3

On the Relation of Intuition to Cognition

Anil Gomes and Andrew Stephenson

3.1 Introduction

> In whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is *intuition*. This, however, takes place only insofar as the object is given to us; but this in turn, at least for us humans, is possible only if it affects the mind in a certain way. (B33)

It is has been said that the amount of attention paid to any given section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is inversely proportional to its distance from the beginning of the book (Moore 2012:310). The above-quoted

A. Gomes (✉)
Department of Philosophy, Oxford University, Oxford, UK
e-mail: anil.gomes@trinity.ox.ac.uk

A. Stephenson
Department of Philosophy, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany
e-mail: andrew.stephenson@philosophy.ox.ac.uk

D. Schulting (ed.), *Kantian Nonconceptualism*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-53517-7_3

two sentences which open the Transcendental Aesthetic (TAe) illustrate the phenomenon. What is intuition? What is its role in cognition? How does intuition give us objects and in what sense is it immediate? The answers to these questions are fundamental to our understanding of Kant's project in the First *Critique*.

Our aim in this essay is largely procedural. We shall suggest that debates about the nature of intuition can be informed by more clearly recognising the implications that the various views have for our understanding of what Kant means by "cognition" (*Erkenntnis*). This gives us a way of making tractable the debates about intuition. For our assessment of views about intuition may depend on our assessment of their implications for cognition.

We proceed as follows. In Sect. 3.2, we characterise two opposing views on the nature of intuition which have dominated recent critical study. In Sect. 3.3, we show how those views determine two opposing views about the nature of cognition. In Sect. 3.4, we set out some implications of adopting each of the views about the nature of cognition. First, regarding real possibility and Kant's modal condition on cognition. Second, regarding the structure and purpose of the Transcendental Deduction of the categories (TD). This allows us to make explicit the commitments of adopting a particular view about the nature of intuition.

Our aim in this chapter is not to show that one account or other of intuition is to be preferred. None of the implications are obviously untenable and there is much to be said in their favour on both sides. Instead we hope to show how to make progress in debates about the nature of intuition by turning instead to the nature of cognition. It is the implications for cognition, we suggest, that will determine which account of intuition we should endorse.

3.2 Intuition

There are a variety of views one might take about the nature of intuition. One important division concerns the question of whether intuitions depend for their existence on the existence of their objects. Call views on which intuitions do so depend *Object-Dependent* views; call views on which they do not *Object-Independent* views.

We need not worry too much about vagaries in the terms "object" and "existence" here. Different kinds of intuition may have different kinds of object, and different kinds of object may enjoy different kinds of existence. Let the object of intuition be whatever is intuited. Then so long as there is some distinction to be had between such objects existing and not existing, we can allow that what this distinction amounts to might vary with the kind of intuition under consideration. *Mutatis mutandis* for the host of related issues that arise in the context of transcendental idealism. What objects are and what it is for them to exist will vary with one's favoured interpretation of transcendental idealism. We can safely abstract from these controversies in asking whether some given interpretation qualifies as an Object-Dependent view or an Object-Independent view *on its own construal of what the difference amounts to*. The same goes for the existence of intuitions themselves. What intuitions are and what it is for them to exist will vary with one's favoured interpretation of intuition. We can safely abstract from these controversies in asking whether some given interpretation qualifies as an Object-Dependent view or an Object-Independent view on its own construal of what the difference amounts to.

As for what it means for intuitions to "depend" for their existence on the existence of their objects, we have in mind any relation that yields a strict implication. Object-Dependent views say that, necessarily, if there exists an intuition i of some object o, then o exists. Object-Independent views deny this. Note that this way of drawing the distinction means that accounts on which certain kinds of intuition depend for their existence on the existence of their objects while certain other kinds of intuition do not, would count as Object-Independent views. For some purposes it might be useful to be more fine-grained than this, indexing the distinction to different kinds of intuition. This need not concern us here. The considerations that follow hold generally. Note also that this way of drawing the distinction means that accounts that are silent on whether intuitions depend for their existence on the existence of their objects count as neither Object-Dependent nor Object-Independent views. There may be many purposes for which it is legitimate to remain neutral on this matter. But a full account of intuition ought not and many accounts do not.

Object-Dependent views come in a variety of forms. Interpreters who agree that intuitions depend for their own existence on the existence of their objects might disagree over whether intuitions involve relations of perceptual acquaintance or merely causal relations to objects. They might disagree over whether or not intuitions have representational content, and even where there is agreement that intuitions do have such content, there might be disagreement as to its nature, preconditions or role.

Lucy Allais (2015), for instance, has argued that the intuition of an object is the "presence to consciousness" of that object.[1] Her model here is the contemporary relationalist or naïve realist theory of perceptual experience, according to which perceiving an object essentially involves standing in a primitive relation of perceptual acquaintance to it. Such relations are conceived of as requiring the existence of their relata. Thus Allais's view is a form of Object-Dependent view. Similarly for Colin McLear's (2016) reading of intuition. Intuition, according to McLear, is a state in which the intuiting subject is directly acquainted with "mind-independent tracts of [her] environment" (2016:96). These might be called *constitutional* forms of the Object-Dependent view. Intuitions depend for their existence on the existence of their objects because they are partly constituted by their objects.

