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Pure Synthesis and the Principle of the Synthetic Unity of Apperception

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Abstract: Kant calls the Principle of the Synthetic Unity of Apperception (PSUA) the “highest point” to which we “*must* affix all use of the understanding, even the whole of logic and, after it, transcendental philosophy.” In this article, I offer an original interpretation of this “supreme principle.” My argument is twofold. First, I argue that the common identification of this principle with the “I think” or even the *form* of the I think misses the basis on which this principle is capable of grounding Kant’s transcendental deduction. It must be understood as a *purely* formal, transcendental principle. Second, I argue that this highest principle must be understood (in part) as a purely formal principle of *pure synthesis* in order for Kant’s account of the mind to lay valid claim to such spontaneity (the freedom of theoretical cognition operative through synthesis) without invoking the very dogmatic idealism that he critiques. The reduction of this principle to the real I think, or even to the Transcendental Unity of Apperception (TUA), undermines the basic distinction on which Kant’s deduction depends. I pay particular attention to important, recent arguments from Longuenesse (2017) on the TUA, Williams (2017) on the Original Unity of Apperception, Allison (2004) and Pollok (2017) on the status of *a priori* principles, and McLear (2015) on the claim that unity necessarily presupposes synthesis.

Keywords: Kant, Synthetic Unity of Apperception, Pure Synthesis, *a priori* Principle, Deduction, Critique of Pure Reason

In an important footnote to the Transcendental Deduction, Kant writes,¹ “The synthetic unity of apperception is the highest point to which one must affix all

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use of the understanding [*allen Verstandesgebrauch*], even the whole of logic and, after it, transcendental philosophy” (KrV, B 134n).² The role of this principle is neither isolated nor cursory. Kant’s chief account of this principle comes in § 17, for which he provides the following thesis-heading: “The principle [*Grundsatz*] of synthetic unity of apperception is the supreme principle [*oberstes Princip*] of all use of the understanding [*allen Verstandesgebrauchs*].” I argue that this principle [*Grundsatz*] *must* be understood as (in part) a formal principle of pure synthesis.

This thesis makes two primary contributions to current literature on Kant’s first *Critique*. First, it distinguishes this supreme *Grundsatz* from the proposition [*Satz*] of the “I think” and any real, formal principle that gives rise to the I think, such as the transcendental unity of apperception. I distinguish between (1) a *real formal* principle of the I think corresponding to any *act* [*ein Actus*] of the mind or the conditions for such an act of the mind from (2) a *pure formal* principle, which does not correspond to any real act (pure or empirical) nor serve as a condition thereof. Instead, I argue that the pure formal principle has the sole distinguishing feature of occupying the status of a pure transcendental ground for a transcendental proof (the deduction) of the real formal principle of the understanding and the possibility of experience. I argue that this “highest” principle is a purely formal principle of transcendental logic and cannot be reduced to the real transcendental unity of apperception as an “act” of spontaneity. The Principle of the Synthetic Unity of Apperception (PSUA) must, as the highest principle, be purely formal, apart from any act of the mind (whether formal and so pure or sensible). This distinction is necessary for the former to serve as the transcendental ground (in a deduction) of the latter as the source of the validity of the Transcendental Unity of Apperception (TUA), where the TUA is the actual form and formal condition of the I think. Second, this purely formal principle (PSUA) of transcendental logic is *not* characterizable merely as a principle of unity or mere “lawfulness,” as it is typically described. Instead, it is a principle of formal, transcendental logic that is the highest form of pure synthesis. As such a principle, it makes possible the successful deduction of the forms of judgment represented in the I think. This recognition of the form of pure synthesis at this “highest” level of Transcendental Logic is necessary for the successful establishment of the real spontaneity of the mind. Without it, the lawful form of the I think can be grounded, but only *qua* mechanistic relation, not spontaneity. However, “spontaneity is the reason I call myself an intelligence,” and is the fundamental aim of the deduction

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² All references are to Immanuel Kant’s *Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Translations are Guyer’s, Longuenesse’s, and my own.

(“Doch macht diese Spontaneität, daß ich mich Intelligenz nenne.” KrV, B 158n). Of course, the immediate purpose of the deduction is to establish the objective validity of the categories, but this is fundamentally in order to ground the lawfulness by which the spontaneity of the understanding “prescribes laws *a priori* to appearances” (“Kategorien sind Begriffe, welche den Erscheinungen [...] Gesetze *a priori* vorschreiben [...]”, KrV, B 163). The aim of the deduction is to establish the lawfulness of the spontaneity of the mind for cognition of “appearances of nature” (“Erscheinungen der Natur”, KrV, B 165). Kant does not divorce the categories from spontaneity as is common in accounts of Kant. The I think, self-consciousness, and the use of reason depend on a fundamentally productive power of synthesis, spontaneity. For such spontaneity of the mind in judgment to be grounded as the *Critique* seeks to prove requires that the *form* of spontaneity itself be grounded by the highest principle. And this requirement, I argue, is evident in Kant’s deduction.

Preamble and Overview

Kant’s transcendental deduction in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, unlike the metaphysical deduction, has the task of establishing the universal *validity* of synthetic judgments *a priori* through appeal to those intelligible conditions of the possibility of experience: the categories.³ The success of this deduction of the categories and thereby the validity of determining judgments of the understanding depends on (is “affixed to”) a single principle: the *Synthetic Unity of Apperception* (§ 17).

Understandably, given its status in the first *Critique*, this principle has received substantial attention. Such attention notwithstanding, it remains perplexing. What interests me at present is the matter of pure synthesis and its relation to this “highest” principle. Although often identified as a “principle of unity,” I will argue that PSUA is best understood and characterized, in part, as a purely formal (non-real) transcendental principle of pure synthesis. It is through this conception of the PSUA as a principle of pure, formal synthesis (not merely formal unity)

³ As Kant states, “The objective validity of the categories as *a priori* concepts rests, therefore, on the fact that, so far as the form of thought is concerned, through them alone does experience become possible. They relate of necessity and *a priori* to objects of experience, for the reason that only by means of them can any object of experience be thought” (“[F]olglich wird die objective Gültigkeit der Kategorien als Begriffe *a priori* darauf beruhen, daß durch sie allein Erfahrung (der Form des Denkens nach) möglich sei. Denn alsdann beziehen sie sich nothwendiger Weise und *a priori* auf Gegenstände der Erfahrung, weil nur vermittelst ihrer überhaupt irgend ein Gegenstand der Erfahrung gedacht werden kann.”) (translation by Longuenesse, KrV, A 93/B 126).

that Kant is able to retain a non-dogmatic justification of the spontaneity of the mind, which is a species of theoretical freedom.⁴ If Kant takes spontaneity to be the freedom of the mind whereby a discursive understanding can form concepts for itself – can combine, synthesize, and produce intuitions and representations – then spontaneity is also, to that degree, the freedom of reason,⁵ within theoretical cognition, to be its own causal power. In Kant’s words, this freedom of theoretical reason is “an absolute causal spontaneity beginning from itself [...] hence transcendental freedom” (“Diesemnach muß eine Causalität angenommen werden, durch welche etwas geschieht, ohne daß die Ursache davon noch weiter durch eine andere vorhergehende Ursache nach nothwendigen Gesetzen bestimmt sei, d. i. eine absolute Spontaneität der Ursachen, eine Reihe von Erscheinungen, die nach Naturgesetzen läuft, von selbst anzufangen, mithin transscendentale Freiheit, ohne welche selbst im Laufe der Natur die Reihenfolge der Erscheinungen auf der Seite der Ursachen niemals vollständig ist.” KrV, A 446/B 474); and, thereby, “spontaneity is the reason I call myself an intelligence” (“Doch macht diese Spontaneität, daß ich mich Intelligenz nenne.” KrV, B 158n).⁶ Computing (and I am not here talking about General or Super AI, which are – at least hypothetical – forms of spontaneity, but rather Local/Specific AI or traditional computing) is an example of an application of the categories in objectively valid way. Yet, computing cannot count as the spontaneity of an intelligence or the unity of the “I think.” The OSUA is more than just a lawful unity of the categories; it is a spontaneity. It is the lawful form of spontaneity (including the categories) that is ultimately in view. So, the highest principle to which we must affix all use of the

4 I use “theoretical freedom” to refer to the specific kind of transcendental freedom necessarily presupposed for a domain of theoretical cognition (i. e., *spontaneity*) as opposed to the freedom of the mind presupposed for practical reason (i. e., *autonomy*) and the freedom presupposed for the reflecting power of judgment in aesthetic and teleological judgments (i. e., *heautonomy*). For more on these three kinds of freedom corresponding to the three *Critiques*, see Pollok (2017), 63–67 on spontaneity; 38, 265 on autonomy; and 279–284 on heautonomy.

5 I use Kant’s mature conception of reason as identified in the second introduction to the third *Critique* whereby reason in general proceeds through determining judgments of the understanding, indeterminate acts of the reflecting power of judgment, transcendental reflection, and the domain of pure practical reason. Reason in general, and my sole use of the term “reason” in this paper, encompass each of the pure critical uses (established by the three *Critiques*) of the human power for thought. It is a referent to discursive reason as a whole. As such, my use of “reason” is not a reference to Kant’s restricted conception of reason originally displayed in the second part of the first *Critique*. For more on “reason in general” see Pollok (2017), 204–206.

6 There are important distinctions internal to forms of spontaneity, autonomy, and heautonomy as well as externally by which they are identifiable as distinct forms of the freedom of “reason in general.” I have spoken to these distinctions elsewhere, see also the above citations, but there is not space to do so here.

understanding is not just a principle grounding the deduction of the categories, but equally the possibility of a spontaneity of the mind, i. e., “the reason I call myself an intelligence.”

