

Kant's Spontaneity Thesis

At the heart of the *Critique of Pure Reason* lies a distinction between two fundamental cognitive powers, sensibility and understanding. It is a measure of how important this distinction is that Kant singles it out as the feature which makes his own position superior to those of his most prominent predecessors, on both the Empiricist and the Rationalist side.¹ What exactly the distinction amounts to, however, is far from clear. In particular, it is not clear how one member of the pair of contrasting characteristics Kant appeals to in drawing it is to be understood. I have in mind here the characterization of the two powers in terms of the causal origin of their actualizations, that is, the characterization of sensibility as *receptive*, and the understanding as *spontaneous*, as it is contained, for instance, in the following passage:

Our cognition springs from two fundamental sources of the mind; the first is the capacity of receiving representations (the receptivity for impressions), the second is the power of cognizing an object through these representations (the spontaneity of concepts). Through the first an object is *given* to us, though the second it is *thought* in relation to that representation (which is a mere determination of the mind). [...] If the *receptivity* of our mind to receive representations, insofar as it is affected in some way, is to be called sensibility, then the mind's power of producing representations from itself, the *spontaneity* of cognition, is the understanding. (A50f/B74f)²

¹ “[...] Leibniz *intellectualized* the appearances, just as Locke totally *sensitized* the concepts of the understanding [...]. Instead of seeking two entirely different sources of representation in the understanding and sensibility, which could judge about things with objective validity *only in conjunction*, each of these great men holds on only to one of them, which in his opinion is immediately related to things in themselves, while the other does nothing but confuse or order the representations of the first” (A271/B327). – Except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is cited in the customary way, references to Kant's works are to the so-called Academy edition (= Ak.), by volume and page number: *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin: de Gruyter and predecessors 1902ff. Translations are largely my own, though based on the Cambridge Edition of Kant's Works, edited by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood.

² Unsre Erkenntniß entspringt aus zwei Grundquellen des Gemüths, deren die erste ist, die Vorstellungen zu empfangen (die Receptivität der Eindrücke), die zweite das Vermögen, durch diese Vorstellungen einen Gegenstand zu erkennen (Spontaneität der Begriffe); durch die erstere wird uns ein Gegenstand *gegeben*, durch die zweite wird dieser im Verhältniß auf jene Vorstellung (als bloße Bestimmung des Gemüths) *gedacht*. [...] Wollen wir die *Receptivität* unseres Gemüths, Vorstellungen zu empfangen, so fern es auf irgend eine Weise afficirt wird, Sinnlichkeit nennen: so ist dagegen das Vermögen, Vorstellungen selbst hervorzubringen, oder die *Spontaneität* des Erkenntnisses der Verstand.

Sensibility and understanding, the passage says, are distinct cognitive capacities because they differ with regard to the way in which their respective representations come into being.

Sensibility is characterized as receptive, because sensible representations result from, and thus depend on, the affection of the mind by something external. By contrast, the understanding is spontaneous, because it generates representations out of itself, independently of external causes.

However, exactly what Kant has in mind when he characterizes the understanding in this way is not clear. Among other things, it is not clear because what may be regarded as the received view of spontaneity among commentators seems to me to be at odds with Kant's text. My goal in this paper is to address this situation and sketch an account of Kant's conception of spontaneity that makes for a better fit. Because the issues here are extremely complex, I shall offer no more than a sketch. But I hope to show that an alternative to the received view is needed, and to give at least an outline of what such a view might look like.

I shall proceed as follows. I begin by sketching the received view. I then provide some textual evidence for regarding this view as insufficient, because it leaves out a central feature of Kant's account. Since this feature appears, on the face of it, to be rather implausible, my strategy in the remainder of the paper will be to ask what reasons Kant has for accepting it. By isolating these reasons, I hope to show that inclusion of this feature in his conception of spontaneity is in fact well motivated. I end by considering an objection, which serves to highlight some features of Kant's conception of sensibility.

1. Spontaneity as Judgment

As the quote from A51/B75 makes clear, the spontaneous capacity of the mind, as far as theoretical cognition is concerned, is the understanding. Because the understanding is defined as the capacity for judgment, it has seemed natural to commentators to associate spontaneity with

the capacity for judgment.³ Thus, to exercise the spontaneous capacity of the mind is to make judgments. Accordingly, commentators have sought to explain the content of Kant's spontaneity claim by considering the distinctive features of judgment.

The view advocated by Henry Allison is representative of this approach.⁴ Central to Allison's view is the idea that judgment must be construed as a "taking as". To make a judgment is to take something to be the case, for instance, to take some object *a* as being *F*. The point of this locution is that it makes explicit the requirement that, in making a judgment, the subject must be aware of the significance of its act. In particular, the subject must be aware that its act makes a claim to objectivity, to representing how things are. How things are is independent of how they are represented as being, in the sense that representing them to be a certain way doesn't make it the case that they are this way. The representation may be true or false. If the subject is to be aware of the significance of its act, this means that it must have a grasp of the fact that its act is beholden to a standard of correctness independent of it in just this way. So judgment must involve a grasp of the fact that things may or may not be as a judgment says they are, which means that it must involve an awareness of the distinction between what one judges to be the case, on the one hand, and what actually is the case, on the other.

For judgment to include an understanding of its own significance is for it to be apperceptive, to involve a particular form of self-consciousness. In fact, Allison takes this to be the content of Kant's principle of apperception, according to which "the 'I think' must be able to accompany all my representations" (B131). The crucial point for our purposes, however, is that,

³ "We can trace all acts of the understanding back to judgment, so the understanding in general may be regarded as a capacity to judge" (A69/B94).

⁴ See Allison's papers "On Naturalizing Kant's Transcendental Psychology" and "Kant's Refutation of Materialism," both in Allison, *Idealism and Freedom: Essays on Kant's Theoretical and Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge/New York: Cambridge UP 1996, as well as his book *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, New Haven/London: Yale UP, 2nd ed., 2004. Another prominent advocate of this view is Robert Pippin in "Kant on the Spontaneity of Mind", in Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations*, Cambridge/New York: Cambridge UP 1997, 29-55. For a particularly clear exposition of the motivation for this view, at some distance from Kant's texts, see Matthew Boyle, "What Is a Rational Being?", unpubl. ms.

according to Allison, the apperceptive nature of judgment requires spontaneity. To take a representation as a representation of how things objectively are, it is not sufficient for this representation merely to occur in the mind, perhaps as a result of sensible affection. Rather, the subject must take a certain stance towards its own representation, attach a certain significance to it. And the taking up of this stance cannot be explained, Allison contends, through the workings of merely receptive capacities. Sensible, i.e. receptive, capacities can explain that a representation with a certain content occurs in the mind. But they cannot explain the taking up of the particular stance involved in attaching objective significance to this representation. In Allison's words, "[s]ensibility can present to the mind x 's that are F 's, but it cannot, not even in collaboration with the imagination, take or recognize them as such. This is the work of the understanding. In this respect, then, Kant's conception of spontaneity is an essential component of his account of the understanding, and particularly its distinction from sensibility."⁵

Furthermore, the "taking-as" of judgment is identified with what Kant calls the synthesis of intuitions. Consider the following passage, where, commenting on Kant's identification of the understanding with spontaneity, construed as "the mind's power of producing representations from itself" (A51/B75), Allison writes:

"The key to understanding this identification lies in Kant's further identification of discursive thought with judgment. [...] What judgment 'produces' from itself is the representation of objects, that is to say, objectively valid judgments. The understanding is, therefore, spontaneous in the sense that it 'constitutes' objectivity or objective reference in and through the act of judgment, and it does this by synthesizing the manifold of sensible intuition in accordance with its own inherent rules (the pure concepts of the understanding)."⁶

In making a judgment, the passage says, the subject synthesizes a manifold of intuition. And since Kant holds that all synthesis is spontaneous, we in fact have here an identification of judgment and synthesis: judging is synthesis, and synthesis is judging.

⁵ Allison, "On Naturalizing Kant's Transcendental Psychology," 62.

⁶ Allison, "Kant's Refutation of Materialism", 94.