Eric Watkins and Marcus Willaschek (forthcoming) prefer to cash out the relation between an intuition and its object in causal rather than constitutional terms, at least when it comes to empirical intuitions. They also give a fundamental explanatory role to representational content. For Watkins and Willaschek, "intuitions and concepts relate to their objects both *by representing them*, i.e., having an objective representational content, and *by referring to them*". Nevertheless, they think that "intuition establishes an immediate awareness of the existence of the object". Similarly for Clinton Tolley (2013:116). According to Tolley, intuitions have a nonconceptual representational content and are object-dependent in the sense that "they entail the *existence* of their objects", although they are not "object-involving" in the sense of containing the object to which the subject is related in intuition. Consider finally John McDowell (1998), who combines an Object-Dependent view with the claim that

[1] See also Allais (2009, 2010, 2011).

intuitions have exclusively conceptual content. For McDowell, "enjoying intuitions—having objects in view—is to be understood in terms of the same logical togetherness in actualizations of conceptual capacities that makes sense of the unity of a judgeable content" (1998:439–40). Having objects in view is to be understood here as a success state. If one intuits an object, then there really is an object that one has in view. Thus "Kant's conception of intuitions embodies a version of Evans's thesis that perceptual demonstrative content is object-dependent" (McDowell 1998:475).[2]

Object-Independent views also come in a variety of forms. Interpreters who agree that intuitions do *not* depend for their own existence on that of their objects might disagree over whether or not they have representational content, and even where there is agreement that intuitions do have such content, there might be disagreement as to its nature, preconditions or role. Stefanie Grüne (2009), for instance, argues that intuitions represent their objects by means of intuitive marks, or tropes. Such a means of representation, she emphasises, is independent of the existence of the represented object (Grüne 2009:42–3). Yet it is fundamentally different in kind to the way in which concepts represent their objects via discursive marks. According to Grüne, intuitions have an essentially nonconceptual content while at the same time being object-independent.

However—and perhaps unlike Object-Dependent views—Object-Independent views can plausibly be regarded as having a *locus classicus*: conceptualist intentionalist readings of Kant. Versions of this reading can be found in Richard Aquila (1983), Derk Pereboom (1988), Gerold Prauss (1971), Wilfrid Sellars (1968) (McDowell's conceptualist but Object-Dependent appropriation notwithstanding) and Hans Vaihinger (1892). The connection between the intentionalist reading of Kant and the Object-Independent view of intuition should not be surprising. It is a characteristic mark of intentional relations that they can hold between subject and object even when the latter fails to exist. According to Pereboom, for instance, intuitions manifest intentional relations that are

[2] Others who defend or express an Object-Dependent view include Abela (2002:35–6), Buroker (2006:37), Cassam (1993:117), Gomes (2014), Gomes (forthcoming), Hanna (2001:210; 2005:259), Setiya (2004:66), Thompson (1972:331), Warren (1998:221) and Willaschek (1997:547).

"concept-dependent" but "existence-independent". Elaborating on the latter, he says:

> For Kant, what we are immediately aware of in typical intentional relations are the contents of intuitions, some of which are real or, we might say, exist, and others of which are not real, or do not exist. (Pereboom 1988:325)[3]

Both the Object-Dependent view of intuition and the Object-Independent view of intuition have had their supporters. And debate about the merits of the two views has surfaced in the recent attention paid to the question of whether intuition depends on the conceptual activity of the understanding.[4] How, then, are we to decide between the two views? There are a number of exegetical questions and the debate continues in Grüne (2014a, b), Grüne (forthcoming), McLear (2014a), McLear (forthcoming b), Stephenson (2015b) and Stephenson (forthcoming). We shall not address these here. We believe that, alongside the exegetical issues, there are systematic structural considerations which bear on the decision. This is the line we pursue.

All the parties to this debate should accept the following characterisation of the relation between intuition and cognition:

(I): The role of intuition is to give objects for cognition.

This is stated in the opening sentences of TAe. It is repeated in a number of key passages.[5] For example, in the Introduction to the Transcendental Logic:

> Our cognition arises from two fundamental sources in the mind, the first of which is the reception of representations (the receptivity of impressions), the second the faculty for cognizing an object by means of these representations

[3] Others who defend or express an Object-Independent view include: Grüne (2014a), Grüne (forthcoming), Hintikka (1969), Howell (1973:217), Parsons (1992), Roche (2011:361, 370), Stephenson (2011, 2015b), Stephenson (forthcoming) and Wilson (1975:262).

[4] See Allais (2010:60), Hanna (2005:259) and Roche (2011:361).

[5] See also A95; B165; A155–6/B194–5; A239/B298; A719/B747.