The success of Kant’s Transcendental Idealism depends on this understanding of the PSUA. I also suggest that this reading makes sense of otherwise problematic passages, like Kant’s conclusion that “pure synthesis, generally represented, yields the pure concept of the understanding” (“Die reine Synthesis, allgemein vorgestellt, giebt nun den reinen Verstandesbegriff.” KrV, A 78/B 104). Given the prominence of this principle in the architectonic of the first *Critique* (KrV), our account of it necessarily informs our reading of the KrV as a whole. The idea that the synthetic unity of apperception is a principle of pure synthesis will be met with suspicion. One likely worry is that something like a principle of pure synthesis must be smuggling some troubling dogmatic-idealist doctrine of the kind Kant ascribes to Berkeley (see KrV, B 274) and which he explicitly rejects (see KrV, A 377). Against this, I will show that it is precisely this feature of the highest principle as a form of pure synthesis that protects Kant’s deduction from the otherwise proper charge of the very dogmatism of theoretical freedom, i. e., spontaneity, that he critiques.

Another worry might be that it improperly collapses the transcendental/empirical distinction by attributing *a priori* necessity to subjective consciousness in a fallacious move reminiscent of the “*sophisma figurae dictionis*” (KrV, A 402/B 411), which Kant identifies as the problem in the first paralogism.⁷ Such a collapse would indeed be concerning and is not what is in view. A final worry might be that what I call principle [*Grundsatz*] in reference to § 17 is really to be understood as a proposition [*Satz*]. I follow Kant’s clarification of *Grundsatz* in the title of § 17 as “Der Grundsatz [...] ist das oberste Prinzip alles Verstandesgebrauchs” and as “der höchste Punkt” (KrV, B 134). Of course, such a principle (*Grundsatz*, not proposition) can itself be used as a proposition (*Satz*). But then it serves not as the “höchste Punkt” grounding the deduction, but rather as a normative constraint for further reflection or judgment.⁸

7 Kant defines this as the fallacy “in which the major premise makes a merely transcendental use of the category, in regard to its condition, but in which the minor premise and the conclusion [...] make an empirical use of the same category.” (“in welchem der Obersatz von der Kategorie in Ansehung ihrer Bedingungen einen bloß transscendentalen Gebrauch, der Untersatz aber und der Schlußsatz in Ansehung der Seele, die unter diese Bedingung subsumirt worden, von eben der Kategorie einen empirischen Gebrauch macht.” KrV, A 402).

8 The concept of the *oberste Princip* and the *höchste Punkt* (of transcendental critique of human cognition) viewed as a concept can be viewed analytically (like any synthetic concept), in which case it can serve equally as a normative proposition for the unity of the real “I think” of self-consciousness. So, Kant says, “Dieser Grundsatz, der nothwendigen Einheit der Apperzeption, ist

A related worry might be that this “höchste Punkt” has a more restrictive function than the one I ascribe. However, my argument is precisely for the most restrictive conception of the PSUA whereby we can agree with Kant’s critical conclusion that “for human understanding it is unavoidably the first principle” (“für den menschlichen Verstand ist er doch unvermeidlich der erste Grundsatz”, KrV, B 139). The only way Kant’s transcendental deduction can ground the discursive understanding and the possibility of experience is if the highest principle is distinguished from anything real. It must not merely be a formal principle of unity but, importantly, a pure formal principle of synthesis in order to ground the further deduction, schematism, and finally the possibility of human experience.

In pursuit of an answer to the relationship between pure synthesis and the PSUA, I will begin, in section 1, by outlining the status and significance of the PSUA. Here, I will discuss Béatrice Longuenesse’s recent account of the “transcendental unity of apperception” and the “I Think” in order to identify the difference between what Kant calls the “höchste Punkt” of his deduction (PSUA) from the transcendental form of the I think.⁹ My goal will be to sketch what it means to have a pure formal synthetic, *a priori* principle that “makes possible” synthetic, *a priori* judgments, without itself existing as a formal feature or condition of the thinking subject. In section 2, moving toward my thesis that the PSUA is a principle of pure synthesis, I argue (contra Colin McLear) that, for Kant, all unity *necessarily* presupposes synthesis.¹⁰

In section 3.1 show (contra Jessica Williams modified-conceptualist account, 2018) that the common identification of the PSUA as a principle of unity undermines a crucial feature of pure reason that the PSUA was meant to ground: namely, the real, productive capacity or spontaneity of the mind, which is identifiable in part as the productive, threefold synthesis of the imagination in the understanding. In other words, the transcendental deduction only succeeds if the highest principle is characterized as a principle of *pure synthesis*, not *merely* a principle

nun zwar selbst identisch, mithin ein analytischer Satz.” (KrV, B 135). The sentence continues, “erklärt aber doch eine Synthesis des in einer Anschauung gegebenen Mannigfaltigen als notwendig” (“Now this principle of the necessary unity of apperception is, to be sure, itself identical, thus an analytical proposition, yet it declares as necessary a synthesis of the manifold given in an intuition, without which that thoroughgoing identity of self-consciousness could not be thought.” KrV, B 135).

⁹ See KrV, B 134.

¹⁰ This claim will require identifying what Kant means by unity, what he means by synthesis (particularly pure synthesis), and from these, why the synthetic presupposition inherent to any transcendental unity leads Kant to the striking conclusion that “pure synthesis, *generally represented*, yields the pure concepts of the understanding” (“Die reine Synthesis, allgemein vorgestellt, giebt nun den reinen Verstandesbegriff.” *My emphasis*, KrV, A 78/B 104).

of unity. If we do not recognize the PSUA to be a principle of pure synthesis (not merely a principle of unity), then the deduction's dependence on spontaneity becomes the very Dogmatic Idealism that critical philosophy needed to avoid and that Kant explicitly critiques. To be a valid feature of the transcendental deduction, however, necessitates that this power of synthesis be adequately "fixed" to the highest principle, which in turn means that the highest principle must be such that it can validate the claim to reason's productive power of synthesis in judgment. Getting this principle right is vital; and Kant got it right (at least, in this regard). Concluding in section 4, I gesture toward the implications of the PSUA for the real spontaneity of the mind, looking specifically at the creative capacity of the imagination for empirical and pure cognition.

1 The Principle of the Synthetic Unity of Apperception

What is the purpose of the Principle of the Synthetic Unity of Apperception and how does it differ from the "Transcendental Unity of Apperception" or the "I think," if it is distinguishable at all?

1.1 Béatrice Longuenesse and the Transcendental Unity of Apperception (TUA)

In her recent book, *I, Me, Mine*, Longuenesse writes that "in the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories, Kant argues that we have representations of objects only if we bind the contents of our representational states through one and the same mental act of combination (*Verbindung*) or 'unity of synthesis' (see KrV, B 130). Combination is 'an act of spontaneity of the power of representation'" [*Ein Actus der Spontaneität der Vorstellungskraft*] (Longuenesse, I, 103).¹¹ She continues, "The transcendental unity of apperception is the consciousness of that overall unity of our mental activity," and this unity is "higher than the category of unity" (Longuenesse, 103), since the category of unity like all categories presupposes this higher unity (see KrV, B 131). Longuenesse emphasizes an important distinction between the TUA and the "proposition 'I think.'" The proposition [*Satz*] "I think" is not an "expression of [the] act" of the "spontaneity of the

¹¹ See KrV, B 130.

Verstellungskraft” (Longuenesse, 104). Rather, the “I think is, itself, an *Actus der Spontaneität*” (Longuenesse, 104). Longuenesse defends this distinction in light of several passages that might seem to suggest that Kant views the two terms (TUA and “I think”) as interchangeable. Longuenesse concludes that

we should understand Kant to mean that *the unity of apperception* (as the unity of synthesis of sensory manifolds, and the systematic unity of the act of combination of concepts in judgments and inferences) “contains the form of every judgment.” By this he means that it occurs according to the logical functions of judgment that find expression in specific *forms* of judgment. It thus “accompanies all categories as their vehicle,” and makes possible all reflection of sensory manifolds under the categories. (Longuenesse, I, 106)

I think this is exactly right. But, if so, we face another important distinction. While the TUA contains “the form of every judgment” and is, thereby, a principle of the form and unity of actual judgments – i. e., is the “vehicle” for all categories – it is not thereby the “highest point” in a *proof* of that validity. The difference between the TUA and the Principle of the Synthetic Unity of Apperception consists solely in this: The TUA is the highest, transcendental form of the unity of judgments, and is thereby the highest *formal* feature of the I think. But now, to prove that this formal apparatus (including the TUA) is not merely a metaphysical assertion to detail some psychological reality, i. e., to make this a genuine, critically established, transcendental form, requires a deduction of that lawful form (validity) of the I think. The *I think* being the necessary representation that “must be able to accompany all my representations” (“Das: *Ich denke*, muß alle meine Vorstellungen begleiten können”, KrV, B 131). The difference between the PSUA and the TUA is that the former is the TUA taken in its purest form, i. e., its *pure formality*, to serve as the highest principle in the deduction of the form (TUA) that it picks out in actual judgments of the I think. So the PSUA is distinct from the TUA not in kind but in status (see KrV, B 136–137). It is a thin but important distinction for a transcendental proof of “the first principle” (KrV, B 139). The PSUA holds the status of a premise (taken through the metaphysical deduction from the form of judgments) in a transcendental proof. Apart from this starting point in a proof, the PSUA is indistinguishable from the TUA. Apart from this thin function of the PSUA in the proof, the TUA stands as the real highest formal principle of the I think.

