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Understanding and Sensibility

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ABSTRACT *Kant holds that the human cognitive power is divided into two “stems”, understanding and sensibility. This doctrine has seemed objectionably dualistic to many critics, who see these stems as distinct parts, each able on its own to produce representations, which must somehow interact, determining or constraining one another, in order to secure the fit, requisite for cognition, between concept and intuition. This reading cannot be squared, however, with what Kant actually says about theoretical cognition and the way understanding and sensibility cooperate in it. Such cognition, as Kant conceives of it, satisfies two conditions: it has unity, and it depends on the existence of its object. The first of these conditions entails that the cognitive power must lie in spontaneity, or understanding, while the second implies that this spontaneity depends on receptivity, or sensibility, to be the cognitive power that it is. Consideration of how these capacities must be conceived as cooperating in cognition reveals them to be related, not as interacting parts, but as form and matter. Such a conception of their relation may at first glance seem to be merely another version of dualistic thinking; in fact, however, a proper appreciation of it eliminates the appearance of dualism and helps allay an associated concern that Kant’s distinction would taint our cognition with an unacceptable subjectivism.*

It would be difficult to overstate the importance Kant places on achieving a proper comprehension of the distinction between the understanding and sensibility. This division lies at the heart of the account of the human cognitive power he sets forth in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and he is well aware that it is no easy thing to understand. Indeed, he tells us that Locke and Leibniz, the two most influential philosophers of his time, seriously misconceived it. Both of these thinkers, in opposing ways, overlooked its fundamental status as they assimilated the representations belonging to one of these mental powers to those of the other—Locke by sensualizing the concepts of the understanding, Leibniz by intellectualizing the

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representations of the senses. Against these approaches, Kant holds that each of these capacities is a distinct original source of representation, neither reducible to the other.

But though this distinction is of sweeping significance, touching every part of Kant's system, it receives little explicit discussion in his writings. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that no clear consensus has emerged among his interpreters as to how it is to be understood, even if there is considerable agreement among his critics that it is somehow defective, many seeing it as a dualism that treats understanding and sensibility as if they were distinct parts, heterogeneous components of the cognitive power, each able on its own to produce representations, which must somehow interact—yet in a way that seems bound to remain mysterious—in order to secure the fit, requisite for cognition, between concept and intuition.¹

Noting the many complications, I will not here venture very far into the surrounding tangle of questions relating to Kant's transcendental idealism. Rather, I will approach the thicket from higher ground, aiming to discover how Kant sees understanding and sensibility as cooperating in theoretical cognition, and hoping thereby to remove any appearance the distinction may have of being a mere dualism. In pursuing this aim, however, I will be taking seriously one of those Kantian distinctions often decried as dualistic, that between form and matter. Though I will not have space to consider in any detail Kant's account of space and time or his distinction between appearances and things in themselves, I will briefly suggest, at the conclusion of this paper, that appreciating how understanding and sensibility cooperate can help allay a familiar concern, associated with the charge of dualism, that an objectionable subjectivism vitiates his doctrine of space and time as forms of sensibility.

I. “Two stems of human knowledge”

1. When Kant reaches the point at which his exposition in the *Critique* divides itself into a doctrine of sensibility (Transcendental Aesthetic) and a doctrine of the intellect (Transcendental Logic), he offers only the seemingly casual comment that

there are two stems of human knowledge², which perhaps arise from a common, but to us unknown, root, namely *sensibility* and *understanding*, through the first of which objects are given to us, through the second of which they are thought.³ [A15/B29]⁴

Though Kant no doubt supposes that we share a prephilosophical understanding of the difference between these “stems”, this cannot be because he thinks common experience enables us to discover what the diverse representations of the several senses have in common and to see how

these differ from the mental operations we observe taking place when we think, judge, and reason. Such a way of thinking would be at odds with the nature of the investigation undertaken in the *Critique*, which, as the propaedeutic for the system of a priori theoretical philosophy, rests on no such empirical facts, nor indeed on any *fact* at all, but relies only on reason, or the *capacity* for a priori theoretical cognition (*P* 274). The notions of understanding and sensibility must be implicated in the idea of such cognition, so they can no more be empirical concepts than is the idea of reason itself.

Further on, Kant expresses this distinction in terms that seem intended to contribute to a deeper understanding of it when he characterizes it as between spontaneity and receptivity. Yet here too, few words are wasted:

Our knowledge arises from two basic sources of the mind, of which the first is to receive the representations (the receptivity of impressions), the second the faculty of knowing an object through these representations (spontaneity of concepts); through the first an object is *given* to us, through the second it is *thought* in relation to that representation (as mere determination of the mind). [A50/B74]⁵

And when, after a brief discussion of the representations—intuitions and concepts—that arise from these two sources, Kant goes on to tie this distinction explicitly to the one drawn earlier between understanding and sensibility, he does so with comparable brevity:

If we wish to call the *receptivity* [*Rezeptivität*] of our mind to receive [*empfangen*] representations, so far as it is in some way affected [*affiziert*], *sensibility*, then in contrast the faculty of bringing forth representations itself, or the *spontaneity* of knowledge, is the *understanding*. [A51/B75]⁶

Since he offers little in the way of direct explanation of the significance of this terminology, Kant presumably trusts that with these statements before them readers with the requisite aptitude and preparation for the study of metaphysics will be able to find their way. But needless to say, further clarification would be desirable.

It does at least seem clear that Kant's new terminology is related to his idea that understanding and sensibility are distinct sources of representation, an idea he opposes to the view he attributes to Locke and Leibniz, that the distinction between them merely reflects a difference in "logical form", or in the ways representations springing from a common source are ordered or related in the mind.⁷ Kant does allow that representations can be assigned to understanding or to sensibility on the basis of a difference in logical form. In fact, he points out several formal differences between

concepts and intuitions, the most often noted of which is his contrast between generality and singularity of representation (A320/B376–77). And he even shares with Locke and the Scholastics (with a few important qualifications) a broadly abstractionist understanding of how general representations are formed (*L* §§5–6). Thus, while he insists that neither of these types of representation—neither the concepts employed by the understanding nor the intuitions of sensibility—can be reduced to the other, he also holds that the understanding, through the act of reflection, can produce a new form for the content of sensible representation, whereby what was initially represented in intuition comes to be represented in a concept.⁸ In such a case only the form, not the content, of the representation has its source in the understanding. But it's to mark a difference in the source of representations *themselves*, or a difference in source in respect of their *content*, that Kant introduces the new terms “spontaneity” and “receptivity”. Since these terms signify, respectively, the capacity of the cognizing subject to produce representations itself and the capacity through which the subject comes to have representations when somehow affected, they imply a contrast between active and passive powers of the mind.⁹ Thus, a bit later Kant says that all intuitions, the representations we come to have through the receptive operation of sensibility, “rest on affections”, and that concepts, the representations we bring forth ourselves through the spontaneous exercise of the understanding, “rest on functions” (A68/B93). It appears, therefore, that the contrast between spontaneity and receptivity is intimately tied to that between function and affection, and that Kant's criticism of his two famous predecessors rests on the claim that the source of our representations, in respect of their content, lies neither exclusively in the capacity of the mind to receive representations upon being affected, as Locke held, nor exclusively in the inner principle of the mind's functioning, as was maintained by Leibniz, who banished affection from his metaphysics altogether.

