

Penultimate draft, for the final draft, please see Sally Sedgwick and Dina Edmundts (editors), *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus/International Yearbook of German Idealism* (2019), pp. 47–80.

## **Finite Minds and Their Representations in Leibniz and Kant**

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### **Abstract:**

This essay examines some of the ways in which the assumption of the essential finitude of the human mind, in contrast to the infinitude of God's mind, bears on Leibniz's and Kant's accounts of our representational capacities. This examination reveals several underappreciated similarities between their views, but also some notable differences that help us to pinpoint where and in what ways Kant departs from his celebrated predecessor. The fruits of this examination are a better understanding of Kant's conception of the discursivity of our understanding, his account of the difference between concepts and intuitions, and the particular flavor of his idealism.

### **1. Introduction**

The project of this essay is to examine some of the ways in which the assumption of the essential finitude of the human mind, in contrast to the infinitude of God's mind, bears on Leibniz's and Kant's account of human cognition. More specifically, in light of Leibniz's views on these matters, we will take a look at how the finitude assumption shapes Kant's theory of the representational capacities of the human mind. This project is motivated by several considerations. First, the primary focal point of Kant's theoretical philosophy is the human mind, and one of its most fundamental premises is the thesis that this kind of mind is essentially finite. To be sure, by itself this fact is not news, but not many commentators have tried to derive any special exegetical mileage from it, so to speak.<sup>1</sup> Many of Kant's most

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<sup>1</sup> A notable exception is Heidegger 1929.

important doctrines – including the transcendental idealist core tenet that empirical objects are appearances and not things in themselves, and the famous ‘restriction’ result that all our theoretical knowledge is restricted to objects of possible experience – ultimately rest on the finitude thesis insofar as it underwrites the Kantian model of our representational capacities on which the arguments for these doctrines depend. Similarly, Kant’s conception of the kinds of representations that we are capable of, as well as the particular flavor of his idealism, are direct reflections of the special way in which he cashes out our finite nature. A closer examination of how Kant takes our finitude to be manifested in various cognitive limitations, in contrast to the infinite divine intellect who is not subject to any of these limitations, thus promises to offer an illuminating, fresh perspective on many central aspects of his theoretical philosophy.

Second, my reason for including Leibniz in our investigation is that this will help to bring out various important features of Kant’s account of our representational capacities that are easily overlooked if one restricts one’s attention to Kant’s writings alone. More generally, on my view, a proper understanding of Kant’s critical philosophy – including the meaning of many of his technical terms, the targets of many of his arguments, the background assumptions that inform much of his reasoning – is, if not impossible, at least vastly more difficult if its genesis and historical background is not taken into account, in particular, the Leibniz-Wolffian background that provided the framework in which Kant gradually developed his critical views. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*‘Critique’* for short from now on), Kant appears to be at great pains to thoroughly distance himself from the Leibniz-Wolffian philosophy, and is often understood as advocating a wholesale rejection of all things Leibnizian and Wolffian. In my assessment, these harshly critical remarks mostly apply to certain versions of Wolffianism but not to Leibniz himself. Despite some undeniable differences, Leibniz’s philosophy and Kant’s critical philosophy are strikingly close, as Kant himself came to realize and emphasizes in some of his subsequent writings.<sup>2</sup> We cannot delve into this genetic story in this essay, or attempt to trace specific lines of influence from Leibniz, or certain Wolffians, to Kant. But even the more modest project of comparing and contrasting Leibniz’s and Kant’s views on the representational

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<sup>2</sup> See MAN, AA IV, 507–508; ÜE, AA VIII, 203, 248–250; Draft notes for ÜE, AA XX, 363–364; Letter to Herz, May 21, 1789, AA XI, 52; Letter to Kästner, August 5, 1790, AA XI, 186. For more discussion, see Jauernig 2008, and Jauernig 2011.

capabilities of the human mind against the background of the assumption of our essential finitude helps to shed new light on various important aspects of Kant's critical philosophy, including his conception of the discursive nature of our intellect, the crucial distinction between concepts and intuitions, and his unwavering commitment to the existence of things in themselves.

Third, by way of investigating and comparing Leibniz's and Kant's views on finite minds and their cognitions one can also gain a better understanding of the way in which, and the extent to which, their philosophical theories may be described as rationalist in nature. There is no generally agreed upon characterization of what makes a certain philosophical theory a form of rationalism, and some people may want to dispute the usefulness of the empiricism-rationalism distinction altogether. Among the more popular previously proposed criteria for a theory to count as rationalist are that it ascribes innate ideas to the human mind, or, similarly, the capacity for *a priori* knowledge about substantive matters of fact, or that it includes the principle of sufficient reason as one of its foundational principles, and conceives of it as necessary and as applying to absolutely everything without any restrictions. Without taking a stance on the merits of these classification criteria, or on the merits of the empiricism-rationalism distinction in general, I want to suggest another way in which philosophical theories in the modern period could be usefully grouped together as belonging into a philosophical family of views that may be called 'rationalist'. Philosophers in this group have in common that God, understood as an infinite rational being, plays an important role in their epistemology and philosophy of mind. The divine infinite mind functions as the backdrop against which their account of the human mind and its capacities is developed, and the human mind is understood as a limited version of God's mind, or as being similar to God's mind in some central respects. On this characterization, being a rationalist is not an 'on/off' kind of affair; philosophers can be more or less rationalist, depending, in part, on how 'God-like' they conceive the human mind to be. Many modern philosophers who are commonly regarded as rationalists, such as Descartes, Malebranche, and Spinoza, score fairly high on this rationalist scale. They all subscribe to a version of the view that the best kind of knowledge that we are capable of—'best' in the sense of both being most justified or certain, and having particularly know-worthy objects, namely,

necessary truths, and the most fundamental features of reality—is knowledge that we have in common with God. We share God’s capacity for contemplating the ideas of the eternal essences of things, and the state of our mind when we know necessary truths is very similar to, or even identical with, the state of God’s mind when He knows these truths. For both Leibniz and Kant, God’s infinite mind also provides an important reference point in their theories of the human mind, although Kant is concerned to emphasize that we cannot know if such an infinite mind is really possible, let alone actual, whereas Leibniz seems comfortable to present his account of the workings of God’s mind as known fact.<sup>3</sup> But for both of them, human cognition turns out to be similar to God’s cognition in several important respects, although the God-like aspects of the human mind on Leibniz’s view are more pronounced and more numerous than on Kant’s view. This is one way in which Leibniz and Kant could both be classified as belonging to a rationalist tradition, and Leibniz could be classified as the greater rationalist between them.

In this brief essay, it is impossible to provide a comprehensive discussion of all of the ways in which the assumption of the finitude of the human mind plays a role in Leibniz’s and Kant’s theoretical philosophy. For the most part, our discussion will thus be restricted to the implications of this assumption for Leibniz’s and Kant’s accounts of the representational capacities of the human mind, in contrast to the representational capacities of God’s mind. More specifically, we will examine their views about the intellectual capacities of finite minds (in sections 2 and 6), the sensible capacities of finite minds (in sections 3 and 7), and the role of passivity in the perceptions of finite minds (in sections 4 and 8). How the limitations of our representational capacities that are due to our finitude translate into limitations of our cognition and knowledge is a longer story that must be told elsewhere. It is also worth noting that interesting further similarities between human beings and God emerge in Leibniz’s and Kant’s practical philosophy with respect to their conceptions of freedom and morally good actions, similarities that also are a topic for another day.

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<sup>3</sup> See A 256/B 311–312.

## 2. Finite minds and intellectual representations in Leibniz

According to Leibniz, monads or souls are the most fundamental entities in the world. All monads are finite, created beings but not all monads are created equal. Some monads are more perfect than others but none is as perfect as God, who is an infinite being and exists outside of the world. Rational monads or minds, including human minds, are more perfect, and thus more similar to God, than the souls of plants and the souls of non-rational animals, but, as finite, they are still subject to various cognitive limitations, which do not apply to God.

One of the main limitations of rational monads with respect to their intellectual representational capacities is that all of their distinct concepts, i.e., all concepts that they can distinctly entertain, are, of necessity, *general* representations, i.e., representations that represent classes of things, or limited aspects of individuals. By contrast, God is capable of entertaining distinct concepts that, not only refer to, but also represent individuals in the sense of expressing their haecceity or thisness, and completely capturing them in all of their individual glory, so to speak. (This is what I should be understood to have in mind from now on when I talk about representing individuals.) How so? To begin with the notion of ‘distinctness’, Leibniz’s theory of the distinctness or confusedness of representations is quite complex, not least because he uses ‘distinct’ in various different senses. For our present purposes, it is sufficient to explicate the core sense of ‘distinct’, which applies to both intellectual and sensible representations, and is also the sense in which Kant primarily uses the term. A representation R is fully distinct or distinct *simpliciter*, or entertained or grasped distinctly, if, and only if, R is conscious and each one of its elements is individually apprehended with consciousness;<sup>4</sup> otherwise R is confused (or indistinct, as Kant prefers to say), or entertained or grasped confusedly, at least in part.<sup>5</sup> As this formulation indicates, the properties of being distinct and

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<sup>4</sup> I say ‘elements’ instead of ‘parts’ because in the case of sensible representations the relevant relation is not the whole-part relation but a relation between an emergent representation and the representations from which it emerged.