To say that the TUA is a real, formal-unity of consciousness is to say that it is an *objective* corresponding (as the “one I think,” see KrV, B 140) to the “manifold of intuitions” (“das Mannigfaltige der Anschauung”, KrV, B 140). Likewise, the subjective corresponding to “determination of inner sense” is also a real formal unity, though of the empirical self “through which that manifold of intuition is empirically given for such a combination” (“Derjenige Verstand, durch dessen Selbstbewußtsein zugleich das Mannigfaltige der Anschauung gegeben

würde [...]”, KrV, B 139). Both of these unities are real formal unities of the I think as opposed to *pure formal*, logical (though still transcendental) unities (see KrV, B 140). Likewise, if we understand the objective, transcendental unity of apperception to be the logical form of all judgments as unified in one’s consciousness (see § 19, KrV, B 140–141), it too is real (though formal), since it conditions the possibility of an act of the mind as that which must be able to accompany all representations.¹²

By contrast, what I am calling *pure formal* transcendental unities can be either pure concepts of (i) general logic or of (ii) transcendental logic. I will argue that the PSUA is *purely* formal concept (unlike the TUA) of transcendental logic (i. e., not a concept of general logic), nor merely a formal concept of transcendental logic (where examples of the latter include the TUA, the concepts of unity, quantity, etc.). The distinguishing marker of “pure” in this context just picks out that difference between a formal transcendental concept corresponding to a real act of the mind (i. e., real), and that formal transcendental concept whose sole existence depends on, and is for the sake of, an apparatus of transcendental logic in a proof of the real. The latter is what I mean by pure formal.

Where the TUA corresponds to the real I think as the form of the latter, the PSUA is the form of the TUA taken as a pure principle for the sake of a pure transcendental proof. The PSUA has no existence except in the context of a proof of the lawful validity of the TUA, categories, forms of judgment, etc. By contrast the TUA does have a real correspondence to the I think, to real acts of spontaneity, without which the latter could not be thought. Unlike the TUA, the PSUA is not a condition of an act of the mind. Its sole function, as that highest principle of the transcendental deduction, is to be that principle by which the proof can establish that the form of the I think, *qua* TUA,¹³ is lawful – has synthetic *a priori* validity. This validity must be proven so as to avoid being a mere dogma of transcendental philosophy. The PSUA exists only for that proof.

12 For more on the I as a logical concept of a singular, substantive, freely thinking self – a judgment conditioning the possibility of experience, see Tobias Rosefeldt: *Das Logische Ich: Kant über den Gehalt des Begriffs von sich selbst*. Berlin 2000, ch. 4.

13 By identifying the TUA as the form of the I think, I am identifying it as a principle that must be able to accompany representations of the I think. By contrast, the “I think is, itself, an *Actus der Spontaneität*” (Longuenesse, 104). So the TUA is the form of the I think as a condition for specific acts of spontaneity. By contrast, the PSUA only exists in and for a transcendental proof as that highest form for the validity of the TUA and specific acts of the mind. For a good alternative account of the “I think” that takes up an expressivist reading, see Katharina Kraus and Wolfgang Freitag, “An expressivist interpretation of Kant’s ‘I think.’” *Noûs*, 2020, 1–23; and Katharina Kraus, *Kant on Self-Knowledge and Self-Formation: The Nature of Inner Experience*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

1.2. The Status of the Principle of the Synthetic Unity of Apperception

To read the PSUA in the way I am arguing is to read Kant's synthetic *a priori* principles as normatively arising through transcendental reflection in order to determine the necessity and validity of the form that governs specific acts of reason in general. I will not defend this epistemic-normativity reading of Kant's critical philosophy here,¹⁴ but it is an interpretive view well-defined and defended in the Marburg tradition from Cassirer to present,¹⁵ and shared more broadly by a wide-ranging collective.¹⁶ However, the norm, even within these traditions, is to frame the PSUA as a principle of unity, not of synthesis. This omission is neither benign nor insignificant.

My thesis, as stated above, is that the PSUA is best understood and characterized, in part, as a principle of pure synthesis, where this principle [*Grundsatz*] is the pure form of the real transcendental unity of apperception taken apart from any real correspondence for the sake of serving as that highest formal *höchste Punkt* and *oberste Princip* to which the transcendental deduction can appeal, thereby grounding not only the lawful unity of acts of the understanding but also the spontaneity whereby it is called an "act" of the mind.

Importantly, then, by "purely formal, transcendental principle," I have in view neither sensibility nor even pure acts of the understanding, nor anything that can be called an "act."

¹⁴ With the exception of a passing footnote later on. See footnote 32.

¹⁵ For an exceptional contemporary variation of the Marburg normative, epistemological readings of Kant's architectonic of pure reason, see Pollok: *Kant's Theory of Normativity*, 2017.

¹⁶ In this non-exhaustive list, I would include Robert Pippin – see: *Hegel's Realm of Shadows*. Chicago 2019; David Wellbery – see *Goethes Pandora: Dramatisierung einer Urgeschichte der Moderne*. München 2017; Mark Alznauer; Matt Boyle; Karen Ng; Beatrice Longuenesse – see *Kant and the Capacity to Judge: Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason*. Princeton 2000; Allen Speight, and myself – see Gentry, Gerad: "Hegel's End of Art and the Artwork as an Internally Purposive Whole", in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (forthcoming, 2022), "The Concept of Life in German Idealism and its Aristotelian Roots", in: *Intellectual History Review* 31 (3), 2021, 379–390, "Hegel's Kantian Logic of Purposiveness", in: *Kantian Legacies in German Idealism*, ed. Gerad Gentry. Routledge 2021 and "The Ground of Hegel's Logic of Life and the Unity of Reason: The Free Lawfulness of the Imagination," in: *The Imagination in German Idealism and Romanticism*, eds. Gerad Gentry and Konstantin Pollok. Cambridge 2019. Of course, compatibility undoubtedly stretches to others such as Dean Moyar, "Die Lehre vom Begriff: Zweiter Abschnitt. Die Objectivität," in: *Kommentar zu Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik*, eds. Michael Quante and Nadine Mooren. Hamburg 2018, 561–650, Eckart Förster: *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*. Princeton 2012; Keren Gorodeisky (2019), Eckart Förster (2012), Paul Franks (2005), and others.

For my purposes, I wish only to note that there is an important formal distinction between that which is bound to a real act of the mind as the form of that act, the condition of that act, or as identical with the act, and a purely formal transcendental principle whose function is the establishment of the *validity* of that form of the act.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to defend the various distinctions related to the PSUA, Synthetic Unity of Apperception (SUA), Analytic Unity of Apperception (AUA), real or otherwise. My sole point and differentiation is that the highest principle (the PSUA), which Kant identifies in § 17 as the principle on which the entire transcendental deduction depends, cannot be conflated with anything pertaining to the real (pure or empirical). The PSUA must, in its role as this highest principle, be purely formal, apart from any act of the mind (whether formal and so pure or sensible).

I take this distinction to be important for the following reasons. First, these real transcendental unities of apperception and sensibility serve as the fundamental unities of real consciousness. The PSUA, however, arises explicitly for the sake of a transcendental deduction. It is the highest *transcendental*, normative ground and does not exist as a form of real consciousness, but rather as a kind of juridical means of grounding acts of the mind and subsequent claims to certainty.¹⁷

The transcendental deduction is precisely the ground on which the form of the real acts of the mind (including judgments) and consciousness can lay claim to necessity, to lawfulness, or – in contemporary terms – epistemic normativity. Some may argue that the PSUA is interchangeable with the *form* of the real “I think,” which must be able to accompany all of my representations (see KrV, B 133–135, B 407–408).¹⁸ However, Kant’s text does not identify them and such identification problematizes the possibility of a successful transcendental deduction by collapsing the very distinction needed for its success. Such a reductive identity would be an instance of the fallacy Kant calls “*sophisma figurae dictionis*”¹⁹ in his

17 For a helpful alternative articulation of the PSUA, see Pollok (2017), 64–65; see also Kant’s account in the *Rostock Manuscript of Anth*, AA 07: 398–399.

18 For more on the distinction between the analytic unity of apperception as a real principle of a thinking subject see KrV, B 131–135. For a helpful discussion of the AUA and PSUA, see Allison (2004), 163–172. My account differs from Allison’s in that I hold carefully in view the distinction between the two principles in terms of a real principle (AUA) and the non-real principle (logical/transcendental), whereas Allison, whether he would agree with this framing, does not make it evident there.

19 By identifying this fallacy, I am not relating Kant’s reference to this fallacy in the context of the paralogisms of pure reason. For more on this fallacy and the separate discussion of the paralogisms, see Ameriks (2004), 336–337; cf. Patricia Kitcher: “Kant’s Paralogism,” in: *The Philosophical Review* 91 (4), 1982, 515–547.

critique of rational psychology (and therein his broader critique of transcendental realism) in the first paralogism (see KrV, A 348/B 411; cf. A 500/B 528).

In sum, The PSUA is *not* the real “I think” or even (merely) the form of the real I think (TUA) of self-consciousness.²⁰ The PSUA arises as the fundamental principle [*Grundsatz*] needed for the TUA and the I think to lay claim to the necessity of its universal validity. This means that while Kant talks about the analytic unity of apperception or the fundamental “I think” of self-consciousness as a unity (and acts of apperception as a synthetic unity), the *I think* is not itself the *principle* grounding the transcendental deduction, nor is the TUA. Instead, the I think is the very thing from which the TUA is abstracted. The TUA is then represented (for the sake of the proof) as a pure logical principle for a transcendental deduction: the highest synthetic *a priori* principle of the deduction, i. e., the PSUA. This is how we should understand the “highest point to which one must affix all use of the understanding, even the whole of logic and, after it, transcendental philosophy” (“Und so ist die synthetische Einheit der Apperception der höchste Punkt, an dem man allen Verstandesgebrauch, selbst die ganze Logik und nach ihr die Transscendental-Philosophie heften muß, ja dieses Vermögen ist der Verstand selbst.” KrV, B 134n). It is possible that there is no meaningful distinction *retainable* outside of transcendental deduction between the PSUA and the TUA or the real I think of self-consciousness, but to reach the point where one could claim their identity (something Hegel will do) still requires first recognizing their (transcendental) distinction for the validity of the proof, since it is only through this proof that the critical validity of the real I think is established.

