not sure whether the object remained the same.¹²⁰ I support the view that for Kant, the rationalist metaphysics of his time, ontology naturally included, was dogmatic, resulting in, as Koistinen writes, "consistent fairy tales".¹²¹ The problem in such metaphysics is that it fails to pass what Koistinen calls "the intuition test",¹²² that is, it fails to take into account the proper role of sensible intuition as a condition of all cognition. And metaphysics, by definition, was supposed to be exactly cognition *a priori*.

¹¹⁸ A246-247/B303.

¹¹⁹ See Koistinen 2012 for elaboration on how Kant's metaphysics relates to Baumgarten etc.

¹²⁰ See Koistinen 2012, 119-123.

¹²¹ Koistinen 2012, 123.

¹²² See Koistinen 2012, 125.

Kant thought that in rationalist metaphysics, the role and nature of sensibility with relation to our possibility to cognize things, was not properly understood. The problem was that the rationalists seemed to build up systems based only on concepts and their relations (their contradictions and non-contradictions), regardless of the actuality or sensible conditions (of objectivity) which could validate these concepts and judgments. What Kant made essential in his critical metaphysics was the distinction of sensibility and understanding, as well as the related distinction of phenomena (or appearances) and noumena. In relation to this, he accused both the rationalists and empiricists of committing the same mistake, namely, the failure to separate between sensibility and understanding, and their differing tasks. This failure results in what Kant calls ‘the amphiboly of the concepts of reflection’, in which the complex tasks involved in cognition are all ultimately ascribed to either the intellect, as in the case of rationalists, or the senses, as in the case of empiricists.¹²³ Kant thought that to rationally build a philosophical doctrine and claim it to be true about the real world, just based on *a priori* concepts, is an attempt in vain, and certainly no true metaphysics concerning the world.

As I now aim to show how Kant’s stance toward ontology was not as confused as it may seem, it might be beneficial to start answering the original question by reformulating it: in what sense is Kant’s transcendental philosophy ontology, and in what sense is it not? The answer to this question of course depends, on the one hand, on what ontology is, and on the other, on what the nature of Kant’s transcendental philosophy is.

3.2 A Very Brief History of Ontology

The word *ontologia*, which roughly translates to the science/study of being/existence, was probably first used by German philosopher Jacob Lorhard in 1606.¹²⁴ It was the rationalist philosopher Christian Wolff, however, who approximately a century later popularized the term, followed by Alexander Baumgarten. It should be noted that the period in question, roughly a century and a half from Lorhard’s introduction of the term to Kant’s supposed rejection of it,

¹²³ I discuss the amphiboly section (A260-A289/B316-346) of the *Critique of Pure Reason* more closely in 4.2.

¹²⁴ See e.g. Øhrstrøm et al 2008.

was a period during which metaphysics was heavily crafted into a science. This also meant coming up with new words for its “sub-sciences”, if one may say so, and an overall attempt to divide metaphysics into sections dealing with different aspects of reality and being. Terms such as ‘ontosophia’ and ‘angelosophia’ were also used, but not many of them remained in use.¹²⁵ Jose Mora writes of the origin of the word, as well as Kant’s stance to it:

Christian Wolff popularized (in philosophical circles) the word 'ontology' (ontologia, Ontologie). [...] Ontology uses a "demonstrative [...] method" [...] and purports to investigate the most general predicates of all entes as such [...] Following Wolff, Alexander Baumgarten (*Metaphysica*, 1740) defined ontology (also called ontosophia, metaphysica, metaphysical universalis, architectonic, philosophia prima) as "the science of the most general and abstract predicates of anything" [...], in so far as they belong to the first cognitive principles of the human mind [...]. Kant launched an epoch-making attack against rational ontology in the sense of Wolff and Baumgarten; for ontology was to him both a pseudo-science and a temptation. He was convinced that he had succeeded in eliminating it by the "transcendental Analytic." The whole *Critique of Pure Reason* is, in a way, the work of a man who was obsessed, and deeply distressed, by ontology.¹²⁶

Whether or not Mora’s claim of Kant’s obsession toward ontology is justified, it seems clear that Wolff’s and Baumgarten’s doctrine of metaphysics as consisting of proper metaphysics (ontology) and special metaphysics (cosmology, psychology and theology), was the prevailing doctrine of metaphysics for Kant, and so it is first and foremost this conception of metaphysics and ontology that Kant was familiar to, and toward which his criticism also was directed. As we shall see in a bit, Kant also divided metaphysics into two sections, but the division was different, namely (1)

¹²⁵ See e.g. Mora 1963.

¹²⁶ Mora 1963.

transcendental metaphysics (ontology in the transcendental sense), and (2) proper metaphysics (as applied to objects).¹²⁷

3.3 Aristotle as Background to Kant

Before launching into Kant's account of ontology, another element which was crucial at least for Kant's terminology and architectonic should be given some consideration. Marco Sgarbi has emphasized the fact that Aristotle's philosophy, or its derivative 'Aristotelianism', is far too seldom acknowledged to be a major influence on Kant; little has been written on the relation of Kant to Aristotle and Aristotelianism, and often Kant is rather depicted as an anti-Aristotelian philosopher.¹²⁸ However, Sgarbi claims that in fact "Aristotelianism had a decisive impact on Kant's philosophy".¹²⁹ Of course it is widely acknowledged that

¹²⁷ See *V-Met/K3E*, 29:956. For elaboration on how Kant's metaphysics relates to that of Wolff's and Baumgarten's, see Koistinen 2012. In this context it is also worth mentioning that when Kant wrote his *Prolegomena*, after publishing the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he wasn't the first to use this term (Prolegomena), but both Wolff and Baumgarten had written what they called a "Prolegomena" to their own doctrines of psychology and metaphysics, respectively. Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*, which was the book used by Kant for his lectures, also includes a section titled "Prolegomena to Metaphysics". I do agree that Kant's critical account of transcendental ontology, along with his self-claimed Copernican revolution, is largely critical toward rationalist ontology, starting already with the rather early text *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. Still, it should be noted that the influence of the rationalist tradition was so heavy, that much of what Kant writes seems to be written precisely in relation to it, and in fact so, that Kant seems to build his version of ontology at least structurally with the aim of replacing it part by part.

¹²⁸ Sgarbi 2016, 217. Sgarbi (2016, 5) writes: "Historical comparisons between Kant and Aristotle in the fields of metaphysics, logic, and methodology are few and far between. My proposal, following Giorgio Tonelli's suggestion, is to read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* not as a treatise on metaphysics or on the theory of knowledge, but as a book on logic and, more specifically, on the "method" of metaphysics, which must be understood within the Aristotelian tradition: "referring the *Critique of Pure Reason* to its logical matrix has the most far-reaching consequences on the very intelligibility, and on the historical and philosophical interpretation of this work [. . .] the whole general structure of the *Critique*, seen in this light, does not appear any more as a personal, and largely obscure and arbitrary, creation of its author, but as the meaningful outcome of some basic traditions in the history of logic." In this sense the whole first *Critique* would have been a propaedeutic tool for metaphysics, while the "critique" would have been a canon for the possibility of knowing an object in general."

¹²⁹ Sgarbi 2016, 218.

Aristotle's philosophy was a major influence on what is called scholastic philosophy, but I find credible Sgarbi's claim that his study of "Konigsberg's intellectual context shows that it was a melting pot for various philosophical traditions, and that, at least up until the first three decades of the eighteenth century, the dominant philosophy was Aristotelianism."¹³⁰ Based on this observation, it is not so surprising to find, upon an even mediocre level of scrutiny, astoundingly many Aristotelian terms and elements in Kant's philosophy.¹³¹

When one starts to look at the formulations in the first *Critique* in this respect, it is striking how full of Aristotelian terminology the work is. Terminology in itself, of course, does not mean that much, as one can say that Kant is using the terms in a very different manner. But is he really using the terms in such a different manner? Furthermore, the structure of the *Critique*, along with the many unexpressed presuppositions, point toward an Aristotelian framework of logic, syllogisms, analytics, categories and deductions. Historically, Marco Sgarbi has traced Kant's deeper acquaintance with Aristotelianism to a specific time in the beginning of what some call Kant's 'silent decade', namely the years 1771-1772.¹³²

Let us first make a few observations about what Kant wrote or spoke concerning Aristotle and logic. First of all, for Kant, logic has to do only with concepts (or form, in Kant's Aristotelian terms), and their relations, and not with actual objects or sensations caused by them etc. (matter, in Kant's Aristotelian terms). Kant holds Aristotle high with regard to logic, but not as much with regard

¹³⁰ Sgarbi 2016, 217-218.

¹³¹ I make no strong claim, but suggest that, as the relation of Aristotle and Kant is often only seen interesting or relevant from the point of view of *ethics*, some Aristotelian tendencies in Kant's philosophy are commonly overlooked. It seems somewhat plausible to me that in his critical philosophy, especially in the first *Critique*, Kant was trying to construct a sort of *organon* akin to that of Aristotle's, which could serve as a basis for all philosophical enquiries from there on. See A11-12/B24-26.

¹³² Sgarbi 2016, 51. Sgarbi (2016, 5) also writes: "the seeds and roots of Kant's philosophy originated between 1766 and 1772, but [...] they do not find a full expression in either the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* or the *Inaugural Dissertation*. From the logical standpoint, the enterprise of criticism began only with the discovery of the Aristotelian doctrine of categories as an essential part in the conception of synthetic a priori knowledge, in other words after 1772. Kant, however, came to this doctrine only after two decades of failed attempts and only, as I have already mentioned, after turning away from Wolffian rationalism and British empiricism. There was an evolution in Kant's thought from the false starts and incomplete projects of the precritical period to the discovery of the key of his transcendental logic."

to metaphysics. This is, to simplify a bit, because of Aristotle's (alleged) confusion of the proper fields and methods of logic vs metaphysics (which confusion resembles what Kant calls 'the amphiboly of the concepts of reflection'¹³³):

Aristotle erred by including in logic a division of general concepts by means of which one can think objects; this belongs to metaphysics. Logic has to do with concepts whatever they might be, and deals only with their relation.¹³⁴

Aristotle can be regarded as the father of logic. But his logic is too scholastic, full of subtleties, and fundamentally has not been of much value to the human understanding. It is a dialectic and an organon for the art of disputation. Still, the principal ideas from it have been preserved, and this is because logic is not occupied with any object and hence it can be quickly exhausted.¹³⁵

From these passages one might get the impression that Kant opposed Aristotle, which in general is only partly the case. The passages nevertheless do illustrate what Kant considered Aristotle's failure, namely the inability to separate logic from metaphysics, in the sense that only the latter should and even can be concerned about objects and the conditions of thinking about objects, whereas logic should only concern concepts and their relations. On the other hand, Kant obviously recognized the immense value of Aristotle's logic as such:

From Aristotle's time on, logic has not gained much in content, by the way, nor can it by its nature do so. But it can surely gain in regard to *exactness*, *determinateness*, and *distinctness*. ... Aristotle had not omitted any moment of the understanding; we are only more exact, methodical, and orderly in this.¹³⁶

¹³³ A260-A289/B316-346. As a note: Kant saw Locke as a kind of follower of Aristotle, and Leibniz as a kind of follower of Plato.

¹³⁴ R4450, 17:556.

¹³⁵ *V-Lo/Wiener*, 24:796.

¹³⁶ *V-Lo/Jäsche*, 9:20.

We have no one who has exceeded Aristotle or enlarged his <pure> logic (which is in itself fundamentally impossible) just as no mathematician has exceeded Euclid.¹³⁷

These passages show that Kant thought highly of Aristotle's logic *per se*, and saw himself as continuing, or rather improving, the work of Aristotle. But what is the purpose and scope of logic according to Kant? It seems crucial for Kant that logic be separated from other fields, such as psychology and most importantly metaphysics, and that logic should only be concerned with concepts and their relations (form), and not with content (matter). The following passages, which criticize given accounts of logic, shed some light on the matter:

After [Aristotle and Peter Ramus] come Malebranche and Locke. This last wrote a treatise *de intellectu humano*. But both writings deal not only with the form of the understanding but with content. They are preparatory exercises for metaphysics. ... The logic of Crusius is crammed full of things that are drawn from other sciences, and it contains metaphysical and theological principles. Lambert wrote an organon of pure reason.¹³⁸

So, for Kant, logic is something that should only be concerned with the form of understanding or thinking (and thereby concepts and their relations, contradictions etc.), and should not concern individual objects, the matter or sensible content of representations. But what, then, is the relation and relevance of logic to metaphysics? Huaping Lu-Adler writes:

For Kant, a strictly scientific logic deals with nothing other than the form of thinking, in abstraction from all relation (*Beziehung*) to the object, that is, from all content (*Inhalt*) of thought (A55/B79). This notion of logic underlay Kant's earlier complaint that Aristotle's logic wrongly included a division of the concepts by which to think objects. It is now also his basis for charging Locke

¹³⁷ V-Lo/DW, 24:700.

¹³⁸ V-Lo/Wiener, 24:796.

with mixing in logic a metaphysical topic, namely the origin of concepts, and Lambert with making logic an instrument or 'organon' of substantive knowledge.¹³⁹

Kant's thought was that logic, as concerning only form (or concepts and their relations), cannot in itself claim anything about objects, without material elements.¹⁴⁰ One of the most important aspects of Kant's critical philosophy indeed is his conception of objects (as appearances) as consisting of *matter* and *form*. It is a matter of debate, however, as to how Kant's use of the notions differs from Aristotle. I find it plausible that Aristotle is perhaps not directly a major influence on the birth of Kant's critical philosophy, but Aristotelianism, as Marco Sgarbi has shown, definitely is.¹⁴¹ Many Aristotelian elements can be found in Kant, but based on Sgarbi's research, perhaps the most essential ones are the facultative logic, the categories and forms of judgment, the distinction of matter and form, and the distinction of logic into analytic and dialectic.¹⁴² Many of these of course come together when discussing Aristotle's view on the nature and method of metaphysics, the 'first philosophy', or the study of 'being as being'. And this brings us to another question: does Kant's use of the Aristotelian framework and concepts serve either metaphysical or epistemological purposes, or are they, for Kant, inseparable? Sgarbi claims the following with regard to the aim of Kant's critical project, in relation to the categories:

Kant's doctrine of categories arises from the failure of the precritical attempts at finding first, simplest, and primitive concepts that, once combined, can explain reality in its complexity: it is the failure of the syllogistic and combinatoric project. [...] The result of Kant's investigation is essentially threefold: (1) the impossibility of finding first, simplest, and primitive concepts that,

¹³⁹ Lu-Adler 2016, 5.

¹⁴⁰ As has been stated, the notions of *matter* and *form*, which seem very suitable for describing Kant's view, are of Aristotelian origin, and were not really present in Kant's precritical writings. Kant's first proper use of 'matter and form' is found in the *Inaugural Dissertation*, AA 2:392. See Sgarbi 2016, 84.

¹⁴¹ See Sgarbi 2016.

¹⁴² See Sgarbi 2016, 220.

once recombined, can describe the whole of reality; (2) concepts are merely heuristic devices to explain reality, but they are in no way constituent building blocks of it; and (3) logical investigation cannot start from concepts, but from judgments from which the concepts are determined. Starting from these results, at the beginning of the 1770s, Kant adopts the Aristotelian doctrine of categories, understood not as the highest kinds or first concepts, but as *modi considerandi* and *cognoscendi*. Categories as *modi considerandi* are what gives determinate significance to the object of knowledge. This notion of “category” is traceable back to early-modern Aristotelianism in authors such as Zabarella and Pace, but was followed in particular by Rabe in his commentary to Aristotle’s categories. Also the idea of schema, the figure of the process of the attribution and arrangement of categories for describing reality, has an Aristotelian origin [...]¹⁴³

I find no reason to doubt Sgarbi’s claims of the historical predecessors from whom Kant might have gotten inspiration to draw on Aristotelian doctrines. Neither do I have much against Sgarbi’s claim of the categories as *modi cognoscendi*. Sgarbi gives plenty of evidence to show that Kant himself identified *modi cognoscendi* with *form*.¹⁴⁴ Based on this evidence it seems fair and accurate to say that, for Kant, space and time are the *modi cognoscendi* of sensibility, and the categories are the *modi cognoscendi* of the understanding.¹⁴⁵ These forms are conditions for the organization of the matter, and thereby *a priori* with regard to cognizing the content. As conditions of cognition of objects (as appearances), the categories can *a priori* be cognized as attributable to all possible objects of experience, that is, to all appearances. In this sense, however, it would also make sense to say that the categories are – not only *modi cognoscendi*, but – something like ‘first concepts’ or ‘highest kinds’, with the restriction that they are not highest kinds with regard to things in themselves, but with regard to appearances. Amie Thomasson writes:

¹⁴³ Sgarbi 2016, 220.

¹⁴⁴ See e.g. Sgarbi 2016, 85.

¹⁴⁵ Sgarbi 2016, 86-87.

Although these are categories of the understanding, they nonetheless retain a certain sort of ontological import, as it is *a priori* that they apply universally to all objects of possible cognition (A79/B105). In this way, by delineating the concepts that are *a priori* necessary for the *cognition* of objects, we can acquire knowledge of categories governing any possible *object* of cognition, and so acquire a sort of descriptive set of ontological categories, though these must be understood explicitly as categories *of objects of possible cognition*, not of the thing in itself.¹⁴⁶

I find this description of Kantian categories quite fitting. Thomasson's mitigating addition of "sort of" could perhaps even be omitted, since the categories do retain ontological import in Kant's sense of ontology, because, as Thomasson puts it, "it is *a priori* that they apply universally to all objects of possible cognition". This is what Kant means by the *a priori* objective validity of the categories.

3.4 Kant's Notions of Metaphysics and Ontology

In one of his lectures on metaphysics Kant introduced ontology as part of metaphysics in the following way:

We now begin the science of the properties of all things in general, which is called ontology. [...] One easily comprehends that it will contain nothing but all basic concepts and basic propositions of our *a priori* cognition in general: for if it is to consider the properties of all things, then it has as an object nothing but a thing in general, i.e., every object of thought, thus no determinate object. Thus nothing remains for me other than the cognizing, which I consider.¹⁴⁷

For Kant, ontology is not a science of some individual objects, but of objects (of thought) in general, and thereby actually concerns cognition itself, along with its

¹⁴⁶ Thomasson 2019, 1.2.

¹⁴⁷ Kant, *V-Met/Mron*, 29:784.

basic concepts and propositions. Kant's view in general is that it is the essence of metaphysics not to be empirical with regard to either (1) the sources of concepts, or (2) the objects of enquiry. In the above passage Kant states that metaphysics does not consider any given, determinate object, and is thus not derived from experience. Rather, it is exactly that science which is completely *a priori*. In the *Prolegomena* he writes:

First, concerning the *sources* of metaphysical cognition, it already lies in the concept of metaphysics that they cannot be empirical. The principles of such cognition (which include not only its fundamental propositions or basic principles, but also its fundamental concepts) must therefore never be taken from experience; for the cognition is supposed to be not physical but metaphysical, i.e., lying beyond experience. Therefore it will be based upon neither outer experience, which constitutes the source of physics proper, nor inner, which provides the foundation of empirical psychology. It is therefore cognition *a priori*, or from pure understanding and pure reason.¹⁴⁸

In the passage we can see that metaphysics is defined in relation to experience as that which is prior, or beyond, experience. Now, if Kant wanted to be rid of all metaphysics, he would most likely not have tried to build a theory, in addition to a critique, of our *a priori* cognition. But as we know, he did build such a theory, and it should be noted that the 'critique' does not refer to a rejection but rather to a proper way of examining this type of cognition. In his lectures on metaphysics, Kant stated the following concerning metaphysics and ontology:

Metaphysics or the system of the pure cognitions of reason divides into two main sections:

I. Transcendental metaphysics, or that part of metaphysics which exhibits elementary concepts in order to cognize *a priori* objects which can be given: this system of metaphysical cognitions is called *ontology* and rests on dissection of reason according to all the

¹⁴⁸ *Prolog.* 4:265-6.

elementary concepts contained in it, e.g., magnitude, quality, substance, cause, effect, etc.

II. Metaphysics proper <*metaphysica propria*>, as metaphysics is called when it is applied to objects themselves [...] ¹⁴⁹

Here we see that Kant keeps ‘ontology’, even after the first *Critique*, terminologically as an essential part of his definition of metaphysics. Ontology is now the transcendental doctrine of elementary concepts of *a priori* cognition. Of course the context of the passage is that of teaching metaphysics in general, but it reflects Kant’s own critical/transcendental views, as is seen from the important reference to objects “which can be given”. To make it clear, ontology is now about *a priori* cognition of – not things in themselves or noumena, but – things that can be sensibly given, namely empirical objects.

Based on the above, Kant does not reject either metaphysics in general, nor even ontology, but rather redefines both while maintaining some aspects and structures of the metaphysics of his predecessors. Even though Kant at times seems to have problems with relating his doctrine of transcendental idealism to previous metaphysics, with regard to both content and terminology, I still find no serious contradictions even when comparing his somewhat older lecture notes to his more ‘official’ views, presented in the *Critiques*. Olli Koistinen has shown that what seems to be ‘the heart’ of the first *Critique*, that is, the ‘Transcendental Analytic’, “has a structure that closely resembles the structure of the metaphysics presented in the lecture notes. Within this structure we may read the ‘Metaphysical Deduction’ as ontology (as presenting the source of the pure concepts of the understanding), the ‘Transcendental Deduction’ as presenting the extent and borders of pure reason, and the ‘Analytic of Principles’ as applied metaphysics. This said, I suggest that Kant in no way abandons metaphysics, but rather his transcendental account of metaphysics is all about making metaphysics objective, in the sense of being concerned precisely with the universal and necessary conditions of representing and cognizing objects.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ *V-Met/K3E*, 29:956.

¹⁵⁰ According to Karl Ameriks (2003, 5), Kant’s metaphysics remains essentially rationalist, regardless of Kant criticizing both his scholastic and rationalist predecessors. On this matter, I cannot bring myself to agree that Kant’s metaphysics is *essentially* rationalist, even though I have already tried to show some of the terminological and structural inheritances to Kant from the rationalists.

3.5 Further remarks on Kant's Metaphysics and Ontology

One of the relevant aspects of Kant's debt to his predecessors, and one relevant to the matter at hand, has to do with his notion of a *thing in itself*.¹⁵¹ This notion is, yet again, a bitterly debated issue in the scholarship, much of which debate relates somehow to the rather well-known debate between one-world and two-world views.¹⁵² As I interpret the notion, the notion of 'thing in itself' refers simply to a thing in itself, that is, with no additions or relational properties. These additions would be the forms (characterized by Sgarbi as *modi cognoscendi*)¹⁵³ of sensibility and understanding, that is, space, time, and the categories. Thus, a thing in itself is a thing without these forms or modes; an abstraction of a kind; (in a specific sense) a formless something.

But Kant was not the first philosopher to speak of things in themselves, although in the Kantian sense he most probably was. I mean this both literally and content-wise, as I think it is worth noting that the notion connects both to John Locke and to Aristotle. Kant had read Locke's *Essay*¹⁵⁴, and even makes detailed references to it. In the *Essay* Locke uses the phrase 'things themselves' to refer to, not the perceived qualities (whether primary or secondary) of things or objects, but rather the proper object or thing, consisting of mathematically depictable properties, to which the perceived qualities have a relation of resemblance. Yasuhiko Tomida has claimed that "Kant's 'things in themselves', 'affection', and sensible 'representations' correspond to Locke's 'things themselves', 'affection', and sensible 'ideas', respectively".¹⁵⁵

Another question to ask is whether Kant's notion of 'things in themselves', or 'thing in itself', is in any interesting way related to the Aristotelian doctrine of metaphysics as the study of being qua being, or being in itself. It is well-known that Aristotle characterized 'Metaphysics', or the first philosophy, as a study of 'being qua being'. That is, it is a study of being as being, or to put in another way, it concerns no special or limited group of beings or ways of being, but rather the most

¹⁵¹ I have above not explicated this notion (thing in itself, *Das Ding an Sich*), or my understanding of it, but will attempt to do so in 4.1.

¹⁵² See e.g. Oberst 2015 or Schulting 2011, 1-25.

¹⁵³ Sgarbi 2016, 86-90.

¹⁵⁴ Locke, John 1997 [1690]. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

¹⁵⁵ Tomida 2009, 51-52. I consider Kant's relation to Locke with regard to things (in) themselves, as well as the distinction of primary and secondary qualities, in chapter 5.

general predicates of all beings, and thereby being itself. This idea of being as being has actually been a matter of debate in Aristotelianism and in later studies of Aristotle and Aristotelianism, and has taken many forms and undergone changes from Aristotle to the Scholastics, e.g. to Francisco Suarez' concept of *ens ut sic*, that is, being as such.¹⁵⁶ It is obviously not my view that Kant simply took his concept from e.g. Suarez or other Aristotelian-Scholastic philosophers, but rather that Kant's metaphysical doctrine is rather a comment or a move in the line of moves which can partly be traced back to Suarez, as well as other Aristotelians. If metaphysics, for Suarez, in general was the study of being, *ens*, in all of its aspects, then the study concerning the very essence of that being (*ens ut sic*) was the prime metaphysics, which later came to be known as ontology, and which would suffer a heavy blow from the fist of Kant's *Critique*. Again, this blow can be claimed to essentially include the Copernican revolution as the claim that we can only have *a priori* cognition of the formal aspects of objects, and are only allowed to use our *a priori* concepts in relation to what can possibly be given to us sensibly. That means that our *a priori* cognition is limited to the objects of experience, and not valid of objects in themselves, as Kant took the rationalists to think. The categories, then, are only objective and thereby objectively valid in relation to the conditions of sensible intuition. Kant writes:

the understanding can never accomplish a *priori* anything more than to anticipate the form of a possible experience in general, and since that which is not appearance cannot be an object of experience, it can never overstep the limits of sensibility within which alone objects are given to us. Its principles are merely principles of the exposition of appearances, and the proud name of an ontology, which presumes to offer synthetic *a priori* cognitions of things in general in a systematic doctrine (e.g. the principle of causality), must give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding.¹⁵⁷

This passage seems to nicely tie up what I have dealt with this far in the study, namely the possibility of ontology and *a priori* cognition, including the principle of

¹⁵⁶ See Pabst, 318-319, and Doyle, 22.

¹⁵⁷ A246-247/B303.

causality which was highly relevant with regard to Hume, in relation to the “form of a possible experience” and the “limits of sensibility within which alone objects are given to us”. What Kant essentially is saying here, is that our *a priori* cognition is relevant, and the *a priori* concepts, such as causality, are valid, only in relation to appearances as objects of a possible experience. Without this limitation ontology is useless, and were it meant to refer to this unlimited use, the whole notion of ontology should be replaced by “the analytic of the pure understanding”. This is not only a terminological question, because it is so essentially related to understanding the nature and scope of Kant’s transcendental idealism altogether.

As I have already pointed out, Kant is not actually criticizing ontology altogether, or saying that all ontology is impossible. Rather he is criticizing such a way of doing ontology that makes claims of real existing things purely rationally. In other words, he is criticizing rational ontology. The point with regard to the notion of ontology is simply that as the word ontology at Kant’s time was used to imply something along the lines of Wolff’s or Baumgarten’s conception of ontology, the whole concept seemed for Kant a failure and an impossibility. Thus for the critical system he does not even want to use the word, but talks of an “analytic of the pure understanding” replacing “ontology” in the new critical system of metaphysics. When put in context of Kant’s transcendental idealism, the point, however, is also to deny *a priori* knowledge concerning things in themselves, as they can never be given in intuition. All that we can do with critical, or transcendental, ontology, is “a kind of self-cognition”, or an examination of “the principles of *a priori* cognizing in general”, that is, what I call a transcendental ontology of subject and object. Kant explicates this in the following passages from his lectures on metaphysics:

Thus transcendental philosophy could also be called transcendental logic. It occupies itself with the sources, the extent, and the boundaries of pure reason, without busying itself with objects. For that reason it is wrong to call it ontology <*ontologiam*>. There we consider things already according to their general properties. Transcendental logic abstracts from all that; it is a kind of self-cognition.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ *V-Met/Mron*, 29:756.

[...] while ontology has no determinate object, it can contain nothing but the principles of *a priori* cognizing in general: thus the science of all basic concepts and basic propositions upon which all of our pure cognitions of reason rest is ontology. But this science will not be properly called ontology. For to have a thing in general as an object is as much as to have no object and to treat only of a cognition, as in logic. The name, however, sounds as if it had a determinate object. But this science has no object that would be distinguishable from the essence of reason, but rather it considers understanding and reason itself, namely their basic concepts and basic propositions in their pure use (or of pure reason and pure understanding); the most fitting name would be transcendental philosophy.¹⁵⁹

So, even if Kant here saw it practical to refrain from using the term ontology, he also, as we saw in the passages from the *Metaphysik Vigilantius*¹⁶⁰, continued to use the word to describe his transcendental philosophy, even after writing the *Critiques*. There can be seen to be a use for the name of ontology when the things that the knowledge is to be about are not things in themselves but appearances. In a sense Kant's transcendental philosophy fulfills the criteria of ontology, namely in the sense that it considers and acquires knowledge concerning every possible object (of experience) and their general predicates. This is the sense in which it is relevant to the investigation at hand, namely with regard to the Humean problem of causality, and thereby with regard to the problem of objective reference altogether. What it doesn't do, on the other hand, is offer *a priori* knowledge of things in themselves. In this sense, Kant's transcendental (critical) philosophy isn't or doesn't include (rational) ontology.