<sup>5</sup> See *Principles of Nature and Grace*, § 13, G VI, 604: “Each soul knows the infinite, knows everything, but confusedly. It is like walking on the shore of the ocean, and hearing the great noise that it makes, I hear the particular noises of each wave, of which the whole noise is composed, but without distinguishing them.” Also see “Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas,” A VI.4A, 585–588; NE, A VI.6, 120. Also see Log, AA IX, 33–34: “If I am conscious of a representation, it is *clear*; if I am not conscious of it, it is *obscure*. [...] All our clear representations [...] can be distinguished with respect to *distinctness* and *indistinctness*. If we are conscious of the whole representation, but not of the manifold that is contained in it, it is indistinct.” All translations throughout this essay are my own.

being confused come in degrees; the more elements of a representation are individually apprehended with consciousness, the more distinct, and the less confused, it is. (As noted in the definition just given, by ‘distinct’ without any further qualifications I should be understood to mean ‘fully distinct’.<sup>6</sup>) God represents individuals by means of so-called ‘complete concepts’. In general, Leibniz, like Kant, subscribes to a containment model of concepts, according to which concepts can be understood as ordered sets of other concepts, which, in turn, are ordered sets of other concepts and so on, until primitive concepts are reached that cannot be analyzed any further. A complete concept of an individual can be thought of as a temporally ordered series of (qualitative) concepts, where each concept in the series bears a time index  $t$  and contains, or is sufficient to deduce, all of the concepts or predicates that can be truly attributed to the individual at time  $t$ .<sup>7</sup> On Leibniz’s view, the complete concept of an individual thus understood amounts to a representation of the individual’s haecceity.<sup>8</sup> Last but not least, Leibniz regards all individuals as infinitely complex, and as having infinitely many properties, which also means that all complete concepts contain infinitely many concepts, and thus are infinitely complex.<sup>9</sup> Putting all of these pieces together, since complete concepts contain infinitely many concepts, only an infinite intellect can have distinct complete concepts of individuals.

“The most important thing in this is that *individuality* involves infinity, and only someone who is capable of grasping the infinite could have knowledge of the principle of individuation of a given thing.” (NE, A VI.6, 289–290)<sup>10</sup>

In fact, God’s complete concepts of individuals are not only distinct but what Leibniz calls ‘intuitive’. A representation  $R$  is intuitive, or entertained or grasped intuitively, if, and only if,  $R$

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<sup>6</sup> Leibniz has a special term for fully distinct representations; he calls them ‘adequate’. But since Kant explicitly does not adopt this usage (see AA XXIV, 913), I will not do so either.

<sup>7</sup> In this understanding of complete concepts, I am following Benson Mates; see Mates 1986, p. 87–88.

<sup>8</sup> See DM, § 8, A VI.4B, 1540: “[...] we can say that the nature of an individual substance, or a complete being, is to have a notion so complete that it is sufficient to understand and allow to deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which this notion is attributed. [...] God, seeing Alexander’s individual notion or ‘haecceity’, sees in it at the same time the foundation and reason for all the predicates that can be said truly of him, for example, that he vanquished Darius and Porus [...]” See Letter to Arnauld, June, 1686, G II, 54; “Primary Truth,” A VI.4B, 1646.

<sup>9</sup> Why are individuals infinitely complex? A straightforward reason is that, for Leibniz, matter is infinitely divisible. A more speculative reason is that, as a matter of metaphysical fact, infinite complexity is a necessary condition for concreteness.

<sup>10</sup> Also see Letter to De Volder, 1704/1705, G II, 277.

is fully distinct and all of its elements are apprehended simultaneously, at once.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to God and because of their finitude, rational monads are incapable of individually apprehending infinitely many concepts with consciousness, let alone doing so at once. As a result, the only distinct concepts within their reach are, of necessity, finitely complex. Accordingly, none of their distinct concepts represent individuals; rather, all of them are, of necessity, general representations. Despite their finitude, monads are capable of representing individuals but the relevant representations are inevitably confused. The further question whether Leibniz believes that monads are capable of confusedly entertaining *concepts* of infinite complexity, and, accordingly, of representing individuals in terms of confused complete concepts, is quite tricky; we will return to it below.

One respect in which rational monads are more perfect than the souls of plants and the souls of non-rational animals is that they have innate concepts that represent the same content as the concepts of the essences of (logical) species in God's mind, which allows them to *a priori* demonstrate and know necessary truths that are based on these concepts.<sup>12</sup> For Leibniz, a proposition is true if, and only if, its predicate concept is contained in the subject concept, and an important sub-class of necessary propositions are those whose subject concept is a concept of a species-essence, such as the concept 'triangle' or 'human'.<sup>13</sup> By analyzing their innate concepts of the essences of species, and by relying on the principle of contradiction, rational monads can *a priori* demonstrate, and thus *a priori* know, necessary truths.<sup>14</sup> The teachings of Leibnizian metaphysics about the nature of monads are presumably among these necessary truths, or at least are derivable from them. That rational monads have innate species-essence concepts, on the basis of which they can *a priori* demonstrate necessary truths, is one respect in which they are similar to God. It is important to note, though, that they can accomplish this feat only because the concepts of the essences of species are merely finitely complex. As

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<sup>11</sup> See "Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas," A VI.4A, 588: "And surely, if a concept is very complex, we cannot think all of its ingredients at the same time. But where this is possible, or at least insofar as it is possible, I call the cognition intuitive." See DM, § 24, A VI.4B, 1568: "When my mind grasps all the primitive ingredients of a concept at once and distinctly, it has an *intuitive* knowledge, which is very rare [...]."

<sup>12</sup> See NE, A VI.6, 74–88.

<sup>13</sup> See "Primary Truths," A VI.4, 1644; Remarks on Arnauld's letter, June, 1686, A II.2, 45; Letter to Arnauld, July 14, 1686, A II.2, 70–73.

<sup>14</sup> See "Primary Truths," A VI.4B, 1644; *Monadology*, §§ 31–34, G VI, 612.

Leibniz famously claims, it is one of the main distinguishing characteristics of necessary truths that they can be proved by analysis in a finite number of steps, while the complete analysis of the subject concepts of contingent truths goes on *ad infinitum*.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Finite minds and sensible representations in Leibniz

God and rational monads each have an intellectual faculty and even operate with some of the same concepts, even though God's mind is infinite while rational monads are finite. By contrast, the possession of a sensible faculty is peculiar to finite creatures. It provides them with information about facts obtaining in the phenomenal world, i.e., in the part of the world that is populated by bodies, which, according to Leibniz's idealism, are mind-dependent entities whose reality consists in their being coherently perceived by all monads.<sup>16</sup> None of God's representations or cognitions are perceptions, including His representations of the phenomenal world. God represents and cognizes the phenomenal world in terms of the complete concepts of the individuals existing in it. This representation is complete, i.e., captures everything that is true of the phenomenal world, and intuitive, i.e., such that He at once individually apprehends with consciousness each one of the concepts contained in the complete concepts that are comprised in it. For future reference, call this 'God's special representation of the phenomenal world'.

Leibniz's views about the nature of the perceptions of monads are best approached via a brief exposé of his doctrine of the pre-established harmony, which is the source for many of the constraints that shape his account of perception. Monads do not interact in any way; they "have no windows through which something can enter or leave" (*Monadology*, §7, G IV, 607). Rather than being connected in one world in virtue of standing in mutual interactions, monads belong to one world in virtue of the relations between their perceptual states. At every moment, each one of them perceives the entire phenomenal world in all its detail, and the perceptions of all of them are in sync.<sup>17</sup> This is what Leibniz calls 'the pre-established harmony'.

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<sup>15</sup> See "On Contingency," A VI.4B, 1650.

<sup>16</sup> See Letter to De Volder, June 30, 1704, G II, 270; Letter to Des Bosses, June 16, 1712, G II, 451–452; NE, A VI.6, 145.

<sup>17</sup> See "Explanation of the Difficulties...", G IV, 519; Letter to Arnauld, October 9, 1687, A II.2, 244–245.



