INTRODUCTORY

Recent years have witnessed spirited philosophical discussion of the involvement of concepts—whether there is any, and if so, what form it assumes—in perception or sensory representation. This discussion has had both contemporary systematic and historical dimensions, and among the historical topics treated has been Kant’s account of cognition. The central question, posed in Kantian terms, is that of whether Kant believes that concepts, universal representations of the understanding, are involved in, or prerequisite to, intuitions, singular, immediate representations of objects.

1 INTRODUCTORY

Kant’s readers have disagreed about whether, according to his account of cognition, concepts, representations of the understanding, are involved in intuitions, representations of sensibility. But proponents of the affirmative ‘conceptualist’ answer and those of the negative ‘non-conceptualist’ answer have alike presupposed that such involvement should be construed in a particular way: i.e., as the involvement of particular concepts in particular exercises of sensibility. I argue, on the contrary, that it should not be: that though, for Kant, no concepts are applied in exercises of sensibility, nonetheless the understanding, the faculty of concepts, is teleologically internal to sensibility and, therefore, to its exercises. That is, those exercises are per se directed towards the provision to the understanding of objects to which its fundamental concepts, the categories, are applicable, though no act of categorical application is internal to them. This conception of sensibility, available only in light of a careful distinction between capacities and acts, is demanded, I argue, by Kant’s conception of a priori knowledge as elaborated in his Transcendental Deduction.
The discussion of this question has tended to complexity, if not to complication. It has been asked, for example, whether particular intuitions demand the application or merely the background possession of concepts. It has been asked whether concepts, if they are required at all, must be empirical, or whether the a priori concepts called ‘categories’ might suffice. To see a cat, for example, must I apply or possess the concept cat? Or is the concept substance enough? It has also been asked why such conceptual involvement might be required: to constitute intuitions as having correctness conditions, perhaps, or to make their objects determinate, or for some other reason. And it has been asked which intuitions might require particular concepts or acts of the understanding: empirical intuitions, like my intuition of a cat, or perhaps just the pure intuitions of space and time.

And yet all this variety in the content of the questions posed and in the possible answers to them masks something that all these questions and answers have in common. In every case the question is not about just any way in which concepts might be involved in intuitions. It is about whether particular concepts are, as we might put it, immanently involved, involved-as-present-in, or as needed in the generation of, particular intuitions. Vary the kind of concept, the kind of intuition, the reason for the involvement: what remains constant is the theme of the immanent involvement of one particular in another.

But this is not the only way in which concepts might be involved in intuitions. I hope to show in this essay that more, and more promising, interpretive possibilities emerge when we turn our attention from particular representations of sensibility and the understanding to the capacities themselves, and ask directly about them. For when we do so, I submit, modes of involvement other than the immanent emerge.

One of these modes, which will become one of the principal themes of this essay, may be approached by way of the distinction between essential and accidental unity. An essential unity is one whose parts belong to the whole per se. That is, it is not just that the nature of the whole demands those parts; each of the parts belongs to the whole by its, the part’s, nature. The traditional example of this kind of unity is that of the organized body. The heart, for example, is not what it is but for its relation to the lungs, and to every other organ, and indeed to the whole organism, of which, we say, they are members [Glieder]. On the other hand, an accidental unity is, in one sense of ‘unity’, not a real unity at all, since its elements are together per accidens. Here again, the Latin expression qualifies not the accidental unity, which we might also call an aggregate, but the elements: a heap of sand by nature demands grains of sand as parts, but it does not belong to the nature of any of those grains that it belong to such a heap. It isn’t that the grains of sand have nothing to do with each other: of course they act on, and react to, each other. But there is nonetheless a way in which each grain is indifferent to every other, a way in which the heart and the lungs are not indifferent to one another.

1For a survey of these different kinds of question, see McLear (2014).

2I do not mean to suggest that nothing has been written on these issues with particular reference to the nature of the capacities. (See, for discussions framed in terms of the capacities, for example, Conant (2016), Deleuze (1971), Engstrom (2006), Heidegger (1973), Kern (2018), Longuenese (1998), and McDowell (2017). For a treatment of a closely related issue in the contemporary philosophy of mind, see Boyle (2016). For a general discussion of ‘capacities-first’ approaches to the interpretation of Kant, see Schafer (2020b). See also Schafer (2020a) for discussion of the application of teleology to Kant’s account of rational capacities.) I mean to suggest only that lines of argument and textual interpretation advanced, especially by ‘non-conceptualists’, have tended to hinge on questions about concepts and intuitions. In some cases, authors treat concepts and intuitions as products of the understanding and sensibility, respectively, in a very literal sense; it is natural for such authors to focus on the properties of these products rather than on those of the producers. (See, for example, Allais (2015: 145-175) and Hanna (2005).)

3Both of these examples are from the Metaphysik Mrongovius [29:747]. In an aggregate like a ‘sand hill’, the parts are ‘arbitrarily put together’. In what is called a series, on the other hand, the parts are ‘called members, because we can cognize one part only through the others, e.g., in a human body each part is there through the others’. This is because it is, as Kant writes in the Preface to the first Critique, a ‘truly articulated structure of members in which each thing is an organ, that is, in which everything is for the sake of each member, and each individual member is for the sake of all’ [Bxxxvii-xxxviii].
Thus the question I want to ask about the capacities, sensibility and the understanding, is this: do they, in their combination, constitute an essential or an accidental unity? Call **essentialism** the thesis that the unity is essential: what Kant calls the cognitive capacity [*Erkenntnisvermögen*] is an essential unity whose parts are sensibility and the understanding.⁴ Call **accidentalism** the view that the unity is accidental: sensibility and the understanding are independently constituted, thus independently intelligible, capacities. Now, if we favor accidentalism, we have to find something to say about the cognitive capacity: how do sensibility and the understanding relate to it, in an accidental way? And here there appear to be several options, but this is an especially natural one: cognition might be construed as an activity which the subject performs, exploiting both sensibility and the understanding as instruments, thus as perfectly serviceable in cognition but as in themselves indifferent to the use made of them. Then the possibility of that activity could be called ‘cognitive capacity’ [*Erkenntnisvermögen*].⁵

I expect that this question, whether the capacities constitute an essential or accidental unity, may seem less tractable than those various questions about immanent involvement I rehearsed above. And yet I think it is deeply important, and, indeed, that it approaches to the very heart of the positive project of the first *Critique of Pure Reason*. I make a case for its importance here by defending, in some detail, an essentialist image of the shape of the Kantian mind. In §2 I gather evidence from the first *Critique* and student notes on Kant’s lectures on metaphysics which supports an essentialist reading. This evidence will also supply a clue as to the particular form Kant’s essentialism might assume: that is, as to how, in particular, we should characterize the way in which the capacities are dependent on one another. I then turn to the details of these modes of dependence. In §3 I discuss the understanding’s dependence on sensibility, in §4 sensibility’s dependence on the understanding.

To anticipate, and to introduce the second of this essay’s principal themes, the argument running through these sections will be that an essentialist image of the mind is demanded by Kant’s conception of the understanding’s *a priori* knowledge.⁶⁷ Part of the interest of this argument will, I think, consist in this: that the essentialism I defend will embody a rejection of the view that particular intuitions need be immanently involved in particular concepts; in this sense, it will embody a rejection of what is usually called ‘conceptualism’. Equally, however, it will embody a rejection of every position I know of defended under the title of ‘non-conceptualism’, since these positions embrace or presuppose

---

⁴The cognitive capacity is, properly speaking, only one of three division of the mind [*Gemüt*], which also comprehends the desiderative capacity [*Begeh rungsvermögen*] and feeling of pleasure and displeasure [*Gefühl der Lust und Unlust*] [*EE-KU* 20: 205-6]. ‘Taken together, these three major powers of the soul constitute its life’ [*Mrongovius* 29:878]. Within each division there is a distinction between higher (active) and lower (passive), but my focus here is on that distinction within the *Er kenntnisvermögen* alone.

⁵This is suggested by Robert Hanna’s interpretation of Kant’s adage ‘thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind’ [*A51/B75*]. While some authors—including that of this essay—take this to express an internal connection between the capacities, he takes this to express the view that thoughts and intuitions must be associated ‘only for the specific purpose of constituting objectively valid judgments’ (Hanna, 2005: 257). Thus, according to Hanna, cognition, in the sense of objectively valid judgment, is merely one purpose among others, which I may take up at my option; should I choose to do so, I shall have to combine two independently constituted items.

⁶Here I follow many ‘conceptualist’ readers in thinking that Kant’s account of *a priori* knowledge is the heart of the matter: if this account requires a particular shape for the mind, that demand has primacy relative to other textual considerations. (Those emphasizing the importance of this demand include, for example, Ginsborg (2008), Gomes (2017), McDowell (2017), and Newton (2016)).

⁷I say ‘knowledge’ advisedly, not to suggest that it is always the right translation of ‘Erkenntnis’ (though it is, in my view, the right translation of the primary use of this term), but to suggest that, for Kant, the fundamental concepts of the understanding (the categories) and their principles, which are *a priori*, constitute knowledge of the form of nature, and that it is this knowledge that is his principal concern in the positive part of the first *Critique*, as discussed below (§4).
accidentalism. And so I indicate, along the way, the points at which it makes its departure from these other readings.