I have said enough at present about the status and significance of the PSUA for my purposes here. I turn now to the presuppositional condition of synthesis contained in the possibility of any unity to show that this highest principle must be conceived in part as a principle of pure synthesis. Only thereby can Kant validly claim a *spontaneity* (theoretical freedom) of the mind.

2 Unity Necessarily Presupposes Synthesis

In this section, I move a step closer to my thesis that the PSUA is a principle of pure synthesis (and a description of what that might mean and why it matters). I do so by starting in 2.1 with a debate about unity. I will respond to Colin McLear’s account of two kinds of unity and what he criticizes as “Intellectualism” in order to preempt a possible critique of my core thesis. I will also use this discussion

²⁰ See KrV, A 341/B 399–A 344/B 402.

as the first step for understanding the relationship between synthesis and unity, which will help determine what a principle of pure synthesis means. I will then confirm in 2.2 the suggestion of 2.1 that unity necessarily presupposes synthesis.

2.1 Two Kinds of Unity?

In “Two Kinds of Unity in the *Critique of Pure Reason*,” Colin McLear critiques what he calls “Intellectualism.”²¹ Intellectualism is his term for the view that all representations depend on the “unifying synthetic activity of the mind” to some degree (79). Against this, he argues that sensible intuitions are unities independent of any kind of synthesis, since synthesis proceeds from part-to-whole and space and time as formal intuitions (see KrV, B 160) are limitless wholes that precede their parts.

In response to McLear’s thesis, we might note that Kant’s deduction seems to depend precisely on the view that unities are the product of the mental activity of “synthesis.” McLear recognizes this, but distinguishes two kinds of unity and defends what he calls “sensibilism.” Sensibilism is the view that sensibility furnishes representations that do not depend on acts of synthesis. His reason is that Kant’s account, in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, of our representations of time and space are incompatible with Intellectualism (i. e., with acts of synthesis), since they cannot be dependent on the synthesis of the understanding. So, he posits a kind of unity for space and time that are not products of synthesis. The non-synthesis-dependent unities he calls “aesthetic,” the synthesis-dependent unities he calls “discursive” (82).

The problem with McLear’s critique (for my purposes here) is twofold. First, he thinks it is a fundamental premise of Intellectualism that “intuition and judgment have a common source of unity in the discursive activity of the understanding.” McLear argues that such a view is incompatible with Kant’s account of the intuition of space and time. Against this, I contend that no such premise need be fundamental to the view that unity (of any kind) is *a priori* dependent on synthesis (of some kind in some way). In fact, as I’ve already shown in the preceding section, Kant differentiates subjective and objective unities where the former concerns determinations of inner sense and the latter concerns the determination of manifolds according to the unity of apperception. These unities are distinct, yet precisely still dependent on and presuppose (as we will see) a higher principle of synthesis.

²¹ Colin McLear: “Two Kinds of Unity in the *Critique of Pure Reason*,” in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53 (1), 2015, 79–110.

I take McLear's chief concern to be that Kant's distinction between sensibility and understanding cannot be maintained if aesthetic unities stem from determining acts of the understanding. McLear's mistake, to my mind, is his reduction of all synthesis-dependent unities to the synthesis given through determining acts of the understanding.

This may not be the only kind of synthesis, however. The understanding operates through acts of synthesis but may also depend on a broader form of synthesis in general. It is rather troubling to try to read the deduction without this distinction. For now, I will posit (and will return to this later) that the understanding (pure and empirical) is not only the source of specific acts of synthesis in judgment, but is itself *a priori* dependent on a broader conception of synthesis in general that is presupposed by any particular form of synthesis in the mind. If this is right (as I will show), McLear's assumption appears fundamentally misplaced and would minimally need a justificatory argument. In short, to claim synthesis dependence for non-discursive unities (McLear's focus) does not necessarily entail what McLear calls discursive synthesis. So, while McLear is right that not all unities are dependent on the synthesis at work in determining judgments of the understanding, he is wrong to infer that such unities are thereby not synthesis dependent, since this inference assumes synthesis as a component of the understanding alone. That picture is hard to square not only with the first *Critique* but also, and particularly, with the third, where synthesis occurs not in determining acts of the understanding, but in indeterminate uses of the reflecting power of judgment.

Part of the problem arises from the following: for McLear the term "discursive" is a referent to that which is determined by the faculty of understanding according to the concepts of the understanding. I think this is an overly restrictive and problematic use of the term "discursive" since it excludes both the reflecting power of judgment and other non-judgment acts of the mind. By contrast, I would retain a more expansive use of the term discursive where it simply picks out the kind of concept/intuition dependence that characterizes human reason (as opposed, say, to an intuitive Intelligence). Namely, for something to be discursive is for it to be dependent on the concept/intuition hylomorphic relation characterizing judgments.²²

On this view, all acts of human reason are acts of discursive reason. Though not all acts of discursive reason are determining acts of the understanding (e. g., other acts include the reflecting power of aesthetic and teleological judgments,

²² For an extended account of what I have in view by both the discursivity of human reason and Kant's transcendental hylomorphism, see Pollok (2017), 117–166, 263–272.

and practical reason). This allows us to say that synthesis is a fundamental feature of discursive reason and that non-discursive synthesis in human reason is a contradiction of terms. The important issue is that McLear wants to reserve a kind of unity for that which is not yet determined according to the pure concepts of the understanding. Archetypes of such aesthetic unity are the pure forms of intuitions (space and time). It is this unity that he thinks is necessarily not synthesis dependent. But this conclusion stems from the assumption that synthesis necessarily presupposes the determinations of the understanding. And *that* assumption is not only unwarranted by the text and unnecessary for McLear's primary point, it is also, in fact, the precise reversal of Kant's argument. Kant's account of subjective unity of apperception (described above) is an example of (in McLear's use of the term) "aesthetic" unity, and Kant nowhere suggests that non-conceptual (aesthetic) unities are not synthesis dependent. Importantly, to say that non-conceptual aesthetic unities are synthesis dependent does not commit me to the claim that there is a non-rule-governed synthesis. Instead, it commits me to the claim that if the necessarily presupposed synthesis of non-conceptual unities is rule-governed, this rule-governing is necessarily not determined by concepts of the understanding, though nevertheless determinable. In other words, it may be implicitly rule-governed without being explicitly or determinately so. I am not staking a claim on this point either way. I am only showing that there is no internal contradiction to a non-conceptually determined aesthetic unity that nevertheless necessarily presupposes synthesis as the prerequisite to its being a *determinable* unity. It is only in determining the unity that the concepts of the understanding are *a priori* necessitated.²³

In other words, McLear is right that the pure forms of space and time are not dependent on an act of synthesis of the understanding, but is wrong to assume that all forms of synthesis presuppose the determinations of the understanding. The synthesis that occurs in the determinations of the understanding (and which helps make such possible) is just one species of synthesis in general. The determining use of the understanding is conditioned by and presupposes synthesis in general. Synthesis encompasses more than just acts of the understanding. While Kant makes reference to this presupposition repeatedly, there is one passage that I think is particularly troubling and important. It is that passage already quoted, namely, "pure synthesis, generally represented, yields the pure concept of the understanding" ("Die reine Synthesis, allgemein vorgestellt, giebt nun den reinen Verstandesbegriff." KrV, A 78/B 104). I will return to this passage shortly.

²³ As an aside, I do understand pre-conceptual synthesis as rule-governed in this sense of being determinable, though not yet determined by concepts as the rule.

For now, it is enough to note that the distinction between kinds of unities does not depend on the denial of their being conditioned by synthesis. A unity that is not dependent on the synthesis of the understanding may still be dependent on synthesis. There simply is no place in Kant's critical work that suggests unity can arise without synthesis, but ample evidence of the reverse (see KrV, A 117–118, B 131, B 133–134, B 161).²⁴

Second, though, there is a conceptual problem at the heart of any *a priori* account of the forms of space and time as unities that do not depend on synthesis. The problem is this: the very claim that they are unities or wholes that make intuitions possible necessitates some kind of synthesis since we have no other formal ground for identifying how a unity could arise as the unity of that which could be separable (as its parts).

A unity, whether intuitive, representational (including a concept [Begriff]),²⁵ logical, objective, or subjective, is that whose parts are identified as a whole according to some term (unifier). This is the conceptual condition of a unity. This whole may be sensible or purely conceptual, it may be representational or logical, but it must always be that whose parts are bound (synthesized) by a term as the unifier. This binding is either implicit or explicit. It is implicit when it occurs without the intentionality of judgment (e. g., in perception), but explicit when it occurs as the product of intentional judgment (representation, determination, reflection, and free play). If it does not meet this condition, it is not a unity. That which cannot be internally differentiated is not a unity, but rather a singular given. Further, even the concept of a pure simple is a concept that cannot be thought without already being synthetically combined with a range of other concepts. So while the concept has as its content that which is not a unity, it is not clear that this concept itself escapes being synthesis dependent by the mere fact that it is a concept or representation of the mind.

So, it seems that unity by definition presupposes synthesis. Unity without synthesis makes no more sense than effect without cause. Something may have no causal relation, but in that case, it is not an effect. Likewise, something may not be synthesis dependent, but in that case it is not a unity.²⁶ (One might rightly

²⁴ Kant does at times speak of the dependence of synthesis on an act of unity of the understanding (for example, KrV, A 78–79/B 103–105). But in such passages two things are clear: (i) what he is speaking of is a real act of synthesis (not an ideal dependence relation), and (ii) unity is identified as a correlating necessity to synthesis, but not as a presuppositional condition of the possibility of the latter.

²⁵ Concepts are not the only instances of unities.