> (spontaneity of concepts); through the former an object is *given* to us, through the latter it is *thought* in relation to that representation (as a mere determination of the mind). Intuition and concepts therefore constitute the elements of all our cognition, so that neither concepts without intuition corresponding to them in some way nor intuition without concepts can yield a cognition. (A50/B74)

> The use of this pure cognition, however, depends on this as its condition: that objects are given to us in intuition, to which it can be applied. For without intuition all of our cognition would lack objects, and therefore remain completely empty. (A62/B87)

And in TD:

> There are two conditions under which alone the cognition of an object is possible: first, *intuition*, through which it is given, but only as appearance; second, *concept*, through which an object is thought that corresponds to this intuition. (A92–3/B125)

> Two components belong to cognition: first, the concept, through which an object is thought at all (the category), and second, the intuition, through which it is given. (B146; cf. A95)

Furthermore, the characteristics of intuition—singularity and immediacy (A320/B376–7; Log, 9:91)—flow from this functional characterisation of intuition. Kant thinks that it is only if intuitions are singular and immediate that they can play the role of giving objects for cognition (A19/B33, B48; Prol, 4:282).[6] So there are grounds for taking (I) to be the most basic characterisation of intuition.

With this in mind, we can make tractable the question of which account of intuition to endorse by considering the following question: What must intuition be like if it is to play the role of giving objects

[6] This is further confirmed by the fact that Kant still talks about objects being given in intuition for the divine, intuitive kind of intellect, one that properly speaking lacks a discursive or general and mediate faculty (e.g. at B72; B138–9).

for cognition? Answering this question can help us fix upon the correct account of intuition. Unfortunately, that task is made difficult by the fact that there is no agreement in the literature on how to understand the notion of cognition. We shall suggest in the next section that differing views on the nature of intuition determine differing views on the nature of cognition.

3.3 Cognition

The notion of *Erkenntnis* is central to the project of the First *Critique*. Kemp Smith renders the German term as "knowledge", as do Meiklejohn and Müller. Recent translations—most notably Guyer/Wood and Pluhar—prefer the term "cognition". We shall stick with the latter. But it is important to be clear that the acceptance of this usage does not settle the substantive interpretative issues concerning the nature of cognition.

To many, Kant seems to use the term in different ways. In the notorious *Stufenleiter* passage, for example, cognition is characterised as objective perception. Intuitions and concepts then seem to be both classed separately as cognitions in this sense, and as such are contrasted only with sensations, subjective representations which "refer to the subject as a modification of its state" (A320/B376).[7] But there is also a more restricted use of the term according to which cognition is the output of being given something in intuition *and* applying a concept or concepts to it. This is the sense of "cognition" in play in the passages quoted in the previous section, as well as in the infamous dictum:

> Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts blind. … Only from their unification [i.e., that of the understanding and the senses] can cognition arise. (A51–2/B75–6)

[7] Though see Tolley (MS a) for an alternative reading of this passage on which Kant's intention is not to classify intuitions and concepts as separate species of cognition but rather to unpack what is involved in cognition—this is especially amenable to what follows.

Kant goes on to call this "cognition in the proper sense" (A78/B103) and we take it that this restricted notion of cognition is the dominant one in the *Critique*. For one thing, cognition in the *Stufenleiter* sense, on the traditional reading of this passage, would seem to include mere "ideas", concepts "of reason" for which no object can be given in intuition, such as that of God. Yet Kant is often at pains to distinguish the mere *thought* we can have of such things from the *cognition* we can have of objects that *can* be given in intuition (e.g. at Bxxvi, B146, B165).

It is clear, then, that intuitions and concepts are each independently necessary for cognition "in the proper sense". We take it, further, that they are jointly sufficient: bringing an intuition under a concept *suffices* for cognition. This is crucial for arguments we present below. It is probably our most controversial assumption and we have no knock-down argument for it. Our motivations are largely negative. It is simply not clear what other, distinct conditions might be necessary for cognition. No other conditions have anything like the status that intuitions and concepts enjoy. Certainly, Kant does not seem to think that any further kind of *representation* is required. He says that "*two* components belong to cognition" (B146; emphasis added), that "intuition and concepts therefore *constitute the elements* of all our cognition" (A50/B74; emphasis added). No mention is made of any third element. Note that, to trouble our claim, any such additional element would have to be genuinely *distinct*. It is no problem if non-distinct representations are also involved in cognition, such as, in empirical cases, the sensations that constitute the manifold of empirical intuition. Similarly for additional conditions that are not additional representations.[8] According to the Object-Dependent view of intuition, for instance, the object of intuition must exist if there is to be an intuition of it. On such a view, it will be a condition on cognition that the object of cognition exist. More on this and other examples below. Such conditions are not conditions above and beyond those

[8] In some ways the example that follows is not optimal given this distinction between the requirement for some additional representation and the requirement for some other additional condition, since on some views the object of intuition will itself count as a representation. If this is your view, a better idea of the distinction will be given below when we come to some other potential conditions, like truth and justification. Consciousness is another potential condition that does not fit especially neatly into the distinction. But either way it again seems plausible that it would not constitute a genuinely distinct condition—that it would be involved in cognition simply in virtue of being involved in bringing intuitions under concepts.

that come for free with bringing an intuition under a concept. They are not really *additional* conditions on cognition at all.

