

# KANTIAN CONCEPTUALISM AND APPERCEPTION

by

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper I argue, with many leading commentators, that Kant is a conceptualist. I support this conclusion, argued for independently by Hannah Ginsborg and John McDowell, by appeal to the analyticity of Kant's apperception principle in the transcendental deduction. I argue that the apperception principle, if taken as an analytic proposition, implies that any mental representation that figures into discursive cognition is the product of *a priori* synthesis. I further argue that making *a priori* synthesis a condition for the possibility of any mental representation is sufficient to make mental representation conceptual in the relevant sense. This, I argue, strongly suggests that Kant is a conceptualist.

INDEX WORDS: Immanuel Kant, Conceptualism, John McDowell, Wilfrid Sellars, Paul Guyer, Henry Allison, Concept, Non-conceptual content, Apperception, Critique of Pure Reason, Representation

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## DEDICATION

To my mother. Her strength has humbled and amazed me, and it has made me stronger. I will always be grateful.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Some recent commentators have asked whether Immanuel Kant is best read as a conceptualist. I shall use the phrase “Kantian conceptualism” to refer to the view *that Kant is a conceptualist*. In this paper I will argue for Kantian conceptualism. First, I will characterize conceptualism. While noting the different conclusions that a conceptualist may care to demonstrate, I will isolate one version of conceptualism that I think Kant demonstrably adheres to. This claim will be evidenced by some reflections upon the transcendental deduction in the 1787 *Critique of Pure Reason*. In particular, I will point to Kant’s apperception principle. I will argue that, correctly formulated, the apperception principle states that any discursive intellect enjoying contentful representational mental states enjoys those states through *a priori* synthesis. I will suggest that this principle, because it is an *analytic* principle, gives us insight into Kant’s commitments concerning the constraints upon possible mental representational contents, and that these constraints show that Kant is a conceptualist. In section II I lay out the claims of conceptualism, and outline some of the strategies available to the non-conceptualist. In section III I introduce the apperception principle, argue for what I take to be the correct formulation of this principle, and I defend the claim that the apperception principle is analytic. In section IV I introduce the notion of a “space of reasons” as developed by Sellars, and I argue that representations that exist in the space of reasons are all conceptual representations. I argue that the analyticity of the apperception principle recommends our interpreting the discursive intellect as representing the world entirely within the restraints of this space of reasons. I conclude by entertaining an objection, according to which discursive representation is a capacity of discursive subjects, rather than a condition of any cognition for a discursive intellect. My strategy for dealing with this objection will serve to clarify the claims and commitments of Kantian

conceptualism. This clarification, I hope, will serve to justify the unorthodox strategy of concluding by responding to an objection.

As a methodological point, my discussion of conceptualism in what follows will often look like a defense of conceptualism. This will seem infelicitously distinct from my purported goal: defending the claim *that Kant is a conceptualist*. In defending conceptualism as I introduce it, however, I intend to do so in a particularly Kantian fashion, employing Kant's vocabulary and commitments in that defense. My objective will be to introduce and defend a conceptualism to which Kant's commitments are amenable, and of which his language is suggestive. Following this introduction, I will defend the claim that *this is in fact the best way to read Kant* by pointing to the implications of the analyticity of the apperception principle.

## II. CONCEPTUALISM

Conceptualism is the view that all representational mental content is conceptual. Said another way, the conceptualist does not allow for non-conceptual representational mental content. A mental content is a constituent of an intentional mental state. An intentional mental state is one *directed* at something, is *about* something; the content an intentional mental state is a representation of whatever it is about. The debate over conceptualism concerns the minimal requirements upon a representation that a mental state contains. What is contained in the belief *that water is wet*? One plausible answer is that the content of the belief is a proposition, the proposition *water is wet*. If one takes this approach, then the belief that water is wet, is the adoption of an attitude (the attitude of *belief*) towards the proposition *that water is wet*, and that proposition is the content of the belief. The mental state is directed toward the proposition, and the proposition is a content of the mental state. The belief is *about* a particular proposition, or the state of affairs that corresponds to that proposition's being *true*, and in order to adopt an

attitude towards that proposition, the believer must *represent* the proposition, or a world in which it is true.<sup>1</sup>

Propositions are not the only plausible candidates of representational states. Representations of concrete entities (*concretums*) or physical sensations (*qualia*) may also serve as the contents of a subject's mental state. To endorse conceptualism is to endorse the claim that any of these possible mental contents, insofar as they are to play any role in the subject's representing the world, is a conceptual content.

What do I mean by calling such contents *conceptual*? This is a difficult question, and the backdrop against which it is asked is a difficult one to navigate. John McDowell, in the most elaborate and sustained defense of conceptualism, communicates the idea as follows.

The original Kantian thought was that empirical knowledge results from a co-operation between receptivity and spontaneity. [...R]eceptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the co-operation. Though relevant conceptual capacities are drawn on *in* receptivity...it is not that they are exercised *on* an extra-conceptual deliverance of receptivity. We should understand what Kant calls "intuition"—experiential intake—not as a bare getting of an extraconceptual Given, but as a kind of occurrence or state that already has conceptual content. In experience one takes in, for instance sees, *that things are thus and so*. That is the sort of thing one can also, for instance, judge.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This disjunction is not intended to invoke controversy. To represent a proposition (rather than, say, a declarative sentence that expresses a proposition) is simply to represent a world, or the minimally described world, or maximal visible set of worlds, in which the proposition is true. If we do not take care to distinguish propositions from the sentences that express them, this view of mental content seems *prima facie* implausible. But we should not be so quick. Indeed, the propositional view of mental content is not unproblematic, but to say a belief is directed at a proposition should not be read as suggesting that we are always directing our thoughts towards (somehow ontologically robust) sentences. Rather the directedness of my mental state toward some proposition simply is its directedness towards some (perceived or imagined) state of affairs in which the proposition is true. To believe a proposition is to believe that one is in such a world. To wonder whether a proposition is true is to wonder whether one is in such a world. I hasten to emphasize that this philosophical shorthand, and the corresponding construal of mental content, is not unproblematic, but neither is it terribly unconventional. I am employing these semantics in order to make my argument; I am not arguing for this semantic approach. If one preferred a different semantics of intentionality (for instance a Russelian notion of direct reference) then one could amend the language of my argument accordingly.

<sup>2</sup> John McDowell. *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) (MW), 9

To understand the relationship between this passage and conceptualism, we must get clear on some Kantian vocabulary. The understanding is the faculty that enables us to think (A51/B75).<sup>3</sup> Kant characterizes the understanding, in its capacity to form universal representations, or concepts, as “spontaneous” (A51/B75]. By virtue of the spontaneity of the understanding, we combine various representations of receptivity, called *intuitions*, into a unity. The reward of the understanding’s spontaneity is a unified combination of intuitions into an object. Representations of the understanding are such as could play a role in judgment. In employing our conceptual capacities we represent an object of cognition as standing *under* concepts. Because the understanding, by virtue of its spontaneity, is responsible for the *a priori* combination of intuitions into unified objects of cognition, conceptualism must proffer a story of the relationship between intuitions, representations received from the outside, or from sensibility, and the conceptual order. McDowell may be overstating himself in saying that intuition doesn’t make a notionally separable contribution to cognition; insofar as these faculties can even be conceptually distinguished (as they can) a minimal, notional separation may be hard to deny. But we correctly understand McDowell to be arguing against the idea that intuition ever contributes to cognition in a manner that doesn’t employ the conceptual, spontaneous capacities of the understanding. We rightly ask what these representations of receptivity would have to look like in order for them to all be conceptual.

One thing can be ruled out from the start: the conceptualist is not committed to the view that all representational mental contents are *concepts*. Kant characterizes *concepts* as rules for

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<sup>3</sup>References to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* will take this form. Numbers refer, respectively, to the 1781 (A) edition and the 1787 (B) edition. All references are to Norman Kemp Smith’s 1933 translation, reissued in 2003 by Palgrave Macmillan. References to the Jäsche Logic are indicated by the label “JL” and the pagination assigned by the academy edition. The translation of JL comes from *Lectures in Logic* (ed. & trans. J. Michael Young, Cambridge University Press, pp. 521-642).

subsuming particulars under general representations such that they allow for objectively valid judgments,<sup>4</sup> and the capacity to employ concepts in cognition is the “power of knowing an object through...representations” (A50/B74). For instance, the concept MAILBOX,<sup>5</sup> according to a Kantian account, is a set of rules for organizing the world. I should subsume a particular representation under the universal representation, MAILBOX, if that representation is of the place in which I receive my parcels. However, the representation of my mailbox as *my mailbox* seems to be a conceptual representation, even though neither my mailbox, nor my representation of the mailbox, *is in any sense a rule*.