The harmony is pre-established because the indicated coordination of the perceptions of all monads is due to a special act of God at the moment of creation. The series of perceptual states of a monad is due solely to its so-called 'law-of-the-series'. A monad's law-of-the-series individuates it by specifying what perceptions, and other mental states (if there are any), follow upon one another in the series of states that the monad runs through during its lifetime. Moreover, Leibniz conceives of the law-of-the-series as an 'inherent' law, i.e., a law that not only governs the monad's progress through the series of its mental states but also generates the series and fuels the monad's progress by providing the impetus that successively carries it from one state to the next in the progress of time.<sup>18</sup> Even though each law-of-the-series is peculiar to one particular monad, at the moment of creation God made sure that the laws-of-the-series of all monads are coordinated in such a way that the resulting series of perceptual states display the special kind of harmony just described.<sup>19</sup>

Now, since at every moment each monad completely perceives the entire phenomenal world, including all the individuals existing in it, every instantaneous perceptual state of a monad comprises infinitely many representations. This is a God-like aspect that all kinds of monads share. Leibniz expresses this point by saying that monads are mirrors, not only of the world, but also of God.<sup>20</sup> But, due to their limited cognitive abilities as finite creatures, no monad, not even a rational monad, consciously apprehends each one of these infinitely many representations. Nevertheless, many of the more perfect monads, including all rational monads, have some conscious perceptions. What happens is that their unconscious 'little' representations blur together, or are con-fused, to yield emergent, or supervenient,

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<sup>18</sup> See Letter to De Volder, Jan. 21, 1704, G II, 264; Letter to Des Bosses, August 19, 1715, G II, 503.

<sup>19</sup> See "Explanation of the Difficulties..." G IV, 518: "It is the nature of created substance to change continually following a certain order that leads it spontaneously [...] through all the states that it encounters, in such a way that he who sees all sees in its present all its past and future states. And this law of order, which constitutes the individuality of each particular substance, is in exact agreement with what occurs to every other substance and throughout the whole universe." See "New System..." §§ 14–15, G IV, 484–485.

<sup>20</sup> See DM, § 9, A VI.4B, 1542: "Moreover, every substance is like an entire world, and like a mirror of God or of the whole universe, which each one expresses in its own manner, a bit like how the same city is represented differently depending on the different positions from which it is regarded. [...] It can even be said that every substance in some way bears the character of God's infinite wisdom and omnipotence and imitates him as much as it is capable. For it expresses, however confusedly, everything that happens in the universe, past, present, or future; this resembles somewhat an infinite perception or an infinite knowledge."

perceptions that are conscious but have a partially different representational content.<sup>21</sup> For example, the unconscious little representations that represent the water droplets that appear to us as a rainbow are con-fused into conscious perceptions that represent bands of color.

More precisely, on my reading of Leibniz, whether a given little representation can be consciously apprehended by a monad depends both on a special intrinsic quality of the representation, which Leibniz sometimes refers to as its ‘strength’, and on a special intrinsic quality of the monad, namely, its specific consciousness threshold, which corresponds to the particular strength that a representation has to exceed in order to be consciously apprehended by the monad in question. In addition to a specific consciousness threshold, all monads also have specifically different powers of ‘con-fusing’ little representations, i.e., of ‘melting’ multiple little representations together in such a way that a perception with a new content emerges whose strength corresponds to the sum of the strength values of all of the little representations comprised in it.<sup>22</sup> As a result, monads differ with respect to which of their little representations are con-fused, how many conscious perceptions they have, what exact content is represented by their perceptions, and how confused their perceptions are. The particular distribution of confusion over its perceptual state is what distinguishes one monad from another. It is this distribution that determines a monad’s particular point of view – roughly, the point of view is the point of least confusion – and singles out one body as its own, namely, the one that is perceived most distinctly.<sup>23</sup> The degree of confusion of the perceptions of a monad also functions as a measure of its degree of perfection. That the perceptions of rational monads are

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<sup>21</sup> See “Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas,” A VI.4A, 592: “When we perceive colors or smells, we certainly have no other perceptions than of shapes and motions, but so numerous and so very small that our mind cannot distinctly consider each individual one in this present state of itself, and thus does not notice that its perception is composed of perceptions of minute shapes and motions alone, just as when we perceive the color green in a mixture of yellow and blue powder, we sense only yellow and blue finely mixed, even though we do not notice this, but rather feign some new thing for ourselves.” See *Monadology*, § 60, G VI, 617: “Since the nature of the monad is representative, nothing can limit it to represent only a part of things. However, it is true that this representation is only confused as to the detail of the whole universe, and can only be distinct for a portion of things that is, either for those that are closest, or for those that are greatest with respect to each monad, otherwise each monad would be a divinity. [...] Monads all go confusedly to infinity, to the whole; but they are limited and differentiated by the degrees of their distinct perceptions.”

<sup>22</sup> For a fuller explication of this reading of Leibniz’s account of confused perception, see Jauernig forthcoming a. A similar reading can be found in Jorgensen 2009.

<sup>23</sup> See *Monadology*, § 62, G VI, 617; Letter to Arnould, April 30, 1687, A II.2, 175–176.

less confused than the perceptions of the monads of plants and non-human animals is another mark of their being more perfect.<sup>24</sup>

In sum, on my reading, the instantaneous perceptual states of monads are best understood as incorporating two components, a basic component and an emergent component. The basic component is unconscious and comprises infinitely many little representations that, taken together, completely represent the entire phenomenal world in all its rich detail, including all of the individuals existing in it, but are not 'strong' enough to be individually apprehended with consciousness. This component is the same for all monads that exist in the same world, and it is modeled on, and represents the very same content as, God's special representation of the relevant time-slice of the phenomenal world in terms of complete concepts. It is these basic components of the perceptual states of all monads that are coordinated in the pre-established harmony, and determine the ontological furniture of the phenomenal realm. It is a tricky question, anticipated in the previous section, what kind of representations Leibniz takes the little representations to be that are contained in the basic components of the perceptual states of monads. Wolff and some of his followers endorse the view that sensible representations do not constitute a special kind but are to be classified as confused concepts.<sup>25</sup> For now, we will just note that if this were Leibniz's view as well, the basic components of the perceptual states of monads would not only represent the same content as God's special representation of the phenomenal world but would be just like it, except for being unconscious. The emergent component of the perceptual states of monads supervenes on the basic component, consists of finitely many, partly confused emergent perceptions, and depends on special features of the monad to which it belongs. Accordingly, the emergent component is peculiar to each monad, and represents only part of the phenomenal world, and does so incompletely, with various subjective distortions, and from a particular point of view. Depending on the particular consciousness threshold of a monad and its powers of con-fusing little representations, the emergent component of its perceptual state may, or may not, include

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<sup>24</sup> See *Principles of Nature and Grace*, § 13, G VI, 604.

<sup>25</sup> More precisely, for Wolff our soul has one fundamental power of representing, which underlies both the understanding and the senses; the latter are distinguished by the distinctness and confusedness of their representations, respectively. See *Deutsche Metaphysik*, §§ 277, 282, 747, 753, 773.

conscious perceptions. Last but not least, it is also important to emphasize that the series of perceptual states of each monad, which are composed of the described two components, unfolds in time. Monads are essentially temporal beings in that they apprehend their mental states, including their perceptual states, one-by-one, or one at a time, in contrast to God who consciously apprehends all of His representations, including all of the different time-indexed components of his special representation of the phenomenal world, at one glance.

I will end this section by drawing attention to another somewhat hairy question that plays a central role in Kant's critique of the Leibniz-Wolffian conception of the nature of our sensible representations, a question with respect to which Leibniz's own view might well differ from the views of the Wolffians. This question is whether the perceptions of monads are not only confused representations of bodies but also amount, by extension, to confused representations of other monads. To be sure, by being connected through the pre-established harmony in the way described above, monads express or 'mirror' each other, but mirroring is not the same as perceiving. The answer to the indicated question depends on how the relation between bodies and monads is understood, which is a widely debated issue in the literature. On one reading, bodies are to be numerically identified with aggregates of monads whose unity is mind-dependent in that it depends on the perceptions of monads.<sup>26</sup> On this reading, by perceiving bodies, monads are confusedly representing aggregates of monads, and, thus, other monads. On another reading, although bodies can be correlated with aggregates of monads – namely, those monads whose most distinct perception represents the body in question, or part of the body in question – they cannot be numerically identified with them. On this reading, by perceiving bodies monads are confusedly representing smaller bodies, not other monads. Space constraints prohibit us from entering this debate here. Let me just say that while the Wolffians are quite clearly committed to the view that bodies are aggregates of monads, the case is much less clear-cut for Leibniz himself.<sup>27</sup> That is, in contrast to the Wolffians, Leibniz might well be in agreement with Kant that our perceptions are not confused representations of things in themselves, even though he does not share Kant's reasons for this assessment, as we will see.

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<sup>26</sup> For a reading along these lines, see Adams 1994, pp. 218–261.

<sup>27</sup> See Wolff, *Deutsche Metaphysik*, §§ 76–77; §§ 582–583.

#### 4. Finite minds and passivity in Leibniz

Against the background of Leibniz's theory of the essentially confused nature of the perceptions of monads, it is natural to wonder whether more can be said about what exactly accounts for this confusion. Leibniz says more by identifying the primitive passive force of monads as the source of the confusion.