²⁶ Consider the *form* of space. Extension and quantity necessarily accompany all spatial intuitions. Prior to the application of categories, the intuitions themselves necessitate the side-by-sideness of that which is conceptually represented. That side-by-sideness is itself a unity of that

wonder whether any given can truly come before the mind without an act of synthesis or whether all givens are necessarily – as soon as they become something for the mind – unities of one kind or another constituted through some kind of synthesis of a discursive mind.)²⁷

If unity necessitates synthesis, as I will argue in the next subsection, there must be some principle of synthesis to which we appeal to account for the possibility of the pure forms of space and time and the categories as the prerequisites of all acts of the mind.²⁸ This synthesis can be neither internal to the unity of apperception nor to the unity of the pure forms of sensibility, since a common source of synthesis internal to one or the other would necessarily reduce either sensibility to a product of apperception, or apperception to a product of sensibility. Neither reduction is possible in Kant's transcendental idealism, as McLear rightly sees.

which can be differentiated. Imagine for a moment, as a thought experiment, that we try to isolate in thought a representation of a spatial part of an abstract, side-by-side whole. That isolated part is itself not representable without the accompanying thought that we could divide it otherwise or that it stands next to nothing. The representation that the single (non-unity) is isolated from any other single part requires the negation of other parts. In other words, all that is left is a purely empty non-space, which is itself merely a limitation on space (an "X" that is not intuitable). In Kant's words, "Space is essentially one, the manifold in it, and hence also the universal concept of space as such, rests solely on limitation" ("Er [der Raum] ist wesentlich einig, das Mannigfaltige in ihm, mithin auch der allgemeine Begriff von Räumen überhaupt beruht lediglich auf Einschränkungen." KrV, A 25/B 40). Put differently, it seems that there is no possibility of representing an absolute non-unity conceptually or intuitively. All representation necessarily depends on synthesis and all reflection (pure or empirical) produces unities that are likewise synthesis-dependent wholes (every part can be conceptually divided or combined or negated). So, the given representation itself becomes a part of the synthesis whereby the conceptual representation is a single unity (divisible or distinguishable).

27 I cannot be read as suggesting that all forms of synthesis are judgment dependent. To say that all unities *a priori* presuppose some synthesis, is not a claim that all unity arises through judgment. Rather, judgment is only possible through the very form of synthesis by which any unity (determinate, indeterminate, intuitive, etc., can arise for the mind). Further, whether there can be such a thing as a genuine, pure simple/given is not a question I can take up in this space and it is not directly pertinent to my argument. For more on this, see Konstantin Pollok: "‘An Almost Single Inference’ – Kant's Deduction of the Categories Reconsidered," in: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 90 (3), 2008, 323–345.

28 It would likewise not be a problem to hold that the pure forms of space and time are co-prior with the categories to all acts of the mind and uses of discursive reason. Neither precedes the other. If the pure forms of space and time on the one hand, and the categories on the other, are fundamental structures of discursive reason, then they necessarily form a unity. In virtue of what are they a unity? The answer would be the TUA and the proof rests on the deduction from the PSUA.

Not surprisingly, Kant's answer is to appeal to a (non-real) transcendental logic of pure synthesis as the transcendental condition for the possibility of both (subjective and objective) real unities. He posits a principle of pure synthesis to explain the unity of both the pure forms of space and time (see KrV, B161), on the one hand, and the pure concepts of the understanding or categories, on the other.

The *principle* of pure synthesis, as we will see, is itself a principle of a part-to-whole movement of synthesis and, as such, it is also a principle of a whole, where the whole is that *movement* of pure synthesis. As the PSUA, it is both of these at once.

In short, I can agree with McLear that “Kant can consistently hold that the unity of the representations of the pure forms of intuition – space and time – is independent of any synthesis, while acknowledging that the representation of these entities as objects, as we do in mathematics, requires a pre-conceptual synthesis carried out by the imagination” (90). My agreement here is possible because what McLear means by “synthesis” in the first clause is an act of synthesis of the understanding (pure or empirical). I agree that the unity of the pure forms of intuition are independent of the synthesis of the understanding. However, this never was what Kant meant when he appealed to a common transcendental ground, a principle of pure synthesis that grounds the possibility of the two kinds of unities (1. Of space and time, and 2. The categories). The principle of pure synthesis, or of the synthetic unity of apperception, is not itself an act of the understanding. It is not real, nor is it the form of a real unity, an I think. Instead, it is that which makes the acts of the understanding *lawful* and which is transcendently necessitated by the possibility of space and time as wholes, since all wholes are synthesis dependent. It is a purely formal, transcendental logical principle (and the highest ideal principle for cognition to which all universal necessity must be “fixed”). This is not a claim that Kant is somehow grounding both the transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental Analytic in the PSUA. Rather, the formal intuitions of space and time as representational wholes preceding their parts (see KrV, B 160) is a representation of a real unity of apperception that does depend on the PSUA for its validity. So while the pure forms of space and time are not dependent on the PSUA, the formal intuitions of space and time do depend on the PSUA and so the former is not synthesis dependent, while the latter are.²⁹

²⁹ While some (including Jessica Williams) interpret the *pure forms of intuitions* (space and time) as intuitions, I do not. I read the “formal intuitions” of space and time as intuitional wholes that encompass all spatiotemporal parts, but the “pure forms of intuitions” at the heart of the Transcendental Aesthetic are the pure forms of our sensibility as such; and so these pure forms of sensibility pick out the formal features whereby intuitions must necessarily arise for the mind as

The PSUA is that, in virtue of which, the understanding is universally necessary and objectively valid. And nothing in this account conflicts with the part-to-whole form of finite discursive reasoners, since the appeal is to that principle whereby the part-to-whole form is *valid*.

To be clear, my central point in this subsection is that interpreters can agree with McLear that the Transcendental Aesthetic identifies a unity that is not identical with unities of the understanding. However, that cannot serve as a genuine critique of synthesis as a prerequisite of all kinds of unity unless there is no kind of synthesis apart from the real, determining acts of the understanding.

Although the burden of proof lies with those who limit synthesis to determining acts of the understanding, I will go ahead and show why synthesis in general is not limited to the synthesis that occurs in determining acts of the understanding. In what follows, I will show not only that it is theoretically problematic to conceive of it as so limited, but that it also stands in opposition to Kant's clearly stated account of synthesis in both the A and B editions.³⁰

2.2 Necessarily Presupposed Synthesis

I suggest that we understand unity to necessarily presuppose synthesis in the same way that effect presupposes cause. By analogy, we may not know the cause, but the existence of an effect, if it is an effect, necessarily presupposes some (even unknown) cause. This is true not merely of experience, but also of thought. To see why we should understand unity as a concept necessarily presupposing (containing within itself the necessity of) synthesis, we need to define synthesis more fully.

Synthesis is one of the most important features of Kant's idealism. Of synthesis, Kant writes, "Synthesis alone is that which properly collects [*sammelt*] the elements for cognitions [*die Elemente zu Erkenntnissen*] and unifies them into a certain content [*Inhalte vereinigt*]; it is therefore the first thing to which we have to attend if we wish to judge about the first origin of our cognition [*über den ersten Ursprung unserer Erkenntniß urtheilen wollen*]" (KrV, A 78/B 103). Béatrice Longuenesse rightly observes that "The most important term in section 10 of the

sensible givens. If this is right, then space and time as formal intuitions are synthesis dependent, but the pure forms of intuitions are not, since they are not representational wholes.

³⁰ I see no problem agreeing with Kant that the B-edition clarifies the logical form as the guiding thread of the transcendental analytic, while also recognizing that the A-edition is still compatible, accurate, and helpful as an augmentation (see KrV, B xlii). For a defense of this "useful complement" read of the A-edition, see Longuenesse (2000), 33–34.

Transcendental Analytic” is synthesis (Longuenesse 2000, 30). Richard Kroner goes further and calls synthesis the “die Kernfrage des transzendentalen Idealismus” (Kroner 1921, 77).

Kant defines synthesis in a way that not only binds it to unity (where unity is the necessary product of some synthesis), but also to the very freedom that defines the mind as an intellect and not mere mechanistic relations. One such passage defining synthesis occurs in § 10 of the metaphysical deduction:

If this manifold is to be cognized, the spontaneity of our thought requires that it be gone through in a certain way, taken up, and connected. This act I name synthesis [*Diese Handlung nenne ich Synthesis*]. By synthesis, in its most general sense, I understand the act of putting different representations together [*verschiedene Vorstellungen zu einander hinzuzuthun*], and of grasping [*begreifen*] what is manifold in them in one cognition. Such a synthesis is *pure*, if the manifold is not empirical but is given *a priori*, as is the manifold in space and time (KrV, A 77/B 102–103).³¹

Pure synthesis has the same operational form as synthesis. However, the objects of thought in the former are pure representations, intuitions, or concepts. In both cases it is the combination in the mind of manifold parts that results in a unity. The unity may be explicitly given as it is in cognition, or it may be implicitly given as it is in a pure intuition of space and time. Every intuition (pure or empirical) is a unity.

If this is right, then pure intuitions of space and time are themselves unities, but this does not mean that the pure *forms* of space and time are unities. Rather, I contend, the pure forms of intuitions are *conditions* for unities. Saying this does not commit me to saying that all conditions of those intuitions (conceptual and aesthetic) are themselves unities.

Synthesis then should be understood as a function of a kind of intellectual, causal freedom: spontaneity. Synthesis is that feature of reason whereby any unity is given (intentionally or unconsciously). Synthesis is the productive source of any unity in the mind and so of any unity in experience (since no experience can be thought apart from that which comes before the mind). But to count as a lawful, productive activity, to be a non-dogmatic spontaneity by which such synthesis occurs, requires more than the mere assertion of the presence of spontaneity in the transcendental deduction.

The transcendental deduction must ground the validity of the spontaneity of the mind for cognition in the highest principle (not merely the form of judgments). And this is what Kant does when he identifies the highest principle of the

³¹ I have used Longuenesse’s translation here instead of Guyer’s for the sake of clarity.

deduction not as a principle of unity, but as the principle of the synthetic unity of apperception. It is a principle that simultaneously grounds the validity of the spontaneity of the mind whereby synthesis can claim to have the power to yield valid unities.