2. It is Kant's insistence on this irreducible difference, of course, that has attracted criticisms from his successors, notably later idealists and Heidegger. The immediate difficulty we face here, however, is to understand how the two capacities are distinguished and how they contribute to cognition, and to do so merely through reflection on our cognitive power itself, without reliance on any facts.

To get started, and with a view to sharpening our question, we may ask why we should suppose there to be any distinction at all. Why not simply speak of a single cognitive power? This is of course the direction in which Locke and Leibniz were pointed, however widely they diverged in their characterizations of that power. And Kant himself, notwithstanding his talk of distinct stems, recognizes perfectly well that the cognitive power is originally one, in that cognition's own self-understanding includes, at least implicitly, the a priori recognition that every cognition must be in full

agreement with itself and with every other, and that this necessary agreement is possible only if every act of cognition springs from the same capacity. As he emphasizes, neither of the two stems can furnish cognition by itself; it is through their cooperation, as stems of the single cognitive power, as elements of a single cognitive economy, that cognition arises (A51/B75–76). Why then suppose that this one capacity must have these two stems?

3. One way of answering this question will perhaps quickly come to mind, suggested to us by Kant's terminology, or a certain way of understanding it. We might suppose that by "spontaneity" Kant means cognitive freedom or autonomy, and that "receptivity" signifies a capacity to acquire representations in which we receive from things their forms and relations. We exercise spontaneity in judging, as we make up our mind about what to think, and in reasoning, as we draw inferences and frame new concepts and hypotheses to extend our knowledge beyond immediate experience. Yet from this source, the mind's free, creative power, can also arise errors and misconceptions. The world we seek to know is a world we never made. The capacity to judge and the liability to misjudge are but two sides of the same spontaneity. If the kernels of truth are to be culled from the chaff of error, the exercise of spontaneity must be somehow constrained or guided, and this is the role of receptivity. For it is through this capacity, operating in experience, that we receive representations that conform to the objects and how it stands with them.¹⁰

This interpretation might receive further encouragement from the consideration that it seems congenial to the spirit of Kant's project in the *Critique*. Few passages better capture that spirit than the one in which Kant, holding up natural science as an example for metaphysics, presents the striking image of reason, with its principles in one hand and the experiment it has thought up in accordance with them in the other, putting its questions to nature. And Kant's account of the errors of traditional speculative metaphysics might be taken as a dramatic exhibition of how illusion prevails when spontaneity, under the proud name of pure reason, is allowed free rein, unchecked by sensibility. Undisciplined spontaneity runs riot into the transcendent, indulging in its fondest dreams as it gropes about among mere concepts, and so stands in need of a check and limitation from sensibility to bring it into line with what's really there. If we wanted to express this reading in a slogan, we might say, "Thoughts without intuitions are blind."

But that's just the opposite of what Kant says. He claims it's intuitions without concepts that are blind (A51/B75). And instead of suggesting that sensibility serves to limit the understanding,¹¹ he maintains that it's the proper function of the understanding to limit sensibility (A256/B312). Furthermore, after remarking that sensibility is the source of real cognition when subordinated to the understanding as that to which the latter applies its function, he says that insofar as sensibility influences the understanding's

action it is the basis of error (A294n/B351n). Moreover, this interpretation should lead us to expect Kant to hold that the marks by which we distinguish the spontaneous and the receptive elements in our cognition and representation are, respectively, the consciousness of a lack of determination in our thinking, and the consciousness of necessity or constraint. In fact, however, Kant's criteria are almost the opposite. In a priori cognition the object known is *necessarily* thought as being a certain way, whereas in a posteriori cognition the object is merely *actually* thought as being a certain way (B3).¹²

The full difficulty facing this interpretive approach becomes especially apparent when we try to square it with Kant's Copernican way of thinking. On this approach, the function of receptivity is to provide the constraint by which the judgments in which our cognition consists are in alignment with how things are. But this conception of receptivity presupposes the familiar, pre-critical view of the relation between cognition and its object that Kant says must be relinquished. In order to comprehend how a priori knowledge is possible, he maintains, we must give up the idea that "all our knowledge must conform to the objects"; instead, we must attribute spontaneity to our cognitive power and suppose that "the objects must conform to our knowledge" (Bxvi).

This problem cannot be evaded by adopting a hybrid reading of Kant's Copernican proposition, on which it asserts only that objects must conform to our *a priori* cognition, leaving intact the traditional empiricist picture in the case of empirical knowledge. At first sight this may seem a sensible and generous reading. Where, after all, should we expect the truth in empiricism to lie if not in its conception of empirical knowledge? And how can we account for Kant's great respect for the empiricist tradition if we do not suppose he appreciates the truth in it? To reject the idea that empirical knowledge conforms to its object would deprive us of the constraint that objects are purportedly supposed to provide, keeping our representations from wandering off course. But Kant's recovery of the relation between cognition and its object is more radical than this cut-and-paste picture implies. If, as he argues, the pure a priori concepts of understanding make experience itself possible, the judgments and concepts of objects figuring in experience are not independent of them; indeed, Kant states explicitly that a concept of experience "is nothing but a concept of understanding *in concreto*" (A567/B595).

4. Now at this point, perhaps with patience wearing thin, we might feel inclined to say: "So much the worse for the Copernican way of thinking, if it means we must deny empirical knowledge in order to make room for Kant's faith in a priori cognition! When a philosopher tries to stand the world on its head, should we be surprised that everything is thrown topsy-turvy into confusion?" Such a response would be understandable. It is not easy, however, to credit the attribution of deep and pervasive confusion to Kant's

project, a move that would expose us once again to the familiar pressure to see the *Critique* as a patchwork, or as a Janus-faced treatise. I think that before resigning ourselves to such a conclusion, we should look for another way of understanding why Kant holds that our cognitive capacity has two irreducible stems.

Having now reminded ourselves of Kant's Copernican way of thinking, however, we are in a position to see that our problem has a sharper edge than may initially have been evident. For at first glance, the Copernican proposition might seem to commit Kant to the view that spontaneity is the only stem we need. If the objects must conform to our cognition anyway, what could be the point of maintaining that our cognitive capacity includes a capacity to receive representations through being affected by those objects? Kant now seems to be sliding in the direction of Leibniz, just as the reading we considered a moment ago had him tilting in the direction of Locke and the Scholastics. Yet any suggestion that receptivity is superfluous is patently absurd, and moreover flies in the face of Kant's repeated insistence that our cognition depends as much on receptivity as on spontaneity. So assuming we can answer our first question and identify Kant's basis for maintaining that our cognition depends on these two stems, we will also need to address the following question: How are we to understand the role of receptivity, if, in order to comprehend the possibility of a priori cognition, we must conceive of our cognition as spontaneous and accordingly suppose that the objects must conform to it?

In what follows, I will approach these questions by working from the top down. Since it is the cognitive power that Kant says is divided into two stems, and since his account of this power is supposed to derive from cognition's own self-understanding, I will first offer a few remarks on the generic form of this self-understanding, as he articulates it. Much could be said about his generic conception of cognition, but there are two conditions implied by it that are particularly relevant to our concerns here. One pertains to the intrinsic form of cognition, the other to cognition so far as it is material.