2 | MIND, AN ESSENTIAL UNITY

2.1 | The specific distinction

One way of putting essentialism is to say that sensibility and the understanding are, by nature, one. And yet it may seem difficult to say this, because Kant insists that they are two:

If we will call the receptivity of our mind to receive representations insofar as it is affected in some way sensibility, then on the contrary the capacity to bring forth representations itself, or the spontaneity of cognition, is the understanding. It comes along with our nature that intuition can never be other than sensible, i.e., that it contains only the way in which we are affected by objects. The capacity to think of objects of sensible intuition, on the contrary, is the understanding. Neither of these properties is to be preferred to the other. [...] Further, these two capacities cannot exchange their functions. The understanding is not capable of intuiting anything, and the senses are not capable of thinking anything. [A51-2/B75-6]

The senses intuit objects, and the understanding thinks the objects intuited. This is essential to the nature of each capacity. They do utterly different things; they have utterly different functions; they are not one; they are two.

Part of the reason Kant insists on this is that other philosophers have denied it. Indeed, such denials are characteristic of theories of the mind and representation in the early modern period:

Leibniz intellectualized the appearances, just as Locke sensitivized the concepts of the understanding. Instead of seeking two entirely different sources of representation in the understanding and the sensibility, which could judge about things with objective validity only in conjunction, each of these great men holds on only to one of them... [A271/B327]

Each of Leibniz and Locke ‘preferred’ one kind of representation to the other, and tried to assimilate the other to it.

Lucy Allais has urged us to remember this, in her defense of a non-conceptualist reading, in a way which usefully summarizes some of the crucial differences between concepts and intuitions: ‘[t]hat intuitions are singular and concepts are general, that intuitions give us objects and concepts cannot do this, and that these two ingredients make essential and distinct contributions to cognition are not features of Kant’s account that are provisional or open to revision. These claims are fundamental to Kant’s position, and asserted many times throughout the critical works’ (Allais, 2015: 162).

8Thus my position might be construed as a kind of middle way, though I hope not one which determines itself ‘as it were mechanically (something from one side, and something from the other), and by which no one is set right, but rather a middle way that can be determined precisely, according to principles’ [Prolegomena 4:360].
2.2 | Unity in diversity

But for sensibility to be assimilated to the understanding, or the understanding to sensibility, is not the only way for these two things to be one. Here we might reach further back than Leibniz and Locke and consider the image of the mind defended by St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas, like Kant, and unlike the early modern figures I have mentioned, embraces a specific distinction of sense and intellect. But he does not think of these capacities as constitutively independent. I wish to introduce an essentialist reading of Kant by comparing some of the remarks recorded by his students to some passages from Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*. Consider first his description of the relation of each capacity to the other. He writes that each is dependent on the other in a different way:

Since the soul is one, its capacities several, and many things come from one in an ordered sequence, there is necessarily an order between the soul’s capacities. [...] The dependence of one capacity on another can be understood in two ways. First, in terms of the order of nature, inasmuch as the perfect are prior by nature to the imperfect. Second, in terms of the order of generation and time, inasmuch as things go from being imperfect to being perfect. With respect to the first ordering of capacities, then, the intellective capacities are prior to the sensory; as a result, they direct and command them. [...] As regards the second ordering, however, the situation is reversed. For the capacities of the nutritive soul are prior, in the process of generation, to the capacities of the sensory soul; as a result they prepare the body for sensory activities. The same is true for the sensory capacities, with respect to the intellective ones. [*Summa Theologiae* 1a 77.4]?

In the order of nature, he says, the intellectual powers are prior to the sensitive. Whereas in the second order, that of generation, the sensitive are prior to the intellectual. This means, in particular, order in the acts of the soul: ‘[t]his order among the soul’s capacities holds both as regards the soul...and as regards objects. It also holds as regards acts’ [*Summa Theologiae* 1a 77.4]. Elsewhere he puts the priority of the intellect to the senses in another way: he says that ‘the senses exist for the sake of intellect, not vice versa’ [*Summa Theologiae* 1a 77.7]. So, abstractly put, the intellect, to do what it does, needs the senses. And the senses are directed towards the intellect’s needs. The intellect and senses are united teleologically. The intellect supplies the principle for the unity that they constitute, but it cannot realize this principle alone. It needs the senses, and their contribution to the intellect, their fulfillment of this need, is their raison d’être.

Aquinas regards sense and intellect as essentially unified even as he regards them as distinct. His is not an assimilative conception of their unity, as are, according to Kant, the doctrines of Locke and Leibniz. Might Kant’s philosophy of mind resemble, in this respect, that of Aquinas? An indication to this effect is to be found in the *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, in which we are told that ‘the use of the lower cognitive powers depends on the higher, and indeed the higher govern over the lower by means of the imagination’ [29:887]. This is not, moreover, the only moment at which Kant uses metaphors of governance and service, familiar from the Aristotelian tradition. He writes in the *Anthropology*, for example, that ‘[t]he senses do not have command over understanding. Rather, they offer themselves to understanding merely in order to be at its disposal’ [*Anthropologie* 7:145].

---

9In citing the *Summa Theologiae* I indicate the part, question, and article. Translations are from Hause and Pasnau (2014).

10Another, related metaphor is that of obedience: ‘[t]he nonrational [part], then, as well [as the whole soul] apparently has two parts. For while the plantlike [part] shares in reason not at all, the [part] with appetites and in general desires shares in reason in a way, insofar as it both listens to reason and obeys it’ [Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.13 1102b29-32; translation from Aristotle (1999)].
Consider another rather telling way in which a parallel can be found between Aquinas and Kant:

[A]n animal would not be absolutely one, in which there were several souls. For nothing is absolutely one except by form, by which a thing has existence….If, therefore, man were ‘living’ by one form, the vegetative soul, and ‘animal’ by another form, the sensitive soul, and ‘man’ by another form, the intellectual soul, it would follow that man is not absolutely one… [Summa Theologiae 1a 76.3]

The singul(arity) (singularity not simplicity) against which some assume three souls (vegetative soul—e.g., growth of hair—sensitive soul—cause of actions according to the brute power of choice, and rational soul, use of reason); but three faculties do not give three souls, and moreover the I brings everything to unity. The question cannot be settled otherwise. A human being constitutes a unity, and we cannot call the principles of life in various parts souls. [Dohna 28:683]

Aquinas advances in the first of these passages the Aristotelian thesis that the human being has only one soul, not several, because otherwise it would not be one thing. And Kant is recorded, in the second, as recapitulating that very argument.\textsuperscript{11,12} This is an indication—again, like the passage from the Mrogonovius above, not decisive, but an indication nonetheless—that Kant, like the Aristotelians, is concerned to explain how the human being, including in her cognitive constitution, is a unity, and not an aggregate of independent elements, though the unity is, to be sure, complex: an Einheit, a unity, but not an Einfachheit, a simplicity.

We might note also that the principle of that Einheit is the ‘I’: Kant says that the ‘I’ brings everything to unity. In the same series of lectures he is recorded as saying that

[the I] is the first act of the mind: the capacity to cognize oneself as representing subject, and also as object of our representation. […] This capacity contains the ground of the difference of sensibility and understanding (capacity of rules—higher cognitive capacity). [Dohna 28:670-1]

In combination, the passages tell us that the ‘I’ brings sensibility and intellect—let’s forget about growth of hair—to unity, and that it is the principle of their difference. This makes sense if we take the ‘I’ to be a principle of what Rachel Zuckert has called a unity of the diverse as such (Zuckert, 2007: 24 et passim). This is, at a certain level of generality, the kind of unity an organism is: its principle—roughly, homeostasis—is what unites all its parts, and determines why the whole is articulated into those parts. In fact, its explaining the unity of the parts and its explaining the diversity of the parts are not two different things. One thing is explained in one explanation: the unity of the diverse as such

It should, however, be noted that this essential unity, of intellect and sense, differs in an important respect from the unity of, say, the heart with the lungs under the principle of homeostasis. Neither the heart nor the lungs can be taken to be the other’s governor. Whereas in the unity of cognition as we find it in Aquinas and Kant, one member of the unity has a kind of explanatory priority relative to other; one part is a privileged member of the whole. That is, it is the intellect which explains why senses are there, and not vice versa. Kant, as we shall see, sometimes identifies the activity of

\textsuperscript{11}See also K\textsubscript{2} 28:753.

\textsuperscript{12}Kant is not, of course, committing himself to the existence of a non-sensible substance such as many members of the tradition have meant by ‘soul’ (‘Seele’, ‘anima’, ‘psyche’ and so on). He means ‘the vital principle of man in the free use of his powers’ [MS 6:384].
understanding with cognition, as though the part were the whole. This is not, I think, sheer sloppiness, but an expression of the explanatory priority we have identified. Indeed, to stress the parallel of Kant with the Aristotelian tradition even further, we might note here the ancient view that a composite system is, in some way, identical to its ruling part, thought not at the expense of the distinctness of the other parts. 