2. Textual Evidence

I believe that the strategy of explaining Kant's conception of spontaneity by focusing exclusively on the characteristics of judgment is mistaken. While it may be correct to say that Kant has a conception of judgment as "taking as," there is textual evidence suggesting that he recognizes exercises of spontaneity other than judgment. He seems to hold that there is a kind of exercise of spontaneity in sensible synthesis, which must be distinguished from exercises of spontaneity in judgment. If this is right, then the account of spontaneity that results from an exclusive focus on judgment is not just incomplete, though it is that. Rather, and more seriously, it leads to the false claim, widely accepted among commentators, that all synthesis takes the form of judging.⁷

As regards its quantity, the textual evidence pointing directly to exercises of spontaneity distinct from judgment is not great. But this is partly compensated by its quality, by which I mean the fact that some of it has a very prominent location. For the central piece of textual evidence comes from the opening of the Transcendental Deduction in the B-edition of the *Critique*. This means that it is situated at a crucial juncture in Kant's argument. The Transcendental Deduction constitutes the heart of the Transcendental Analytic; arguably even of the entire *First Critique*. It is here that Kant seeks to prove his central contention, that there are pure concepts of the understanding, whose application to objects is known a priori, and which therefore form the basis for synthetic judgments a priori. We can expect, therefore, that a claim advanced at this point in the text plays some role in the overall argument of the Deduction, and thus matters to the main concerns of Kant's project.

Here, then, is the passage in question, taken from the first paragraph of §15, the opening section of the B-Deduction:

⁷ [references]

The manifold of representations can be given in an intuition that is merely sensible, i.e. nothing but receptivity, and the form of this intuition can lie a priori in our faculty of representation without being anything other than the way in which the subject is affected. However, the *combination* (coniunctio) of a manifold in general can never come to us through the senses, and therefore cannot already be contained in the pure form of sensible intuition; for it is an act of the spontaneity of the power of representation, and, since one must call the latter understanding, in distinction from sensibility, all combination, whether we are conscious of it or not, whether it is a combination of the manifold of intuition or of several concepts, and in the first case either of sensible or non-sensible intuition, is an action of the understanding, which we would designate with the general title *synthesis* in order at the same time to draw attention to the fact that we can represent nothing as combined in the object without having previously combined it ourselves, and that among all representations *combination* is the only one that is not given through objects but can be executed only by the subject itself, since it is an act of its self-activity. (B129f)⁸

Kant here puts forth a general principle, which I call his Spontaneity Thesis. At a first approximation, we can formulate it as the thesis that combination cannot be given. Exactly what combination is will concern us later. For now we can simply note that the term is supposed to be equivalent to ‘synthesis,’ and thus concerns a topic familiar from the preceding parts of the *Transcendental Analytic*, in particular the concluding section of the “Clue to the Discovery of all Pure Concepts of the Understanding,” in which the Table of Categories is presented.⁹ That Kant there calls the categories “pure concepts of synthesis” (A80/B106) makes it clear that the topic of synthesis, hence combination, is closely connected to his chief concern of establishing the objective validity of the categories.

⁸ Das Mannigfaltige der Vorstellungen kann in einer Anschauung gegeben werden, die bloß sinnlich, d.i. nichts als Empfänglichkeit ist, und die Form dieser Anschauung kann a priori in unserem Vorstellungsvermögen liegen, ohne doch etwas andres als die Art zu sein, wie das Subject afficirt wird. Allein die *Verbindung* (coniunctio) eines Mannigfaltigen überhaupt kann niemals durch Sinne in uns kommen und kann also auch nicht in der reinen Form der sinnlichen Anschauung zugleich mit enthalten sein; denn sie ist ein Actus der Spontaneität der Vorstellungskraft, und da man diese zum Unterschiede von der Sinnlichkeit Verstand nennen muß, so ist alle Verbindung, wir mögen uns ihrer bewußt werden oder nicht, es mag eine Verbindung des Mannigfaltigen der Anschauung oder mancherlei Begriffe, und an der ersteren der sinnlichen oder nichtsinnlichen Anschauung sein, eine Verstandeshandlung, die wir mit der allgemeinen Benennung *Synthesis* belegen würden, um dadurch zugleich bemerklich zu machen, daß wir uns nichts als im Object verbunden vorstellen können, ohne es vorher selbst verbunden zu haben, und unter allen Vorstellungen die *Verbindung* die einzige ist, die nicht durch Objecte gegeben, sondern nur vom Subjecte selbst verrichtet werden kann, weil sie ein Actus seiner Selbstthätigkeit ist.

⁹ Kant seems to use the term ‘combination’ (*Verbindung*) to refer both to the activity of synthesizing, and to its result, the representation of a unified manifold. For the sake of simplicity, I will not usually track this distinction. Nothing in my argument, however, hangs on this.

Of combination Kant says in this passage that it is an act of the spontaneous faculty of the mind, the understanding. Hence the Spontaneity Thesis. What is important for my purposes is the fact that he goes on to distinguish between different types of combination. In particular, he distinguishes between combination “of the manifold of intuition” and combination “of several concepts”.¹⁰ Since the latter, combination of several concepts, must be judgment, the fact that he separates out the former as distinct from this implies that there must be a kind of combination which is not judgment. If we call this sensible combination, or sensible synthesis, we can take Kant to be saying that sensible synthesis is a distinct kind of combination from judgment. The former is combination in intuition, the latter is the combination of concepts.

Before I present further textual evidence, let me introduce some terminology. I want to distinguish between a weak and a strong reading of the Spontaneity Thesis. The weak reading attributes to Kant what I call the Weak Spontaneity Thesis:

Weak Spontaneity Thesis: There is only one type of spontaneous act of the mind, viz. judgment.

Allison’s view, as sketched above, is an instance of the weak reading. By contrast, the strong reading takes Kant to be committed to the Strong Spontaneity Thesis:

Strong Spontaneity Thesis: There are two distinct types of exercise of spontaneity, viz. judgment and sensible synthesis.

As I said above, my goal in this paper is to argue that we have to attribute to Kant the Strong Spontaneity Thesis, rather than its weaker cousin.

In addition to the passage from §15, there are two main sources of direct textual evidence for the claim that Kant holds the Strong Spontaneity Thesis. One is his essay “On the Progress of Metaphysics since Leibniz and Wolff” (written in 1793, though published only

¹⁰ That he speaks of “sensible” and “non-sensible” intuition when he further differentiates between two types of combination in intuition is seen by most commentators as a slip of the pen. What he has in mind, presumably, is the distinction between empirical and non-empirical intuition.

posthumously), the other is his correspondence with Jacob Sigismund Beck, a former student of Kant's who, at the time of the correspondence, was working on a book intended to make the Critical philosophy accessible to a wider audience. Consider first a passage from the Progress-essay:

Once the subjective form of sensibility is applied, as it must be if its objects are to be taken as appearances, to objects as the forms thereof, it brings about in its [their?] determination a representation inseparable from this [i.e. the determination, T.L.], namely that of the composite. For we can represent a determinate space to ourselves in no other way than by drawing it, i.e., by adding one space to the other, and so also with time.

Now the representation of a composite, as such, is not a mere intuition, but requires the concept of a compounding, so far as it is applied to intuition in space and time. So this concept (along with that of its opposite, the simple), is one that is not abstracted from intuitions, as a partial representation contained in them, but is a basic concept, and a priori at that – in the end the sole basic concept a priori, which is the original foundation in the understanding for all concepts of sensible objects.

There will thus be as many a priori concepts resident in the understanding, to which objects given to the senses must be subordinated, as there are types of compounding (synthesis) with consciousness, i.e., as there are types of synthetic unity of apperception of the manifold given in intuition.” (*Fortschritte*, Ak. XX, 271)¹¹

Kant talks about ‘composition’ (*Zusammensetzung*) here, rather than ‘combination’ (*Verbindung*), but for our purposes the difference is irrelevant. According to the technical usage he defines at B202n, combination (lat. *coniunctio*) is a genus whose species are composition (lat. *compositio*) and connection (lat. *nexus*), where composition is combination in accordance with the mathematical categories, i.e. quantity and quality, while connection is combination in accordance with the dynamical categories, the categories of relation and modality, including in

¹¹ Die subjektive Form der Sinnlichkeit, wenn sie, wie es nach der Theorie der Gegenstände derselben als Erscheinungen geschehen muß, auf Objekte, als Formen derselben, angewandt wird, führt in ihrer Bestimmung eine Vorstellung herbei, die von dieser unzertrennlich ist, nämlich die des Zusammengesetzten. Denn einen bestimmten Raum können wir uns nicht anders vorstellen, als, indem wir ihn ziehen, d. i. einen Raum zu dem andern hinzutun, und eben so ist es mit der Zeit bewandt.