Kant's thought was that with regard to noumenal reality we can have no ontology, that is, a doctrine concerning the essences or properties of things or objects in themselves. A position claiming this would claim, in Kantian terminology, a kind of a noumenal ontology, which would be exactly what Kant criticized in Wolff and Leibniz, especially in the Amphiboly section in the first

¹⁵⁹ V-Met/Mron, 29:784-786.

¹⁶⁰ V-Met/K3E, 29:949 ["Transcendental philosophy is also called ontology, and it is the product of the critique of pure reason."] and 29:956.

Critique. On the other hand, if we restrict ontology to be a doctrine of the essences or properties of appearances, then it is possible to have such a doctrine, but as Kant pointed out, it might be better to call such a doctrine the analytic of the understanding, so to make clear that this doctrine does not make claims of things in themselves, but only appearances, and even there, it actually makes claims concerning no particular thing or object but rather the concepts of an object in general.

For the reasons explicated above it was essential for Kant to redefine the notion of *a priori*, as this notion is required to solve the Humean problem, as something related only to the form of objects of experience. To be even possible objects of experience, these objects must be such that they can be given to the understanding sensibly. This implies the distinction of things in themselves and appearances, as the *a priori* cognition that Kant is seeking will only be applicable to the latter. What I wish to have made clear this far, is that according to Kant, we must have *a priori* cognition, because certain concepts, as well as objective experience itself, would not be valid or possible without it, but this cognition only concerns objects which can be sensibly given. Now we must turn to the question of why this *a priori* cognition is applicable to even the objects of experience, that is, why and how are the forms of sensibility and the understanding universally objective.

4 Objective Reference

4.1 The Notions of Objects and Objectivity

Let us begin this discussion with a thought, or the assumption that there are things, or objects, around us. These things presumably also affect us in many ways. Some of these affections create what we call representations in us. Now, should we then call these representations objective, if they were brought about by the objects? But if we did, why wouldn't every affection caused by any object be 'objective'? No, this cannot be what we mean by objectivity, and it is not what Kant means, either. Something else is meant by objectivity, and this something is the focus of this chapter. Kant writes:

Understanding is, generally speaking, the faculty of **cognitions**. These consist in the determinate relation of given representations to an object. An **object**, however, is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is **united**. Now, however, all unification of representations requires unity of consciousness in the synthesis of them. Consequently 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.¹⁶¹

What Kant here calls a “determinate relation of given representations to an object” is the key here. I have already stated my basic view, according to which objectivity *per se*, in Kant's sense, means the object-relatedness or object-directedness of representations. I have just also stated that objectivity does not mean something like the mere affections created by objects. These affections are of course necessary for objectivity, but something else seems to be needed to make the representations objective, meaning that the representations are really and validly about the objects. The task of this chapter is to try to explicate what this something else is, and why.

¹⁶¹ B137.

For Kant, both the Humean phenomenalist account of cognition, as well as rationalist metaphysics, were deeply unsatisfying theories. From Kant's perspective, these previous accounts were incapable of explaining the objectivity, or objective validity, of such crucial metaphysical concepts as substance, causality and necessity. To be precise, what is at stake here, is not mainly the usefulness, but the origin – and along with it the validity – of these concepts, which we seem to need as a basis for all objective, empirical judgments.¹⁶² For how are we to cognize and describe the world if we cannot validly say that there are 'objects' or 'substances', and that they affect other objects, which affect them, and yet other objects, and so forth, reciprocally, according to universal and necessary rules? Making any statements about these things, and even thinking these things, requires concepts, by which we synthesize and universalize given content, and thereby achieve objectivity. Objective cognition cannot be simply contingent being-affected-by-objects in this or that way. Even if this affection were assumed to work according to rules or laws (of nature), this affection would not in itself produce any general or universally valid cognition, or unified experience. And even though e.g. Hume wrote of the 'uniformity' of experience, the empiricist accounts were still somewhat atomistic and subjectivistic with regard to cognition, and most of all, seemed to lack a ground for the universality and necessary unity of experience, which Kant sought.

As I want to lay it out, this missing ground Kant finds in our universal capacity of making judgments which apply the *a priori* categories to objects of sensibility. In my view, it is precisely the concepts and forms of judgment, which carry the *generality* and *universality* needed for what we call cognition. But the concepts in themselves would not be cognition, if they were in no way related to objects of sensibility. Kant writes:

¹⁶² In the Prolegomena, Kant writes of Hume and the Humean Problem: "The question was not, whether the concept of cause is right, useful, and, with respect to all cognition of nature, indispensable, for this Hume had never put in doubt; it was rather whether it is thought through reason a priori, and in this way has an inner truth independent of all experience, and therefore also a much more widely extended use which is not limited merely to objects of experience: regarding this Hume awaited enlightenment. The discussion was only about the origin of this concept, not about its indispensability in use; if the former were only discovered, the conditions of its use and the sphere in which it can be valid would already be given." (Kant, Prolog. 4:258-259.)

We cannot **think** any object except through categories; we cannot **cognize** any object that is thought except through intuitions that correspond to those concepts. Now all our intuitions are sensible, and this cognition, so far as its object is given, is empirical. Empirical cognition, however, is experience. Consequently **no a priori** cognition is possible for us except solely of objects of possible experience.¹⁶³

Kant's view could perhaps be simplified in the following way: concepts, however essential they may be, are worth nothing if we cannot show their objective validity. Concepts need to be validly and universally *about objects*, that is, if they are to be objective. Sensations brought about by objects are also in themselves not objective cognition, because if not related to anything universal and necessary (concepts and their related rules), the sensations are contingent and subjective. The question of objectivity is thus not only how objects affect us, even though this is part of the issue, but how these affections relate to our representational acts and faculties, so that we can claim to represent the objects in a universally and necessarily valid way. Kant continues the above passage:

But this cognition, which is limited merely to objects of experience, is not on that account all borrowed from experience; rather with regard to the pure intuitions as well as the pure concepts of the understanding, there are elements of cognition that are to be encountered in us *a priori*. Now there are only two ways in which a necessary agreement of experience with its concepts can be thought: either the experience makes these concepts possible or these concepts make the experience possible. The first is not the case with the categories (nor with pure sensible intuition); for they are *a priori* concepts, hence independent of experience (the assertion of an empirical origin would be a sort of *generatio aequivoca*). Consequently only the second way remains (as it were a system of the **epigenesis** of pure reason): namely that the

¹⁶³ B165-166.

categories contain the grounds of the possibility of all experience in general from the side of the understanding.¹⁶⁴

This passage is important in its clarity. First of all, empirical cognition is limited to objects of experience. Experience, accordingly, is experience of empirical objects; thus it is empirically objective. But in what sense is experience valid or necessary? In the sense that there is a completely necessary agreement of “experience with its concepts”. The nature of this necessary agreement, which is based on the claim that only these concepts make the experience possible, is one of the focuses of this chapter.

To proceed, let us take a closer look at some of Kant’s essential notions, and their roles with regard to the possibility of objectivity. J. Michael Young writes of Kant’s notions of object and objectivity:

The notion of an object, along with such related notions as those of objectivity and objective validity, plays a prominent and important role in Kant’s theory of knowledge, especially in his famous “transcendental deduction.” After identifying a set of pure concepts or categories, Kant seeks in the deduction to show that they possess objective validity, i.e., that they can legitimately be applied to the objects of experience. His endeavors necessarily involve him in an analysis of the notion of an object, for he grants what Hume had argued concerning the concept of causality, namely, that the applicability of the categories cannot be established straightforwardly, by an appeal to empirical evidence. It must be established indirectly instead, through an analysis of the very notion of an object.¹⁶⁵

As said earlier, it is the validity of the categories in relation to objects which is crucial for Kantian objectivity in general. Objectivity *per se* only means object-relatedness, but the question is: what does this relation consist of? How does this relatedness come about, and under which conditions? These are not questions

¹⁶⁴ B166-167.

¹⁶⁵ Young 1970, 71.

which can be treated in isolation from Kant's other claims and theories. Nevertheless, as Young states, Kant deals with this question especially in a section of the first *Critique* called the 'transcendental deduction', as a question of the objective validity of the categories, and the conditions of the unity of objective representation. But, again, the validity of the categories is hardly explainable without reference to other Kantian notions and his doctrine of faculties.

Now, I will not try to conduct a thorough examination or even an explication of Kant's doctrine of faculties. Nevertheless, some account of them is required here. I present my reading of Kant's philosophy throughout this study, but my simplified reading of some of Kant's basic notions is as follows. According to the *Critique of Pure Reason* we are in possession of three original faculties, namely *sense*, *imagination* and *apperception*.¹⁶⁶ I take it that it can be supposed that the co-workings of these basic and original faculties 'produce' the other faculties, e.g. sensibility and the understanding. In the course of the work I will come to make reference to the tasks of these faculties, but it should perhaps already be mentioned that in Kant's view we do need all of the three original faculties for objective cognition. The role of *transcendental apperception*, however, is crucial for objective reference, as it seems to serve the purpose of creating a (self-)consciously unified and objective relation of the representations to the object.¹⁶⁷ Only in this relation are both, the subject and the object, represented to the subject self-consciously. And this act of representing objects, which involves unification of different representations, seems to require that these representations belong to a single consciousness.¹⁶⁸ As I stated above, it is the role of the concepts (of an object in general) and the forms of judgments, to bring generality, universality and necessity to our representations. Let us look at the three following quotes from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which now serve to illuminate a route to Kant's account of objective reference and objectivity in general:

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

¹⁶⁶ See A94, A97-98 and A114-115 (*Sinn, Einbildungskraft, Apperzeption*). It is noteworthy, however, that the three original sources or capacities are not as such mentioned in the B-deduction, nor is their relation to apprehension, reproduction and recognition.

¹⁶⁷ I discuss Kant's notion of apperception below, especially in 4.3.

¹⁶⁸ See Williams 2017, 69.

of our empirical concepts in general can provide relation to an object, i.e., objective reality.¹⁶⁹

If we investigate what new characteristic is given to our representations by the **relation to an object**, and what is the dignity that they thereby receive, we find that it does nothing beyond making the combination of representations necessary in a certain way, and subjecting them to a rule [...] ¹⁷⁰

[...] a judgment is nothing other than the way to bring given cognitions to the **objective** unity of apperception.¹⁷¹

I do not wish to oversimplify these complex passages, but as a preliminary outline, I wish to interpret Kant as claiming that there are concepts which are more general than any empirical concept, but which still are to be valid of any empirical object. Further, not only are these concepts to be valid of all objects we may encounter, but these concepts are that which provides the objectivity, or objective reality to our empirical representations, and relate them to objects. These universal concepts of objects in general are the categories, which represent the universal rules of synthesizing representations, and they are necessary for any objective representation.¹⁷² For subjective representation, such as sensations (in themselves), these concepts are not needed.¹⁷³ Now, by these concepts – or the concept of a

¹⁶⁹ A109.

¹⁷⁰ A197/B242-3.

¹⁷¹ B141.

¹⁷² According to my view, the categories can thereby be taken to be concepts for the most general predicates of all possible objects. See e.g. A11-12, B128, A246-247/B303, *V-Met/Mron*, 29:752 and Koistinen 2012, 125.

¹⁷³ There is, however, heated discussion concerning questions of what is the relation of the categories (and the unity of apperception) to our sensibility, and whether we need concepts for intuitions etc. Lately this discussion has often taken place in the context of the debate of conceptualism vs. nonconceptualism, which really is too complex to sum up here. At the moment, I only wish to claim that according to Kant, we can at least be affected by objects which produce something in us, completely regardless of concepts. Just to give an example of a moderate nonconceptual view, let us see what Lucy Allais (2016, 4) writes: “It seems to me impossible to dispute that Kant is a conceptualist about *cognition*; he does not think we have or could have cognition without the application of concepts (A51–2/B75–6; A320/B377). Similarly, I think that the overwhelming evidence is that Kant does not think we

transcendental object, in which concept the categories are united, so to say – we are able to think about an object, or, be (self-)conscious of the object(s). This consciousness is, according to Kant, only possible if there are certain, unchanging elements involved, such as the *a priori* concepts, the rules of synthesizing representations, and the capacity of apperception, by which the representations are united into one. Thus we find an aspect of objectivity here: it is the act of conscious relating of our representations to objects, which relating follows universal and necessary rules. As a note, I do confess to have given the above statement a bit hurriedly, but below I attempt to clarify and justify it.

Before we proceed further, however, there seems to be a need to address some essential notions, which I have used above, but not sufficiently explicated.¹⁷⁴ One group of terms in question refers to different kinds or aspects of objects, and they are the following: *thing in itself*, *appearance*, *phenomenon* and *noumenon*.¹⁷⁵ By saying that these are different kinds or aspects of objects, I do not mean that they are completely different and separate real entities, but rather objects *of* differing faculties or representations. The difference is based on what these representations (objects) are objects *of* or *for*. Clearly I cannot here give full arguments for my interpretation of these notions, but I must settle for an explication of how I interpret them. In addition to the immediately following section below, the arguments I give for this interpretation are found in the ways in which this interpretation makes use and sense of them throughout this study.

Let us start with a passage from the B-edition's Preface, where Kant presents the distinction of *things as appearances* and *things in themselves*, and claims that space and time are neither things in themselves nor predicates of things in themselves, but rather they are *forms* of sensible intuition, and as such, conditions for experience and objectivity:

could have what he calls "experience" without concepts, but this is simply because what he means by "experience" is empirical cognition (and not, for example, phenomenological consciousness). Whether or not Kant is a conceptualist about *perception* is less clear. As I shall show, conceptualists have clear texts to appeal to here. On the other hand, a few nonconceptualists have, it seems to me, given compelling reasons for caution here, based on seeing specifically what Kant means by "perception", and that he may be using the word technically."

¹⁷⁴ This is not to say that I am able to sufficiently explicate them now.

¹⁷⁵ *Das Ding an Sich, Erscheinung, Phenomenon, Noumenon*.

In the analytical part of the critique it is proved that space and time are only forms of sensible intuition, and therefore only conditions of the existence of the *things as appearances*, further that we have no concepts of the understanding and hence no elements for the cognition of things except insofar as an intuition can be given corresponding to these concepts, consequently that we can have cognition of no *object as a thing in itself*, but only insofar as it is an *object of sensible intuition*, i.e. as an *appearance*; from which follows the limitation of all even possible speculative cognition of reason to mere objects of **experience**.¹⁷⁶

In this passage Kant speaks of things or objects *as* appearances and *as* things in themselves. This could be taken to support the dual-aspect view, or the one-world view¹⁷⁷, according to which Kant does not want to postulate or claim that there are two separate worlds, or that there are *things in themselves*, which are *a cause for*, but still completely *different from*, *appearances*. Rather, the appearances and things in themselves are aspects of the same thing, either considered as objects of sensibility (appearance) or as objects of none of our faculties or capacities. Taken like this, the passage can be read so that with “object as a thing in itself” he seems to mean an object which is simply in no relation to sensibility. That is, things in themselves are not considered objects of sensible intuition and thus do not have the form of space and time, while the things as appearances do. I take it that Kant’s term *thing in itself* (*Ding an sich*) should be understood simply as to mean a thing just by itself, with no additions, forms or conditions attached to it.¹⁷⁸ For Kant, the concept of a thing-in-

¹⁷⁶ B xxv, italics added.

¹⁷⁷ For more on the one-world and two-world views, see e.g. Oberst 2015, Schulting 2011, 1-25, or Quarfood 2004, 16-65.

¹⁷⁸ In this question, I presume to be along the same lines as Henry Allison, who writes (2004, 56): “to consider things as they appear is to consider them in their relation to the sensible conditions under which they are given to the mind in intuition, that is, as in uns in the transcendental (but not the empirical) sense; just as to consider them as they are in themselves is to think them apart from all reference to these conditions, that is, as ausser uns in the transcendental sense. Clearly, however, in order to consider things in the former manner, it is necessary to distinguish the character that these things reveal as appearing (their spatiotemporal properties, and so forth) from the character that the same things are thought to possess when they are considered as they are in themselves, independently of the conditions under which they appear.”

itself is a logical and metaphysical assumption, because, if Kant is right, a thing cannot just in itself be simply passively either intuited or understood, that is, without actively “adding” something, namely form, to it: “absolutely nothing that is intuited in space is a thing in itself.”¹⁷⁹ This means that if something is intuited, something is “added” to it. This is not to say that we e.g. add or make up the spatial figure of an object, say, a tea cup, but rather this figure is in the object as intuited via our sensibility according to the form of our intuition, that is, space.

Now, objects nevertheless produce *representations* (*Vorstellung*) in us, and of some of these representations, as well as the objects, we may become conscious.¹⁸⁰ Kant writes in the beginning of the transcendental aesthetic:

[t]he effect of an object on the capacity for representation, insofar as we are affected by it, is **sensation**. That intuition which is related to the object through sensation is called **empirical**. The undetermined object of an empirical intuition is called **appearance**.¹⁸¹

Here we have what might be called Kant’s classic definition of appearance (*Erscheinung*), that is, the “undetermined object of an empirical intuition”. What Kant here (and elsewhere) means by ‘undetermined’ has been a cause of puzzlement, but I take him to mean that the object (of intuition) is not as such conceptually determined by the understanding. Once more, I emphasize that according to Kant, appearance is an *object of intuition*. Thereby it necessarily has the form according to which the intuition, so to say, ‘intuits’ the object, that is, the form of spatiotemporality.¹⁸² But, in addition to form, appearances naturally also have matter:¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ A30/B45.

¹⁸⁰ See A197/B242: “We have representations in us, of which we can also become conscious [...]”

¹⁸¹ A20/B34.

¹⁸² Both Allison and Longuenesse take Kant to mean, by the form of intuition, the form of the *intuiting* and the form of the *intuited*. Allison, however, takes these to be in some sense two forms, while Longuenesse (1998, 218n) stresses that “one and the same form is form of the intuited and form of intuiting.”

¹⁸³ It is obvious that here the Aristotelian distinction of *matter* and *form* plays a crucial role, as discussed in 3.3.

I call that in the appearance which corresponds to sensation its **matter**, but that which allows the manifold of appearance to be intuited as ordered in certain relations I call the **form** of appearance. Since that within which the sensations can alone be ordered and placed in a certain form cannot itself be in turn sensation, the matter of all appearance is only given to us *a posteriori*, but its form must all lie ready for it in the mind *a priori*, and can therefore be considered separately from all sensation.¹⁸⁴

As I stated earlier, by “the form of appearance” Kant does not mean the shape or figure of an individual appearance, but the general form of all intuition and thus all appearances, spatiotemporality. As the form of our sensibility and intuition is space (and time), the matter of our sensible representations is always already ordered in space, that is, it is necessarily and universally spatial. Everything we intuit is already spatiotemporal.¹⁸⁵

Now, the relation of things in themselves and appearances is one of the most debated issues related to Kant, and has been from the very beginning. One of the manifestations of the discussion is the debate between one-world views and two-world views. Within this study, I do not want to take a strong stand on the matter, but only remark that, as much depends on what is meant with ‘world’ and ‘object’, I find it more fruitful to focus on understanding the distinction in the original context of Kant, who writes in the *Prolegomena*:

In fact, if we view the objects of the senses as mere appearances, as is fitting, then we thereby admit at the very same time that a thing in itself underlies them, although we are not acquainted with this

¹⁸⁴ A20/B34.

¹⁸⁵ Henry Allison (2004, 68) writes: “if we think of Kant’s transcendental account of the conditions of discursive cognition as a “grand narrative,” then the indispensable role of material condition of this cognition must be assigned to something considered as it is in itself, apart from this epistemic relation and, therefore, as a merely transcendental object.” I think Allison is correct here, even though I do not quite see why he adds the word ‘merely’ to the transcendental object. Nevertheless, this material condition which he refers to, could, under certain conditions, also be called the ‘transcendental matter’ of representations, as Kant seems to do on page A143/B182: “Since time is only the form of intuition, thus of objects as appearances, that which corresponds to the sensation in these is the transcendental matter of all objects, as things in themselves (thinghood, reality).”

thing as it may be constituted in itself, but only with its appearance, i.e., with the way in which our senses are affected by this unknown something. Therefore the understanding, just by the fact that it accepts appearances, also admits to the existence of things in themselves, and to that extent we can say that the representation of such beings as underlie the appearances, hence of mere intelligible beings, is not merely permitted but also unavoidable.¹⁸⁶

This passage could be taken to support a one-world view, but aspects of it might also point to a two-world view. In any case, Kant's thought is most likely not that just using the word or concept of appearance would somehow prove the existence of things in themselves. Rather, it comes with the way of conceptualizing the matter, namely the concept of appearance, that something appears, but this something that appears as appearance is only relatable to us as an intelligible being, since it is the object without its relation to our sensibility.

When appearances (the objects of sensible intuition) are taken as objects of *thought*, that is, they are "thought in accordance with the unity of the categories", they may be called *phenomena*.¹⁸⁷ This is, then, the proper place of objectivity, as Kant's view was that intuitions in themselves do not stand in a universally necessary relation to each other and to the objects. Nevertheless, Kant has made it clear that we can have intuitions without the concepts of the understanding, but these intuitions in themselves are not universal or objective without being brought into the original unity of apperception. In the original act of apperception the categories are applied to objects of intuition, but without these objects of intuition the categories are of no use, and can yield no cognition.

Next, if by the notion of *phenomena* Kant means sensible objects of *the understanding*, as I read him to do, we may contrast this to his notion of *noumena*, which is for Kant, so to say, only a negative notion, marking a non-sensible, but still possibly intuitable object of understanding.¹⁸⁸ The concept of noumena thus is in a way parallel to the concept of a thing-in-itself, even though these concepts are, as it

¹⁸⁶ *Prolog.* 4:315.

¹⁸⁷ A249. Allison (2004, 58-59) writes: "[i]n short, a phenomenon is a conceptually determined appearance."

¹⁸⁸ See A249-258.

were, constructed from different starting points.¹⁸⁹ In addition, we still need to account for at least one more kind of concept of object, and this is what Kant calls the concept of a *transcendental object*, which basically means the concept or thought of (a) something in general.¹⁹⁰ This concept brings together the categories, which Kant says to be the concepts of an object in general, and is closely related to, and at times equated by Kant to, both the notions of a thing in itself and a noumenon.

In my reading of these key terms I do not intend to be committed to specific standard readings of Kant. However, simply based on the above, it cannot be said that Kant either did or did not hold a one-world or a two-world view, because all he was claiming here was that it is wrong to divide objects or the world into two, in the following way: to the world of sensibility, and the world of understanding.¹⁹¹ This division only functions as a distinction of kinds of concepts, and the pure concepts of understanding, also called intellectual concepts¹⁹², have no object as such, that is, without a relation to sensibility and thus without a relation to any object whatsoever.¹⁹³ Thus the objects of Kant's criticism are the rationalist accounts, including Kant's own former view, which held that there is indeed an intellectual world available to be cognized by pure understanding. His critical account is that this is wrong; the pure concepts of understanding have no objective validity or reality by themselves, but only in relation to sensibility, that is, as applied to appearances. This is to say that we need both sensibility and the understanding to cognize this one world that we are experiencing and living in. Whether we then want to think of things in themselves, or noumena, as making up another world, is a matter of debate, but in my view these are more or less negative, restricting

¹⁸⁹ Given what has been stated above, and with regard to the discussions and readings of Kant as holding either a 'metaphysical' or 'epistemological' account, I find that it makes no sense in Kant's case to speak of separate accounts of epistemology and metaphysics. If epistemology is supposed to refer to a theory of knowledge or cognition (a knowledge of knowledge, if you will), and metaphysics is to be knowledge of the world, how could we have one without the other? If we want to claim to know anything about objects and their relations, we are making a claim to knowledge, and this knowledge, as Kant has shown, always has conditions. Similarly, there is no knowledge in itself, but knowledge about something. This obviously does not mean that reality or things in themselves depend in any way on any conditions of cognition. But the same cannot be said of objects of experience (or cognition): they must take the form of experience (or cognition).

¹⁹⁰ A249-253.

¹⁹¹ A255/B 311.

¹⁹² Or, as in the letter to Herz: "intellectual representations"; See *Br.* 10:130-131.

¹⁹³ A255/B 311.

concepts, because without both sensibility and understanding we can have no objective cognition whatsoever.

There has also been a lot of confusion and debate concerning what Kant means by his notion of *a priori* cognition: “[w]e are in possession of certain *a priori* cognitions, and even the common understanding is never without them.”¹⁹⁴ It would probably go without saying that the interpretations of this notion at times seem a bit shallow, especially if done by people not engaged with the proper context of Kant’s philosophy. This seems to be the case e.g. with Saul Kripke, whose interpretation of Kant’s notion of *a priori*, and the critique of Kant based upon that interpretation, unfortunately miss Kant’s intentions.¹⁹⁵ After attempts, I find it hard to conceive what Kripke means by *a priori*, but it seems as if he means by it some secret, pre-given knowledge of things, which knowledge we just have without doing, thinking or experiencing anything.¹⁹⁶ This is not so with Kant, as for him “[t]here is no doubt whatever that all our cognition begins with experience”.¹⁹⁷ *A priori*, as in “prior to experience”, means for Kant something which is not abstracted from (contingent) experience, but rather a necessary (formal) condition for experience in the first place, and thus not alterable by contents (matter) of experience. It should be noted that Kant himself stressed, time after time, that we can never cognize or experience actual objects *a priori*, because these acts require empirical elements such as sensing and judging. What we can know are only the formal elements, which Kant wants to show are necessary for experience, and thus

¹⁹⁴ B3.

¹⁹⁵ See Kripke 1980.

¹⁹⁶ In *Naming and Necessity* we find Kripke arguing (1980, 159) that Kant has made a mistake (well, many, to be precise) and that mathematical knowledge is – instead of being either *a priori* and necessary or *a posteriori* and contingent – both necessary and *a posteriori*, because we can learn it by experience, by e.g. asking a mathematician. Now, I find it hard to see how we could really know something to be necessary by only asking a mathematician, but even if we think that testimony is sufficient to know a thing, it seems we could find another mathematician making a differing claim. These means of trying to arrive at necessity by asking seem completely contingent. Kant’s point was that necessity is not found empirically, by asking, or in the objects themselves, as also Hume noted. Rather, the necessity of mathematics for Kant is based on the *a priori* form of intuition, by which we can come to know it in such a way that no contingent empirical experience could change it or prove otherwise. Thus, it is not so much that we do not need any experience for it, but rather that it is a condition for experience itself, and thus no experience could change it. We can find *a priori* truths, and this is what Kant means by synthetic *a priori* cognition.

¹⁹⁷ B1. I discussed this passage in Chapter 2.

even for the objects of experience (as experienced). Thus his *a priori* elements are not what the rationalist ontology was trying to formulate, but rather only concern the concepts and form of experience:

the understanding can never accomplish *a priori* anything more than to anticipate the form of a possible experience in general, and since that which is not appearance cannot be an object of experience, it can never overstep the limits of sensibility within which alone objects are given to us. Its principles are merely principles of the exposition of appearances, and the proud name of an ontology, which presumes to offer synthetic *a priori* cognitions of things in general in a systematic doctrine (e.g. the principle of causality), must give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding.¹⁹⁸

This brings us to what I noted in the end of chapter 3, that is, Kant's view that we cannot have or do *a priori* metaphysics or ontology concerning things in themselves. What we can do, on the other hand, is analyze our sensibility and understanding to arrive at the conditions of experiencing objects in the first place. These objects are not experienced as they are in themselves, but as they are given to us by sensibility and brought under concepts of the understanding. Thus, Kant is saying that we cannot know the objects themselves *a priori*, but we can know the formal conditions of the objects, or, the form of the objects as appearances, *a priori*. To have cognition of the actual objects, we obviously also need intuition. In this way Kant is not agreeing with Hume on the impossibility of metaphysics, but instead saying that the possibility of metaphysics is based on what he calls synthetic *a priori* cognition. To appreciate this, one must go back to Kant's crucial distinction of appearances and things in themselves, on the one hand, and sensibility and understanding on the other. As Kant saw it, both of these distinctions were missing in empiricism as well as in rationalism, resulting in what Kant called the "Amphiboly of the concepts of reflection".¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ A246-247/B303.

¹⁹⁹ A260-292/B316-349.

4.2 The Amphiboly

In the following I illustrate some aspects of what Kant saw to be the problem he called the “Amphiboly of the concepts of reflection”. I try to explicate how he nevertheless fused elements of both rationalism and empiricism – both of which he found guilty of committing to the amphiboly – to build his conception of objective experience. I wish to emphasize that for Kant there is no real objectivity without sensibility, but instead the forms of sensibility are necessary (but not sufficient) conditions for all real objectivity. However, there is also no proper objectivity without the concepts and judgments that unite the sensible representations into experience. Thus Kant rather famously writes in the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

It comes along with our nature that intuition can never be other than sensible, i.e., that it contains only the way in which we are affected by objects. The faculty for thinking of objects of sensible intuition, on the contrary, is the understanding. Neither of these is to be preferred to the other. 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.²⁰⁰

My view is that this well-known passage should be read in relation to Kant’s critique of both empiricism and rationalism as saying that neither alone is a sufficient account of our relation to objects. Rather, what is needed is a distinction of the roles and forms of sensibility and understanding, and an account of their co-operation. This is what is at issue in the amphiboly section where Kant writes that “Leibniz intellectualized the appearances, just as Locke totally sensitized the concepts of understanding”.²⁰¹ The section is, among other things, a densely packed illustration of the problems of rationalism and empiricism, although mainly a critique of Leibnizian rationalism.²⁰² Kant sees the core of all these problems in the failure to distinguish the functions of sensibility and understanding, on the one

²⁰⁰ A51/B71.