But upon what grounds could this essentialism be attributed to the critical, published Kant? Here all we can do is to examine the published works and what they say about the relationship between sensibility and the understanding. I begin by considering whether the understanding needs sensibility (§3). I then turn to the question whether sensibility is, by nature, that which allows the understanding the fulfillment of this need (§4).

3 | THE INTELLECT’S VOCATION

3.1 | The Erfahrungsgebrauch

In an initial characterization of the understanding in the opening pages of his analysis of that faculty, the Transcendental Analytic, Kant calls sensibility a ‘capacity to receive representations’, the understanding a capacity ‘to cognize an object by means of those’—those sensory—‘representations’ [A50/B74]. Note that in this characterization, Kant says that the understanding is a capacity to cognize an object by means of such sensory representations; that such sensory representations are the means of its activity is specified in the characterization of the capacity.

Of course, this cannot mean that the understanding depends on sensibility in the same way in each and every one of its representations. For Kant’s foremost ambition is to explain the possibility of knowledge a priori, which we may characterize negatively as knowledge ungrounded in the sensible presentation of objects. If the understanding depends on sensibility per se, as suggested by this initial characterization, this cannot be taken as a universal generalization over determinations and exercises of the understanding, as though, in speaking of the dependence of one capacity on another, we were merely summarizing facts about these exercises. What I seek to show here is that, according to Kant, all the acts and determinations of the understanding are unified, not by some feature which each has, but by a kind of exercise which is explanatorily privileged relative to the others: a kind of exercise of which it makes sense to say that, though it is not the only act of the understanding, it is the act of the understanding.

But I want to work up to this thought, and its textual ground, more carefully. Let us begin by considering the ways in which the understanding depends upon sensibility according to Kant’s discussion in the First Chapter of the Analytic of Concepts.

13 See Engstrom (2006) for discussion of cognition as the activity of the understanding.
14 [A] city and every other composite system seems to be above all its most controlling part’ [Nicomachean Ethics IX.8 1168b30-5].
15 In the first Critique’s A-Deduction, Kant calls transcendental apperception the ‘radical faculty [Radikalvermögen] of all our cognition’ [A114]. Dieter Henrich suggests in accordance with this that ‘[i]n its content the structure formed by the faculties of the mind [sensibility, imagination, and understanding] is determined through the structure of finite self-consciousness’ (Henrich, 1994: 31). And apperception—finite self-consciousness—is, Kant claims, identical to the understanding [B134a.]. Here, then, the higher, the understanding, is identical with what, in the Metaphysik Dohna, is called the principle of the higher’s unity with the lower, sensibility. Cognition is here depicted as a composite system which is most of all its ruling part.
16 Recall also that in the passage quoted above from A51-2/B75-6, the understanding is characterized as ‘the capacity to think of objects of sensible intuition’. 
First of all, the understanding depends on sensibility in its acts: that is, in judgments.\footnote{Here I follow Béatrice Longuenesse’s reading of the understanding as capacity to judge \textit{[Vermögen zu urteilen]} and the power of judgment, or judgmental force \textit{[Urteilskraft]} as that capacity’s actualization (Longuenesse, 1998: 7). Thus judgment, insofar as I consider it here, is not judgeable content but an act. As Kant puts it in a letter to Jacob Sigismund Beck, ‘[t]he difference between the connection of representations in a concept and the connection of representations in a judgment…lies, I think, in this: in the first, one thinks of a concept as determinate \textit{[bestimmt]}; in the second, one thinks of the activity of my determining \textit{[meines Bestimmens]} this concept’ [Briefwechsel (July 3, 1792) 11:347]. It is, in particular, the assertoric judgment, in the making of which ‘[the assertion] is considered actual (true)’ [A74-5/B100; emphasis mine].} Thus:

Now the understanding can make no other use of these concepts than of judging by means of them. Since no representation pertains to the object immediately except intuition alone, a concept is thus never immediately related to an object, but is always related to some other representation of it (whether that be an intuition or itself already a concept). Judgment is therefore the mediate cognition of an object, hence the representation of a representation of it. [A68/B93]

Because ‘we can trace all actions of the understanding back to judgments’, the understanding ‘can be represented as a capacity to judge’ [A69/B94]. In a judgment, concepts are applied to an object given by sensibility. The object has to be given by sensibility, because concepts do not ‘pertain to the object immediately’. An intuition must mediate the relation of concept to object. So in a judgment, an act of the understanding here and now, the higher capacity depends upon the lower. It depends upon it for the object of the judgment, the presentation of which enables this activation of the intellect.\footnote{Kant’s remarks here may seem, in spite of his refusal to include any explicit qualification to this effect, to apply only to some judgments: synthetic, and, in particular, empirical judgments. In a way, this is right. But, as I am in the course of arguing, this is not a case of mere sloppiness, nor of ambiguity or polysemy in the word ‘judgment’. The kind of judgment Kant describes here has, as an act of the understanding, a kind of explanatory priority relative to the others.}

But this is not the only way in which the understanding depends upon sensibility. For Kant speaks not just of the act of judgment as so depending but even of the concept applied in such an act as so depending. Thus:

The concept of body thus signifies something, e.g. metal, which can be cognized through that concept. It is therefore a concept only because other representations are contained under it by means of which it can be related to objects. It is therefore the predicate for a possible judgment, e.g., “Every metal is a body”. [A69/B94]

How are concepts related to the understanding, if judgment is related to the understanding as act to capacity? We can understand concepts as determinations of the capacity, which constitute it as a readiness to judge concerning particular subject matters.\footnote{These are determinations \textit{[Bestimmungen]} because they yield a capacity more specific than that of the capacity to judge in general: a capacity to judge about this or that subject matter.} Thus, to possess an understanding is to be capable of judging \textit{sans phrase}. To possess the concept \textit{cat} is, roughly speaking, to be ready to make judgments
about cats. To judge that something is a cat is to exercise one’s capacity to judge in that determination.\(^{20}\)

Now Kant says that the concept *body* ‘is a concept’ only because it can be related to objects by intuitions. He does not say that it is a concept because it is related to objects by intuitions; for then it would be a concept only in an act of the understanding, only in judgment. But as concept, it is the possibility of such acts, insofar as they would concern bodies. For a concept is not an act but a determination of potentiality. If an act of the understanding requires the actual presentation of an object, then the corresponding potentiality of the understanding—the concept—requires the possibility of such presentation. In this way, the possibilities for the understanding depend upon the possibilities for sensibility. Call this the *sensible-significance condition* on conceptuality.\(^{21,22}\)

So far, it sounds very much as though the understanding depends by nature on sensibility. But it might be thought that this is an artifact of Kant’s example: *body*. For *body* is, according to Kant, an empirical concept. It might be thought fair enough to describe an empirical concept as the possibility of judging, or, as we might put it, the readiness to judge upon sensory presentation of an appropriate particular. But what of *non*-empirical concepts? Broadly speaking, Kant admits two kinds of non-empirical concept. The first kind I shall call, more or less in agreement with his own usage, the *pure concepts* [A70/B95ff.]. These concepts all derive from the fundamental system of the concepts of the intellect, or the *categories*: examples include *reality, substance, cause and effect*, and the like. The second kind of non-empirical concept he calls *ideas* [A311/B368f.]. These are not applicable to sensible things, or at least not straightforwardly: these are concepts like *God, immortal soul*, and *world-totality*. I consider the first kind, the pure concepts, here, and discuss the ideas very briefly in §3.2 below.

\(^{20}\)Schafer (2020a: 4) suggests, against Longuenesse (see n. 17 above), that the understanding should not be defined as a ‘capacity to judge’ because its ultimate end is not ‘merely to generate judgments for their own sake’ but to ‘give us cognition’. In drawing the distinction between concepts, as determinations of the capacity to judge, and judgments, as exercises of that capacity, I hope to have gone some distance towards an explanation of why it is correct to characterize the understanding as, fundamentally, a capacity to judge. Capacities are characterized according to their exercise, and judgment is the exercise of the understanding. Capacities are, further, characterized according to their successful exercise: when Kant says that the understanding is a capacity to judge, he means, in my view, a capacity to judge in such a way as to express knowledge. (With such a capacity comes the liability to judge falsely, or truly but not so as to express knowledge.)

Of course, there is much that I know even when I do not judge it, and at least my universal knowledge—knowledge of the cat *überhaupt*, for example—is embodied in the concepts I possess. A complete account of the understanding—not my topic here—would, moreover, have to explain why this capacity, the capacity to judge, is perfected only to the extent that its concepts are systematized under ideas of reason [A642/B670ff]. This is all to say that my emphasis on judgment does not shortchange concepts, ideas, or system: in my view, judgment is that in terms of which their significance should be explicated.