What are the candidates for genuinely additional conditions on cognition? There might, for instance, be restrictions on *the way* in which an intuition must be brought under a concept if it is to amount to cognition. Again, it is just not clear what such restrictions might be. Kant does not explicitly say that there are any. But consider the following option. Suppose a subject intuits a painted horse and her intuition is brought under the concept of a zebra. Horses are not zebras; to judge of a horse that it is a zebra would be to judge falsely. So one might argue that this is not cognition because the intuition has not been brought under a concept in such a way as to produce or ground *knowledge*. On this account, cognition requires more than the subsumption of an intuition under a concept. It requires, further, that the subsumption be (or enable or produce something that is) true and, perhaps, justified.

This brings us to a second motivation for our view that cognition *just is* the bringing of an intuition under a concept. No doubt there is a close connection between cognition and knowledge. Intuiting a zebra and bringing this intuition under the concept of a zebra is surely a paradigmatic way of coming to know various things, such as that there are zebras. But there is increasing recognition that the *identification* of cognition with knowledge is incautious, at least if knowledge is understood as anything like the kind of propositional knowledge that has been the focus of much contemporary epistemology.[9] And if cognition cannot be identified with knowledge, then we have not been given reason to impose additional conditions on cognition beyond the bringing of intuitions under concepts.

Why is it a mistake to identify cognition and knowledge? Consider the traditional conception of knowledge as justified true belief. The most obvious problem with equating cognition and justified true belief might plausibly be regarded as a red herring. Kant occasionally talks about false cognitions (A55/B83; cf. A59/B84, A709/B737; Log, 9:50–1, 54). So too do we occasionally talk about false banknotes. What we really mean is pieces of paper that purport to be banknotes but aren't. There is nothing infelicitous in talking this way and perhaps it is how we should read Kant. His talk

[9] See, for example, Schafer (forthcoming).

of false cognitions is properly understood as talk about representations that purport to be cognitions but aren't, because they are false.

Two further problems are much more difficult to deal with. First, Kant does not seem to think of cognition as a species of assent, or holding-for-true (A820/B848ff.; Log, 9:66ff.). Cognition, unlike knowledge, does not entail belief. In this respect, the Kantian term that seems closer to knowledge is rather *Wissen*, and Kant keeps the terms *Wissen* and *Erkenntnis* apart with notable—one might even say uncharacteristic—consistency. Second, the same goes for justification. The closest Kantian analogue of justification is something involved in what he calls "objective sufficiency". And objective sufficiency is a feature of assents, not cognitions.[10]

To this last point it might be objected that all cognitions are either a priori or a posteriori, and these are surely justificatory notions, so there is after all a connection between cognition and justification. This might be true. Suppose for the sake of argument that cognitions are indeed the kind of things that can themselves be justified and that each is either a priori or a posteriori. This on its own is not enough to save the knowledge account of cognition. As Frege (1960:3–4) notices, whether or not some given cognition is to be classed as a priori, say, is a matter of how it *could in principle* be justified. This says nothing about how *or even whether* it is, as a matter of fact, justified.

None of the three traditional marks of knowledge fare well. This suggests that motivations for adding further conditions on cognition which arise from an identification of cognition and knowledge are to be resisted. There is of course much more to say and different aspects of this issue will arise again shortly. For the moment we hope to have said enough to have at least shifted the burden of proof onto those who think that further conditions are required for cognition, so as to allow us to continue working with the view that cognition arises from bringing an intuition under a concept without further conditions.

The opposing views on the nature of intuition have implications for how we should think of cognition. As already noted, the translation of

[10] Very different grounds for rejecting the cognition = knowledge thesis are developed in Stephenson (2015a).

Erkenntnis as "knowledge" has been largely rejected.[11] But there are weaker and stronger ways of rejecting this translation. According to one weaker view—which nevertheless avoids the problems that dog the knowledge account—cognition is a certain kind of object-directed representation in which one picks out an actual object and predicates some property of it. This view understands cognition to be an objective representation in the sense that it concerns some particular object or objects. Call this the *Object-Dependent* view of *cognition*.

The Object-Dependent view is a step away from the equation of cognition with a kind of knowledge, since there can be thoughts that are object-directed but false. I can think of a man holding the martini glass that he is drinking martini, when in fact he is drinking water. This allows the view to make sense of the passages in which Kant talks of false cognitions, and in a less deflationary way than the knowledge view. But it is close to the knowledge view in an important sense: cognition, on the Object-Dependent view, is a kind of acquaintance with objects, one in which the subject is in touch with objects and able to think thoughts about them.[12] The Object-Dependent view is in this sense a generalisation of one core aspect of the traditional knowledge view. Otherwise put, the identification of cognition with a kind of knowledge entails but is not entailed by the Object-Dependent view.

An alternative view of cognition involves a stronger rejection of the traditional picture. According to what we shall call the *Object-Independent* view of *cognition*, cognition is a representation which has objective purport. What it is for a representation to have objective purport is for it to represent a state of affairs as obtaining. There are many ways one might cash out the details of this notion but we take it that it will involve the possession of truth-conditions.[13] Typically—though not always, as in certain cases of inner cognition—these truth-conditions will concern objects distinct in some way from the subject. What is important, for the Object-

[11] We acknowledge that this may well have been as much for linguistic reasons as for the reasons we just outlined—"cognition", unlike "knowledge" and like *Erkenntnis*, can take the plural, and it is closer to the Latinate *cognitio*, which Kant occasionally parenthetically appends.

