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Self-Consciousness and the Priority Question: A Critique of the “Sensibility First” Reading of Kant

La autoconciencia y la cuestión de la prioridad: una crítica de la lectura de Kant de “la sensibilidad primero”

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Abstract

This essay presents a critique of what Robert Hanna has recently called the “sensibility first” reading of Kant. I first spell out, in agreement with Hanna, why the contemporary debate among Kant scholars over conceptualism and non-conceptualism must be understood only from within the perspective of what I dub the “priority question”—that is, the question whether one or the other of our “two stems” of cognition may ground the objectivity and normativity of the other. I then spell out why the priority question may be asked only from within the perspective of self-consciousness. Specifically, the central issue to be dealt with is how what Kant calls the original combination of understanding and sensibility is a synthesis internal to an act of self-consciousness. Only then can we ask what that original synthesis might tell us about the possibility of prioritizing one capacity over another in a story of cognition generally. Once we see the central issue more clearly, then I will look at the “sensibility first” view in its most general form and propose that it should be criticized for its failure to account for Kant’s notion of an objective unity of self-consciousness.

Keywords: Kant; self-consciousness; sensibility; non-conceptualism.

Resumen

Este ensayo presenta una crítica de lo que Robert Hanna ha llamado recientemente la lectura de Kant de la “sensibilidad primero”. Primero explico, siguiendo a Hanna, por qué el debate contemporáneo entre los estudiosos de Kant sobre el conceptualismo y el no conceptualismo debe entenderse solo desde la perspectiva de lo que denomino la “cuestión de la prioridad”, es decir, la cuestión de cuál de nuestros “dos tallos” de cognición puede fundamentar la objetividad y normatividad del otro. Luego explico por qué la cuestión de la prioridad puede formularse solo desde la perspectiva de la autoconciencia. Específicamente, el tema central a tratar es cómo lo que Kant llama la “combinación original del entendimiento y la sensibilidad” es una síntesis interna de un acto de autoconciencia. Solo entonces

podemos preguntarnos qué podría decirnos esa síntesis original sobre la posibilidad de priorizar una capacidad sobre otra en una historia de la cognición en general. Una vez que hayamos visto el problema central con más claridad, examinaré el punto de vista de la lectura “sensibilidad primero” en su forma más general y propondré que debe ser criticada por no dar cuenta de la noción kantiana de una unidad objetiva de la autoconciencia.

Palabras clave: Kant; autoconciencia; sensibilidad; no conceptualismo.

Introduction

An abundance of recent work on Kant and Kantian philosophy focuses on whether to understand Kant as a “conceptualist” or a “non-conceptualist”. Relatedly, some have recently turned to Kant and Kantian philosophy as a means of criticizing so-called “additive” or “layer-cake” accounts of rationality.¹ As some have noted, it is not easy to give even a quick and rough characterization of these debates,² some of which have to do with the very possibility of non-conceptual mental content,³ and others with whether the use of non-conceptual cognitive capacities depends on the use of conceptual ones.⁴ Within these two categories of debate, a variety of positions, backed up by various motivations, is taken. Some are concerned to account for the phenomenological character of content, others with the normativity of content and capacities, and yet others with issues such as the objectivity and finitude of our cognition. I believe that it is the latter set of issues that comes closest to capturing the spirit of the overall debate, for reasons that will become clear.⁵ However, this set of issues, dealing with the role that non-conceptual content or capacities might play in grounding the objectivity of cognition, suggests

¹ For an overview of the conceptualism and non-conceptualism debates, see Schulting (2016); for the critique of additive views of rationality, see Boyle (2016) and Conant (2017).

² See, for instance, the multitude of positions taken in Schulting (2016) and Newton’s (2018) review of that volume.

³ See Hanna (2001, 2005, 2015).

⁴ See Golob (2016).

⁵ I believe this is also recognized by both McLearn (2015) and Allais (2016).

one even more basic to Kant interpretation and scholarship: whether to understand one or the other of our two stems of cognition as having priority over the other in cognition, and what kind of “priority” is at issue here. Hanna (2015) has recently emphasized this more basic issue by putting forth what he calls a “sensibility first” reading of Kant (hereafter, *SF*). According to *SF*, cognition in general (both theoretical and practical) is grounded in our sensible faculty. This quite general claim includes, more specifically, the normativity and objectivity of cognition, which are said to be first constituted in our embodied situatedness in the world.⁶ The *normativity* of knowledge and the *objectivity* of knowledge, according to *SF*, are inherited from an act of sensibility—that is, the *fit* of cognition to its object, generally speaking, is first established by sensibility so that the understanding might deploy concepts aimed at that content. In other words, *SF* seeks to account for the normativity and objectivity of cognition by showing that these are first secured in sensibility (in some form), thus giving normativity and objectivity (in some form) to the understanding. We will explore this in more depth as we come to Hanna’s view, but for now it should be clear that *SF*’s claim is not the generic and uncontroversial Kantian claim that sensibility is a necessary ingredient of knowledge, but a specification of that claim which makes sensibility not a mere necessary condition for judgment’s objective validity, but itself the source of that objectivity.⁷

Call the question raised by Hanna the *priority question*—that is, which of Kant’s “two stems” of cognition has objective and normative priority over the other, in the general sense we have just outlined? The priority question is significant precisely because it presses us to consider an issue more fundamental than the aforementioned question whether one should be a conceptualist or a non-conceptualist (especially since the latter debate is itself ambiguous and composed of a multitude of questions that are rather narrow in scope and therefore loaded with assumptions). We typically distinguish between a variety of positions on what appears to be a scale between conceptualism and non-conceptualism: strong conceptualism (perhaps McDowell, 1994),

⁶ Hanna (2015).

⁷ While I will later speak of both objectivity and normativity, I take it that the issue of cognition’s objectivity already includes some notion of its normativity, in the sense that cognition’s being objective includes the notion of its being correct or possibly correctly implemented.

moderate conceptualism/weak non-conceptualism (later McDowell, 2009; Land, 2016; Schulting, 2012; Waxman, 2014), and strong or essential non-conceptualism (Tolley, 2013, and Hanna, 2015). Again, this variety of positions is made possible by the fact that the debate can shift between talk of mental content, cognitive acts, and cognitive capacities. But in Hanna (2015), a much stronger and more interesting challenge is raised. In the most general terms, can we and should we privilege the capacity of *sensibility* over the capacity of *understanding* in an account of the overall unity of cognition?

Here, then, is the fundamental philosophical question that is being asked in the debate about non-conceptual content: Can we, do we, and must we, at least sometimes, and in a minimally basic way, cognitively encounter other things and ourselves directly and non-discursively, hence non-intellectually or sensibly (Non-Conceptualism), or must we always cognitively encounter them only within the framework of discursive rationality, hence only intellectually or discursively (Conceptualism)? Are we, as rational animals, essentially different from other kinds of animals (Conceptualism), or do we share at least some minimally basic mental capacities with all minded animals (Non-Conceptualism)? Or even more simply put: Is a thoroughly intellectualist and “discursivity first” view of the rational human mind (Conceptualism) correct; or by sharp contrast is a non-intellectualist and “sensibility first” view of the rational human mind (Non-Conceptualism) correct? (Hanna, 2015, pp. 38-39).

Hanna’s way of putting the question recognizes that it is absolutely basic for Kant that cognitive acts are acts of *capacities*, and mental content is fixed by or with reference to those acts. Therefore, the answer to the question raised by Hanna will color our answers to questions regarding cognitive acts and their content. However, it is also absolutely basic to Kant’s philosophy that the possibility of cognition generally can only be understood if we understand its relation to self-consciousness (*apperception*). Without presupposing too much: Kant is clear that this relation is such that *knowledge* is an essentially self-conscious act—i.e., one in which the judgment *S is P* is also (minimally) the consciousness

of taking S to be P. The self-consciousness of judgment in knowledge—since knowledge is a cooperation of the faculties of understanding and sensibility—is the self-consciousness of a unity of these faculties. Therefore, I suggest that the priority question (and therefore even the above attempts at answering it, including the debate over “additive” or “layer-cake” theories of rationality⁸) is itself internal to a broader issue, which is still largely left out of explicit discussion—namely, how we should understand the relation between our conceptual and non-conceptual capacities *from within the perspective of self-consciousness*.⁹ If we fail to ask this question, then we will fail to comprehend how the cooperation of the two stems of cognition can be related to knowledge, the possibility of which is the very issue of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹⁰ My suggestion will *not* be that we should, in addition to considering the question as raised by Hanna, also consider how understanding and sensibility are related to self-consciousness. This would be rather like asking, in addition to how subject and predicate concepts are united in a judgment, how the unity of the judgment might be related to my consciousness of that unity. For Kant, the unity of judgment and my consciousness of that unity are one.¹¹ Instead, for reasons very much related to the latter point, my suggestion is that we can consider the

⁸ These are indicative of debates that have become very important in the recent scholarship on, e.g., the rationality of perception. Contemporary readers will learn from these debates how Kant is important to their own interests, and readers of this paper will, I hope, learn something about how Kant’s conception of self-consciousness ought to figure centrally in these debates.