Nun ist die Vorstellung eines Zusammengesetzten, als eines solchen, nicht bloße Anschauung, sondern erfordert den Begriff einer Zusammensetzung, so fern er auf die Anschauung in Raum und Zeit angewandt wird. Dieser Begriff also (samt dem seines Gegenteils, des Einfachen) ist ein Begriff, der nicht von Anschauungen, als eine in diesen enthaltene Teilvorstellung abgezogen, sondern ein Grundbegriff ist, und zwar a priori, endlich der einzige Grundbegriff a priori, der allen Begriffen von Gegenständen der Sinne ursprünglich im Verstande zum Grunde liegt.

Es werden also so viel Begriffe a priori im Verstande liegen, worunter Gegenstände, die den Sinnen gegeben werden, stehen müssen, als es Arten der Zusammensetzung (Synthesis) mit Bewußtsein, d. i. als es Arten der synthetischen Einheit der Apperzeption des in der Anschauung gegebenen Mannigfaltigen gibt.“

particular the categories of substance-accident and causality. However, Kant's identification of 'composition' and 'synthesis' in the final sentence of the passage, along with what he says there about the pure concepts, suggests that he is using 'composition' in a wider sense, as referring to the genus.

What is of interest in this passage is that Kant refers specifically to the combination of spatial and temporal manifolds, and suggests that, in the case of space, combination is effected by "drawing."¹² While it may not be clear exactly how we should conceive of this activity, it does seem clear that it is not identical to judging. The "adding of one space to another", which presumably is what we do when we e.g. draw a line by moving a point, is clearly not something we effect by making a judgment. And this is evidence for the claim that there is a kind of exercise of spontaneity that is distinct from judging.

The following passages from the correspondence with Beck point in the same direction:

We cannot perceive composition as given. Rather, we must produce it ourselves: we must *compose*, if we are to represent anything *as composed* (even space and time). (Letter to J. S. Beck, July 1, 1794, Ak. XI, 515)¹³

In my judgment everything depends on this: since, in the empirical concept of the *composite* the composition itself cannot be given by means of mere intuition and its apprehension, but only through the self-active combination of the manifold in intuition – that is, it can be represented only in a consciousness in general (which is not in turn empirical) – this combination and its function must be subject to rules a priori in the mind, which constitute the pure thought of an object in general (the pure concept of the understanding), by which the apprehension of the manifold must be governed, insofar as it amounts to *one* intuition; furthermore, these a priori rules constitute the condition of all possible empirical cognition of the composite (or that which belongs to it). On the common view, the representation of the composite as such figures, *as given*, among the representations of the manifold, which is apprehended, and does therefore not belong en-

¹² This of course echoes a well-known passage from the *Critique*, where Kant says, at B154, that we cannot represent a line except by drawing it in thought and goes on to describe this activity as one of synthesis, specifically as the *figurative synthesis* (*synthesis speciosa*).

¹³ Die Zusammensetzung können wir nicht als gegeben wahrnehmen, sondern wir müssen sie selbst machen: wir müssen *zusammensetzen*, wenn wir uns etwas *als zusammengesetzt* vorstellen sollen (selbst den Raum und die Zeit).

tirely to spontaneity, as however it really must, etc. (Letter to J. S. Beck, October 16, 1792, Ak. XI, 376)¹⁴

The first passage is a concise statement of the general principle, the Spontaneity Thesis. Again, there is a reference to space and time, the forms of intuition. So here, too, Kant seems to be saying that the representation of, say, a spatial figure requires an act of combination. Since, again, it seems plausible to hold that it takes something other than an act of judgment to represent a spatial figure, the implication is that there is a type of synthesis, of exercising spontaneity, which is distinct from judging.

This is confirmed by the second passage, specifically by the repeated reference to intuition. Kant speaks of “the self-active combination of the manifold *in intuition*” (my emphasis) and of “the apprehension of the manifold [...], insofar as it amounts to *one* intuition.” Of particular interest is the last sentence, where Kant in effect admits that his view is counterintuitive, and thereby gives indirect support to the strong reading of the Spontaneity Thesis. For the point about the common view, as he calls it, clearly concerns perception, the apprehension of sensory manifolds. Otherwise there would be no reason for the common view to suppose that the composite is given. So if Kant says, of this particular case, that even though combination may appear to be given, it is in fact due to spontaneity, he must be talking about exercises of spontaneity in perception itself, independently of judgment.

¹⁴ Meinem Urteile nach kommt alles darauf an: daß, da im empirischen Begriffe des *Zusammengesetzten* die Zusammensetzung nicht vermittelst der bloßen Anschauung und deren Apprehension sondern nur durch die *selbsttätige Verbindung* des Mannigfaltigen in der Anschauung gegeben und zwar in ein Bewußtsein überhaupt (das nicht wiederum empirisch ist) vorgestellt werden kann, diese Verbindung und die Funktion derselben unter Regeln a priori im Gemüte stehen müsse, welche das reine Denken eines Objekts überhaupt (den reinen Verstandesbegriff) ausmachen unter welchem die Apprehension des Mannigfaltigen stehen muß, so fern es *eine* Anschauung ausmacht, und auch die Bedingung aller möglichen Erfahrungserkenntnis vom Zusammengesetzten (oder zu ihm gehörigen) ausmacht, (d.i. darin eine Synthesis ist) die durch jene Grundsätze ausgesagt wird. Nach dem gemeinen Begriffe kommt die Vorstellung des Zusammengesetzten als solchen mit unter den Vorstellungen des Mannigfaltigen welches apprehendiert wird *als gegeben* vor und sie gehört sonach nicht, wie es doch sein muß, gänzlich zur Spontaneität usw.

3. The Merely Receptive Mind

While there may be textual evidence favoring the strong reading of the Spontaneity Thesis, this reading faces a number of problems. To begin with, while it may be plausible to suppose that judgment must be spontaneous, it is less easy to see why sensible combination should be spontaneous, as well. To make a case against the weak reading, we should be able to identify the philosophical motivation for Kant to hold the Strong Spontaneity Thesis. There are, however, at least two considerations suggesting that there is no such motivation, that combination should in fact be regarded as given. First, there is what we might call the phenomenology of perception. We seem to perceive all kinds of combination: we perceive things as standing in spatial and temporal relations; we perceive objects as bearing properties; we arguably even perceive causal interactions among objects. These are all kinds of combination which must fall inside the scope of Kant's thesis, given that they are kinds of combination governed by various categories (quantity, substance, and causality, in my example). Second, the claim that sensible combination cannot be given threatens to undermine the heterogeneity of sensibility and understanding. For sensibility is defined as the receptive capacity of the mind. What is sensible, this seems to imply, cannot be spontaneous. It must be given. So if there is a distinctly sensible species of combination, the very fact of its being sensible seems to entail that it must be given. If it is not, the strict separation Kant wants to uphold between the receptive and spontaneous aspects of the mind seems to break down.

There are, then, reasons not to attribute to Kant the Strong Spontaneity Thesis. But since the textual evidence seems to point in the opposite direction, we need to ask what might nevertheless prompt him to hold the Strong Thesis, despite the apparent pressures against such a move. This is what I want to do in what follows. So my guiding question will be what reasons Kant has for affirming the strong version of the Spontaneity Thesis and hold that no combina-

tion whatsoever, including specifically sensible combination, is given. The strategy I shall pursue is based on the following thought. If sensible combination could be given, the receptive capacity of the mind would be responsible for it. We should therefore be able to understand the idea of sensible combination without reference to spontaneity. If this is right, then a merely receptive mind, that is, a mind not possessed of a spontaneous faculty of representation, should be capable of enjoying sensible combination as well; regardless of whether this would take the same form as in the human case – what matters is that it would be possible in principle. We can therefore make progress if we reflect on what a merely receptive mind can and cannot do. If it turns out that a merely receptive mind can in fact not enjoy sensible combination, we have identified a reason for the Strong Spontaneity Thesis.

The viability of this strategy depends on two conditions. First, we must have an independent grip on the distinction between a merely receptive and a finite rational mind; independent, that is, of any claims about combination. Second, we need to flesh out the notion of sensible combination. That is, we must know what counts as sensible combination. Now, it may seem that my example above shows that we already know this: sensible combination is combination in accordance with the categories. Although I will argue that this is correct, we need a more principled reason for this claim. Providing such a reason is the task of the next section. For the remainder of this section I will discuss the idea of a merely receptive mind.