[12] For discussion, including the connection of this view to those of Russell and Evans, see Allais (2010:60), McLear (2016:127ff.) and Schafer (forthcoming).

[13] See Burge (2010) for a recent discussion of these issues.

Independent view, is that representations can have objective purport even in cases in which there is in fact no actual object that one is representing. Thus the Object-Independent view allows that one can cognise without there being any actual object to which one is related in so cognising.

These two views come apart in one direction. Consider imaginings. In certain episodes of imagining, for instance hallucination, there is no really existing object to which one's imaginational representations are directed. So a subject cannot have cognition in the first sense. But one's imaginings may still represent objective states of affairs, perhaps by purporting to represent genuine objects. So there are representations which count as cognitions on the second view but not on the first. The converse does not hold: any cognition which is directed at objects will also purport to be objective. Just as any case of cognition according to the knowledge view will also be a case of cognition according to the Object-Dependent view but not conversely, any case of cognition according to the Object-Dependent view will also be a case of cognition according to the Object-Independent view but not conversely. The conditions the views place on cognition reduce in stricture from left to right—the knowledge view, the Object-Dependent view, the Object-Independent view.

Note that the intended sense of "purport" has nothing to do with whether or not the subject would be willing to assert that things really are as they are presented to her. In Kantian terms, for a representation to be objective does not require an act of assent. In the good case, where the subject's representation with objective purport is also an object-directed representation, the subject may falsely believe that she is imagining. In the bad case, where the subject's representation with objective purport is not also an object-directed representation, she might be fully aware of this fact. In both cases, she has a representation with objective purport but would not base an assertion upon her representation in the normal way, for she does not believe her eyes. Kant was clearly alive to such possibilities, and thus to the distinction between purport and assent. He refers to them in drawing out a shared feature of transcendental and optical illusion at the beginning of the Dialectic (A297–8/B353–4). Transcendental illusion does not cease to be an illusion once one has shown that it is an illusion any more than "the astronomer can prevent the rising moon from appearing larger to him, even when he is not deceived by this illusion"

(A297/B354). In these terms, the objective purport of a cognition is how things appear to the subject in having the cognition, independently of what she makes of how things appear to her when forming assents.

How do these two views of cognition relate to our two accounts of intuition? Given our chosen nomenclature, our answer should not be surprising. Assume that intuitions are object-dependent. Then one cannot have an intuition of an object *o* without *o* existing. So whenever one brings one's intuitions under a concept and makes a judgement about *o* to the effect that it is *F*, there will be some object *o* about which one is making a judgement. And since bringing intuitions under concepts is necessary for cognition, there cannot be cases of cognition in which one's cognitions have objective purport without there being some object to which one's cognition is directed. So the Object-Dependent view of intuition entails the Object-Dependent view of cognition.

Conversely, assume that intuitions are not object-dependent. Then one can have an intuition of an object *o* without there being any such *o* to which one is related. If one brings this intuition under a concept, then one has made a judgement that *o* is *F* without there being any *o* about which one has made a judgement. But bringing intuitions under concepts suffices for cognition, so one can cognise that *o* is *F* without there being some *o* at which one's cognition is directed. So the Object-Independent view of intuition is incompatible with the Object-Dependent view of cognition (and a fortiori the knowledge view). If we now assume further that the Object-Dependent and Object-Independent views of cognition partition the logical space, then the Object-Independent view of intuition entails the Object-Independent view of cognition. This last assumption might be controversial. Even so, the two views certainly fit very naturally together. For if one does not think that cognition requires there being actual objects to which one is related, then one is committed to thinking of cognition as extending beyond object-directed representations. And the natural way to do that is to take cognition to be any representation with objective purport, of which object-directed representations form merely a proper subset.

To summarise: one's view on whether or not intuitions are object-dependent has implications for one's views on the nature of cognition. On the view that intuitions are object-dependent, cognition must be

thought of as a form of object-directed representation, whereas the view that intuitions are not object-dependent goes together most naturally with, and plausibly entails, the view that cognitions are representations with mere objective purport.

3.4 Implications

In this section we draw out two implications of adopting one or other view about the nature of intuition which result from their implications for the nature of cognition: first, regarding real possibility (Sect. 3.4.1); second, regarding the structure and purpose of TD (Sect. 3.4.2). These topics are closely connected.

3.4.1 The Modal Condition on Cognition

Kant endorses a link between cognition and what he calls "real" possibility. This is stated clearly in a footnote to the B Preface, which is worth quoting in full:

> To *cognize* an object, it is required that I be able to prove its possibility (whether by the testimony of experience from its actuality or *a priori* through reason). But I can *think* whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself, i.e., as long as my concept is a possible thought, even if I cannot give any assurance whether or not there is a corresponding object somewhere within the sum total of all possibilities. But in order to ascribe objective validity to such a concept (real possibility, for the first sort of possibility was merely logical) something more is required. This "more", however, need not be sought in theoretical sources of cognition; it may also lie in practical ones. (Bxxvi)

More specifically, then, Kant thinks it a necessary condition on cognition that the cognising subject be able to prove the real possibility of the object of her cognition. The opposing views of intuition yield different accounts of how we should understand this claim.