⁹ While it is *largely* left out of the discussion, it is not entirely left out. For instance, Land (2016) and Williams (2017) both aptly point out the significance of self-consciousness to questions about conceptualist and non-conceptualist readings of Kant. However, Land only briefly sketches such a thought to introduce his more specific examination regarding the nature of space, and (as we will soon see) Williams’s argument can be augmented and extended by mine.

¹⁰ This is not to say that Kant’s project in the first *Critique* is “epistemology”, either in the contemporary sense or in the neo-Kantian sense rejected by Heidegger (1962, pp. 16-17). Instead, I take Kant to believe that an explanation of knowledge is at the same time an explanation of what there is to be known.

¹¹ Indeed, if we follow Kant in §§ 15-16 of the B Deduction, all synthetic unity (which is presupposed by any analytic unity) rests on a self-conscious act of combination.

unity of understanding and sensibility *only* from within the perspective of the consciousness of that unity (i.e., from within *self*-consciousness).

Now, if we can gain insight into the nature of the priority question, why some of the answers to it fail, and why some may be more plausible, then we will also be providing a framework for approaching lots of particular issues having to do with Kant's broader philosophy. For example, we will be in a better position to understand what it takes to even have a Kantian theory of mental content. Tolley (2013) argues, for instance, that we can identify in Kant a proto-Fregean notion of content. But the possibility of such an assessment, I hope it will become clearer, depends very much on how we understand the very possibility of a self-conscious original synthesis of the two cognitive capacities. For one thing, narrower debates over the notion of content at issue in Kant will have to take a stand on whether content (and its species) is capable of having determinacy independently of the function of transcendental apperception. But how could we take a stand on such an issue without taking a stand (implicitly or explicitly) on how self-consciousness originally figures into the relation between the two stems of cognition? For, as Kant says, the manifold of intuition must *stand under* or be *subject to* the transcendental unity of apperception, even if they are not already *brought under* it (B143). The variety of issues impacted by our discussion is not, of course, restricted to the realm of theoretical philosophy. As Hanna sees SF, it is a proposal about the unity of cognition generally, and therefore has equally important implications for practical philosophy (although these will not be taken up here).

The fact that the question about the centrality of an original self-conscious unity of capacities is often left out of the debates is the source of significant problems, including a problem that is recently aptly pointed out by Jessica Williams (2017). In her paper, Williams argues that there is an original synthesis of the faculties of understanding and sensibility which accounts for how the unities of space and time can be understood to depend already on the unity of apperception. She agrees with critics of what she calls "Standard Conceptualism", according to which the unities of space and time as formal intuitions is the result of categorial syntheses. The critics of Standard Conceptualism argue: (1) that the unity of space and time is not given through figurative synthesis via the categories, because space and time as formal intuitions are wholes preceding their parts; and (2) that figurative synthesis as a successive act could not yield the unity of space and time as infinite

given magnitudes. But she disagrees with these critics that the solution to Standard Conceptualism is to argue that space and time must have their unities and objective purport independently of *any* act of the understanding. Williams argues, by contrast, that according to Kant “there is a holistic dimension to all acts of synthesis that stems directly from the OSUA [original synthetic unity of apperception]” (2017, p. 10), and therefore that there is a more basic apperceptive act unifying the understanding and sensibility. Williams’s argument is insightful in that it helps us to overcome a persistent problem in these debates—namely, of assuming that the difference in form between concepts and intuitions is based on radically opposed notions of unity, one notion belonging to conceptual unity and one belonging to intuitional unity. I propose, in agreement with the spirit of Williams’s analysis, that we should focus this powerful philosophical insight on the priority question and especially on the proposal of SF as a possible answer. The very proposal of SF as such an answer is one that needs to be dealt with by sorting out certain Kantian questions about self-consciousness. For instance, is there a kind of self-consciousness that belongs to *sensibility alone*? Might we, along with Heidegger, argue that the original “holistic dimension” of OSUA is rooted in such a form of sensible (or better, “imaginational”) self-consciousness?¹² And, if so, could this self-consciousness be the source of the overall unity of human rationality? This latter view, properly spelled out, is the position of the more plausible SF reading of Kant, especially as it is articulated by Hanna. Furthermore, I hope to spell out more explicitly in this paper just what the connection is between what Williams refers to as the “holistic dimension” of self-consciousness and what Kant calls “universality” in connection with the notion of the objective validity of judgment. If our preliminary goal is successful and we are able to see that the distinction between conceptual and intuitional unity is only a distinction *from within* a broader unity of self-consciousness, then we will be positioned to get clearer about (1) what is at stake across the various debates, and (2) how to make progress in them. This alone would be a welcome step forward. If our ultimate conclusion is correct—that SF is false—then we will have made considerable progress in a long-standing debate.

I begin by spelling out why I take the central issue here to be how conceptual and non-conceptual capacities are related only within self-

¹² See Heidegger (1962).

consciousness. Specifically, it will become clear that the central issue to be dealt with is how what Kant calls the *original combination* of the sensible manifold with the supreme principle of the understanding (B132-33) is a self-conscious act of synthesis. Only *then* can we ask what that original synthesis might tell us about the possibility of prioritizing one capacity over another in a story of cognition generally. Once we see the central issue more clearly, then I will look at SF in its most general form and propose that it should be criticized for its failure to account for Kant's notion of an objective unity of self-consciousness. More specifically, my criticism will be that SF implies one of the following problematic theses:

- (1) The self-conscious unity of sensibility and the self-conscious unity of understanding are independently intelligible and thus distinct unities of cognition = *unity dualism*.
- (2) The self-conscious unity of understanding is simply an elaboration or teleological development of the self-conscious unity of sensibility = *organicism*.

In each case, I argue, what Kant spells out as the objective unity of self-consciousness would be impossible. If SF implies (1), then it is committed to what has recently been dubbed a "layer-cake" or "additive" theory of human rationality.¹³ If SF implies an additive theory of human rationality, it does not make an objective unity of self-consciousness possible, because it supposes the self-conscious unity of understanding to be a mere imposition upon what is independently objectively given in sensibility. If SF implies (2), then the self-conscious unity of cognition will never comprehend the universality and necessity that constitutes objectively valid judgment. In order to be conscious of the universality and necessity of objective knowledge, self-consciousness must be a consciousness of thought's own absolute generality (and therefore of its unrestricted character, in a sense to be spelled out later). SF's understanding of the self-conscious original unity of understanding and sensibility is, by contrast, a restricted understanding of generality. This, we will see, flies in the face of Kant's own account of cognitive objectivity.

¹³ See Conant (2017), Boyle (2016).

1. The centrality of self-consciousness to the priority question

To understand why I take self-consciousness to be at the center of the priority question, we must proceed in two steps. First, I will spell out a common tendency to associate conceptual synthesis with a “part-whole” form of synthesis. We will see that this tendency yields a form of separatism regarding the understanding and sensibility which makes the “unity dualism” version of SF an apparent possibility. But the appearance of this possibility is dashed once we see that it relies on a flawed conception of the relation between conceptual and intuitional unity.