To get the idea of a merely receptive mind into view, it will be helpful to start with the distinction between an intuitive and a discursive understanding; or equivalently, an infinite and a finite rational mind. An infinite mind is characterized by the fact that thinking that p and its being the case that p do not come apart. The reason is that through the act of thinking, the infinite mind creates the objects of its thought. As we can also put it, an intuitive understanding gives itself its own objects. Contrast a finite rational, or discursive mind. Here the thought that p

does not guarantee its own truth. The objects of finite thought are not created by it, but have independent existence. For this reason, a discursive mind cannot know through thinking alone whether the objects of its thought exist, and are as it represents them. It is this fact that, in Kant's mind, creates the need for a receptive, or sensible, capacity in a discursive mind. In addition to the capacity for thought, a finite mind needs a way of ascertaining whether the objects of its thought exist, and are as it represents them as being. This requires a receptive capacity of representation, a capacity to have representations of objects in virtue of being affected by them. Because affection by the object presupposes the object's existence, such a capacity is a capacity for knowing existence. Its receptive nature enables it to supply what a discursive understanding needs.

Based on this notion of a receptive, or sensible, capacity of representation we can form the idea of a merely receptive mind. This is a mind whose capacities are exhausted by the capacity for sensible representation. It was implicit in the foregoing that a sensible capacity is essentially object-dependent: it is a capacity to have representations of objects in virtue of being affected by them. For affection to take place, the object must be present. That is, the mind's (properly functioning) sensible capacities must be in a position to register the object.

Whatever the precise nature of the representations which are generated in the subject through affection by the object, the idea of an object-dependent sensible capacity of representation is sufficient for us to ask what kind of cognition a being that has only sensible capacities is capable of, and to contrast this with the kind of cognition enjoyed by a being which is both sensible and intellectual, that is, a finite rational being, or discursive understanding.

As I said, an object-dependent capacity of representation essentially depends on the presence of the object for its exercise. It can represent only what is currently within the reach of its senses. If we add to this what Kant calls the reproductive imagination, that is, a capacity to

recall previously enjoyed sensible representations, we can say that a merely receptive mind can have representations either in virtue of present affection by objects, or in virtue of past affection by objects. Moreover, in various comments about animals, Kant claims that animals are capable of forming associative connections among the representations they enjoy.¹⁵ Since he also thinks that animals have a receptive capacity of representation, but no intellectual one, we can add the idea of connection by association to the repertoire of a merely receptive mind.

The idea of association at work here is essentially Hume's: If representations A and B are repeatedly experienced together, a disposition is formed to call to mind one of them on the occasion of the other. Thus, if the subject has, say, a perception of A, it also represents B, even though B is not a content that is currently being perceived.

With connection by association added to the repertoire of a merely receptive mind, we now have three basic ways in which such a mind can enjoy representations: by being affected, by recalling past affection, and by forming, and actualizing, associative dispositions. Since each of these directly depends on affection, in the sense that it is merely a more or less complex arrangement of representations resulting from affection, all the representations a merely receptive mind is capable of are essentially of the same type. They are all at bottom sensible representations, that is, representations, which come into being as a result of affection.

4. Sensible Combination

I suggested that the strategy of investigating why Kant might hold that sensible combination cannot be given by reflecting on what a merely receptive mind is capable of depends on two conditions. The first condition was that we have a grip on the distinction between a merely receptive and a finite rational mind independently of the idea of sensible combination, and I just

¹⁵ See e.g. the letter to Marcus Herz of May 26, 1789, Ak. XI, 48-55.

showed that this condition is satisfied. The second condition was that we have an account of what sensible combination actually is. Let me try to sketch such an account.

For this purpose, I want to introduce the notion of a sensible mode of combination. I will argue that this notion captures the idea of sensible combination that is at work in Kant's discussion of the Spontaneity Thesis. We can take as our clue the remark from §15, quoted above, that all combination is an act of the understanding, which is called synthesis (cf. B130). If we connect this with the claim from §10, that the categories are the pure concepts of synthesis, we get the idea that the categories constitute an inventory of the various forms that combination can take. This fits well with what Kant goes on to say about the categories in the Transcendental Deduction. He argues, first, that all combination presupposes the idea of a unity; second, that this unity is the synthetic unity of apperception, and third, that the categories articulate the unity of apperception. We can surmise, therefore, that the categories are, or are at least closely related to, the forms sensible combination can take. If this is right, we can determine what sensible combination is if we can say how the categories function.

Kant defines the categories as “concepts of an object in general, by means of which the intuition of an object in general is regarded as determined with regard to one of the logical functions of judgment” (B128). I interpret this definition as follows. The categories derive from the logical forms of judgment, as listed in the Table of Judgments. We therefore need to begin by saying something about these. A logical form of judgment, in Kant's sense, is the way in which, in the basic case, two concepts are combined in a judgment. This sense of logical form is based on the notion of logical form familiar in traditional Aristotelian logic. The square of oppositions nicely illustrates it.

To give an example, consider the judgments ‘All F are G ’ and ‘Some F are not G ’. Because these two judgments contain the same concepts, Kant would say that they have the same

matter. They differ only in respect of their logical form. In the terminology of Kant's Table, the first is a universal affirmative categorical judgment, while the second is a particular negative categorical judgment. Because the logical form of a judgment, in this sense, describes the way in which its component concepts are combined, I call the forms listed in Kant's table modes of concept-combination. Thus, 'universal judgment' is a mode of concept-combination, as are, for instance, 'negative judgment' and 'categorical judgment'.¹⁶

Although they contain the same concepts, the two judgments 'All F are G ' and 'Some F are not G ' obviously have different truth-conditions. Now, it is a central pillar of Kant's epistemology that our mode of ascertaining whether some state of affairs obtains is through intuition. We can therefore say, as a kind of shorthand-talk, that our two judgments would be made true by different sets of intuitions. Both sets of intuitions, however, would have to include the same kinds of intuitions, or, as Kant would say, the same intuitional matter. They would both have to involve F -intuitions and G -intuitions. But the two sets of intuitions would differ with regard to what Kant would call their form. They would differ with regard to the way in which F -intuitions and G -intuitions are related to one another. For instance, for the judgment 'All F are G ' to be true, all F -intuitions would have to be G -intuitions as well, while for the judgment 'Some F are not G ' to be true, there would have to be some F -intuitions that are not also G -intuitions.

The lesson to draw from this is that if the modes of concept-combination in judgment make a difference to the truth-conditions of a judgment, there must be in intuition something corresponding to each of these modes. Call this a sensible mode of combination. For each logi-

¹⁶ Note that we need to distinguish between the logical forms (plural) listed in Kant's table, and the logical form (singular) of any given judgment. If we call the former the elementary logical forms of judgment, we can say that the logical form of any given judgment will be some combination of these elementary forms. Which combinations are possible need not concern us here. Cf. Michael Wolff, *Die Vollständigkeit der kantischen Urteilstafel. Mit einem Essay über Freges 'Begriffsschrift'*, Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann 1995, for discussion.

cal form of judgment listed in Kant's table, each distinct mode of concept-combination, there must be a corresponding sensible mode of combination.

Because of the essential heterogeneity of sensibility and understanding, we are not, at this point, in a position to specify different sensible modes of combination. For the heterogeneity of sensibility and understanding entails that such a specification would have to be given in terms of the form of sensibility. Kant provides this specification, in terms of time, the form of inner sense, in the chapter on the Pure Principles. Although we need not concern ourselves with the details of that doctrine, I mention it here to indicate that what we have now is only an abstract characterization of sensible modes of combination. But for present purposes, this is sufficient.

I will now argue that the notion of sensible combination we are interested in is exactly the notion of combination contained in the idea of a sensible mode of combination. More specifically, sensible combination, in the sense in which it is the concern of the Spontaneity Thesis, is precisely that which sensible modes of combination are modes of. It follows that we know what sensible combination is if we know what sensible modes of combination are. This, I have just argued, we do know, albeit at a fairly abstract level of description: They are the analogues, in intuition, to the modes of concept-combination in judgment. And this means that they constitute the formal properties of intuitions, in virtue of which intuitions can be the content of judgments.

But now let me support the contention that the idea of a sensible mode of combination explains what Kant means by sensible combination in connection with the Spontaneity Thesis. I have already gestured at some supporting considerations above, when I suggested that we could glean from a consideration of §§10, 15, 16, and 20 the claim that the categories are meant to ar-

ticulate the unity, which according to §15 is presupposed by any combination in the sense of the Spontaneity Thesis. But we can say more.