This distinction is important for recognizing the transcendental validity whereby the pure concepts of the understanding can be said to “arise” or be given to itself. Without this highest principle, the appearance of those pure concepts would be merely dogmatic assertions. While their *metaphysical deduction* through abstraction from the forms of judgments was valid,³² such assertoric status in the *transcendental deduction* is problematic. The transcendental deduction *necessitates* a principle of pure synthesis: the synthetic unity of apperception (not merely a principle of unity). The highest principle is a principle of apperceptive synthesis and unity. It is the principle capable of grounding a deduction of both the spontaneity yielding acts of synthesis and of the formal unity by which it is representable, experiential, and cognizable.

That Kant is concerned with such a principle of pure synthesis at the heart of his articulation of this highest transcendental principle is evident in both the A and B editions. In the A-edition, Kant says,

The unity of apperception in relation to the synthesis of the imagination is the understanding, *and this very same unity, in relation to the transcendental synthesis of the imagination is the pure understanding.* [Die Einheit der Apperception in Beziehung auf die Synthesis der Einbildungskraft ist der Verstand, *und eben dieselbe Einheit, beziehungsweise auf die transcendente Synthesis der Einbildungskraft, der reine Verstand.*] In the understanding there are therefore pure *a priori* cognitions that contain the necessary unity of the pure synthesis of the imagination in regard to all possible appearances. These, however, are the categories, i. e., the pure concepts of the understanding. (*my emphasis*, KrV, A 119)

This is striking. The pure understanding. What is it? It is two principles standing in a specific “relation.” What are those two principles? The “unity of apperception” and the “transcendental synthesis of the imagination.” The distinction between the “synthesis of the imagination” and the “transcendental synthesis of the imagination” is the only difference he notes in this passage between the understanding and the “pure understanding.” This is notable because the supreme principle of the pure understanding is the synthetic unity of apperception. That supreme transcendental principle arises first, as he describes in A 119,

³² For an excellent account of Kant’s deduction and the form of judgment, see Longuenesse (2000), 81–90. Cf. Melissa Merrit’s account of the distinction between the analytic and synthetic methods when reflecting on the form of judgment, “Science and the Synthetic Method of the ‘Critique of Pure Reason,’” in: *The Review of Metaphysics* 59 (3), 2006, 517–539.

through abstraction from the form of the pure understanding to the necessary conditions of that form. That is the purpose of the metaphysical deduction. As such, we should expect to find the PSUA reflecting the form of the understanding and the pure understanding. That is what we do find here: the synthetic unity of apperception *qua* principle arises, through abstraction from the form of the necessary conditions of judgments, for the sake of a transcendental deduction. The transcendental deduction aims to ground the validity of the pure understanding through the PSUA, where the pure understanding is the “unity of apperception in relation to the transcendental synthesis of the imagination.”

I will not address the different kinds of synthesis of the imagination: transcendental, figurative, empirical, etc. For more on those, see the excellent contributions to the recent volume on the subject: *The Imagination in German Idealism and Romanticism* (2019).³³ It seems clear to me that for the transcendental synthesis of the imagination to be a principle that makes up the pure understanding means that Kant does not have in view anything like the figurative or empirical synthesis of the imagination, since that would make the resulting function a matter of the understanding (not the pure understanding). Whatever the “transcendental synthesis of the imagination” is, it is something “pure” (e.g., that which synthesizes pure representations and pure concepts for pure cognition) and that is enough for my present purposes.

It is not only the A-edition that evidences Kant’s view that this principle somehow is or contains within itself a fundamental principle of pure synthesis. In the B-edition we find Kant drawing equally striking, and consistent, conclusions, which I will turn to in a moment.

While I do not need to defend the continuity of the A- and B-editions, since my argument does not rest on acceptance of the A-edition, it is worth drawing attention to one of Kant’s notes in the margin of the A-edition. In his copy, on A 137, he writes in the margins, “The incomprehensibility of the categories stems from the fact that we cannot have insight into the synthetic unity of apperception” (E Llv, 27; 23:27) (see KrV, A 137).

That the PSUA is simply the highest principle abstracted from the form of the understanding, and reflecting the form of the understanding by being the conditional relation of the “unity of apperception” and the “transcendental synthesis of the imagination” is Kant’s view in the A-edition’s deduction. Kant seemingly

³³ *The Imagination in German Idealism and Romanticism*, eds. Gerad Gentry and Konstantin Pollok. New York 2019. For an overview, see my “Introduction to the Significance of the Imagination in German Idealism and Romanticism” (2019). See also Beatrice Longuenesse: *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*; Johannes Haag: *Erfahrung und Gegenstand*; Henry Allison: *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*; and Konstantin Pollok: *The Sources of Normativity*.

changed his mind about the degree to which he could articulate “insight into the synthetic unity of apperception,” since the additions to the second edition of §§ 16–17 are inserted for precisely this purpose. This possible change of mind is not necessarily a departure from the A-edition and, arguably, a recognition of the possibility of further clarifying and expounding a central feature of his critique.

The B-edition retains the notion that unity presupposes synthesis. Here, Kant writes, “Now pure synthesis, generally represented, yields the pure concept of the understanding. By this synthesis, however, I understand that which rests on a ground of synthetic unity *a priori* [...]” (“Die reine Synthesis, allgemein vorgestellt, giebt nun den reinen Verstandesbegriff. Ich verstehe aber unter dieser Synthesis diejenige, welche auf einem Grunde der synthetischen Einheit *a priori* beruht [...]”, KrV, A 78/B 104). This sounds to me thoroughly consistent with the A-edition, but again, even if we leave the A-edition out, my argument is not affected.

Kant’s point in this passage from the B-edition of the metaphysical deduction can hardly be overstated, and indeed is essentially the thesis of this article. I have said that the PSUA should be understood as a principle of pure synthesis. Kant here says something very similar, namely, “pure synthesis [...] yields the pure concept of the understanding.” We have two options here; either we could try to tell a story about how the pure concept of the understanding in view is not the categories (and such a story seems implausible and counter to Kant’s whole point in the metaphysical deduction) or we must recognize a principle of pure synthesis that is presupposed by both the categories and the categorial unity of apperception. Indeed, the latter is what Kant has in mind, since the passage continues, “by this synthesis, however, I understand that which rests on a ground of synthetic unity *a priori*” (“Ich verstehe aber unter dieser Synthesis diejenige, welche auf einem Grunde der synthetischen Einheit *a priori* beruht [...]”, KrV, B 104), namely, the synthetic unity of apperception.

Notice that Kant has not actually given us much more “insight” into the PSUA than he did in the A-edition, and what was noted in the margins. Nevertheless, what he has articulated in this second edition is exceptionally helpful. He has identified pure synthesis as simultaneously that which must be posited as preceding (*qua* principle) the pure concepts of the understanding, without thereby reducing PSUA to a real (act of) pure synthesis.

This distinction is vital because it is what makes possible the claim to the validity of the real (i. e., the validity of the TUA and the spontaneity of the mind). After all, “Metaphysics is not a philosophy about objects for these can only be given by means of the senses, but rather about the subject, namely, the laws of its reason” (“Die metaphysic ist nicht eine philosophie über die obiecten, denn diese können nur durch die Sinnen gegeben werden, sondern über das subject,

nemlich dessen Vernunftgesetze.”, Refl, AA 16: R 3716, ca. 1764–1768). Those who follow in the wake of Cassirer, and the Marburg tradition, will agree with my emphasis on the status of the PSUA. But the assumption from this tradition is that freedom in the theoretical use of reason (spontaneity) is fundamentally a matter of “being conscious of oneself as an intelligence,”³⁴ as a lawgiver, and as subject to the laws of reason (Cassirer 1981, 258). This is correct for one important definition of theoretical freedom, namely the spontaneity of an actual self. But what such lawfulness accounts, such as the Marburg tradition, rarely emphasize is that within the laws of reason, forms of *freedom* (not merely lawful unities) figure as essential features of the highest principles. Kant rightly and vitally recognizes in the highest non-real principles of transcendental logic the need for the quality that grounds claims to *real* productive representations, creative thoughts, genuinely free acts of the will, artistic freedom, and even the possibility of organic, teleological freedom (a matter of the organism’s own self-differentiable, teleological growth). All of these real forms of freedom must be adequately grounded in that highest principle. And so, Kant’s account of the PSUA is an account not just of a principle of lawful unity but also, at the same time, *a principle of pure synthesis as the ideal ground of reason’s spontaneity*.

We might reasonably identify each of the highest points of the three *Critiques* as principles of *freedom and lawfulness*. The PSUA – like the Autonomy of the Will, and the Principle of Purposiveness,³⁵ – is a principle that makes possible claims to the validity of universally necessary (lawful), *free* acts of reason in the domain of cognition.

My thesis in this paper is not that the PSUA is pure synthesis *in contrast to* what I labeled the “lawfulness account” (which focuses on a principle of lawful unity). Instead, my thesis has been that what I have labeled the lawfulness account leaves out a vital feature of the PSUA and without this feature the transcendental deduction cannot be completed (since its assertion of spontaneity depends on a metaphysical dogma). That missing feature in the Marburg Tradition is the recognition that the PSUA is an “oberste Princip” of pure synthesis. It is the “höchste Punkt” in a transcendental deduction of real acts of synthesis, real spontaneity, while also and in the same way, being a *principle* of lawful unity.

It is the synthetic unity of apperception, not merely the unity of apperception, because it contains within itself, qua principle, the ground for identifying pure productive synthesis *and* lawful unity. Again, it contains both qualities as

³⁴ Ernst Cassirer: *Kant’s Life and Thought*. New Haven 1981.