²⁰¹ A271/B327.

²⁰² An elaborated presentation of Kant’s relation to, and critique of, Leibniz, is found in Anja Jauernig (2018).

hand, and phenomena, or appearances, and noumena, or things in themselves, on the other.²⁰³

In the amphiboly section Kant introduces *transcendental reflection* as a procedure by which we are to determine whether certain representations belong together in sensibility or in understanding. This procedure works as what I call a *transcendental positioning system* (TPS) of representations to find out their transcendental place either in sensibility, as determined by intuition, or in understanding, as logically determined concepts. Given the weight of the issue, the section and the points made are remarkable explications of Kant's critique of Leibniz and his own transcendental position.

Now, what I take Kant essentially to be saying is that by logical comparison alone (in the case of Leibniz), or by sensibility alone (in the case of Locke), we are doomed to make crucial errors in trying to understand objective reality, as either making unjustified claims which never can be tested, or failing to build any kind of certainty and necessity in our attempted objective understanding of the world. We need to be able to separate whether something is to be tested or determined conceptually or by intuition. As Kant claims, the error of Leibniz was that he thought everything could be tested conceptually, thus degrading sensibility to something that partly benefits, but also greatly confuses our cognition of objects:

deceived by the amphiboly of the concepts of reflection, the famous Leibniz constructed an intellectual system of the world, or rather believed himself able to cognize the inner constitution of things by comparing all objects only with the understanding and the abstract formal concepts of its thinking. Our table of the concepts of reflection gives us the unexpected advantage of laying before our eyes that which is distinctive in his theory in all its parts and the leading ground of this peculiar way of thinking, which rests on nothing but a misunderstanding. He compared all things with each other solely through concepts, and found, naturally, no other differences than those through which the understanding

²⁰³ I am aware that in Kant's use the word "appearance" does not always refer exactly to what the word "phenomena" refers to, but many times they can be and are treated as equal. The same applies to the relation of "noumena" and "things in themselves". I have already discussed the differences and relations of these terms in 4.1.

distinguishes its pure concepts from each other. The conditions of sensible intuition, which bring with them their own distinctions, he did not regard as 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 [...]²⁰⁴

Kant, on the other hand, wants to show that there are a great many things which never can be cognized, compared or decided upon based only on concepts. This is to give sensibility its proper place as a necessary condition of experience, and even the empirical objects themselves, that is, appearances. The way to determine the transcendental place of a representation is to use the procedure I just dubbed TPS, that is, to reflect upon it as acknowledging four essential relations that representations may have to each other: (1) identity and difference, (2) agreement and opposition, (3) the inner and the outer, and (4) the determinable and the determined (matter and form), the last of which Kant says to be the “two concepts that ground all other reflection, so inseparably are they bound up with every use of the understanding. The former [matter] signifies the determinable in general, the latter [form] its determination.”²⁰⁵ Kant writes:

But all judgments, indeed all comparisons, require a **reflection**, i.e., a distinction of the cognitive power to which the given concepts belong. The action through which I make the comparison of representations in general with the cognitive power in which they are situated, and through which I distinguish whether they are to be compared to one another as belonging to the pure understanding or to pure intuition, I call **transcendental reflection**. The relation, however, in which the concepts in a state of mind can belong to each other are those of **identity** and **difference**, of **agreement** and **opposition**, of the **inner** and the **outer**, and finally of the **determinable** and the **determination**. The correct determination of this relation depends on the

²⁰⁴ A270/B326.

²⁰⁵ A266/B322.

cognitive power in which they **subjectively** belong to each other, whether in sensibility or in understanding, [...] [**T**]ranscendental **reflection**, however, (which goes to the objects themselves) contains the ground of the possibility of the objective comparison of the representations to each other [...] ²⁰⁶

Kant's explication of the relations inherent in transcendental reflection offers illuminating examples, all of which include the confusion of appearances and things in themselves. For example, in the case of *identity* and *difference*, Kant claims that there are objects we cannot distinguish numerically by concepts alone, e.g. in the case of two water drops. The objects we are here dealing with are not noumena, that is, objects of pure understanding, but instead they are phenomena, that is, objects that are necessarily sensible. This means that the objects may not have any conceptual, or "inner", difference,²⁰⁷ but can still be differentiated numerically on the basis of their spatial position:

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. Leibniz took the appearances for things in themselves, thus for intelligibilia, i.e., objects of the pure understanding [...], and there his principle of **non-discernibility** (*principium identitatis indiscernibilium*) could surely not be disputed, but since they 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.²⁰⁸

With regard to the other relations making up the grid of Kant's transcendental positioning system (TPS), the situation is the same: what might be true of concepts based solely on logic, does not need to be true of appearances, and what we can cognize of objects, does not pertain to things in themselves. Kant writes:

²⁰⁶ A261-263/B317-319.

²⁰⁷ At least such that we would have access to it.

²⁰⁸ A263-264/B319-320.

even if we could say anything synthetically **about things in themselves** (which is nevertheless impossible), this still could not be related to appearances at all, which do not represent things in themselves. In this latter case, therefore, I will always have to compare my concepts in transcendental reflection only under the conditions of sensibility, and thus space and time will not be determinations of things in themselves, but of appearances; what the things may be in themselves I do not know, and also do not need to know, since a thing can never come before me except in appearance.

I proceed in the same way with the other concepts of reflection. Matter is *substantia phaenomenon*.²⁰⁹

The objects we are to have experience of, are thus not objects of pure understanding, but sensible appearances, that is, *substantia phaenomenon*, which are from the very beginning determined by the forms of intuition, space and time. Thus pure conceptual reflection never objectively suffices to grasp empirical reality. Neither does sensing alone ever provide us with any kind of pertaining relation of subject and object, thus, any proper objectivity. Sensibility and understanding have separate functions but both are needed for cognizing objects. An aspect of this is that both *a priori* and *a posteriori* elements are necessary for objective cognition. In Kant's view pure conceptual comparison or analysis amounts to very little more than nothing with regard to actually cognizing empirical objects. On the other hand, sensibility by itself, let alone sensations in a Humean sense, cannot provide us experience of objects.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ A276-277/B332-333. In 3.4 I briefly discussed Kant's account of *substantia phaenomenon*. Of this, Kant wrote: "A phenomenon is in itself no substance, with respect to our senses we call the appearance of substance itself substance. But this phenomenal substance <*substantia phaenomenon*> must have a noumenon as substrate. This can be called transcendental idealism." (*V-Met/Dohna*, 28:682.)

²¹⁰ As I mentioned in 2.1 and 2.2, Hume already took experience to be, not individual perceptions, but rather, representations that have been reflected and compared to form a uniform experience. The uniformity, or unity, of the experience was nevertheless still left somewhat a mystery and thus his account was lacking something absolutely essential from the point of view of Kant, who writes: "If every individual representation were entirely foreign to the other, as it were isolated and separated from it, then there would never arise

The case, then, seems to be the following: via our faculty of sensibility we intuit objects and receive representations which are necessarily spatiotemporal, due to the form of our sensibility/intuition. These representations, however, in themselves are only subjective representations, if not related to an object (by the act of apperception via the categories). This means that we could have as many and as frequent representations as we like, but without a universally and necessarily grounded relation to an object, these representations would remain subjective.²¹¹ What are needed are the (necessary and universal) rules by which to relate the representation to an object (in the unity of apperception) and make it the universal experience of a subject cognizing an object. These rules are the general functions or forms of judgment, generally represented in the categories as the concepts of an object in general. Kant writes:

besides intuition there is no other kind of cognition than through concepts. Thus the cognition of every, at least human, understanding is a cognition through concepts, not intuitive but discursive. All intuitions, as sensible, rest on affections, concepts therefore on functions. By a function, however, I understand the unity of the action of ordering different representations under a common one. Concepts are therefore grounded on the spontaneity of thinking, as sensible intuitions are grounded on the receptivity of impressions.²¹²

anything like *cognition*, which is a *whole of compared and connected representations*." (A97, italics added.) Thus it is for Kant that the notions of cognition and experience both entail unified objectivity, in which inherent features are necessity and universality.

²¹¹ On page A97/B242 Kant writes: "We have representations in us, of which we can also become conscious. But let this consciousness reach as far and be as exact and precise as one wants, still there always remain only representations, i.e., inner determinations of our mind in this or that temporal relation. Now how do we come to posit an object for these representations, or ascribe to their subjective reality, as modifications, some sort of objective reality? Objective significance cannot consist in the relation to another representation (of that which one would call the object), for that would simply raise anew the question: How does this representation in turn go beyond itself and acquire objective significance in addition to the subjective significance that is proper to it as a determination of the state of mind?" As a note, here we can clearly see the meaning of 'objective' as signifying a relation to something beyond the representations, that is, to the object.

²¹² A68/B93.

Here we first of all see Kant calling intuition a kind of cognition. Nevertheless, in the very next sentence he states that at least all human understanding is cognition through concepts, and thereby discursive. Kant here groups activity and spontaneity with the understanding, and passivity and receptivity with sensibility. It is the task of the activity to order the representations in a unified manner, using concepts according to universal rules, to form judgments. The passage continues:

Now the understanding can make no other use of these concepts than that of judging by means of them. Since no representation pertains to the object immediately except intuition alone, a concept is thus never immediately related to an object, but is always related to some other representation of it (whether that be intuition or itself already a concept). Judgment is therefore the mediate cognition of an object, hence the representation of a representation of it. In every judgment there is a concept that holds of many, and that among this many also comprehends a given representation, which is then related immediately to the object. [...] All judgments are accordingly functions of unity among our representations, since instead of an immediate representation a higher one, which comprehends this and other representations under itself, is used for the cognition of the object, and many possible cognitions are thereby drawn together into one.²¹³

Thus we see that the universal functions of judgment are what according to Kant bring the necessary unity to our representations. They are needed to represent the objects as something more than subjective affections, that is, as something necessarily general and universal:

If we investigate what new characteristic is given to our representations by the **relation to an object**, and what is the dignity that they thereby receive, we find that it does nothing

²¹³ A68-69/B93-94.

beyond making the combination of representations necessary in a certain way, and subjecting them to a rule [...]²¹⁴

As stated, these rules are the general functions or forms of judgment, generally represented in the categories, the use and unity of which is grounded in the original apperception. This is what I turn to now.

4.3 Transcendental Apperception and Objectivity

The notion of a *transcendental* or *original apperception* is famously central to Kant's transcendental idealism, but the exact nature of it as well as its role in especially the transcendental deduction of the categories, are still debated issues. In their introduction to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Guyer and Wood write on the deductions and the notion of apperception:

Kant centers his argument on the premise that our experience can be ascribed to a single identical subject, via what he calls the "transcendental unity of apperception," only if the elements of experience given in intuition are synthetically combined so as to present us with objects that are thought through the categories. The categories are held to apply to objects, therefore, not because these objects make the categories possible, but rather because the categories themselves constitute necessary conditions for the representation of all possible objects of experience. Precisely what is entailed by the idea of the unity of apperception, however, and what the exact relation between apperception and the representation of objects is, are obscure and controversial, and continue to generate lively philosophical discussion even after two centuries of interpretation.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ A197/B242-3.

²¹⁵ Guyer and Wood, Introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, 9.

First of all, whatever else apperception is and how it works, it is in any case a capacity that we have, to combine or synthesize different representations together, so that they belong to a single subject, and are thereby part of the single and unified relation to objects that we call experience.²¹⁶ This capacity operates via the categories as the general concepts for all objects.²¹⁷ Usually Kant uses the word ‘apperception’ to simply mean what he other times dubs transcendental or original apperception, and which is, according to my reading, by nature, objective, or intentional.²¹⁸ For Kant, this apperception is an active capacity – in contrast to passive reception – by which we can become conscious of ourselves as well as of the represented objects and their properties.²¹⁹ It is an intentional act by which we become conscious of our representations as universally representing something objectively, that is, objects. It is thereby that we cognize objects. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant introduces the notion of apperception as follows:

²¹⁶ See B132-142; and A110: “There is only **one** experience, in which all perceptions are represented as in thoroughgoing and lawlike connection, just as there is only one space and time, in which all forms of appearance and all relation of being or non-being take place. If one speaks of different experiences, they are only so many perceptions insofar as they belong to one and the same universal experience. The thoroughgoing and synthetic unity of perceptions is precisely what constitutes the form of experience, and it is nothing other than the synthetic unity of the appearances in accordance with concepts.”

²¹⁷ See A103: “The word “concept” itself could already lead us to this remark. For it is this one **consciousness** that unifies the manifold that has been successively intuited, and then also reproduced, into one representation.” And B137: “**Understanding** is, generally speaking, the faculty of **cognitions**. These consist in the determinate relation of given representations to an object. An **object**, however, is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is **united**. Now, however, all unification of representations requires unity of consciousness in the synthesis of them. Consequently 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.”

²¹⁸ In the passage, Guyer and Wood do not make the distinction of two types of apperception. Kant, on the other hand, sometimes speaks of two kinds of apperception (see e.g. A107), namely *empirical* and *transcendental*. The first one coincides with what Kant calls inner sense. In addition, Kant also writes of empirical and transcendental unity of apperception.

²¹⁹ I read this in relation to Kant’s claims in the Refutation of Idealism, where Kant claims that the persisting existence of things outside me, and the perception of them, are inseparable from the consciousness of my own existence. See e.g. B276: “[...] the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me.”

[N]o cognitions can occur in us, no connection and unity among them, without that unity of consciousness that precedes all data of the intuitions, and in relation to which all representation of objects is alone possible. This pure, original, unchanging consciousness I will now name transcendental apperception. That it deserves this name is already obvious from this, that even the purest objective unity, namely that of the *a priori* concepts (space and time) is possible only through the relation of the intuitions to it. The numerical unity of this apperception therefore grounds all concepts *a priori*, just as the manifoldness of space and time grounds the intuitions of sensibility.²²⁰

To set the terminological aspects right, when Kant speaks of apperception, he usually means this transcendental, pure, original and unchanging consciousness, which is essentially a unity. Based on the above passage, it is also an essential condition for objective unity. As this consciousness has numerical unity (and identity), it is the ground for all use of rules or concepts in judgments. Space and time do not as forms have the same unity as their concepts, but rather they formally bring about the manifold of intuition.²²¹

It should be noted that I have up to now mainly treated Kant's notion of apperception as a faculty or a capacity. However, it would be a mistake to only treat apperception as a faculty which we simply have, because more than often Kant uses the term to mean the *act* of apperceiving, i.e., the act of apperception. Thus I suggest that we should often read Kant's 'apperception' as meaning 'apperceiving'²²², as in the case of the title of §19 of the first *Critique*. A translation of the title reads: "The logical form of all judgments consists in the objective unity of the apperception of the concepts contained therein". So, in my formulation we could say that the logical form of all judgments consists in the "objective unity of the *apperceiving of the concepts* contained therein". I would like to note that I do not

²²⁰ A107.

²²¹ As we have seen elsewhere, Kant also speaks of an empirical unity of consciousness, which he ascribes to inner sense, sometimes called empirical apperception. See A107; see also B140 and R5927.

²²² I do not mean 'apperceiving' as an attribute of an 'apperceiving subject', but as an act, as in "my apperceiving of a tree".

claim that we should concretely substitute ‘apperception’ with ‘apperceiving’, but only that the latter is a formulation of what is sometimes meant with the word ‘apperception’, i.e., the act. There are still passages in which it is not clear whether Kant refers to the act or the capacity, such as the following: “Just this transcendental unity of apperception, however, makes out of all possible appearances that can ever come together in one experience a connection of all of these representations in accordance with laws.”²²³ For now, I refrain from attempting to explicate the two, possibly differing interpretations of this passage, based on the act vs. capacity distinction.

At any rate, it seems rather uncontroversial that apperception is closely related to what Kant calls *consciousness in general*, that it is essentially a unifying act, and can thus be said to ‘have unity’.²²⁴ As Kant frames it, it is necessarily a unity, because, to be blunt, without *one* consciousness, which also operates identically, we cannot conceive of a relation between subject and object. In that case, it seems, we would have neither subjects nor objects represented. Thus the unity of the original or universal apperception is necessary as a condition for (objective) experience in the first place. The categories represent the very rules by which the original apperception acts and relates itself to intuition.²²⁵ Kant writes:

A category is the representation of the relation of the manifold of intuition to a universal consciousness (to the universality of consciousness, which is properly objective). The relation of representations to the universality of consciousness, consequently the transformation of the empirical and particular unity of consciousness, which is merely subjective, into a consciousness that is universal and objective, belongs to logic. This unity of consciousness, insofar as it is universal and can be represented *a priori*, is the pure concept of the understanding. This can thus be nothing other than the universal of the unity of consciousness, which constitutes the objective validity of a judgment.²²⁶

²²³ A108.

²²⁴ See B143.

²²⁵ See A105-110. See also A79/B104-105.

²²⁶ R5927, 18:388–389.

We need not here consider all the stages and conditions needed for what Kant calls “the manifold of intuition”. But, as I understand the passage, when this manifold of intuition is there for us, or rather in us, and given to the understanding, there are universal rules by which it relates to what Kant calls a universal consciousness. This consciousness is the same for all human beings or human subjects. We can see that Kant writes of an empirical and particular *unity* of consciousness, transformed into a consciousness that is universal and objective. So there is (of course, one might add) a kind of unity in merely empirical consciousness, but it is not the kind of unity which can conceptually grasp all representations and relate them to each other according to universally necessary rules of representing objects. The transformation needed happens by subsuming the representations under the categories. Even if not mentioned in the passage just quoted, this subsuming happens in the act of judging. For this reason, judgments are the proper acts of objectivity.²²⁷ The reflection continues:

The manifold, insofar as it is represented as necessarily belonging to one consciousness (or also to the unity of consciousness in general) is thought through the concept of an object: the object is always a something in general. The determination of it rests merely on the unity of the manifold of its intuition, and indeed on the universally valid unity of the consciousness of it.

Two elements of cognition occur *a priori*. 1. Intuitions, 2. Unity of the consciousness of the manifold of intuitions (even of empirical ones). This unity of consciousness constitutes the form of experience as objective empirical cognition.²²⁸

²²⁷ Let us remember the passages already mentioned a bit earlier: “If we investigate what new characteristic is given to our representations by the **relation to an object**, and what is the dignity that they thereby receive, we find that it does nothing beyond making the combination of representations necessary in a certain way, and subjecting them to a rule [...]” (A197/B242-3.) and “[...] a judgment is nothing other than the way to bring given cognitions to the **objective** unity of apperception.” (B141.)

²²⁸ R5927, 18:389.

According to Kant all cognition consists of judgments.²²⁹ Thus intuitions or perceptions in themselves are not cognitions and are not, in themselves, properly objective, without a universally and necessarily identically operating act of objectification (the act of judging). Now, Kant states that there are two elements of cognition, which occur *a priori*, namely (1) intuitions and (2) unity of the consciousness of the manifold of intuitions. Now, I cannot here bring myself to believe that Kant would mean the intuitions to be *a priori* in the same sense as the categories are *a priori*. Rather, I suggest that the intuitions are prior to experience, as necessary building blocks of it, and it is precisely in experience that the two *a priori* elements are united. Kant writes:

Thus experience is possible only through judgments, in which to be sure perceptions comprise the empirical materials, but the relation of which to an object and the cognition of which through perceptions cannot depend on empirical consciousness alone. The form of every judgment, however, consists in the objective unity of the consciousness of the given concepts, i.e., in the consciousness that these **must** belong to one another, and thereby designate an object in whose (complete) representation they are always to be found together.²³⁰

Now, surely Kant does not claim that all objective judgments or even judgments in general always and every time require the subject to consciously reflect upon whether some concepts belong together necessarily or contingently. Rather, this is an explication of what happens and must happen in an objective, unifying act of consciousness. It is an analysis of the synthesis inherent in objective judgments. So, when Kant writes of the consciousness that given representations, or concepts, must belong together, or to one another, it is not that we have reflected upon the matter and then decided that yes, they do. Rather it is the case that in order to represent an object, certain representations do and must always belong together

²²⁹ "All cognition, hence also that of experience, accordingly consists of judgments; and even concepts are representations that are prepared for possible judgments, for they represent something that is given in general as cognizable through a predicate." (R5923, 18:386.)

²³⁰ R5923, 18:386.

(“in the object”, as Kant says).²³¹ We cannot represent objects without the categories, or with just one category, for example. In the end of the B-deduction Kant writes on why the categories, and their necessary unity, cannot be of either empirical or simply subjective nature and origin:

For, e.g., the concept of cause, which asserts the necessity of a consequent under a presupposed condition, would be false if it rested only on a subjective necessity, arbitrarily implemented in us, of combining certain empirical representations according to such a rule of relation. I would not be able to say that the effect is combined with the cause in the object (i.e., necessarily), but only that I am so constituted that I cannot think of this representation otherwise than as so connected; which is precisely what the skeptic wishes most, for then all of our insight through the supposed objective validity of our judgments is nothing but sheer illusion, and there would be no shortage of people who would not concede this subjective necessity (which must be felt) on their own; at least one would not be able to quarrel with anyone about that which merely depends on the way in which his subject is organized.²³²

I suggest to take this passage as a clue or confirmation that the necessity which Kant seeks for objectively valid cognition, is the necessary agreement of the *a priori* concepts (the categories) to both (1) each other, and (2) their objects. The cause and effect, for example, do not belong together because of subjective tendencies of combining representations, but because they belong together essentially as conditions of representing objects and events. Thereby they validly and really belong together, not only in the subject, but in the objects.

Now, let us take a step back to still ponder on the capacity or act Kant calls apperception, which is often stated to mean self-consciousness. What does the rule-guided representation-unifying act of representing objects have to do with self-consciousness? What should we think Kant essentially refers to by the word ‘apperception’? Consciousness? Self-consciousness? Object-consciousness? Unity

²³¹ See B130, B142, B168, A197/B242.

²³² B168.

of consciousness? Objective unity of consciousness? Let us consider textual support for the claim that apperception (simply) means self-consciousness. First, §18 of the B-deduction is entitled “What objective unity of self-consciousness is”. The beginning of the section then reads as follows: “The **transcendental unity** of apperception is that unity through which all of the manifold given in an intuition is united in a concept of the object.”²³³ Now, it does not seem far-fetched to read the “objective unity of self-consciousness” of the title as referring to the same thing as the first sentence of the section, that is, to the “transcendental unity of apperception”. By this, I should note, I do not wish to read “transcendental” as identical to “objective”, which would be absurd. Rather, I am merely pointing out that it seems right and justified to read “unity of self-consciousness” as meaning the same as “unity of apperception”, in the context of the sentences in question. Thus the correct interpretation seems to be that the “transcendental unity” in question is objective by nature.

The passage claims that through this unity “all of the manifold given in an intuition is united in a concept of the object”. I take this to mean that the manifold of intuition is not objective in itself, although created by objects, so to say, but only when the manifold is united in the concept of an object, can we speak of representing objects. Only these objects, then, can be said to be really apart from the subject. It is here that we find the connection between the capacity to represent objects, and the capacity to be self-conscious, namely as the distinction of the object and the subject.

As we have already seen, according to Kant there is also another, subjective, unity of consciousness. But this subjective unity of consciousness is not unity of ‘self-consciousness’, and thus not unity of apperception. The passage reads on: “It [the transcendental unity of apperception] is called **objective** on that account, and must be distinguished from the **subjective unity** of consciousness, which is a determination of inner sense, through which that manifold of intuition is empirically given for such a combination.” Thus there is both subjective and objective unity of consciousness, and what Kant calls ‘transcendental apperception’ or ‘self-consciousness’ is inherent *only* in the latter. The subjective unity needed to grasp the manifold is a product of inner sense, and not of transcendental apperception. The section continues:

²³³ B139.

Whether I can become empirically conscious of the manifold as simultaneous or successive depends on the circumstances, or empirical conditions. Hence the empirical unity of consciousness, through association of the representations, itself concerns an appearance, and is entirely contingent.²³⁴

Now, this latter, subjective unity of consciousness could be taken to be of the kind which Hume (and perhaps other empiricists) had in mind, so to say. As is apparent, Kant is trying to show that this kind of associative unity of consciousness is contingent, as it varies from one subject to another, and cannot thus work as a ground for a universally necessary relation (of agreement) to objects. And indeed, the crucial passage still continues:

The pure form of intuition in time, on the contrary, merely as intuition in general, which contains a given manifold, stands under the original unity of consciousness, solely by means of the necessary relation of the manifold of intuition to the one **I think**, thus through the pure synthesis of the understanding, which grounds *a priori* the empirical synthesis. That unity alone is objectively valid; the empirical unity of apperception, which we are not assessing here, and which is also derived from the former, under given conditions *in concreto*, has merely subjective validity. One person combines the representation of a certain word with one thing, another with something else; and the unity of consciousness in that which is empirical is not, with regard to that which is given, necessarily and universally valid.²³⁵

So, we have it that there is an empirical unity of consciousness, which is nevertheless contingent and thereby not necessarily and universally valid of the objects represented. The pure forms of intuition, on the other hand, are objectively valid, due to their necessary relation to the “I think”, as Kant puts it. Finally, I

²³⁴ B139-140.

²³⁵ B140.

suggest, it is in this thinking about objects, that we are able to separate the thinking I from the objects thought about. This assumption is strengthened by the following passages:

the concept - or rather, if one prefers, the judgment – **I think** [...] serves to distinguish two kinds of objects through the nature of our power of representation. **I**, as thinking, am an object of inner sense, and am called "soul." That which is an object of outer sense is called "body."²³⁶

the determination of my existence in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself. Now consciousness in time is necessarily combined with the consciousness of the possibility of this time-determination: Therefore it is also necessarily combined with the existence of the things outside me, as the condition of time-determination; i.e., the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me.²³⁷

So, Kant's thought seems to be that there must be, first of all, things, or bodies, which affect us and which we can perceive. And becoming conscious of these things as objects, that is, as something outside and separate from ourselves, enables us to become conscious of ourselves.²³⁸ This consciousness of the objects and ourselves happens via concepts (the categories) used in judgments, which are, as we remember, ways "to bring given cognitions to the objective unity of apperception"²³⁹. The capacity of apperception is necessarily a unity, because otherwise separate representations could not be synthesized or united (in concepts of objects). Thus, I would like to suggest that apperception is an objective act (of

²³⁶ A341-342/B399-400.

²³⁷ B275-276.

²³⁸Nikkarla (2017) has noted that this thought quite strongly (and not by accident) resembles Wolff's conception, according to which we must first be able to cognize objects, and distinguish them from each other, and then become conscious of our distinctness from the objects. See Nikkarla 2017, 39.

²³⁹ B141.

self-consciousness), in which, through synthesis of given representations, an object separate from the thinker comes to be thought. The rules for the synthesizing of the representations are conceptualized in the categories. In this interpretation apperception is not primarily understood as consciousness of one's own states of mind, feelings etc., but as consciousness of an object distinct from the subject. Something akin to this reading is proposed by A. B. Dickerson, who claims that the notion of apperception is commonly misunderstood in Kant scholarship:

Kant's notion of apperception, despite initial appearances, should not be assimilated to modern notions of 'self-awareness', 'self-consciousness', 'self-knowledge' or 'self-reference'. Rather, apperception is the reflexive act whereby the mind grasps its own representations as representing, and is thus an essential part of all thought and cognition.²⁴⁰

I find Dickerson's claim, at least as presented in the quote above, much in line with my interpretation of Kant's notion of apperception. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that there is clear textual evidence supporting the interpretation of apperception as self-consciousness, even if we should not read it from the perspective of contemporary accounts of self-consciousness. In relation to 'original apperception' Kant at times also writes of 'self-perception' as well as the judgment or representation 'I think', which Kant in a famous passage claims "must be able to accompany all my representations":

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.²⁴¹

Dickerson of course does not deny this, but in the previous passage refers to this identification of apperception to a contemporary notion of self-awareness as the

²⁴⁰ Dickerson 2007, 81.

²⁴¹ B131-132.