“Substances have metaphysical matter or passive power insofar as they express something confusedly, active power insofar as they express something distinctly.” (“On the Method of Distinguishing Real from Imaginary Phenomena”, G VII, 322)<sup>28</sup>

Monads thus comprise both a primitive active and a primitive passive force.<sup>29</sup> As I read Leibniz, the primitive active force grounds everything that is God-like in monads. As one might say, it is through their primitive active force that monads participate, however modestly, in the divine. The capacity of rational monads for conscious thought in terms of distinct concepts and, in particular, their ability for *a priori* reasoning in terms of innate ideas, are expressions of their primitive active force. But primitive active force also plays an important role in perception, and also pertains to non-rational monads, which are not capable of conscious thought or *a priori* reasoning but do perceive the phenomenal world. That monads have primitive passive force in addition to primitive active force is one of the main ways in which their finitude manifests itself. God is pure activity and does not comprise any passive component at all – which is also why He does not have a sensible faculty, or a body.<sup>30</sup>

How exactly the role of the primitive active and passive force in monadic perception should be understood – which, as we will see, is an important question when it comes to the comparison of Leibniz's with Kant's account of perception – depends on how we want to answer the tricky question, previously noted, whether we want to read Leibniz as holding that

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<sup>28</sup> Also see Letter to Remond, February 11, 1715, G III, 636; *Theodicy*, § 124, G VI, 179.

<sup>29</sup> See Letter to De Volder, June 20, 1703, G II, 252; “On Nature Itself,” G IV, 512.

<sup>30</sup> See Letter to De Bosses, Oct 16, 1706, G II, 324–325: “Primary matter is essential to any kind of entelechy and is never separated from it, because it completes it and is itself the passive power of the entire complete substance. [...] Therefore, although God through his absolute power could deprive a substance of secondary matter, he can still not deprive it of primary matter, for through this he would bring about pure act such as he alone is.” See NE, A VI.6, 256, 306; Letter to De Volder, June 20th, 1703, G II, 248–249.

sensible representations are confused concepts ('confusion-reading') or that sensible representations are *sui generis* ('*sui-generis*-reading'). On either reading, the primitive active force of a monad is best understood, I submit, as embodying an inherent general law that governs the evolution of the basic components of the monad's perceptual states and supplies the impetus that makes the monad transition from one state to the next. Since the series of the basic components of the perceptual states of monads is the same for all of them, this general law is also the same for all of them. The primitive passive force of a monad, on my view, is best understood as determining its particular consciousness threshold and its capacity for con-fusing little representations. In this way, the primitive passive force is responsible for the inherently confused nature of monadic perception, and, more specifically, for the particular distribution of confusion over the emergent component of a monad's perceptual state, and, consequently, for the perspectival character of the monad's perceptions and its embodiment. In addition, it is also plausible to assume that it is due to the passive force of monads that the series of their perceptual states unfolds in time.<sup>31</sup> As one might put it, the active force supplies the impetus that moves a monad from one state to the next but the passive force dampens this impetus, as it were, in such a way that each one of these transitions takes time, and all of the monad's perceptual states form not only a series, but a temporal series. The law-of-the-series of a monad, which, as noted above, individuates the monad by governing and fueling the temporal evolution of its mental states, can thus be conceived of as the result of combining its passive force with its active force. So much for the shared ground between the confusion-reading and the *sui-generis*-reading. But once we turn to the question of how to account for the generation of the basic components of the perceptual states of monads, in particular, of the all-important initial state, the same story will no longer do for both readings. The most straightforward proposal would be to say that the primitive active force of a monad not only embodies an inherent general law and supplies a force that moves the monad from one state to the next, but also generates the basic components of its perceptual states, including the initial one. Since both monads and God have active forces, and God does not have a sensible faculty, it is

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<sup>31</sup> After all, God grasps all of His representations at once, and the most fundamental difference between Him and monads is that He is not afflicted by any passive forces.

plausible to assume that the active force of monads corresponds to their intellectual faculty. On this assumption, it directly follows from the indicated straightforward proposal that, not only the representations in terms of which rational monads consciously think and perform *a priori* reasoning, but also the little representations that compose the basic components of their perceptual states are intellectual in nature, lending support to the confusion-reading. This means that proponents of the alternative *sui-generis*-reading must either reject the assumption that all representations that are generated by the active force are intellectual in nature, or come up with a different account of the generation of the basic components of the perceptual states of monads. The first option seems implausible. Why would the same basic force of monads produce two entirely different kinds of representations? Going with the second option, an alternative proposal for how to think about the generation of the basic components would be to regard them as produced by a representational capacity that results from a modification of the active force by the passive force, and differs in kind from the intellectual representational capacity of rational monads, which is an expression of the active force alone. To put my cards on the table, I favor the earlier straightforward proposal, mostly on account of its greater simplicity, and, accordingly, lean toward the confusion-reading, according to which Leibniz turns out to be in agreement with the Wolffians that our sensible representations are, at bottom, confused concepts.<sup>32</sup>

It is a noteworthy aspect of the primitive passive force of monads that there is nothing genuinely passive about it. This is not to say that Leibniz did not have any reasons for choosing this label. First, the force in question can be regarded as ‘opposed’ to the active force in the sense that it disturbs the non-confusion of the basic components of the perceptual states of monads by con-fusing the little representations contained in them, and in that it ‘temporalizes’ the series in which those states unfold. Similarly, the passive force is responsible for the embodiment of monads, and bodies can be acted upon, or affected, by other bodies. Third, by way of introducing different degrees of confusion into the emergent components of the perceptual states of monads, the passive force allows Leibniz to give an account of the

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<sup>32</sup> By contrast, the emerging consensus in the literature seems to be that Leibniz does *not* regard sensible representations as confused concepts. For discussion, see McRae 1976, esp. chapter 5; Brandom 1981; Parkinson 1982; and Wilson 2005.

‘interaction’ between monads. As noted, strictly speaking, monads do not interact. The only being that can, and does, genuinely affect monads is God, at the moment of creation and through His continual concurrence.<sup>33</sup> But all changes in a monad throughout the course of its life are due to its own inherent law-of-the-series. However, Leibniz introduces a sort of quasi-interaction among monads by utilizing the different degrees of perfection of their perceptual states. In a given harmonious change of the perceptual states of a pair of monads, if monad A moves to a more perfect state, i.e., a state whose emergent component is overall less confused than its previous state, while monad B moves to a less perfect state, i.e., a state whose emergent component is overall more confused than its previous state, A can be regarded as acting, while B can be regarded as being acted upon, or as being passive.<sup>34</sup> While these considerations may be sufficient to justify Leibniz’s choice of words, none of them detract from the fact that, despite essentially having passive force, monads are not genuinely passive, except in relation to their creator. This also has the important consequence that, without appealing to any additional metaphysical considerations, just based on Leibniz’s account of the human mind, I have no reason to assume that there is anything else in the world apart from God and me.<sup>35</sup>

## 5. Taking stock: finite minds and their representations in Leibniz

The main results of our investigation in the previous three sections can be summarized as follows: For Leibniz, with respect to our representational capacities, the finitude of our mind manifests itself in that, (1), our intellect is capable of only finitary conscious operations, which has the consequence that, (2), our distinct concepts are only finitely complex, which, in turn, implies that, (3) our distinct concepts are essentially general; furthermore, (4), our mind includes, not only an active, but also a passive force, which has the consequence that, (5), all

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<sup>33</sup> See DM, § 28, A VI.6, 1573: “In the rigorous sense of metaphysical truth there is no external cause that acts upon us except God alone, and he alone communicates himself to us immediately in virtue of our continual dependence upon him. Whence it follows that there is no other external object that affects our soul and immediately excites our perception. [...] It can be said that God alone is our immediate object outside of us, and that we see all things through him [...]” Also see “Conversation between Philarète and Ariste,” G VI, 591.

<sup>34</sup> See *Monadology*, § 49, G VI, 615.

<sup>35</sup> See DM § 9, § 14, A VI.4B, 1542, 1550; Remarks on Arnauld’s letter, A II.2, 53; Letter to Arnauld, July 14, 1686, A II.2, 80–81.



our mental states, including, in particular, our perceptions of the phenomenal world, are successive and follow upon one another in time, and, (6), our perceptions are essentially confused, which, in turn, has the implication that, (7), we perceive the world from a point of view, have a body, and our mind can be said to be acted upon by other finite monads, even though there are no genuine interactions between monads. Our mind's representational capacities are God-like in that, (8), we have innate concepts that represent the same content as God's concepts of the essences of species, on the basis of which we can *a priori* know some necessary truths, including the doctrines of Leibnizian metaphysics about the nature and properties of monads, (9), our perceptions are infinitely complex, if also confused, and completely represent, *via* their basic components, the entire phenomenal world in all of its rich detail, including all individuals existing in it, and, (10), all our mental states, including our perceptions, on which the existence and properties of the phenomenal world depend, are generated by our own law-of-the-series, without any external input. But the representational capacities of God's infinite mind are still more perfect than ours in that, (i), He grasps all of His representations, including the infinitely complex ones, distinctly and even intuitively, (ii), His mind does not include any passive force, and, consequently, (iii), He completely represents the entire world, including all monads but also the entire phenomenal world and all individuals existing in it, non-perspectively in terms of infinitely complex concepts, whose complete analysis He consciously grasps at once.