The nature of real possibility is a complex and controversial issue that we cannot hope to cover fully here.[14] It suffices for present purposes to note that, whereas freedom from contradiction is necessary *and sufficient* for logical possibility, real possibility is stricter than this. "Something more is required", Kant says in the above-quoted footnote, later issuing "a warning not to infer immediately from the possibility of the concept (logical possibility) to the possibility of the thing (real possibility)" (A596/B624; cf. V-Met-L2/Pölitz, 28:1016). According to Kant, there are logical possibilities that are not real possibilities, but not conversely. He gives various examples of the logically possible but really impossible: thinking matter, or an extended subject which possesses a mind (BDG 2:85; cf. NTH, 1:355, RGV, 6:128–9); matter that has attractive forces but no repulsive forces (MAN, 4:511); a figure that is enclosed between two straight lines (A220–1/B268); and the being with all realities (A274/B330; cf. V-Met-L2/Pölitz, 28:1025–6). What matters here is not the really impossible and what makes it so. Our concern is with the really possible and how it is that cognition puts us in a position to prove it. In particular, our concern is with theoretical cognition. The last sentence of the B Preface footnote makes it clear that Kant's modal condition is also meant to hold for practical cognition, but let us put that to one side. What is it about the theoretical cognition of an object that distinguishes it from the mere thought of an object and provides the "something more"?

The natural answer, of course, is intuition. Unlike the mere thought of an object, the cognition of an object puts the subject in a position to prove the object's real possibility because cognition, unlike mere thought, involves intuition, and only really possible objects can be intuited. This also gives us an explanation for (I): the role of intuitions is to give objects for cognition because intuitions provide the kind of singular and immediate relation to objects that secures, and thereby puts us in a position to prove, their real possibility. Hence the fact that the opposing views of intuition yield different accounts of this connection.

Recall from Sect. 3.3 that all cases of cognition on the Object-Dependent view are cases of cognition on the Object-Independent view,

[14] See Stang (2016) for the most comprehensive account to date.

but not conversely. Otherwise put, the set of objects that one can cognise on the Object-Independent view is larger than the set of objects that one can cognise on the Object-Dependent view. Given the link between cognition and real possibility, it follows that the set of objects that cognition puts us in a position to prove really possible is larger on the Object-Independent view than it is on the Object-Dependent view. In particular, only the Object-Independent view and not the Object-Dependent view allows that cognition can put us in a position to prove the real possibility of non-actual objects. This initial difference has repercussions.

Take the Object-Independent view first. Why would it follow, as it does on the Object-Independent view, that cognition of non-actual objects puts us in a position to prove their real possibility? The most straightforward explanation would be that this is because real possibility is equivalent to—or at least is already entailed by—the kind of possibility Kant defines in the Postulates:

> Whatever agrees with the formal conditions of experience (in accordance with intuition and concepts) is *possible.* (A218/B266)

Call this *formal* possibility. Cognition through intuition puts us in a position to prove the real possibility of objects by showing that they are formally possible, which is to say compatible with our sensible and intellectual forms of space and time and the categories.

An example will illustrate the proposal. Consider the hallucination of a pink elephant. This is not a case of illusion. One is not seeing a grey elephant under unusual lighting conditions—there is in fact no elephant to which one is related. On the Object-Independent view, this is nevertheless a cognition of a pink elephant. Since being in a position to prove is a factive state—one is in a position to prove p, only if p—the modal condition on cognition entails that this suffices to show that a pink elephant is a really possible object. How can it do this when there is no pink elephant in existence? By showing that a pink elephant is in accordance with the formal conditions on experience, for formal possibility entails real possibility.

By contrast, the Object-Dependent view has it that one cannot have a cognition of an object without the object existing. Thus, it is not com-

mitted to cognition putting us in a position to prove the real possibility of non-actual objects, nor therefore is it committed to formal possibility being sufficient for real possibility. This is already an interesting result, but with a few additional assumptions we can say something stronger. Suppose that the Object-Dependent view takes formal possibility to be sufficient for real possibility. Then the Object-Dependent view has a similar explanation of how cognition puts us in a position to prove real possibility to that offered by the Object-Independent view above. All cognised objects are actual on this view, and presumably actuality entails formal possibility, so if this in turn entails real possibility, it is easy to see how cognition puts us in a position to prove real possibility.

But the supplementation of the Object-Dependent view with the claim that formal possibility is sufficient for real possibility raises questions. First, note that there is something superfluous about the middle step here. It is just as evident that actuality entails real possibility as it is that actuality entails formal possibility. So why go via formal possibility at all? Second, relatedly, there is also something superfluous about cognition here. Various other processes which do not count as cognition by the standards of the Object-Dependent view, such as hallucination and certain kinds of imagination, would also be sufficient for showing formal possibility, and thus real possibility if the entailment in question is allowed to stand. The thought, then, is that Kant seems to think there is something special about the relation between cognition and (our ability to prove) real possibility. The modal condition on cognition is not likewise a condition on any old state, nor even just on those with objective purport.