To this end, in our second step it will become clear that the reason why we can (with Williams, 2017) (1) agree with Standard Conceptualists that space and time are informed by the understanding and (2) disagree with them that this is primarily a matter of the effect of categorial synthesis on sensibility, is that the act of categorial synthesis itself already presupposes the unity of understanding and sensibility. That is, a categorial synthesis is possible only under the condition that the manifold of sensibility in general *stands under* the faculty of understanding. This will become clear as we see that any *determinate* act of understanding on sensibility (e.g., through categorial synthesis) involves a conception of synthesis that is shared across capacities. While there is certainly a difference between the form of concepts and the form of intuitions, we are not entitled to see this difference as absolute. Rather, this difference exists *within* a consciousness of the broader unity of the capacities. In other words, we should think of the difference like we would think of the differences between organs in an organism (as differences within an organic life), not like differences between forms of organic life.

1.1 The apparent dualism of unity

We will begin by looking at a tendency in the recent literature: to hold the unity of concept and the unity of pure intuition apart in a seemingly strict and dualistic fashion. For instance, both McLear (2015) and Onof and Schulting (2015) argue that because concepts rest on a part-whole unity of synthesis and space and time on a whole-part unity, the unity of concepts belongs to a unity of the faculty of understanding

in a special way and the unity of space and time belong to a unity of the faculty of sensibility in a special way. That is, both forms of unity are independently intelligible with respect to their capacities. Let us first examine the evidence in support of this view.

In the Transcendental Aesthetic of the first *Critique*, Kant argues that space and time are forms of intuition because they are immediate singular a priori representations. One upshot of this is that the pure intuition is a representation the whole of which precedes its parts or manifold:

[...] first, one can only represent a single space, and if one speaks of many spaces, one understands by that only parts of one and the same unique space. And these parts cannot as it were precede the single all-encompassing space as its components (from which its composition would be possible), but rather are only thought in it. It is essentially single; the manifold in it, thus also the general concept of spaces in general, rests merely on limitations. From this it follows that in respect to it an *a priori* intuition (which is not empirical) grounds all concepts of it (A25/B39).

Particular spaces are *parts of* one infinite representation of space. But those parts couldn't merely be cobbled together into the representation of something infinite. The mere aggregate of a number of particular spaces would be, Kant says, a *creature of our imagination* (A40/B57).¹⁴ So, the particular parts of space—the spatial manifold—is the result of limitations on the whole of space. The unity of the pure intuition of space, then, is a unity preceding its parts. More specifically, the unity of pure intuition is one that *contains its manifold*.¹⁵

A concept has a different form of unity. Kant says that a concept is “a representation that is contained in an infinite set of different possible representations (as their common mark)” (B40). So, while pure intuition is a unity that contains its manifold, a concept is a unity *in* a manifold. Further, to understand what a concept is, we must understand what sort of synthesis it involves. According to McLear: “the nature of the

¹⁴ Which is different from a *being of the imagination*, i.e. an *ens imaginarium*. “Creature”, of course, carries with it the etymological sense of “created being”.

¹⁵ It is therefore a *complex* unity.

[intellectual] activity must proceed via a movement from part to part, out of which a representational whole may be fashioned" (2015, p. 90). The notion of moving from part to part and, from this movement, composing a representational whole, is clearly a notion of a form of successive synthesis. In fact, for McLear, *all* synthesis has a kind of successive form, in the sense that all acts of synthesis are acts of proceeding from part to whole (2015, p. 81). This is already a contentious starting point. Even those who wish to fundamentally separate sensible from discursive forms of unity, one might think, may want to acknowledge Kant's claims (e.g., at B103) that space and time themselves exhibit a pure form of synthesis. However, whether or not we wish to accept this starting point, we can see that for McLear there is a natural way of dividing conceptual from sensible/intuitional activity by dividing *synthetic* activity from *non-synthetic* activity. The non-synthetic form of pure sensible awareness is then, presumably, sensible cognitive activity absent any notion of combination.

The basic support for these claims, in turn, comes from two passages in Kant:¹⁶

- (1) Kant's claim that the *synthesis of apprehension* is an act of "running through and taking together" a manifold (A99).
- (2) Kant's claim that "synthesis in the most general sense" is the act of "putting different representations together with each other and comprehending their manifoldness in one cognition" (A77/B103).

We may note from the outset that while (1) uses language that might appear to support the part-whole reading of synthesis, it is much less certain that (2) does. In fact, there is nothing in the idea of "putting" representations together that necessarily implies the *successiveness* of the act in the way McLear finds (1) to clearly imply. This is not to suggest that Kant does not have a notion of successive synthesis, for he makes such a notion very clear when he says that a concept is "this *one* consciousness that unifies the manifold that has been *successively* intuited, and then also reproduced, into one representation" (A103, my emphasis). Kant's

¹⁶ See McLear (2015, p. 90).

example of cognizing a number, for instance, involves the successive addition of one unit to another and the comprehension of their unity. But it is far from clear that this act of putting representations together *in one consciousness* (the consciousness of unity) is itself a successive act. Let us turn to this issue more specifically.

1.2 Synthetic unity as simple self-consciousness

We may read Kant as saying that cognizing a number involves, in one and the same act, successively adding units and comprehending their unity. But the fact that addition is successive does not entail either that the comprehension of the unity of what is added is successive, aggregative, or complex; or that the comprehension of this unity is the mere *product* of such a process. McLear understands “discursive” synthesis to consist in “the combination of their many parts into a unity” (2015, p. 88). However, the idea of a “combination of parts into a unity” is, on its face, an ambiguous notion. On the one hand, we could understand by this an activity much like gathering apples into a basket, where the act is itself extended over determinate successive times. On the other hand, it could refer to an activity whose unity is itself a whole prior to its parts, *through which* a certain succession is represented. To see this more clearly, consider the unity of a judgment. Kant says that the unity of a judgment is the same as the “qualitative” unity he points to in § 12 of the *Analytic* (B131). And this qualitative unity is, in turn, “the unity of the theme in a play, a speech, or a fable” (B114). At B131 Kant does not say here that this qualitative unity is a *simple* unity, but it is easy to see how this is true. Kant is clear that the unity of a theme, speech, or fable is not an aggregative form of unity—that is, it is not a unity derived from prior parts. Thus, he says that “this unity cannot, therefore, arise from the combination; rather, by being added to the representation of the manifold, it first makes the concept of combination possible” (B131). Later, Kant also says of apperception that “its simplicity lies already in its possibility” (B419). Since the “I” of apperception is precisely what Kant aligns with the “qualitative” unity of § 12 of the *Analytic*, it follows that this qualitative unity is a *simple* unity, prior to its parts.

This simple unity of judgment is, then, a unity which assigns the parts of judgment their *place* in judgment. Judgment, that is, does contain concepts as its parts. But these parts would be no parts at all, would have no place in the unity of judging, unless their role were defined by the act of uniting those parts in one consciousness. As Kant

says, we can make use of concepts only in judgment (A68/B93). This unification of parts is the *combination* of those representations into one. But “combination” is not mere aggregation.¹⁷ Kant says of judgment that it is “nothing other than the way to bring given cognitions to the objective unity of apperception” (B141). What is this “bringing-to” activity? Is it like an arbitrary “bringing-together” of a red object with a blue object, composing a set of red and blue objects? No, for the unity of judgment is a unity prior to its parts, and the act of judging is itself not a temporally extended act. It is worth quoting Stephen Engstrom at length on this point:

Kant does characterize judgment as an act, and as a combination of representations. But he does not suppose, as some philosophers do, that to be an act at all is to be a certain type of process or event [...]. Judgment is an act in the sense that it is an actuality. It is an actualization of the understanding, but not in a sense that implies that it is a transition or a coming-to-be: the act of combination in which a judgment consists is not a *putting* together of representations, but a *holding* of them together. So we might say that to judge in this sense is to hold. We do describe ourselves as ‘making’ judgments and as ‘reaching’ them, and such makings and reachings can be counted as mental events or psychical processes; but the making or reaching of a judgment in the sense of interest here is no more the same as the judgment itself than is the making or reaching of anything else—events aside—the same as the thing made or reached (2013, p. 47).