## 6. Finite minds and intellectual representations in Kant

According to Kant, the central defining feature of our intellect is that it is *discursive*, in contrast to God's intellect, which we conceive of as *intuitive*.<sup>36</sup> The discursive nature of our intellect is one important way in which the finitude of our mind manifests itself, on Kant's account. Kant's claim that our intellectual faculty is discursive is often glossed as meaning no more than that we think in terms of general concepts. On my reading, that our concepts are essentially general is an important consequence that follows from the discursivity of our

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<sup>36</sup> See A 68/B 93.

understanding, but it is not what being discursive means. With the notion of discursivity, Kant is making explicit a feature of our intellect that Leibniz already recognized – although the latter may have taken this feature to be characteristic of only the conscious workings of our intellect. As we saw, for Leibniz, it is one of the defining properties of God’s intellect that He grasps all of His concepts intuitively, i.e., such that He individually apprehends with consciousness all of the other concepts that are contained in them at once, whereas in our case this kind of intuitive grasp is very rare, and possible only for concepts that are of rather limited complexity. If we grasp concepts distinctly, i.e., in such a way that we individually apprehend with consciousness each one of the concepts that are contained in them (called ‘marks’ by Kant), we characteristically do so, not at once, but only by analyzing them step-by-step. This contrast between apprehending the marks of a concept at once and apprehending them step-by-step, I submit, is also the crucial contrast at the heart of Kant’s distinction between an intuitive and a discursive intellect. For our understanding to be discursive means that we think in terms of concepts that are composed of prior concepts, or prior general marks, such that we must individually apprehend these marks, in piecemeal fashion, by ‘running through’ them one-by-one, and such that each one of these acts of apprehension takes a certain amount of time. (The Latin ‘*discurrere*’ literally means ‘to run through’.) By contrast, God, in His infinitude, is blessed with an intuitive intellect, where ‘intuitive’ is to be understood in Leibniz’s sense. That is, God thinks in terms of representations all of whose elements He individually apprehends with consciousness at once, without having to run through them one-by-one.

“For the discursive understanding must expend much work by means of the former [cognition through concepts] for the analysis and again for the synthesis of its concepts according to principles and must ascend many steps in a tiresome way in order to make progress in cognition, whereas an *intellectual* intuition would grasp and represent the object immediately and at once.” (VT, AA VIII, 389)

“Our understanding is discursive, i.e., we cognize things through general marks that we determine by and by in such a way that they signify an individual. But in this way I cognize things only successively and not at once according to all of their predicates. But these are obvious shortcomings; for this reason, God cannot have a human understanding. He must

have an understanding that represents things at once, that intuits them, so to speak.” (V-Th/Baumbach [1783/84], AA XXVIII, 1267)

Kant puts the same point also by saying that we think in terms of concepts that are synthesized from prior parts, whereas God’s representations are such that the whole is prior to, or at least coeval with, the parts.<sup>37</sup>

Note that in the proposed characterization of what it means for our understanding to be discursive, I did not restrict the piecemeal, step-wise mode of operation of our intellect to the *conscious* apprehension of the marks of concepts. This was no oversight. As I read Kant, no matter whether a concept is distinct or confused, if it is grasped at all, the grasping proceeds by way of the indicated piecemeal apprehension of its marks. This is an important difference between Kant’s conception of the nature of our concepts and the Wolffian conception. As we have seen, the Wolffians, and maybe also Leibniz, identify our sensible representations with *infinitely* complex confused concepts, which entails that they cannot conceive of the unconscious operations of our intellect as taking place according to the described discursive, piecemeal mode.

Given the sketched Kantian conception of the discursive nature of our understanding, it directly follows that, for lack of time and intellectual firepower, none of our concepts, be they distinct or confused, are very complex, let alone infinitely complex. Apprehending infinitely many marks discursively, in piecemeal fashion, is simply impossible. Since Kant agrees with Leibniz that ‘individuality involves infinity’ in the sense that infinitely many predicates are required to fully describe an individual,<sup>38</sup> it also follows that none of our concepts, be they distinct or confused, represent individuals in the previously indicated sense of expressing their haecceity, and completely capturing them in all their individual glory. Rather, all our concepts are essentially general, and represent only classes of things, or limited aspects of individuals. The generality of our concepts is one of the features that Kant tends to highlight when he

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<sup>37</sup> See KU, AA V, 407.

<sup>38</sup> See V-Lo/Wiener (1780f.), AA XXIV, 931: “But this complete determination of a thing is impossible, because an infinite cognition would be required to identify all of the predicates that pertain to a thing, and thus I can proceed *in infinitum* while still not completely determining the thing.”

characterizes their nature.<sup>39</sup> We now see that this feature is grounded in an even more fundamental feature, namely, the finite complexity of our concepts, which, in turn, is a direct consequence of the finitude of our mind as expressed in the discursive nature of our intellect.

It is a central claim of Kant's account of our intellectual cognitive faculty that we have *a priori* concepts, the so-called categories, as for instance the concept of substance, and the concept of the relation of cause and effect. Despite Kant's protestations that "the Critique admits in no way innate or inborn representations" (ÜE, AA VIII, 221), I think it is fair to classify the categories as a kind of innate concepts after all. As becomes clear by how Kant continues the passage in which the cited declaration occurs, what he means to deny is that, at the moment of our birth, the categories lie ready-made in our mind. On his alternative view, the categories are acquired, albeit not through experience but 'originally', namely, through acts of our intellect that are grounded in our mind's own internal features, features that, Kant admits, can rightly be characterized as innate.<sup>40</sup> This Kantian account of the original acquisition of the categories quite closely matches Leibniz's account of the genesis of our innate concepts, since Leibniz also thinks that we must acquire them, despite their innateness.<sup>41</sup>

The categories also serve as part of the basis for our *a priori* knowledge of necessary truths, on Kant's view. But, in contrast to the necessary truths *a priori* known by God, the necessary truths *a priori* known by us on the basis of the categories are restricted to appearances and do not extend to things in themselves, and the way in which the categories allow us to demonstrate these truths differs significantly from how our innate concepts of species serve as the basis for our *a priori* knowledge of necessary truths, on Leibniz's view. These differences reflect, among other things, Kant's classification of the relevant truths as synthetic judgments, and, hence, as requiring an extra principle, and other kinds of representations (namely, *a priori* intuitions), for their proof in addition to the categories and the principle of contradiction, in contrast with Leibniz's classification of the relevant truths as (what Kant calls) analytic judgments, judgements that can be demonstrated on the basis of the

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<sup>39</sup> See Log, AA IX, 9: "An intuition is a singular representation [...], a concept is a general or reflected representation." Also see A 320/B 376–377.

<sup>40</sup> See ÜE, AA VIII, 221–222.

<sup>41</sup> See NE, VI.6, 85.

involved concepts and the principle of contradiction alone.<sup>42</sup> This is not the place to further examine these kinds of differences between Kant's and Leibniz's views on our *a priori* knowledge. But I would like to draw attention to one central element of Kant's account of our *a priori* knowledge of synthetic judgments in order to indicate, however briefly, one way in which our intellect, despite all of its limitations, is also God-like, on Kant's view. This central element is that the categories, notwithstanding their *a priori* nature, are objectively valid, i.e., relate, or apply, to actually existing objects. The question of how it is possible for *a priori* concepts to relate to actually existing objects goes to the very core of Kant's famous question of how *a priori* synthetic judgments are possible.<sup>43</sup> In his famous 1772 letter to Herz, in which he highlights the importance of the question of the "ground on which the relation of that which in us is called representation to the object rests," Kant describes the following two general options for how the relation of a representation R of a cognizer to an object O could be established. On the 'passive' option, R is caused in the cognizer by O; on the 'active' option, O is created by the cognizer according to R. The passive option is how our empirical concepts relate to objects; the active option is how God's *a priori* representations relate to objects. On the assumptions that these options are exhaustive, and that natural objects (as opposed to artifacts) are created by God alone, it seems utterly mysterious how we could possibly have *a priori* concepts that relate to actually existing natural objects.<sup>44</sup> Kant's solution for the mystery, which he unveiled almost ten years later in the *Critique*, is his transcendental idealism. Roughly put, on Kant's critical view, our *a priori* concepts are involved in something like the 'creation' of natural objects after all, except that those objects are no longer conceived of as things in themselves or mind-independent objects, but as appearances, i.e., objects that are fully mind-dependent in the sense of depending, with respect to their existence and properties, on the experience of human minds.<sup>45</sup> In Kant's words, the solution is to let go of the previous assumption "that all our cognition has to conform to the objects," under which "all attempts to make out something about them *a priori* through concepts turned out to be a failure," and

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<sup>42</sup> See A 154–158/B 193–197.