The main consideration concerns the cognitive function of intuition. Through intuition, Kant says, objects are “given” to the mind, while through concepts they are thought.¹⁷ I take this to mean that intuition has a verifying function. Let me give a very schematic sketch of what I mean by this. Through the use of concepts in judgment, we assert that things are thus-and-so. Through intuition we ascertain whether things are as we judge them to be. The object-dependence of intuition is the feature that makes this possible. Because an intuition is had only insofar as an object is affecting the mind, intuition constitutes what Kant calls the immediate representation of this object. In intuition, we might say, objects are directly present to the mind. Therefore, intuitions reveal to us how things are with the objects on which they depend.

If intuition has a verifying function, intuition must be, as it were, tailored to judgment. That is to say, the basic structure of intuition must be such that intuitions can stand in relations of verification and falsification to judgment.¹⁸ And this must be so despite the essential heterogeneity of intuition and thought. Using Kant’s term ‘unity’ instead of my ‘basic structure’ we can put the point by saying that intuitions must be so constituted that their unity is the sensible analog to the unity of judgment. Only if this condition is satisfied can intuitions play the role of giving *objects* to the mind. And this entails that if intuitions do play this role, they must exhibit what I have been calling sensible modes of combination. The unity of intuition, therefore, is the unity of sensible modes of combination.

Further support for this claim can be derived from consideration of the goal of the Transcendental Deduction. The Deduction is intended, of course, to establish the objective validity of the categories, or pure concepts of the understanding. For the categories to be objectively

¹⁷ Cf. A50/B74, quoted above.

¹⁸ This is a point familiar from the work of John McDowell.

valid is for them to apply to intuitions. In fact, since they are pure concepts, it is for them to apply to intuitions of necessity – which means that if the categories are objectively valid, there is no possible intuition to which they do not apply. Now, for the categories to apply to intuitions is for intuitions to have the properties the categories denote.¹⁹ What are these properties? The answer is to be found in the definition of the categories, already quoted earlier in this section. According to this definition, the categories are concepts of an object in general, by means of which its intuition is regarded as determined with regard to the logical functions of judgment. Again, I take this to mean that a category relates an intuition to the logical form of possible judgments about it. Put differently, a category characterizes an intuition with regard to the logical form of judgments, whose content the intuition is. And as I argued above, the category does this by specifying, in its schematized version anyway, the sensible mode of combination the intuition exhibits.

We can now give the following argument. If the Transcendental Deduction is intended to establish the objective validity of the categories, and if for the categories to be objectively valid is for intuitions to exhibit sensible modes of combination, then the sense of combination at work in the principle about combination announced at the opening of the Deduction must be that of a sensible mode of combination. Therefore, the Spontaneity Thesis, the thesis that combination cannot be given, amounts to the claim that sensible modes of combination cannot be given.

5. An Objection

¹⁹ Because the categories are pure concepts, ‘having application’ in this case is equivalent to ‘being true of’, as opposed to ‘being either true or false of’. The reason is that a pure concept is either true of nothing at all, in which case it lacks objective validity, or it is true of everything. Its purity entails its universality. We can express this point by saying that pure concepts are formal concepts: they characterize the objects that fall under them with respect to their form as objects. And this means that they characterize these objects with regard to the features that make them objects in the first place.

One might object to both of the arguments just given that they beg the question. They beg the question because in deriving the notion of sensible combination from judgment, that is, from a capacity characteristic of finite rational minds, as opposed to merely receptive minds, they already assume that combination is something a merely receptive mind is not capable of. For if the sense of combination is such that it is tailored to the unity of judgment, it is but a small step to the thought that combination depends on capacities a merely receptive mind is by definition not possessed of. And if this is so, then the strategy I am pursuing is pointless, because the answer to the question whether a merely receptive mind is capable of representing sensible combination is already fixed.

The first thing to say in response to this objection is that the notion of combination, as I have introduced it, leaves it open whether or not combination can be given. It is true that, according to this notion, sensible combination is defined as the analog, in intuition, to the unity of judgment. But by itself, this leaves it open whether combination in this sense can, or cannot, be accounted for by merely receptive capacities. So far, nothing has been said about what it takes to account for the presence of sensible combination. I have only specified what sensible combination consists in.

But if this is so, then my strategy for identifying the reasons Kant has for holding the Strong Spontaneity Thesis is not circular. If the fact that the notion of sensible combination must be understood by reference to the unity of judgment does not by itself establish that sensible combination cannot be given, then the reason why sensible combination cannot be given cannot be that it must be understood by reference to the unity of judgment.

Nonetheless, the objection gets at something important. Let me try to bring this out by retracing my steps. The goal is to understand why Kant thinks that *sensible* combination, in particular, cannot be given. I suggested that we can make headway by considering what a merely

receptive mind is capable of; in particular, by considering whether a merely receptive mind is capable of representing combination. This is informative with regard to our goal for the following reason: if combination can be given, then combination is something that sensible capacities can account for. And if combination is something that sensible capacities can account for, then a merely receptive mind is capable of exhibiting it. Because of this connection, we should be able to learn something about why combination cannot be given by considering why a merely receptive mind cannot exhibit it.

We must of course be careful not to end up saying something to the effect that a merely receptive mind cannot exhibit combination because it is not spontaneous. That would defeat the purpose of my strategy. And this is what the objection highlights. But if we have, first, a conception of a merely receptive mind which is more substantive than a merely negative characterization in terms of its difference from a spontaneous mind, and, second, a notion of combination which does not have built into it the claim that it must be spontaneous, then we should be able to give a more informative response. We should be able to say something of the form ‘A merely receptive mind cannot exhibit combination, because combination is F, and a merely receptive mind can only do G; but G is not sufficient to account for F’.

The advantage of this strategy is that it will allow us to say why the claim, noted above, that we seem to perceive things as combined all the time, does not pose an objection to the Spontaneity Thesis; why it is, in other words, compatible with the strong reading of that Thesis.

6. Combination and the Merely Receptive Mind

We are now in a position to provide reasons, on Kant’s behalf, for his commitment to the Strong Spontaneity Thesis. I will argue that there are two such reasons. The first is simply that a merely receptive mind is incapable, in principle, of enjoying sensible combination. The second

is that, even if sensible combination could be given, intuition could not play the role it has in Kant's epistemology, viz. that of "giving objects to the mind"; what I call its verifying role. I will discuss them in turn.

First, then, let us turn to the contention that a merely receptive mind is in principle incapable of enjoying sensible combination. This amounts to saying that a capacity for object-dependent representation, on its own, cannot account for the presence of sensible modes of combination. To see why this is so, consider the following. Object-dependent representation, as I have defined it, is representation in virtue of affection by an object. In the fundamental case, it is representation in virtue of current affection. That is, the subject entertains a representation only because, and as long as, something is affecting it. Clearly, the content of such a representation is that which does the affecting, the object. Now, if all representations a merely receptive mind is capable of are of this kind, then it is clear that these representations cannot exhibit sensible modes of combination. For a sensible mode of combination is, in essence, a particular kind of unity among representations. It is the unity apparent, for instance, in the idea that distinct representations, occurring at different times, are representations of one and the same persisting object. Or in the idea that numerically and qualitatively distinct objects, perceived on different occasions, are all instances of a single kind. Or in the idea that an object may change its properties, while remaining the same object. Or, finally, in the idea that a change in one object is brought about by the action of another object. Note that these are meant to be examples of the unity constitutive of sensible modes of combination. They do not amount to an exhaustive characterization. But they should suffice for conveying a sense of the kind of unity at issue.

The representations of a merely receptive mind do not exhibit this kind of unity. They fail to exhibit it, because object-dependent representation on its own lacks the resources to generate it. To see this, consider the resources that are available to object-dependent representation.

As we saw, in the basic case, the content of the representation characteristic of a merely receptive mind is exhausted by what is currently affecting the mind. So representations change as affections change. But this means that there is no space here for awareness of any connections between the changing contents. There is, we might say, a succession of contents, but no awareness of this succession. Awareness is restricted to the changing contents, and does not include the fact that they are changing, nor the awareness of any other relations obtaining between them. As Kant puts it, such awareness is “in itself dispersed” (B133).

It does not change matters if we add to the repertoire of a merely receptive mind capacities for reproductive imagination (memory) and associative dispositions (see above, §3). Reproductive imagination is the capacity to recall previously entertained contents. But if these contents did not include the awareness of the relevant kind of unity when they were first received, they will also lack it when they are recalled in imaginative reproduction.