Following Engstrom, we can think of the unity of a judgment as a “holding” of our representations together into one cognition. I take it to be of utmost importance in this passage that this act of holding-

¹⁷ The same applies when Kant says, for instance, that a cognition is “made out of” taking up and combining representations (A77/B102). Going through, taking up, and combining representations need not be understood along the same lines as aggregating objects into a set of objects. This is just to say that the *unity* of the consciousness of those representations is not itself *complex*, even if it is the unity of a complexity.

together is neither an event nor a process, but a self-conscious *act*. The holding-together of representations in a judgment, for instance, does not take up time; there is no temporal extension from the subject concept to the predicate concept. That is, the unity of judgment is not a unity of temporal parts—the judgment “The house is large” does not require that I have successive representations of “house” and then “large”. While making up one’s mind about what to judge takes up time, the *act* of judging does not. We can recognize the temporal *processes* related to judgment and the *act* of judging to be intimately related but separate. Let us look at another example of this.

Turning back to Kant’s own recognition of this point: he seems to relegate the successiveness of synthesis (when it has such a character) to determinations of inner sense, when he says that in drawing a line we attend “merely to the action of the synthesis of the manifold through which we successively determine the inner sense, and thereby attending to the succession of this determination in inner sense” (B154). This should come as no surprise, since the determination of a manifold through a concept is just the determination of the inner sense by an act of the understanding (B153). We are to understand the succession that is determined (the determinate temporal series) to be that which appears in inner sense (B154-155), but that does not imply that the *act of determination* (the unity of consciousness through which the series *is* that series) is a successive act appearing in inner sense. And yet, any determinate act of cognition appearing in time (such as a judgment) already involves a determining act. The unity of the determining act is, then, a unity through which I cognize a succession. It is not itself, however, a “movement from part to part”.¹⁸

One final consideration in this direction is in order before we move forward. The unity of a concept, to be sure, is an act of holding

¹⁸ And it could not be, or else we could never be in a position to distinguish a mere *succession of representations* from a *representation of succession*, as Kant later requires for representing phenomena under a principle of causation (see A198/B243). Note that I do not wish to saddle McLearn with any particular view about how synthesis relates to time. I am doing two things: (1) pointing out what seems to come along with the conception of “moving from part to part” and “fashioning a whole” from them, and (2) speaking generally about the consequences of the idea that a conceptual act of synthesis is a *result* or *product* of putting together prior elements.

together shared “marks” (*Merkmale*), finding unity *inside* a manifold of representations. However, Kant describes this (analytic) unity, in the footnote to B133, as itself the spontaneous ability to combine—that is, the unity *is* the capacity to unify (again, unity *is* a consciousness of unity).¹⁹ But, could this be the case? Could it be, that is, that for Kant the unity of a concept is *not* a complex unity produced out of parts, but rather a simple unity of consciousness? Indeed, this would appear to be so. Consider two points Kant makes explicitly. My ability to pick out the red objects—red ball, red chair, red house—requires that in each case I grasp the concept “red”. It would not be enough (perhaps it is even unintelligible) that in cognizing the red house I cognize only a part of redness. Redness is wholly contained in each case of something’s being red; the same “red” is in *x*, *y*, and *z*. Kant makes this clear in the logic lectures when he says:

To *take apart* a concept and to *divide* it are thus quite different things. In taking a concept apart I see what is contained *in* it (through analysis), in dividing it I consider what is contained *under* it. Here I divide the sphere of the concept, not the concept itself. Thus it is a great mistake to suppose that division is the taking apart of the concept [...] (*JL* 9: 146, note 1).²⁰

This same point seems to be in play in a well-known passage from the first *Critique*:

The analytical unity of consciousness pertains to all common concepts as such, e.g., if I think of red in general, I thereby represent to myself a feature that (as a mark) can be encountered in anything, or that can be combined with other representations [...] (B133n.).

Kant says that a general consciousness of “red” is the representation of a feature that can be encountered in anything or be combined with other representations. It is therefore also a consciousness of my spontaneous capacity for reflecting on what is shared and for combining. Thus, the synthesis involved in the unity of a concept is not itself successive or

¹⁹ On this point, see also Newton (2015, p. 10).

²⁰ See also *Vienna Logic* (AA XXIV: 925), and *Dohma-Wundlacken Logic* (AA XXIV: 760).

part-whole in character, but a simple unity of apperception like the unity of a theme, speech, or fable.

1.3 Difference inside unity

Now let us return to the nature of the distinction between conceptual and pure intuitional unity. Notice that Kant *doesn't* say that the difference lies in the precedence that the unity has over its parts. Concepts, as *general* representations, apply to many objects of the same kind. But it doesn't make sense to say that any set of appearances sharing a common mark jointly constitute a concept, since concepts, as general representations, apply not just to those actually-encountered appearances, but to all possible appearances bearing the common mark. As such, just as with space, the unity of a concept could not be determined through a mere aggregation of appearances; so its unity is basic, not acquired part-to-part.²¹

What Kant is pointing to as the locus of *difference* is: pure intuition is a unity that *contains* a manifold, whereas a concept is a unity contained *in* a manifold. Thus, the unity of a concept is the recognition of a sameness or identity inside a manifold, and it can be said to be contained in a manifold because each representation bearing the relevant mark necessarily contains the whole concept. For this reason, it seems that even concepts have a kind of whole-part structure. I do not produce a concept out of all the red parts. Rather, I recognize 'redness' as a commonality to many things through finding one and the same "I" in each of those things, thereby holding them together in a consciousness of their so belonging together (i.e., in a *conception* of their unity). If this is right, then on what basis do we understand a distinction between the forms of unity of concept and pure intuition?

I want to suggest that the key to understanding the distinction lies in the manner in which their difference is internal to a more general form of unity. The point I have made thus far is simply this: even acts of synthesis that have what McLear has called a part-whole structure involve the simple or qualitative unity of apperception. And we see that this is true by seeing that even temporally extended acts of cognition

²¹ At B114 it is also noteworthy that Kant identifies the "unity of the comprehension of the manifold" (synthetic unity of apperception) with the unity of a concept, and then describes that unity as a qualitative unity. Kant confirms at B413 that "qualitative unity" means *simple* unity.

contain the unity as of holding our representations together as one in a single act of consciousness (“in one cognition”), which is not *itself* a successive or part-whole unity. Now, if we see this, then we see it only in being self-conscious. In fact, the identification of the notion of synthesis “in its most basic sense” as combination through a single consciousness of that combination as such *just is* a conception of self-consciousness. “Self-consciousness” here, then, simply designates the manner of being conscious—i.e., combining representations through a consciousness of their being so combined by me. And it should be noted that, because the shared notion of unity across all acts of synthesis is simple or qualitative unity, it is a self-consciousness of *generality* (insofar as it involves a consciousness of what is common to many, in the analytic unity of self-consciousness) and *necessity* (insofar as it involves a consciousness of what must be held together in my consciousness, in the synthetic unity of apperception).²²

If McLear were right, it would appear that there are two mutually independent forms of unity corresponding to each capacity of cognition: one (non-synthetic) whole-part unity for sensible activity, and one (synthetic) part-whole unity for intellectual or discursive activity. McLear’s account itself is a version of SF in virtue of taking the independent unity of sensibility to be responsible for our direct *objective connection* to the world. This means that judgment must inherit the objectivity of sensibility, making the unity associated with our forms of sensibility *prior* to the unity of judgment (which exhibits the unity of concepts).²³ As McLear notes: “The categories make possible the having of complex representations, which govern our grasp of the objects given

²² Here we may ask about the possibility of separating intuition from the *consciousness of* intuition. Would granting such a possibility render the above discussion about the qualitative or simple unity of self-consciousness useless for addressing McLear’s points? I don’t think so. This point may be granted for the sake of argument, so long as we are clear that the *function* of intuition is to present an object to sensible awareness (something McLear grants: 2015, p. 105). Supposing this, then the object relation in intuition essentially presupposes the possibility of the sensible awareness *of* that object relation, and this in turn is sufficient for generating my worries. For instance, it preserves what I take to be the central problem with the view, which is that Sensibilism (or SF generally) relies on a notion of sensory objectivity which is prior to and heterogeneous with intellectual objectivity.