The first is a condition of unity. Knowledge, Kant says, is "a whole of compared and connected representations" (A97). Its unity is that of a system, represented in the idea of "the form of a whole of knowledge, which precedes the determinate cognition of the parts and contains the conditions for determining a priori for each part its place and relation to the others" (A645/B673). This condition implies, as I mentioned earlier, that every cognition must be in full agreement not only with itself but also with every other. Thus, anything we know—any bit of knowledge, that is—will both sustain itself and also confirm and be confirmed by the other things we know, while nothing we know can ever undermine itself, or provide the least ground for doubting anything else we know, or itself be subject to doubt arising from any other bit of knowledge. This condition is not satisfied in

the case of opinion or belief, of course; in fact, it is from encountering judgments that fail to satisfy this condition that we first obtain our concept of opinion and take note of the mark by which we can distinguish opinion from knowledge. But this unity is essential to cognition.

Second, cognition proper (material, not merely formal, cognition) has an object with which it is in agreement and to whose existence it stands in a certain relation. Specifically, there must be a relation of causal dependence connecting the *actuality* of cognition and the *actuality* of its object. Kant holds, for instance, that even the a priori judgments of mathematics count as cognition only insofar as we know through experience that objects suited for their application exist (B146–47). This condition too is not satisfied by mere opinion; the fact that I opine that some object has a certain attribute implies neither that it does nor even that it exists. As I will indicate shortly, this second condition can be satisfied in different ways, but like the first, it is essential to cognition.¹³

It will emerge as we proceed that spontaneity is tied to the first condition and receptivity to the second. But to prepare the way for addressing the questions I've raised, it will be useful first to specify the location of our problem under the generic conception of cognition I just outlined. For the cognition with which the *Critique* is concerned is a particular *type* of knowledge, one that Kant marks off from others by calling it *discursive* and *theoretical*. To throw light on its essential character as discursive, he often contrasts it with intellectual intuition, or the type of cognition that would belong to an infinite, or divine, intellect; and to highlight its character as theoretical, he occasionally compares it with practical cognition.¹⁴

II. Theoretical discursive cognition

1. In saying “there are two stems of human knowledge”, Kant makes it plain that he is not suggesting that the need to distinguish the two stems arises from reflection on the idea of cognition in general. He draws the distinction within his account of *human* cognition, not as part of a general account that would also embrace the cognition of an infinite, intuiting intellect.¹⁵ Appreciating this restriction will enable us to see that, despite his insistence that our cognition depends on both capacities, Kant also holds that it is spontaneity, not receptivity, that is absolutely basic to cognition.

Just as our conception of mere animal consciousness, where there is sensory awareness but no cognition, reflects our understanding that the bare capacity to acquire representations through being affected by things (even if it includes a capacity to acquire habits of associating such representations) is not *sufficient* for cognition, so the idea of infinite cognition shows that, so far as we can tell from the notion of cognition in general, such affection is also not *necessary*.¹⁶ When we attempt to conceive of a subject whose cognitive power is absolute, or without limit, and therefore such as to

exclude all possibility of ignorance (and *a fortiori* of error), the notion of affection must fall away. For a subject that needs to be affected by an object to acquire knowledge of it will be ignorant of it unless affected and so will not possess a cognitive power that of itself rules out the possibility of ignorance. Hence infinite cognition must be absolutely spontaneous; the cognizing subject must be the absolutely self-sufficient source of its cognition. And since (according to the second condition of cognition noted earlier) there must be a dependence relation connecting the actuality of cognition and the actuality of its object, the absolute self-sufficiency of infinite cognition implies that the act of cognition itself makes its object actual, or causes it to exist. Thus the subject of infinite cognition is the absolute source of its cognition and thereby also of the existence of the object known.

If Kant is correct that it is spontaneity, not receptivity, that is absolutely basic to cognition, then this special relation spontaneity bears to knowledge must be recognizable simply from reflection on the idea of cognition. As I've already suggested, Kant is well aware that cognition includes in its own self-understanding both the recognition of itself as unified, so that every cognition must be in full agreement with itself and with every other, and also the cognizance that this necessary agreement would not be possible did not every act of cognition spring from the same capacity. But that cognizing subjects recognize *in advance* that all cognition must have this unity—so that it is *through* this very recognition that such unity belongs to all cognition—entails that the *unity of representation* in which cognition generically consists must lie in an at least implicitly self-conscious *representation of unity* common to all cognition. Hence this representation, the self-awareness of which includes awareness of its own necessity, must have its source in the cognitive power. Otherwise we could not account for our *awareness* of its necessity, of its involvement, that is, in all possible exercise of this capacity, given that this capacity is the one thing we can know in advance to be one and the same across its entire exercise. But if the cognitive power must itself be the source of this representation of unity, then it must be spontaneity, “the faculty of bringing forth representations itself”. The same representation of unity must ground each act of the cognitive power, as its original constituting form, however much diversity and contingency of representation it may contain. And regardless of what source this diversity may have, the cognition in which it figures must itself be the product of that same power from which the representation of unity arises, given that the diversity is included *in* the representation of unity. And since all this diversity of representation is subject to the spontaneously represented condition of unity, *all* representation included in cognition must lie in the exercise of spontaneity.

If it is spontaneity, not receptivity, that is necessary for there to be cognitive capacity at all, then even in the case of human cognition the

cognitive power, properly speaking, is spontaneity, or understanding, not receptivity, or sensibility. That Kant holds this view is indicated by various things he says,¹⁷ but perhaps above all by the way he characterizes the two stems themselves. In one of the passages we considered at the outset, for instance, we find that although he speaks of spontaneity and receptivity as two basic sources from which our cognition arises, he singles out spontaneity as the capacity to *know* an object (A50/B74). Sensibility is implicated as an indispensable requisite on account of being our capacity to receive representations through which we know the object, but it is spontaneity that is identified as the capacity to know the object through those representations. It would appear, then, that, according to Kant, while in one sense our capacity to know has two stems, in another sense it lies in one of those stems, though this stem is conceived in a way that implies that to possess it at all is also to possess the other, in that to have the capacity to know an object through representations I have received I must also have the capacity to receive them.

If the cognitive power, properly speaking, is spontaneity, then the essential difference between infinite and finite cognition implies a corresponding difference in forms of spontaneity: the spontaneity of infinite cognition is absolutely sufficient for cognition, whereas the spontaneity of finite cognition is sufficient only in a relative way. In the former case, the subject's spontaneity, or capacity to bring forth representations itself, is a cognitive capacity not only in itself, but absolutely; here capacity and act are one and the same. In the latter case, the subject's spontaneity is also in itself a cognitive capacity, but one whose exercise, whose actualization, depends on conditions outside itself.

If this is correct, then it seems clear that the reason why Kant describes human cognition as involving receptivity is that it is finite, or dependent. Infinite cognition, on account of its necessary completeness, produces, or gives itself, the object it knows. But because finite cognition is not by itself alone capable of producing the object it knows, the actuality of its object is not a consequence of the actuality of the cognition itself. Thus, whereas the spontaneity of infinite cognition is a power through which both of the two conditions of cognition distinguished earlier—the formal condition of unity and the material condition of relation to an object—are satisfied, the spontaneity of finite cognition is not itself sufficient to secure the second of them.