A defender of the Object-Dependent view who finds these questions pressing may instead opt to deny that formal possibility entails real possibility. What might ground such a denial? Suppose we strengthened the modal condition on cognition to a biconditional, so that cognition is not only sufficient but also *necessary* for us to be able to prove real possibility—it is not just one way but *the* way to get in a position to prove real possibility. Then it would follow, on the Object-Dependent view, that there are objects we can prove formally possible but not really possible, for instance the non-existent objects of hallucinations. And the most straightforward explanation would be that this is because formal

possibility does not suffice for real possibility—just the relationship we were looking for.

Indeed, we could go even further. If we now also assumed that all really possible objects are provably really possible, then it would follow, on the Object-Dependent view, that the only really possible objects are actual objects. For in effect what these assumptions together achieve is a restriction of what is really possible to what is cognisable, and the Object-Dependent view has it that only actual objects can be cognised. And since, as mentioned above, it is presumably the case that all actual objects are really possible, what we have here, on the Object-Dependent view, is a collapse of any (extensional) distinction between the really possible and the actual.

Recall from Sect. 3.1 that none of these potential implications is supposed to act as a *reductio* of the views in question. This holds for the current proposal too. Kant certainly recognises and considers extremely important a notion of possibility on which the possible coincides exactly with the actual (and indeed with the necessary). This notion of possibility is one on which what is possible is constrained not only by the formal conditions of experience but also by the empirical laws of nature along with its prior states (A230–2/B282–4).

In any case, several assumptions have been made and the issues that surround them are complex. For instance, the assumption that all real possibilities are provably really possible looks highly plausible in an idealist context. But here is not the place to conduct an investigation into the nature of Kant's idealism. We focus instead on saying a little more about the other key assumption in the preceding chain of reasoning, namely that cognition is not just one way but the *only* way to prove real possibility.

As a *general* thesis, the claim looks somewhat dubious. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant denies that we can have cognition of God or immortality. He retains this doctrine in the *Critique of Practical Reason* but now he appears to argue that their real possibility is established through our knowledge (*Wissen*) of the moral law and freedom as its condition (KpV, 5:3–5). If so, and if establishing real possibility in this way suffices for proving it in the sense employed in the modal condition on cognition, then there are objects that we can prove really possible though not cognise. Perhaps Kant has some special notion of proof in mind in the modal condition. And even if not, it is not wholly implausible that these

particular "practical" objects, presupposed in the practical use of pure reason, are the only exceptions. But in any case, recall that our primary interest is in theoretical cognition. The claim should be understood as restricted accordingly. The question is this: Is *theoretical* cognition, via intuition, necessary for us to be able to prove the real possibility of *theoretical* objects?

Kant slides easily and often between talking about the real possibility of objects and about the real possibility of concepts. It is evident that he takes the two ways of talking to be inter-translatable. This is an extremely widespread feature of his writings and is to be expected given his logic (see especially Log, 9:91ff.). Moreover, when he does start talking about the real possibility of concepts, Kant tends to equate it with objective validity. One such passage is the B Preface footnote quoted above. This suggests that proving the real possibility of an object and proving the objective validity of a concept are one and the same. In particular, being in a position to prove the real possibility of an object entails being in a position to prove the objective validity of the concept of that object. If this is right, then the prospects of finding evidence for our claim start to look quite good. For it seems to amount to the claim that a connection to intuition through cognition is a requirement of any concept having objective validity, which is a staple Kantian doctrine. Here is a passage from the Phenomena and Noumena chapter, for example:

> For every concept there is requisite, first, the logical form of a concept (of thinking) in general, and then, second, the possibility of giving it an object to which it is to be related. Without this latter it has no sense, and is entirely empty of content …. Now the object cannot be given to a concept otherwise than in intuition …. Without this they have no objective validity at all. (A239/B298; cf. KU, 5:351)

There is, however, a notable qualification in this doctrine. Establishing the objective validity of a concept requires the mere *possibility* of giving it an object in intuition. We were looking for evidence to support (a suitably restricted version of) the claim that cognition is necessary, and not only sufficient, for us to be able to prove real possibility. All we have so far is that the *possibility* of cognition plays such a role.

Nevertheless, it is far from obvious how we ought to analyse this qualification. One option might be to appeal again to the notion of formal possibility. In this case the claim would simply be that formal possibility is necessary for us to be able to prove real possibility, so far something ruled out by neither of our candidate views. But there are several other plausible analyses that would secure the required result that, for this form of the Object-Dependent view, only actual objects can be proved really possible. For instance, we have already seen that Kant countenances a notion of possibility on which nothing is possible that is not actual. Perhaps this is the notion of possibility involved in Kant's talk of possible cognition. And significantly weaker notions are available that would also suffice. In particular, it is quite natural to read "*o* is an object of possible cognition" as saying something like the following: it would be humanly feasible, given how things are with us now in the current state of information, for someone to get themselves into a position to cognise *o*.