²³ McLear (2015, pp. 99-100).

through intuition, but they need not be understood as making possible our fundamental cognitive connection to the world via intuition" (2015, p. 103). In McLear's version of SF ("sensibilism"), the independent unity of intuition secures a "fundamental cognitive connection to the world", which connection then becomes the material for the governing activity of more "complex representations". Now, Kant certainly holds that the sensibility provides some material content for the understanding's use. The question here is whether this material (on its own) may be considered as giving a "fundamental cognitive connection to the world", or whether such a connection requires an act of understanding. On McLear's view, the fundamental connection to objects is understood in a minimal sense to mean only that my intuitions are intuitions *of* objects, even if they are not representations of them *as* objects (see 2015, p. 99). Here I simply want to point out that there is an important distinction to be drawn between the idea that sensibility provides material content to the understanding and the idea that sensibility provides the understanding with an *objective connection* to the world, even in McLear's minimal reading. We will address this more directly in the next section.

What I have set us up to see is that the basic notion of synthetic unity, which is at work *in* any act of synthesis, is not only *not* a part-whole unity, it is a notion of synthesis which, as a self-consciousness of the generality and necessity of my cognition, already contains a consciousness of the belongingness of sensibility to understanding. As per the account that has been briefly sketched above, Kant's notion of the simple unity of self-consciousness underlying all acts of synthesis involves both an analytic and a synthetic unity of apperception. As such, it is a simple self-consciousness of the unification of a manifold—i.e., a simple self-consciousness of an original synthesis of the capacity to *think* together with the capacity to be given a *manifold*. Therefore, we cannot suppose that the intellectual activity of discursive or conceptual cognition is fundamentally or dualistically contrasted with sensible activity. Nor can we move from the premise that concepts and pure intuitions are different with respect to their forms of unity to the conclusion that this difference is absolute. Instead, we must consider the possibility that the difference is itself internal to a conception of what unites the two forms of unity. That is, we must consider the possibility that the difference between sensible and discursive unity is a difference internal to a unity of cognition as a whole. Indeed, this is what Kant himself suggests in § 16 by the claim that there is an "original combination" of the faculties:

For the manifold representations that are given in a certain intuition would not all together be my representations if they did not all together belong to a self-consciousness; i.e., as my representations (even if I am not conscious of them as such) they must yet necessarily be in accord with the condition under which alone they can stand together in a universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not throughout belong to me. From this original combination much may be inferred (B132-133).

What has prevented some from acknowledging the centrality of self-consciousness to these particular issues seems to be that there is inadequate concern for what constitutes the *original combination* (or “original synthesis”) of the understanding and the sensibility. Interpreters have paid too much attention to the fact that there is a difference between the unity of an intuition and the unity of a concept, and too little attention to the fact that this difference itself cannot be absolute. It is at this point that we can reflect on how SF emerges as an apparent possibility within these considerations, and what kind of view SF might be if we have indeed eliminated the possibility of McLear’s account.

2. The possibility of a sensibility first reading of Kant

We can now step back and look at how the priority question may initially give rise to SF as an apparent possibility—that is, either through the idea of (1) the absolute separability of the unities of concept and intuition, or (2) the organic teleological development of understanding from sensibility (alluded to earlier as Hanna’s version of SF).

SF, as described in the beginning of this paper, is (in the most general sense) the view that the whole of human cognition is normatively and objectively grounded in our sensible capacity. Now we can, first, return to the idea that I began to sketch at the end of section 1—that the subordination of the priority question to the topic of self-consciousness already precludes the possibility of the version of SF that claims that sensibility and understanding are two entirely distinct unities. It seems that we cannot hold to this idea without destroying the very possibility of objective knowledge. If there is an absolute difference between these two forms of unity, then it would seem as though those who argue in

this direction would wind up with what has been called an “additive” or “layer-cake” picture of knowledge. I will very briefly sketch this criticism.

2.1 A problem for SF as unity dualism

McLear’s view in particular suggests that the independent unity of intuition accounts for a kind of objective spatial and temporal situating of the subject with respect to the world (see 2015, p. 105). This objective situatedness, however, does not yet place us in a position to be able to make propositionally structured judgments about the objects. Thus, the issue of *knowledge* must be taken up by the other independent form of unity—that belonging to acts of the understanding (see McLear, 2015, p. 105). Now, if this were the case, it would be very difficult for Kant to maintain that objective knowledge is a real possibility. Recently this sort of argument has been supplied by both Boyle (2016) and Conant (2017). Boyle lays out what he calls the “unity problem” for additive theories of rationality. Additive theories hold that “our animal capacities for perception and desire are not themselves capacities whose actualization involves the actualization of our rational capacities” (2016, p. 548). Now, the additive theorist faces the question: how, in *our* case, perceptual and desiderative capacities present no point of view distinct from the rational one (see Boyle, 2016, p. 548). An equivalent question appears to be: how does the unity of our rational perspective arise from the mere combination of perceptual and rational capacities? An analogous (though not identical) problem presents itself for the unity dualism reading of Kant.²⁴ We may ask the unity dualist how they will account for the unity of self-conscious rational cognition on a merely additive account of the two cognitive unities. This is a *problem* precisely because the type of response that is available on behalf of this position would appear to achieve such a unity only at the cost of the objectivity of cognition. I will briefly explain why this is so before turning to a more plausible form of SF.

Kant’s account of the unity of cognition hylomorphically distinguishes between the *matter* and the *form* of cognition, where

²⁴ The two problems are slightly different. For Boyle, the primary concern is how a rational unity is a real possibility at all for the additive theorist. For me, the primary concern is that the only form of rational cognitive unity available for unity dualism yields a non-objective impositional form of cognitive unity.

deliverances of sensibility provide cognition with its matter and spontaneous representations of the understanding provide cognition with its form. More specifically, an act of knowing is one in which what is represented has the form of a judgment (A125). And Kant does not take forms of judging to *alter* some given objective content. To be sure, “content” (*Inhalt*) is fixed by what informs it. Therefore, one might be tempted to think that our sensible capacities deliver objective content, while our understanding fixes that content as a proper content for *judgment*. But this is problematic, considering what Kant himself explicitly holds regarding the “objective validity” of judgment. Judgment’s objective validity is not borrowed from an act of sensibility; rather, it is established in an act of the understanding:

Understanding is, generally speaking, the faculty of cognitions. These consist in the determinate relation of given representations to an object. An object, however, is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is united. Now, however, all unification of representations requires unity of consciousness in the synthesis of them. Consequently the unity of consciousness is that which alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object, thus their objective validity, and consequently is that which makes them into cognitions [...] (B137).

The objective validity of representation is thus established by a conceptual unity of consciousness, not by a sensible representation. But, what about the possibility that the objective validity of judgment is established by the understanding while a more *primitive* form of objectivity is established by sensibility? Perhaps, that is, there are two distinct forms of objectivity—that of judgment’s objective *validity* and that of intuition’s *direct relation* to an object. A basic form of direct referentiality, as McLearn (2015, p. 105). hints. Of course, we do not want this to become a mere semantic quibble. The term “objectivity” may be seen as perfectly applicable to intuition’s direct relation to an object; after all, the “object” figures directly in the relation. But the point is that we need to be clear about what such a relation amounts to. There is no problem, from Kant’s point of view, with the notion of direct relatedness to an object in sensibility. In fact, absent such a relation, we would lack

all sensible content. This minimal reading of the “objectivity” that is secured in sensible representation may therefore seem innocent enough.

However, the designation “objective” with which we (with Kant) are chiefly concerned is that which may be shared by the two stems of cognition in the act of judging—i.e., the objectivity of *knowledge*. We want to know, that is, how the objectivity of sensibility could be understood in such a way that it is not foreign to the objective validity of judgment. If we separate objectivity into two distinct formulations: one corresponding to intuition’s direct object-relatedness, and one corresponding to propositionally structured judgment, then sensible “objectivity” either loses its cross-capacity significance all together, or it gives sensibility’s objectivity a determinate character, in which case it’s unclear how to smoothly integrate it with the objectivity belonging to the very distinct unity of judgment. This separation would risk making the objectivity of knowledge into either a second self-sufficient form of objectivity which is therefore not necessarily integrated with sensible objectivity, or it would make the objectivity of knowledge a form of *imposition* on that of sensibility, as the former would only be drawing on the latter by fundamentally altering it for its own purposes. The sensibly-formed relation to an object, in this case, would be material which does not simply *cooperate* with the form of understanding, but material with its own determinate form, in need of further shaping by the form of understanding. As this criticism shares a form with Boyle’s “unity problem” criticism of additive theories of rationality, and as our way of thinking about the *unity* of cognition overall is through a *self-consciousness* of that unity, this is also explicitly a concern that unity dualism is incapable of accounting for the self-consciousness of the objective validity of cognition.