Connection by association might seem to be more promising. But consider what this mechanism, as I have introduced it, really amounts to. The idea of connection by association is that if representations A and B are repeatedly experienced together, a disposition is formed to call to mind one of them on the occasion of the other. Thus, if the subject has, say, a perception of A, it also represents B, even though B is not a content that is currently being perceived.

There are several reasons why such a capacity cannot generate sensible modes of combination where there were none to begin with. First, the kind of unity that accrues to representations in virtue of associative connection is obviously far less complex than the unity of sensible modes of combination. As Hume makes clear in his discussion of this capacity, connection by association tracks spatio-temporal contiguity among perceived contents. It connects things that repeatedly occur at roughly the same time, and in roughly the same location. But it is clear that

the unity at issue in the notion of a sensible mode of combination is a much more complex affair.

More importantly, however, connection by association operates, as it were, behind the subject's back. At least this is so in the case of a merely receptive mind. What associative dispositions accomplish is that some representation B occurs whenever representation A occurs, even when there is nothing present to generate B by virtue of affection. But this connection is not *for* the subject. The subject is not aware of the fact that B occurs whenever A occurs. It experiences first A, and then B (in a case of temporal contiguity, that is). It does not experience that there is first A, and then B. In other words, it does not experience the way in which A and B are related, their unity.

If this is right, then however complex the associative dispositions of a merely receptive mind may be, its representations will not exhibit sensible modes of combination. It follows that, if the notion of combination at issue in the Spontaneity Thesis is that captured by the idea of a sensible mode of combination, a merely receptive mind is not capable of representing combination. The representation of combination does not belong to its repertoire.

7. The Function of Intuition

I said that there is a second reason for Kant to hold the Strong Spontaneity Thesis, one that derives from the cognitive function of intuition. The cognitive function of intuition is to “give” objects to the mind. I have interpreted this as saying that intuition has a verifying function: Other things being equal, judgments are true or false accordingly as they do or do not correspond to what is given in intuition.

Now, for intuition to be able to serve this function, it must be possible for judgments to “correspond” to intuition.²⁰ That is, it must be possible for what is given in intuition to be as a judgment says it is, or not to be this way. Let me capture this point by saying that judgment and intuition must have the same unity. Again, the point is just this: if intuition is to be in a position to verify or falsify a judgment to the effect that some x is F , then intuition must be such as to represent x 's as being F (or not being F , as the case may be). Moreover, this must be a formal characteristic of intuition, in the sense that it is constitutive of intuitions to have this unity.

Above I argued that for intuitions to exhibit combination is for intuitions to exhibit sensible modes of combination. And for intuitions to exhibit sensible modes of combination is for them to possess the unity of judgment. For a sensible mode of combination is defined as the analog, in intuition, to the logical form of judgment. And the logical form of judgment constitutes the unity of judgment, in the sense that matters to our purposes.

Now assume, for the sake of argument, that combination can be given. Then the fact that intuitions exhibit sensible modes of combination would itself be something that can be given in intuition. And let's assume, further, that it is in fact given in intuition; moreover, that it is given in the case of all intuitions. In other words, the assumption is that all intuitions exhibit the unity of judgment, and that they do so as a result of affection.

In such a scenario, it would be a contingent fact that intuitions possess the unity of judgment. Which means that they might, at least in principle, fail to possess this unity. And this means that intuition cannot serve the verifying function it is supposed to have. For if intuition is to serve this function, it must not be a contingent matter that intuitions possess the unity of judgment. It must be a matter of necessity.²¹ That is, it must be something that is knowable *a*

²⁰ Cf. B165: “We cannot think an object except through categories; we cannot cognize an object we think except through intuitions, which *correspond* to these concepts.” (my emphasis).

²¹ [reference to Barbara Herman's claim about importance of non-contingence in CI]

priori. This follows from the fact that being truth-evaluable is constitutive of judgment, in conjunction with the fact that, for Kant, our only access to objects is through intuition. Let me elaborate.

Because our only access to objects is through intuition, judgments must be evaluated as to their truth in light of what is given in intuition. As a kind of shorthand, we might say that intuitions are what makes judgments true or false. But if it is constitutive of judgment that it be truth-evaluable, it follows that it is constitutive of judgment that it “correspond to” intuition, in the sense that what it is for a judgment to be true is defined in terms of the intuitions that would make it true. And this of course requires that intuition is such as to be able to make a judgment true or false. Which is just the requirement that intuition exhibit the unity of judgment.

It follows that if judgment is possible, intuition necessarily possesses the unity of judgment. So the possibility of truth-evaluable representation – cognition (*Erkenntnis*), in Kant’s use of that term – requires that all possible intuitions possess the unity of judgment. Put differently, in a being that possesses the capacity for judgment the unity of judgment must be a constitutive feature of the intuitions such a being enjoys. And this entails that it cannot be a contingent fact that intuitions possess this feature. It cannot be a fact which may or may not obtain. Therefore, that intuitions possess this unity cannot be something that is given.

We could put the same point in a different way as follows. To say that sensible combination is given is to say that it is the content of some range of actual intuitions. But to say that combination is constitutive of intuition is to say that combination enters into the very possibility of intuition. That is, combination is definitive of what it is for something to be a possible intuition. But if this is so, then whether intuition exhibits combination cannot depend on what is or is not given in actual intuition. Combination, we might say, must be in place already “prior” to any actual acts of intuiting. It must be *a priori* in Kant’s sense: a necessary and strictly universal fea-

ture of intuition.²² So, again, the conclusion is that if combination were given, it would not have the right modal force.

8. The Pure Form of Sensibility

In the two preceding sections I gave two arguments, on Kant's behalf, for the thesis that sensible combination cannot be given. The first argument is a simple *modus tollens*. If combination could be given, a merely receptive mind would be capable of it. But consideration of the notion of a merely receptive mind shows that such a mind is incapable, in principle, of representing combination. So combination cannot be given.

The second argument starts from the observation that sensible combination is a constitutive feature of intuition, and contends that if combination were given, it would not be constitutive of intuition. Put differently, the argument is that it cannot be a merely contingent fact that intuition possesses the unity of judgment. But if combination were given, it would be a merely contingent fact.

If this is right, we have good reason to attribute the strong version of the Spontaneity Thesis to Kant. However, the Spontaneity Thesis contends not just that combination cannot be given. It takes this claim to entail that combination must be "produced"; that is, that combination must be a product of spontaneity. One might object that, while my arguments establish that Kant has good reason to hold that combination cannot be given, they do not show that combination must be produced. What we lack is an argument to the effect that these two alternatives exhaust the available possibilities.

²² Cf. A2/B3f for the definition of 'a priori' in terms of necessity and universality.

Put in this general way, this objection goes to the heart of Kant's "Zwei-Stämme-Lehre," his doctrine that there are two (and only two) sources of cognition. This is too large a topic to be treated within the confines of this paper. But we can give the objection a more specific focus, one which arguably makes it stronger, as well.

Central to Kant's doctrine in the *Critique* is the view that there is a pure form of sensibility. And this idea seems to contain everything we need to undermine my arguments to the effect that combination cannot be given. If this is right, then these arguments do not entail that combination must be a product of spontaneity. They show at most that combination belongs to the pure form of sensibility, as opposed to its (empirical) matter. Obviously, this would support the case for the weak reading of the Spontaneity Thesis.

Let me elaborate on how one could make out such a claim. We can take the thesis that there is a pure form of sensibility to mean that there are constitutive properties of intuition, which can be known independently of ("priori to") any particular act of intuiting. Thus, to say that space and time constitute the pure form of sensibility would be to say that intuitions necessarily have spatio-temporal properties, which pertain to them independently of what is apprehended in any particular act of intuiting.

Now, part of the point of calling space and time forms of sensibility is that these properties pertain to intuition independently of the understanding. They are forms of sensibility, not of the understanding, and in accord with the Two Sources Doctrine, this seems to imply that intuitions exhibit these forms independently of any facts about the understanding. The fact that Kant thinks that the schematism is needed to relate the categories to intuition supports this independence claim. The categories need to be schematized, because by themselves they bear no relation

to the form of sensibility. Forms of the understanding, i.e. pure concepts, and forms of sensibility are, as Kant puts it, completely heterogeneous.²³

So it seems that a pure form of sensibility possesses sufficient independence from the understanding to block the move from ‘combination cannot be empirically given’ to ‘combination must be spontaneous’. If, that is, it can be established that what the pure form of sensibility accounts for is the right kind of combination. But this should be straightforward. Again, we may look to the doctrine of the schematism, and its implementation in the chapter on the Pure Principles.