\(^{21}\)With the word ‘significance’ I mean to echo the most common translation of *Bedeutung* as used by Kant. It might be alleged that significance in this sense goes beyond mere conceptuality, because there are concepts without significance [A292/B348-9; A596/B624n.]. But I think we should take Kant seriously when he writes that *body* ‘is a concept’ only because it can be related to objects by intuitions. Two brief notes on this. First, we need not assume that it is true of every concept that its being a concept depends on such a possibility; we need only, as I am in the course of arguing, recognize that for some concepts, and indeed for the explanatorily central concepts, their conceptuality cannot be sundered from their significance. Second, we may acknowledge a distinction between genuine concepts, which have positive content, and merely negative or analogical characterizations which do not strictly deserve the title concept (e.g., ‘we can think these properties of the highest being only by means of analogy’ [KU 5/456]; therefore, ‘the human understanding cannot even form for itself the least concept of another possible understanding, …one that would itself intuit’ [B139]). Kant thinks that these characterizations admit of formulation only by virtue of their (e.g., analogical) relation to (genuine, positive) concepts.

\(^{22}\)This is related to, and deliberately reminiscent of, P.F. Strawson’s ‘principle of significance’: ‘there can be no legitimate, or even meaningful, employment of ideas or concepts which does not relate them to empirical or experiential conditions of their application’ (Strawson, 1966: 16).
The pure concepts, unlike the ideas, are applicable to sensible things. Unlike empirical concepts, they do not depend for their sensible applicability on an object’s falling into one species of sensible being rather than another. The concept cat applies to cats, but not to rats or bats; the pure concepts apply, as a system, to every region of sensible being. For they are applicable to things just insofar as those things are sensible. They are not readinesses to judge this or that kind of sensible being; rather, as a system, they articulate the form of any such readiness. This is why Kant says of empirical concepts that they are ‘concepts of the understanding in concreto’ [A567/B595].

Because the pure concepts fulfill the sensible-significance condition, as they must if empirical concepts are the pure concepts in concreto, Kant’s admitting these concepts does not force him to qualify the condition. To the extent that the condition expresses a dependence of the understanding on sensibility, his admitting pure concepts does not require that we deny or qualify such a dependence. Nonetheless, there is an important difference between the way in which the pure concepts fulfill the condition and the way in which empirical concepts do, and this difference might be thought to undermine the claim of dependence. Consider a representative passage from the Analytic of Principles:

A concept that includes a synthesis in it is to be held as empty, and does not relate to any object, if this synthesis does not belong to experience, either as borrowed from it, in which case it is an empirical concept, or as one on which, as a priori condition, experience in general (its form) rests, and then it is a pure concept, which nevertheless belongs to experience, since its object can be encountered in the latter. For whence will one derive the character of the possibility of an object that is thought by means of a synthetic a priori concept, if not from the synthesis that constitutes the form of the empirical cognition of objects? That in such a concept no contradiction must be contained is, to be sure, a necessary logical condition; but it is far from sufficient for the objective reality of the concept, i.e., for the possibility of such an object as is thought through the concept. [A220/B267-8]

Here we are told that an empirical concept’s synthesis is ‘borrowed from experience’, whereas that of a pure concept is ‘an a priori condition of experience in general’. If a concept is empirical, its marks are supplied by observation of the particulars which fall under it. This is confirmed in the Doctrine of Method:

Thus in the concept of gold one person might think, besides its weight, color, and ductility, its property of not rusting, while another might know nothing about this. One makes use of certain marks only as long as they are sufficient for making distinctions; new observations, however, take some away and add some, and therefore the concept never remains within secure boundaries. [A728/B756]

Pure concepts are not like that. There are, to be sure, objects in experience to which they are applicable; they ‘belong to experience’ [A220/B267-8]. But that is not because they, like empirical concepts, depend on

---

23‘All the pure cognitions of the understanding are such that their concepts can be given in experience and their principles confirmed through experience; by contrast, the transcendent cognitions of reason neither allow what relates to their ideas to be given in experience, nor their theses ever to be confirmed or refuted through experience’ [Prolegomena 4:329]. Now, in fact, not even the pure concepts are, according to Kant, completely exemplified in experience [Prolegomena 4:315]. But they are incompletely exemplified, whereas an idea cannot be incompletely exemplified, because an idea is per se expressive of a perfection, thus of a completion: see n. 30 below.

24Thus ‘I have complete insight into not only the possibility but also the necessity of subsuming all appearances under these concepts’ [Prolegomena 4:311].
the actual experience of these objects. It is rather because the experience of these objects depends on them.\textsuperscript{25} The concept \textit{cat} is, as it were, at the mercy of our experience of nature: in such experience we may be given cats or not. Now, as a matter of fact, we have been, so that we can have a concept \textit{cat}. But we need not have been so lucky: as Kant is recorded as saying in one of his lectures on logic, ‘concepts of experience simply do not exist without experience...If there were no horse, then no one would be in a position to fabricate a horse, either’ [\textit{Blomberg} 24:253]. The pure concepts, on the other hand, are not at the mercy of experience; experience is at their mercy. So though they fulfill the sensible-significance condition, the direction of the fulfillment’s explanation is not the same in the pure case as in the empirical case. As Kant says in the Transcendental Dialectic, it is ‘because [the pure concepts] constitute the intellectual form of all experience’ that ‘it must always be possible to show their application in experience’ [A310/B367]. And so, it may seem, they do not depend upon sensibility, though experience, to which sensibility contributes, does depend on them.

It may seem, then, that we must qualify our initial impression. The understanding does indeed depend upon sensibility for its empirical activity. But it does not seem to depend upon sensibility for its \textit{a priori} form, that by which it makes experience possible. The understanding appears to have a potentiality which is not dependent upon sensibility after all.

But actually, this dependence, of experience on the pure concepts, could turn out equally to be a dependence of the pure concepts on experience. It all depends on whether the pure concepts are \textit{per se}—that is, according to what they are—anything if not constitutive of the possibility of experience. That is, it depends on whether they would be anything if not for their making experience possible, anything apart from their role as the form of empirical concepts.\textsuperscript{26} If so, then they themselves would not depend on experience, and the understanding would have a potentiality which, in its nature, need have nothing to do with experience. Making experience possible would just be, for them, an especially engaging transcendental hobby, and they would find something else to do if it were not available to them. But if they are nothing if not what makes experience possible, then they depend on experience for their constitutive purpose, and thus for their very being.

And that is exactly what Kant thinks. Indeed, he announces, as the central result of his Transcendental Analytic, the positive part of his consideration of our intellectual powers, ‘that everything that the understanding draws out of itself, without borrowing it from experience, it nevertheless has solely for the sake of its empirical exercise [\textit{Erfahrungsgebrauch}]’ [A236/B295-6].\textsuperscript{27} This is the principle I anticipated at the beginning of this section, which unifies every act and determination of the understanding, empirical and non-empirical alike. The capacity to judge is the capacity to judge empirically, and everything non-empirical belonging to it belongs to the form of that capability, a capability whose exercise essentially involves sense. The understanding is, in a sense deeper than that expressed by the sensible-significance condition, by its own nature dependent upon sensibility.

\textsuperscript{25}The possibility of the pure concepts ‘is founded solely in the relation of the understanding to experience: not, however, such that these concepts and laws are derived from experience, but such that experience is derived from them’ [\textit{Prolegomena} 4:313].

\textsuperscript{26}Note that I do not say: it depends on whether they are anything apart from their making experience possible. For they are, in some sense, something apart from their making experience possible: they can serve as mere \textit{Gedankenformen} for the inexperientiable [A248/B305]. What I am suggesting is that they can do that only because they make experience possible. For an explicit suggestion by Kant to this effect, see his discussion of Hume on cause and effect in the second \textit{Critique} [\textit{KpV} 5:54].

\textsuperscript{27}He similarly describes the ‘concepts and principles of the pure understanding’ as ‘destined for a merely empirical exercise’ [\textit{zum bloffen Erfahrungsgebrauch bestimmt}] [\textit{Prolegomena} 4:313], and claims to have achieved, as no one has before, an ‘insight into the nature of the categories’, [emphasis mine] ‘that these concepts serve only to determine empirical judgments with respect to all the functions of judging...so as to procure universal validity for these judgments, and, by means of it, to make judgments of experience in general possible’ [\textit{Prolegomena} 4:324].
This kind of observation is available to us only if we train our attention on capacities. For capacities are capacities to do something; they are teleologically constituted. This means that what they are for— their Behuf, their Bestimmung—is not additional to, but indeed constitutes, what they are. It is only in appreciating this that we can see how the understanding can be essentially dependent on sensibility even as much belongs to it which is not empirical.

3.2  Indirect dependence

Before I move on to consider sensibility’s dependence on the understanding, I want to return very briefly to the concepts of God, the immortal soul, and the world-whole. I cannot give a comprehensive reading of the transcendental ideas in this essay, but it is important to see that what I have said does not make for their impossibility. Indeed, I think that Kant’s discussion of the ideas, and the positive use to which he puts them, corroborates what I have said about the understanding. But here I can only gesture to the reason why.