“initial appearances”. But if Dickerson does not think that apperception is essentially, or only, a capacity or an act of introspection, what does he claim instead, and on what grounds? He writes that

apperception (‘the *I think*’) is necessarily involved in *all* conscious thought, and thus in the cases of both inner and outer cognition. Apperception is, in other words, not simply the capacity for introspection or self-awareness. That apperception is something quite different from inner sense is made even clearer by a remark in a footnote to § 16 of the B-Deduction, where Kant tells us that ‘indeed, this faculty [*sc.*, of apperception] is the understanding itself (B134n). [...] Apperception is the reflexive awareness in virtue of which I (the subject) grasp my representations as presenting something to me. It is, in other words, that in virtue of which I have conscious thought or cognition, and is thus ‘the faculty of understanding itself’.²⁴²

First of all we should note here the distinction of inner sense and apperception, which Kant himself very clearly and repeatedly draws. We have seen elsewhere that Kant at times refers to inner sense as empirical apperception. But the original or pure apperception is of a different nature, namely one which Kant in the footnote says to be *the understanding itself*, and which connects to the famous ‘I think’ claim of Kant’s. Here we should perhaps also pay attention to the fact that Kant does not state that I *must accompany* all my representations with ‘the *I think*’, but rather that I *must be able* to do it. In Kant’s text, the phrase ‘must be’, as well as the phrase ‘I think’, is emphasized by being written in italics. Thus it is not a question of what must actually be done, but of what must be possible. Of course, the act of apperception must also be actualized if the thinking of objects through representations is to happen. In R4677, which is a note from Kant’s ‘silent decade’, just prior to the first *Critique*, Kant writes:

Only because the relation that is posited in accordance with the conditions of intuition is assumed to be determinable in

²⁴² Dickerson 2007, 90.

accordance with a rule is the appearance related to an object; otherwise it is merely an inner affection of the mind. Everything that is **thought** as an object of intuition stands under a rule of construction. Everything that is **thought** as an object of perception stands under a rule of apperception, self-perception.²⁴³

Here we see apperception treated as equal to “self-perception”. This is in line with my interpretation, according to which the act of apperception is a self-conscious act of objective representation, that is, of thinking about objects which are distinct from the subject. Thus it is at the same time the condition of objectivity and of self-consciousness, as this consciousness of the self means consciousness of the I as distinct from the objects. Kant’s note continues:

[...] Appearance is made objective by being brought as contained under a title of self-perception. And thus the original relations of apprehension are the conditions of the perception of the real relations in appearance, and indeed just insofar as one says that an appearance belongs thereunder is it determined from the universal and represented as objective, i.e., thought. When one does not represent it as belonging under the functions of self-sensation, but rather represents it by means of an isolated perception, then it is called mere sensation.²⁴⁴

At the time of these notes, Kant’s critical theory was not yet fully shaped, but I find no essential contradiction between the notes in question and the first *Critique*. Kant here brings up the role of apprehension, but states it to be a function of the apperception, which he, as we remember, also identified with the understanding itself. Another note from the same period supports this view:

If something is apprehended, it is taken up in the function of apperception. I am, I think, thoughts are in me. These are all relations, which to be sure do not provide rules of appearance, but

²⁴³ AA 17:658.

²⁴⁴ R4677, AA 17:658.

which make it such that all appearance is to be represented as contained under a rule. The I constitutes the substratum for a rule in general, and apprehension relates every appearance to it.²⁴⁵

Once more, the passage shows the role of “The I” as that identical one, that unity, in relation to which rules can be applied to appearances. Then the last, especially illuminating quote, from the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

Apperception is itself the ground of the possibility of the categories, which for their part represent nothing other than the synthesis of the manifold of intuition, insofar as that manifold has unity in apperception. Self-consciousness in general is therefore the representation of that which is the condition of all unity, and yet is itself unconditioned. Hence of the thinking I (the soul), which [thus represents] itself as substance, simple, numerically identical in all time, and the correlate of all existence from which all other existence must be inferred, one can say **not so much** that it cognizes **itself through the categories**, but that it cognizes the categories, and through them all objects, in the absolute unity of apperception, and hence cognizes them **through itself**.²⁴⁶

Based on all of the above, my view is that apperception is, for Kant, a faculty or a capacity, which is a necessary component of cognition as being a capacity for an identical, unified and universal *act* which through the categories allows the understanding to think of objects. Thus apperception is the component which creates objectivity and intentionality by subsuming the manifold of intuition, via the categories, under the concept of an object or a something in general (=X) and by relating these representations to others in the necessary unity of apperception. The result of this is what Kant calls experience. Thus it is not the only purpose of apperception to allow one to become conscious of oneself, but rather to become conscious of objects, which are, so to say, not-me. Thus the categorically unifying act of apperception is what creates objectivity and thereby makes possible the

²⁴⁵ R4676, AA 17:656.

²⁴⁶ A401–402.

conscious relation of subject and object. That is, the objectivity, as in a representational relation to an object, brought about by the (act of) apperception, first allows for a consciousness of the distinctness of the object from the subject.

In addition and with regard to the above, we might say that the main element missing from Hume's philosophy was the universal and necessary objectivity, which, for Kant, requires *a priori* elements, such as the capacity of transcendental apperception, as well as the universal rules by which the apperception necessarily operates. Apperception is the capacity to think objects (distinct from ourselves) for our representations. This action of thinking objects is rule-guided, conceptually unifying activity of making judgments. Therefore, with regard to objects we may also call this activity cognition, and it results in objective experience. The proper, universal and necessary ground for thinking and making judgments is the transcendental unity of apperception. In this context it makes sense for Kant to identify the capacity of apperception with the capacity of understanding, because apperception is precisely the one *original capacity*²⁴⁷ which is, so to say, added to sensibility and imagination (the other two original capacities) in order to be able to make judgments, think of objects, and have a self-conscious relation to objects at all. Transcendental apperception is an active capacity to self-consciously and universally represent objects distinct from the subject, and this capacity necessarily has a universal and permanent structure. The unity of this transcendental apperception is that non-changing structural capacity, on which the identity of the active, categorizing and thinking subject is possible, and based on which it makes sense to speak of a subject and objects in relation to each other. Based on this unity subjects are able to synthesize representations and use them to refer to and make judgments about objects.

²⁴⁷ See A94: "There are, however, three original sources (capacities or faculties of the soul), which contain the conditions of the possibility of all experience, and cannot themselves be derived from any other faculty of the mind, namely **sense, imagination, and apperception.**"

4.4 Judgment, Categories and Objectivity

[...] a judgment is nothing other than the way to bring given cognitions to the **objective** unity of apperception.²⁴⁸

In the first *Critique* Kant presents the twelve logical forms of judgment, that is, functions of thinking. These, according to Kant, “can be brought under four titles, each of which contains under itself three moments.”²⁴⁹ The four titles and moments are (1) *the quantity* (universal, particular, singular), (2) *the quality* (affirmative, negative, infinite), (3) *the relation* (categorical, hypothetical, disjunctive) and (4) *the modality* (problematic, assertoric, apodictic) *of the judgments*. This is supposed to be a presentation of all the logical forms that a judgment can possibly take or include. As it is not my aim here to try to present Kant’s theory of judgment in all its details, but rather show the place and importance that judgments have for Kant’s conception of objective reference, I shall only make a few comments.

First, Kant remarks that there is a difference with regard to whether we are taking the judgments as only internally, that is, logically, valid, or transcendently valid, that is, as cognition in general. As I see it, this question is most relevant to the study at hand, since only the latter validity is in my view objective validity. We should note that even though we are here at issue with the logical forms, and not the content of the judgments, still, taken transcendently, it is the three first titles (*quantity, quality and relation*) which constitute the content of a judgment. This means that the *modality* of judgments does not contribute to the content, as Kant writes:

[t]he modality of judgments is a quite special function of them, which is distinctive in that it contributes nothing to the content of the judgment [...], but rather concerns only the value of the copula in relation to thinking in general.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ B141.

²⁴⁹ A70/B95.

²⁵⁰ A74/B99-100.

Here, an essential supposition is that objective reference requires intuitions and concepts working together in judgments. But is all use of concepts in relation to intuitions judgment, and are all judgments objective? In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant presents judging as essentially the same as thinking, which again is said to be conceptual cognition:

We can [...] trace all actions of the understanding in general back into judgments, so that the **understanding** in general can be represented as a **faculty for judging**. For according to what has been said above it is a faculty for thinking. Thinking is cognition through concepts.²⁵¹

Now, this still does not mean that judgments are always objective, or refer to objects in a universally valid way. Part of the problematics in presenting Kant's view of judgments and objectivity is that he at times presents judgments as essentially objective, whereas at other times he writes specifically of *subjective* and *objective* judgments, and their differences. Another distinction of judgments is that of *judgments of perception* and *judgments of experience*, the first of which Kant says to be subjective, and the latter objective. These distinctions are relevant to my purpose because some interpreters, such as Cassirer²⁵² and Allison²⁵³, claim that Kant's theory of judgments actually requires judgments to be essentially objective, which would mean that his own talk of subjective judgments of perception is incoherent rhetoric. Others, such as Longuenesse²⁵⁴, Beizaei²⁵⁵ and Laiho²⁵⁶, claim that there actually is no incoherence or contradiction, but rather the notion of judgment that Kant uses leaves room for subjective judgments, some of which can become objective through the proper use of understanding, while others will remain subjective. As stated, my aim is not to solve all the problems related to these distinctions, but they can still be of assistance in forming a picture of Kant's

²⁵¹ A69/B94.

²⁵² Cassirer 1981.

²⁵³ Allison 1983, 148-153.

²⁵⁴ Longuenesse 1998.

²⁵⁵ Beizaei 2017.

²⁵⁶ Laiho 2012, 201-205.

conception of judgment. In the B-edition of the transcendental deduction Kant writes of judgments and the objective unity of apperception:

I have never been able to satisfy myself with the explanation that the logicians give of a judgment in general: it is, they say, the representation of a relation between two concepts. Without quarreling here about what is mistaken in this explanation, that in any case it fits only **categorical** but not hypothetical and disjunctive judgments (which latter two do not contain a relation of concepts but of judgments themselves) (though from this error in logic many troublesome consequences have arisen), I remark only that it is not here determined wherein this **relation** consists.²⁵⁷

Here Kant first criticizes the view that judgments only represent relations between concepts, as it is his view that they also represent relations between judgments. However, the second matter criticized is that the nature of the relation is not at all explicated. By this I mean the question of whether the relations depicted are contingent or necessary, and thus subjectively or objectively valid. Kant continues:

If, however, I investigate more closely the relation of given cognitions in every judgment, and distinguish that relation, as something belonging to the understanding, from the relation in accordance with laws of the reproductive imagination (which has only subjective validity), then 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.²⁵⁸

This passage has come up multiple times already, and for a reason. I have above discussed Kant's notion of apperception as a capacity to unify representations objectively, that is, to combine and synthesize different representations according

²⁵⁷ B140-141.

²⁵⁸ B141-142.

to universal and necessary rules, to become unified experience which is about the world, or, about the objects. Now, Kant says that the procedure of moving from mere associative, subjective and contingent synthesizing of representations to objective representation is to bring the representations to the objective unity of apperception by judging that something **is** something (e.g. 'x is p'), in which we do not claim merely to associate something with something, but that something really and necessarily is something. By this Kant does not mean that if we e.g. see a glass of milk, and judge that 'the milk is white', then the milk is necessarily white. Rather, the point is that the whiteness and milk necessarily and objectively belong together (in the unity of apperception), when we represent the object (milk; substance) as white (accident). Likewise, if I were to pour more and more milk into the glass, it would eventually be spilled on the table. Now, to objectively represent this event, one must use the category of causality. It is then possible to understand the necessity of the relation of the pouring as cause and the spilling as effect. The passage continues:

For this word designates the relation of the representations to the original 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.²⁵⁹

I attempt to approach this with an example. There is a story, found in many cultures and languages, about a rather foolish man who sits on a tree branch, sawing off the very branch he is sitting on. Another man passes by and advises the fool to stop the sawing, or he will fall. The fool, nevertheless, neglects this advice, because he does not see how the other man could possibly foresee what will happen to him.

²⁵⁹ B142.

So, sawing on, he cuts the branch and falls. The fool starts shouting out that the other man is a sage who can tell the future. But the other man has thought it quite natural to understand what will happen if the branch is cut. Now, what has this to do with Kant and judging?

In Kantian context, we might say that the fool was somehow lacking in his capacity of the understanding, or his capacity to judge objectively. He was not able to apply the category of causality in his thinking, which category one needs to understand something as a cause (the sawing) and something else as an effect (the falling). A simple failure to see the specific effects of a given cause, however, is common enough, and happens to everyone at times. This, in Kant's terms, would simply be a failure of the *capacity to judge*. According to Kant, *the understanding* itself is a *capacity of rules*²⁶⁰, that is, a capacity to form and comprehend rules. But the capacity to apply these rules is a separate capacity which Kant calls the capacity (or faculty) to judge.²⁶¹ Now, as we all do sometimes, the fool might have had problems with his capacity to judge. Maybe he did not see that the situation with the branch was such that causality applies to it, even if he otherwise thinks of relations of objects and events using the concept of causality. One might think it is actually rather impossible for us to even comprehend what the world would seem like without this concept. But in this case, the fool did not see this even after the accident. Rather, he seems incapable of at least fully understanding the notion of causality, and the fact that it does apply to all objects in all times, as Kant requires of the categories as the concepts of objects in general. Thus he did not properly and objectively experience the relations of the tree, the branch, the sawing and himself. The Kantian notion of experience, however, means basically the same as objective cognition, and both of them require the understanding and the application of the categories to empirical objects and events. Thus, the fool of our story could not cognize the world (fully) objectively, because of a lack of either the capacity to judge, or perhaps even a lack of the capacity of understanding itself.²⁶²

Having pondered on Kant's thought on the capacity to judge, let us still return to the passage of the B-deduction, which continues:

²⁶⁰ A69/B94; A132/B171; A158/B198.

²⁶¹ A132/B171.

²⁶² Kant (A133n/B172n) notes: "The lack of the power of judgment is that which is properly called stupidity, and such a failing is not to be helped."

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).²⁶³

In this crucial passage Kant depicts a difference between relating representations to other representations either subjectively (contingently or according to laws of association) or necessarily and objectively. As I suggested, we should not think of this difference as a depiction of something we choose to do this or that way, thus producing either subjective or objective judgments, but rather it is a depiction of what happens in objective judgments, that is, in those judgments which actually claim something about objects, and can thus have what some call truth value.²⁶⁴

Once more, Kant writes that judgments are ways of bringing "given cognitions to the objective unity of apperception". Thus, rather than talking about relating *concepts* to each other, Kant now says that judgments relate *cognitions* to each other in the objective unity of apperception. The difference between relating concepts and relating cognitions could be that cognitions themselves are, as it were, already objective and contain something sensible as well as conceptual, whereas concepts just by themselves can have a relation to an object only via sensibility.

²⁶³ B140-142. The very last sentences of the passage, concerning the repetitions of certain perceptions, seem to be direct reference to Hume's theory of perception, in which the concept of necessary connection, or causality, is derived from the repeated occurrences of perceiving a connection between things. This was discussed in Chapter 2.

²⁶⁴ Henry Allison (2012 ,34) writes of this: "the objective validity, which Kant here attributes to judgment as such, is not to be equated with truth (since that would commit Kant to the absurdity that every judgment as such is true). It is rather that every judgment makes a claim to truth or has a truthvalue, which is enough to distinguish judgment from a merely imaginative association of the same representations."

In any case, the activity of relating cognitions concerns their relation to the original apperception, from whence the unity and necessity of the judgments originates. This relation that the representations will have to apperception and each other is then not only subjective, as, say, association, but objectively valid, in the case of having happened according to the necessary rules of understanding, which are conditions for the objectivity. Furthermore, Kant explicates that this is what we properly mean by saying that something “is” something; it not only feels like something or appears like something, but indeed is (objectively) something. For to make a judgment that states e.g. that “this stick is one meter long”, it is presupposed that certain necessary laws are followed, which laws are common to every judging subject, as they are laws of objective judging in general. This Kant says to mean that they are proper judgments.

Now, it is essential that categories are necessary concepts for cognition and thus for objective judgments. As a pre-note to what will be discussed below, this could even by name suggest that objective judgments are always categorical judgments. Now, as we already saw, Kant indeed writes that the other forms of relation besides categorical, that is, hypothetical and disjunctive judgments, are functions of relating two or more judgments. This relating in itself does not guarantee objectivity, because it remains unsettled whether the related judgments themselves are objective or true. However, in my view the question of different types of judgments does not, in the end, cause serious difficulties at least to my essential interpretation of Kantian objective reference. The key still lies in the use of the categories, as they are what make it possible to form the universally necessary relation of objects in general to apperception. Related to this A.B. Dickerson writes:

Kant’s analysis aims to show that cognition should be analysed as involving the two faculties of receptivity and spontaneity. The argument is that grasping a unified complex representation entails spontaneity, but if spontaneity is to be made compatible with objectivity, and thus with receptivity, then it must be governed by a priori rules derived from the essential structure of the act of judging – that is, it must be governed by the categories. In this way,

Kant argues, the categories are shown to be necessary conditions of experience, and thus their objective validity is proved.²⁶⁵

Now, I agree with Dickerson's claim of the interplay of receptivity and spontaneity. It is the latter which is supposed to be governed by rules "derived from the essential structure of the act of judging". But how does this essential structure of judging relate to the use of the categories, and the question of the objectivity and subjectivity of judgments? As the question concerning the subjectivity and objectivity of judgments may shed more light on Kant's thought, below I offer a few thoughts on the types of judgment as related to the question of objectivity.

4.5 Judgments of Perception and Judgments of Experience

The seemingly essential objectivity of all judgments appears to be in contradiction with the *Prolegomena's* and the *Critique of the Power of Judgment's* notions of subjective judgments of perception and subjective judgments of beauty. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* we find not a single mention of 'subjective judgment', which fits very well with the fact that Kant also only once in the *Critique of Pure Reason* uses the expression 'objective judgment'.²⁶⁶ By this I mean that it makes sense not to talk of 'subjective' and 'objective' judgments, if the matter involves no distinction, or such a distinction is irrelevant to the matter dealt with. This might be taken to support a supposition that in the *Critique of Pure Reason* the 'judgments' referred to are the ones that Kant later calls objective or determining judgments. We might want to note that in the earlier quoted passage from the B-deduction, Kant indeed expresses what he says to be a subjectively valid relation of representations, in the form of a hypothetical judgment: "If I carry a body, I feel a pressure of weight". To give this judgment objective validity, Kant then offers the formally categorical judgment, in which the "representations are combined in the object": "It, the body, is heavy". This change of a formally hypothetical judgment to

²⁶⁵ Dickerson 2007, 32.

²⁶⁶ A262.

a formally categorical judgment often marks or represents for Kant the difference between a subjective relation of representations and an objective one.²⁶⁷

Kant's talk of *judgments of perception* and *judgments of experience* causes a notorious difficulty in interpretation because of the seeming contradiction to at least the account found in the first critique in which we can find no mention of judgments of perception. Rather the account of the *Critique of Pure Reason* seems to be that all *judgments* are categorical and objectively valid. Thus they seem to be what Kant in the *Prolegomena* deems judgments of experience. Now, the problem is not only that the notion of judgments of perception, which are supposed to be valid only subjectively and not objectively, is missing in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In addition, as is claimed by many, the notion seems contradictory to the *Critique of Pure Reason's* doctrine, and especially the B-deduction, as Kant there seems to present judgments altogether as conditioned by the categories and the original unity of apperception. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant writes about the Table of Categories:

Now this is the listing of all original pure concepts of synthesis that the understanding contains in itself *a priori*, and on account of which it is only a pure understanding; for by these concepts alone can it understand something in the manifold of intuition, i.e., think an object for it. This division is systematically generated from a common principle, namely the faculty for judging (which is the same as the faculty for thinking) [...] ²⁶⁸

Here we see what is basically an identification of thinking and judging, and an account of what they are essentially achieving: *an object* for the manifold of intuition. Now, this would suggest that without the understanding (as a faculty for thinking or judging) we only have subjective representations, as in the manifold of intuitions. It is only when the understanding starts to synthesize these representations that we can achieve the relation to an object, and this synthesizing happens precisely by the functions identified, or represented, as the categories:

²⁶⁷ In addition to B 140-142, see e.g. the *Prolegomena's* examples of subjective and objective judgment.

²⁶⁸ A 80-81 / B 106.

The same function that gives unity to the different representations in a judgment also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations in an intuition, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of understanding. The same understanding, therefore, and indeed by means of the very same actions through which it brings the logical form of a judgment into concepts by means of the analytical unity, also brings a transcendental content into its representations by means of the synthetic unity of the manifold in intuition in general, on account of which they are called pure concepts of the understanding that pertain to objects *a priori* [...]²⁶⁹

This passage is much debated as it identifies the unity bringing function of a judgment and that of an intuition. This has led some commentators to think that if and when we have intuitions, they are always already subsumed under the categories.²⁷⁰ I do not think this is the case, as Kant rather clearly says that we do not need concepts or the understanding for intuition, and as the case would then make the purpose of the transcendental deductions rather odd.²⁷¹ Rather, it seems that we obviously can have representations called intuitions without the understanding, but for them to be objective, that is, to have a relation to an object, the understanding and the categories are necessary. In the *Prolegomena* Kant writes:

We will therefore have to analyze experience in general, in order to see what is contained in this product of the senses and the understanding, and how the judgment of experience is itself possible. At bottom lies the intuition of which I am conscious, i.e., perception (*perceptio*), which belongs solely to the senses. But, secondly, judging (which pertains solely to the understanding) also belongs here. Now this judging can be of two types: first, when I merely compare the perceptions and connect them in a consciousness of my state, or, second, when I connect them in a

²⁶⁹ A79/B104-105.

²⁷⁰ See e.g. Guyer, McDowell (1996, 46), and Schulting (2016a, v-xviii).

²⁷¹ See e.g. A91/B123: "Appearances would nonetheless offer objects to our intuition, for intuition by no means requires the functions of thinking."

consciousness in general. The first judgment is merely a judgment of perception and has thus far only subjective validity; it is merely a connection of perceptions within my mental state, without reference to the object. Hence it is not, as is commonly imagined, sufficient for experience to compare perceptions and to connect them in one consciousness by means of judging; from that there arises no universal validity and necessity of the judgment, on account of which alone it can be objectively valid and so can be experience.²⁷²

According to this passage we can and do have conscious perception and judging (or relating) of these perceptions, all without reference to an object. For objective reference we need something more:

A completely different judgment therefore occurs before experience can arise from perception. The given intuition must be subsumed under a concept that determines the form of judging in general with respect to the intuition, connects the empirical consciousness of the latter in a consciousness in general, and thereby furnishes empirical judgments with universal validity; a concept of this kind is a pure *a priori* concept of the understanding, which does nothing but simply determine for an intuition the mode in general in which it can serve for judging.²⁷³

Now, an obvious problem seems to be that if the *a priori* concepts depicted in the latter passage are what determine an intuition's mode for judgments, then the prior passage's judgments of perception are completely lacking it. The judgments of perception seem to be mere connections of perceptions without the categories, and thus without unity in a consciousness in general, and without universal validity or reference to an object. This description also seems to fit the *Critique of Pure Reason's* passage, which I remarked in 4.4, where Kant contrasted the subjective hypothetical judgment "If I carry a body, I feel a pressure of weight," with the

²⁷² *Prol.*, 4:300.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

objective one: "It, the body, is heavy". Now, we can note that Kant in fact does not call the hypothetical one a judgment at all in the passage but writes only of "saying" this. But it is then very hard to express the subjective relation of the representations without forming a judgment of some kind, and thus Kant uses the form of hypothetical judgment for expressing the relation in question.

In the *Prolegomena* Kant repeatedly refers to Hume's problem and his *crux metaphysicorum*.²⁷⁴ I have already discussed aspects of the problem but in the *Prolegomena* Kant treats it in close relation to his notions of judgments of perception and judgments of experience. What I take Kant to be saying is that the Humean picture simply lacks the relation of the representations to an object, as it is simply subjective comparing and relating of representations, or ideas, as Hume would have put it, to each other. Thus, what Kant repeatedly says of the sun warming a stone should be read as explicating the difference of relating representations to each other categorically and non-categorically.

Now, I find that one reading of §29 would be that hypothetical judgments as such are simply not objective, as Kant's procedure in §29 is first to turn the judgment "If a body is illuminated by the sun for long enough, then it becomes warm" into another one: "The sun through its light is the cause of the warmth". Now, this surely fits what we already saw Kant to say about hypothetical judgments, namely that in them only the relation of two judgments is considered. This means that the validity of the two judgments themselves is not at issue. Thus we can consider the relation of two or more judgments logically, while none of the judgments are objective. Now what exactly is the difference between the two judgments, the first of which is subjective and the latter objective? At first glance it appears that the objective judgment "The sun through its light is the cause of the warmth", has the form of a categorical judgment, because of the copula "is". This is still not the case, but rather what is considered is the relation of the two judgments, namely one about sunshine and the other of the stone's warmth. In the objective judgment we find the quite exact word "cause" being used to describe the relation. Now this is precisely what hypothetical judgments are supposed to be as objective determinations. As logical, the form is that of ground and consequence, but as empirically objective, it is that of cause and effect. Thus a hypothetical judgment

²⁷⁴ E.g. *Prolog.* 4:257-262, 4:312.

can in itself be objective, if it includes the relation of ground and consequence, that is, the concept of cause:

the concept of cause indicates a condition that in no way attaches to things, but only to experience, namely, that experience can be an objectively valid cognition of appearances and their sequence in time only insofar as the antecedent appearance can be connected with the subsequent one according to the rule of hypothetical judgments.²⁷⁵

What I still find to be problematic in this account is the first judgment, “If a body is illuminated by the sun for long enough, then it becomes warm”. First of all, I do not see how this is not a hypothetical judgment, and Kant even says it to be such. Secondly, isn’t it the case that the judgment rather clearly expresses a relation of cause and effect, even if not using the word “cause”? I would think that the latter judgment, which indeed includes the word cause, is basically an analysis of the first one, with the additions of “is” and “cause”. But if it is simply an analysis, then why isn’t the first judgment already objective?²⁷⁶

So, does Kant at one point seriously claim that all proper *judgments* are categorical and related to the original apperception? If so, did he change his view, or rather terminology, so as to call that which in the *Prolegomena* is named judgments of perception by another name in the *Critique of Pure Reason*? Or, is the case such that what is at issue with judgments of perception is simply not really dealt with at all in the *Critique of Pure Reason*? Still, to avoid contradiction it seems that either one must say that not all judgments are categorical, and thus the definitions of *Critique of Pure Reason* would be either lacking or only referring to so called judgments of experience, or that judgments of perception aren’t really judgments altogether, at least in a strict sense.

Beatrice Longuenesse claims that there is no contradiction between the *Prolegomena* and the B-deduction, but on the contrary that they complement each

²⁷⁵ *Prolog.*, 4:312.

²⁷⁶ A similar case to be considered, but which I cannot give a satisfying solution to, is the example that Kant gives concerning air. Kant claims that air will serve as antecedent to expansion which is then the consequent, but the final, objective judgment, again, has the form of a categorical judgment: “air is elastic”.

other.²⁷⁷ How does that come to be the case? After stating that many interpretations, as that of Cassirer's²⁷⁸, often reduce judgments of perception to a Humean associationist model (perhaps then identified with Kant's theory of pre-judgmental empirical association?) she makes an interpretative move towards recognizing the role of the mere forms of judgment with regard to schemata. Longuenesse refers to an ability that we supposedly have to reflect upon a sensible manifold using the logical forms of judgment as our guide:

To say that all judgments concerned with appearances are at first mere judgments of perception or "mere logical connections" of perceptions, prior to any subsumption of appearances under categories, is to recognize the full role of *mere logical forms of judgment*, as *forms of reflection*, in guiding the generation of perceptual schemata. If judgments of perception result from reflection on a sensible manifold given in circumstances that are quite contingent (depending on the biography of particular empirical subjects), the activity that produces this kind of judgment is also the activity that first generates in the sensible given the forms of synthesis Kant calls "*schemata* of the pure concepts of understanding."²⁷⁹

Now, I have only presented Longuenesse's view as an example of an interpretation in which there is no real contradiction in Kant's talk of judgments of perception and judgments of experience. I do not wish or see necessary here to consider her claims with regard to the role and origin of schemata, but it must be noted that her interpretation still is left with the problem raised by the *Critique of Pure Reason* B 140-142, that is, the fact that Kant defines judgments to be objective. The solution for this problem, then, seems to be that what Kant meant by saying "judgment" in B 140-142, simply was "objective, determining judgment".

²⁷⁷ Longuenesse 1998.

²⁷⁸ Cassirer 1981.

²⁷⁹ Longuenesse 1998, 194-195.

4.6 The Categories as the Concepts of an Object in General

We have now seen that it is necessarily the use of the categories which according to Kant makes it possible to relate our representations to an object. But what precisely does Kant mean by saying that the pure concept of a 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”?²⁸⁰ To be more precise, Kant states that this concept (of a transcendental object) *provides the relation* to an object, and thus, the objective reality of empirical concepts. But this concept is precisely the product of an act of objectivization, whereby the pure sensible manifold is united in relation to the act of apperception. Empirically this means that the sensibly given is subsumed under the categories in the necessary unity of apperception. Kant writes:

Now since this unity²⁸¹ must be regarded as necessary *a priori* (since the cognition would otherwise be without an object), the relation to a transcendental object, i.e., the objective reality of our empirical cognition, rests on the transcendental law that all appearances, insofar as objects are to be given to us through them, must stand under *a priori* rules of their synthetic unity, in accordance with which their relation in empirical intuition is alone possible, i.e., that in experience they must stand under conditions of the necessary unity of apperception just as in mere intuition they must stand under the formal conditions of space and time; indeed it is through those conditions that every cognition is first made possible.²⁸²

Let us revise. According to Kant he was able to show the necessity and objective validity of space and time by showing that no objects can appear without these forms of intuition. The strategy is similar with regard to the categories as conditions of thought and thus of experience, as the categories are subject to the unity of apperception and thus in a sense make up the unity of experience. The

²⁸⁰ A109.

²⁸¹ [The unity of consciousness.]