A failure to appreciate the difference between a *concept* and a *conceptual content* has led a number of commentators to draw problematic conclusions. Robert Hanna, for instance, has made the *prima facie* case for Kantian non-conceptualism by pointing to Kant’s distinction between intuitions and concepts, and noting Kant’s division of labor between *receptivity* and *spontaneity*.<sup>6</sup> “The receptivity of our mind,” says Kant, is “its power of receiving representations insofar as it is to be in any way affected” (A51/B75). In receptivity, the mind takes the matter of its representations from outside itself. Contrastingly, the “mind’s power of producing representations from itself” is called the “spontaneity” of the mind (*ibid.*). Further, the mind’s capacity for spontaneity can be regarded as the mind’s capacity for conceptualization, its

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<sup>4</sup> It has been suggested to me that concepts are better understood as rules for synthesis, rather than as rules for subsumption under universals. While I have no doubt that some portions of the text of the *Critique* argue in favor of this reading, my own way of construing concepts as rules for ordering representations under universals is suggested by Kant’s reference of bringing “synthesis to concepts” (A78/B103). Synthesis is prior to conceptualization, so concepts could not dictate the former. This intimate relationship between the concept and synthesis, however, is an important one, which will be important in my later argument for Kantian conceptualism.

Evidence that Kant regards concepts as rules for subsumption can be found, for example, in Kant’s characterization of pure concepts as containing “the archetype[s] for the use of the understanding” [JL 92]. Hannah Ginsborg has also characterized concepts (on a Kantian reading) as “normative rules which govern sorting or discrimination” in “Concepts as Rules: A Kantian Perspective” (in draft).

<sup>5</sup> I follow standard practice in referring to a concept (e.g. a MAILBOX concept, of which my particular mailbox is a token, or possible referent) by putting the word that is used to refer to the concept in capital letters.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Hanna “Kantian Nonconceptualism” *Philosophical Studies* 137 (2008): 41-64. (KNC)

conceptual capacities.<sup>7</sup> It is tempting to suppose that the mind's receptivity is its source of non-conceptual content, as it is only in spontaneity that the mind produces concepts. Concepts could not be given in receptivity. The provisional conclusion is that representations of receptivity, not being concepts, must be non-conceptual. Concepts are rules; in categorizing our representations in accordance with such rules (representing an object as a mailbox only if it is the sort of thing in which, e.g. I receive my parcels) our conceptual representations acquire the character of being universal. In this sense, any conceptual representation is a universal representation. Universal representations (concepts) require (as a condition of their possibility) a representation of universality, which cannot be given in receptivity. Therefore, the representation of concepts cannot be given in receptivity. As receptivity *does* provide content for representations, the resultant representations might be non-conceptual.

However, the distinction between representations given in receptivity and *concepts*, is insufficient to establish the non-conceptualist thesis. The non-conceptualist requires representations that represent the world independently of *any* involvement of concepts. Noting the distinction between intuitions and concepts, we are still unsure whether intuitions could represent the world independently of conceptual capacities. The operative confusion is between *concepts* and conceptual representations. Kantian conceptualism remains viable in light of Kant's assertions that "these two powers or capacities [receptivity and spontaneity] cannot exchange their function" (A51/B75), or that "all cognitions, that is, all representations related with consciousness to an object, are either intuitions or concepts," or the remark in the *Jäsche Logic* that "a concept is *opposed* to intuition" (JL, 91; my emphasis). These remarks support the claim that some representational mental contents are not concepts. However to consider this evidence

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<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, MW 9.

*contra* conceptualism is to assume that to refer to the *conceptual* is just to refer to a concept. But this cannot be right.

The “conceptual” should be conceived rather differently. The word “conceptual” is one that Kant never uses. The most plausible interpretation of conceptual content is that a mental content is conceptual if it allows of being conceptualized, being brought under concepts. By conceptualization, I mean the bringing of the content of a representation before the mind in a manner that allows of possible predication, or playing a constitutive role in judging. When presented with a new shade of red, for instance, I may see the color shade without ever attending to it in a manner that involves predication or discrimination.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, by calling the representational content of the visual perception conceptual, I am committing to its being in principle possible to say of the color shade, for instance, that it is of a maroon-ish shade, or that the shade is the same shade as my car. In attending to the shade in this way I am conceptualizing the mental content that represents that shade. A conceptual representation need not be a concept and it need not be actually conceptualized.

This may seem a strange characterization of conceptual content. After all, a grey scale image is not colored insofar as it allows of possibly being colored, so why say a representational content is conceptual insofar as it allows being conceptualized?<sup>9</sup> This deserves two responses. Consider an agent that willfully gives himself over to an authority figure, pledging to do exactly as the authority figure dictates. There is an important sense in which it is appropriate to say that the agent possesses autonomy (he is autonomous), but is simply not exercising his autonomy. Likewise, I wish to say, conceptual representations need only be activations of conceptual

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<sup>8</sup> This would be something like Fred Dretske’s notion of non-epistemic seeing. See *Seeing and Knowing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> This way of construing this objection comes directly from one of my commentators. My thanks to Sebastian Rand.

capacities, and they need not be the object of an exercised conceptual capacity. Representational contents that never play a role in judging are, nonetheless, conceptual representations insofar as they are the sorts of contents that could be conceptualized. Second, the way in which I am characterizing conceptual content does stand opposed to the way in which non-conceptualists characterize non-conceptual content. For instance, in characterizing non-conceptualist claims, Jeff Speaks writes

...for the contents of experience [to be] absolutely nonconceptual we would need [it that] such properties cannot figure in thought, and that these properties are somehow different in kind from the properties that can figure in the conceptual contents of thought.<sup>10</sup>

Non-conceptual content of the sort that I intend to deny is, in principle, ruled out from possible participation in rational, discursive cognition.<sup>11</sup>

What is the feature that all and only conceptual representations share? To assert of a representation that it is conceptual is to assert that it could be brought into rational relations with other representations. The relationships I mean are relations of comparison, contrast, combination, and distinguishing representations from one another. Any representational content that could be taken as thus-and-so is conceptual content. A judgment that a color shade is thus-and-so (e.g. darker than the color of a green apple) requires that the representation of the color shade be comparable with some other representation. By calling a representational content conceptual, I am referring to its determinate comparability with other representations. The ability to compare a representation with another representation indicates that both representations are preconditioned by the synthetic activity of the understanding, which requires conceptual capacities. In the *Jäsche Logic*, Kant remarks that “to make concepts out of representations one

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<sup>10</sup> Jeff Speaks, “Is There a Problem with Non-conceptual Content?” *Philosophical Review* 114:3 (2005) [PNC] p.8.

<sup>11</sup> The literature on non-conceptual content is vast, and some accounts will not fall prey to the argument I am making here. This will be clearer below, when I introduce Speaks’s distinction between absolute and relative non-conceptual content.

must thus be able to compare, to reflect, and to abstract” (JL 94). This is an account of the mind’s forming concepts out of representations. Forming a concept out of a representation requires the representation’s having the sort of content that allows of such rational interactions with other representations as comparison, subsumption, or abstraction. Only conceptual representations could be divided into constituent representations, as would be required for the mind to abstract from the representation in order to form a corresponding concept.<sup>12</sup>

What is ruled out by this characterization of conceptual representations? Not very much. After all, I am urging that all representational mental content fits into this category, so the category ought to be broad. But what *is* ruled out is a class of mental occurrences that lack any stability or unity whatsoever. These occurrences do not give rise to representations that can be brought under judgment. Occurrences like these, impingements upon the mind that escape potential conceptualization. Such occurrences could not be taken *as thus-and-so*. Such bare impingements may be non-conceptual, but on the conceptualist view they yet fail to be in any way *representational*. Representation begins when conceptualization becomes possible.

The space of the conceptual tracks what Wilfrid Sellars refers to as the *space of reasons*, the space of mentality characterized by the practice of “justifying and being able to justify what one says”.<sup>13</sup> My representation of a mailbox belongs in the space of reasons by virtue of it being possible predicate something of the mailbox—for instance, that it is the receptacles of parcels, or that it is to my left—and to provide reasons for holding that predication to be accurate. My representation of a color shade belongs to the space of reasons by virtue of its being possible to predicate something of the shade—for instance that it is darker than the shade one sees on

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<sup>12</sup>Notably, this characterization of conceptualism makes all the more clear that concepts and the conceptual are different categories, as it is a non-trivial truth that concepts are conceptual. My BALD concept, for instance, is conceptual not by virtue of being a concept, but because I can have thoughts of the form “BALD is vague”.