The pure principles of the understanding relate the categories to the pure form of inner sense, time.²⁴ They specify the way in which intuitions instantiate the categories simply in virtue of the fact that they possess the pure form of inner sense. As I argued above, the categories signify sensible modes of combination. Being derived from the logical forms of judgment, they embody the unity of judgment. So intuitions that instantiate the categories exhibit the unity of judgment. It follows that if intuitions instantiate the categories in virtue of their form, the fact that intuitions exhibit combination is due to the pure form of sensibility, rather than the spontaneity of the understanding.

In response to this objection, I want to make two points. First, I will argue that while the objection may have bite against the first argument of the preceding section, it leaves the second argument untouched. That is, it has no force against the claim that the correspondence of judgment to intuition must be non-contingent. Second, I will argue that the objection highlights an important feature of Kant’s doctrine of the pure form of sensibility. This feature is connected to the distinction, explicitly drawn in a famous footnote at B160f, between the form of intuition

²³ “However, in comparison with empirical intuitions (indeed, sensible intuitions in general), pure concepts of the understanding are completely heterogeneous [...]” (A137/B176).

²⁴ That, and why, there is no corresponding doctrine for the form of outer sense, space, is irrelevant to our purposes.

and formal intuitions. I shall argue that we understand Kant's conception of the pure form of sensibility only if we understand this distinction. And that once we understand this distinction, we will see that the objection loses its force.

Let me begin, then, with the point about the non-contingent correspondence of judgment to intuition – or rather, for our purposes, intuition to judgment. I argued that Kant holds that combination cannot be given partly for the reason that, if it were, it would be a merely contingent fact that intuition corresponds to judgment. The suggestion that combination in intuition is accounted for by the pure form of sensibility might seem to address this argument, because the pure form of sensibility is *a priori*, not empirical. Which is to say that the relevant features would be necessary and universal. This follows from Kant's definition of '*a priori*'. It seems, therefore, that if sensible combination is due to the pure form of sensibility, the correspondence between intuition and judgment is non-contingent.

To make the case that this argument does not go through, I want to turn our attention to a comment Kant makes at the end of the B-Deduction, in §27. The comment is made in the context of a discussion of how the necessary correspondence between experience and the categories can be explained. Before I turn to the comment, however, I want to emphasize that this is exactly the topic we are dealing with. Experience, at least in this context, may be taken as equivalent to empirical intuition; while the categories stand for sensible modes of combination, i.e. for the unity of judgment. So to explain how experience corresponds to the categories is to explain how intuition corresponds to judgment. More specifically, it is to explain why intuitions necessarily exhibit the unity of judgment.

Now, Kant says that the necessary correspondence can be explained in only one of two ways. Either experience makes the categories possible, or the categories make experience possible. He rules out the first option, because that would turn the categories into empirical concepts.

Consequently, the necessary correspondence is explained by the fact that the categories “contain the ground of the possibility of all experience in general” (B167). He then considers, and rejects, a third alternative, and I want to suggest that what he says about the third alternative applies *mutatis mutandis* to the claim that sensible combination is due to the pure form of sensibility.

The third alternative Kant considers, in the form of a potential objection, is what he dubs a “system of preformation”. In such a system, the categories do not make experience possible, nor is there a dependence in the opposite direction. Rather, experience and the categories are completely independent of one another, but are nevertheless in agreement. On this view, the categories have the status of subjective dispositions: they reflect not objective requirements of cognition, but rather the way our minds cannot help but operate. They express, as Kant puts it, a subjective necessity.

Kant rejects this alternative because it does not do justice to the necessity that characterizes the pure concepts, and it is worth quoting the relevant passage in full:

The concept of cause, for instance, which expresses the necessity of an event under a presupposed condition, would be false if it rested only on an arbitrary subjective necessity, implanted in us, of connecting certain empirical representations according to such a rule of relation. I would not be able to say that the effect is connected with the cause in the object (that is, necessarily), but only that I am so constituted that I cannot think this representation in any other way than as so connected [...]. (B168)²⁵

And this, he concludes, leads directly to skepticism; specifically to a Humean skepticism about the existence of necessary connections.

The first thing to note about this passage is that it turns on the idea of a non-contingent agreement between cognition and its object. On the alternative Kant is rejecting here, there is agreement, but it is a merely contingent fact that there is. And he suggests that this means that

²⁵ Denn z.B. der Begriff der Ursache, welcher die Notwendigkeit eines Erfolges unter einer vorausgesetzten Bedingung aussagt, würde falsch sein, wenn er nur auf einer beliebigen uns eingepflanzten subjektiven Notwendigkeit, gewisse empirische Vorstellungen nach einer solchen Regel des Verhältnisses zu verbinden, beruhte. Ich würde nicht sagen können: die Wirkung ist mit der Ursache im Objekte (d. i. notwendig) verbunden, sondern ich bin nur so eingerichtet, daß ich diese Vorstellung nicht anders als so verknüpft denken kann [...].

the source of the agreement is in the wrong place. It lies, in the terms of the passage, in the subject, rather than in the object, as it should. If we spell this out, the claim is that the reason why my judgment that a is F corresponds to the object, in the sense that it is either true or false of the object, must be that a is F (or that a is not F , as the case may be), not that I cannot help but judge in this manner. If I cannot help but judge in this manner, the fact that my judgments take this form does not rest on the right reason. It rests on what is, as far as cognition is concerned, an extraneous factor.

I said that this argument can be made to apply to the thesis that combination in intuition is neither given nor spontaneous, but rather due to the pure form of sensibility, which was the core of the objection I raised. The point of contact lies in the fact that the forms of sensibility, like subjective dispositions of thought, constitute a merely subjective requirement. They are merely subjective in the sense that they do not derive from the concept of an object of cognition. And this means that, although they are a priori, they are not necessary in the required sense.

That Kant recognizes the possibility of forms of sensibility other than ours is evidence for this claim. It shows that the fact that space and time are our forms of sensibility is a fact about human nature. And this means, in the first instance, that it does not derive from the objective requirements of cognition.²⁶

If this is right, it follows that if sensible combination is due to the form of sensibility, the contingency-argument from §7 applies. The objection gets no grip on this argument. As a consequence, the doctrine of the pure form of sensibility does not constitute a third alternative, which would block the move from ‘combination cannot be given’ to ‘combination is spontaneous’.

²⁶ This is also a point that is prominent in some of John McDowell’s recent work. See, in particular, “Hegel’s Idealism as a Radicalization of Kant.”

9. Construction in Intuition

I said that the objection brings to the fore an important feature of Kant's conception of sensibility, which is connected to the infamous distinction between the form of intuition, on the one hand, and formal intuitions, on the other. A full treatment of this distinction and the theory of sensibility on which it is based would require discussion of Kant's philosophy of mathematics, which is beyond the scope of this paper. What I propose to do instead is to provide a sketch – and really no more than a sketch – of the notion of construction in intuition, which lies at the heart of his philosophy of mathematics. This will shed light, first, on how he conceives of the pure form of sensibility, and second, on what it might mean for sensible combination to be the product of spontaneity. As we shall see, the main idea is that the possession, by empirical intuitions, of spatio-temporal form depends on exercises of spontaneity. Obviously, if this is right, then Kant's own theory of sensibility lends support to, or is at least compatible with, the strong reading of the Spontaneity Thesis. I should say upfront, however, that I will be moving very quickly. My purpose is merely to point out a number of connections, in order to suggest that the reading of the Spontaneity Thesis I am advocating fits well with Kant's theory of sensibility. To establish these points by argument would take substantially more work.

I shall first give a brief discussion of the footnote at B160f., before turning to the notion of construction in intuition. In §26 Kant attempts to complete the argument of the Transcendental Deduction by showing that the categories govern empirical intuition, that is, perception. If this can be shown, the objective validity of the categories has been demonstrated, because it has been established that nothing can be an object of perception which does not fall under the categories. The argument turns on the notion of the pure form of sensibility. In a nutshell, it is this: empirical intuitions are necessarily given in accordance with the form of sensibility; the form of

sensibility is governed by the categories, because it exhibits categorial unity; therefore, empirical intuitions exhibit categorial unity as well, and are likewise governed by the categories.