²⁸² A109-110.

situation, then, is that all relation of objective representation to objects is dependent on a connection that the appearances have to the understanding according to universal and necessary laws. These laws, according to Kant, cannot originate in our empirical and contingent perceptions, but must be *a priori*, and so originate in the structure of the understanding.²⁸³ Kant writes:

Unity of synthesis in accordance with empirical concepts would be entirely contingent, and, were it not grounded on a transcendental ground of unity, it would be possible for a swarm of appearances to fill up our soul without experience ever being able to arise from it. But in that case all relation of cognition to objects would also disappear, since the appearances would lack connection in accordance with universal and necessary laws, and would thus be intuition without thought, but never cognition, and would therefore be as good as nothing for us. The *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience. Now I assert that the categories that have just been adduced are nothing other than the conditions of thinking in a possible experience, just as space and time contain the conditions of the intuition for the very same thing. They are therefore also fundamental concepts for thinking objects in general for the appearances, and they therefore have *a priori* objective validity, which was just what we really wanted to know.²⁸⁴

I should like to note that the well-known statement Kant makes here about the "*a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general" being "at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience" does indeed stand just as is, and should be taken seriously. This statement is part of the answer to the question of the Herz-letter. There Kant stated that empirical objects cannot produce pure or intellectual representations or vice versa. But now the view has changed: it is here claimed that the conditions of experience are the conditions of

²⁸³ A112: "All attempts to derive these pure concepts of the understanding from experience and to ascribe to them a merely empirical origin are therefore entirely vain and futile."

²⁸⁴ A111.

the objects of experience, which can be found nowhere other than in experience, as objects given through sensibility and thought via categories. Thus we may say that the formal conditions of experience are *formal reasons* (or even formal causes) *for* the empirical *objects* (of experience).

In addition to standing in a necessary relation to the original apperception²⁸⁵, the objects also stand in a necessary relation to each other: “[a]ll 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.”²⁸⁶ Now, to refer to one of these objects is essentially to make a categorical judgment about an empirical object. An empirical object is, so to say, intuitively determined by sensibility according to the forms of intuition, by which determination it necessarily has primary qualities²⁸⁷, that is, extension and shape (and their derivatives), and conceptually determined by the understanding via the categories. Through these determinations we are able to use our representations to refer to an object intersubjectively, that is, different people can stand in a similar relation to one and the same object, and make judgments about it. As seems natural, in this picture we must be able to judge a thing objectively, that is, in relation to a consciousness in general, to then be able to compare these judgments (of the same object) to those made by others, to arrive at any kind of certainty or truth in knowing the nature of the objects.

Even though objectivity for Kant in the simplest sense means object-relatedness, on the other hand, objectivity seems in Kant’s use to refer to our using the categories to bring a representation into the unity of apperception. In other words, it is basically the product of a subject relating or referring a representation to an outer object as an object of experience, using the categories. Thus there is no objectivity without the use of categories, which again means that e.g. no sensation alone can be objective, even if it is caused by an object, unless this sensation is used in the cognition of the object, in which case it is brought under the categories as experience of an object. Still, Kant at times calls some sensations objective to

²⁸⁵ A111-112: “the possibility, indeed even the necessity of these categories rests on the *relation* that the entire sensibility, and with it also all possible appearances, have to *the original apperception*, in which everything is necessarily in agreement with the conditions of the thorough-going unity of self-consciousness.”

²⁸⁶ A113-114.

²⁸⁷ I return to this more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

separate them from mere feelings (of pleasure and displeasure), which cannot contribute to cognition of the object, and are thus completely subjective.

Intersubjectivity or intersubjective validity is in itself not a condition of objectivity in the same sense, but rather objectivity is a precondition of intersubjectivity, even though these two go somewhat hand in hand. As Kant writes in the third *Critique*, the sensation of the green color of the meadow belongs to objective sensation of the object²⁸⁸, even though I might very well see the color of the object differently than others, or even see the object in only black and white. The point is that it is still the same object, because there is only one space-time and only one experience.²⁸⁹ On the other hand, we can also use the categories to think of things which are not and cannot be given to us sensibly, but this does not entitle us to any claims of such things. To think of a transcendental object, or a noumenon, is to apply the concept of objectivity without an empirical reference, because a noumenon cannot be an object of sense, and to really apply objectivity, or the categories, we need an object of sense. For this reason we obviously can have no objective relation to noumena, or, in other words, we cannot represent noumena in any other way than conceptually as a transcendental object.

With regard to my purpose here, it seems that the relation of a representation to an object is only achieved in the universally necessary relation that the representation has to the unity of original apperception. This relation is cognitively achieved by the use of categories in an objective judgment. This is where the essence of Kantian objective reference lies, as it is precisely this relation of subject and object, determined by both the *a priori* forms of intuition and the *a priori* categories, in which we find the conditions of objectivity, namely necessity and universality, fulfilled. However, even if the *a priori* forms of intuition and the understanding make up the formal conditions of objective reference, they alone are not sufficient for it, because obviously we also need the empirical, material elements to achieve this. To put it in Aristotelian-Kantian terminology, in addition to

²⁸⁸ *KrU* 5:206.

²⁸⁹ Kant (A110) writes: "There is only one experience, in which all perceptions are represented as in thoroughgoing and lawlike connection, just as there is only one space and time, in which all forms of appearance and all relation of being or non-being take place. If one speaks of different experiences, they are only so many perceptions insofar as they belong to one and the same universal experience. The thoroughgoing and synthetic unity of perceptions is precisely what constitutes the form of experience, and it is nothing other than the synthetic unity of the appearances in accordance with concepts."

formal elements we also, and obviously, need material elements. These elements and their role I try to explicate in the two following chapters.²⁹⁰ Thus, as an answer to Kant's own question concerning the relation of representations to their objects, presented in the letter to Herz, Kant claims that in a way we indeed are responsible for the objects and their properties, but not with regard to their original existence or (all of) their properties. Thus Kant does not claim that we produce the things in themselves, but that cognition of the objects is not purely passive, rather on the contrary it involves quite a lot of activity and spontaneity on behalf of the cognizer. This activity, then, is a condition of the objects as appearances and as phenomena. In this sense, we, along with our activity, are *formal causes for the objects*, as phenomena, that is, as sensible objects of the understanding.

4.7 Further Remarks on Objectivity, Objective Validity and Truth

There seems to be some controversy in Kant scholarship about how the notions of objectivity, objective validity and truth relate to each other. I mostly agree and want to support Dennis Schulting in his view that:

The object *qua* object, the object's objectivity, is a sheer product of the synthetic unity among our representations. It is in the way that we combine our representations that we are able to recognize some existing thing *as* object. (The object of our judgement is not, or more precisely cannot be, simply a thing that exists *in itself*, but is rather something that is necessarily *for us*. If it merely existed *in itself*, it would *by definition* not be an object *for us*, an object that we could cognise.) The "as" here is important; it points to the necessary reflexive or subjective element in the cognition of objects, which in a certain respect is also sufficient for it.²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ Taken transcendently, the material elements of cognizing objects would also have to include what Kant calls transcendental objects, or, depending on interpretation, transcendental matter. In an empirical sense, we might include in the material conditions of cognition the physical senses by which only can our sensibility gain the representations.

²⁹¹ Schulting 2017, 105.

Schulting here claims that objectivity is a product of a unity among our representations. This much I agree on with him, but I find that it should be clarified that objectivity is, to be precise, not a feature or property of objects, but a property of representations, with regard to objects. The representations may or may not concern objects. This is to say that representations may be objective or subjective, and if they are objective, they still may be true or untrue. The objects themselves are not true or untrue, valid or invalid, but the representations are. It is my view that Kantian objectivity in itself does not amount to truth, and so to say e.g. that a judgment is objective does not mean to say that it is true, but rather that it makes a claim about an object. This is simply understandable because we can most surely make errors of false claims which are about objects, but which are not true. These are mistaken objective judgments. But Dennis Schulting makes the claim that even objective validity does not straightforward amount to truth:

What Kant calls the objective validity of a judgement is therefore not its truth *value* per se [...] Rather, the truth *value* of a judgement—that a judgement can be true or false—is, while certainly essential, merely a surface aspect of judgement (an aspect considered in general logic, not in transcendental logic); it is *not* what makes a judgement an objectively valid statement.²⁹²

I think this matter, and Schulting's claim, need clarification, most of all with regard to the meanings of 'objective' and 'objectively valid'. I imagine that I understand what Schulting here means. If I understand him correctly, the point is that when the categories are used (in relation to the unity of apperception), we manage to 'catch' or refer to the objects. Moreover, we refer to the objects in a way which is universally valid. I would express this by saying that the judgments are objective. As Schulting states, and I agree, this does not amount to truth of the judgments concerning the objects, but only that the judgments are about the objects. My problem is rather conceptual, but I find that the proper way to characterize the difference would be to say that these judgments are objective, even though not necessarily correct. The objective validity of the categories, on the other hand, is another matter than the objective validity of a claim or a judgment. I have found

²⁹² Schulting 2017, 117-118.

time and again in Kant scholarship that ‘objectivity’ and ‘objective validity’ are identified, or their distinction is not made sufficiently.²⁹³ Now, this may seem a small or even irrelevant matter, especially when I myself am defining objectivity as object-relatedness, or object-aboutness. Nevertheless, it seems obvious that we should not strictly identify ‘objectivity’ with ‘objective validity’, for the following reasons. First, a phrase like ‘objective validity’ does not in itself make the meaning of objectivity, or ‘objective’, any clearer, but rather to understand what ‘objective validity’ means, we already need to understand what ‘objective’ means. Thus, ‘objective validity’ means ‘validity with regard to an object or objects’. Second, we may very well have representations or make judgments which are objective, but which are not objectively valid, that is, correct or true. For these reasons I feel there is a need to be precise with the concept of objectivity. I partly disagree on this matter with Robert Hanna, who states that

[o]bjective validity, in turn, is a necessary but not sufficient condition of truth, and hence of objectively real propositions, for false judgments are also objectively valid (A58/B83). In this way the objective validity of a judgment is equivalent to its *propositional truth-valuedness*, but not equivalent to its propositional truth. By contrast, all judgments that are not objectively valid are “empty” (*leer*) or truth-valueless.²⁹⁴

The reason why I have a small reservation to agreeing with Hanna²⁹⁵, is that he does not clarify the referent of the statement when he says that objective validity is a necessary condition of truth, and that false judgments are also objectively valid. By referent I here mean: the objective validity of *what*? That is, the validity of the categories, or the validity of the actual judgment? I would nevertheless agree with his first claim about objective validity being a condition of truth. However, he does not specify whether he means the objective validity of the categories used in the judgment, or the objective validity of the judgment itself. Now, this is only a matter of clarification, and in this case I take it that both would be required for truth. Still, I find that there is a sense in which his claim of false judgments being objectively

²⁹³ See e.g. Young 1979; Allison 2004, 83.

²⁹⁴ Hanna 2018, 1.3.

²⁹⁵ And Schulting, for the same reason.

valid does not hold. I agree, that both a true and a false judgment, if it is objective, will use the categories in an objectively valid way. However, the content of the judgment cannot be objectively valid, if the judgment is false. Kant himself rarely speaks of the objective validity of judgments, but usually of the objective validity of certain concepts. What is more, Kant himself identified objective validity with correctness, or truth.²⁹⁶ I propose that both the true and the false judgments can be objective, if they are about an object, but the false judgment cannot, simply as a judgment, be objectively valid. Nevertheless, the applying of the categories in the false judgment can be objectively valid. Thus we also here, in Hanna's case, seem to have a slight need for clarification, and especially a more precise analysis of the concept of objectivity, which is what I am trying to accomplish. To sum what I have discussed and claimed, I am of the conception that for Kant, the only case in which the objectivity and objective validity of a representation is pretty much the same thing, is the case of the pure concepts, that is, the categories. In the case of judgments, objectivity in itself does not amount to claims about validity or truth, but only to object-relatedness, as the 'objective validity' of a judgment would obviously amount to the validity or truth of the judgment, with regard to the object of it.

²⁹⁶ See A125.

5 Empirical Objectivity and the Properties of Empirical Objects

5.1 Empirical Conditions of Objectivity?

In this chapter I present a view of how Kant thought of empirical, sensible objects and their objective properties.²⁹⁷ I build this presentation on my interpretation of Kant's distinction of *primary and secondary qualities*, claiming that what Kant calls *empirical things in themselves*²⁹⁸ consist precisely of the primary qualities of empirical objects. In my view these are, for Kant, the real empirical referents in objective judgments. Now, I have already stated that according to Kant, experience has both sensible and conceptual elements and conditions, both of which are also conditions of the existence of the objects of experience. Even if these conditions should be seen to belong together as the conditions of all experience, they can, to some extent, be treated separately. Thus, by "empirical conditions" of experience I refer to our senses and sensibility as necessary elements of experience.²⁹⁹ This is only to emphasize that Kant did not think we can achieve cognition of real objects without sensibility, that is, by understanding or reason alone. Thus, this is firstly to emphasize his difference from rationalist metaphysics, or any philosophies, which thought to achieve knowledge of the real world in a purely intellectual fashion. Secondly, this is to defend Kant from later attacks against him, which attacks, such as those of e.g. Quentin Meillassoux's³⁰⁰ or Levi Bryant's³⁰¹, claim that Kant's transcendental idealism loses affiliation with the real world, and is only concerned with the subject. This is not the case, as Kant's famous *a priori* cognition offers us only formal cognition of objects, and is thus not in itself empirical objective cognition. Thus Kant writes in the B-edition of the first *Critique* that "we can

²⁹⁷ I do not claim to present a complete view, but only a sufficient one for the purposes of this study. I thereby do not attempt to thoroughly include all aspects of the matter, such as the principles of pure understanding, into my presentation. I suggest that one way to interpret Kant is that such things as colors and smells, which are often called secondary qualities, may be taken to be subjective properties of objects, whereas primary properties, such as figure and size, could respectively be called objective properties of objects.

²⁹⁸ See A29-30/B45 and B69-70.

²⁹⁹ For the most part, I refrain from dealing with the 'Principles of the Understanding', because they are not necessary for making the points I am trying to make in this work.

³⁰⁰ Meillassoux 2008.

³⁰¹ Bryant 2010.

cognize of things *a priori* only what we ourselves have put into them”.³⁰² Things, however, whether as themselves or as phenomena, do not consist only of what we have put into them.

My aim here is to explicate a kind of difference between the material and formal conditions of cognizing empirical objects, and to inquire into the relation of sensation to objectivity, to find out what role our senses and sensations have in achieving a relation to an object. I have in the previous chapter explicated why and how Kant thought that neither sensibility nor the understanding alone can achieve any kind of objective reference, but rather what is needed is the co-operation of these two.³⁰³ Based on this, I want to explicate what, on Kant’s account, we can then expect to know of the properties or qualities of objects *a priori*. I suggest that the matter can be illuminated by relating Kant’s account to the historical discussion regarding primary and secondary qualities of objects. This discussion was, if not initiated by, at least made famous by John Locke, who presented the view that we can make a distinction of the qualities we perceive in objects into primary and secondary qualities, of which only the first ones are actual properties of the objects themselves, and the latter, the secondary qualities, only contingent effects in the perceivers.³⁰⁴ To this claim Berkeley in his idealist way replied that all of the qualities are actually only in the perceiver, and thus ideal and secondary.³⁰⁵ I aim here to show that Kant worked out a sort of synthesis between these views, and thus in a way was able to keep both of these views, with certain restrictions, which I address below.

As an example, I address the contrast of such subjective qualities as colors to such objective, spatial properties as size and figure, and explicate the way in which some of our sensations, as well as some of our senses, are more objective than others. I show that for Kant the most basic spatiotemporal properties are the primary qualities, and they are precisely what constitute the empirical object in itself, in contrast to secondary qualities, which are only modifications of the senses. This distinction, however, only applies to appearances, and not to things in themselves,

³⁰² B xviii.

³⁰³ See e.g. A253, where Kant writes: “If I take all thinking (through categories) away from an empirical cognition, then no cognition of any object at all remains; for through mere intuition nothing at all is thought, and that this affection of sensibility is in me does not constitute any relation of such representation to any object at all.”

³⁰⁴ See Locke, *Essay*, II.VIII, §9-15.

³⁰⁵ See Berkeley 2009, 1:9-10.

as all qualities or properties of objects are subject to the formal conditions explicated by Kant. Thus certain criticisms toward Kant, such as that of Meillassoux's³⁰⁶, fail, if they claim that Kant does not recognize the difference between certain measurable or mathematizable properties of objects, and those which are only e.g. feeling. Thereby Meillassoux fails to acknowledge that also Kant made a similar distinction between primary and secondary qualities, but Kant insisted, with good grounds, that in such a case it is not a distinction of things-in-themselves and appearances, but rather a distinction of primary and secondary qualities of *appearances* or *phenomena*. Now, before moving on to address the distinctions, I want to lay out the more basic pieces of the puzzle, that is, the role of sensibility, senses and sensations with regard to objectivity and the objective properties of objects.

5.2 Sensations and Objectivity

Kant's treatment of *sensation* has given rise to many questions and problems. One problem relevant to my question concerning the conditions of objectivity is whether sensations are objective or not. That is, do sensations refer or relate to objects, or are they simply and only subjective modifications of the subject's states?³⁰⁷ Kant's writings on the matter seem to be somewhat contradictory. In the beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant writes the following: "The effect of an object on the capacity for representation, insofar as we are affected by it, is sensation."³⁰⁸ Later in the book he defines sensation in relation to cognition:

A **perception** that refers to the subject as a modification of its state is a **sensation** (sensation); an objective perception is a **cognition** (cognition). The latter is either an **intuition** or a **concept** (intuitus vel conceptus). The former is immediately related to the object and

³⁰⁶ Meillassoux 2008.

³⁰⁷ This question is related to but not identical with the problem in the debate of conceptualism and nonconceptualism. The debate, however, pulls into many other directions, and therefore I have chosen to treat my question separately from the mentioned debate.

³⁰⁸ A20/B34.

is singular; the latter is mediate, by means of a mark, which can be common to several things.³⁰⁹

Based on these definitions it seems rather clear that, for Kant, a sensation is something that objects cause or affect in a subject. Nevertheless, Kant says, sensations do not refer to any object but only to the subject, namely as modifications of the subject's states. It is here that we once again find the relevant meaning for the terms objective and subjective; objective is something (a representation) that refers or relates to an object, in other words, is "about" an object, whereas subjective means something that only refers to the subject, and thus lacks this "aboutness" with regard to objects.

It is noteworthy that when speaking of the effect of the objects upon the subjects, Kant does not mean primarily some (perhaps measurable) physical effects of the object upon the subject's senses or body in general, but rather the effect that the objects have on our consciousness, even though the former of course are involved in producing the latter. Thus Kant is obviously not saying that we do not need actual senses such as sight and hearing, for objective representations, rather on the contrary. But in this context, objects can be said to affect our capacity for representation.³¹⁰ Now, this capacity for representation is a complex matter, but it may be claimed that a sort of a material ground for our capacity for representing anything objective is our sensibility. This is because Kant has abandoned assumptions of an intellectual intuition, and thus our only way of intuiting objects is by sensibility. Kant writes of sensibility and intuition in the very beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

In whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is intuition. This, however, takes place only insofar as the object is given to us; but this in turn, is possible only if it affects the mind in a certain way. The capacity (receptivity) to acquire representations through the way in which we are affected by objects is called

³⁰⁹ A320.

³¹⁰ A19/B33.

sensibility. Objects are therefore given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone affords us intuitions but they are thought through the understanding, and from it arise concepts. But all thought, whether straightaway (*directe*) or through a detour (*indirecte*), must ultimately be related to intuitions, thus, in our case, to sensibility, since there is no other way in which objects can be given to us.

The effect of an object on the capacity for representation, insofar as we are affected by it, is sensation. That intuition which is related to the object through sensation is called empirical. The undetermined object of an empirical intuition is called appearance.³¹¹

So, first of all, some things or objects must be there, and they must be able to affect us. This requires something from both the things and from us. Our capacity to be affected by objects is what Kant calls sensibility, and sensibility thereby is receptivity; a capacity to acquire representations. Intuitions, on the other hand, are not sensations, but rather intuition relates to the object through sensation, that is, in empirical cases. Now, this still does not mean that intuitions as such would be objective in a proper sense. This is shown in the end of the passage where Kant informs us that the object of intuition, which also bears the name of appearance, is an *undetermined object*. I take this peculiar expression to mean that it has not been determined by the understanding through the categories, and thus is only a subjective representation as such, and not a cognition. This is also shown in the following passage:

If I take all thinking (through categories) away from an empirical cognition, then no cognition of any object at all remains; for through mere intuition nothing at all is thought, and that this affection of sensibility is in me does not constitute any relation of such representation to any object at all.³¹²

³¹¹ A19/B33.

³¹² A253/B309.

It is only the effect caused by the object in the subject's capacity for representation that Kant calls 'sensation'. It is something that is brought about in the subject (as a modification) by the object, but still does not refer to the object.

Considering all of the above, it can strike one as a surprising fact that in both the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*³¹³ and on his lectures on metaphysics³¹⁴, Kant indeed speaks of *objective sensation*. What does he then mean by "objective sensation", and how could a sensation be objective, if it is, by definition, such a modification of the subject's states which does not refer to any object? Kant writes:

The green color of the meadows belongs to *objective sensation*, as perception of an object of sense; but its agreeableness belongs to *subjective sensation*, through which no object is represented, i.e., to feeling, through which the object is considered as an object of satisfaction (which is not a cognition of it).³¹⁵

It is clear that in this passage Kant speaks of two types of sensation, one of which is objective and the other subjective. But we can also see here once again Kant's use of the notion of object, namely that an object is the object *of* some capacity or act. In this case, the green color is included in the perception of an *object of sense*, whereas what Kant calls agreeableness has to do with the object as considered as an *object of satisfaction*. Of course the context here is that of the *Critique of Judgment*'s, where Kant is contrasting the subjective *feeling* of agreeableness to the *perception* of the object. Nevertheless he now uses the term "objective sensation", which seems contradictory to the first *Critique*. What is going on here, and how does this relate to what Kant says of sensation in the first *Critique*? Has Kant either changed his view or his terminology, or are we dealing with different account or aspects of objectivity?

³¹³ *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 1790.

³¹⁴ The lectures *V-Met/L1* (AA 28) and *V-Met/Mron* (AA 29).

³¹⁵ *KrU*, 5:206; Italics added.

5.3 Is there a Problem of Objective Sensation?

For the reasons explicated above, it seems to be conceptually contradictory for Kant to talk of objective sensation. Nevertheless, he obviously does so, which raises questions to be answered. If he was not just being sloppy with concepts, could sensations perhaps be in some way subjective, and yet be objective on another? Or is the case such that there indeed are sensations which can be called objective in some sense of the word, but there also are sensations which are in no way objective? In what way, then, could even some sensations be objective, if, on the other hand, Kant says specifically that only 'cognitions', which include the categorial understanding, are objective, and sensations are subjective?

Without going into very much detail, I claim that the short answer to the relevant problem of objective sensation is the following. Kant actually doesn't claim that sensations themselves can be really objective in the strict sense of the concept. That is, he doesn't say that they are representations that refer to objects. What I take to be his real stand on the matter is that some sensations can and do contribute to our cognition of empirical objects, and in this way they can be objective. Thus the above quoted passage actually makes a distinction between those sensations that are included in the sensible cognition of the objects, and which thus are objective, and those which are of no use to cognition, and thus subjective. In themselves, as separate representations, sensations still cannot be claimed to be objective as in being a representation which would be related to an object. So, it seems to me that the problematicity of the objectivity of sensation is in a way only ostensible, because Kant does not claim anywhere that any sensation as such would be sufficient for a real objective relation to an object. In other words, no sensation alone can be objective.³¹⁶ Kant may still claim that a sensation is objective in the sense that it is a

³¹⁶ For example Westphal (1997) considers Kant's 'sensationism', that is, the view that sensations in themselves cannot refer to objects, to be central to Kant's critical philosophy. According to this interpretation we cannot have an objective relation to an object without the understanding and the ability to form judgements. This seems to be affirmed rather clearly by Kant himself, e.g. in B137: "**Understanding** is, generally speaking, the faculty of **cognitions**. These consist in the determinate relation of given representations to an object. An **object**, however, is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is **united**. Now, however, all unification of representations requires unity of consciousness in the synthesis of them. Consequently the unity of consciousness is that which alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object, thus their objective validity, and

necessary requirement for an objective cognition, or included in it. But are all sensations, then, equally objective as parts or requisites of cognitions?

First of all, it should be noted that in addition to the aforesaid, part of the problematicity of the objectivity of sensation is due to Kant's usage of the terms objective and subjective in different contexts. This is not to say that there isn't a common factor in all of his uses, but to remind of the need to consider context. Now, to answer the questions I presented above I once more summarize my claim this far: *all sensations as such are pure modifications of the subject*. Thus it is the case that sensations can only be objective as part of cognition, that is, as contributing to our relation to and knowledge of objects. Furthermore, not all sensations can be objective in this sense, because all sensations cannot be part of cognition. Some sensations really do contribute to our knowledge concerning real empirical objects, and as part of cognition refer to real properties of objects. These sensations can thus be called objective sensations. Others, respectively, only refer to the subjects' states, or feelings, and are thus called subjective sensations. Cognition properly understood needs sensations but only some sensations are of use to cognition. These are the sensations that Kant calls objective sensations, as opposed to the subjective ones, which basically contribute and relate only to how we feel.

5.4 Another Problem of Objective Sensation?

It might seem that the problem of the objectivity of sensations has now been solved, but actually another problem remains. Let us consider the following question: if sensations are either subjective (contributing to feeling) or objective (contributing to cognition), then are all sensations clearly either subjective or objective, and can we distinctly know which they are? My take is that even if there are sensations which are only subjective, generally taken this is not a clear question of either/or, but rather sensations seem to differ in the *amount of objectivity and subjectivity*. In the metaphysics lectures Kant even says that all sensations are both objective and subjective, but differ in degrees of objectivity and subjectivity.³¹⁷ What is the cause of the differences in the amount of objectivity, and how do we get to know it? Can

consequently is that which makes them into cognitions and on which even the possibility of the understanding rests."

³¹⁷ *V-Met/L1* 28:231-232

we still make sense of objectivity as proper object-relatedness after taking into account the notion of objectivity coming in degrees?

According to my interpretation, which I explicate and justify below, it makes sense to talk of the degrees of objectivity as object-referentiality, when considering that different senses and sensations give us access to different aspects or qualities of the objects. My basic claim is that those senses and sensations which provide access to the spatially determined primary qualities of the objects are the objective ones, because the empirical object in itself, so to say, consists of these qualities rather than the secondary ones. Still, I find it fruitful to consider the notion of objectivity with regard to sensation, as not only object-referentiality, but also as *instructivity* or *revealedness* with regard to the object.³¹⁸ Thus it would not be simply a relation of reference to the object, but a special kind of relation to the object, or to certain aspects of the object. Kant speaks about the objectivity and subjectivity of different senses on his lectures on metaphysics:

Some of these senses are objective, others subjective. The objective senses are at the same time connected with the subjective; thus the objective *senses* are not only objective, but also subjective. Either the objective is greater in the senses than the subjective, or the subjective is greater than the objective. E.g. with seeing, the objective is greater than the subjective, and with a strong sound that pierces the ears, the subjective is greater. But if we look not to the strength, but rather to the *quality of the senses*, then we notice that seeing, hearing, and feeling are senses more objective than subjective, but smelling and tasting are more subjective than objective.³¹⁹

In spite of numerous examples, the above does not make it clear what Kant here means with objective and subjective. What is the essential difference? It is important to note that Kant, however, now starts to speak of the *quality* of the senses. As I take it, this should be read with regard to the relation of the senses to the *qualities* of the objects. The following part sheds more light on the matter:

³¹⁸ I clarify these concepts below.

³¹⁹ *V-Met/L1* 28:231, italics added.

The subjective senses are senses of *enjoyment*, the objective senses, on the other hand, are *instructive* senses. The instructive senses are either fine, if they act on us by means of fine material from a distance, or coarse, if they act on us and affect us by means of a coarse material. Thus the sense of sight is *the* finest because the material of light, by means of which objects affect us, is the finest. Hearing is somewhat coarser, but touch the coarsest. Sight and touch are completely objective representations. But touch is the fundamental one of the objective representations, for through touch I can perceive shapes when I can touch them from all sides, it is thus the interpretive art of shapes. Through sight I cognize only the surface of the object.³²⁰

To summarize the above, first, in the metaphysics lectures Kant says that our senses themselves differ, by quality, from each other. The differences in quality explain the differences in the amount of objectivity that the sensations can include. For example, seeing and touching are more objective ways of sensing than smelling and tasting. But why and in what way are some senses (and sensations) more objective than others? What is the standard of objectivity here?

My claim is that according to Kant some senses are more objective than others in that they reveal to, or tell us, something more of the real, primary properties of the empirical objects themselves. The primary qualities are the basic, mathematizable and universal properties of the objects, by which they can be identified and referred to as the holders of other, subjective qualities. In other words, some senses are better than other senses, as it were, in grasping the *empirical objects* or *empirical things themselves* (and their real properties).³²¹ If this is right, it would mean that we would not have to give up the account of objectivity as referentiality to objects, but rather that we would have to think about what the objects cognized actually consist of, i.e. their essential, primary properties.

³²⁰ *V-Met/L1* 28:231-232, italics added.

³²¹ See A29-30/B45.

5.5 Primary Qualities and Empirical Things in Themselves

Above, I have suggested how the objectivity of sensations (as part of cognition) could be taken to refer to their object-relatedness, or object-referentiality. The thought of this objectivity having degrees still needs more attention. What I suggest is that the degree of objectivity that a sensation carries is determined by how it is able to represent *the empirical thing in itself*, that is, the primary qualities that make up the empirical object in itself, rather than its secondary qualities. Kant writes:

[...] things like colors, taste, etc., are correctly considered not as qualities of things but as mere alterations of our subject, which can even be different in different people. For in this case that which is originally itself only appearance, e.g., a rose, counts *in an empirical sense as a thing in itself*, which yet can appear different to every eye in regard to color.³²²

So, according to Kant, a rose is an empirical thing/object in itself, whereas its color is only a modification of the subject. What then, generally taken, are the empirical objects themselves, along with their properties, and how do we know them?