Some would object to the kind of reading I am proposing on the ground that these concepts, though not satisfying the sensible-significance condition, because no sensible object can be congruent to them, are concepts just as much as any concepts satisfying that condition, and that given the crucial roles they play in Kant’s theoretical philosophy, must have a kind of content. Of course, they do have a kind of content; they have marks. That is, we associate different predicates with each of them. (For example, omnipotent belongs to God but not to immortal soul.) Some might suppose that, once this is admitted, we are forced to think that having consistent marks is just what it is to be a concept, so that, just insofar as they are concepts, God, immortal soul, and perhaps even unicorn are on all fours with body, gold, and little leaf linden. The latter three satisfy the sensible-significance condition, to be sure; but you can think with all six of them alike, because none is self-contradictory, and the only principle governing thinking as such is the principle of non-contradiction: ‘I can think whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself’ [Bxxvi n.].

But this line of argument presupposes that we must have a full and complete generic account of conceptuality (or, equivalently, of what it is to think), comprehensible independently of our understanding of any of the species of concepts (or thinking), and thus, in particular, independently of our understanding of empirical concepts (or empirical judgment). The result is an image of the understanding as ‘flat’, so that its nature can be fully characterized without reference to this or any other species of concept. But that image is distortive if, as Kant says, the empirical use of the understanding is that capacity’s sole Behuf. Thus even

---

28Some readers may prefer to put the ideas entirely aside, as representations of reason, as opposed to the understanding, narrowly construed; this would limit my scope here to the relation between sensibility and the understanding, narrowly construed. I do not share this preference. The capacities under discussion here are sensibility, the power to represent an object in and through being affected by it, and the understanding, the power to judge on the basis of representations of sensibility. Both the understanding in the narrow sense and reason belong to this power. Reason is the power of syllogism, and ‘the syllogism is nothing but a judgment mediated by the subsumption of its condition under a universal rule’ [A307/B364]. Thus, it is a judgment mediated by the consciousness of its ground. As I suggested in n. 20 above, a full account of the understanding as capacity to judge would, in my view, have to explain why such judgment—judgment identical with syllogism—must belong to that capacity.

29The practical philosophy, in which God, freedom and immortality play essential roles, is yet another matter. In this essay I am concerned with concepts only as representations of the intellect (the higher division of the Erkenntnisvermögen), thus not with concepts as representations of the will (the higher division of the Begehungsvermögen). The latter require, in my view, a different treatment, and there is no reason to expect that representations essential to our practical consciousness work in the same way as those essential to our theoretical consciousness. There are, however, analogies: in both cases, these ideas serve as schemata for structural features of the exercises of the capacities in question (cognition in the theoretical case, desire in the practical). Still, the two cases are different, because theory and practice are different.
if concepts like God, soul and world-whole have their marks independently of the possibility of experience, they are determinations of the capacity to think, and that capacity is per se directed to its Erfahrungsgebrauch as its principal exercise. So these concepts must, if they are determinations of that capacity, be shown to contribute to its Erfahrungsgebrauch. This is why Kant, in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, insists that because the ideas ‘are given as problems for us by the nature of our reason’, which ‘cannot possibly contain original deceptions and semblances’, ‘they have their good and purposive vocation in regard to the natural predisposition of our reason’ [A669/B697]. The vocation he claims for them is to serve as the necessary schemata for a principle expressing the systematic perfection of the understanding’s empirical exercise [A671/B699ff.]. This is ‘the true but hidden end of the natural determination of our reason’, that ‘they may be aimed, not at concepts that are overreaching, but merely at the unbounded expansion of the use of concepts in experience’ [Prolegomena 4:333]. He never suggests that it might make sense for the ideas to sit about with nothing to do, as though, even if he had not found them some empirical work, they would still be there, all right, but with no function, rather like a transcendental appendix—the title of the relevant part of the Critique notwithstanding—or, worse still, that it might be that they have (irresolubly and irremediably) deleterious effects on the understanding’s operation. Indeed, he writes that ‘there must nonetheless be agreement between what belongs to the nature of reason and what belongs to the nature of the understanding, and the former must contribute to the perfection of the latter and cannot possibly confuse it’ [Prolegomena 4:331; emphasis mine]. Thus, though they do not satisfy the sensible-significance condition, they, like the pure concepts, play a role in experience which is essential to them.30

4 | ESSENTIALISM & KNOWLEDGE A PRIORI

4.1 | The task of the Deduction

So much, then, for the understanding’s dependence on sensibility. What of sensibility’s dependence on the understanding? I think that unless sensibility plays its role in cognition by nature, Kant’s explanation of the categories as embodying a priori knowledge of sensible objects fails by his own lights. This means, in textual terms, that it is required for the success of the Transcendental Deduction that sensibility not just contribute to cognition, but be by its own nature directed to doing so, in one of two senses allowed by the first Critique and which I elaborate towards the end of this section.

The aim of the Transcendental Deduction is to explain how the categories of the understanding can constitute knowledge a priori of sensible objects. They constitute such knowledge just in case they are known to be, of necessity, applicable to objects just insofar as they, those objects, are sensible. Sensible objects are, for human beings, at least, by necessity spatiotemporal. So Kant’s strategy in the Deduction is to explain why the categories are, by necessity, applicable to objects of a spatiotemporal sensibility. He thinks that the explanation is not easy. Not as easy, that is, as the explanation of the necessary applicability of the concepts space and time:

In the case of the concepts of space and time, we were able above to make comprehensible with little effort how these, as a priori cognitions, must nevertheless necessarily relate to objects, and made possible a synthetic cognition of them independent of all

30This is to say nothing of the role of the ideas in transcendental illusion, a role they do not play by accident. In this essay I describe the elements of cognition, including those belonging to reason, only in connection with their correct employment. Since Kant’s interest in the first Critique is not limited to the transcendentally normal, but extends to the transcendentally pathological, this treatment cannot but be incomplete.
experience. For since an object can appear to us only by means of such a pure form of sensibility, i.e., be an object of empirical intuition, space and time are thus pure intuitions that contain a priori the conditions of the possibility of objects as appearances, and the synthesis in them has objective validity. [A89-90/B121-2]

Sensible things are all, by necessity, spatiotemporal; therefore, the concepts space and time, by necessity, apply to them. The categories, on the other hand, unlike the concepts space and time, ‘do not represent to us the conditions under which objects are given in intuition at all’ [A89-90/B121-2]. So we cannot explain their necessary applicability to objects in the same way. Thus, Kant says, ‘a difficulty is revealed here that we did not encounter in the field of sensibility’ [A89-90/B121-2].

This is the point at which I can begin to make more explicit the interpretive attractions of essentialism in connection with the discussion of conceptualism and non-conceptualism. Some conceptualists take this claim—that ‘the categories…do not represent to us the conditions under which objects are given in intuition at all’—to be merely didactic.31 That is to say, they think that this is given to us as a problem of the following form. Suppose objects are not given in intuition under the categories as conditions. Then the categories would not apply to objects as given in sensibility as such, and thus could not embody knowledge a priori of sensible objects. Thus, we must show that the supposition is false.32 They must say the same thing about Kant’s claim, in the next sentence, that ‘appearances can be given in intuition without functions of the understanding’ [A89-90/B121-2]. They say all this because they think that functions of the understanding are involved in particular acts of sensibility, and that this is required to account for the necessity of categorical applicability to objects given in those exercises. I think that this is wrong. I think that these claims are made in Kant’s own voice, and that they express his considered view.33 But it is important to be clear about what they mean.

When he says that ‘objects are given in intuition without having to be related to functions of the understanding’, he cannot mean that objects are given in intuition to which the categories of the understanding need not be applicable. That cannot be what he means because it would immediately foreclose the possibility of the Deduction’s success; the Deduction is supposed to explain why the categories are necessarily applicable to the deliverances of sensibility.34 I propose that what he means is just this: that objects are given in intuition without already being thought under categories, or indeed any other concepts—any functions of the understanding. That is, an object’s being given in an act of sensibility does not depend on any particular act of categorical predication by the thinker.35

---

31I owe the application of the term ‘didactic’ in this context to Grüne (2011: 475).

32For example, Ginsborg (2008: 70) argues that the supposition seems true because Kant has not yet introduced the possibility of an imaginative synthesis in perception; that possibility exhibited, we shall be in a position to dismiss the supposition.

33Thus on this point I agree with some non-conceptualists, like Allais (2015: 162-3), who notes that ‘can’ [können] in this passage appears in the indicative mood. In the context of corroborating evidence, this can be treated as a defeasible indication that this passage is not didactic.

34Allais writes that ‘to show that everything given in intuition must fall under the categories…is not the same’ as to show ‘that everything given in intuition must fall under the categories in order to be presented to us in intuition’ (2015: 174). It is important that I am drawing a different distinction. I am saying that to show that everything given by sensibility must fall under the categories is not the same as to show that acts of categorical application are involved in sensibility’s exercises. For it is compatible with my denial that such acts are so involved that, nonetheless, ‘everything given in intuition must fall under the categories in order to be presented to us in intuition’. Indeed, I believe that, according to Kant, that is true.