Obviously, this argument goes through only if it is true that the form of sensibility exhibits its categorial unity. In the following passage Kant argues that it does:

But space and time are represented a priori not merely as *forms* of sensible intuition, but as themselves *intuitions* which contain a manifold, and are therefore represented with the determination of the *unity* of this manifold in them (see the Transcendental Aesthetic). Thus *unity of the synthesis* of the manifold, without or within us, and consequently also a *combination* to which everything that is to be represented as determined in space or in time must conform, is given a priori as the condition of the synthesis of all *apprehension* – not indeed in, but with these intuitions. (B160f)²⁷

To the first sentence he appends a footnote whose central claim, for our purposes, is this:

Space, represented as *object* (as is indeed required in geometry), contains more than mere form of intuition; it contains, namely, *comprehension* of the manifold, given in accordance with the form of sensibility, into an *intuitive* representation, so that the *form of intuition* gives only a manifold, while the *formal intuition* gives unity of representation. (B160n)²⁸

There is much here that would require comment. And that is more than I can do here. Instead, let me simply state what I take to be the gist of the argument. We might put the point like this: Calling space and time forms of intuition is ambiguous. One thing we might mean by this claim is that space and time contain a structure, which accounts for the manifoldness of intuition. The idea is that e.g. being in different moments in time is a criterion of distinctness for the elements of intuition. It is what enables us to speak of what is given in intuition as being a manifold. However, another thing we might mean by calling space and time forms of intuition is that

²⁷ Aber Raum und Zeit sind nicht bloß als *Formen* der sinnlichen Anschauung, sondern als *Anschauungen* selbst (die ein Mannigfaltiges enthalten) also mit der Bestimmung der *Einheit* dieses Mannigfaltigen in ihnen a priori vorgestellt (siehe transz. Ästhet.). Also ist selbst schon *Einheit der Synthesis* des Mannigfaltigen, außer oder in uns, mithin auch eine *Verbindung*, der alles, was im Raume oder der Zeit bestimmt vorgestellt werden soll, gemäß sein muß, a priori als Bedingung der Synthesis aller *Apprehension* schon mit (nicht in) diesen Anschauungen zugleich gegeben.

²⁸ Der Raum, als *Gegenstand* vorgestellt, (wie man es wirklich in der Geometrie bedarf,) enthält mehr, als bloße Form der Anschauung, nämlich *Zusammenfassung* des Mannigfaltigen, nach der Form der Sinnlichkeit gegebenen, in eine *anschauliche* Vorstellung, so daß die *Form der Anschauung* bloß Mannigfaltiges, die *formale Anschauung* aber Einheit der Vorstellung gibt.

empirical intuitions necessarily have spatio-temporal properties; that they necessarily represent their contents as being in space and time. And to represent something as being in space and time, Kant suggests, is to represent it as exhibiting categorial unity.

This can be brought out by representing space itself “as an object,” as Kant puts it in the footnote. To represent space as an object is, I take it, to represent particular spatial figures. For that is what geometers do. This contrasts with thinking of space as an abstract structure, a system of certain relations, which may be variously instantiated.

Now, in representing particular spatial figures, that is, in representing space “as an object” in the way the geometer does, we represent space as exhibiting categorial unity. When we do this, we represent what Kant in the footnote calls “formal intuitions.” I take the crucial point here to be that when, in empirical intuition, we represent things as being in space, we do exactly the same; that is, we also represent space as exhibiting categorial unity. And we therefore represent what is in space as exhibiting categorial unity as well.

We can also put this point by saying that space functions as the form of empirical intuition in the same way, at least in the relevant respect, as it functions in formal intuitions. Or rather, formal intuitions highlight a feature of space which is also present in the formal properties of empirical intuition, but which we lose sight of when we think of space merely as what Kant here calls a “form of intuition”, viz. an abstract system of relations, of mere manifoldness. And this feature is the presence of categorial unity.

Why the representation of concrete spatial figures exhibits categorial unity, Kant does not say here. The argument, in a nutshell, is that we can represent spatial figures only by constructing them. And to construct a figure is to perform a synthesis in accordance with the categories of quantity. I don’t want to discuss this argument here. Instead, I want to say something about the notion of construction.

Construction, we might say, is the step that takes us from the mere manifoldness of space, which “lies ready a priori in the mind,” to actual intuitions with spatial properties. It takes us from a potentiality to an actuality. Qua mere manifoldness, space is only a potentiality. And this is what depends on sensibility, what “lies ready a priori in the mind.” But for this potentiality to be actualized, acts of construction are required. And acts of construction are acts of the understanding. They are acts of synthesis in accordance with the categories (specifically, the categories of quantity).

Construction, therefore, is the kind of exercise of spontaneity which effects sensible combination. It is distinct from judgment, the combination of concepts, but it cannot be identified with affections of sensibility. It is, rather, a distinct kind of exercise of the spontaneous capacity of the mind.

If this is right, it turns out that Kant’s commitment to the Strong Spontaneity Thesis is underwritten by his theory of mathematical construction, suitably extended to cover not just the categories of quantity, but the other categories as well. Some indication that this is indeed how Kant sees things is provided by the passages I quoted at the beginning of this paper as textual evidence for the strong reading of the Spontaneity Thesis. Both in the passage from the Progress-essay, and in the first passage from the correspondence with Beck, Kant connects the statement of the Spontaneity Thesis with construction in space. He specifically mentions the drawing of a figure, as the paradigm case of construction, and claims that this is a type of act, which requires an exercise of spontaneity.

10. Sensible Synthesis and the Understanding

Even if it is true that sensible synthesis is modeled on mathematical construction and therefore distinct from judgment, one might wonder why the exercise of the mind in sensible

synthesis should be attributed to the understanding. The very fact that sensible synthesis is distinct from judgment seems to render this attribution doubtful, since the understanding is defined, after all, as the capacity for judgment. In conclusion, I want to make two brief points in response to this query, although again I will not provide much argument. First, it should be pointed out that, properly speaking, sensible synthesis draws into operation not just the understanding, but also the productive imagination; or, as Kant puts it at one point, spontaneity “under the title of imagination.”²⁹ Given that the imagination is defined as the capacity to represent intuitions apart from current affection, this might go some way towards explaining the specifically sensible character of sensible synthesis. But it does not, of course, answer our question, viz. why this activity should nevertheless be attributed to the understanding.

Second, the unity of sensible synthesis is, as I have been putting it, the unity of judgment. More precisely, the unity of sensible synthesis, whose presence in intuition requires the exercise of spontaneity, is the sensible analog of the unity of judgment. It is important to see that there is what we might call a top-down dependence here: The unity of sensible synthesis takes the form it does *because* it is an analog to the unity of judgment. The unity of judgment is prior in the order of explanation. And this fact might go some way towards legitimating the attribution of sensible synthesis to the faculty that is defined as a capacity for judgment. The understanding, we might say, is the capacity to unify representations in a certain way. More specifically, it is the capacity to confer on representations the unity of judgment. If we start with this abstract characterization, we can go on to say that there are two ways of doing this. One is discursive, the other intuitive. One is the combination of concepts in judgment, the other is the construction of concepts in intuition. In the former case, possible intuitions are represented, through

²⁹ Cf. B162: “It is one and the same spontaneity, which in the one case, under the title of imagination, and in the other case, under the title of understanding, brings combination into the manifold of intuition.” (Es ist eine und dieselbe Spontaneität, welche dort, unter dem Namen der Einbildungskraft, hier des Verstandes, Verbindung in das Mannigfaltige der Anschauung hineinbringt).

concepts, as exhibiting the unity of judgment. In the latter case, this unity is generated in actual intuitions through the construction of pure concepts. As Kant puts it in a well-known passage: “The same function which gives unity to the various representations *in a judgment* also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations *in an intuition*” (A79/B104).

I hope to have provided some reasons to think that when Kant puts forth the Spontaneity Thesis, he is committed to the strong reading of this thesis. It has emerged that a full-scale defense of this claim requires close consideration of Kant’s theory of sensibility as well as the concept of construction in intuition, which Kant discusses in the context of his philosophy of mathematics. To fully make the case for the Strong Spontaneity Thesis, it has to be shown how the notion of construction, which in the case of mathematics involves only the categories of quantity, can be extended to the other categories in Kant’s Table. In addition, consideration is needed of how construction, or some analog to it, operates in empirical intuition. This is the theory of what Kant calls the synthesis of apprehension (cf. the passage from B160f quoted above). Only a worked-out theory of the synthesis of apprehension will be able to show whether Kant can maintain the Strong Spontaneity Thesis without undermining the heterogeneity of sensibility and understanding; in particular, without undermining the receptivity of sensibility. But that is a topic for another paper.