Our discovery in section 1 was that a simple and “qualitative” self-consciousness underlies all acts of synthesis, and therefore can account for the *original* synthesis of the two stems of cognition (as it is an original consciousness of synthesis). But in the unity dualist’s proposed account of cognition, we have no room for a generic synthesis of capacities, and therefore no room for this notion. And this is where what I will call the *organicist alternative* comes into play as a genuine possibility.

2.3 Hanna’s organicist alternative

Our criticism of SF as a form of unity dualism still leaves open the possibility of SF as the view that the unity of understanding is an organic

elaboration on, or teleological growth of, the self-conscious unity of sensibility. We will look specifically at Robert Hanna's proposal to this effect.

Hanna describes SF as the view according to which sensibility's direct veridical connection with material reality provides us with a kind of primitive (theoretical) cognitive normativity. When we are directly sensibly aware of some object, we have a *veridical sense perception* or what Hanna calls "world-connectedness and world-situatedness".²⁵ And this world-connectedness could never be secured *except* through essentially non-conceptual means. To quote Hanna at length:

The bottom-up theory I am proposing, then, is that essentially non-conceptual content and non-conceptual cognition are not only presupposed by all conceptual content and concept-driven cognition, but also that the former grounds the latter in the strong metaphysical sense that the essentially non-conceptual partially constitutes the conceptual. Otherwise put, my claim is that the conceptual side of human mindedness cannot secure directly referential veridicality or world-connectedness and world-situatedness on its own, so the essentially non-conceptual independently and autonomously does this for it (2015, p. 25).

So, according to Hanna, material truth in empirical knowledge has its source in essentially non-conceptual "world-connectedness and world-situatedness". This primitive connection to objects in the world is, then, the material for formal or logical operations in (further acts of) knowledge. The capacities for these formal or logical operations, in turn, are not thought to be simply added to our essentially non-conceptual sensible capacities. Rather, as Hanna puts it, the former capacities are "strongly metaphysically" grounded upon the latter. Furthermore, we are to think of this grounding relation in essentially organic or teleological terms. So, Hanna also says:

The several faculties or powers of the human mind are inherently and irreducibly normatively-guided, goal-

²⁵ Hanna (2015, p. 25). This is simply a more "embodied" conception of direct referentiality.

specialized, and epigenetically spontaneous, functions of a living totality, the essentially embodied conscious and self-conscious human mind, aka “the rational human animal,” aka the rational human organism, that operate not only in relative independence of one another, but also organismically and vitally combine with one another according to an internal representation of systematic unity that teleologically governs all embodied human cognition, affect/desire/emotion, willing, and action (2015, p. 33).

Thus, according to Hanna, both our essentially non-conceptual and conceptual capacities are originally related to one another by a representation of systematic unity, which is the *telos* of cognition in general.²⁶ For Hanna, our sensible capacity is “first” or primary in the sense that it independently provides cognition with a direct objective connection to the world, enabling further forms of activity such as judging. But judging, in turn, is not simply a further act added on to the essentially non-conceptual capacities. Therefore, even this independent essentially non-conceptual capacity of sensibility presupposes, in some sense, a capacity for judging about independently sensibly-given content. This is just to say, repeating Hanna’s point above, that the faculties act “in *relative* independence of one another” (my emphasis). Nevertheless, while the faculties are not absolutely but only *relatively* independent of one another, they are not thereby equally fundamental for cognition. Sensibility, as the anchoring point for objective world-connection, must act independently of the understanding in securing such a connection.

Even the organicist conception of SF, however, struggles to make good on its Kantian promises. We will begin with a problem initially raised by Schulting (2012), and then end by considering a final and perhaps more serious criticism of organicist SF.

²⁶ Differences aside, Hanna’s view clearly has much in common with Heidegger’s phenomenological interpretation of Kant, according to which a spontaneous-receptive faculty of imagination is the original synthesis and *telos* of all rational cognition. I take this to be a clear improvement upon the unity dualist’s view for the simple fact that it recognizes the centrality of a form of original self-conscious unity of the faculties. Indeed, debates over conceptualism and non-conceptualism would do well to return to an investigation of Heidegger’s interpretation of Kant.

2.3.1 Potential problem 1: a regress of syntheses

The unity of understanding and sensibility in knowledge (as unity of form and matter) is not like the unity of wood with the form of a table, which is the (merely accidental) unity of an artifact.²⁷ Kant's notion of judgment's objective validity involves the determination of *the object* as such, and not merely of the subject's *thought* of the object.²⁸ This means that judgment must predicate something of the object itself, and not simply of the object in relation to an individual subject (or kind of subject). Now, the unity of an artifact (such as the wooden table), does involve an act of determination in relation to an independently intelligible form (the form of the wood, which is given new form by the craftsman). Knowledge, on the model of artifactual unity, would be the product of an imposition of form. As such, its imposed form is accidental to it, and therefore the object of artifactual knowledge is determined only in a particular relation (the relation of this craftsman to the object).

What, on the SF reading of Kant, could enable us to avoid an artifactual account of knowledge? Whatever the specific answer is, it must involve the idea that the understanding and the sensibility originally *depend on one another*, so as to avoid positing a merely accidental relation of the two faculties. With something like this in mind, Dennis Schulting (2012, p. 70) has raised a worry about Hanna's version of organicist SF:

Hanna cannot explain what it is that connects two irreducible and essentially different things, viz., the essentially non-conceptual—i.e., 'embodied animal experience'—with what is essentially conceptual—i.e., rational thought and 'action-oriented deliberation'—in such a way that together they yield objective knowledge.

²⁷ For an approach to the conceptualism vs. non-conceptualism debate along these lines, see also Newton (2016).

²⁸ Refer to Kant's transition from § 18 to § 19 of the B edition Transcendental Deduction. Kant says that the empirical unity of apperception, which occurs under given conditions *in concreto*, contains a merely subjective validity, whereas the objective validity of judgment occurs through the copula "is" and therefore concerns the object as such.

The inability to explain the connection between the two faculties manifests in a kind of regress problem, according to Schulting. The thought here seems to be that there must be, at some point, an *a priori* and *original* synthesis of the faculties if we are to avoid an infinite regress of syntheses. And, of course, one traditional candidate for such an original synthesis is the thought—often given as a reading of the Transcendental Deduction—that it is the understanding which originally synthesizes itself with sensibility. This cannot be the answer which SF gives, of course.

Hanna has in turn answered Schulting by an appeal to the original synthetic unity *in rational animal life*:

[...] the ground of the unity of the two basic capacities, or of any other capacities in addition to those, is not a further *capacity*, but instead the living totality *itself*, the whole rational human organism. The *notion* of the rational human organism *explanatorily* precedes the *notions* of any of that organism's several capacities or powers; and the *existence* of the rational human organism *ontologically* precedes the existence of any of that organism's several capacities or powers, which may also, of course, emerge diachronically and be activated successively (2019, pp. 33-34).

Of course, it is not enough simply to stipulate that understanding and sensibility mutually require one another. We must ask how they require one another or what makes them right for each other. We might, in Aristotelian fashion, say that it is an appeal to the *form* which answers this question for us. This would seem to spoil SF, however. If we appeal to *understanding* as an explanation for why there is an original organic unity of the two capacities, then we are yielding to a form of conceptualism and rejecting SF. But, how else could the story go? For sensibility does not *generally* require a capacity of understanding (think of animal sensibility). And in our case, Hanna agrees, it is no accident that our sensibility conforms to the unity of the understanding.

If Hanna's position is going to be coherent, it must be able to consistently hold onto the following two theses:

- (1) The cognitive faculties (understanding and sensibility) are only relatively independent of one

another, in the sense that they mutually require one another in an overall conception or telos of cognition.

- (2) Nevertheless, in presupposing the understanding in its overall conception or telos of cognition, the sensibility does not rely on the form of the understanding in delivering directly referential objective cognition.