2. In the case of finite cognition, then, spontaneity is sufficient for cognition not absolutely, but in a relative way, or under a condition external to it, which makes possible the connection, requisite for cognition, between cognition's actuality and the existence of its object. This condition, Kant notes, may take one of two forms, since there are two different directions the dependence in which this connection consists may have—a difference on which is based the division of finite cognition into its two types, theoretical

and practical. For theoretical cognition it is required that the object can be given to the cognizing subject from elsewhere, or from without; for practical cognition it is required that the subject can be determined by the cognition to bring the object into existence (Bix-x, *KpV* 46). The subject of theoretical cognition, then, is sufficient to achieve cognition of objects provided that those objects are given to it from elsewhere. Objects are given to the cognizing subject by affecting it, and such affection is possible insofar as the subject is so constituted as to be receptive, or able to acquire representations through the affection, and provided that those objects exist and are in a position to affect it (are present to the senses). In short, we can say that in the theoretical case the condition external to spontaneity that is requisite for the actualization of finite cognition, so far as this condition lies in the cognizing subject, is receptivity.¹⁸

It follows that a subject of theoretical cognition always passes from ignorance to knowledge. It passes, that is, from an initial lack of cognition to the knowledge it is sufficient to achieve under the condition that the object is given.

3. It is noteworthy that this finite character of theoretical cognition is perfectly captured in Kant's account. According to that account, it is built into the very form of such cognition, as synthetic judgment, that the subject passes from ignorance to knowledge. Synthetic judgment (in its basic, affirmative categorical form) differs from analytic judgment in that it lies, not merely in the clear consciousness of something as already contained in the judging subject's concept of the object, but rather in the *enlargement* of that concept. In other words, it lies, not in clarification or explication of knowledge the subject already actually has, but in the increase in the subject's knowledge or understanding. As Kant puts it, analytic judgments are "elucidatory", synthetic judgments are "ampliative" (A7/B11). The act of theoretical cognition, then, is one that *comes to be*, where the coming into being, or learning, is the subject's emergence from, or passing out of, ignorance.

Because such cognition always proceeds *from* a concept of its object, Kant speaks of it as "cognition from concepts". And because in the act of synthetic judgment the understanding must, so to speak, venture out beyond the concept from which it begins, this type of cognition does not simply abide within itself, like always-already-complete intellectual intuition, staying indoors, as it were. It must rather, without abandoning its concept, depart from it and "run about" outside it to secure a further concept that is not already actually thought in the original yet suited to it, a concept it then combines with the original in the act of synthetic judgment. Because it involves this running about, it merits the appellation "discursive". Thus the expressions "discursive cognition" and "cognition from concepts" are but two ways of capturing the distinctive feature that belongs to this type of cognition and distinguishes it from the infinite cognition of an intuiting

intellect—namely, its character as learning, or as cognition that comes to be and grows.

4. But the ignorance from which the subject begins is not, of course, a lack even of the *capacity* to know. For what lacks this capacity can no more be called ignorant, strictly speaking, than it can be said to know. And unless it is supposed that the capacity to know is already—albeit dormant (B1)—in place, independently of objects’ being given from elsewhere, it will not be possible to account for the self-sustaining character essential to cognition. This point too is reflected in the form of synthetic judgment. For as the enlargement of a concept of an object, synthetic judgment presupposes the concept of which it is the enlargement and hence a certain cognition of the object or at least an understanding of what an object, a cognizable something, is, as the starting point from which it arises. Since this antecedent understanding is presupposed in every synthetic judgment, a primitive understanding of the objects of discursive cognition must originate in the cognitive power itself and be actually present in all exercise of this power as the original pure concept of an object, in accordance with the primitive representation of unity constituting discursive understanding itself. (Kant argues, of course, that this pure concept can be articulated a priori in accordance with the complete system of the understanding’s basic functions in judging.)

Moreover, as we have noted, the theoretical cognitive power, properly speaking, must be spontaneity, not receptivity, even though spontaneity depends on receptivity in order to be that power. For as synthetic judgment, theoretical cognition lies in an *act of combination* of representations in accordance with the original representation of unity; however much it depends on receptivity for materials suitable for combination, the combination itself, expressing as it does the original representation of unity, can never come into us through the senses (cf. B129). Theoretical cognition must therefore lie in the subject’s own act, even if this act is possible only on the condition that the object be given, by affecting the subject. This is true even in the case of experience, or empirical knowledge (B147): experience, Kant says, is “the product of the understanding out of materials of sensibility” (P 316; cf. A1). If we were to liken the theoretical cognitive power to a living being, spontaneity would stand to receptivity, not as organ stands to organ, but as soul (form) stands to body (matter).¹⁹

III. Spontaneity and receptivity

1. Up to this point, I have been drawing on Kant’s generic conception of cognition to throw light on his claim that the capacity for theoretical discursive cognition must include the two stems he identifies. We have seen that one of them, spontaneity, constitutes the subject’s cognitive capacity, properly speaking. The other, receptivity, indicates by its very presence that

the spontaneity to which it belongs is limited in that it depends on an external condition for its actualization as a cognitive capacity.

Our next task is to find a way of understanding, at least in outline, how these two capacities cooperate in cognition. To respect the contribution of each, we will need to keep in mind that, while the only way objects can be given to the cognizing subject is through their affecting it, the spontaneity of the cognitive capacity entails that the act of cognition cannot itself be constrained or determined by this affection. This point implies that the operation of receptivity cannot be seen as an imposition of a form on the exercise of the cognitive capacity, something analogous to an image projected onto the retina by the cornea and lens. In fact, such a conception of receptivity's involvement was already ruled out by our earlier observation that cognition, through its own self-understanding, is essentially unified. For such unity can never be found in any aggregate, nor therefore in an aggregate of effects upon the mind.

But even though an appreciation of the essential unity of cognition precludes us from assigning to the affections of receptivity the role of constraining or determining the exercise of spontaneity, we might still find ourselves with a lingering sense that, somehow, some such constraint is required. How else, we might wonder, could receptivity play a role in cognition? We can take a first step toward spelling out a suitable conception of the contribution of receptivity by distinguishing the idea that the act of cognition *depends* on the operation of receptivity through which objects are given from the idea that it is *constrained*, or *determined*, by it. The former idea, but not the latter, is compatible with the spontaneity of cognition. In elaborating this distinction, the natural place to begin is with *affections* produced in us by objects, that is, sensations, or impressions.²⁰ For as we have noted, Kant says intuitions depend on affections, and it is through their affecting the mind that objects are given. Then we can turn to *intuitions*.

2. The suggestion that cognition depends on affections without being determined by them may at first seem questionable, or at least obscure. But we can bring the distinction into focus if we note the following two points, which concern the notion of constraint, or determination of one thing by another, and its applicability to the cognitive capacity.

First, the general idea of one thing's being determined by another implies that, through this determination, a change is brought about in the thing being determined, which implies in turn that this thing comes to be in a state that is not only other than the state it was in beforehand, but really opposed to the latter, so that the coming to be of the one is identical with the driving out, the extermination, of the other. When the sun melts a piece of ice, for instance, the water is determined by the action of the sun to pass from being cold and solid to being warm and fluid. And since change is always from one state to an opposing one, the changes that take place here are from cold to

warm and from solid to fluid; the concept of change itself rules out the possibility of a change from cold to fluid or from solid to warm. So the determination of one thing by another is always the production of a transition from one state to an opposing one.