35It might be noted in this connection that when he introduces the term ‘function’ [Funktion], he writes that ‘by a function…I understand the unity of the action [der Handlung] of ordering different representations under a common one’ [A68/B92-3]. In agreement with one possible reading of this characterization, I am saying here that relation to functions of the understanding should be understood as relation to acts of the understanding. But I should not wish to lean on this, given Kant’s habits of terminological fluidity.
Therefore, Kant says, we cannot explain the necessary applicability of the categories by pointing to their already having been actually applied. We must find some other way to explain it. The explanation is ‘not so easily seen’ [A90/B122-3]. But that does not mean, as might be thought, that his point is skeptical. He is not entertaining the possibility that, after all, the categories are not necessarily applicable to sensible objects. For, again, that would foreclose the possibility of the Deduction’s success. Thus, though nothing I have discussed thus far is didactic, it is clear that the chaotic scenario imagined shortly thereafter is indeed put forth merely didactically:

For appearances could after all be so constituted that the understanding would not find them in accord with the conditions of its unity, and everything would then lie in such confusion that, e.g., in the succession of appearances nothing would offer itself that would furnish a rule of synthesis and thus correspond to the concept of cause and effect, so that this concept would therefore be entirely empty, nugatory, and without significance. [A90/B122-3]

In this scenario, in which nothing sensibility presents to us exhibits the order of cause and effect, the concept of cause is ‘entirely empty, nugatory, and without significance’—and that is precisely what the concept of cause is not, according to the conclusion of the Deduction. It is easy to read this passage as saying the same thing as the previous one. 36 But that they are not, that this passage is didactic, where the previous one is not, is corroborated by the difference in verbal mood between these passages. In the previous one he says that ‘appearances can [kjönnten] be given in intuition without functions of understanding’. Whereas in the description of the chaotic scenario in this one, he says that ‘appearances would be [wäre] empty, nugatory, and without significance’.

4.2 | The internal a priori

So, although concepts are not applied in any act of sensibility, nonetheless sensibility must, in its acts, present us with objects to which the categories are applicable. 37 Now this can be heard in either an accidentalist or an essentialist register. According to the essentialist construal, our sensibility gives us, by necessity, objects to which the categories are applicable, and does so in order that the categories be

---

36 This is suggested, for example, by Grüne (2011: 475-6). I agree with her that the passages have the same import, but they communicate that import in very different ways.

37 Compare, from the Duisburg Nachlass:

> Only because the relation that is posited in accordance with the conditions of intuition is assumed to be determinable in accordance with a rule is the appearance related to an object; otherwise it is merely an inner affection of the mind. [R4677 (1773-75); 17:567]

Kant does not say here that an act of determination in accordance with a rule is required for the relation of the appearance—here this appears to mean an empirical intuition (‘Empirical intuition is appearance’ [R4679 (1773-75); 17:663].) to an object. He says that unless the relation posited in accordance with the conditions of intuition is thus determinable, the appearance is not related to an object. This suggests that exercises of sensibility can indeed themselves have relation to an object, but need not, to have this, contain an act of determination. Consider also:

> The synthesis contains the relation of appearances not in the perception but in the concept. That all relation in perception nevertheless presupposes a relation in the concept indicates that the mind contains in itself the universal and sufficient source of synthesis and that all appearances are exponible in it. [R4681 (1773-75); 17:667]

Once again, the word is ‘exponible’, not ‘exposed’.
applicable to them. This is just a specification of the idea of sensibility as being for the sake of the under\ndstanding: it is a Kantian specification because it incorporates Kant’s theory of the categories. On the other hand, according to the accidentalist construal, our sensibility gives us, by necessity, objects to which the categories are applicable, but in indifference to this applicability.\n\nNote that, while the essentialist interpretation explains why sensibility gives, by necessity, objects to which the categories are applicable, the accidentalist interpretation does not. An accidentalist might think there is no explanation, that it is just a matter of luck.\nOr an accidentalist might think that our author has rigged us up just right. It is important to see, then, that the essentialist interpretation requires more than just that there be some explanation for sensibility’s delivering, by necessity, objects to which the categories are applicable. The explanation must be internal to the nature of sensibility; that is, to its essence. That is why the position is called ‘essentialism’.

I am going to argue that the essentialist interpretation of the necessity of categorical applicability to sensible objects is true to Kant. (It will follow that the accidentalist reading is false; here, then, is the point at which I depart from those positions usually called ‘non-conceptualist’.) Recall that this necessary applicability is the way in which the categories embody knowledge a priori of sensible objects. So towards our conclusion, we must now consider Kant’s doctrine of knowledge a priori. We already have in hand the negative characterization: knowledge ungrounded in any particular act, or any number of particular acts, of sensibility. And though we do not yet have in hand his positive conception, it is reasonable to suppose—and every reader of the Critique will admit—that though this conception is of a kind of knowledge ungrounded in acts of sensibility, nonetheless it will refer to knowledge that is grounded in such acts. For we know the applicability of metaphysical concepts in recognizing it as a condition on the possibility of empirical knowledge. This reflection yields the following conception of

\[38\]To embrace this alternative is to think that, in Allais’s terms, though ‘everything given in intuition must fall under the categories’, it is not true that ‘everything given in intuition must fall under the categories in order to be presented to us in intuition’ (Allais, 2015: 162-3). According to this conception, sensibility, though it serves the understanding’s needs perfectly, is in its nature indifferent to the service it performs.

\[39\]But is not this—that there is no explanation—Kant’s stated position? Consider, for example, this remark from a letter to Marcus Herz:

\[W]e are absolutely unable to explain further how it is that a sensible intuition (such as space and time), the form of our sensibility, or such functions of the understanding as those out of which logic develops are possible; nor can we explain why it is that one form agrees with another in forming a possible cognition. [Briefwechsel (May 26, 1789) 11:51]

No. What Kant means by ‘explain’ in this passage is not what I mean. It is clear from the rest of the letter that what he regards as impossible are ‘judgments about [the] origin’ of the faculties, in which, he writes, ‘we could name nothing beyond our divine creator; once they are given, however, we are fully able to explain their power of making a priori judgments’ [11:52]. What I am urging is precisely that the categorical determinability of all objects given by our sensibility is not enough to explain the understanding’s power of making a priori judgments; we must recognize that this pertains to those objects on account of the understanding’s need for conditions suitable to the exercise of that power.

This distinction maps onto one upon which Kant relies in the Critique of the Power of Judgment [e.g., at KU 5:372-7; 378-381]. There he distinguishes between our understanding of a natural being as organized and our thought of an intelligent cause as the explanation of the existence of such a being. Kant shares with many of his predecessors the view that natural teleology is comprehensible only according to the idea of such a cause, but he nonetheless carefully distinguishes between the description of the being as organized, on the one hand, and the explanation of how it could have ‘come about’, on the other. In this essay I operate entirely on the earlier side of this distinction: I claim merely that to explain the a priori knowledge of the understanding, we must depict sensibility and understanding as organized. This depiction is immanently, but not transcendentally, teleological.
knowledge \textit{a priori}: knowledge that objects are thus-and-so, grounded in knowledge that their being thus-and-so is a necessary condition of my having empirical knowledge of them.\textsuperscript{40}

But this, in turn, has at least two possible determinations. The first is the \textit{internal} construal: knowledge \textit{a priori} is knowledge that objects are thus-and-so in and through knowledge of my own cognitive requirements as the ground of their being thus-and-so, as their \textit{ratio essendi}.\textsuperscript{41} This interpretation is the only one I discuss in this essay which inherits the original sense of the term ‘\textit{a priori}’—the sense it had before it meant ‘independent of experience’. In brief, the traditional notion of \textit{a priori} knowledge is that of knowledge from grounds, from \textit{explanatory} grounds.\textsuperscript{42} So, for example, if you could know the essence of gold, and the connection between this essence and gold’s surface-level properties, you could know that gold is malleable \textit{a priori} by deducing that surface-level property from the essence. Similarly, according to the internal construal of knowledge \textit{a priori}, I know that things are thus-and-so in and through knowing that their being thus-and-so is an necessary condition of my knowing them by knowing my cognitive need to be the explanatory \textit{ground} of their being thus and so.\textsuperscript{43} Of course, the notion of an explanatory \textit{ground}, of a \textit{ratio essendi}, admits of more than one specification, and the way in which, according to the internal conception of knowledge \textit{a priori}, the form of my understanding is the explanatory ground of that of the object must differ in some respects from the way in which the essence of gold might be taken to ground that metal’s surface-level properties. We can, however, say this much: that according to the internal conception, what I know \textit{a priori} is not intelligible—is not itself intelligible, is not intelligible as what it is—indeed independently of the possibility of my knowing it \textit{a priori}. Knowledge \textit{a priori} is, according to this conception, not merely an epistemic route to the object of this knowledge; it enters into our most fundamental understanding of that object. It is, in this sense, internal to it.\textsuperscript{44}

The alternative is the external construal of knowledge \textit{a priori}, which is simply the rejection of the internal construal. What exactly does this mean? Consider the following line of argument: ‘in order for anything to be knowable by me, by virtue of my cognitive constitution, it must be thus-and-so. Since my author is omnipotent and omnibenevolent, He will have ensured that things are thus-and-so. Therefore, things are thus and so’. That is an argument which begins with my cognitive need and arrives at a conclusion about the nature of things. But the direction of thought in the argument does not at the same time express the status of the first premise as ground (\textit{ratio essendi}) of the conclusion. Something else, a ‘third-thing’, as we might put it, is cited as the explanatory connection my knowledge of which justifies the inference.