According to my reading the empirical objects consist of what can be called the primary qualities of objects. These qualities are the real properties of the objects, and they are essentially spatiotemporal by nature. But why are these properties the ones that determine the empirical object? In what way are they special? I suggest that the answer lies in the conditions of the possibility of the objects being experienced, which conditions are universal and necessary. I am now not explicitly referring to space and time as forms of sensibility and our intuition, by which we immediately relate to empirical objects, but also to the forms of the understanding. In Kant's theory, however, all empirical objects we may encounter are necessarily spatiotemporal, because space and time are the forms of our sensibility. We cannot experience outer objects otherwise than in the form of space and time. Already this *a priori* nature of the forms of sensibility makes it the case that empirical objects must have certain properties which come along with existing

³²² A29-30/B45, italics added.

in space and time.³²³ These properties are such as extension, location and shape, which thereby are necessary properties of all empirical objects. Let us consider this lengthy but very relevant passage from the first *Critique*:

Besides space, however, there is no other subjective representation related to something external that could be called *a priori* objective. Hence this subjective condition of all outer appearances cannot be compared with any other. The pleasant taste of a wine does not belong to the objective determinations of the wine, thus of an object even considered as an appearance, but rather to the particular constitution of sense in the subject that enjoys it. Colors are not objective qualities of the bodies to the intuition of which they are attached, but are also only modifications of the sense of sight, which is affected by light in a certain way. Space, on the contrary, as a condition of outer objects necessarily belongs to their appearance or intuition. Taste and colors are by no means necessary conditions under which alone the objects can be objects of the senses for us. They are only combined with the appearance as contingently added effects of the particular organization. Hence they are not *a priori* representations, but are grounded on sensation, and pleasant taste is even grounded on feeling (of pleasure and displeasure) as an effect of the sensation. And no one can have *a priori* the representation either of a color or of any taste: but space concerns only the pure form of intuition, thus it includes no sensation (nothing empirical) in itself, and all kinds and determinations of space can and even must be able to be represented *a priori* if concepts of shapes as well as relations are to arise. Through space alone is it possible for things to be outer objects for us.³²⁴

So first of all, Kant claims that space is both a subjective and an objective representation. But as an objective representation, space in itself does not contain

³²³ In addition (or contrast?) to the *a priori* nature of the primary qualities, which I stress, Gary Hatfield (2011) has stressed their physical explanatory power.

³²⁴ A28-29/B44.

anything empirical, that is, no sensation. On the other hand, taste and colors, for example, exist only in relation to our senses. We might even conclude that were our senses different, these qualities might also be different. But there is something that could not be different, and that something is space, the form of intuition itself. Now, we only need to add that there are certain properties which necessarily result from existing spatially, and these are then the essential and primary qualities of empirical objects. The passage continues:

The aim of this remark is only to prevent one from thinking of illustrating the asserted ideality of space with completely inadequate examples, since things like colors, taste, etc., are correctly considered not as qualities of things but as mere alterations of our subject, which can even be different in different people. For in this case that which is originally itself only appearance, e.g., a rose, counts in an empirical sense as a thing in itself, which yet can appear different to every eye in regard to color. The transcendental concept of appearances in space, on the contrary, is a critical reminder that absolutely nothing that is intuited in space is a thing in itself, and that space is not a form that is proper to anything in itself, but rather that objects in themselves are not known to us at all, and that what we call outer objects are nothing other than mere representations of our sensibility, whose form is space, but whose true correlate, i.e., the thing in itself, is not and cannot be cognized through them, but is also never asked after in experience.³²⁵

So, the claim seems to be that we can assert that taken empirically, things or objects in themselves can be separated from their affections in subjects. This is not to say that we could know or attribute anything to things in themselves in the transcendental sense. But within the sphere of appearances, we can separate essential, spatial properties from mere contingent modifications of the subject. A worry, however, comes to mind here. Is Kant claiming that we do not need senses and sensations to cognize the essential properties, or the empirical things in

³²⁵ A29-30/B45.

themselves? I do not think so. This is because I read the passage to say that some of the things which we call qualities of objects, e.g. taste and smell, seem to exist wholly dependently on subjective sensing. Their existence is grounded upon the organization of sensing, as Kant wrote: “[taste and colors] are only combined with the appearance as contingently added effects of the particular organization. Hence they are not *a priori* representations, but are grounded on sensation, and pleasant taste is even grounded on feeling (of pleasure and displeasure) as an effect of the sensation.” But spatial representations, such as shapes, are not grounded on sensation. This is still not to say that we would not need sensation to have access to these properties of the objects, but it is a question of whether there is a universal and necessary ground for these representations. In the case of the purely spatial properties, the universal and necessary ground is space itself, as the form of intuition.

I hope to have reached a point of some clarity with regard to how some of the qualities of objects are more essential than others in identifying the empirical thing in itself. It is a further claim of mine that these primary properties/qualities can be characterized as being transcendently ideal but empirically real, whereas some other so called qualities of objects (secondary qualities) are both transcendently and empirically ideal. Thus the same would apply to phenomena generally, as applies to the primary qualities: they are transcendently ideal but empirically real.³²⁶ The primary qualities which make up the empirical object in itself are such that they could be represented *a priori*. By this I do not mean that we can represent the objects without ever sensing them, but that the qualities are of the kind that every subject can necessarily represent them in a similar way, because for us there is only one *a priori* space, and this space is a condition for representing objects.³²⁷

What does all this mean with respect to our original question concerning the objectivity of (some) sensations? As we remember, it is intuitions that give us access to empirical objects, and intuitions consist of sensations. Now, objects must be of the kind that they can affect our sensibility, in order for us to have a relation to them. This, in turn, means that objects must have certain “essential” or “minimal” properties, to be experienced by us, and to exist in the first place as objects. As for the side of sensibility, some senses as well as their related sensations are more

³²⁶ See e.g. A28/B44.

³²⁷ See e.g. A26-30 and A110.

objective than others because via them we can cognize the essential properties of empirical objects, which are empirically real and yet transcendently ideal. The senses that give us access to the primary qualities are (more) objective senses, and the sensations by which this is achieved, are (more) objective sensations. As the case still is that the distinction of primary and secondary qualities is not often dealt with in Kant's context, I find it beneficial to further explicate his understanding and use of the distinction. This is even more necessary because in fact Kant seems to make two such distinctions: one most clearly put in the *Prolegomena*, but which basically only amounts to the distinction of appearances and things in themselves, and another, which is the relevant one here, and which can be called Kant's real distinction of primary and secondary qualities.

5.6 Primary and Secondary Qualities

5.6.1 Locke and Berkeley

Even though a distinction akin to what we nowadays call primary and secondary qualities can be found at least as early as in Democritus, in the modern sense it was formulated by figures such as Galilei, Descartes and Boyle, and finally made famous by John Locke.³²⁸ In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke presented a representationalist view according to which we can distinguish between three kinds of qualities (primary, secondary and tertiary) of objects based on what the relation of our ideas is to the actual properties of the objects. According to Locke, the objects themselves consist of certain (primary) properties, such as size and figure, and have the power to affect other objects and minds. What Locke then calls qualities (of objects) are actually for him *powers* to bring about something in other objects. *Primary* and *secondary* qualities are for Locke basically powers to bring about *ideas* in perceiving minds, whereas tertiary qualities are just powers to affect other objects. The difference between primary and secondary qualities is the fact that only the ideas brought about by the primary qualities *resemble the actual properties* of the objects, whereas the ideas produced by the secondary qualities are just contingent, non-resembling effects produced in the mind of the perceiver by

³²⁸ See e.g. Lee 2011, and Jackson 1929.

the powers of the object consisting of the primary properties. The actual properties of the object, as well as the object itself, is never perceived directly, as according to Locke we only perceive ideas, but the primary qualities represent to us the actual properties of the objects, which properties then have explanatory power with regard to the other powers or qualities.³²⁹

Berkeley's account of Locke's distinction, on the other hand, seems to have reduced the whole distinction to that of real properties and ideas, which in the end does not really do justice to Locke. From his own idealist theses Berkeley claimed that Locke's distinction is wrong from the start. This is because all we have access to are ideas, and the only thing common to everyone and responsible for causing the ideas then is God.³³⁰ For Berkeley it is not the case that some of the properties of objects are ideal or contingent and others real, absolute or necessary. Rather, all of the properties, as well as the objects themselves, are ideal and relational. Now, I admit that my representation of Berkeley above hardly does him justice but it may suffice to help me lay out a the following claim. Even though Kant's transcendental idealism obviously contradicts both Locke and Berkeley, there is still a way in which he manages to partly hold on to, not only one, but both of the mentioned accounts. That is, Kant's transcendental idealism actually commits to two distinctions of primary and secondary qualities, which respectively can be related to Locke and Berkeley. I will now examine these two ways in a more structured manner.

5.6.2 Kant's Transcendental Distinction

In the *Prolegomena*, Kant famously refers to Locke and the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. As commentators such as Langton³³¹ have pointed out, it is a matter of dispute whether Kant does justice to Locke's distinction or not. In the latter case, it seems that Kant is interpreting Locke in the way that Berkeley interpreted him, namely so that secondary qualities are something that exist only in the mind of the perceiver, whereas primary qualities are real properties of the objects themselves. This is only partially true, since according to Locke, the secondary qualities, such as color and taste, are, in a way, also contained in the

³²⁹ See Locke, *Essay*, II.VIII, §9-15.

³³⁰ See Berkeley 2009, 1:33.

³³¹ Langton 1998, 140-161.

objects, but only as powers to affect perceivers, or, to be exact, powers to create ideas in the perceiver.³³² According to Locke we never directly perceive the objects, but rather the ideas caused by the objects. What should be noted is that according to Locke all qualities are powers to produce ideas, but only the ideas produced by primary qualities resemble the real properties of the objects³³³. So, the secondary and tertiary qualities do also reside in the objects, but not as they are perceived, or as resembling the ideas produced by the qualities.

Kant's view is obviously not the same as Locke's, but taken only empirically it does seem to resemble it. However, from a transcendental perspective, the views are worlds apart, as in Locke's view the primary qualities are the properties of things in themselves, whereas in Kant's view they are qualities of appearances, and the qualities of the things in themselves remain out of reach. Here is Kant's lengthy take on the matter, from the *Prolegomena*:

That one could, without detracting from the actual existence of outer things, say of a great many of their predicates: they belong not to these things in themselves, but only to their appearances and have no existence of their own outside our representation, is something that was generally accepted and acknowledged long before *Locke's* time, though more commonly thereafter. To these predicates belong warmth, color, taste, etc. That I, however, even beyond these, include (for weighty reasons) also among mere appearances the remaining qualities of bodies, which are called *primarias*: extension, place, and more generally space along with everything that depends on it (impenetrability or materiality, shape, etc.), is something against which not the least ground of uncertainty can be raised; and as little as someone can be called an idealist because he wants to admit colors as properties that attach not to the object in itself, but only to the sense of vision as modifications, just as little can my system be called idealist simply because I find that even more of, *namely, all of the properties that make up the intuition of a body* belong merely to its appearance: for the

³³² See Locke, *Essay*, II.VIII, §9-15.

³³³ Locke, *Ibid.*

existence of the thing that appears is not thereby nullified, as with real idealism, but it is only shown that through the senses we cannot cognize it at all as it is in itself.³³⁴

This seems somewhat straightforward. When secondary qualities are taken to mean something that exists only in, or as, our representation, then Kant is willing to count all qualities or predicates of objects among the secondary qualities, because they indeed are qualities of appearances. Thus they are entirely relational, and Kant indeed affirms, e.g. in the amphiboly section, that appearances consist entirely of relations.³³⁵ In this distinction the primary qualities would be attributed to things in themselves, but of course we cannot know about these qualities, and thus it would perhaps be wiser not to talk about primary qualities at all. Now, I do realize that in the *Prolegomena* passage Kant does not actually call the perceivable qualities secondary but rather points out that they are transcendently ideal, as they are not properties of the things in themselves. Thus the *Prolegomena* distinction is basically a distinction of appearances and things in themselves, and all of the qualities we are in contact with belong to the former. In this sense Kant's distinction resembles Berkeley's view. This, however, does not mean that there is no other distinction of primary and secondary qualities for Kant. There indeed is another one, which is made within the empirical domain of appearances. To confirm and explicate the point just made, let us look at one more passage, where Kant indeed makes the comparison of two different distinctions, one of which is empirical and one transcendental (*italics added*):

We ordinarily distinguish quite well between that which is essentially attached to the intuition of appearances, and is valid for every human sense in general, and that which pertains to them only contingently because it is not valid for the relation to sensibility in general but for a particular situation or organization of this or that sense. And thus one calls the first cognition one that represents the object in itself, but second one only its appearance. This *distinction*,

³³⁴ *Prol.*, 4:289.

³³⁵ A285/B341: "It is certainly startling to hear that a thing should consist entirely of relations, but such a thing is also mere appearance, and cannot be thought at all through pure categories; it itself consists in the mere relation of something in general to the senses."

however, is only *empirical*. If one stands by it (as commonly happens) and does not regard that empirical intuition as in turn mere appearance (as ought to happen), so that there is nothing to be encountered in it that pertains to anything in itself, then our *transcendental distinction* is lost, and we believe ourselves to cognize things in themselves, although we have nothing to do with anything except appearances anywhere (in the world of sense), even in the deepest research into its objects.³³⁶

Thus, the transcendental distinction which Kant refers to amounts to the distinction of things in themselves, whose properties as such are unknown to us, and appearances, whose empirical properties we are able to know. The reason why the properties of the transcendental things in themselves are unknown to us, is that all of the properties of these representations, that is, appearances, are spatiotemporal, and if we were now to strip the forms (space and time) away, we would be left with no properties at all. The empirical distinction, on the other hand, refers to precisely what I call the proper or real distinction of primary and secondary qualities, or to put it in other terms, the distinction between the empirical thing in itself and its contingently sensible qualities, which are only modifications of the subject.

5.6.3 Kant's Empirical Distinction and Its Transcendental Grounding

Gary Hatfield presents Kant's "real distinction" of the qualities, which distinction is situated within the domain of appearances (and not things in themselves), as being mostly about physics, in the sense that the primary qualities are those which can explain the secondary physical qualities, but not vice versa.³³⁷ In Hatfield's interpretation Kant's primary qualities are thus, to be precise, *spatialized forces* as they *appear* in space and time, and thus form the object with its qualities, first the primary, and, in a way, on top, the secondary. Now, it does seem fair to say that physical explanatory power has certainly played a role in the distinction, and is

³³⁶ A44-45/B61-63.

³³⁷ Hatfield 2011.

linked to the “new mechanistic science” of the 17th century and after.³³⁸ Kant does not seem an exception to this, and he probably wanted to incorporate physics, and to be precise, Newtonian physics, into his system, or at least make them compatible.³³⁹

Nevertheless, there is also another reason or grounding for Kant's ‘real distinction’, which distinction substantially resembles Locke's distinction, only now applied to appearances, and not things in themselves. This reason, as we have already seen, has more to do with Kant's idea of the *a priori* forms of intuition as conditions for all objective representation, than with Newtonian physics. I wish to note that I do not claim that e.g. Hatfield reduces the notion of primary qualities simply to physics, but rather I want to stress that Kant indeed constructs a theory where spatiotemporality has the essential role as being the one absolutely necessary form of all possible objects of experience. Thus Kant's project results in supporting the natural sciences in the view that the mathematizable properties are primary to other properties. In 5.4 we saw Kant actually identify the difference between subjective and objective senses as that of senses of enjoyment and instructive senses. We should here note, that taken at face value, this description really does not hold, that is, without further specifications. We can think of many cases where our so called subjective senses, such as smelling or hearing, can be enormously instructive and perhaps even save our lives, if by them we know to e.g. avoid rotten food or move out of the way of a truck. Thus they are not only senses of enjoyment, but on the contrary, very instructive senses. What they do not instruct us of, however, are the basic, mathematizable properties of the objects, such as spatial figure and size. Thereby it is revealed that these basic spatial properties are the standard of objectivity and thus of objective reference.

In order to cognize objects, we need to have an intuition of the object. Intuitions, as we know, have the form of time and space. Thus we know *a priori* that all objects of intuition necessarily have qualities that come along with being in time and space, such as size and figure. Even if it were so that e.g. colors are completely contingent qualities of objects, I take it that for Kant it would not have to mean that we could actually see objects completely without colors. The point is, as Kant wrote with regard to a rose, that the color may vary from perceiver to

³³⁸ See Nolan 2011, or Langton 1998.

³³⁹ See e.g. Cassirer 1981, 25-27; 69-92.

perceiver, but the thing to which the color is attached is the same for every perceiver. This empirical thing consists of, not the secondary qualities, but precisely the basic spatiotemporal qualities of the object. The empirical object in itself has size and shape, whereas colors are only modifications of the sense of sight, and nothing in the objects. Thus the empirical thing in itself is the proper referent of our objective judgments.

To summarize the question of the primary and secondary qualities within the domain of appearances: in addition to being (scientifically) explanatory within the field of empirical objects, the primary qualities (of objects) differ from the secondary in that they are based on something *a priori*, namely the form of intuition. For this reason we may call these primary qualities formal or transcendental qualities of objects. These qualities are, in Kant's sense, transcendently ideal and empirically real, while the secondary qualities are both transcendently and empirically ideal.

5.7 Summary

It is Kant's thought that only via sensibility, in other words *a posteriori*, can we experience objects and acquire knowledge concerning and referring to them. Objects must then be such that they can affect us in order for us to experience them. They must be such that they are able to affect our sensibility, because this is the only way of intuition for us. The case being such sets *a priori* conditions to what can even possibly be experienced and known. These *a priori* conditions of experiencing objects are at the same time conditions of the existence of the objects (as appearances). This is because the only objects which can sensibly be given to us are appearances, the objects of experience, which (experience) has an *a priori* form. Thus we can know beforehand that all objects we may encounter must and will have certain properties, even if we obviously cannot know their exact organization prior to the encounter. My claim is that those properties which the objects will and must have, based on the *a priori* forms of experience, are the primary qualities of the objects. These properties, such as extension and shape, are thereby objective, and they make up the *empirical thing in itself*. The secondary qualities, on the other hand, are produced in the experiencing subjects upon the encounter, but are not

necessary for the existence of the objects (as appearances), and are not necessarily or universally the same for different subjects experiencing the same object.

Upon encountering objects, they cause sensations in us. My claim is that those sensations (or parts of sensations) that refer to the primary qualities of the objects, are objective. Accordingly, those sensations (or parts of sensations) that do not refer to the primary spatiotemporal qualities of the objects are subjective. Thus these secondary qualities are not actual properties of the objects, but only modifications of the subject. One should keep in mind that from a transcendental perspective all qualities or properties are only modifications of the subject, as we have no access to the formless thing in itself. Therefore all qualities of objects as appearances are secondary, if by this is meant that their existence has some conditions other than the objects themselves. Empirically, however, we can differentiate between the actual primary qualities of the objects, and the secondary qualities which are only modifications of the subject's state.

We should also note that in this picture our particular senses play no determining role. The point is not that the way our senses are determines the objects and their properties. Rather, the determination has to do with the *forms* of sensibility/intuition, space and time. However, it is clear that we need to have some actual, material senses to have access to the objects, and in providing this access to the empirical thing in itself (a substance consisting of the primary qualities), some senses are more useful than others. The point is exactly that some of our senses provide us better access to the essential and necessary spatiotemporal properties of objects, and thus they are more objective senses. The properties that are essential and necessary, in a word, *a priori*, are such because they are conditions for objects to exist and to be experienced in space and time. The senses providing the access, on the other hand, are not *a priori*, but are still *necessary requirements* for objectivity and objective reference.

My essential claims here have been that the formal *a priori* conditions of objectivity, that is, the forms of intuition and understanding, are not alone sufficient for actual objective reference, but certain material, in a way *a posteriori*, elements are also required. We cannot claim to know the organization or particular specifics of any object without it affecting us sensibly, but we can claim to know which kinds of qualities in general it must and will have. Here we find reflected Kant's negative view of metaphysics and his critique of Leibniz-Wolffian

rationalism, which claimed to have knowledge of the world and objects in a purely intellectual fashion, thus neglecting the special and necessary role of sensibility as the other original source of objective cognition. These *a posteriori* elements, then, are not the forms of sensibility but our actual senses, as well as the sensations as representations produced by them. Given this, we can make sense of Kant's claim that some senses, as well as some sensations, are more objective than others. What determines the (amount of) objectivity of a sense, or a sensation, is the way it provides us access (or a relation) to the empirical objects themselves, consisting of spatial primary qualities. The senses that provide us access to physical properties, such as size and shape, are more objective than those which provide us access to the smell or taste of an object, the latter properties being subjective in the sense that they are only modifications brought about in the subject, and nothing in the objects themselves, even when considered empirically. Size and shape, on the other hand, are properties which are necessary for us to even have a relation to the object, and they are necessarily such that all subjects experience them in a similar way.

6 Kant on Objective Judgment, Language and Communication

6.1 Language, Thought, Judgment and Form

The aim of this chapter is to explicate the role of language and communication in Kant's account of objective judgment and objective reference. This is an attempt to treat Kant's theory of judgment, already partly explicated in previous chapters, in relation to Kant's views on language. As we have seen, the basic units of proper objective reference for Kant are objective judgments, which basically are acts of relating given cognitions to other cognitions in the unity of apperception.³⁴⁰ The question is, does language play any role in this activity, or is this activity reflected in language somehow?

My suggestion is that, unlike critics such as Herder and Hamann (and many after them) have suggested, Kant does not overall neglect language and communication in his philosophy, but rather can be taken to give an account of how it is possible to use language objectively and communicate objective judgments in the first place.³⁴¹ Furthermore, from Kant's perspective we can account for a certain necessity in the structure of language(s), which is something we need for objective use of language, but could perhaps not be accounted for by e.g. Hume. Thus Kant indeed recognizes the interconnection of thought and language, and at times comments on it, even though it must be admitted that the nature of the relation is only vaguely commented upon by him. A crucial question here is the nature of judgments (and concepts): are they linguistic by nature, or do they perhaps depend on language only on behalf of their expression? Do we thus need to consider language – and even communication – necessary components in laying out a satisfying Kantian theory of objective reference or not?

In the following I explicate the way in which Kant's views on the relation of language and thought seem to alter throughout his philosophy, perhaps in the end remaining somewhat ambivalent. Nevertheless, there seems to be enough consistency in his scattered remarks concerning language to form a conception his view. I aim here to show that for Kant, some structures of language and

³⁴⁰ B141.

³⁴¹ For more on Herder's and Hamann's "Metacritiques" of Kant, see e.g. Robert E. Butts 1988 and Michael Forster 2010.

communication are formally determined by the logic of the understanding, and thus necessarily reflect the *a priori* form of thought. This means in essence that natural languages are necessarily inherently categorical by nature. Still, language and communication are indeed *empirically necessary* for making – and obviously for communicating – objective judgments. As such, I claim that they should be read as *empirical conditions* of actual objective reference, much in the same fashion as I claimed in the previous chapter that we should read the senses and sensations as empirical conditions of objective reference. In addition, I hope to show that there is no obstacle for thinking that Kant could have accepted the view that languages also determine our thought to some extent. Still, the most basic and universal functions and structures of languages are dependent on laws of understanding, which are themselves independent of language and communication. This is reflected in Kant's frequent mentions of *universal grammar*, which I address below. For the tasks described above, I need to examine Kant's writings and lectures for comments on the relation of language to judging/thinking, as well as his account of the role of communication for objective judgments. Before digging into Kant's position, I briefly sketch out the context and discussion Kant himself was partaking, after which I offer my take on Kant's views and their relevance for his theory of objective reference.

6.2 A Context for the Relation of Language and Thought

I first briefly present two overlapping distinctions of philosophical language theories, to which I then relate Kant. The first of these is (1) Charles Taylor's distinction of language theories into two groups which he names the *designative theory*, or *HLC-theory* (Hobbes, Locke, Condillac), and the *constitutive theory*, or *HHH-theory* (Herder, Hamann, Humboldt).³⁴² I will shortly explicate the core of the distinction below. The other is (2) Michael N. Forster's presentation of Kant's view on language, in which he identifies the two main claims of *Herder* and *Hamann*, sets them against what he calls a *dualistic enlightenment view*, and follows the stages of Kant's career to see whether he accepted the views or not.³⁴³

³⁴² Taylor 2016.

³⁴³ Forster 2012.

The basic difference between Taylor's HLC- and HHH-theories is the following. The HLC-theories, described by Taylor as *atomistic* and *designative*, take language essentially to describe or designate some content, like ideas or thoughts, which already exist without and prior to language. In this respect language can be said to exist on top of the thinking, which can be examined without reference to language. The purpose of language, then, is to encode these thoughts and ideas into words, and the purpose of communication is to transmit these codes to others. The HHH-theories, described as *holistic* and *constitutive*, on the other hand, see a tighter connection of language and thought, because of which connection thinking cannot occur without or prior to language. Furthermore, language is taken to be primarily speech, that is, social activity, which then obviously brings in a strong social and linguistic element to thinking and cognizing.³⁴⁴

This distinction rather well coincides with the distinction Michael N. Forster makes between a basic dualistic enlightenment view of language, on the one hand, and Herder's and Hamann's view, on the other. According to Forster Kant's view of the importance of language for our thinking and cognition altogether somewhat consistently moved, probably with the influence of Herder and Hamann, from an enlightenment view to something closer to Herder's and Hamann's view³⁴⁵, so as to finally give language an essential role in our cognizing objects and making true, objective judgments. However, the change did not occur at any given point of Kant's life or career, but rather these two differing accounts both lived within Kant's philosophy throughout his career. Still, at some point, after the *Critiques*, Kant's emphasis clearly seems to have changed. Forster writes of what he calls the dualistic enlightenment view:

The philosophers of the Enlightenment had usually conceived of the relation between thoughts and concepts (or "ideas"), on the one hand, and language, on the other, in a sharply dualistic way: thoughts and concepts were in principle quite separable from whatever expression in language they might happen to receive (so that they could in principle occur without it), developed autonomously of it, and merely employed it as a useful means for

³⁴⁴ Taylor 2016, 3-25; 104-106.

³⁴⁵ In Taylor's terms: from an HLC-view to an HHH-view.

memorization and especially for communication with other people.³⁴⁶

It is this dualistic view which obviously seems to be present in many of Kant's writings, e.g., the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is supposed to be an account of our cognition and its transcendental conditions altogether, presented with very few mentions of language or communication at all. An alternative view, however, was already to some extent prevailing before Kant's writing, in the form of Leibniz's and Wolff's conception of thought being somehow essentially related to language, and especially at Kant's time of writing, in the form of Herder's and Hamann's philosophies, which tied language and thinking together inseparably.³⁴⁷ It is these latter views that we sometimes seem to meet in Kant's writings, especially in the period after the *Critiques*. Forster presents the view which Herder and Hamann introduced as supporting the two following doctrines:

(1) Thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by (Hamann even goes as far as to say: identical with) language – i.e. a person can only think if he has a language and can only think what he can express linguistically. (2) Concepts or meanings are – not the sorts of items independent of language that much of the philosophical tradition has understood them to be, for example, referents, Platonic forms, or the subjective mental “ideas” favored by the Cartesian tradition and the British Empiricists, but instead – usages of words.³⁴⁸

Forster claims that in the later stages of Kant's career he came to accept these two Herder-Hamannian doctrines. I find this to some extent questionable, even though it must be admitted that there are passages which point to this direction. The biggest problem, however, is doctrine number two (2), which I claim Kant could

³⁴⁶ Forster 2012, 485.

³⁴⁷ See e.g. Forster 2012, 509.

³⁴⁸ Forster 2012, 485-486. Note the resemblance to such modern views on language as the pragmatists held, or, Wittgenstein's *private language argument*. In his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein wrote: “the meaning of a word is its use in the language.” (PU 2009: 43.)

never have fully accepted. For this I argue below, but we should also note that even if Kant by some interpretation would have accepted even doctrine (2) at final stages of his career, this by no means implies Kant's acceptance of all of Herder's and Hamann's views, most of all their view on the essentially historical nature of language. According to Herder, language is not such an innate capacity which everyone, so to say, brings into the world, but rather language essentially exists socially and historically.³⁴⁹

Moving back to Charles Taylor, Kant is not especially important for his distinction, and thus he does not make too many claims about Kant as a language philosopher, but he does consider Kant to be meaningful as a figure who fell somewhere between the dualistic enlightenment view and the modern linguistic view, that is, what he calls the HLC-theory and the HHH-theory. In addition, Kant may have contributed something essential to the modern understanding of the relation of language and cognition, via his transcendental philosophy in general.³⁵⁰ Taylor writes:

The arguments of the transcendental deduction can be seen in a number of different lights. But one way to take them is as a final laying to rest of a certain atomism of the input which had been espoused by empiricism. As this came to Kant through Hume, it seemed to be suggesting that the original level of knowledge of reality (whatever that turned out to be) came in particulate bits, individual "impressions". This level of information could be isolated from a later stage in which these bits were connected together, for example in beliefs about cause- effect relations. We find ourselves forming such beliefs, but we can, by taking a stance of reflexive scrutiny which is fundamental to the modern epistemology, separate the basic level from these too hasty conclusions we leap to. This analysis allegedly reveals, for instance, that nothing in the phenomenal field corresponds to the necessary connection we too easily interpolate between "cause" and "effect".³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ See e.g. Herder 2002, 154-156.