Second, this notion of determination from without applies to the affections of receptivity, but not to the spontaneous act of cognition. Although affections of receptivity always involve transitions between opposing sensory states, the coming to be of the cognitive activity that depends on the affection lies, not in a transition from one determinate cognitive act to an opposing one, but simply in a coming to be determined. Affections of sensibility are modifications of consciousness that arise from objects affecting the subject; here the comings to be are always changes, or transitions from one state of consciousness to an opposing one. More specifically, they are changes in the quality or intensity of sensation: changes from awareness of one shade or brightness level of color to that of another, for instance, or from feeling coldness to feeling warmth, and so forth. Such changes are variations across one or another dimension of comparison, where each position on the scale or in the field of possibility excludes every other. In contrast, the coming to know that depends on such affection is not itself any such transition, but a becoming determinate on the part of the subject's spontaneous capacity to know, a passing from ignorance to cognition—a passing, for instance, from ignorance regarding the sun to knowledge of what it is, that it exists, or that it is now shining, or from ignorance whether the ice has melted to knowledge that it has. Since ignorance is not a determinate state of consciousness or act of cognition, but the lack thereof, coming to know is not any change of state or of act (which would imply replacement of one state or act by another that opposes it), nor therefore is it an alteration of the cognizing subject.²¹ This is reflected in our ordinary speech: we do not think it suitable to describe simple learning, or coming to know, as a “change of mind” or “change of view.”²²

A question might arise about sensory states in which sensation is absent, since these may at first glance seem analogous to ignorance. Consciousness of darkness or of silence resembles ignorance in that its presence implies the absence of a contrasting positive state: just as ignorance implies the absence of cognition, so consciousness of darkness implies the absence of consciousness of light. But even in such negative cases there is an essential difference. For ignorance is precisely the indeterminacy from which the cognitive power naturally *proceeds*, while consciousness of darkness, consciousness of silence, and the like are not indeterminacies of sensory awareness, but negative sensory states to which sensory awareness naturally *returns*. Were consciousness of darkness mere indeterminacy of the capacity to be conscious of light rather than a determinate negative state opposed to all positive states, the positive states could not be understood as arising through *affection*. Ignorance, on the other hand, cannot be conceived as

negative determinacy. For it essentially involves possible awareness of itself as indeterminacy, or potentiality, of the capacity to know. Since it is only in a concept (that is, only through reflection, or self-consciousness) that this consciousness of indeterminacy can be found, it is only in the act of spontaneity that we can find a coming to be of a determination that is not equally also a passing away of an opposing determination. In Kant's terms, the opposition between ignorance and cognition is not *real*, but merely *logical* (cf. A272–74/B328–30).

Since the understanding's acts of cognition are judgments, any transition from one such act to an opposing one would be a transition between two incompatible judgments, so one of them would have to be false; hence such a transition would necessarily be either *from* error or *into* error and so would imply some deficiency relating to the exercise of the cognitive capacity. No such transition, therefore, can be essential to its proper exercise. Indeed, the very idea of cognition precludes the possibility of the incompatibility a transition presupposes: it follows from the unity of cognition that all cognitive acts must be consistent with one another and so capable of belonging to a single subject, not merely *serially* in time (like the opposing accidents inhering in an object of experience, which can and must be ordered successively), but as *coexisting* determinations of its cognitive power (or as cohabitants of the space of knowledge, we might say, adjusting the Sellarsian image). An act of cognition can no more give way to another than it can bring itself to an end. (This is not, of course, to deny the possibility of limitations in the cognitive power in an individual subject or defects in its exercise, owing to which what was once known is later forgotten or erroneously rejected.)

Our consideration of the notion of one thing's determination by another has revealed that while the affections of receptivity do enable the cognitive capacity to pass from the indeterminacy of ignorance to the determinacy of cognition, their involvement does not lie in the determination of spontaneity by receptivity, nor therefore in any kind of constraint or influence, since the determinate cognition that results is not the outcome of a transition from one cognitive act to an opposing one.²³ Yet discursive cognition does nevertheless consist in acts of synthetic judgment in which the cognizing subject's concept of an object is *determined* and thereby enlarged. So if this determination cannot, for the reasons just indicated, lie in the determination of the act of spontaneity by anything *outside* it (through affections of receptivity), it must be *self-determination*. It must, in other words, lie in the *self-enlargement* of the subject's cognition of the object, even though such self-enlargement is possible only under the sensible conditions provided by the operation of receptivity in the presence of the object, through which the latter is given.²⁴

3. The dependence of finite cognition on the operation of receptivity is thus to be likened, not to a life-activity's liability to be determined,

influenced, or molded by external circumstances, but to its dependence on enabling material conditions. Borrowing one of Kant's own images, we could say the sensible conditions of cognition resemble the air that enables a dove to fly (B8–9), not a gust of wind that blows it this way or that. So the operation of sensibility that constitutes the dependence relation of cognition on given objects does not in any way influence the exercise of spontaneity, but rather provides the matter upon which it exercises its cognitive function.

Here we see a notable difference between Kant's conception of cognition and the picture favored by his empiricist predecessors, especially those of the Scholastic tradition to which he belonged. The empiricist's image of a waxen tablet's dependence on the impression of a stylus or a signet ring for the marks and characters it bears upon it has built into it the idea of reception of form itself, and it therefore also includes the associated assumptions that combination of a manifold of representations can come into us through the senses and that cognition must conform to its object.²⁵ This idea of reception of form is precluded right from the start in Kant's thinking. For the very possibility of articulating a conception of cognition solely through cognition's own self-understanding entails the a priori consciousness of the unity of cognition and therewith the recognition that the capacity for discursive cognition, even though finite, is a capacity for a priori cognition, in that it is itself the source of the formal representation (or system of representations) of synthetic unity on which all cognition depends, and so is essentially spontaneous rather than receptive. Seeing that the empiricist's picture of the way our knowledge depends on sense impressions is incompatible with the spontaneity of knowledge, Kant concludes that it must be given up.²⁶

4. But before we finally set aside the empiricist's picture, we need to consider intuition. Here we can be brief, however, for if spontaneity, as self-determining, cannot be determined from without by affections of receptivity, then, for the same reason, it also cannot be determined by intuitions, the sensible representations that Kant says depend on those affections. Indeed, far from determining the exercise of spontaneity, intuition actually depends on it. As receptivity, sensibility cannot determine itself to represent at all; only through an act of spontaneity that inwardly determines sensibility to represent—animating it, so to speak—can intuition arise. Thus, not long after pointing out the dependence of intuition on affection, Kant calls attention to another condition on which intuition depends, namely, a synthesis carried out by the imagination (A78/B103), which, like all synthesis, is an act of spontaneity requisite for the unity of cognition (B129–30).²⁷ If sensible intuition is, accordingly, first made possible—first constituted as a representation—through an act of spontaneity, then we have, in a sense, even more reason to deny that the exercise of spontaneity can be determined by intuition than we already have to deny

that it can be determined by the impressions on which the intuitions in theoretical cognition themselves depend.

There is, of course, as Kant maintains, yet a further condition on which sensible intuition depends. In order for the synthesis that brings about intuition to be possible, the modifications of sensibility and therefore also sensibility itself must be so constituted as to enable the material of sensible intuition to be ordered in certain relations by that act of synthesis (A20/B34). He thus argues that our sensible intuition has a certain form, which reflects the specific constitution, or form, of our sensibility.²⁸ But the following brief review of the considerations that underwrite Kant's account of the role played by the form of sensible intuition in theoretical cognition will make clear that here too, in respect of the form of intuition, there is no determination of spontaneity by receptivity. We will find instead—as I hinted earlier in comparing spontaneity to soul and receptivity to body (§II.4)—that spontaneity generically (or “transcendentally”) determines receptivity *itself*,²⁹ that understanding stands to sensibility as determining form stands to the material it determines, or to the object to which it applies its function (cf. A266/B322, A294n/B351n).