<sup>13</sup> Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 76.

oranges, or that it is maroon. Conceptual representations are those that could possibly allow of being predicated *as being thus and so*.

Conceptual representations draw upon conceptual capacities. The subject receives representations through sensibility. If representations of sensibility are conceptual representations, then they could be compared to other representations. In order for a representation to be compared to another representation, it must be thought under some universal representation, some concept.<sup>14</sup> What we need is a story about the relationship between *receptivity* and the *conceptual order*. McDowell's answer, we saw above, is that representations of receptivity *require* the involvement of the understanding. That is, though there may be impingements from the outside, modifications of inner sense that are, in some sense, received, they fail to represent the world prior to the *combinatorial* involvement of the understanding, made possible by the understanding's being a spontaneous faculty of conceptualization.<sup>15</sup> Receptivity is always already providing unified objects of perception, a feat made possible by spontaneous, *a priori* combinations of intuitions into objects of possible predication.

Here the non-conceptualist expresses a concern: certain visual representations, for instance of fine-grained color shades, are simply too many and too rich to be captured by our conceptual capacities. Our ability to individuate fine perceptual distinctions may turn out to be

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<sup>14</sup> See again JL94-5, particularly note 1.

<sup>15</sup> It's been asked of me how such impingements could even gain their distinction from one another, and their distinction from the conceptual contents of discursive representational states, if they are not initially possessed of the kind of separability and comparability that I am claiming is characteristic only of conceptual representations. But notably, such impingements, prior to their entrance into discursive cognition as conceptual representations, are only notable, only observable, by a third party. My interlocutor is quite right; such impingements couldn't be taken by the subject as distinct from representations by the subject herself. This is simply to say that in order for the representations themselves to be notable and thinkable by the subject they must be conceptual contents. The rise of talk over non-conceptual content has come from the desire to make sense of intentional representational states from outside of the first-person perspective. So the distinction between pre-conceptual impingements upon inner sense and the conceptual representational contents of discursive mental states is not itself a threat to the conceptualist thesis.

inadequate to the task of accommodating all of our perceptual input.<sup>16</sup> If the content of our perceptual input outstrips our conceptual capacities, doesn't this argue in favor of non-conceptual content?

The McDowellian response to this concern is to invoke the *demonstrative concept*. A demonstrative concept is one that takes the form of a "this-such", or in the case of color shades, perhaps, "that-shade". Structured thusly, it seems, we are able to form judgments about objects of cognition even when the possible range of such objects outstrips the fineness of grain of our linguistic scheme. The claim, then, is that we are able to utilize perceptual data in rational deliberation and justification only when that matter is already given in sensation *as a this-such, a this-thing, a that*. A representation of a this-such allows of comparison and evaluation (concerning, for instance, whether a perception is veridical or not). To say a mental representation is of a this-such does not assume that the representation is already playing a role in a judgment, but it does insist that such a representation *could* play a role in a judgment. The possibility of this sort of judgment requires the comparability of the contents out of which such representations are formed, and this requires the involvement of the understanding in all representation, including representations of sensibility. This is to say that the contents of representations are always already conceptual.

The invocation of the demonstrative concept is often considered *ad hoc*, as a move of desperation. For instance, in laying out the "telephone test" for conceptual content, according to which a mental content is conceptual only if it could be referred to over a telephone, Hanna

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<sup>16</sup> For further elaboration of this argument against conceptualism, referred to in the literature as the "fineness of grain argument," one could consult Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) and *Speaks* [PNC]. A particularly vivacious employment of the fineness of grain argument can be found in Christopher Peacocke's "Non-conceptual Content Defended," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LVIII:2 (1998). Sean Kelly (notably, a non-conceptualist) has made some persuasive points concerning the failure of the fineness of grain argument in "The Non-conceptual Content of Perceptual Experience: Situation Dependence and Fineness of Grain," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LXII:3 (2001).

essentially rules out any conceptual content the unpacking of which would require recourse to the demonstrative concept.<sup>17</sup> But I think this is wrong. The demonstrative concept is not simply the escape route for the conceptualist, but rather the central insight of the conceptualist account of intentional representational mental content. The conceptualist is claiming that the class of representational mental contents is made up of the very things that admit of possible comparison or distinction, even if these contents will often be more fine grained than can be picked out by the rough distinctions available by a linguistic scheme. On the conceptualist picture, it is precisely those mental contents that could be the referent of a "that!" exclamation that are given representational status. In order to point at one and the same thing ("*that* thing!"), we must be able to fix onto something as a unified object of cognition. Those mental occurrences which we would call non-conceptual are transient impingements upon inner sense, and do not allow of any entrance into rational relations with other representational contents. The claim of the conceptualist is that such occurrences fail to represent anything; they are not representational mental contents at all.

Many possible objects of such demonstrations are never actually conceptualized, or brought to conscious attention in a manner that would count as their having been conceptualized. Consider a brick wall, on which appear innumerable of shades of red, orange, grey, purple, and brown. The number of different visible shades is compounded by the reflection of different light intensities and angles. It could not be the case that, in looking at the wall, I bring each distinct shade to cognition as its own unique "this shade." The core of conceptualism is the thought that each perception of some color shade is such that it could be employed in a judgement of the form "this shade is f" or "x is this shade." Such mental contents allow of possible predication; they

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<sup>17</sup> KNC 9.

are comparable with other representations in a manner that allows of comparison and distinction. This is sufficient, on the present view, for their being conceptual contents. The conceptualist denies that any candidate for representational mental content could lack the minimal structure that allows for its entry into the space of reasons.

#### A. Non-conceptualist Strategies

Hannah Ginsborg argues for Kantian conceptualism. I consider the following remark informative.

...[Kantian non-conceptualists] interpret imagination, for Kant, as functioning independently of understanding. This approach to imagination is, I think, essential to a workable non-conceptualist strategy. For otherwise the only candidates to be bearers of non-conceptual content are the sensible impressions belonging to “sheer receptivity”, that is, sense-impressions or sensations. And while these clearly do not depend on concepts, it is implausible to view them as having representational content in the sense that is at issue in the debate over nonconceptual content.<sup>18</sup>

The strategy to which that Ginsborg refers takes the productive imagination — a difficult topic that Kant takes up in the second half of the transcendental deduction — to operate independently of the actualization of conceptual capacities. This non-conceptualist strategy recognizes the productive imagination to be a condition of the possibility of representation, but denies that the enactment of the productive imagination requires the involvement of spontaneity. This is the strategy employed by Lucy Allais and Robert Hanna.<sup>19</sup> Understanding the status of conceptualism in the context of Kant’s philosophy of mind will consequently require coming to terms with the productive imagination.

The discussion of the productive imagination in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is one of the most difficult and opaque in the Kantian corpus, and I will not be able to provide a satisfying

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<sup>18</sup> Hannah Ginsborg “Was Kant A Nonconceptualist?” *Philosophical Studies* 137 (2008): 65-77.

<sup>19</sup> Lucy Allais. “Kant, Non-conceptual Content and the Representation of Space” (draft) [NCRS]; Robert Hanna (KNC) and “Kant and Non-conceptual Content,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2005): 247-90.

account of it here. However, the imagination has been important to various arguments for non-conceptual content in Kant's philosophy of mind, so some discussion is called for. In general, the imagination is the ability to think an object when the object is not present. The productive imagination is the capacity for *a priori* synthesis of intuitions into appearances. Kant claims that the "reproducibility of appearances" required for even "our purest *a priori* intuitions" entails "something which, as the *a priori* ground of a necessary synthetic unity of appearances, makes their representation possible" (A101). Thus, the reproducibility of appearances in reproductive imagination is preconditioned by the capacity of productive imagination, by which intuitions are synthesized into appearances. The *a priori* activity of the imagination is *a priori* synthesis. It is only by productive synthesis of appearances out of intuitions that that representations of particulars are given to thought. The object of the productive imagination is not a general kind of thing, but a singular representation, a thing that one might intend to draw your attention to by pointing: 'that thing', perhaps 'that cube'. In apprehending this cube, the representing subject is taking in and apprehending a concrete particular; this concrete particular is not a kind, a type, or a category, but simply the thing. Productive imagination brings singular representations into the space of reasons by synthesizing intuitions into appearances.