³⁵⁰ Taylor 2016, 14-16.

³⁵¹ Taylor 2016, 14-15.

What Taylor is saying here is very much connected to what I dealt with in Chapter 2, namely the ‘Humean Problem’. As Kant noticed, Hume’s account of experience and cognition was still atomistic, even if Hume did write of the (perhaps temporal) uniformity of experience. There is still no proper ground or explanation as to how and under what circumstances impressions or representations are united, and in what way they are connected to objects. But that is exactly what would be needed to make the relation of representations and objects objective, that is, to make the relation universal and necessary. These are the characteristics of objective representation, in contrast to simply being subjectively affected by objects, and this reciprocity or holism in contrast to atomism, is also reflected in the language theories discussed in this chapter. Taylor continues:

Kant undercuts this whole way of thinking by showing that it supposes, for each particulate impression, that it is being taken as a bit of potential information. It purports to be about something. This is the background understanding which underpins all our perceptual discriminations. The primitive distinction recognized by empiricists between impressions of sensation and those of reflection amounts to an acknowledgment of this. The buzzing in my head is discriminated from the noise I hear from the neighboring woods, in that the first is a component in how I feel, and the second seems to tell me something about what’s happening out there (my neighbor is using his chain saw again). So even a particulate “sensation”, really to be sensation (in the empiricist sense, that is, as opposed to reflection), has to have this dimension of “aboutness”. This will later be called “intentionality”, but Kant speaks of the necessary relation to an object of knowledge. “Now we find that our thought of the relation of all knowledge to its object carries with it an element of necessity” [...]

With this point secured, Kant argues that this relationship to an object would be impossible if we really were to take the

impression as an utterly isolated content, without any link to others.³⁵²

This passage is obviously not mainly concerned with the relation of language and thought but rather links tightly to the core theme of my entire study. As such Taylor's presentation nicely serves to illustrate the importance of Kant's transcendental philosophy, and the element in it which I call objective reference, as an abandoning of the atomism prevalent in empiricism. The important point here is that just being affected by an object is not enough to represent that object objectively, that is, in a way that is universally valid (and communicable). A task of transcendental philosophy is to explicate the conditions of this universally and necessarily valid representing of objects. To these conditions belong our shared, necessary forms of intuition, our empirical senses (at least some of them), our universally shared concepts, and finally, it seems, the socially and linguistically existing expressions of the concepts and judgments.

6.3 Language and Objective Judgments

It is apparent that Kant was not a philosopher of language, and I do not intend to portray him as one. Nevertheless, his published books and lectures are sufficient for creating an overview of his standing. Thus, I do not claim that Kant ever accomplished or even tried to give a full and proper account of the relation of language and thought. My purpose is, then, not to try to reconstruct such an account in all detail, but only to show how Kant's theory of objective cognition can be seen to ground the objective use of language, as expressing objective judgments, which can be communicated and thus compared to the judgments of others.

For my purpose, the essential question concerns the relation of language and communication to the possibility of thought and judging. Now, this relation, or these relations, are big and debated issues to start with, and far too wide in scope to be thoroughly dealt with here. Thus I limit my task according to the theme of the study, and ask the following questions: did Kant think that we need language and communication for objective reference? If so, in what way? If thinking is making

³⁵² Taylor 2016, 15.

judgments, do we need language for both or neither? In trying to answer these questions I develop a view I ascribe to Kant, according to which natural languages share a universal grammar, which is determined by universal logic. Thus, natural languages inherently include or are structured according to categories, as well as including expressions for space and time, and thus it is the grounding possibility of objective reference achieved by the use of categories which brings the possibility of objective reference into language. However, within Kant's texts and lectures we can find passages which at least may seem contradictory. Let us look at the following passages:

Among the rules of thought there are universal ones, which apply to particular objects without distinction. Thus there are universal rules of language, too. Such a grammar does not contain words, not a copia vocabularum, but rather only the form of language. We will be able to represent to ourselves a universal doctrine <of thought>. This universal doctrine of thought is called *logic*, doctrine of the understanding. It is a preparation for thinking about objects.³⁵³

When the *logici* say, however, that a proposition is a judgment clothed in words, that means nothing, and this definition is worth nothing at all. For how will they be able to think judgments without words?³⁵⁴

One does not understand a thing until one can communicate it to others.³⁵⁵

The above passages present what may seem to be differing aspects of the relation of language and communication to our cognition and objective judging. The first speaks of language as including a universal grammar which is identified with logic, also called the "doctrine of the understanding". The latter two seem to point to a more practical, or empirical, account of linguistic communication, which is considered a prerequisite for understanding. In my view, these are only differences

³⁵³ Kant, *V-Lo/DW*, 24:693.

³⁵⁴ Kant, *V-Lo/Wiener*, 24:934.

³⁵⁵ Kant, *V-Lo/DW*, 24:781.

in aspect, and need not present a crucial difference with regard to the relation of language and communication to our thought and understanding. It would admittedly be surprising if there were a big conflict, as the first and third of the passages are from the same lectures. However, when considering Kant's view of the matter at hand throughout his writings and lectures, it indeed seems we can find two differing accounts, which cannot really be said to sit well together. Here I focus on explicating these two differing views, and investigating which of them Kant in fact held on to, and what implications this may have to his conception of objectivity and objective reference.

To consider Kant's theory of objective reference from sufficient aspects, it is my view that one must come to understand Kant's conception of objective judgment. In the previous chapters I have shown that the conditions of objective reference include for Kant the conditions of sensibility by which we may be given the object, and the conditions of understanding, that is, the categories as the concepts of an object in general, by which we can achieve a proper, objective relation to an object, in the form of an objective judgment. What I now want to consider is whether language and communication, for Kant, play any significant role in these operations. That is, are they conditions of objective judgments?

The basic question or problem of this chapter is how Kant saw the role of language and communication with regard to the objectivity and truth of judgments. The first of the passages I presented in the beginning points out Kant's belief in a *universal grammar*, which he thought to be tightly connected, if not identical to, *universal logic*. An account like this does not need to give language any proper role in grounding or forming our ability to refer to objects, but rather this ability is grounded on the general conditions of experience, that is, the forms of intuition and the categories of the understanding. Even if Kant throughout the *Critiques* (1-3) gives judgments, and the conditions of making judgments, an essential role, he rarely refers to language use in this context. Still, on his lectures and other texts, Kant at times does refer to language and communication as the best means to test the truth of our judgments, and come to certainty with regard to them, and even as a prerequisite of making judgments altogether.

Now, it is clear that Kant did not at any point of his career present a proper theory of language. Still, the remarks he did make of language are not so few as to give the impression that Kant didn't care about language. Rather, it seems that he

thought of the intimate relation of language to judging and thinking so obvious that one needed not say that much about it. He probably also felt that it belonged not in the field of transcendental philosophy or metaphysics, but rather more in some empirical field of study, which explains why he thought it not that essential for his purposes. Another thing to note is that, as Michael N. Forster has observed, Kant was well informed of the then-contemporary developments in language philosophy, mainly those of Herder and Hamann.³⁵⁶ According to Forster, these views were actually influenced by, and to some extent developed from the views of Leibniz and Wolff, who obviously were essential influences on Kant. It is noteworthy that Kant expressed that he felt to be out of his field of expertise when considering language, and for this reason did not want to make claims with regard to it. However, he did occasionally make such claims, and it seems that they follow a certain pattern rather consistently.

6.4 A Kantian Account of Language?

According to some interpreters, like Michael Wolff and Reinhard Brandt, Kant did in fact consider thought and judging to be essentially linguistic.³⁵⁷ They would then support Forster's claim that Kant would have finally accepted doctrines (1) and (2). In his anthropology lectures he indeed stated that "thinking is *speaking* with oneself".³⁵⁸ This does not mean that he really offered a proper language theory of his own, but basically borrowed these insights from others, mainly Leibniz and Wolff in his early writings, and later Herder and Hamann.³⁵⁹ In this respect, Kant did not have or create his own language theory. According to Pietro Perconti

there are only the premises of a theory of language in Kant's work, which however is never developed. Kant stopped on the threshold of language, investigating only the pre-linguistic conditions making linguistic meaning possible. Even if Kant's reflections are not explicitly on a linguistic level, they are taken by some language

³⁵⁶ Forster 2012.

³⁵⁷ Forster 2012, 488-490; Wolff 1995; Brandt 1991.

³⁵⁸ Kant, *Anth*, 7:192.

³⁵⁹ See Forster 2012, 488-490.

theorists of the post-Kantian generation as a basis for a linguistic theory inspired by critical philosophy. In this perspective we can therefore talk of a 'Kantian linguistics': not in the sense of a linguistic theory hidden in the folds of transcendental philosophy of mind, but with reference to all linguistic theories elaborated immediately after Kant and used in the linguistic conversion of his philosophy.³⁶⁰

Given this, it is unsurprising that what Kant wrote of language in his three *Critiques* is not very much. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* there seems to be only one section relevant to the matter at hand. Starting at A 312 Kant describes in particular the reasons why he thinks it is good to philosophize using a dead language or the terms of a dead language. This is a view he often expressed on lectures, and which is connected to the stability of a given language. The passage also illuminates the difference, yet intimate connection, between concepts and expressions/words:

In the great wealth of our languages, the thinking mind nevertheless often finds itself at a loss for an expression that exactly suits its concept, and lacking this it is able to make itself rightly intelligible neither to others nor even to itself. Coining new words is a presumption to legislate in language that rarely succeeds, and before we have recourse to this dubious means it is advisable to look around in a dead and learned language to see if an expression occurs in it that is suitable to this concept; and even if the ancient use of this expression has become somewhat unsteady owing to the inattentiveness of its authors, it is better to fix on the meaning that is proper to it (even if it is doubtful whether it always had exactly this sense) than to ruin our enterprise by making ourselves unintelligible.³⁶¹

³⁶⁰ Perconti 1999, 19.

³⁶¹ Kant, A312/B369.

This preference to use old or existing words instead of coining new ones is repeated in the second *Critique* (5:10-12) but Kant does also seem to approve new uses or even new words if none other are available. What is very noteworthy in the passage above, is that without an expression the mind cannot even be intelligible to itself. This does seem to show the intimate connection of (1) concepts and words, and (2) thought and speech/language. Now, it should be noted that for Kant thinking is essentially making judgments, and as I noted earlier, on his lectures he described thinking as “*speaking* with oneself”.³⁶² Thus, a question essential to this study is, whether judging itself is dependent on language, or not? That is, is language an essential element or a condition of judgments? In the beginning of this chapter, we saw Kant reply:

When the *logici* say, however, that a proposition is a judgment clothed in words, that means nothing, and this definition is worth nothing at all. For how will they be able to think judgments without words?³⁶³

As stated, this answer points to a direction of an HHH-view, where judging in itself is already conditioned by language. However, this reply represents Kant’s later views and may not represent his thought overall. We already saw that Kant thought, probably based on a Leibniz-Wolffian account of language, that there exists a universal grammar, on which any reasonable language would be based. A particular language may differ to some extent from another language, and the vocabulary will obviously be different, but Kant must have thought of the universal, logical essence, as it were, of language as the same in all languages: “[w]ords are the matter of language, but grammar the form. Thus a science that is occupied with the form of the understanding is called logic.”³⁶⁴ Kant also describes the relation of grammar to speech as analogous to the relation of logic to thinking: “Logic is related to the whole use of the understanding just as *grammatica* is to a language.”³⁶⁵ This implies that as the use of understanding happens according to logic, so does the use of language happen according to grammar. To state this would

³⁶² See Kant, A69/B94, A70/B95; *An*, 7:192.

³⁶³ Kant, *V-Lo/Wiener*, 24:934.

³⁶⁴ *V-Lo/Wiener*, 24:791.

³⁶⁵ *V-Lo/Blom*, 24:24.

seem for Kant to give the upper hand, so to say, to the grammar of a language instead of the empirical and contingent use of a language.

It should also be noted that when Kant wrote of grammar, he did not primarily mean a grammar constructed from an existing tradition of language use, but rather the universal grammar, grounded on logic. However, in the following passage he refers to a constructed grammar: “Languages were there before their grammars, speakers before rhetoric, poets before poesy.”³⁶⁶ Thus this comment may not imply any “Herder-Humboldtian” view of language, according to which no one can use a language unless the language already exists, but a language cannot exist unless it is being used, but rather only that the acts were there before any theory of them was constructed. In any case, Kant's thought was that even if the speakers of a given language do not know it, the speaking and related communication can only occur if there already is a (universal) structure of the language, which enables communication:

[u]niversal grammar is the form of a language in general, for example. One speaks even without being acquainted with grammar, however; and he who speaks without being acquainted with it does actually have a grammar and speaks according to rules, but ones of which he is not himself conscious.³⁶⁷

This much is certain, however, that all languages, in accordance with their first principles, can be reduced to a grammar. Moreover, grammar is a doctrine of the understanding, of course. For as our soul combines concepts, so must words also be combined.³⁶⁸

For Kant it seems that ultimately the possibility of speech and communication means the possibility to have a universal system within which objective judgments, or cognitions, can be communicated. This system does not for Kant seem to be primarily linguistic but conceptual. Nevertheless the conceptual system is somehow dependent on a linguistic system and the use of it. I find very interesting the comparison which Kant in the above passage makes between combi He writes:

³⁶⁶ *V-Lo/Blom*, 24:23.

³⁶⁷ *V-Lo/Jäsche*, 24:11.

³⁶⁸ *V-Lo/Wiener*, 24:790.

“Our cognition has need of a certain means, and this is language. This means, however, is subject to many alterations. Hence one must write in a dead language.”³⁶⁹ Kant very clearly thinks of the relation of cognition and language as an intimate one, and the preference of a dead language supposedly is connected to the fact that in such a language the rules cannot change. But how should we think of the dependency relation between concepts and words/language, and how does this fit together with Kant’s account of communication and communicability?

6.5 Judgments, Communication and Objectivity

“One does not understand a thing until one can communicate it to others.”³⁷⁰

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant describes judgments as ways of bringing cognitions to the objective unity of apperception.³⁷¹ In context, Kant wants to make it clear that judgments are not simply actions of relating concepts to other concepts, but rather relating cognitions to each other.³⁷² The difference is that cognitions here are objective and sensible, for which reason they are also conditioned by senses and sensations. Now, we may compare this relation to that of language and concepts; as sensibility is in need of senses to be able to operate, so do the concepts of the understanding need language and words to operate. As I have shown, Kant thought that languages are determined by logic/universal grammar, and so naturally include the universal *a priori* elements necessary for objective reference. It is because of this universal basis of language that we can understand the judgments of others, and are able to test their truth. Thus, we need the forms of judgment and the categories for objective communication, but we also need language and communication to really understand our own cognitions and to compare them to those of others. To put it shortly, according to Kant, linguistic

³⁶⁹ *V-Lo/Wiener*, 24:812.

³⁷⁰ *V-Lo/DW*, 24:781.

³⁷¹ B141-142.

³⁷² It should be noted that Kant is probably here talking about what he later called objective, determining judgments. See Chapter 4, and Laiho 2012, 198-210.

communication is (1) natural or essential human activity, (2) somehow necessary in order to understand cognitions and to test their truth:

It is unfair to condemn people to keep all their judgments to themselves. For they have to communicate if they are not to lose the strong criterion of truth, to compare their judgments with the judgments of others.³⁷³

Men have a natural inclination to communicate to others the judgments that their understanding has made, and merely from this arises the writing of books, whose cause has otherwise been set down to vanity, to ambition, by other critics of the human race, who would happily interpret everything most unfavorably. Men who separate themselves from all human society necessarily find, in the end, when they begin to investigate their condition and the causes of their misanthropy, that they do not themselves have enough means to distinguish the true from the false. The freedom to communicate one's thoughts, judgments, [and] cognitions is certainly the only[,] most certain means to test one's cognitions properly, however, and to verify them. And he who takes away this freedom is to be regarded as the worst enemy of the extension of human cognition, indeed, of men themselves. For just by this means he takes away from men the one true means they still possess for ever uncovering, becoming aware of, and correcting the frequent deception of their own understanding and its false steps.³⁷⁴

These passages alone do not make the strong claim that language is necessary for any kind of judging, but they do claim that communication is necessary for verification of judgments. The judgments must thus be universally expressible in a way that can be communicated to others. This fits well with my suggestion that objectivity as a feature of those representations which are related to an object, is no

³⁷³ Kant, *V-Lo/DW*, 24:740.

³⁷⁴ Kant, *V-Lo/Blom*, 24:150-151.

guarantee of the truth or validity of the objective representations, but rather it is a precondition for the objective validity or truth of the representations or judgments. It would not make sense to try to arrive at the truth of a thing, by comparing our judgments to those of others, if the judgments were not about the same objects. But, again, the comparison seems to require that the judgments be about the same object, and somehow of the same, universally expressible/communicable form. In the following passage we see an aspect of the intimate connection of cognition and expression:

A *rule* for testing oneself and one's science concerning any cognition is this: if I understand and have insight into a thing perfectly, then I must be able to communicate and represent it so clearly to another man that he will have insight into it just as perfectly as I, if only he has a healthy understanding. If I cannot do this, however, it is a certain sign that I do not yet understand it rightly myself.³⁷⁵

All of this could be taken to support that Kant did in fact think that expressing a concept or a cognition in language is necessary for understanding it in the first place, and communicating it to others must necessarily be possible if we want to decide upon its truth. But what does all of this mean specifically with regard to objectivity? My idea here is that for Kant, if a judgment is objective, it relates representations to each other and to the object in a way which is necessary and universal. This means that others too must be able to relate to the object in a similar way. Now, if we want to test out the universality of our cognition, we must be able to communicate it to others. Is it then so that, that which is objective, is necessarily communicable? In the following lengthy passage from a letter to Beck communicability rather clearly means universal validity:

one cannot actually say that a representation *benefits* another thing but only that, if it is to be a cognition, a *relation* to something else (something other than the subject in which the representation inheres) *benefits* the representation, whereby it becomes

³⁷⁵ V-Lo/Blom, 24:96.

communicable to other people; for otherwise it would belong merely to feeling (of pleasure or displeasure), which in itself cannot be communicated. But we can only understand and communicate to others what we ourselves can *produce*, granted that the manner in which we *intuit* something, in order to bring this or that into a representation, can be assumed to be the same for everybody. Only the former is thus the representation of a *composite*. For –

2. The composition itself is not given; on the contrary, we must produce it ourselves: we must *compose* if we are to represent anything *as composed* (even space and time). We are able to communicate with one another because of this composition. The grasping (apprehensio) of the given manifold and its reception in the unity of consciousness (apperceptio) is the same sort of thing as the representation of a composite (that is, it is only possible through composition), if the synthesis of my representation in the grasping of it, and its analysis insofar as it is a concept, yield one and the same representation (reciprocally bring forth one another). This agreement is related to something that is valid for everyone, something distinct from the subject, that is, related to an object since it lies exclusively neither in the representation nor in consciousness but nevertheless is valid (communicable) for everyone.³⁷⁶

Based on this passage, it seems that for something to be communicable it must first of all relate to an object, i.e., be objective in some sense, and thus mere feelings (in themselves) cannot be, according to Kant, communicated.³⁷⁷ The universal validity of a representation/cognition is tied to our universally shared way of synthesizing, which makes it possible to communicate a cognition that is about an actual, shared object. Thus, it seems that due to their grounding in logical forms of understanding, as well as their role in materializing these forms, language and communication are necessary elements in our cognizing and verifying judgments.

³⁷⁶ Kant, *Letter to Beck*, July 1794.

³⁷⁷ There is, however, an exception, namely judgments of beauty, which Kant says to be universal (and communicable) but nevertheless subjective, and not objective. For this reason I read Kant as thinking that objectivity implies communicability but not vice versa.

I have suggested that the objectivity that Kant ascribes to at least some judgments, e.g. in B-deduction §19, which is related to bringing sensibly given material into the objective unity of apperception as experience, does not necessarily imply the truth of judgments. Rather, it implies the object-relatedness of the judgments, which relate to the object through the intuitions subsumed under the categories, thus creating the very possibility of the judgments having what can be called truth value. To test the correctness, or truth, of our judgments, we however need to be – or at least greatly benefit from being – able to communicate and compare our judgments to those of others, for which reason language and communicability of judgments are requirements for their certainty and truth. Furthermore, especially at later stages of his career, Kant expressed the view that we need language to think of objects and make objective judgments in the first place.

Thus my essential concluding suggestions are the following: Kant probably would never have accepted all of the implications of an HHH-type of theory of language. Mostly this is due to Herder's and Hamann's emphasis on the empirical and historical nature of language, in which our thought seems to be essentially dependent on historical, thus contingent events, occurrences and changes in language. Furthermore, Kant might have accepted Herder's and Hamann's simplified doctrine on the interdependence of language and thought, as presented by Forster in doctrine (1), but never doctrine (2).³⁷⁸ This need not cause a serious conflict in his transcendental theory of objective reference, if he still held onto his account of a universal grammar. In this case it is definitely something to explicate that we need words within a language to actually make judgments altogether, but any given languages must and will have a certain, similar, *a priori* structure by which the objective reference is possible according to universal rules. Thus, we do need language for objective reference, but the form and basic functions of language are not in this respect subject to contingent changes, but rather determined by the universal functions of sensibility and the understanding.

³⁷⁸ Forster, 2012, 485-486: “ (1) Thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by (Hamann even goes as far as to say: identical with) language – i.e. a person can only think if he has a language and can only think what he can express linguistically. (2) Concepts or meanings are – not the sorts of items independent of language that much of the philosophical tradition has understood them to be, for example, referents, Platonic forms, or the subjective mental “ideas” favored by the Cartesian tradition and the British Empiricists, but instead – usages of words.”

Given the above, I still do not find it a plausible view that according to Kant there is no thinking at all without or prior to language. This is shown many times, especially in the first *Critique*, when Kant speaks of finding the right [linguistic] expression for given thoughts. Nevertheless, in this same passage Kant does hold the view that we do not properly understand even ourselves, if we do not find the proper expression for our thoughts. This basically shows that Kant was very aware of the importance of language for thinking, and thus cannot have held a view where language and thought are completely separated. This being the case, Kant would still not have approved the idea that language determines our thought overall, were this taken absolutely, as this would then entail complete relativism of thought. Rather, Kant's account would have been that the basic structures of language are and have to be determined by the *a priori* rules of the understanding, namely the categories, which, as we have seen in prior chapters, are the elements which bring unity, necessity and universality to experience, and make objectivity and objective reference possible in the first place.

Kant's account does not rule out the importance of language for our thinking, judging and communicating. On the contrary, it gives a ground, or an explanation, if one likes, to the possibility and structure of thinking, speaking, judging, referring, communicating, and in the end, to the possibility of being right or wrong. Thus my claim is that Kant's account of categorical experience as universal and necessary cognition of objects provides the ground for languages and their objective use, that is, for the possibility of objective reference in language.

7 Kantian Remarks about Speculative Realism: What is Wrong with the Critique of the *Critique?*

7.1 From Kant's *Critique* to Contemporary Critiques of Kant

The Kantian theory of objectivity and objective reference, aspects of which I have discussed in previous chapters, has proven very difficult to grasp, or at times difficult to accept, possibly due to misunderstandings concerning Kant's actual claims and their implications. This has resulted in huge numbers of both interpretations and critiques of Kant's critical philosophy and his transcendental, or formal, idealism. Over two centuries have now passed since Kant gave his last lectures, and almost two and a half centuries since he wrote his magnum opus, the *Critique of Pure Reason*. There is no room here to make even a brief survey of the astounding impacts which his work had, or the debates and currents of philosophy it started. What can be said is that the nature of Kant's idealism has been a matter of debate from the very beginning, sometimes causing interpreters to forsake it altogether. One of the somewhat strange aspects of these debates is that philosophers advocating various sorts of realism at times tend to forget that Kant himself advocated empirical realism, while of course simultaneously advocating transcendental idealism. In recent years such philosophical movements as *speculative realism* and *object-oriented ontology* have tried to construct various forms of realist ontology, often unitedly criticizing Kant and the philosophical currents his philosophy started.³⁷⁹ Thus e.g. Quentin Meillassoux, one of the forerunners of speculative realism, writes in his celebrated and debated book, *After Finitude*, that

the central notion of modern philosophy since Kant seems to be that of correlation. By 'correlation' we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call correlationism any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined. Consequently, it becomes possible to say

³⁷⁹ See e.g. Bryant, Harman et al. 2011; Meillassoux 2008; Harman 2011. For a critical evaluation, see e.g. Cole 2013.

that every philosophy which disavows naïve realism has become a variant of correlationism.³⁸⁰

From this we can see that the program of speculative realism is rather clearly set against Kant, or as it sometimes seems, against a constructed version of his philosophy.³⁸¹ To point this out, in his preface to Meillassoux's *After Finitude*, Alain Badiou indeed calls the book a "critique of Critique".³⁸² Because of the united stand against Kant, and the fact that the name of *speculative realism* itself can be read as a critique (or denial) of Kant, there is a need to address the accusations and relate to what Kant really stated. In addition, this is to clarify my interpretation of Kant, and to show that the criticisms of the speculative realists are not as novel as one might think, but rather resemble the exact debates that went on before, during and after Kant's active writing. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant wrote of speculative reason and cognition:

A theoretical cognition is **speculative** if it pertains to an object or concepts of an object to which one cannot attain in any experience. It is opposed to the **cognition of nature**, which pertains to no objects, or their predicates, except those that can be given in a possible experience.

The principle of inferring from what happens (the empirically contingent) as effect to a cause, is a principle of the cognition of nature, but not of speculative cognition. For if one abstracts from it as a principle that contains the condition of possible experience in general, and, leaving out everything empirical, wants to assert it of the contingent in general, then not the least justification is left over for any synthetic proposition from which it can be discerned how I can go from what exists to something entirely different (called its cause); indeed, in such a speculative use the concept of a cause, like that of the contingent, loses all the significance that is made comprehensible by its objective reality *in concreto*.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ Meillassoux 2008, 5.

³⁸¹ One might even say 'strawman'.

³⁸² Badiou 2008, VII.

³⁸³ A634-5/B662-3.

For Kant “speculative cognition” implies that it is not empirically objective, thus not universal or necessary cognition of objects, but rather, as the name says, subjective speculation based on reason alone. If the agenda of the speculative realists is to try and venture in metaphysics, or philosophy on a larger scale, beyond the boundaries set by Kant, that is, beyond the boundaries of the conditions of experience, then from Kant’s point of view they are only trying to return to the time before Kant’s Copernican revolution. Again, from a Kantian point of view, it seems they are unhappy with the claim that there are things inaccessible or inexpressible to us, or that there are conditions to our cognition and experience. This seems to be the essence of the speculative critique of Kant: the speculative realists want to show that not all properties of objects, and thus not all of the objects themselves, are dependent on any human conditions:

The thesis we are defending is therefore twofold: on the one hand, we acknowledge that the sensible only exists as a subject’s relation to the world; but on the other hand, we maintain that the mathematizable properties of the object are exempt from the constraint of such a relation, and that they are effectively in the object in the way in which I conceive them, whether I am in relation with this object or not.³⁸⁴

Thus it is entirely fitting that Meillassoux opens his *After Finitude* by insisting that the distinction of primary and secondary qualities be brought back into philosophy. This is because, taken prior to Kant, it implies that there are objects, and most of all certain properties or qualities of these objects, which are completely and utterly independent of us or any conditions set by us for them. As I have shown in chapter 5, Kant in fact did maintain even two distinctions of primary and secondary qualities. In one sense, he maintained that neither are properties of things in themselves, but in another sense, the mathematizable properties can, according to my reading, be attributed to what I call *empirical things in themselves*. Thus I find that the speculative realists most often do not actually have any proper critique of Kant’s critical philosophy and his account of objectivity, but they simply do not

³⁸⁴ Meillassoux 2008, 3.

recognize the claims and implications of it. This seems to be the case with regard to, first of all, Kant's claim of the Transcendental Aesthetic, that space and time are *a priori* and necessary for objects of experience, but not properties of things in themselves. Space and time are not representations abstracted or drawn from experience but conditions of the possibility of appearances.³⁸⁵ Secondly, as I have shown in chapter 4, Kant maintains that precisely by using the *a priori* universal concepts known as the categories to relate objects to our capacity of apperception, we are able to bring universality and necessity to experience, and thus make objective reference possible. These claims, at least, seem to be what the speculative realists wish to disregard.

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly address this debate, and show, based on my previous chapters, that very often the accusations toward Kant, and the implications constructed, are without a proper a ground, or simply false. This is not to say that all of the speculative realists' claims are simply due to a misunderstanding of Kant; sometimes they are a matter of a real and deep difference in thinking about the world, and the possibilities of cognizing it. Yet, at times the misunderstandings concerning Kant's philosophical standing are so obvious that a question concerning motivation in answering might rise. In addition, the criticisms in my view do not rival earlier criticisms of Kant's philosophy, such as those of Schopenhauer (1818/19) or Strawson (1966), because of a simple lack of expertise on Kant. Nevertheless, as speculative realism has gained notable attention, it seems a proper context to address the interpretation of Kant's philosophy, both for sake of clarification and for sake of criticism, as well as, hopefully, a more fruitful dialogue.