Since the capacity for theoretical cognition, as spontaneous, is a capacity for a priori cognition, the object of theoretical cognition must conform to the cognition and so must be constituted—determined, that is, in respect of its essential form as a theoretically cognizable object—by the formal representation of unity in which the original act of spontaneity basic to such cognition consists. But this determination must take place through the determination of sensibility to a *sensible representation* of the object. For since theoretical cognition is essentially of objects that, as independently existing, must, in order to be known, be given from without by affecting sensibility, the object of such cognition is originally conceived as an object representable in empirical sensible intuition. Moreover, spontaneity's *specific* determination of sensibility (as modified on the occasion of the mind's being affected by objects present to the senses), whereby empirical intuition of given objects is secured, must arise through its prior *generic* (occasionless) determination of sensibility, whereby original formal intuitions are established. For all specific acts of determination depend on and share in common the single universal synthetic act of spontaneity that constitutes the unity of cognition (the original synthetic unity of apperception). These original formal intuitions have (i) a formal, intellectual aspect of unity, inherited from the unity of cognition, and (ii) a material, sensible aspect, comprising both (a) containment within themselves of a manifold of (somehow) given representations, reflecting sensibility in its general character, and (b) the specific way the manifold is given, reflecting the special character, or form, of human sensibility. The priority of the generic determination to the specific ensures that all possible sensible intuitions that may figure in theoretical cognition, and thereby also the

intuitable objects with their determinations, conform collectively as well as individually to the conditions of unity requisite for theoretical cognition, in that all intuitable objects are necessarily related to one another in virtue of belonging to a single whole represented in the formal intuition of outer sense, and all their determinations, or states, are similarly related to one another in virtue of belonging to a single successive order represented in the formal intuition of inner sense. Kant argues in the Transcendental Deduction (§§ 24, 26) that the generic determination of our sensibility by the understanding (that is, by the synthetic unity of apperception) yields the original representations of space and time, as the formal intuitions through which, respectively, objects and their determinations are represented in human theoretical discursive cognition (cf. ID 405).

In every case, then, intuition depends on spontaneity rather than determining it. And while at first glance this result might appear to collapse receptivity into spontaneity, a specific difference in source and content of representations remains, corresponding to the active and passive sides of spontaneity's determination of receptivity. For on the one hand, cognition's self-understood unity entails that spontaneity's synthetic activity can be brought to self-consciousness in a fundamental universal representation of unity—a “simple representation” through which “nothing manifold is given” (B135)—which accordingly originates solely in spontaneity. And on the other, the same synthetic activity, being a determination of *receptivity*, generates representations that have a distinctive sensible character, for as the *effects* of *synthetic* activity, they essentially contain a *manifold* of representations *within* them, rather than *under* them as concepts do (cf. B137n); they therefore belong to receptivity and so are possible even prior to the self-consciousness, or reflection on its own act, through which spontaneity first constitutes itself as understanding proper, the faculty of thought and knowledge.

IV. Implications

1. It is sometimes suggested in discussions relating Kant to later idealists, and to Hegel in particular, that in depicting the human cognitive power as divided into two stems, with one of them, sensibility, having special forms of its own, Kant introduces into his account an unacceptable subjectivism, reflected in his claim that our cognition is of appearances, not things in themselves. In tracing space and time to these forms of sensibility, it is held, Kant in effect imputes a certain illusory character to human cognition, in that he must suppose that the understanding, which is naturally directed at knowledge of things as they are, is limited or restricted by these forms. Here sensibility is seen as an alien presence intruding on the intellect, distorting or influencing its cognitive activity, leaving it with nothing but a subjectively tainted appearance in its hands, when what it reached for was the thing

itself.³⁰ It can thus seem that Kant sees the forms of sensibility as “imposed” on things, though he never espouses such a view himself.

If Kant’s account of human cognition relates understanding and sensibility in the way I’ve suggested, however, it does not suffer from this defect. Nothing on the side of sensibility constrains or interferes with the spontaneous act in which such cognition consists, so nothing sullies its objectivity, or credentials as cognition. This cognition is certainly *limited*, in that, since it is not intellectual intuition, conditions external to it must be in place in order for it to be possible, including the forms of human sensibility. But because this limitation lies in a dependence on conditions that enable rather than a subjection to conditions that constrain, the spontaneous act of the discursive cognitive power yields cognition of its objects with no taint of objectionable subjectivity, having instead unrestricted validity, for any subject capable of cognizing those objects at all. That Kant calls these objects “mere appearances” indicates, not that they lack *independence* from our cognitive power *in respect of form* (even a thing in itself must conform to the cognition of it), but that—in contrast to things known as they are in themselves by an intuiting intellect—they lack *dependence* on it *in respect of existence*. As he makes clear, they are the very objects we’ve all along taken ourselves to be able to know (A30/B45).

2. It is also sometimes suggested that Kant’s division of the cognitive power into two stems amounts to an untenable dualism. But the appreciation we have gained of how Kant sees understanding and sensibility as related enables us to recognize that these stems are not in fact dualistically split asunder. Perhaps it will always be possible for it to seem, at least initially, that his two-stem conception is dualistic. Although Kant himself points out that neither stem can be understood in complete separation from the other (B145–46, B160–1n), he also insists that we need to understand them, so far as possible, in isolation in order to have a clear comprehension of the terms we’re relating, and it may seem to readers that in treating them separately he is killing his subject with the blade of his analysis.³¹ Kant’s conception can also seem dualistic because his talk of two capacities or stems can lead us to suppose that he conceives understanding and sensibility to be related as two distinct organs, each able on its own to produce representations, which must somehow interact, determining or constraining one another, to ensure the coincidence of concept and intuition requisite for cognition—a supposition that contributes to difficulties of the sort I described earlier.

As I have suggested, Kant characterizes the distinction between understanding and sensibility as one between form and matter. Far from depicting the two stems in a way that prevents us from seeing an intelligible relation between them, this characterization displays them as inseparably united and evinces the non-dualistic spirit of the Aristotelian tradition. Indeed, notwithstanding Kant’s rejection of the Scholastic doctrine of sensible

species, the hylomorphism informing his conception of human cognition serves a philosophical purpose parallel to that of the hylomorphism in Aristotle's doctrine of the soul. Just as Aristotle's account of the soul as the form of a natural body with the potentiality for life secures the soul's inseparability from the body against those who claim the soul to be capable of a separate existence,³² so Kant's account of the understanding as depending on sensibility in order to be the theoretical cognitive power it properly speaking is secures the understanding's reliance on sensibility for all its theoretical cognition against the dogmatic metaphysician who holds that the bare intellect is capable of such knowledge on its own.³³