The non-conceptualist strategy employed by Allais and Hanna *severs* the connection between synthesis *as such* and the conceptual capacities of the subject. The suggestion is that conceptual capacities are not required for the subject to synthesize intuitions, one that can apprehend *the thing*. In particular, the position in question wants to allow that I could be provided, in productive imagination, with a representation of "the thing" without that thing's being constrained by the rule-governance of the pure categories of the understanding.

This is one strategy available to the Kantian non-conceptualist. According to it, the productive imagination can produce synthetic representations without the actualization of conceptual capacities. The second available strategy, to which Ginsborg cursorily refers, is to allow that conceptual capacities are always already actualized in the employment of the faculty of productive imagination, but to deny that the productive imagination is required for any possible representational content. This is to be the strategy of Wilfrid Sellars.<sup>20</sup> Sellars is *not* inclined to deny the role of the spontaneity in the employment of the productive imagination, but rather to posit the existence of representational mental contents that are given by mere receptivity, in which the productive imagination is not operative. Kantian *intuitions*, Sellars argues, are “Janus-faced”. Two sorts of representations, both of which receive their matter from the outside, are called “intuitions.” One type of received representation, or intuition, is a member of a “special sub-class of conceptual representations of individuals which, though in some sense a function of receptivity, belong to a framework which is in no sense prior to but essentially includes general concepts” (SM, 7). Sellars refers to these intuitions as “in some sense a function of receptivity” while at the same time “essentially including general concepts”. These special, conceptual intuitions “are formed by the synthesizing activity of the productive imagination.” While Ginsborg, Allais, and Hanna all share the assumption that Kant could only allow non-conceptual content by allowing that the imagination functions independently of spontaneity, Sellars considers all representations formed by the productive imagination to be essentially conceptual.

For Sellars, these conceptual intuitions are contrasted with another sort of received representation. These other intuitions, for Sellars, are “a radically different kind of representation

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<sup>20</sup> This comes out most clearly in *Science and Metaphysics* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968)(SM). This strategy is noticeably in the background of Sellars’s argument in EPM, but is somewhat obscured by his preoccupation with denying the existence of an *epistemologically salient* pre-conceptual given.

of an individual which belongs to sheer receptivity and is in no sense conceptual...the purely passive representations of receptivity” (SM, 7). Rather than making space for non-conceptual content by severing the imagination from spontaneity, Sellars denies that the productive imagination is necessary for representational mental content. On this view, sensibility presents the subject with particulars, which cannot be thought until they are brought under concepts by spontaneity. The imagination, we might say, functions in an intermediate role between receptivity and spontaneity, synthesizing disparate appearances into images, or unities, which can then be brought under a unity by the spontaneity. It could be that, as Allais and Hanna suggest, the productive imagination is broader in scope than spontaneity, and may provide the subject with representations that do not enter the conceptual order. On the other hand, it may be preferable to say that synthesis of representations into something which cannot in principle be represented under concepts is unintelligible (thus denying the isolation of the imagination from spontaneity) and so to require that any synthesis of appearances by the imagination be already fully conceptual. This tactic still leaves Sellars’s strategy available: it may be that such conceptual, imaginative intuitions, such *this-suches* are, while fully conceptual, only part of the story. On the Sellarsian model, the conceptual intuitions of the imagination are only “receptive” to the extent that they “have to cope with a manifold of representations characterized by ‘receptivity’ in a more radical sense, as providing the ‘brute fact’ or constraining element of perceptual experience” (SM, 7). These radically receptive representations are non-conceptual contents.

We can take from Sellars, on the one hand, and Ginsborg, Allais and Hanna on the other, two pictures of Kantian non-conceptualism. On one view, some representations of the productive imagination may not be possessed of a sufficiently sophisticated structure as to allow

of possible conceptualization. On another view, there may exist representations in sensibility that are merely receptive, wholly prior to the synthesis of productive imagination. Either or both could be true, and the Kantian conceptualist, it seems, must be equipped to deny that either would or should be endorsed by a thoroughgoing Kantian.

The Sellarsian version of Kantian non-conceptualism carries different commitments than the Hanna/Allais version. Further, they map well onto two types of non-conceptual content distinguished from one another by Jeff Speaks. Speaks writes:

A mental state has absolutely nonconceptual content iff that mental state has *a different kind of content* than do beliefs, thoughts, etc....A mental state of an agent A (at a time t) has relatively nonconceptual content iff the content of that mental state *includes contents not grasped* (possessed) by A at t.<sup>21</sup>

Recall that Allais, with Hanna, argues that the productive imagination can function independently of the actualization of conceptual capacities. In suggesting that non-conceptual contents are those that are not attended by the relevant concept possession, Hanna and Allais are both arguing for the existence of relative non-conceptual content. Allais, for one, is explicit about this:

I am concerned here to argue only for the attribution to Kant of what Speaks calls ‘relative,’ as opposed to ‘absolute,’ non-conceptual content. The idea is that only the latter asserts that perception and belief have an intrinsically different structure; the former merely claims that a subject can have a perceptual representation with a certain content without herself possessing relevant concepts to describe that content.<sup>22</sup>

By alleging that the productive imagination can produce representations without drawing on particular operations of spontaneity that correspond to the particular concepts of which the representation is a token, Allais need not deny that such contents are in principle incapable of

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<sup>21</sup> Speaks (PNC 2)

<sup>22</sup> Allais (KRNS 3)

participating in the Sellarsian space of reasons. That is, the non-conceptual contents to which Allais draws our attention may be conceptual in the sense that I have outlined.<sup>23</sup>

Sellars's strategy, we recall, is to posit the existence of representations of mere receptivity, which do not involve the productive imagination. These representations of mere receptivity are non-conceptual representations, and are contrasted with the conceptual representations of the productive imagination. Sellars's non-conceptualism is absolute non-conceptualism, in that he posits two classes of mental representational contents that are different in kind. The bare receptivity of those "radically different kinds of representation[s]" which are "in no sense conceptual" distinguishes them in kind from the properly conceptual representations of the productive imagination.

These are two distinct strategies available to the Kantian non-conceptualist. I will be arguing that the apperception principle, properly formulated and regarded, will lend support to the claim that Kant is some kind of conceptualist. In particular, my concern will be to raise doubts about Sellarsian *absolute* non-conceptualism. I will be arguing against the claim that radically receptive intuitions are non-conceptual representational contents, in no sense involving the combinatorial activity of spontaneity that characterizes conceptual representations.

The goal of this section was to characterize the available Kantian non-conceptualist strategies. The absolute non-conceptualist takes a subject's representational mental states to be constituted, in part, by representational contents that structurally rule out possible predication. The claim that such contents play a constitutive role in our representing the world is deeply problematic, I will argue, in light of the apperception principle. I turn to the development of this point in what follows.

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<sup>23</sup> Incidentally, Allais also believes that Kant is an absolute nonconceptualist, but she has not argued for this claim.

### III. APPERCEPTION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The transcendental deduction provides the argumentative centerpiece of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the 1781 preface, Kant admitted that this section “cost [him] the greatest labour” (Axvi), and he exacerbated this labor by completely re-thinking and re-writing the section prior to the *Critique*’s second publication in 1787. The stated objective of the transcendental deduction is to ascertain whether certain *a priori* concepts could be conditions of the possibility of experience. For instance, the concept of causation, with its accompanying principle according to which *every event has a cause*, asserts something of way things *actually* are. Nonetheless, the application of the concept of causation to experience is conducted according to a principle that holds of necessity, and consequently one whose truth is undiscoverable in experience. The transcendental deduction purports to provide the ground for such principles in their status as conditions of the possibility of experience.

The goal of this section is to introduce, clarify and elaborate the central premise of Kant’s argument for the objective validity of these categories of the understanding (concepts like causality, unity, and necessity). I will follow the dominant tendency in Kant scholarship by referring to this central premise as the *apperception principle*. I will explore the rich implications of Kant’s assertion that the apperception principle is an analytic principle. It is the *analyticity* of the apperception principle that I take to support reading Kant as a conceptualist.

In attempting to discern the fundamental premise of the transcendental deduction, and the premise immediately grounding the apperception principle, we look to one of Kant’s most famous passages.