I believe these two theses ultimately cannot be made consistent. In this way, we can extend Schulting's original concern. The two theses cannot be made consistent because Hanna wants to separate two ideas that, for Kant, must come together: the idea of one capacity's explanatory presupposition of some other capacity, and the idea of those two capacities sharing form. If the sensibility explanatorily presupposes the understanding in an overall explanation of cognition, then the sensibility and the understanding must be able to share a form. For, the manner of explanation is, as we have now made clear, an explanation from within the self-consciousness of the unity of the faculties. I presume Hanna would agree, that is, with the fundamental idea that has been driving this essay thus far—namely, that we cannot answer the priority question except from within self-consciousness, specifically because there is no difference between the way in which the faculties necessarily belong together and our consciousness of them as belonging together. That is, the point that I assume is retained by Hanna's view is that our cognitive faculties are fundamentally forms of conscious activity; and the unity of forms of conscious activity is nothing but a consciousness of unity. But now we can see that Hanna's view is inconsistent. Organicist SF at once recognizes the need for this central self-conscious (original) unity of the faculties, from which it follows that the faculties involved are not estranged with respect to their forms, and it also assumes that the original connection between cognitive faculties does not require them to share form.

But, even if this first problem can be overcome, there is still a difficulty that organicist SF faces with respect to the possibility of objective knowledge. Let us now turn to this final issue.

3. Problem 2: the problem of the objective unity of self-consciousness

I now want to conclude this essay by proposing that organicist SF, above all, fails to account for what Kant calls the *objective unity of self-consciousness*—namely, that activity through which we bring representations to the original unity of apperception in judgment. This failure, moreover, is a failure to fully incorporate our conclusion from section 1—that underlying all acts of synthesis is a simple or qualitative self-consciousness.

As we have seen, Kant holds that the objective validity of judgment is established in an act of understanding and not borrowed from sensibility. Of course, SF reads Kant differently and holds that objective validity belongs both to intuition (as a primitive objective world-situatedness) as well as to judgment (as a propositionally structured form of representing the objective world).²⁹ The organicist version of SF, obviously, must see the difference between these two forms of objective validity as a difference between primitive and less primitive, or primitive and *sophisticated* forms of objectivity. Given the nature of judgmental objectivity, we would have to speak of the transition from primitive to sophisticated objectivity in terms that would capture a transition from non-conceptual to conceptual *form*. As Hanna explicitly seeks to avoid any charge associated with additive theories of rationality by emphasizing the organic and teleological (“epigenetic”) nature of the unity of cognitive capacities, this transition from non-conceptual to conceptual form must be, as we have already seen, based on an original unity of non-conceptual and conceptual capacities. And this unity, in turn, has been described as the unity of rational animal life. Thus, the unity of rational animal life must itself be the condition under which the *conceptuality* of objectively valid judgment is possible.

But, if our reading of Kant is so far correct, the conceptuality of judgment cannot be grounded on a prior unity of rational animal life. The act of understanding that constitutes judgment—the *objective* unity of self-consciousness—is distinguished from the *subjective* unity of self-consciousness in being a consciousness with predicative structure.

²⁹ SF theorists will cite, for instance, A239/B298 as evidence.

The way our consciousness of an object gains predicative structure, through the copula “is”, is by being a consciousness of what *anyone* under the same circumstances *must think*. The objective unity of self-consciousness, therefore, consists in a consciousness of universality and necessity (B141-143).

What is it to cognize with universality and necessity? Kant’s answer lies in the Transcendental Deduction. Let us look at passages from § 18 in particular:

The transcendental unity of apperception is that unity through which all of the manifold given in an intuition is united in a concept of the object. It is called objective on that account, and must be distinguished from the subjective unity of consciousness, which is a determination of inner sense, through which that manifold of intuition is empirically given for such a combination. Whether I can become empirically conscious of the manifold as simultaneous or successive depends on the circumstances, or empirical conditions. Hence the empirical unity of consciousness, through association of the representations, itself concerns an appearance, and is entirely contingent (B139-140).

The unity of apperception (self-consciousness) is called objective insofar as it is that unity of consciousness through which the given manifold of intuition is united in a concept of the object. But this notion is then expanded upon. We can distinguish this objective unity from the merely *subjective* or *empirical* unity of consciousness, which consists in a mere association of representations. A mere association of representations in inner sense is “entirely contingent”, and therefore fails to express the necessity of connection that is found in an objectively valid judgment. Kant goes on:

The pure form of intuition in time, on the contrary, merely as intuition in general, which contains a given manifold, stands under the original unity of consciousness, solely by means of the necessary relation of the manifold of intuition to the one *I think*, thus through the pure synthesis of the understanding, which grounds *a priori* the empirical synthesis. That

unity alone is objectively valid; the empirical unity of apperception, which we are not assessing here, and which is also derived only from the former, under given conditions *in concreto*, has merely subjective validity. One person combines the representation of a certain word with one thing, another with something else; and the unity of consciousness in that which is empirical is not, with regard to that which is given, necessarily and universally valid (B140).

By contrast with the merely subjective and empirical unity of consciousness, which concerns an *appearance*, the objective unity of consciousness concerns the *pure form of intuition* itself (not an appearance). This relation consists in the *a priori* grounding of empirical synthesis in general on the pure synthesis of the understanding. Further, the subjective or empirical unity of consciousness is “derived only from” the objective unity, “under given conditions *in concreto*”. Thus, when we are speaking of the unity of consciousness derived under concrete sensible conditions, we are speaking of an act of consciousness that expresses no universal and necessary validity, but only validity with respect to those concrete conditions.

One important lesson to draw from what Kant has said here is that a cognition exhibiting objective unity of consciousness cannot be established by concrete sensible conditions—namely, those concerning the determination of particular appearances. Rather, this unity of consciousness is established only in a consciousness of *generality*—that is, in a consciousness of the necessary relatedness of pure sensible forms to thought in general. This is merely to say that the *objective validity* of cognition consists in a consciousness of validity that is necessary (not merely contingent, under specific circumstances) and universal (valid for everyone, not just for me as an individual). This may sound as though the suggestion is that the objectivity of cognition somehow lies, absurdly, in a consciousness that is not of anything in particular. On the contrary, Kant is expressing the sort of consciousness (of generality in necessity and universality) that must be *internal* to any particular determination of appearances. Therefore, even in the judgment “Bodies are heavy”, where the representations seem to belong together only contingently *in intuition*, we find a necessary unity of the *apperception in the synthesis of intuitions* (B142). We must, that is, find such consciousness

of generality in our particular circumstances, but not *from* our particular circumstances.

Now our question can be: does Hanna's suggestion—that *rational animal life* is the original ground of unity from which objective cognition springs—capture Kant's above insight? To the contrary, Hanna's position gives rise to a dilemma regarding the rational status of our form of animality. By considering this rationality to be essentially non-conceptual, we are supposing that a non-conceptual capacity of cognition could be the source of an awareness of generality appropriate for the development of a conceptual capacity. But how would this work, specifically? On the face of it, it seems that we have only two candidate explanations. We can explain the generality of our conceptual capacity as already contained in the non-conceptual capacity. Or, we can explain this generality as a kind of expansion on our non-conceptual capacity.

If we opt for the former explanation, then it appears that by referring to an essentially rational form of animal life as the ground of original synthesis is nothing more than sneaking the form of conceptuality into the picture. As we have pointed out above, Kant explicitly connects consciousness of generality to conceptual representation *as opposed to* a consciousness intrinsic to sensibility as such (see, e.g., B124). And, when Kant speaks of generality, he does not speak of a *restricted* form of generality, but of what all rational beings must think (i.e., universality). This is why, again at B124, Kant is explicit that in a judgment of causality, the idea that B follows from A is something of which we are conscious through an *absolutely universal rule*, such that it is to be thought by all rational beings. An attempt at finding such a universality within sensibility itself would seem to be nothing more than the discovery of conceptuality (i.e., understanding).