Notes

1. Here "dualism" is of course used in a pejorative sense: "A distinction becomes a dualism when its components are distinguished in terms that make their characteristic relations to one another ultimately unintelligible" (Brandt, Robert B. (1994) *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press], p. 615). The charge is an old one, dating to the first generation of Kant's readers, and its influence on the reception of his philosophy has been extensive. Some early formulations of it are recounted and related to the development of post-Kantian idealism in Beiser, Frederick C. (1987) *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).
2. In this paper I use "knowledge" as well as "cognition" to translate "*Erkenntnis*". Some might question the suitability of "knowledge", since passages can be found in which Kant says or implies that *Erkenntnis* can be false (e.g., A58/B83, A709/B737, L 50–51, 54). But there is an abundance of evidence that in his *basic* usage truth is implied. When, for example, he propounds his "Copernican" proposition that "the objects must conform to our *Erkenntnis*" (Bxvi), he is not suggesting that the objects must conform to the false judgments we make about them as well as to the true. When he says that human reason "regards all *Erkenntnisse* as belonging to a possible system" (A474/B502), he is not saying that reason takes this view even of judgments it recognizes to be false. And when he attributes to us a "drive for *Erkenntnis*" that "incessantly strives for expansion" (A708/B736), he does not have in mind some absurd impulse to accumulate opinions. Kant holds truth to be a "chief perfection of *Erkenntnis*, indeed the essential and inseparable condition of all perfection of it" (L 49–50), and he accordingly takes falsity—"the opposite of truth" (L 53)—to be an imperfection (a "fault") insofar as it is present (as error) in judgment or *Erkenntnis* (L 54). In *Erkenntnis*, therefore, falsity stands to truth as negation stands to reality: the thought of the former presupposes the prior thought of the latter (A574–75/B602–3). In the first instance, then, *Erkenntnis* must be conceived as true. This paper is concerned with *Erkenntnis* only in this most basic sense.
3. As commentators have noted, a similar passage occurs near the end of the *Critique*: "the universal root of our cognitive power divides and throws out two stems" (A835/B863). Not surprisingly, Kant's mention of a common root has attracted the interest of various later figures—especially Heidegger—who hear dualism in his talk of two stems. For discussion, see Henrich, Dieter (1994) "On the unity of subjectivity", *The Unity of Reason: Essays on Kant's Philosophy*, ed. Richard L. Velkley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), pp. 17–54.
4. Page references to the *Critique of Pure Reason* use the numbers of the first (A) and second (B) editions; page references to Kant's other writings are given by abbreviated title—*Anth* (*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*); *Fortschritte* (*What Actual*

Advances has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?); ID (Inaugural Dissertation [*On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible Worlds*]); *KpV* (*Critique of Practical Reason*); *L* ([Jäsche] *Logic*); *P* (*Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward As Science*)—and by the page numbers of the appropriate volume of *Kants gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Deutschen [formerly Königlich Preußischen] Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin: de Gruyter [and predecessors], 1902–). Translations are my own, though I have consulted the commonly used English translations.

5. With these words, which begin the Introduction to the *Transcendental Logic*, Kant first speaks of the understanding as spontaneity. Sensibility, however, was first characterized as receptivity earlier on, at the beginning of the *Transcendental Aesthetic*: “The capacity [*Fähigkeit*] (receptivity) to acquire representations through the manner in which we are affected by objects is called *sensibility*” (A19/B33).
6. As this passage suggests, the reception of a representation should not be identified with the mind’s being affected, though reception depends on affection. Nor (contrary to what the ordinary meaning of the word might lead one to expect) does Kant’s notion of reception imply that the features of objects given through receptivity can “wander over” into the subject’s capacity to represent, as if they were like the shape of a seal that might be pressed into a block of wax (*P* 282). Thus when Kant speaks of impressions (*Eindrücke*) (e.g., in the passage from A50/B74 previously quoted), he is not thinking of impressions of *form* effected by objects acting on the mind; the specific form that distinguishes one received representation from others is always a specific *combination* of the manifold of representation it comprises, and such combination, he holds, “can never come into us through the senses” (B129). Rather, he has in mind sensations (*Empfindungen*), which, though they are indeed effects of objects on the mind (A19–20/B34), provide, not the form, but the material of received representations.
7. In the *Logic*, after stating that the “logical distinction” between understanding and sensibility is between the faculty of concepts and the faculty of intuitions, Kant adds that these capacities can also be defined in another way, as faculties of spontaneity and receptivity (*L* 36). He calls this second way of defining them “metaphysical”, indicating thereby that it represents these capacities as distinct *sources* of a priori representation lying within the cognitive power (cf. *L* 33, §5 nn. 1–2, B38, B159).
8. It is only through the act of reflection and the formation of a concept that the sensible representation or representations that supplied the original content can be *regarded* as singular, in that insofar as singularity is itself understood through opposition to commonality (one, not many), it is only through being thought under the concept that the sensible representation can be understood as singular, not general. Yet since the act of reflection (in contrast to the act of synthesis) neither generates nor affects intuition itself with respect to either form or content, singularity of representation belongs to the form of intuition, even prior to and independently of the *actuality* of concept formation. (Similarly, even though it is only through the use of concepts that intuition is related to an object, it nevertheless belongs to intuition as a matter of its very form that it is *representation* on account of its being so constituted (as a product of the cognitive power) as to be relatable to objects in cognition through an act of thought on the part of the understanding.)
9. Kant explicitly speaks of the understanding as active or determining and sensibility as passive or determined in various places, for example in §24 of the *Critique*, where he says spontaneity is “determining” and sense is “merely determinable” (B151–52); cf. §7 of the *Anthropology*. Also relevant is the fact that Kant generally speaks of understanding, but not sensibility, as a *Vermögen*, for in his usage this term, which he employs as the equivalent of “*facultas*”, signifies a capacity that is active (*tätig*) (cf. *Anth* §7) (hence only a *Vermögen* can be self-active (*selbsttätig*), or spontaneous).

10. See, for example, Pippin, Robert B. (1982) *Kant's Theory of Form* (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 34–35, where sensations are said to “play the decisive guiding role” for the understanding’s powers of discrimination in experience; Pippin also speaks of pure intuition as an “intuitional constraint on thought” in *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 31. In a similar spirit, Brandom asks, “How does intuition *constrain* the application of concepts?” (*Making It Explicit*, p. 615). John McDowell’s depiction of Kant in *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) also resembles the view I have sketched in certain respects. But I do not mean to suggest that any of these authors would endorse this interpretation as it stands.
11. Pippin attributes to Kant an “insistence on the constraints exercised *by* sensibility on the understanding” (*Hegel's Idealism*, p. 28).
12. If we suppose that consciousness of necessity or constraint is a criterion of receptivity, we will be ready, as P. F. Strawson was, to read into Kant’s occasional mention of necessitation or constraint in his account of experience a reference to the work of receptivity, and we will thereby be led, again as Strawson was, to misread Kant’s statement in the Second Analogy that in the experience of objective change the order of perceptions is a “determined” order, to which our apprehension is “bound down” (A192/B237)—a misreading that led Strawson to think he had discovered in Kant’s argument “a *non sequitur* of numbing grossness” (*The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* [London: Methuen, 1966], p. 137).
13. Whereas the first condition guides the Metaphysical Deduction’s search for the complete table of pure concepts of understanding (cf. A64–67/B89–92), this second condition is intimately tied to the Transcendental Deduction’s task of explaining how the pure concepts can relate a priori to objects, notwithstanding that the latter exist independently of the actuality of our cognition (A85/B117). In the Transcendental Deduction, Kant relies on the Copernican proposition that the objects we can know must conform to our cognition to reconcile the a priori status of the pure concepts with this second condition (as it bears on theoretical cognition) by explaining how the direction of dependence in respect of *form* can be the opposite of the direction of dependence in respect of *existence* (cf. A92/B124–25). The dependence required by the second condition is represented through the *pure* category of cause. For a different interpretation of this relation (as noncausal), see Longuenesse, Béatrice (1998) *Kant and the Capacity to Judge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. 20ff.
14. Although these types fall under a common genus, they are not on a par with one another. Kant suggests that intellectual intuition is the archetype (cf. A695/B723). It contains as a unity what is present in a finite subject only as divided in the complementary functions of theoretical and practical cognition.
15. Only because of “the peculiar fate” of *human* reason is a critique of pure reason necessary (Avii).
16. Heidegger draws on Kant’s contrast between finite and infinite cognition to support his claim that in Kant’s conception of cognition intuition is more basic than thought (*Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, 4th ed. [Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1973], §4). But the same contrast supports with equal justice the point here being made, that in this conception spontaneity is more basic than receptivity. To Heidegger’s claim that “properly speaking, cognizing is intuition” (§4) we can juxtapose the proposition that properly speaking, cognition is the work of spontaneity, not receptivity. (Even experience itself, Kant says, is the work of the understanding (A1, P 316).) And to Heidegger’s conclusion that the finitude of human cognition must be sought in the finitude of human intuition (as receptive) we can juxtapose the conclusion that the finitude of human cognition must be sought in the finitude of human spontaneity (as in itself productive merely of the form, not the existence, of its object). Both sides deserve