It must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me. (B131-2)

This proposition, which I will follow Merritt in referring to as the *cogito statement*,<sup>24</sup> contains Kant's basic assumption concerning the *requirements for any mental state to count as a representation*. Recall that absolute non-conceptualism asserts the existence of *representational* mental content that, in principle, does not admit of conceptualization. Non-conceptual mental contents must (in order to satisfy the non-conceptualist thesis in question) *represent* the world while failing to have the unity that makes it possible to compare a representation to other representations. That is, the non-conceptualist would have it that some representational mental content could not, in principle, be brought into rational relations with other representations. Such representations fail to allow for possible subsumption under universal representations, or predication. If we allow that any state that can be accompanied by the 'I think' must be in principle amenable to conceptualization, then we have strong *prima facie* grounds for doubting that Kant will allow for the existence of absolute non-conceptual content.

It seems natural to assume, and many have, that the *cogito* statement is the apperception principle. However, there is reason to think that the apperception principle (that which Kant asserts to be analytic) is best formulated as a conclusion, for which the *cogito* statement serves as a premise.<sup>25</sup> But what, then, is the *principle*? If we don't take the *cogito* principle to do the trick,

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<sup>24</sup>Melissa McBay Merritt, "Kant's Argument for the Apperception Principle" (forthcoming in *European Journal of Philosophy*, 2010). (KAP)

<sup>25</sup> This is in slight tension with Henry Allison, particularly in *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, 163), who takes the *principle* actually to be a triad of statements, ascertaining in turn the capacity of the 'I think' to accompany all representations (the *cogito* statement), that intuitions are representations prior to thought, and that the manifold of representations has a necessary relation to the I think. As will become clear, I consider my own construal of the apperception principle to be simpler and more amenable to being labeled analytic. I borrow the idea from Melissa Merritt (KAP 2) who takes it as implausible that Kant's fundamental

then we would regret the absence of an explicit formulation of the principle in the B-deduction, even as Kant repeatedly refers to “this principle”. He writes that “this principle of the necessary unity of apperception is itself, indeed, an identical, and therefore analytic, proposition” (B135).

*The unity of apperception* is not a principle, and the claim *that the unity of apperception is necessary* could not be an analytic proposition. In possible worlds where there are no thinking things, there would be no “unity of apperception”. The proposition must be of the form *the unity of apperception is necessary for x* or *the unity of apperception is necessary in order for any S to A*. Regrettably, Kant has not filled in this additional condition for us, and confusion has resulted. We must investigate the surrounding passages to seek out the antecedent of *this*. Knowing, as we do, that the unity of apperception under consideration is a *synthetic unity*, the following passage is suggestive:

This amounts to saying, that I am conscious to myself a priori of a necessary synthesis of representations—to be entitled the *original synthetic unity of apperception*—under which *all representations that are given to me must stand, but under which they have also first to be brought by means of synthesis*. (B135-6; my emphasis)

According to this passage, it is necessarily the case that (1) “all representations...*stand*” under original synthetic unity of apperception. This posits original synthetic unity of apperception as the condition of the possibility of all representation. It is further necessary that (2) representations “*have also first to be brought [under original synthetic unity of apperception] by means of synthesis*”. Representation requires synthetic unity of apperception. But in order for representation to be apperceptively apprehensible, or accessible to the apperceptive consciousness, the representation must be subject to *synthesis*.

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premise would be this unargued proposition. The relevant passage in which Merritt elaborates upon this is quoted below.

The synthesis of representations is a condition of the possibility of theoretical cognition. As a condition of all theoretical cognition and, hence, all possible discursive cognition, the synthesis that is operative in all representational mental content is *a priori* synthesis. Kant is giving the title of “original synthetic unity of apperception” to the *a priori* synthesis that is requisite for any representation, and, equivalently, any experience for the discursive subject. Kant characterizes the discursive subject as follows:

Our nature is so constituted that our intuition can never be other than sensible; that is, it contains only the mode in which we are affected by objects. The faculty, on the other hand, which enables us to think the object of sensible intuition, is the understanding... To neither of these powers may a preference be given over the other. These two powers or capacities cannot exchange their functions.... Only through their union can knowledge arise. (A51/B75)

The discursive intellect is the *spontaneous* intellect (whose conceptual capacities allow a degree of control over her representations, allowing for cognitive *freedom*). But spontaneity, to be able to create representations for oneself, is only half of the story. The discursive intellect depends upon *receptivity* in order to be in possession of her representations. Appreciating this requires that we consult to the first lines of the 1787 *Critique* (B1), and Kant’s assertion that all *our* knowledge begins in experience, yet does not arise out of experience. The sense in which knowledge begins in experience is the sense in which the matter of our mental representations is given by the outside (in receptivity). This received matter for cognition, however, is not yet a representation until the form of the representation is determined by the intellect’s spontaneity. The discursive intellect is the active mind that receives the matter, the stuff, of her representations from the outside, but that matter is only the content of a representational state upon its being constrained by the categories of the understanding. The apperception principle, I

wish to argue, is a characterization of what it is to be a discursive intellect. Thus, I suggest that it is best formulated as follows:

*Insofar as I am a discursive intellect, all of my representations are necessarily are products of a priori synthesis.*

As an analytic principle, this proposition is discoverable upon investigation of the concept of a discursive intellect, one capable of *imposing* form upon its representations, but which must *receive* the matter of its representations from the outside. Reflection on the latter characterization of a discursive intellect is sufficient to ground the above principle, and no additional information (for instance, the idea that we are such beings) is necessary.

The claim of the apperception principle is that discursivity *as such* implies a priori synthesis. The discursive intellect, the *creature like us* with which Kant is primarily concerned, is characterized by two faculties, one receptive (sensibility) and one spontaneous (the understanding). The possession of spontaneity gives the discursive intellect a degree of cognitive freedom: in the face of any received representation from the outside, the discursive intellect can say “no!”, or can endorse the claim that “things are not as they have been represented to me in receptivity.” This is not to say that the cognitive freedom of the spontaneous subject is absolute; since all knowledge necessarily begins in experience (B1), the receptive intellect must receive the matter of its representations from the outside.

The content of any discursive intellect’s representations is always in part constituted by the representations given in receptivity, and yet such content is presented to the subject through the senses in a “many colored and diverse” (B134) manner that could never yield representations of objects without its being the case that “I can unite” or synthesize “a manifold of given representations in one consciousness” (B133). Therefore the capacity of the discursive intellect

to have representations at all demands the capacity and actualization of *a priori* synthesis, merely by virtue of its nature as a discursive intellect. This is the implication of the apperception principle, and the reason for taking it to be properly analytic.

My decision to read the *cogito* statement as a premise in the argument for the apperception principle is supported by Merritt's claim that

commentaries often present the apperception principle as an unargued, or self-evident, presupposition of Kant's Transcendental Deduction. We should be wary of this suggestion: it should hardly be appropriate for Kant to present the fundamental principle of his epistemology (and, by extension, theoretical metaphysics) as an unargued presupposition — the principle simply does too much work in Kant's system to be granted such easy passage. (KAP, 2)

Merritt formulates the apperception principle slightly differently,

Although Kant does not offer a concise statement of this principle, let me begin with what I take to be an uncontroversial report of its content: the *apperception principle says that a cognitive subject's representations belong to it in virtue of an a priori synthesis*. (KAP, 1)

I believe that our renderings of the fundamental principle are, finally, corroborative and friendly to one another. Henry Allison refers to the *cogito* principle as the *starting point* of the deduction, but does not regard a claim about the *I think*'s accompaniment of all possible representations to be the apperception principle itself. Rather,

What Kant actually claims to be analytic is the complex and apparently contentful proposition that “all my representations in any given intuition must stand under the condition under which alone I can ascribe them to the identical self as my representations, and thus can grasp them together, as synthetically combined in an apperception, through the general expression “I think”...I cannot ascribe [thoughts] to my identical self without in the very same act also bringing them into synthetic unity...Consequently, *it is a condition of the possibility of the self-ascription of distinct thoughts that they can be brought into a synthetic unity*; just as it is a condition of such a synthetic unity that the thoughts be ascribable to a single thinking subject.<sup>26</sup>

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26 Allison, Henry. *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* ([2nd ed.] New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) p. 166

I would add that the possibility of bringing thoughts into a synthetic unity is not conditioned upon the mere capacity for self-ascription (for we could entertain that some thoughts may not be possible to self-ascribe, such as sub-conscious thoughts) but the *in principle* possibility of self-ascription, by virtue of the form of the representations in question. This emphasizes the extent to which the conditions for possible representation are those conditions necessary for any mental representation at all, that they admit of possible self-ascription, or are apperceivable as *mine*. This remains appropriately separate from the question of whether it is actually possible for any given subject to self-ascribe any given mental representation, since presumably many representational states are somehow inaccessible to the subject's conscious reflection (unconscious desires, perhaps). These representations, nonetheless, would fit appropriately into a judgment that accompanied the 'I think'.