Along these lines, perhaps Hanna would agree with a thesis articulated by Andrea Kern (2015), according to whom knowledge (and therefore rational activity) can be said to “rest” upon a form of life, but only if we understand the existence of this form of life to itself depend upon knowledge (or rational activity). In this way, our form of life is not “more fundamental than knowledge” (as Kern puts it), but in a sense co-equal. However, this would seem to loosen our grip on the very idea of a “sensibility first” account of cognition. Kern's suggestion, far from endorsing SF, would actually appear to identify the capacity of

reason with our rational form of life.³⁰ But, perhaps this worry is itself only based on a particular conception of what a rational form of life is. Indeed, we must remember that, on Hanna's view, *reason* is implicit in sensibility itself, and therefore the capacity for reason is not identical with the capacity for knowledge. If so, then deliverances of sensibility are somehow proto-rational acts, although not necessarily proto-judgmental. This falls directly out of Hanna's view that our rational capacities have their source in "essentially non-conceptual content".

If we opted for the view that the generality of conceptuality is an organic expansion upon the non-generality of non-conceptuality, then of course we would have to avoid anything that may look like an "additive" picture of rationality, which has already been ruled out. But it is simply unclear what such an alternative could look like. For, if there is to be a kind of organic relation between the non-conceptual and the conceptual such that the former is prior (in, say, a "metaphysical" or "real" modality), then we would certainly have to imagine the non-conceptual capacity as somehow "ready for" (for lack of a better term) the generality of the conceptual. Or, to use Kant's terminology (and to point back to a point emphasized above), our non-conceptual capacity must *stand under* the form of the understanding, even if it is not yet *brought under* it by judgment. How could the sensibility be ready for the understanding without already having an implicit relation to the form of understanding?

We may compare this to Kant's thought, in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, that "were we ever to lose [respect for the moral law], we would also never be able to regain it" (AA 6: 46). In this passage Kant is pointing out that respect for the moral law cannot be achieved by a capacity that is essentially non-morally shaped. The same point applies for us here: conceptual awareness (thus the self-consciousness of transcendental apperception) cannot be achieved by a capacity that is essentially non-conceptual. Under such circumstances we could only envision the non-conceptual capacity as re-shaped by an imposition of conceptual form. This would again threaten the very idea of an objective unity of self-consciousness. As it was for the unity dualist above, this would be to conceive of an object in two stages: first, the objectively-given sensible object; second, the object of knowledge.

³⁰ This, in turn, would line up nicely with Hegel's suggestion that "life" be treated more properly as a logical concept (Hegel, 12: 179).

And, now with Kant's understanding of the objective unity of self-consciousness in hand, we can also say more precisely why the imposition of conceptual form onto non-conceptual form is such a problem. As we have seen, the objective unity of self-consciousness, which is constitutive of acts of objective judgment, cannot be thought of as a unity acquired under any particular sensible circumstances. However, that a *form of life* could constitute the original unity of the faculties would suggest that the constitution of the highest form of cognitive unity rests on a *way of being* in the world. After all, this is presumably what it is to be a form of life for organicist SF, once we have ruled out the Hegelian-sounding conception above. The trouble is that we can think beyond any particular way of being in the world, for that is exactly what is involved in being a *particular way of being*—namely, to be something of which we are conscious in relation to something else. To say that our highest (original) unity of cognition rests on a particular way of being would be to limit our overall cognitive capacity to something that we manifestly already think beyond (and do so, ironically, *in* the thought of its limit).

4. Conclusion

If we return to our earlier discussion of Kant's notion of the original synthesis of the two stems of cognition, we will recall that what drives such a notion is the awareness of our spontaneous capacity to combine representations in a way such that the "I" can be found in each. The basic thought, that is, relies on the idea that the spontaneity of thought in general presupposes an ability—each of the manifold of representations *can be mine* only because my ability to judge and my ability to perceive are already thought as ready for combination in actual acts of judging. What this tells us is that our original self-conscious synthesis of the capacities of understanding and sensibility is a consciousness of the way in which sensibility is always already apt for our conceptual activity. For, if it were not always already apt for our conceptual activity, how could it ever *come to be* this way? And, if it *is* always already apt for our conceptual activity, then when sensible acts of cognition have form, they have it in a way that non-accidentally agrees with the understanding. This non-accidental agreement, because it is non-accidental, is not a brutally given fact. Nor can it be secured by the sensibility for the reasons given above. So, our choice appears to be simple: either we affirm that sensibility always already (i.e., at least implicitly) has conceptual form, or we affirm that in the activity of judging the sensibility requires the addition of a

further capacity.³¹ It is unclear how a third way might emerge. If the above is helpful for understanding the centrality of self-consciousness to all of cognition, then it should also help to clarify the sense in which Hanna's priority question is asked already from within an essentially self-conscious perspective, since to ask which capacity has priority over the other is just to recognize a difference between capacities from within a consciousness of their necessary connection and cooperation.

And this brings us back to the point I attributed to Williams. Again, Williams's insight is that according to Kant "there is a holistic dimension to all acts of synthesis that stems directly from the OSUA [original synthetic unity of apperception]" (2017, p. 10), and therefore that there is a more basic act, apperception, unifying the understanding and sensibility. We have basically agreed with Williams's point here, but have sought to extend this point by focusing it on the issue of SF more generally, and specifically in a way that deals with the possibility that apperception or self-consciousness might have its roots more directly in the sensibility in the form of pure imagination. I have also argued, in ways that Williams and other broadly conceptualist Kantians do not, that there is no third mediating form of unity from which conceptuality and intuitionality emanate. If there were, then the consciousness of universality essential to conceptual thinking would have to be grounded in a form of consciousness that does not exhibit that generality. A consciousness of universality arises from nothing but the capacity to think, which is why Kant is explicit about attributing spontaneity to the understanding. This point about the impossibility of unity dualism or organicism rests on a point which, while it may be implicit in Williams (and perhaps Longuenesse), is not brought to the foreground in a way that speaks to the impossibility of a form of self-conscious unity that precedes that of the conceptual self-consciousness of understanding.

To recapitulate, the basic line of argument has run as follows. The discussion of the distinction between the unity of a concept and of intuition has not sufficiently focused on how this distinction is itself internal to a more general form of unity, and more specifically how that more general form of unity is a form of self-consciousness. By looking in this direction we see that all acts of synthesis involve a simple unity of synthesis that is a form of self-consciousness. We can then ask whether

³¹ The only way around this would be to hold, contrarily, that concepts have *sensible* form instead of sense having *conceptual* form.

there is a version of the “sensibility first” reading of Kant that can adequately recognize this fact. We find that if we reject the thought that understanding and sensibility are two independently intelligible unities, we can imagine a different account of their relation according to which there is an organic underlying or original synthesis of the two capacities. But we then find that this conception of the original synthesis (the form of self-consciousness we first articulated in section 1) can never amount to what Kant calls an objective unity of self-consciousness. Therefore, even if SF can overcome some of the problems that dog the literature on this topic, there is a problem that it cannot overcome—namely, it does not exhibit the self-consciousness of universality and necessity that comes with the simple and qualitative self-consciousness underlying all acts of synthesis. What we learn, in the end, is that the key to overturning unity dualism (a proper conception of the original self-conscious unity of the faculties) is also an insight into the falsity of SF more generally.

Now a final aside with which I will end this paper. While we cannot tackle the issue here, it may be helpful to at least point to the idea that the rejection of such a third way may ultimately be a rejection of Heidegger’s analysis of Kant.³² In rejecting the (at least *broadly* Heideggerian) view that the pure imagination is itself the source of the two stems of cognition, we also open up a line of questioning about how the post-Kantian German tradition (and even the French phenomenological tradition, including Sartre) might be brought into our discussion. Because this paper has dealt specifically with how to understand the relation between the unity of understanding (apperception) and the unity of sensibility (space and time), it would be quite useful going forward to explore what options might be left on the table in terms of making sense of the central importance of *temporality* for thought without giving up the idea that time is itself “first given” through an act of simple or qualitative (and itself non-temporal) apperception.³³

³² See Heidegger (1962), Weatherston (2002), and Longuenesse’s (1998) comments on Heidegger’s reading of Kant.

³³ In connection with this, it is particularly important to look at another contemporary debate—namely, that of how to understand the so-called “transparency” of self-consciousness. See Moran (2001), Boyle (2019), Byrne (2018), and Newton (2019).

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