- our attention; emphasizing intuition to the exclusion of spontaneity impedes our understanding of the Copernican way of thinking.
17. For example: “*Understanding* is, to speak generally, the faculty of *cognitions*” (B137); it “provides us with cognition in the proper sense” (A78/B103); it is the “higher” cognitive faculty (*Anth* §7; cf. A130/B169).
 18. Though our concern here is only with external conditions so far as they lie in the subject, Kant also takes note of external conditions on the side of the object (see, e.g., A650–54/B678–82). In the practical case, the condition lying in the subject is located in the faculty of desire. The subject of practical cognition is sufficient to achieve cognition of objects owing to its possession of a faculty of desire so constituted that the cognition of those objects can, by determining this faculty, cause them to exist.
 19. I use the subjunctive not to keep the comparison at arm’s length, but because it inverts the proper order of terms. For Kant, as for Aristotle, life is not the model for cognition. Cognition is the model for life.
 20. Kant also speaks of affection arising from the activity of spontaneity; in such a case, the effect is not the sensation that accompanies empirical intuition, but intuition itself (see §III.4).
 21. Because the term “state” signifies *condition*, I restrict its use here to sensory modes of consciousness, which (where positive) come about through the affection of the cognitive power (the mind) by things outside it. Cognition, on the other hand, is the spontaneous *act* of this power. The contrast can be marked in traditional terms by subsuming sensory states under the heading of *accident* and bringing acts of the cognitive power under the general titles of *property* and *habit*.
 22. As Annette Baier points out in “Mind and change of mind”, in *Postures of the Mind: Essays on Mind and Morals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 54. The two points just set forth are formulated for the case where the determination is theoretically cognizable, as determination in time. But we can also express them in abstraction from this condition by saying that the idea of one thing’s being determined by another implies that the former is in a state opposed to some state it would have been in had it not been determined, and that the cognitive act that depends on the affection is not itself opposed to a cognitive act the subject would have performed had it not been for the affection. (Strictly speaking, the determination under consideration here is what Kant speaks of as the determination of a thing’s *existence*.)
 23. The supposition that receptivity’s role *must* be to determine or to constrain spontaneity seems to presuppose, if not the idea that spontaneity is at bottom inert or indifferent and so in need of being formed or molded by the operation of receptivity (which would reduce it to another receptivity), then the thought that it contains within itself a certain propensity to err, making it liable to pervert its own employment. But we have no a priori basis for presupposing this. Nor is it even a sustainable supposition that the cognitive power itself, the very capacity *to know*, could contain such a propensity (even though, as limited, its actualization is a passing from ignorance to knowledge). Similarly, while we may discover that inclinations and wishes can influence our theoretical judgments (A53/B77), we have no basis for supposing a priori that such influence is possible, nor therefore any basis for building into our original conception of the cognitive power the idea that this capacity is liable to such influence.
 24. Noting this *self*-enlargement of discursive cognition enables us to attach a quite specific sense to Kant’s characterization of (philosophical) discursive cognition as *from concepts*.
 25. A vestige of this traditional empiricist’s image lives on, of course, in recent views that replace talk of form with talk of facts and represent knowledge as belief that tracks the truth or is caused by the fact that makes it true (see, e.g., Nozick, Robert (1981) *Philosophical Explanations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), ch. 3, and Goldman, Alvin (1967) “A causal theory of knowing”, *Journal of Philosophy*, 64, pp. 357–72).

26. Also notable is the difference between Kant's conception of the role of receptivity in cognition and that of more recent empiricism, with its foundationalist commitment to "the given" in experience. The spontaneity of cognition entails that the material provided by sensibility does not itself amount to cognition at all (A253/B309), from which it follows that the dependence of cognition on sensible materials is not to be likened to the dependence of a conclusion on a premise or a historian's judgment on the testimony of a witness. Kant betrays no temptation to use such expressions as "the testimony of the senses", claiming instead, in keeping with his distinction between receptivity and spontaneity, that the senses "do not judge at all" (A293/B350) and "are not capable of thinking anything" (A51/B75).
27. Kant introduces the imagination as a "function of the soul" (A78/B103), but in his own copy of the first edition of the *Critique* he specifies that it is a function of the *understanding* (cf. B151–52), and he says the synthesis carried out by the imagination is an action demanded by the *spontaneity of thought* (A77/B102). As the work of imagination intuition "can be given prior to all thought" (B132), but where the imagination's synthesis is prior to thought the spontaneity exercised in it can rise through reflection to the "spontaneity of concepts" (A50/B74), thereby actualizing itself as *understanding proper*.
28. Since the form of sensibility is what *enables* the materials of sensibility to be combined by the understanding in the act of cognition, its place in Kant's account of the human cognitive power corresponds to the place occupied in Aristotle's account of the soul by the *potentiality for life* that belongs to the natural body in a living being (*De Anima* II.i). Kant holds that we are not able to determine whether discursive cognizers with forms of sensibility other than our own are possible (A27/B43, B72, B139).
29. Constituting it as the capacity to receive *representations*, and thereby as a stem of the cognitive capacity, complementary to the understanding. Thus, receptivity depends on spontaneity for its standing as a stem of the cognitive power, just as spontaneity depends on receptivity to be the cognitive power that it properly speaking is.
30. This reading makes it difficult to understand why Kant characterizes sensibility as *receptivity*—an expression that does not suggest any diverting of thought from truth to error. Kant denies explicitly that any illusion is involved in theoretical cognition (B69–70, A293/B349–50, *Fortschritte* 269).
31. "Won't both stems wither and die from a dichotomy and bifurcation of their common root?" Hamann, J. G. (1949–57) *Sämtliche Werke, Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, (Ed) J. Nadler (Vienna: Herder), Vol. III, p. 286.
32. *De Anima* II.i.
33. This is a slightly revised version of a paper presented at the "Von Kant bis Hegel" Conference held at the University of Pittsburgh in April 2005. I thank the audience for the stimulating discussion, and Susan Hahn and Nicholas Rescher for many helpful comments and suggestions.