<sup>43</sup> As I read Kant, for a judgment to be synthetic means, not only that the predicate concept is not contained in the subject concept, but also that there is an actual object that falls under the subject concept.

<sup>44</sup> See Letter to Herz, February 12, 1772, AA X, 130.

<sup>45</sup> For more details, see Jauernig forthcoming b.

assume instead “that the objects must conform to our cognition, which coheres much better with the desired possibility of a cognition of them *a priori*” (B xvi). On this new transcendental idealist account of the relation of our *a priori* concepts to actually existing objects, we employ our *a priori* concepts in the constitution of empirical objects in a way similar to how God employs His *a priori* representations in the creation of things in themselves. To be sure, there are also several important differences between God’s creating and our constituting. These differences include that the objects constituted by us are ontologically less fundamental than the objects created by God, and that our constituting, in contrast to God’s creating, is not a completely active affair and, thus, not a genuine creation *ex nihilo*, as we will see in section 8.<sup>46</sup> Still, that we have *a priori* concepts that are involved in the constitution of actually existing objects, on account of which they are objectively valid, is one respect in which our intellectual faculty is God-like, on Kant’s account.<sup>47</sup>

## 7. Finite minds and sensible representations in Kant

One of the features that Kant tends to highlight when characterizing the nature of our sensible representations – or intuitions, as he calls them – is that, in contrast to concepts, they are *singular*.<sup>48</sup> In the literature, the singularity of intuitions is commonly cashed out as their reference to exactly one individual. But this cannot be all that Kant means by it. There are also some concepts that refer to exactly one individual, e.g., ‘the tallest male penguin alive’. On my alternative reading, for a representation to be singular means, not only that it refers to exactly one individual, but also that it represents an individual in the now familiar sense of expressing its haecceity, and capturing it in its full individual glory. As we have just learned, due to the discursive nature of our understanding, none of our concepts are singular in this sense; they

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<sup>46</sup> The former is part of the reason why our knowledge of synthetic necessary truths is restricted to appearances and does not extend to things in themselves, and the latter is part of the reason why this knowledge is not only based on our *a priori* concepts but also on our *a priori* intuitions.

<sup>47</sup> Given that God alone creates things in themselves, does that mean that none of our *a priori* concepts relate to things in themselves? Good question; as I see it, the (somewhat complicated) answer can be summarized as ‘not quite’. See Jauernig forthcoming c.

<sup>48</sup> See note 39.

represent only classes of things, or limited aspects of individuals.<sup>49</sup> This even holds for concepts that refer to exactly one individual, such as the concept ‘the tallest male penguin alive’. All that this concept tells us about the relevant individual is that he is a penguin, male, alive, and taller than every other male penguin alive, which falls far short of expressing his haecceity. Given the essential generality of concepts, if our sensible representations are indeed capable of representing individuals, as Kant claims, it follows that they cannot be identified with confused concepts, as the Wolffians, and maybe also Leibniz, propose; rather they must be classified as representations of an entirely different kind, representations that originate in a self-standing cognitive faculty that is distinct from our understanding.

“To regard sensibility [to consist] in the indistinctness of representation, but intellectuality in distinctness and, thus, to posit a merely formal (logical) difference of consciousness instead of a real (psychological) [difference], which concerns not only the form but also the content of thinking, was a big mistake of the Leibniz-Wolffian school [...].” (Anth, AA VII, 140–41 note)

“[...] a kind of enchanted world, to the assumption of which the famous man [Leibniz] could only have been misled by regarding sensible representations (as appearances) not, as it should be, as a kind of representation that is completely distinct from all concepts, namely, as intuition, but as a cognition through concepts, albeit a confused cognition, which has its seat in the understanding, not sensibility.” (FM, AA XX, 285)<sup>50</sup>

As already noted, Kant concurs with Leibniz that ‘individuality involves infinity’. Given that he conceives of our intuitions as representations of individuals, it is not surprising that he also shares the view with Leibniz that our sensible representations contain infinitely many elements. Just as the essential generality of our concepts is grounded in their finite complexity, the singularity of our intuitions is grounded in their infinite complexity. The infinite complexity of our intuitions, compared to the finite complexity of our concepts, thus provides us with an excellent criterion to distinguish between these two kinds of representations. Kant relies on this

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<sup>49</sup> Also see Log, AA IX, 99: “Since only singular things or individuals are completely determinate, there can be completely determinate cognitions only in form of intuitions, but not in form of concepts; in the case of the latter the logical determination can never be regarded as completed.” Also see A 655–656/B 683–684.

<sup>50</sup> Also see FM, AA XX, 278; A 44/B 62; ÜE, AA VIII, 219–220.

criterion in his so-called fourth space argument in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* of the *Critique* where he shows that, because our original representation of space is infinitely complex, it cannot be a concept but must be an intuition.

“Now it is true that one must conceive of every concept as a representation that is contained in an infinite multitude of different possible representations (as their common mark), and thus contains them under itself; but no concept as such can be conceived in such a way as if it contained an infinite multitude of representations in it. Still space is conceived in this way (for all parts of space in infinitum are simultaneous). Therefore, the original representation of space is an intuition *a priori* and not a concept.” (B 39–40)

The ability of human minds to entertain infinitely complex intuitions is another respect in which they are similar to God, on Kant’s view. It should be noted, however, that this ability is less God-like than the corresponding ability of monads, on Leibniz’s view, for reasons that will become clear in due course.

That Kant refers to our sensible representations as ‘intuitions’ is no accident. Although there are some differences between our intuitions and God’s intuitive representations, in Kant’s use the term ‘intuition’ as applied to our sensible representations still retains a crucial part of the Leibnizian meaning, namely, that the elements of the representations thus characterized are apprehended *at once*.<sup>51</sup> In contrast to our understanding, our sensibility is not discursive but intuitive in that we apprehend the elements of our sensible representations, not in piecemeal fashion by running through them one-by-one, but simultaneously.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, whereas all our concepts are synthesized by putting together prior parts, our intuitions are such that the whole is prior to the parts. Kant relies on this distinguishing feature between concepts and intuitions in his third space argument in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* where he demonstrates that our original representation of space is an intuition, and not a concept, by showing that this representation is prior to all our representations of determinate finite spaces,

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<sup>51</sup> Of course, Kant is primarily writing in German, and the German word for intuition is ‘*Anschauung*’, which does not wear its connection to Leibniz’s ‘*cognitio intuitiva*’ on its sleeve. But Kant also uses the Latin ‘*intuitus*’; ‘*Anschauung*’ is simply Kant’s German translation of this Latin term.

<sup>52</sup> Obviously, this is not to deny that different sensible representations essentially follow upon one another in time in our conscious apprehension of them in inner sense, on which more below.



spaces that are imagined as cut-out parts of space.<sup>53</sup> It is this intuitive, grasped-at-once character of our sensible representations that first makes it possible for us to entertain them, despite their infinite complexity. Just as the finite complexity of our concepts, which underwrites their essential generality, is grounded in the discursive nature of our intellect, the infinite complexity of our intuitions, which underwrites their singularity, is grounded in the intuitive nature of our sensibility thus understood.

Since Kant acknowledges that the human mind is finite, the question arises how he can square this finitude with the claim that, in form of our intuitions, we can entertain infinitely complex representations. Kant's answer, which is rarely (if ever) appreciated in the literature, again, substantially overlaps with Leibniz's answer to this question. We will take a look at the first, Leibnizian part of Kant's answer now, and come back to the second, Kant-specific part in the next section. The first part of Kant's response to our question is that, although our intuitions are infinitely complex, our finitude makes it impossible for us to individually apprehend each one of their infinitely many elements with consciousness. That is, Kant agrees with Leibniz that our intuitions are essentially *confused*, at least in part.

“No microscope has yet discovered Newton's little particles out of which the color particles of bodies are composed, but the understanding recognizes (or supposes) not only their existence, but also that they are actually represented in our empirical intuition, albeit without consciousness.” (ÜE, AA VIII, 205)

“According to the Critique, everything in an appearance is itself again appearance, as far as the understanding might divide it into its parts and prove the actuality of the parts, of whose clear perception the senses are no longer capable.” (ÜE, AA VIII, 210)<sup>54</sup>

More precisely, on my reading, Kantian empirical intuitions, or perceptions, are best understood along the lines of the previously sketched two-component model of the perceptual states of Leibnizian monads. Without going into the somewhat messy details, the basic component of our empirical intuitions is unconscious, consists of infinitely many 'little' intuitions, and represents the same content as the basic components of the empirical intuitions

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<sup>53</sup> See A 25/B 39, A 31–32/B 47–48.