This gloss on Allison's reading has the virtue of being in the same modal spirit as Kant's other assertions concerning mind. By "modal spirit", I mean to refer to the relationship between "in principle possibility" and the membership of some mental event in a relevant class. Kant is frequently concerned with the minimum conditions of the possibility of some mental state, rather than the conditions of the actualization of a given mental state. By following Allison in characterizing the apperception principle as asserting the in principle possibility of discursive cognition, rather than the possibility of actually being in possession of some representation, we bring the apperception principle more in line with Kant's broader methodological approach to mind.

### A. Is the Apperception Principle Analytic?

Paul Guyer has contended that the apperception principle is actually synthetic.<sup>27</sup> This requires some attention before I move on. My response to the charge Guyer would level against me is simple: Guyer and I understand the apperception principle differently. While I have argued for reading the apperception principle as characterizing a discursive intellect, Guyer takes the apperception principle to characterize representations. Guyer resorts to the A-deduction formulation of the apperception principle to a far greater extent than I have, and the resulting confusion needs some untangling. A footnote note to page A117 addresses what may as well be the A-deduction's apperception principle. Kant writes,

We are conscious *a priori* of the complete identity of the self in respect of all representations which can ever belong to our knowledge, as being a necessary condition of the possibility of all representations. For in me they can represent something only in so far as they belong with all others to one consciousness, and therefore must be at least capable of being so connected. *This principle holds a priori, and may be called the transcendental principle of the unity of all that is manifold in our representations, and consequently also in intuition. Since this unity of the manifold in one subject is synthetic, pure apperception supplies a principle of the synthetic unity of the manifold in all possible intuition.* (A116-7; my emphasis)

Here is a statement of a principle and the claim that it is the transcendental principle of the unity of *all representations*, and *all intuition*. This principle seems to be the following: the *synthetic representation* of the complete identity of the self as that in which all representations obtain is required for the possibility of the representation of any object. Having just outlined this principle, Kant goes on in A117n to make reference to “the synthetic proposition, that all the variety of empirical consciousness must be combined in one single self-consciousness, is the absolutely first and synthetic principle of our thought in general.” To many commentators, this note seems

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<sup>27</sup> We find expression of this argument most clearly in *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), particularly in pages 149-157, in “Kant on Apperception and *A Priori* Synthesis,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 17:3 (1980) and “The Failure of the B-Deduction,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* XXV (1986).

to have been an admission in the A-deduction that the central principle of the transcendental deduction is in fact a synthetic proposition. On this reading, this note stands in competition with the B-deduction's claim that the central principle of the deduction is an analytic principle. Guyer, in particular, seems to think so.

But we need to be clear on *what* Kant is taking to be synthetic. Kant writes:

The synthetic proposition, that all the variety of empirical consciousness must be combined in one single self-consciousness, is the absolutely first and synthetic principle of our thought in general. (ibid.)

The particular proposition which Kant is calling synthetic is the claim that *empirical consciousness* must, in all of its heterogeneity, be combined in a single self-consciousness. I am inclined to read this sentence as a comment upon the same claim that Kant entertains in the introduction to the deduction: "for appearances can certainly be given in intuition independently of functions of the understanding" (A90/B122). That is, the synthetic proposition asserts that something is true of empirical consciousness *simpliciter*, namely that it is necessarily synthesized by a single self-consciousness. This unconditioned empirical consciousness may indeed allow, as a logical and conceptual possibility, that appearances should present themselves to it in such a disconnected way that no self-consciousness is necessary; were this the case, the latter would not be the condition of the possibility of such empirical consciousness, just as the experience may be such as to never conform to the categories of the understanding.

This principle may well be synthetic, but it is distinct from the apperception principle that is called identical, or analytic, in the B-deduction. Indeed, to say that we combine intuitions of receptivity into unified objects of cognition is to add something to the concept of consciousness *simpliciter*, and the fact that we do so is a properly synthetic proposition. This is not what the B-deduction apperception principle says, however, and it is the B-deduction, and its analyticity,

from which I think we can gain insight into the relationship between Kant's philosophy of mind and conceptualism.

Guyer's argument for the syntheticity of the apperception principle simply does not address the same principle that I am referring to. The proposition that we are the kinds of intellects that can combine various intuitions into one unified consciousness is synthetic. In arguing that the apperception principle's analyticity supports Kantian conceptualism, I am not saying that our being representing subjects that recommends conceptualism (this would be my tactic if I thought that the cogito were the apperception principle). Nor does Kant exploit our status as representing subjects, as such, in his deduction of the validity of the categories of the understanding. Rather, I am arguing for Kantian conceptualism with reference to the analyticity of the B-deduction principle, according to which *a priori* synthesis of representations is a condition of the possibility of any representation as it is apprehended *in a discursive intellect*. This is the operative principle in Kant's transcendental deduction, and its analyticity recommends conceptualism.<sup>28,29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Regarding the apperception principle as a characterization of a discursive intellect, and consequently deflating Guyer's argument against the syntheticity of the apperception principle, ought to be attributed to Henry Allison, who develops this argument at length in *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, and further in "Reflections on the B-Deduction" *Southern Journal of Philosophy* XXV (1986) and "Apperception and Analyticity in the B-Deduction" *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 44 (1993).

<sup>29</sup> It is worthwhile to elaborate upon Guyer's position, which is more nuanced and impressive than is made clear by my dismissal. Guyer does seem to understand the apperception principle as the *cogito* principle, however, and consequently takes it to be the case that IF the apperception principle were analytic, THEN it would be, if true, true by the definition of *representation*. On this view, the apperception principle makes a claim about the nature of any possible representation, that it must be subject to the conditions of self-ascription and, therefore, self-consciousness. Guyer suggests that the necessity of this proposition would be brought into question by such counterexamples as sleep-talking or unremembered dreams. If Guyer were right to read the apperception principle as providing an analytic definition of any *representation* as such, this would be a serious problem. Since some representations refuse to become entirely unified with other representations in empirical consciousness, particularly delusional, subconscious, or hallucinogenic representations, it certainly doesn't seem like representations must, by their very nature, be self-ascribable by any particular subject. It could be the case that, empirically, all representations can become self-ascribable (for instance, via psychoanalysis) but there would be no contradiction in conceiving of a representation that remained permanently incapable of being integrated. It consequently could not be true, by conceptual necessity, that representations can be cognized in accompaniment with an "I think". Indeed, Guyer is so clearly right on this point, that he surely has gotten Kant wrong; the only position damaged by such counterexamples

It is my view, and my contention, that the analyticity of this principle provides yet untapped argumentative potential in ascertaining the profound friendship between Kant's illustration of the cognitive subject and the illustration offered by contemporary conceptualism. I now move on to elaborate further on this connection and my reasons for thinking that Kant, by virtue of his demand that the apperception principle is analytic, is best read as a conceptualist.

#### IV. CONCEPTUALISM, CONTENT, AND THE APPERCEPTION PRINCIPLE

I have been suggesting that the analyticity of the apperception principle provides evidence for Kantian conceptualism. In this section, I will forge some textual and theoretical connections between the suggestions and implications of conceptualism and the suggestions and implications of an analytic apperception principle (as construed above). In so doing, I will make use of Wilfrid Sellars's vocabulary. In his own philosophy of mind, Sellars provides a theoretical space for non-conceptual content, and his language is useful in showing how an analytic apperception principle may render non-conceptual content superfluous. That is, once we see how non-conceptual content is operative in Sellars's own philosophy of mind, and how Sellars's illustration of the representing mind maps onto Kant's, we will be able to see that there is no interesting role left for non-conceptual content to play once the representing mind in question is taken to be a discursive intellect, and conditioned (by conceptual necessity) upon *a priori* synthesis.

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as "sleep talking" would be quite an implausible position indeed, as it would seem to presume absolute transparency in our cognitive lives. Guyer's mistake, then, can be corrected by understanding the apperception principle in the manner I have suggested, as asserting a conceptual requirement of representations of discursive intellection. To claim that *this principle* is analytic is altogether different from the claim Guyer wishes to refute. Correctly formulated, the apperception principle analyzes the concept of a *discursive intellect*, rather than that of representation.