³⁵ For my parallel account of Kant’s highest principle of the third *Critique*, see “Formal Purposiveness in Kant’s Aesthetic Judgment,” in: *Rethinking Kant*, ed. Pablo Muchnik. Vol. 5. Newcastle upon Tyne 2018.

a purely transcendental principle (not as a real, existing feature of a thinking subject). It is a principle necessarily posited by transcendental reflection for the sake of a valid transcendental deduction of the categories and finally of the spontaneity of synthetic *a priori* judgments and the possibility of experience. This supreme principle stands as the principle grounding both conceptual and aesthetic unities, as well as the possibility of real acts of synthesis, of genuine spontaneity, and the freedom of theoretical reason.³⁶

3 A Principle of Pure Synthesis and Williams' Modified-Conceptualist Account

I turn now to a brief discussion of Jessica Williams's modified-conceptualist account, in order to argue that if we do not recognize the PSUA as a principle of pure synthesis (not merely a principle of unity), then the deduction's depend-

³⁶ In the fuller text from B 168–169 quoted above, Kant writes, “It is the exhibition of the pure concepts of the understanding (and with them of all theoretical cognition *a priori*) as principles of the possibility of experience, but of the latter as the determination of appearances in space and time in general – and the latter, finally, from the principle of the *original* synthetic unity of apperception, as the form of the understanding in relation to space and time, as original forms of sensibility.” (“Sie ist die Darstellung der reinen Verstandesbegriffe (und mit ihnen aller theoretischen Erkenntniß *a priori*) als Principien der Möglichkeit der Erfahrung, dieser aber als Bestimmung der Erscheinungen in Raum und Zeit überhaupt, – endlich dieser aus dem Princip der ursprünglichen synthetischen Einheit der Apperception, als der Form des Verstandes in Beziehung auf Raum und Zeit als ursprüngliche Formen der Sinnlichkeit.” KrV, B 168–169). Consider also his earlier passage on the subject from both editions: “The same function that gives unity to the different representations *in a judgment* also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations *in an intuition*, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of understanding. The same understanding, therefore, and indeed by means of the very same actions through which it brings the logical form of a judgment into concepts by means of the analytical unity, also brings a transcendental content into its representations by means of the synthetic unity of the manifold in intuition in general, on account of which they are called pure concepts of the understanding that pertain to objects *a priori*.” (“Dieselbe Function, welche den verschiedenen Vorstellungen in einem Urtheile Einheit giebt, die giebt auch der bloßen Synthesis verschiedener Vorstellungen in einer Anschauung Einheit, welche, allgemein ausgedrückt, der reine Verstandesbegriff heißt. Derselbe Verstand also und zwar durch eben dieselben Handlungen, wodurch er in Begriffen vermittelt der analytischen Einheit die logische Form eines Urtheils zu Stande brachte, bringt auch vermittelt der synthetischen Einheit des Mannigfaltigen in der Anschauung überhaupt in seine Vorstellungen einen transcendentalen Inhalt, weswegen sie reine Verstandesbegriffe heißen, die *a priori* auf Objecte gehen, welches die allgemeine Logik nicht leisten kann.” KrV, A 79/B 104–105). Cf. B 168–169.

ence on spontaneity becomes the very Dogmatic Idealism that critical philosophy needed to avoid and that Kant explicitly critiques. To be a valid feature of the transcendental deduction, however, necessitates that this power of synthesis be adequately “fixed” to the highest principle, which in turn means that the highest principle must be such that it can validate the claim to reason’s productive power of synthesis in judgment.

In “Kant on the Original Synthesis of Understanding and Sensibility,” Jessica Williams nicely sketches contrasting accounts of the unity of apperception in the conceptualist/non-conceptualist debate. She defends a modified-conceptualist account (MCA). According to Williams, we can account for “the fact that space and time are given to the thinking subject as unified structures” by appealing to the “holistic consciousness that arises from the synthesis of the understanding and sensibility” (Williams 2018, 3). Further, the “synthesis of the understanding and sensibility” is the “realization or instantiation of the Original Synthetic Unity of Apperception (OSUA) in relation to the manifold of human sensibility” (Williams 2018, 3).³⁷ Williams takes up the non-conceptualist critique that synthesis as a part-to-whole process cannot account for the whole-part priority of the pure intuitions of space and time. Against this, she argues that synthesis can be whole-to-part and this possibility stems directly from the form of the OSUA (Williams 2018, 10). Further, she argues that the OSUA is not actually evidencing a new kind of synthesis, but rather a “holistic dimension of all synthesis in relation to the sensible manifold.”

While this is an interesting move, I think there are three problems. I will focus here on one for the sake of furthering my argument in a way that is perhaps sympathetic to Williams’s general direction while objecting to her specific solution. First, as argued above, the highest principle cannot be understood as that which is “instantiated” to give rise to consciousness, since this would be to make it real, not purely formal. Second, it remains unclear what a “holistic dimension of all synthesis” might be. Third, it is not a solution internal to Kant. The latter is fine if there is not already a good solution given in the first *Critique*. However, the whole-part priority problem only arises in conceptualist and non-conceptualist debates when the PSUA is not held clearly in view as a non-real principle of synthetic unity that grounds all acts of synthesis and unity of the understanding. On my account, there is no problem saying that the pure forms of space and time are wholes for which we must necessarily presuppose some synthesis. If we keep carefully in view that these pure forms of intuitions are not real, but ideal, pure transcendental conditions for the possibility of experience; if we remember that

³⁷ Cf. Messina (2014), 12.

these represent the highest principle of the given in the transcendental aesthetic; if we recognize that as pure forms, they are that posited principle for the sake of recognizing what must necessarily be the case for any sensibly given that arises in the mind of a sensible, discursive reasoner; if we keep all of this in view, then we do not need to worry about how the whole could precede the parts. Synthesis still proceeds from part to whole, and space and time as the *pure forms of intuitions* are indeed wholes that precede their parts, but they are purely ideal wholes posited by a synthetic act of the mind for the sake of a critique of the possibility of experience.³⁸ They are posited for the sake of a deduction of the universal validity of judgments of cognition by which experience is possible. This persistent issue at the heart of the conceptualist/non-conceptualist debate is, to my mind, the unnecessary result of this ideal/real collapse concerning the fundamental forms of the transcendental aesthetic and the transcendental deduction (PSUA).

Put differently, we could not show the validity of intuitions arising for us (or sensibility in general) if we did not presuppose such an underlying principle for their coming to be a feature of our reflective awareness. Likewise, the PSUA is not a real feature of self-consciousness that is itself somehow dependent on those unities that it grounds. To be sure, the PSUA is an abstraction from the forms of judgment and in relation to the pure forms of intuition (i. e., arises through a metaphysical deduction), but it arises, as I've shown, to serve as a pure touchstone for the transcendental deduction. It serves to ground the necessity of pure uses of theoretical judgments and the possibility of experience. So, on my view, we need not go beyond the text to resolve the supposed problem of synthesis and the whole-to-part relation.

Speaking to this issue, Kant writes, "In the Aesthetic I ascribed this unity merely to sensibility, only in order to note that it precedes all concepts, though to be sure it presupposes a synthesis, which does not belong to the senses but through which all concepts of space and time first become possible. For since through it (as the understanding determines the sensibility) space or time are first given as intuitions, the unity of this *a priori* intuition belongs to space and time, and not to the concept of the understanding (§ 24; see KrV, B 160–161n). Likewise, the categories of the understanding are not produced by the synthesis of the understanding, yet are transcendently dependent on a principle of pure synthesis for their possibility.

Thus, the deduction states, "pure synthesis, generally represented, yields the pure concept of the understanding" ("Die reine Synthesis, allgemein vorgestellt,

³⁸ For my distinction between "pure forms" of space and time and "formal intuition" of space and time such that the former counts as purely ideal wholes, see footnote 29. I take my view on this to be in accord with both Longuenesse and Pollok.

giebt nun den reinen Verstandesbegriff.” KrV, A 78/B 104). And, unity necessarily presupposes synthesis because “this unity, which precedes all concepts of combination *a priori*, is not the former category of unity (§ 10); for all categories are grounded on logical functions in judgments, but combination, thus the unity of given concepts, is already thought in these. The category therefore already presupposes combination. We must therefore seek this unity (as qualitative, § 12) someplace higher, namely in that which itself contains the ground of the unity of different concepts in judgment, and hence of the possibility of the understanding, even in its logical use (see KrV, B 131). So, a real category of unity³⁹ necessarily presupposes that which grounds even the possibility of the understanding, i. e., the Principle of the Synthetic Unity of Apperception as a principle of pure synthesis (and unity). Finally, Kant concludes, with the passage already quoted, “The synthetic unity of apperception is the highest point to which one must affix all uses of the understanding, even the whole of logic and, after it, transcendental philosophy”.⁴⁰

So, there seems to be no problem accounting for the unity of the pure intuitions apart from the synthesis of the understanding while still holding that all unity necessarily presupposes synthesis. This presupposed principle of synthesis is also the ideal ground for real claims to freedom in theoretical reason: spontaneity.

4 Concluding Implications for the Freedom of Reason

In this concluding section, I would like to underscore several implications of the PSUA as I have defined it for Kant’s broader tripartite critique of pure reason in general.⁴¹ In particular, the account I have given importantly makes explicit the transcendental validity in theoretical cognition of reason’s freedom.

³⁹ E.g., OSUA in B 135–136 as well as the “synthesis of apprehension” and “formal intuition” discussed in B 160–161. Each of these unities is dependent (as far as their place in a transcendental deduction is concerned) on that highest transcendental principle “to which one must affix [...] even the whole of logic and, after it, transcendental philosophy.”

⁴⁰ KrV, B 134n: “Und so ist die synthetische Einheit der Apperception der höchste Punkt, an dem man allen Verstandesgebrauch, selbst die ganze Logik und nach ihr die Transscendental-Philosophie heften muß, ja dieses Vermögen ist der Verstand selbst.”