<sup>54</sup> Also see Log, AA IX, 34.

of all other human minds who are affected by the same things in themselves. In the context of our present investigation, I will not be able to discuss what exactly this content is supposed to be, since this would lead us deep into Kant's theory of experience and the nature of appearances. But in the interest of full disclosure, I will simply state that, staying true to the Leibnizian spirit of my reading of Kant's account of intuition, I take the basic components of our empirical intuitions to be equivalent to a representation of the entire phenomenal world, including all of the individuals existing in it.<sup>55</sup> The emergent component of our empirical intuitions may or may not contain conscious parts, supervenes on the basic component through the con-fusion or synthesis of some of the little intuitions, consists of finitely many, partly confused emergent intuitions, differs from one human subject to the next, and partially represents part of the phenomenal world with various subjective distortions and from a particular point of view. Note that the essentially confused nature of our intuitions marks the main difference in meaning between the term 'intuition' as used by Kant to characterize our sensible representations, on the one hand, and Leibniz's meaning of 'intuitive', which corresponds to the meaning of 'intuitive' as used by Kant to characterize God's representations, on the other hand. For Leibniz, an intuitive representation is, by definition, a distinct representation. Similarly, as noted, on Kant's view, God apprehends the elements of all His representations not only at once but individually with consciousness. In contrast and because of our finitude, our intuitions cannot possibly be fully distinct, although they can be more or less confused, and hence more or less distinct.

Like Leibniz, Kant also holds that all our perceptions, and our mental states in inner sense more generally, follow upon one another in time, and that this constitutes another expression of our finitude. But Kant is more explicit than Leibniz that this aspect of our temporality is tied to our sensible faculty. According to Kant, both our understanding and our sensibility have

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<sup>55</sup> The following passage is from Kant's pre-critical period, but I suspect that it is still reflective of his view in the critical period as well. "There is something great and, as it seems to me, very correct in the thought of Mr. *Leibniz* that the soul comprises the whole universe with its power of representation, although only an infinitely small part of these representation is clear." (NG, AA II, 199) The description of the representational content of the basic components of our perceptual states in the main text glosses over several complications that I cannot discuss here for lack of space. They have to do with the fact that appearances and the actual phenomenal world depend on experience, not just empirical intuitions. For discussion, see Jauernig forthcoming b and forthcoming c.

certain specific *a priori* forms that govern the way in which we represent objects. In the case of sensibility, these forms are space, the form of outer sense, and time, the form of inner sense.<sup>56</sup> That time is the form of inner sense not only has the consequence that all appearances, as objects that depend on our (outer) experience, are in time, but also, in the first instance, that all our perceptions and conscious mental states, as properties of our empirical self, which depends on our inner experience, are successive and follow upon one another one-by-one in a temporal series.<sup>57</sup> This successive arrangement of our representations in inner sense can be seen as the sensible pendant to the discursive nature of our intellect, marking us as all around essentially temporal beings. God, by contrast, is entirely a-temporal. He has only intuitive representations, and, since time is nothing but the form of our sensibility and God is not a sensible object, sports no temporal properties whatsoever.

That our sensible faculty has its own idiosyncratic *a priori* forms – idiosyncratic in the sense that these forms are *nothing but* forms of our sensibility – also has the important implication that our perceptions exclusively represent appearances but not things in themselves, not even confusedly. As anticipated, Kant often highlights this feature of his account of perception when criticizing the Leibniz-Wolffian account.

“He [Leibniz] did not regard the conditions of sensible intuition as original, which carry their own differences with them; for sensibility was for him merely a confused kind of representation, and no special source of representations; appearance was for him a representation of a *thing in itself*, although distinguished with respect to logical form from the cognition through the understanding [...].” (A 270–271/B 326–327)<sup>58</sup>

## 8. Finite minds and passivity in Kant

Against the background of Kant’s views about the self-standing character of our sensible faculty, it is natural to wonder whether more can be said about what exactly in the nature of our sensibility and our understanding accounts for their mutual irreducibility. Kant says more by

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<sup>56</sup> See A 22/B 37, A 26–28/B 42–44; A 32–36/B 49–53.

<sup>57</sup> See B 152–153; B 156.

<sup>58</sup> Also see A 43–44/B 60–62; FM, AA XX, 278; ÜE, AA VIII, 218.

identifying as the main difference in the nature of our two main cognitive faculties that our understanding is active or spontaneous, while sensibility is passive or receptive.

“Our cognition arises from two fundamental sources of the mind, the first of which is to receive representations (the receptivity of impressions), the second is the capacity to cognize an object through these representations (spontaneity of concepts). [...] Our nature brings it with itself that *intuition* can never be other than *sensible*, i.e., contains only the manner in which we are affected by objects. By contrast, the capacity to *think* an object of sensible intuition is the *understanding*.” (A 50–51/B 74–75)

That our mind includes not only an active but also a passive faculty is another crucial way in which the finitude of our mind manifests itself, on Kant’s account. God is purely active, and hence only has an intellect but no sensibility.<sup>59</sup> As discussed, Leibniz also emphasizes that monads, due to their finitude, have not only primitive active, but also primitive passive force, whereas God is pure activity. But the way in which Kant spells out the precise character and function of the passive component of our mind deviates in important respects from Leibniz’s account and reveals further noteworthy differences in their views about our representational capacities, as well as important differences in the flavor of their idealisms.

The most salient difference in this context is that our sensibility, on Kant’s account, is a genuinely passive capacity, while the passive force of monads, on Leibniz’s account, is not. As we saw, the passive force of monads, by introducing confusion in their perceptual states, associates each monad with a phenomenal body, through which it can act on other bodies, and allows us to define a sort of quasi-interaction between monads by appeal to their changes to more or less perfect states. But the passive force does not translate into a capacity to be genuinely acted upon, at least not by other finite beings. For Kant, our sensibility is a genuinely passive capacity; it can be affected, not only by God, but also by other finite creatures.<sup>60</sup> More precisely, the nature of our sensibility is such that it can produce sensations and intuitions only in response to being affected by things in themselves.

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<sup>59</sup> See V-Th/Baumbach (1783/84), AA XXVIII, 1267: “God’s cognition is not sensible; for that contravenes the concept of the *ens originarium*.”

<sup>60</sup> How do we know that God is not the only thing in itself that affects us? Good question; maybe we cannot know it, but Kant certainly seems to be committed to this claim.

“After asking on p. 275 ‘Who (what) gives sensibility its material, i.e., the sensations?’ he [Eberhard] believes himself to have spoken against the Critique in saying on p. 276: ‘We can choose what we want—we end up with things in themselves.’ Now, that is exactly the constant assertion of the Critique; only that it posits this ground of the matter of sensible representation not again itself in things, as objects of the senses, but in something supersensible, which is the underlying ground of the former and of which we can have no cognition.” (ÜE, AA VIII, 215)<sup>61</sup>

While Kant agrees with Leibniz that the involvement of a passive faculty in the generation of our sensible representations is what distinguishes them from our intellectual representations, due to his different conception of the nature of this faculty, he also argues for a different account of what distinguishes these two kinds of representations. Although all our intuitions are essentially confused, on Kant’s view, he insists that being confused is not what it means for them to be sensible. (There can be confused concepts as well.) Rather, our intuitions are sensible precisely in that they are due to genuine affections, and thus the products of a truly passive cognitive faculty. Similarly, even though our concepts are the only representations that can be fully distinct, being fully distinct is not what it means for them to be intellectual. (Again, there can be confused concepts as well.) Rather, our concepts are intellectual in that they are the products of an active or spontaneous cognitive faculty, which is capable of operating without having to rely on any input from the ‘outside’.<sup>62</sup>

“Sensible cognitions are not sensible because they are confused, but because they arise in the mind insofar it is affected by objects. Intellectual representations, on the other hand, are not intellectual because they are distinct, but because they originate in ourselves. For distinctness or obscurity are merely forms, which pertain to both sensible and intellectual representations. But they [the representations] are sensible and intellectual according to their origin; may they be distinct or confused.” (V-Met-L<sub>1</sub>/Pölitiz [mid 1770s], AA XXVIII, 229–230)<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> See A 494/B 522.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Outside’ in the sense of “something that, as thing in itself, exists as distinguished from us” (A 373).

<sup>63</sup> Also see Log, AA IX, 35–36. Pure intuitions also originate in ourselves, but they still depend on affections, namely, self-affections; see B 67–68.

In contrast to our sensible intuitions, God's intuitive representations are not due any kind of affections but are produced spontaneously without any external input.

"The divine understanding is called the highest and pure understanding that cognizes things in general as they are in themselves. It is not sensibly conditioned. It is not receptivity, but absolute spontaneity. It is an original, not derivative intellect." (R6041 [1780–1789], AA XVIII, 431)

This is why Kant also often calls God's representations 'intellectual intuitions'. These intuitions are intellectual, not in that they are fully distinct – although they are fully distinct – but in that they are spontaneously generated.