### A. Sellars and Ostensible Seeings

Sellars believes that there is such a thing as non-conceptual representational content. He thinks that Kant requires the positing of such content in order to make sense of the relationship between the sensibility and the understanding. Sellars writes in *Science and Metaphysics*:

...it is only if Kant distinguishes the radically non-conceptual character of sense from the conceptual character of the synthesis of apprehension in intuition and, accordingly, the receptivity of sense from the guidedness of intuition that he can avoid the dialectic which leads from Hegel's *Phenomenology* to nineteenth century idealism. (SM, 16)<sup>30</sup>

Our question is whether Kant's illustration of discursive representation and discursive intellection requires or allows us to accept the existence of representational mental contents that are "radically non-conceptual" in character. Some years earlier in *Empiricism in the Philosophy of Mind*, Sellars characterizes the *conceptual episodes* of receptivity (particularly visual receptivity) as *ostensible seeings*.<sup>31</sup> For S to ostensibly see that p is for it to look to S as if p were the case, where p is a proposition. That is, in ostensibly seeing that p, S is in the experiential state in which she would expect to be in the case that p were true. S's ostensibly seeing that p does not entail that p is the case, nor that S believes that p is the case, but it does place S in a position that allows endorsement of p, or her withholding of that endorsement. As the content of an ostensible seeing is always some propositional state, ostensible seeings are *conceptual episodes*. To ostensibly see *that p* is always already to actualize conceptual capacities that make the thought *that p* possible.

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<sup>30</sup> The dialectic in question here is that which motivates the first three chapters of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which the failure of sense-certainty to determine the content of representations leads the Hegelian to so radically divorce reality from representation that the latter can only ever be determined as the opposite of the real. I take Sellars to be suggesting non-conceptual representations of receptivity would alleviate Kant from requiring that the guidedness of representations of the understanding be borrowed from the received representations of sense.

<sup>31</sup> Sellars (EPM §7)

To say that ostensible seeings are *actualizations* of conceptual capacities is distinct from saying that the subject experiencing an ostensible seeing is *exercising her* conceptual capacities. To perceive that there is a red cube on the table is a conceptual episode. However, we are supposed to intuitively see the difference from the passivity of this representation to the deliberate exercise of conceptual capacities operative in judging. One is, in some sense, *forced* to perceive that there is a red cube on the table. The episode is characterized by a sort of cognitive passivity. And yet, spontaneity is required for one to have a thought of the form “there is a red cube on the table.” Appreciating this point will alleviate whatever concerns we may have about a mental state that is both conceptual (and hence under the purview of the faculty of spontaneity) *and* passive. This same appreciation will also make clear that it need not be the case that the content of an ostensible seeing *actually* enter into the space of reasons—i.e., that the subject *actually* entertain, doubt, or consciously endorse *that p*. Indeed, in our many perceptual episodes we rarely bring such ostensible seeings to consciousness in a manner that would allow for such endorsement. Nonetheless, the contents of ostensible seeings are such as always to allow of *possible* entry into the space of reasons; they are the sorts of things that *could* be endorsed, or concerning which endorsement *could* be withheld.

Kant posits that the *realm of the conceptual is the realm of freedom*.<sup>32</sup> The realm of freedom is that in which the subject *could in principle say “no”*. That is, any *conceptual* content is one towards which the thinking subject can adopt any number of attitudes. The subject could entertain *that p*, believe *that p*, doubt *that p*, or deny *that p*. This freedom of cognitive scrutiny, the freedom to wrest control of one’s representations, defines the conceptual order. Ostensible

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<sup>32</sup> This point is put nicely by McDowell, “Having the World in View: Sellars, Kant and Intentionality; Lecture 1: Sellars on Perceptual Experience,” *Journal of Philosophy* 95:9 (1998): 433-4. [HWV]

seeings *themselves* do not require any such exercise of conceptual capacities, but they do, by definition, possess a structure that would *be amenable* to the exercise of such capacities.

Ostensible seeings are actualizations of conceptual capacities. RED is a concept. S's capacity for it to look to S as if something were red is a conceptual capacity. Though I may passively experience the world as though X, it is still available to me to doubt or decide that X is true. To doubt, decide, consider, or deny that an object is red is to exercise a conceptual capacity, and to exercise one's cognitive freedom in the Kantian sense. The space of cognitive freedom is coextensive with the Sellarsian space of reasons. The space of reasons is characterized as "the logical space of...justifying and being able to justify what one says".<sup>33</sup> Both Sellars's space of reasons and Kant's realm of freedom extend to the *actualization of or capacity for* the subject's taking a discursive or critical attitude toward the propositional contents of her thoughts.

For a subject, S, to ostensibly see that p is not always for S to exercise her freedom, for ostensible seeings can *impose* or *impress* themselves upon the subjects. The subject may have no choice in the matter; she cannot resist a concept's becoming operative in experience in response to a particular ostensible seeing. Nonetheless, ostensible seeings do "contain claims."<sup>34</sup> Thus the content of an ostensible seeing is the right sort of content for potential consideration, endorsement, rejection, etc.. That is, the subject can decide for herself whether to believe that some representation is veridical. The space of reasons, occupied both by contents that stand to the subject as potentially justifiable or unjustifiable and contents that could stand in such a relation, includes among its occupants all ostensible seeings. Such ostensible seeings are all, in principle, possible objects of the subject's exercise of freedom, activating and exercising

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<sup>33</sup> Sellars (EPM 32)

<sup>34</sup> See Sellars (EPM 23-4 and 39-40). This point is also brought out by McDowell (HWV 438).

capacities of justification, consideration, etc.. As such, they are *actualizations* of conceptual capacities, and this is sufficient for their being conceptual representational contents.

Does Kant's account of receptive consciousness, of intuitions, require anything that does not minimally qualify as an ostensible seeing (or some analog corresponding to a distinct receptive modality)? If the answer is no, then Kant is a conceptualist. The thing thought in an ostensive seeings, as presently construed, is a representation that contains a claim, and is impressed upon the subject by receptive capacities. As potential matter for such activity as justifying, considering, and denying, ostensive seeings are within the space of reasons, and they depend upon the actualization of conceptual capacities. They are conceptual contents.

#### B. Apperception and the Space of Reasons

It is worth noting that Sellars's introduction of the space of reasons and Kant's introduction of the *cogito* principle share very similar modal conditions. The space of reasons is the space of justifying and *being able to* justify what one says. The space of reasons includes not only the *actual* objects of our justificatory practices, but also the *possible* objects of such practices. Whether the subject ever stops to consider whether there is a red rectangular object, the cognitive state that represents the world "as if there were a red rectangular object" contains a claim and thus is such as to allow of possible endorsement, denial, etc. Such a state is, consequently, within the space of reasons, and draws upon conceptual capacities. I am emphasizing *modal* conditions placed upon something's being within the space of reasons; the space of reasons is occupied only by representational contents which admit of *possible* entry into justificatory considerations by the thinking subject.

My objective, at large, is to relate the *apperception principle* to *conceptualism*. Enough has been said in what has preceded that I think I can make this point rather swiftly. The claim of

conceptualism is that all representational content belongs within the *Sellarsian space of reasons*, the Kantian space of freedom. The apperception principle, qua analytic, is that all representational content falls under the purview of the *cogito principle*. According to the *cogito principle*,

[i]t must be *possible* for the ‘I think’ to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me. (B131-2)

Any mental state that does not conform to this minimal constraint does not, by Kant’s lights, qualify as a representation. This constraint does not go so far as to suggest that the ‘I think’ must *in fact* accompany all my representations. All that is demanded by the *cogito principle* itself is that representations be so structured as to *possibly* be accompanied by the ‘I think’.

The *cogito principle*, which provides support for the apperception principle, says of any representation that it must be possible for the latter to be accompanied by the ‘I think’. The space of reasons (which, according to conceptualism, contains all representational mental content) says of any representation (contained therein) that it must be such as to allow for the representation to enter into possible justificatory practices. The modal condition Kant places on the relationship between the class of *things accompanied by the ‘I think’* and the class of representations is precisely the same condition that Sellars places upon the relationship between the class of representations within the space of reasons and the representations which the subject can provide justification for. The condition is, in both cases, that the particulars that fall into the latter class *must be such as to be able to be placed in the former class* by the discursive subject.

The cogito principle is the premise in an argument, the conclusion of which is the apperception principle. The representations characterized by the apperception principle are representations that are capable of being accompanied by the *I think*. In order for a representation to allow for the possibility of the representer's thinking that p, p must be subject of the synthesis of representations; that is an *a priori* condition of the possibility of discursive intellection. This, in turn, requires that the representation is conceptual in the relevant sense. And, as the apperception principle is an analytic principle, this restraint is appropriately placed upon all possible representations by conceptual necessity. This amounts to conceptualism. Kant's inclination to refer to the apperception principle as analytic gives us reason to regard Kant as a conceptualist.