⁴¹ For an excellent account of Kant’s tripartite use of the term “reason in general,” see Pollok (2017), 204–206.

I discussed B 131 in section 2.2, in which Kant references the presupposed synthesis as a need for a principle “someplace higher” and which “itself contains the ground of the unity.” I noted that the question that this passage begs is, what is the higher “combination” presupposed in the category of unity? And, when we seek out that presupposed combination “someplace higher” than the categories of the understanding, namely in “that which itself contains the ground of the unity” and the very “possibility of the understanding, even in its logical use,” we must keep in mind that we are not merely seeking a principle of unity as the “unity of apperception” is often called. Rather, we are seeking a principle of “combination” of “synthesis.” We are seeking a lawful basis for reason’s *spontaneity*.

Spontaneity is the freedom whereby pure reason can form concepts for itself,⁴² can combine, synthesize, and produce intuitions.⁴³ Spontaneity is theoretical reason’s freedom to be its own causal power, “an absolute causal spontaneity beginning from itself [...] hence transcendental freedom” (“eine absolute Spontaneität der Ursachen [...] mithin transscendentale Freiheit”, KrV, A 446/B 474);⁴⁴ and, thereby, “spontaneity is the reason I call myself an intelligence” (“Doch macht diese Spontaneität, daß ich mich Intelligenz nenne.” KrV, B 158n).

Kant repeatedly identifies the imagination as a real, productive power of synthesis. It is central not only to the work of the understanding and of theoretical cognition in general, but also to aesthetic and creative uses of pure reason, and arguably also to questions of the highest good. In this way, the imagination figures prominently in his account of the lawfulness of the freedom of reason in general (spontaneity, autonomy, heautonomy).

It seems to me that a common fear is that talk of a pure synthesis attributable to the imagination is tantamount to the reduction of idealism to a dogmatic, real, self-producing I.⁴⁵ It is a worry I discounted at the outset, and which runs counter to my entire argument, but it is precisely this worry that needs addressing. Kant’s account of discursive reason is undeniably dependent on a creative power of the mind. Kant’s use of and claims to genuine freedom of reason (even in its neces-

⁴² “Concepts are therefore grounded on the spontaneity of thinking, as sensible intuitions are grounded on the receptivity of impressions” (“Begriffe gründen sich also auf der Spontaneität des Denkens, wie sinnliche Anschauungen auf der Receptivität der Eindrücke.” KrV, B 93).

⁴³ Cf. “It is one and the same spontaneity that, there under the name of imagination and here under the name of understanding, brings combination into the manifold of intuition” (“Es ist eine und dieselbe Spontaneität, welche dort unter dem Namen der Einbildungskraft, hier des Verstandes, Verbindung in das Mannigfaltige der Anschauung hineinbringt.” KrV, B 162n).

⁴⁴ While this particular quote is from the third Antinomy, the specific definition of spontaneity is consistent with his use of the term throughout the three *Critiques*.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Michael Friedman: “Exorcising the Philosophical Tradition,” in: *The Philosophical Review* 105 (4), 1996, 464.

sity) pervade and define his three critiques. Spontaneity, autonomy, and heautonomy each necessitate, and in specific ways embody, a concept of freedom, a power of reason to produce, to be its own causal force.

Importantly, Kant does not assume or dogmatically assert spontaneity in the first *Critique*. Instead, he grounds this form of freedom in precisely the way I have outlined in this paper.⁴⁶ The PSUA is so significant because it is a principle that grounds not only the lawful unity of the understanding for cognition and experience, but also the *real* productive power of synthesis, whereby spontaneity can be attributed to the mind against the attribution of mere determinism, i. e., a mere cognitive mechanism.

The PSUA, as a transcendently supreme principle, must ground the non-mechanistic, free-causality of the mind in the domain of cognition, whereby the mind “could start to act from itself” (“von selbst anheben könne zu handeln”, KrV, A 533/B 561). To be clear, the PSUA is not a principle for judgments (as the TUA is). Instead, it is the highest principle of the transcendental deduction grounding the validity of judgments, including the TUA, the I think, spontaneous acts of the mind, pure synthesis, empirical synthesis, etc.; it is the highest principle of a proof grounding the validity of all of these.

If judgment is the fundamental movement and determination of the mind – the freedom of an intelligence that conditions the possibility of experience – then the highest source of the validity of judgment (i. e., the PSUA) must ground the validity of that spontaneity, not merely the forms of that spontaneity. This is so because freedom is a condition of a judgment’s being a judgment, being an act of consciousness (as opposed to merely valid computation). It is for this reason that Kant identifies the PSUA not purely as a principle of unity but also as a principle of pure synthesis, a principle of lawful spontaneity of pure theoretical reason. It is as such a principle that the PSUA lays the foundation for recognizing pure reason in general as the kind of activity that could include a morally free agent, a pure

⁴⁶ Clinton Tolley has argued that there is an important distinction between the normativity of concepts and the laws of reason in “Kant on the Nature of Logical Laws,” in: *Philosophical Topics* 34 (1/2), 2006, 371–407. He argues that the laws of reason are only “normative” for beings whose freedom allows them to choose otherwise (384–391). Freedom is not at work in the following of logical laws in first order thinking. However, my argument here is that thought is not the kind of thing that can be separated from spontaneity (a self-causing cause or a principle of such spontaneity) and still be thought. There are no laws of reason without the freedom of thought, since the former just are the conditions for the latter and do not exist apart from this. Pure mechanistic relations can follow logical laws by directive without spontaneity, but thought is not a process of such mechanistic relations. It is a relational process constituted by freedom and so is inescapably normative (even when abstracted to general logic or first-order thought). Put conversely, freedom just is rational activity (theoretical, practical, aesthetic, or otherwise).

aesthetic judge and acts of artistic genius, and even regulative acts of teleological reflection. In order to hold the non-dogmatic validity of such real, transcendental claims to freedom, the PSUA must be recognized as a principle of pure synthesis as much as it is a principle of unity.

The freedom to direct one's thoughts and produce for oneself must be grounded and "fixed" to the highest transcendental principle just as any claims to lawfulness or conceptual necessity must. Otherwise, the spontaneity of the mind remains a pure dogma.

I want to end now with a reminder of some key passages in which Kant describes the imagination as the source of real acts of synthesis (pure and empirical). The significance of these passages for my argument consists solely in the verification that the grounding of spontaneity in the PSUA as I have described it is precisely what Kant has in view. These acts of synthesis of the imagination are the real (pure and empirical) correspondence of the transcendental form of spontaneity given in specific acts of the mind for an individual person and retain their validity from the deduction of which the highest point is the PSUA.

First, Kant attributes synthesis in general to the "mere effect of the imagination" [die bloße Wirkung der Einbildungskraft] in the *B-deduction*.⁴⁷ And, he specifies, "such synthesis is pure if the manifold is given not empirically but *a priori* (as is that in space and time)."⁴⁸ Two considerations should arrest us here. First, Kant explains that the *categories*, as pure concepts of the understanding, *cannot* "arise analytically as far as the content is concerned."⁴⁹ They can *only*, and *necessarily*, arise synthetically, through synthesis (which he has just identified as the "mere effect of the imagination").⁵⁰ Second, and most importantly, "pure synthesis, generally represented, yields the pure concept of the understanding."⁵¹ To underscore: it is in the *B-deduction* that Kant confirms his *A-deduction* suggestion that pure synthesis is the necessarily presupposed source of the "pure concept of the understanding," i. e., the *categories*. The former principle of pure synthesis (not a real act of synthesis) is transcendentially presupposed in the unity of the latter.

I have shown that such passages are deeply troubling if we fail to keep clearly in view the PSUA as (i) the highest non-real, purely formal, transcendental princi-

⁴⁷ KrV, A 77/B 103.

⁴⁸ "Eine solche Synthesis ist rein, wenn das Mannigfaltige nicht empirisch, sondern *a priori* gegeben ist (wie das im Raum und der Zeit)." KrV, A 77/B 103.

⁴⁹ "[...] es können keine Begriffe dem Inhalte nach analytisch entspringen." KrV, A 77/B 103.

⁵⁰ KrV, A 77/B 103, my emphasis.

⁵¹ "Die reine Synthesis, allgemein vorgestellt, giebt nun den reinen Verstandesbegriff." KrV, A 78/B 104.

ple, and (ii) as a *principle* not merely of unity, but fundamentally of pure synthesis, of the free causality (spontaneity) whereby the act of judging is possible. If we keep this in view, we can see how these passages ground the real correspondence of reason's freedom without relying on any inherent dogma, or vicious circle of dependence on a higher act of the mind, but rather on that same highest (purely formal) principle to which the unity of apperception (and evidently the unities of the pure forms of space and time)⁵² are "fixed."⁵³ Likewise, this account of the PSUA as the grounding for a transcendental proof provides a way of understanding this passage from B 104 as a purely formal dependence relation on the principle of pure synthesis itself (the PSUA), not to some real act of the mind. Above all, the success of Kant's Transcendental Idealism depends on this understanding of the PSUA to retain a non-dogmatic justification of theoretical freedom: spontaneity.⁵⁴

52 For more on the difficulties involved in relating the unity of the pure forms of intuition and the synthetic unity of apperception, see James Messina: "Kant on the Unity of Space and the Synthetic Unity of Apperception," in: *Kant-Studien* 105, 2014, 5–40.

53 I take Robert Pippin to be suggesting a similar conclusion in "Kant on the Spontaneity of the Mind," in: *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 17 (2), 1987, 449–475: 469. Namely, he defends "a non-noumenal relativization of the spontaneity claim to subject qua possible knowing subject and so can be said not to violate that restriction on knowledge of the subject simply as it is in itself."

54 For more on the importance of spontaneity in Kant's tripartite critique of pure reason, see Pippin (1987), 474.