\textsuperscript{40}By ‘knowledge \textit{a priori}’ I do not, then, mean just any representation \textit{a priori}. My attention, here as elsewhere in this essay, is restricted to the theoretical \textit{a priori}, and only insofar as it amounts to knowledge.

\textsuperscript{41}Thus, not just as their \textit{ratio cognoscendi}, and not at all—‘for we are not here talking about…causality by means of the will’ [A92/B125]—their \textit{ratio fiendi}. ‘The principle of becoming <ratio fiendi> is cause (principle of becoming <principium fiendi> is that which contains the ground of causality, [principle] of cognizing <cognoscendi> [contains the ground of] judgment, [principle] of being <essendi> the ground of possibility, and concerns the essence of things’ [Mrongovius 29:844].

\textsuperscript{42}See, for example, Leibniz’s variation on this theme in his ‘Meditations on knowledge, truth and ideas’ (Leibniz, 1989: 26).

\textsuperscript{43}For a discussion of the interaction of the traditional and contemporary senses of ‘\textit{a priori}’ in Kant’s philosophy, see Smit (2009).

\textsuperscript{44}It may be asked whether, according some specification of the internal construal, the possibility of knowledge \textit{a priori} enters not just into our most fundamental understanding of the object of this knowledge but into the \textit{object itself}. This is a difficult matter which I cannot broach here, but below (§4.4) I gesture to the thought that contained in Kant’s reflections is an identification of the form of our understanding and that of the object, so that this putative specification is, from his point of view, really no specification at all.
4.3  The epigenesis of pure reason

Which of these—the external, or the internal—expresses Kant’s position? His remarks in introducing the Deduction suggest the internal construal, which is then confirmed to be his position in §27. In introducing the Deduction he writes that

[t]here are only two possible cases in which synthetic representation and its objects can come together, necessarily relate to each other, and, as it were, meet each other: Either if the object alone makes the representation possible, or if the representation alone makes the object possible. If it is the first, then this relation is only empirical, and the representation is never possible a priori. And this is the case with appearance in respect of that in it which belongs to sensation. But if it is the second, then since representation in itself (for we are not here talking about its causality by means of the will) does not produce its object as far as its existence is concerned, the representation is still determinant of the object a priori if it possible through it alone to cognize something as an object. [A92/B124-5]

The representations belonging to the understanding make their objects possible. They are the ground of the possibility of those objects and thereby ‘concern the essence of things’ [Mrogoovius 29:844]; they relate to those objects as rationes essendi. Like representations of the will, these representations are not posterior but prior to their objects. Unlike representations of the will, these are not their objects’ rationes fiendi: they are not the ground of their coming into being. They are the ground not of their existence but only of their essence.

Thus Kant writes in §27 of the B-Deduction that ‘the categories contain the grounds of the possibility of all experience in general from the side of the understanding’ [B166], and in the A-Deduction that ‘the a priori conditions of possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of objects of experience’ [A111]. Putting these together, we obtain this: the categories contain the grounds of the possibility of objects of experience. This is codified in the ‘supreme principle of all synthetic judgments’, according to which ‘[t]he conditions of the possibility of experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience, and on this account have objective validity in a synthetic judgment a priori’ [A158/B197].

But why does Kant embrace the internal conception? This is explained in §27 as follows:

Now there are only two ways in which a necessary agreement of experience with the concepts of its objects can be thought: either the experience makes these concepts possible or these concepts make the experience possible. The first is not the case with the categories (nor with pure sensible intuition); for they are a priori concepts, hence independent of experience….Consequently only the second way remains (as it were a system of the epigenesis of pure reason): namely that the categories contain the grounds of the possibility of all experience in general from the side of the understanding. […]

If someone still wanted to propose a middle way between the only two, already named ways, namely, that the categories were neither self-thought a priori first principles of our cognition nor drawn from experience, but were rather subjective predispositions for thinking, implanted in us along with our existence by our author in such a way that their use would agree exactly with the laws of nature along which experience runs (a kind of preformation-system of pure reason), then… this would be decisive against the proposed middle way: that in such a case the categories would lack the necessity that is essential to their concept. For,
e.g., the concept of cause, which asserts the necessity of a consequent under a presupposed condition, would be false if it rested only on a subjective necessity, arbitrarily implanted in us, of combining certain representations according to such a rule of relation. I would not be able to say that the effect is combined with the cause in the object (i.e., necessarily), but only that I am so constituted that I cannot think of this representation otherwise than as so connected; which is precisely what the skeptic wishes most... [B166-8]

This is Kant’s definitive embrace of the internal conception of knowledge *a priori* as expressed by the categories. Here, he explicitly entertains a version of the external option I introduced above, a version due to Crusius, according to whom ‘the categories are subjective predispositions for thinking, implanted in us along with our existence by our author in such a way that their use would agree exactly with the laws of nature along which experience runs’. Kant says that all this would mean is that I am so constituted that I cannot think otherwise. This predisposition would not count as knowledge. For it would be a predisposition to apply a concept which is explanatorily detached from that concept’s applicability. That is, neither my applications of the concept *hic et nunc*, nor my disposition to apply it, would be owed to their applicability. We see, in this passage as in the passage from A92/B124-5, that for Kant there are ‘two ways’ in which our application of a concept might be explanatorily connected to its applicability.

The first way is the familiar empirical way, characteristic of finite knowledge. According to this way, as we saw earlier, it is not just judgment—the act of the understanding—which is enabled by the presentation of actualities. I only determine my understanding as a capacity to judge a particular subject matter—I only, for example, come to be able to make judgments about cats—in response to the presentation of actualities. Both my judgments *hic et nunc* and my readiness to judge are explained, in the empirical case, by my recognition of the applicability of the concept which constitutes that readiness.

The second way concerns my capacity rather than my act. For the acts *hic et nunc* in which I apply such concepts as *substance* and *cause* are the same as those in which I apply *cat*: I apply *substance in concreto* as the concept *cat*, in recognition of its applicability to the actuality which enables my judgment. But unlike empirical concepts, which are determinations of my capacity, concepts like *substance* and *cause* belong to that capacity’s very form. They are not grounded in any object; rather, the form of every object is grounded in them. They presuppose no act *hic et nunc*, but make every such act possible by making possible its enabling condition: the experientiable object. And nothing short of this, Kant says, can count as knowledge *a priori*. No third thing—in particular, no divine author—but, in general, nothing external to the nature of the intellect can explain the necessary applicability of its concepts to sensible objects. Rather, that necessary applicability, which, recall, is constitutive of knowledge *a priori*, must be internal to the power of the intellect itself.\(^{46}\)

\(^{45}\)Crusius is identified as the exponent of this position in the *Prolegomena* [4:319n.].

\(^{46}\)Land (2015) considers a form of accidentalism according to which (i) the understanding’s forms are neither grounded in, nor the grounds of, the essence of sensible objects; (ii) there is, for whatever reason, nonetheless some kind of similarity between these forms and the essence of sensible objects, so that the former ‘agree exactly’ with the latter; but (iii) the understanding would operate according to its forms even if they did not agree with the essence of sensible objects. This form of accidentalism is clearly ruled out by Kant’s argument in §27, but it is not the only such form. Consider that an accidentalist could accept (i) and (ii) but reject (iii): she might say that though the understanding’s forms are neither grounded in, nor grounds of, the essence of sensible objects, it is only when there is a match between the former and the latter that the understanding is ‘awakened into exercise’ [B1]. (This is structurally analogous to a position defended by Messina (2014: 24-5).) That Kant’s argument in §27 embodies a rejection of (i), and not just (iii), shows that his concern is not merely to secure a counterfactual condition: if the object were different, so would the forms be. He insists on a direct explanatory relationship between cognition and object.
4.4  |  The capacity to know

What is Kant’s reason for this insistence? Is his criterion of adequacy for an account of a priori knowledge, that it involve no ‘third-thing’ explanations, arbitrarily adopted? No. It is worth reflecting for a moment on the significance of the criterion, so that its philosophical attractions come more clearly into focus. According to a ‘third-thing’ explanation, there are two conditions whose satisfaction constitutes the possibility of knowledge a priori. The first, subjective condition is that the forms of our capacity be $x$, $y$, and $z$. The second, objective condition is that the forms of objects be $x$, $y$, and $z$. The subjective condition is satisfied by the capacity, the objective condition by something external to it. In rejecting any explanation of this structure, Kant is saying that it is one and the same thing, the capacity, which fulfills the subjective and objective conditions. Another way to put it, and, I think, a better way, is to say that in internalizing the satisfaction of the objective condition to that which satisfies the subjective condition, Kant rejects the distinction between these conditions. He tells us that the categorical form of the intellect and the categorical essence of nature are one and the same, not per accidens but per se: ‘[t]he principles of possible experience are, at the same time, universal laws of nature that can be cognized a priori’ [Prolegomena 4:306]; ‘the possibility of experience in general is therefore at the same time the universal law of nature’ [Prolegomena 4:319]; ‘nature is derived from the laws of the possibility of experience in general and is fully identical with the mere universal lawfulness of experience’ [Prolegomena 4:319]. What this means, given that the a priori knowledge embodied by the categories is the form of empirical knowledge, is that the human cognitive capacity is itself, and by its own nature, the possibility of empirical knowledge. Thus, contrary to the thought of many of Kant’s predecessors, there is no gap between knowing my own mind and knowing the essence of nature, that knowing which constitutes my readiness to know the natural objects nature throws before me. We can know, not by grace of anything alien to our being, but simply by virtue of our human capability.47