## V. CONCLUSION

### A. Summary of the Argument

The goal of this thesis has been to show that Kant is committed to something like contemporary conceptualism in his account of representational mental content for beings like us. In particular, I have made it my aim to explore the relationship between conceptualism and Kant's apperception principle. I have argued that the apperception principle is the following:

*Insofar as an intellect is discursive, all of its representations are its representations by virtue of being a product of a priori synthesis.*

My argument has aimed to show that construing my rendition of the apperception principle as analytic weighs heavily in favor of Kant's being a conceptualist. Conceptualism is a theory about representations as they are operative in human, and therefore discursive, intellect. Insofar as my intellect is discursive, the only way that I can have representations is by spontaneously acting

upon representations that I receive from outside. In order for such *spontaneity* to be possible, those representations must one and all be subject to the conditions of *a priori* synthesis. Those representations must allow the *in principle* possibility of such cognitive manipulation as combination, opposition, and comparison. This requires a minimal conceptual *structure*, which would allow for the representations' possible constitutive participation in *discursive cognition*, for *possible* entrance into the space of reasons. That is: for all possible representations in beings like us to be the products of *a priori* synthesis is for all possible representations to be *structured* such as to allow for the *in principle* conceptualization of any such representation. The analyticity of the apperception principle strongly suggests that any discursive representation must always have a minimal structure of this sort, and must consequently be conceptual.

### B. Conclusion By Way Of An Objection Considered

In this final section, I will further explore the relevance that apperception has to the question of conceptualism, and I will consider an objection.

The discursive intellect is characterized by its capacity for theoretical knowledge about an independently existing world based on its apprehension of representations taken in from the outside. To affirm the analyticity of the apperception principle is to affirm that discursivity as such requires *a priori* synthesis, and carries with it all corresponding constraints. These constraints, I have suggested, amount to limiting the space of representational contents to the space of conceptual contents.<sup>35</sup> At this point we must be very careful, for there is an ambiguity in my construal of the apperception principle, one that turns out to be relevant to the conceptualist

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<sup>35</sup> This is perhaps an ironic spatial metaphor, since McDowell prefers to speak of the "boundlessness" of the conceptual order, suggesting that it is the space of conceptual contents that is unlimited, rather than the space of representations that is limited. I have been speaking throughout of structural constraints placed upon representational contents, so my having turned McDowell's master thought on its head is not completely out of line.

question. The apperception principle asserts that the discursive intellect is one in whom representations are produced by *a priori* synthesis. The cognitive agent is presented with objective particulars and is capable of representing the object by combining a manifold of disparate presentations of intuited particulars as a manifold, or an object. Such a capacity is the *a priori* condition of the possibility of discursive thought.

But this claim—that that the content of the representations of a discursive intellect are constituted by such *a priori* combination—could mean one of two things. First, it could be that the discursive intellect, *qua* discursive, has the capacity to represent objects by means of a priori synthesis. This would be like asserting of a telepath that she has the capacity to represent the thoughts of others. This is a properly analytic claim, but it does not limit the class of possible representations *to* those of the thoughts of others. A telepath would also be capable of representing objects that she takes in through modes of receptivity that she shares with the rest of us. She could still hear a trumpet. Call the claim that the apperception asserts of the discursive subject that she has a particular capacity the *capacity interpretation*.

Alternatively, the apperception principle could assert that a discursive intellect is one for whom *all* representations are the products of *a priori* synthesis. If this is the correct way to understand the apperception principle, the apperception principle would be analogous to a characterization of animal intellect, for which all possible representations are given by receptivity. On this reading, the apperception principle affirms a limitation upon discursive cognition, that its contents can only ever be given by the *a priori* synthesis. I will refer to this as the *limitation interpretation*.

The ambiguity at hand is between the characterization of a discursive intellect as one whose representational contents are one and all generated by *a priori* synthesis, or as an intellect

which is possessed of *some* representations that are given through *a priori* synthesis. I am not equipped to assert with certainty that Kant intends one or another of these. However, if the capacity interpretation is preferable, this raises some problems for my claim that Kant's conceptualism can be demonstrated by recourse to the apperception principle. If the discursive intellect is one who is uniquely capable of *a priori* synthesis, but who can nonetheless represent the world prior to such synthesis, then space for non-conceptual content remains. But I do think that there are some reasons to prefer the limitation interpretation. This will become clearer, I think, once we appreciate the role that *a priori* synthesis plays in Kant's illustration of cognitive architecture.

On the introduction of *a priori* synthesis and the role it plays in introducing the "battery of 'principles of the pure understanding'," Merritt writes,

Kant is not asking us to imagine *a priori* synthesis as some kind of mysterious process; for he is not, he insists, trying to provide a genetic account of human cognition in the Transcendental Deduction (A86-7/B118-9). He is instead arguing that *we must have a fundamental grasp of the systematic order of representation in order to be knowers at all. This fundamental grasp of the systematic order of representation is, in effect, the a priori synthesis of the apperception principle.* (KAP 24; my emphasis)

Merritt points to the need for a *systematic order of representation* as a condition of the possibility of the spontaneity of the understanding. As discursive intellects, we grasp our representations as systematically ordered, and in so doing we grasp nature as systematically ordered, as a law-governed whole. This structural feature of our representations is the structure required by our being knowers at all, as it is this structure that admits of our representations that they are the sorts of things which could possibly be known. In Sellarsian terms, this is simply to say that our representations are within the space of reasons. *Qua* knowers, we *must* structure our representations, *one and all*, so that they are characterizable as propositional claims. This is tied

to, and demanded by, our status as discursive, and hence cognitively free, intellects. In order to represent discursively, we must cognitively postulate a world independent of us, in accordance with which our representations can be or fail to be veridical, but this is in turn to represent that mind-independent world as a law-governed whole. This postulated systematicity must be ever operative as a backdrop of all possible representations.

This returns us to the McDowellian demonstrative concept. For color shades so fine-grained as to escape our coarsely-divided color concepts, McDowell suggests that any color representation is always possessed of a minimal conceptual structure, that of the demonstrative “that shade.” We see again the sense in which the demonstrative concept, far from an *ad hoc* cop out, is the essence of the conceptualist perspective, and the perspective that I am attributing to Kant. If we read the apperception principle as an analytic characterization of a discursive intellect, and if we understand a discursive intellect as one for whom all representations must be placed within a context of systematicity, for whom all possible representations are already woven into a representation of nature as a law-governed whole, it is no longer *ad hoc* to suggest that representations for which we do not have particular, determinate concepts (for instance, a particular shade of red) are minimally conceptual to the extent that all such contents are defeasible (potentially not veridical) in the face of, and requisitely in agreement with, the backdrop of a law-governed world-in-view.

The point of all of this is that the characterization of the discursive intellect given by the apperception principle is closer to the *limitation interpretation* than the *capacity interpretation*. The discursive intellect is an intellect that, to borrow McDowell’s famous phrase, *has a world in view*. The discursive intellect is one whose representations are nested within a complex web of representations that manifoldly present the subject with a systematic and law-governed whole. In

this context, the discursive intellect is one for whom all *possible* representations are situated thusly, within the context of a manifold systematic nature, and are thus available to spontaneity for incorporation into a conceptual scheme that constitutes the space of reasons. The discursive intellect is one that is *limited* to conceptual representations by virtue of their underlying dependence upon *a priori* synthesis in order to gain access a manifold world-in-view. It is not merely the case that the discursive intellect is one capable of some conceptual representation; the discursive intellect experiences the world of appearances as always-already incorporated into a world-in-view, a conceptual scheme, and all possible representations emerge within that scheme and are amenable to its formal demands. So a potential concern, that the apperception principle may be characterizing a rational capacity over and above our passive animal capacities, need not concern us.

I have argued that construing the apperception principle as an analytic proposition that predicates *a priori* synthesis of discursive intellection *as such* justifies our concluding that all possible representational mental contents conform to a minimal conceptual structure not unlike McDowellian demonstrative concepts. One could—and many do—reject the Kantian picture of the cognitive architecture of beings like us. But Kant himself, in presenting the apperception principle as he did, rules out, in principle, the sort of absolute non-conceptual content that Sellars wants to characterize as representations of mere receptivity, as non-conceptual contents. We are left with reason to regard the *constraints of the conceptual* as operative in *all possible representational content* for beings like us. If so much is granted, then the conclusion that Kant is a conceptualist is well-warranted.