The foregoing considerations also put us in the position to return to the question how Kant can square our finitude with the claim that, in form of our intuitions, we can entertain infinitely complex representations. As we saw in the previous section, the first, Leibnizian part of his answer is that our intuitions are essentially confused. Now we can add that our intuitions are also not generated from our own depth; rather, they are produced by our sensibility in response to being affected by things in themselves. Our intuitions are not made by us; they are, in large part, given to us. As one might say, due to our finitude, we cannot entertain infinitely complex representations, not even confusedly, unless we get external assistance. This represents an important difference between Kant's and Leibniz's account, and reflects not only their different conceptions of the passive component of our mind, but also their different views about how the active and passive components are involved in the production of our representations. Leibniz explicitly highlights at many places that all of the mental states of a monad, including its perceptual states, are generated out of its own depth, by its own law-of-the-series.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, as we have seen, the truly creative part in the generation of the perceptual states of a monad is played by the monad's active force. The active force, either by itself (on the confusion-reading) or modified by the monad's passive force (on the *sui-generis*-reading), produces infinitely many little representations that make up the basic component of the monad's perceptual state, from which the emergent component arises due to the confusion of some of the little representations on account of the passive force. So, even if the

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<sup>64</sup> See notes 18 and 35.

passive force were to amount to a genuinely passive capacity, Leibnizian monads would still differ significantly from Kantian human minds in being capable of spontaneously generating infinitely complex representations. On Kant's view, the spontaneous generation of an infinitely complex representation is possible only for an infinite intellect; any infinitely complex representation of ours must be given to us. This is why I said above that, even though the possession of infinitely complex representations is something that both Leibnizian monads and Kantian human minds have in common with God, once the details of Kant's and Leibniz's account are spelled out, it becomes clear that Leibnizian monads are more God-like in this respect than Kantian human minds.

The genuinely passive nature of our sensibility is closely connected to another fundamental feature of our mind that is also a direct expression of our finitude, namely, that our mind is not original and hence not genuinely creative. As noted before, even though the creation of things in themselves is beyond us and falls under God's power alone, according to Kant's transcendental idealism, we are involved in the constitution of appearances (tables, rocks, trees...) in that they depend, with respect to their existence and all their properties, on our experience. But although this constitution of appearances shares several aspects with God's creation of things in themselves, the former does not amount to genuine creation, or creation *ex nihilo*, precisely because we do not generate all of the representations that feed into this constitution on our own. Some of the representations that are involved in the constitution process are, in fact, contributed by us. This includes the aforementioned categories, which are spontaneously generated by our active faculty, the understanding. It also includes our *a priori* intuitions of space and time, which, although not spontaneously produced by the understanding, are generated on the basis of 'inborn' features of our mind, namely, on the basis of the forms of sensibility, which, according to Kant's analysis, "lie ready in the mind *a priori*" (A 20/B 34). But everything else, all of the material that is to be ordered according to the forms of the understanding and the forms of sensibility, is contributed from the 'outside'. In Kant's technical terminology, while the 'form' of appearances is supplied by our own mind, their 'matter' must be given to us, in form of sensations that are the results of affections of our

sensibility by things in themselves.<sup>65</sup> This kind of unoriginality, and corresponding partial passivity, is distinctive of finite minds.

“Had we intellectual intuitions our understanding would have to be creative and bring about the things themselves. Since that is not the case, the things must bring about the representations in us, and do so through sensible intuition. The understanding thus adds nothing to experience but the form. In cognition sensibility brings the sensation.” (V-Met/Mrongovius [1782/83], AA XXIX, 880)<sup>66</sup>

In contrast to our mind, an infinite mind is original in that it can spontaneously generate infinitely complex representations whose form and matter are supplied by itself, a process that – for somewhat complicated reasons that go beyond the scope of this paper<sup>67</sup> – goes hand in hand, not only with the *a priori* cognition of things in themselves, but also with their creation.<sup>68</sup>

The thesis that, due to its essential finitude, the human mind lacks originality, accordingly includes a truly passive cognitive faculty, and is thus not capable of genuine creation even with respect to appearances, constitutes one of the most fundamental, defining commitments of Kant’s critical philosophy. Although from a late text, the following passage nicely captures this fundamental commitment, a commitment from which I do not see Kant retreating until the very end.

“Here we have to recall that we have before us the *finite*, not the infinite spirit. The finite spirit is one that does not get to work other than through passivity, that only reaches the absolute through limits; it acts and builds only insofar as it receives material.” (OP, AA XXI, 76)<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See R314, AA XV, 124: “The generation of the representations is either passive or active. [...] The active [generation] is never [a generation] of matter but of form.” Also see R4135, AA XVII, 429: “The phenomenon of a thing is a product of our sensibility. God is the creator of things in themselves.” Also see A 19–20/B 33–34.

<sup>66</sup> See “Philosophical Encyclopedia Lecture,” AA XXIX, 39: “Our intuitions are always sensible and not intellectual since we are not the creators of things.”

<sup>67</sup> These reasons have to do with the immediacy of all intuitions, which implies that their object is actually present. For further discussion, see Jauernig forthcoming c.

<sup>68</sup> Also see B 72.

<sup>69</sup> Also see OP, AA XXI, 90: “Transcendental Philosophy is not a science of objects that are *a priori* given to the subject by reason. For this would be self-creation of the imagination. Rather, it is a science of forms, under which objects had to appear if they were given.”



The indicated thesis not only has important ramifications for Kant's account of our sensible representational capacity, it also defines the particular flavor of his idealism by underwriting the crucial claim that things in themselves affect us and thereby ground appearances, thus allowing us to justify the assumption of their existence.

“Indeed, if we regard the objects of the senses as mere appearances, as is proper, we admit through this at the same time that a thing itself is their ground, although we do not know the same as it is in itself but merely its appearance, i.e., the way in which our senses are affected by this unknown something. Thus, the understanding, precisely by assuming appearances, admits the existence of things in themselves [...].” (Prol, AA IV, 314–315)<sup>70</sup>

The claim that things in themselves ground appearances by affecting our sensibility marks an important difference between Kant's transcendental idealism and Leibniz's idealism. This difference is a direct reflection of the fact that the kind of mind on which the phenomenal world depends is less similar to God's mind on Kant's view than it is on Leibniz's view.

## **9. Taking stock: finite minds and their representations in Kant**

The main results of our investigation in the previous three sections can be summarized as follows: For Kant, with respect to our representational capacities, the finitude of our mind manifests itself in that, (1), our understanding is discursive in the sense of being such that it grasps its concepts by 'running through' their marks in piecemeal fashion, which has the consequence that, (2), our concepts, be they distinct or confused, are only finitely complex, which, in turn, implies that, (3) our concepts, be they distinct or confused, are essentially general; furthermore, (4), our intuitions are essentially confused, and, (5), our mind is unoriginal, and hence includes, not only an active, but also a genuinely passive cognitive faculty, sensibility, which is equipped with its own *a priori* forms, space and time, which, in turn, has the consequence that, (6), all our perceptions and conscious mental states are successive and follow upon one another in time, (7), our perceptions represent appearances, not things in themselves, not even confusedly, and, (8), we are not genuinely creative, not even with respect

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<sup>70</sup> Also see GMS, AA IV, 451.

to appearances. Our mind's representational capacities are God-like in that, (9), we have *a priori* concepts, the categories, that are involved in the constitution of appearances, similar to how God's *a priori* representations are involved in the creation of things in themselves, (10), based on the categories and our *a priori* intuitions of space and time, we can *a priori* know some necessary synthetic truths, although these truths are only about appearances while the truths *a priori* known to God are about things in themselves, and, (11), our empirical intuitions are infinitely complex, if also confused, and completely represent, *via* their basic components, the entire phenomenal world in rich detail, including all of the individuals existing in it. But the representational capabilities of God's infinite mind are still more perfect than ours in that, (i), He grasps all of His representations, including the infinitely complex ones, distinctly and even intuitively, (ii), His mind does not include any passive faculty, and, consequently, (iii), He intellectually intuits things in themselves, i.e., He completely represents them in terms of infinitely complex concepts whose complete analysis He consciously grasps at once, a process that is invariably bound up with their creation *ex nihilo*.

A comparison between this summary of Kant's views about the representational capacities of the human mind with the summary of Leibniz's views from section 5 confirms that there is a lot of common ground between them, in particular with respect to the compositional structure of our sensible representations and their ability to represent individuals, but that they also differ in some notable respects, most prominently with respect to the nature of the passive component of our mind and its role in perception. Most of the similarities can be traced to the fact that they both conceive of the human mind as a limited version of God's mind, and that they are working with very similar conceptions of what the divine mind is like. This is one sense in which Leibniz and Kant could be classified as belonging to the same rationalist tradition. Most of the differences can be traced to the fact that Kant takes the finitude of our mind more seriously than Leibniz, and, thus, sees our mind as more limited compared to God's mind. This is one sense in which Leibniz could be seen as more rationalist than Kant.

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