In this connection we might consider Kant’s dismissal of the theological account of a priori knowledge—of which the ‘preformation system’ of Crusius is one kind—as a ‘deus ex machina’ in a letter to Marcus Herz [Briefwechsel (February 21, 1772) 10:131]. A deus ex machina is a contrived plot device which advances a narrative in an unnatural way: that is to say, in a way that cannot be accounted to the natures or characters of any of the subjects of the narrative. They cannot move the story forward on their own, and so something external does the job for them. So too, according to the theological account of knowledge a priori, the possibility of knowledge cannot be accounted to the nature of the human cognitive capacity alone. Something external to it must supply the condition of its providing for the possibility of knowledge. Thus read, Kant’s point against the deus ex machina is not just a point against theological accounts of the possibility of knowledge in particular. It is a point against any account which locates the possibility of knowledge as external to the human cognitive capacity. If knowledge is possible for us, this possibility must be accounted to our own nature. We must be for ourselves our own light. The Erkenntnisvermögen must be, by nature, a capacity to know.

4.5  |  Sensibility, the subject of the intellect

At this point, we can see that if Kant’s conception of a priori knowledge is what the internal construal captures, then the categories embody such knowledge only if I know them to be applicable to sensible

47For a related discussion of §27 as expressing a conception of a rational capacity, see Kern (2017: 246-253).
objects because their being so applicable is a necessary condition of my having knowledge of those objects.

But what does this entail about sensibility, and its nature? There are, it seems to me, two apparently distinct alternatives compatible with the text of the *Critique*, each meriting the title of essentialism, one, however, perhaps more than the other; what is entailed about sensibility is their disjunction. According to the first alternative, though sensibility’s objects are not categorically determinable by virtue of the nature of sensibility as such, that capacity is determined by an act of the understanding on sensibility which constitutes its objects as so determinable. In this act, the transcendental synthesis of the imagination [B153], sensibility is ‘appropriated’ to serve the understanding’s needs. At this transcendental ‘level’, then, sensibility is, as it were, at first teleologically external to the understanding, only to be, in this synthesis, internalized. This would satisfy the demand of Kant’s positive conception of knowledge *a priori* because in the original synthesis the form of the understanding would itself constitute, in its ‘effect’ [*Wirkung*] on sensibility [B152], the sensible as categorically determinable.

According to the second alternative I have in mind, sensibility is as such, even, as it were, ‘prior to’ the transcendental synthesis, a capacity to receive a judgeable, and therefore categorically determinable, object; the understanding’s ‘effect’ on sensibility is not to be construed as appropriative or transformative but as a moment in sensibility’s actualization. In some respects its significance is analogous to that of development, insofar as, in development, what is actualized is already there in potentiality. This would satisfy the demands of the positive account of knowledge *a priori* because the nature of sensibility would be constituted by the cognitive need of the understanding by virtue of their teleological relationship, a relationship immanent to the *Erkenntnisvermögen*.

Which of these alternatives is true to Kant—and, indeed, whether his text decides between them—is not something that can be settled here. It would require, at least, a careful reading of §§21-27 of the B-Deduction. What I wish to emphasize here is the character they have in common. The latter is most obviously an essentialism: for it has it that, in the deepest sense, the nature of sensibility involves its role in cognition. The former can, however, be understood as an image of sensibility transformed: of sensibility as reconstituted, in its appropriation in the original synthesis, as, as it were, *now* for the sake of the understanding. Somewhat as, in general, we are to establish a kingdom of ends on earth, thus to introduce nature to its purpose, our own moral perfection, by making that its purpose, in the original synthesis, according to this conception, we should make our intellectual end that of sensibility.

48In this idiom of appropriation I follow Longuenesse (1998: 207, 222).
49It is possible to understand development as transformative, and perhaps especially tempting to understand the development of a rational animal in this way. Such an understanding would, in application to the relation between the understanding and sensibility, be a specification of the first alternative I have described. But there is another way of understanding development which constitutes a distinct alternative because it is the denial that development is transformative. See, for example, Rödl (2016), who argues that ‘the idea of a change from animal to person is incoherent. […] Reason is…always already present as a character of [the child’s] first nature’.
50I might refer, in indication of a defeasible reason to favor the latter, Kant’s general teleological orientation, as discussed in §2. But this section is about the demands of his positive conception of *a priori* knowledge in particular, and not on other possible sources of support.
51Neither of these positions entails that human sensibility has nothing positive in common with non-rational animal sensibility. In all cases, sensibility is by nature a capacity for immediate, singular representation of objects. According to the latter essentialist position, human sensibility is by nature a capacity for such immediate, singular representation of objects as allows for their judgment and therefore for their categorical determination. For illuminating discussion of the specific distinction between human and non-rational animal sensibility, with especial reference to perception but with implications for sensibility generally, see Matherne (2015: 773-4 n. 85).
5  |  CONCLUSION

I said at the beginning of this essay that the discussion of Kantian conceptualism has focused on the question of whether particular concepts are immanently involved in particular acts of sensibility. And I suggested that we ask, instead, not immediately about acts, but about the capacities themselves. I left it relatively indeterminate why I was saying this, but now, I hope, we can appreciate the point better. The teleological unity of sensibility and understanding for which I have argued is impossible to make out if we speak only of the immanent involvement of one particular in another. For the dependence of sense on intellect I have identified is not a dependence of any act of sense on any act or determination of intellect. It is a dependence, to revert to Aquinas’s terms, not in the order of generation but in the order of nature. And if the capacities are lost to us, the order of nature will be too.

This is, I think, proof enough that a lot depends, even before we get into the details, on our basic image of the shape of the Kantian mind. And in particular, if I am right, among the things dependent on this image is the positive accomplishment of the first Critique: Kant’s explanation of how knowledge is possible a priori, an explanation which, as we have seen, identifies the human cognitive capacity as, in itself and by nature, the possibility of knowledge. In short, then, what rides on the shape of the Kantian mind is nothing less than the internality of knowledge to human capability. Knowledge is no accident because cognition is no heap. Just insofar as they are two, sense and intellect are one.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
I wish to thank, for comments and conversation, Matthew Boyle, Jeremy David Fix, Sean Kelly, Béatrice Longuenesse, Samantha Matherne, Michael Pendlebury, Susanna Siegel, and Mary Tjiaattas; and audiences at Harvard University, the University of Chicago, Columbia University, and the University of Pittsburgh. Thanks also to an anonymous referee for helpful suggestions.

Abbreviations
Citations of Kant’s works (except of the Critique of Pure Reason, in citing which I indicate pagination in the first (‘A’) and second (‘B’) editions) are to the Akademieausgabe. Translations are based on those of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Guyer & Wood, 1992-2016). If needed, the title of the volume in that edition in which the translation appears is indicated in brackets.

| Works & drafts | (1781/1787) Kritik der reinen Vernunft (Critique of pure reason) |
| PROLEGOMENA | (1783) Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik: die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können (Prolegomena to any future metaphysics that will be able to come forward as science) [Theoretical Philosophy after 1781] |
| KP | (1788) Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (Critique of practical reason) [Practical Philosophy] |
| EE-KU | (1789) Erste Einleitung in die Kritik der Urteilskraft (First introduction to the Critique of the power of judgment) [Critique of the power of judgment] |
| KU | (1790) Kritik der Urteilskraft (Critique of the power of judgment) |
| MS | (1797) Metaphysik der Sitten (Metaphysics of Morals) [Practical Philosophy] |
| ANTHROPLOGIE | (1798) Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht (Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View) [Anthropology, History and Education] |
Lecture notes

[Doehna] (1792-3) *Metophysik Doehna [Lectures on Metaphysics]*

[Mengovius] (1782-3) *Metophysik Mengovius [Lectures on Metaphysics]*

[K2] (early 1790s) *Metaphysik K2 [Lectures on Metaphysics]*

[Blomberg] (early 1770s) *Blomberg Logic [Lectures on Logic]*

Notes & correspondence

[Briefwechsel] Briefwechsel (Correspondence) [Correspondence]

[R] Reflexionen (Reflections) [Notes and Fragments]

REFERENCES


**How to cite this article:** Pendlebury T. A. The Shape of the Kantian Mind. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 2022;104*, 364-387. https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12767