7.2 Meillassoux

In his *After Finitude* Quentin Meillassoux presented his view concerning philosophical ontology in modern times. A term central to the book, and which has since become rather famous, is *correlationism*, which Meillassoux takes to be descriptive of a certain modern tendency to do philosophy (correlation of thinking

³⁸⁵ See A22-26/B37-42.

and being).³⁸⁶ As we already saw, this tendency, according to Meillassoux, first and foremost begins with Kant. Now, Meillassoux may in some respects be right to make this sort of a claim about modern philosophy in general, and to place the beginning of “correlationism” with Kant. I do feel, however, that there are problems, and even mistakes, in Meillassoux’s interpretation of Kant, as well as the interpretation of what both Kant and Meillassoux call “Hume’s problem”. In addition, some of the problems that Meillassoux ascribes to what he calls correlationism seem superficial, or even nonexistent to me, and it is possible to question the correctness of the entire term in the first place.³⁸⁷ Even if some of the things that Meillassoux ascribes to what he calls correlationism were true, it is not clear to me how his concept brings much novelty to the historical conversation, other than a novel name for idealism. This is so because Meillassoux’s formulation and critique of correlationism seem to be in the end just forms of a critique of idealism, and a defence of (scientific) realism. Below I present observations on *After Finitude*, and a critique of Meillassoux’s view of Kant and his notion of correlationism. Meillassoux writes:

Correlationism consists in disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another. Not only does it become necessary to insist that we never grasp an object ‘in itself’, in isolation from its relation to the

³⁸⁶ The term probably derives from many sources, but an important one is most likely Husserl’s use of “correlation” in describing the nature of intentionality.

³⁸⁷ Luckily, I am not alone with this thought; e.g. David Golumbia (2016) has defended Kant and Kantian philosophy against the accusations by Meillassoux, and stated that Meillassoux misrepresents both Kant’s view and the philosophical situation and standings concerning the issues Kant dealt with and which have been dealt with since him. Golumbia (2016, 3) writes e.g. the following: “Among [Meillassoux’s *After Finitude*’s] most troubling characteristics in this regard are its almost total lack of reference to secondary and interpretive writings on Kant, and to contemporary philosophy in general, because Meillassoux repeatedly tries to show that Kant’s influence has made contemporary philosophy correlationist. Instead of demonstrating that flaw in contemporary philosophy, though, Meillassoux generally (with very few specifics) argues that Kant himself is correlationist and that this foundational taint itself contaminates what comes after. Meillassoux thus purports to discover something unseen in Kant, and then to claim that this unseen thing has been the dominant influence over all philosophy since Kant, while making no effort to show how correlationism can at one and the same time have been so strongly determinative and also largely unnoticed.”

subject, but it also becomes necessary to maintain that we can never grasp a subject that would not always-already be related to an object. If one calls 'the correlationist circle' the argument according to which one cannot think the in-itself without entering into a vicious circle³⁸⁸, thereby immediately contradicting oneself, one could call 'the correlationist two-step' this other type of reasoning to which philosophers have become so well accustomed – the kind of reasoning which one encounters so frequently in contemporary works and which insists that

'it would be naïve to think of the subject and the object as two separately subsisting entities whose relation is only subsequently added to them. On the contrary, the relation is in some sense primary: the world is only world insofar as it appears to me as world, and the self is only self insofar as it is face to face with the world, that for whom the world discloses itself [...].'

Generally speaking, the modern philosopher's 'two-step' consists in this belief in the primacy of the relation over the related terms; a belief in the constitutive power of reciprocal relation.³⁸⁹

I do not think that this description of correlationism fairly represents Kant's view, and I am not sure whose view it does actually represent. The main problem associated with so called correlationism seems to be, for Meillassoux, the inability to grasp the object in itself. That is, the problem seems to be the relativity of the object and its properties. And it is exactly here that I find the first problem of Meillassoux's thinking: he misunderstands the relativity and the nature of the conditions of the objects and their properties. Meillassoux seems to think of the

³⁸⁸ I wish to remark already here, that Kant did not talk of any "vicious circle" in this respect, and he did in fact hold the view that we can think of things in themselves as transcendental objects, using the categories, but we cannot experience them as such. We can experience objects only under the formal conditions of experience, which are transcendental.

³⁸⁹ Meillassoux 2008, . The passage Meillassoux sites in the middle as an example is: Huneman, P. and Kulich, E. (1997), *Introduction à la phénoménologie* (Paris: Armand Colin), p. 22.

relativity as a dependency on actual, empirical subjects, when Kant speaks of transcendental, universal conditions of experience. In Kant's view, singular empirical subjects do not set conditions for the existence of objects, and in this way Kant was indeed an empirical realist.³⁹⁰ Rather, the conditions are transcendental and universal conditions for cognizing and experiencing objects at all. Of course, Kant did hold the view that the existence of appearances is relational, and thus he writes in the amphiboly section of the first *Critique*:

It is certainly startling to hear that a thing should consist entirely of relations, but such a thing is also mere appearance, and cannot be thought at all through pure categories; it itself consists in the mere relation of something in general to the senses.³⁹¹

Given this, Meillassoux's claim of Kantianism as a form, or even the root, of correlationism, could at first glance seem fit. As I said, it is nevertheless the nature of the relativity which Meillassoux seems to misunderstand, or in some instances simply disagree with. At times, one gets the impression that it is not quite clear what Meillassoux claims is wrong in the Kantian picture, and what it is that Meillassoux then wants to claim instead. On page seven of *After Finitude* Meillassoux gives a hint of what he thinks is wrong or missing in the view he coins correlationism: it is a *wrong feeling*. Here is how he says it's wrong:

on the one hand, correlationism readily insists upon the fact that consciousness, like language, enjoys an originary connection to a radical exteriority (exemplified by phenomenological consciousness transcending or as Sartre puts it 'exploding' towards the world); yet on the other hand this insistence seems to dissimulate a strange feeling of imprisonment or enclosure within this very exteriority (the 'transparent cage'). For we are well and truly imprisoned within this outside proper to language and consciousness given that we are *always-already* in it (the 'always already' accompanying the 'co-' of correlationism as its other essential locution), and given

³⁹⁰ For a thorough investigation on the nature of Kant's empirical realism, see Abela 2002.

³⁹¹ A285/B341.

that we have no access to any vantage point from whence we could observe these ‘object-worlds’, which are the unsurpassable providers of all exteriority, from the outside.

[...]

For it could be that contemporary philosophers have lost the *great outdoors*, the *absolute* outside of pre-critical thinkers: that outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not; that outside which thought could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign territory – of being entirely elsewhere.³⁹²

Here Meillassoux’s aim seems rather obvious: he wants to return to pre-critical thinking, openly stating to favor cartesianism over Kantianism, thus raising the same questions and debates that Kant himself, and his immediate followers, were battling with.³⁹³ Indeed, Meillassoux states later that the aim is “*to get out of ourselves*, to grasp the in-itself, to know what is whether we are or not.”³⁹⁴ I, again, think that Meillassoux is not correct in his interpretation of Kant as a correlationist in his sense. To be sure, it gives me no pleasure to read that Meillassoux feels trapped or caged within a domain of language and thought. I, however, do not feel like this, and I believe I am not alone in this either. Rather, I believe that the Kantian (transcendentally idealist, empirically realist) world view most definitely leaves room for uncharted territory, some of it perhaps to remain uncharted forever. But it also provides us the means of doing some of the charting in a very well-grounded manner. In my view, Kant is not denying that we are in contact with reality itself, but he is modest enough to say that even the contact has conditions, especially when we are talking of an objective contact with reality. Thus it is not unfitting that e.g. Rae Langton has written of Kant’s critical philosophy and its view concerning our knowledge of things in themselves as *epistemic humility*.³⁹⁵

Another problem Meillassoux associates to correlationism, and as should now be obvious, thus to Kant, has to do with Meillassoux’s notions of *ancestral*

³⁹² Meillassoux 2008, 7.

³⁹³ Many speculative realists, however, also seem to criticize Descartes along with Kant.

³⁹⁴ Meillassoux 2008, 27.

³⁹⁵ Langton 2001.

statements and *arche-fossils*. By the former he means statements or judgments concerning objects and time prior to any human thought (or even any form of life), that is, “anterior to every form of human relation to the world”.³⁹⁶ By arche-fossils he means “materials indicating the existence of an ancestral reality or event”. Correlationism and Kant, he says, are in trouble in explaining ancestral statements or arche-fossils. This is because Meillassoux seems to think of Kant as a sort of berkeleyan without God, by which I mean that existence is to be perceived, and there is no all-perceiving God, but only the empirical human perceiver-subjects. Here Meillassoux is simply wrong with regard to Kant. Some forms of his so-called correlationism may be in trouble, but if they are, they should be. The Kantian basic view, however, is not. This is so because the rules or conditions for our thinking of objects are in no way limited to objects that exist now, or during the thinking, or even during the physical, or material, possibility of the thinking. It is simply not a Kantian statement that dinosaurs couldn't have existed if there weren't minds of men existing at the time of the dinosaurs. It is a Kantian statement to say that dinosaurs existed, and we, now, are capable of knowing this. It is just that as we do, there are certain conditions to our doing and being able to do so. As if anticipating such accusations, Kant himself wrote:

Accordingly, the objects of experience are never given in themselves, but only in experience, and they do not exist at all outside it. That there could be inhabitants of the moon, even though no human being has ever perceived them, must of course be admitted; but this means only that in the possible progress of experience we could encounter them; for everything is actual that stands in one context with a perception in accordance with the laws of the empirical progression. Thus they are real when they stand in an empirical connection with my real consciousness, although they are not therefore real in themselves, i.e., outside this progress of experience.³⁹⁷

and

³⁹⁶ Meillassoux 2008, 10.

³⁹⁷ A492-3/B521.

The real things of past time are given in the transcendental object of experience, but for me they are objects and real in past time only insofar as I represent to myself that, in accordance with empirical laws, or in other words, the course of the world, a regressive series of possible perceptions (whether under the guidance of history or in the footsteps of causes and effects) leads to a time-series that has elapsed as the condition of the present time, which is then represented as real only in connection with a possible experience and not in itself so that all those events which have elapsed from an inconceivable past time prior to my own existence signify nothing but the possibility of prolonging the chain of experience, starting with the present perception, upward to the conditions that determine it in time.³⁹⁸

Thus, such things as past times or far distances present no problem at all to Kant's view of objectivity. Meillassoux however holds that correlationism basically always means actual, spatiotemporal mind-dependency of existence (or dependency of being on thought), which would mean that whenever (temporally) minds do not exist, then nothing exists. This conclusion can luckily be avoided by Meillassoux by positing that some things just basically exist regardless of who, whether and how the things are thought of or experienced. These things are called primary qualities, and mathematical sciences are able to form statements pertaining to them, that is to say, can be true of them. Now, Meillassoux does, however, claim that a Kantian, or correlationist, way to answer his supposed problem of ancestry is possible, but will always be one which includes a condition, that is, it will be of the form: "event Y occurred x number of years before the emergence of humans – *for humans*."³⁹⁹ Now, this is for Meillassoux supposed to portray the problem, which is that nothing is true in itself, or just bluntly true, but only in relation to something else. At this point we start to see that the conflict of thought between Meillassoux and Kant is probably too deep to overcome. It seems to me that Kant wanted to show how objectivity requires rules or concepts of necessity and universality, which we

³⁹⁸ A495/B523.

³⁹⁹ Meillassoux 2008, 13.

cannot abstract from the objects or from experience, but which we nevertheless need for objective experience, whereas Meillassoux seems to want objectivity to require nothing at all. Indeed, Meillassoux seems to claim that even the laws of nature are contingent.⁴⁰⁰ In any case, Meillassoux's perhaps most relevant claim to this study is that Kant's view in a way loses the object and defines objectivity only in terms of intersubjectivity. He writes:

We said above that, since Kant, objectivity is no longer defined with reference to the object in itself (in terms of the statement's adequation or resemblance to what it designates), but rather with reference to the possible universality of an objective statement. It is the intersubjectivity of the ancestral statement – the fact that it should by right be verifiable by any member of the scientific community – that guarantees its objectivity, and hence its 'truth'.⁴⁰¹

I have shown in previous chapters that the meaning of objectivity, for Kant, does include object-relatedness, and thus is actually defined with reference to the object. The universality of an objective judgment does not mean only that a judgment is such that it can be posited by anyone, but that it is about an object, thus an *objective* judgment. Meillassoux's insistence of referring to the object in itself of course complicates the matter. However, I must contend that in the end Meillassoux seems to seek a view according to which the existence of objects is in no way dependent on any conditions. But this, taken with reference to things in themselves, is the Kantian view. As I have shown, Kant assured in the *Prolegomena* that his formal idealism in no way questions the existence of the objects, but only posits their properties as relational. If the case, however, is such that what Meillassoux seeks is properties of objects which exist regardless of any conditions or relations, then the problem is unsolvable, and there simply is an absolutely essential difference between his aim and that of Kant's. Whether or not we take Kant to be right in his claims or not, it is clear that they are not sufficiently, or at all, recognized in most of the speculative realist discussions. Kant's aim was to show

⁴⁰⁰ See Meillassoux 2008, 53.

⁴⁰¹ Meillassoux 2008, 15.

that objectivity requires universal and necessary *a priori* elements, namely the forms of intuition and the categories, by which only can we achieve objective reference. This claim is not dealt with properly at all in the speculative realist discourse concerning only a proposed independence of the objects from the aforementioned conditions. In my view, the discussion will lead nowhere unless Kant's claims are taken seriously and, if chance will have it, even understood.

7.3 Bryant, Harman and the Mind-World Relation

I have already stated that I find the speculative realist critique of Kant to be based on very little knowledge and understanding of Kant's true claims and position. Thus the so called critique is not even a proper critique but more of a misunderstanding. Showing and explicating this is one of the aims of this chapter, and an aim perhaps not too difficult to accomplish. With this in mind I observe a few more claims about Kant by other speculative realists, if only in order to lay out Kant's view proper, rather than a straw man version of it, attacked by speculative realists. In Graham Harman and Levi Bryant, we see Meillassoux's claim of Kant's correlationism repeated, now in the form of the claim that Kant reduces philosophy into a mere study of the relation of mind and world, thus neglecting everything else, including the objects themselves.

One of the leading speculative realists, Graham Harman, writes that "what is truly characteristic of Kant's position is that the human-world relation takes priority over all others."⁴⁰² This sounds as if Kant was oblivious to what his own project was. In Chapters 2 and 3 I have indeed shown that Kant very knowingly stated that the doctrine called ontology should be replaced by the analytic of the understanding.⁴⁰³ This does not mean that he eliminated the possibility for objectivity, but on the contrary, that he wanted to eliminate the speculative claims he thought to have no ground. Here, I should not and cannot repeat what I wrote in the aforementioned chapters, but only note that in my view Kant had good grounds for his claim.

⁴⁰² Harman 2011, 45.

⁴⁰³ A247/B303.

As opposed to the Kantian view, Harman writes the following about realism, supposedly identifying his own philosophy along with other speculative realism with it: “For the realist, the existence of objects outside the mind is as real as human experience itself.” Now, if this is supposed to be a critique of Kant, or an explication of what is wrong in Kant’s or Kantian philosophy, we need only one passage from Kant to surpass the critique:

[...] what I called idealism did not concern the existence of things (the doubting of which, however, properly constitutes idealism according to the received meaning), for it never came into my mind to doubt that, but only the sensory representation of things, to which space and time above all belong [...]⁴⁰⁴

Here Kant explicitly states that his idealism is not such an idealism which makes objects, and all of the world in fact, existentially dependent on subjects or minds. His idealism in no way doubts the very existence of things. Rather, his idealism is formal idealism, in which it is the way of sensing, experiencing and cognizing objects which is shown to be a condition of the properties of objects as objects of experience. It is shown here that Harman’s critique does not even apply to Kant, who clearly was not an idealist in the sought sense.

Levi Bryant has repeatedly expressed similar thoughts and what seems to be the basic speculative critique and misconception of Kant. He writes:

In beginning with the hypothesis that objects **conform** to mind rather than mind to objects, Kant who genuinely sought a secure grounding for knowledge and freedom from the endless debates of metaphysics, *paradoxically rids us of the need to consult the world or objects*. For as Kant himself observes, this shift or inversion allows us discern how it is possible for something to be given **in advance**. Yet if the world is given *in advance*, then there is no longer any need to consult the world or objects. Rather, philosophy, at this

⁴⁰⁴ Kant, *Prolog.* 4:293.

point, becomes *self-reflexive*, interrogating not being or the world, but interrogating rather the *mind* that regards the world.⁴⁰⁵

This would of course be a troubling matter, were it really the case, but it is not. With something “given in advance” Bryant refers to Kant’s notion of *a priori*, which, for sure, is a notion that was central for Kant, and does indeed have to do with “how it is possible for something to be given **in advance**”. These *a priori* elements are first and foremost the forms of our intuition and the categories of experience. This, however, in no way produces a state where “there is no longer any need to consult the world or objects”. On the contrary, these formal *a priori* elements are of absolutely no relevance without empirical use, that is, without the experienced world and its objects. Thus Bryant totally misrepresents Kant’s view, and what is more, seems also to contradict Meillassoux’s notion of correlation. This is so because in Bryant’s view Kantian philosophy is only self-reflexive, and not even concerned with the co-relation (or correlation) of the cognizer and the objects, as Meillassoux takes it to be.

I have tried to explicate in Chapter 2 what Kant saw to be wrong in the empiricist account which did not properly acknowledge the role of *a priori*, and in chapter 4 why Kant thought that we must have *a priori* concepts to be able to have experience and objective reference in the first place. Also, in chapter 5 I have tried to show in what way our empirical senses and sensations are conditions of objective reference. So, yes, Kant claims that there is and must be something that can be known or given in advance, because the aforementioned forms and concepts are universal and necessary conditions of all experience and its objects, the appearances. Otherwise we would only have some sort of subjective representations, which, even if caused or initiated by the objects, could have no proper objective reference. Thus it is not the world that is given in advance, but the forms of sensibility and the most general concepts and principles of the understanding, by which we can empirically experience the world. This is why Kant held that the appearances, even though transcendentally or formally ideal, are *empirically real*.

⁴⁰⁵ Bryant 2010.

7.4 Final Remarks

As I have said, I find the speculative realists' critique of Kant essentially a misunderstanding of Kant's philosophy, the nature of which misunderstanding I have briefly tried to sketch out here. Rather than considering Kant's claims and arguments, the speculative realists take Kant as an easy opponent, and write hundreds of pages against this straw man, aiming only to show that Kant must have been wrong, because the objects and their properties are really out there even without us. It thus seems to be as Andrew Cole writes in his *Call of Things: A Critique of Object-Oriented Ontologies*⁴⁰⁶ that in fact the new speculative realism turns out to be a form of dogmatic realism, one of the very views Kant was heavily criticizing. My suggestive view is that a more fruitful conversation could perhaps follow if Kant's philosophy was also in this context taken seriously, and serious attempts were made on trying to understand it, as well as its aims and implications. The speculative realists fail to answer Kant's questions of how metaphysics is possible and what makes objectivity and objective reference possible. In this context, we may remember what Kant wrote in the *Prolegomena*:

[...] whosoever undertakes to judge or indeed to construct a metaphysics, must thoroughly satisfy the challenge made here, whether it happens that they accept my solution, or fundamentally reject it and replace it with another – for they cannot dismiss it [...]⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁶ Cole 2013, 115.

⁴⁰⁷ Kant, *Prolog.* 4:264.

8 Conclusion

Over the course of this work, I have attempted to explicate the most general and relevant aspects and mechanisms of the notions of objectivity and objective reference in the context of Kant's transcendental idealism, and attempted to show that Kant's notion of objectivity is perfectly relevant today. I have also tried to show that Kant should not be taken to be primarily "a philosopher of the subject". That said, his accounts of objectivity and subjectivity should be carefully studied in their own context before relating them to that of ours. In the process, I believe to have made some valuable observations and formulations about Kant's notion of objectivity, and about how it relates to the contemporary notion of objectivity. The attempted generality may have cost me to overlook some details, which, however, could be taken into account in following studies. I hope to not have missed any of the most relevant aspects, but I admit and urge that much more could be done still.

I have suggested that there is a need to clarify between differing uses of *objective*, but nevertheless the essence of the meaning, for Kant, always refers to object-relatedness. In this sense, Kant seems to be among the originators, or perhaps even *the* originator, of the modern concept of objectivity, obscure as it might nowadays be. I suggest that also the essence of the contemporary meanings of the notion of objectivity is related to being-about-objects. Impartiality and unbiasedness can be taken to be possible derivatives of objectivity in the sense that it is only possible to be impartial in, say, a judgment about milk in a glass, if that judgment is universally and necessarily about the object, and not about the sensing subjects or their feelings. For that reason, impartiality requires non-subjective representation, that is, it requires objective representation. Kant might have expressed this by saying that in this case the representation of milk and the representation of the glass belong together in the object, and not only in the subject.

I have proposed that in Kant's context objectivity is basically a feature of a specific kind of relation of representations to objects. So, those representations which concern or refer to objects are objective. They are still not thereby necessarily valid or true. A representation may be objectively valid only if it is objective in the first place, that is, such that it relates to an object (in a universal and necessary manner). If not related to an object, representations as such are subjective. Thus, a

subjective judgment, a sensation or a feeling, is subjective because it does not claim anything about the object, or properly refer to an object, but only to a feeling in the subject, even if caused by something external, that is, an object. An objective judgment, on the other hand, claims something universal about our real, empirical world and its objects. A sensation in itself cannot be objective as a representation, but as a condition and part of our objective cognition, it is essential in establishing objective reference.

As I have tried to show, if objectivity indeed is said to mean object-relatedness, other questions immediately arise: what are these objects in relation to which some representations are, and what does this relation consist in? Here we find that in Kant's account, these objects must in a sense be the same objects to everyone, as universality and necessity are properties of such a relation which may be called objective. For Kant, the concept of objectivity does not entail truth, but rather it entails the very possibility of truth about objects, i.e., objective truth. This is the result of a *necessary agreement* of the categories with the objects.⁴⁰⁸ Thereby objectivity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for truth (about objects), that is, for objective truth. The same applies to what Kant called objective validity. Objectivity and objective validity are not strictly taken interchangeable notions, because the meaning of objectivity *per se* is not about truth or validity of judgments as such, but about being related to and representing objects. A judgment can well be objective and still not valid objectively. In the case of the categories, however, the 'objectivity' and 'objective validity' of the concepts come close to expressing the same relation or property.

The possibility of objectivity in general is intertwined with the possibility and mechanism of objective reference, as initially posed in the letter to Herz as a problem concerning the relation of representations to their objects, and what Kant called "the ground" of that relation. My claim was and is that this ground Kant found in the possibility of pure, objective representations, also called *a priori* synthetic cognitions, and their unity in the original apperception. However, this alone yields no objective cognition, but we also need sensibility through which the objects can be given. I thus suggest that we may call the *a priori* cognitions transcendently objective, as they are related to an object (x) via operating by the universal and necessary rules of objectivity, but in the case of pure representations,

⁴⁰⁸ See B166-167.

the object is 'empty', as it were. Furthermore, sensibility has a form of its own, for which reason the origin of space and time is not the understanding. A proper acknowledgement of the role of sensibility as the foundation of the *a priori* nature of spatiotemporality was in Kant's view severely lacking in rationalist ontology, and metaphysics altogether, for which Kant heavily criticized it. To paraphrase how Kant put it in A402, the subject cognizes the categories, and by their unity can think and cognize the objects for the representations Kant calls appearances.⁴⁰⁹ These appearances are sensible and thus subject to the form of sensibility/intuition, spatiotemporality. Only through them can we have objective reference.

In the beginning chapters I outlined the most important philosophers and traditions which Kant was both using and criticizing. After this I showed how Kant's transcendental idealism along with its notion of *a priori* forms of intuition and *a priori* concepts of the understanding proved to be requirements for objective reference. The key of objective reference lies in the necessary agreement of the categories to the objects of experience. However, these *formal* conditions are not the only conditions of proper, actual objective reference, as we also need to *materialize* the forms and concepts by both senses and language, which offer us sensations and words for judgments. Thus I have argued that a more full list of the conditions of objective reference in Kant's case would consist of the purely *formal* conditions of experience, that is, the forms of intuition and the categories as the concepts of an object in general, and most of all the capacity to unite representations in the act of apperception, and what I have called the *material* or *empirical* conditions of objective reference, that is, our actual senses, as well as a language by which we can materialize judgments.

To summarize: to cognize something is to categorially think about something that is given sensibly to the understanding. To think about an object is to relate the original unity of apperception categorially to an object, thus determining the object. Thus cognizing is not the same as thinking, nor is it the same as sensing, but it is the co-operation of the two. If we try to think of something completely without sensibility, this action may have the form of thinking, that is, we may apply the categories and thus formally think of an object, but in this case the object would be empty, as it were. This is the case with trying to cognize e.g. God or souls. This does not mean that the concept of God or soul is completely meaningless, but

⁴⁰⁹ See Chapter 4.3.

rather that we cannot sensibly be given anything to which we can apply the concepts, and thus they remain empirically empty for us. In addition, as things in themselves are just things in themselves, without any formal additions, such as space, we cannot cognize them as such, and can only think of them by trying to apply the concept of a transcendental object. Therefore the conditions of proper objective reference include both *formal* and *material* elements as described in this thesis.

For Kant, the notion of experience implies objectivity. By this I mean that not all of our representations are objective, or have a necessary relation to an object, but those that do are called cognitions, and they make up what we call experience. Thus Kant can rightly claim that experience is where all cognition and knowledge begins and continues. And thus the possible scope of experience equals the possible scope of our objective cognition. But Kant has shown that having experience is not a simple matter of being passively affected by objects, but rather requires a sort of activity from the subject of experience. Experience has a form (or, rather, forms) which we can come to understand. This form, or better these forms, then, are formal conditions of the experience. But they are then also formal conditions – or, formal causes – of the cognized objects, as these objects can only be found in experience.

Primary sources and abbreviations

Kant

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- Anth.* Kant, Immanuel 2006 [1798]. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* [*Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*]. Transl. & Ed. Robert B. Louden. Cambridge University Press.
- Br.* Kant, Immanuel 1999 [1749-1800]. *Correspondence* [*Briefe*, AA 10-13]. Cambridge University Press.
- KrU* Kant, Immanuel [1790] 2000. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Ed. Paul Guyer. Transl. Paul Guyer & Eric Matthews. Cambridge University Press.
- KrV* Kant, Immanuel [1781/1787] 2013. *Critique of Pure Reason* [*Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*]. Transl. & ed. Paul Guyer & Allen W. Wood. Cambridge University Press.
- ProL.* Kant, Immanuel [1783] 2005. *Prolegomena* [*Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*]. Cambridge University Press.
- R* Kant, Immanuel 2005. *Notes and Fragments*. [*Reflexion*, AA 14-19.] Cambridge University Press.
- V-Lo/Blom* Kant, Immanuel 1992. *Logik Blomberg* [1771]. *Lectures on Logic*. Transl. & ed. J. Michael Young. Cambridge University Press.

- V-Lo/Wiener* Kant, Immanuel 1992. *Wiener-Logik* [1780]. *Lectures on Logic*. Transl. & ed. J. Michael Young. Cambridge University Press.
- V-Lo/DW* Kant, Immanuel 1992. *Logik Dohna-Wundlacken* [1792]. Transl. & ed. J. Michael Young. *Lectures on Logic*. Cambridge University Press.
- V-Lo/Jäsche* Kant, Immanuel 1992. *Logik Jäsche* [1800]. Transl. & ed. J. Michael Young. *Lectures on Logic*. Cambridge University Press.
- V-Met/Do* Kant, Immanuel 1997. *Metaphysik Dohna* [1794–1795]. *Lectures on Metaphysics*. Transl. & ed. Karl Ameriks & Steve Naragon. Cambridge University Press.
- V-Met/K3E* Kant, Immanuel 1997. *Metaphysik Vigilantius* [1794–1795]. *Lectures on Metaphysics*. Transl. & ed. Karl Ameriks & Steve Naragon. Cambridge University Press.
- V-Met/L1* Kant, Immanuel 1997. *Metaphysik L₁*. [1762-1795]. *Lectures on Metaphysics*. Transl. & ed. Karl Ameriks & Steve Naragon. Cambridge University Press.
- V-Met/Mron* Kant, Immanuel 1997. *Metaphysik Mrongovius*. [1762-1795] 1997. *Lectures on Metaphysics*. Transl. & ed. Karl Ameriks & Steve Naragon. Cambridge University Press.

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- EHU* Hume, David [1748] 2007. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. Stephen Buckles. Cambridge University Press.
- PU* Wittgenstein, Ludwig [1953] 2009. *Philosophical Investigations* [Philosophische Untersuchungen]. Wiley-Blackwell.

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This study analyzes and lays out different aspects of Kant's account of the concept of objectivity and objective reference in the broad view, as well as their conditions, to show the relevance of Kant's view to contemporary philosophy, and to answer some of the criticisms expressed toward Kant, which criticisms often seem to be based on misguided readings of his doctrines. The study shows that Kant's philosophy is not – contrary to what is often claimed – overly subjectivistic with the expense of losing objectivity. Rather, his theory of objectivity and objective reference is both coherent and relevant as a philosophical theory today. Furthermore, Kant's account of objectivity, as well as subjectivity, is essential in understanding the origin and meaning of the modern concept of objectivity, which concept is crucial to science in general.

This work hopefully contributes first of all to the study of Kant's theoretical philosophy. In addition, the work is related to such fields as philosophy of science and conceptual history, because of the historical role of the concept of objectivity. Furthermore, the study may prove relevant to discussions in philosophy of language, and finally the discussion concerning the interpretation of Kant's philosophy among the contemporary speculative realists.

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