The technical details of such an analysis are complex and not at all easy to fill out in the standard contemporary framework of possible worlds,[15] but the basic idea is simple. The objects of possible cognition do not include any old objects that happen to be cognised in some world structurally similar enough to our own. Assuming the Object-Dependent view, they include only the objects that exist in this world—the world where we are. Of course they need not actually be cognised by us now. But they do have to exist (have existed, etc.) if we are *to be able*, in the relevant sense, to cognise them. Possible cognition does not outstrip actual objects (though it is important to be clear that this is *not* to say that it does not outstrip actual cognition). The following well-known passage provides some support for such an interpretation of the notion of possibility at work in Kant's doctrine:

> That there could be inhabitants of the moon, even though no human being has ever perceived them, must of course be admitted; but this means only

[15] Anti-realists have done the most to articulate this notion. See Dummett (1993:45–6), Tennant (2000:829)—the best formal treatment—and Wright (2001:60). The commonly recognised connections between Kant and anti-realism could well provide a good source for more systematic support for the current proposal. For an application of the notion in the Kantian context, see Stephenson (MS).

> that in the possible progress of experience we could encounter them; for everything is actual that stands in one context with a perception in accordance with the laws of the empirical progression. (A493/B521)

Just as the possible progress of experience does not cover objects that do not actually exist, nor does possible cognition more generally.

There is of course much more to be said here. For our present, procedural purposes, it is enough to have set up some conditionals and to have highlighted some salient issues. It is natural for the Object-Independent view to take real possibility as already entailed by formal possibility, perhaps because it thinks formal possibility is just one particular species of real possibility. The Object-Dependent view can likewise take real possibility as already entailed by formal possibility, but only at the cost of making the relation to something actual superfluous in proving the real possibility of objects, and only at the cost of making the connection to intuition in cognition superfluous for proving the real possibility of objects. The alternative is for the Object-Dependent view to deny that real possibility is already entailed by formal possibility. And if it does not want to go further and collapse real possibility into actuality, then it must also deny either that all real possibilities are provably really possible or that only actual objects can be the objects of possible cognition in the relevant Kantian sense. Doing either would involve investigations that would likely take us to the very heart of Kant's Critical system.

3.4.2 The Transcendental Deduction of the Categories

Kant's aim in TD is to show that "without [the categories'] presupposition nothing is possible as *object of experience*" (A93/B126). For "the objective validity of the categories, as *a priori* concepts, rests on the fact that through them alone is experience possible" (A93/B126). As we have seen, showing the objective validity of a concept amounts to showing the real possibility of the objects that fall under that concept. So showing the objective validity of the categories requires showing the real possibility of objects that instantiate the categories.

What is involved in showing the objective validity of the pure concepts of the understanding, and thereby the real possibility of objects that instantiate them? Kant's solution involves the claim that "the manifold

in a given intuition also necessarily stands under categories" (B143), and that "from the way in which the empirical intuition is given in sensibility … its unity can be none other than the one the category prescribes to the manifold of a given intuition" (B144–5). The opposing views of intuition suggest different accounts of how to understand these claims.

Let us start with the Object-Independent view of intuition. On this view, intuitions need not have actual objects in order to give objects for cognition. Since bringing an intuition under a concept suffices for cognition, there are cognitions which do not represent actual objects. And since cognition involves showing the real possibility of objects that instantiate the concepts involved in one's cognition, doing so does not involve showing that there is an actual object which instantiates the concept in question. We suggested above that the best way to make sense of this claim is for the Object-Independent view to hold that real possibility is equivalent to, or at least already entailed by, formal possibility, which is to say compatibility with our sensible and intellectual forms.

The implication for TD is that showing the objective validity of the categories involves showing only that the categories accord with the formal conditions of intuition. Thus the claims that "the manifold in a given intuition also necessarily stands under categories" and that "from the way in which the empirical intuition is given in sensibility … its unity can be none other than the one the category prescribes to the manifold of a given intuition" are to be understood as claims about states which seem to present us with objects—*objective* representations in the sense, articulated in Sect. 3.3, of representations with objective *purport*. It is a condition on seeming to be presented with an object that such an object be presented as falling under the pure concepts. If showing that "the manifold in a given intuition also necessarily stands under the categories" is sufficient to show that "without [the categories'] presupposition nothing is possible as object of experience", then TD is completed when we see that all representations which purport to represent objects necessarily present objects as falling under the categories.

It is compatible with this conclusion that there are no objects which *actually* fall under the categories—or, at least, we need a further step to ensure that this is not so. So the Object-Independent view is committed to thinking that Kant's project in TD, as characterised above, can be secured without

showing that there are objects which actually fall under the categories. And if the theorist rejects the above characterisation of Kant's project in TD, then they are at least committed to any further conclusion requiring extra work.

Consider next the Object-Dependent view. On this view, intuitions depend for their existence on the presence of the objects. Since the application of concepts to intuition is sufficient for cognition, cognitions are object-directed representations: representations which concern an actual object or objects. We noted above two options for the Object-Dependent view. The first combines the view with the claim that formal possibility is sufficient to prove real possibility. The second combines the view with the claim that formal possibility is insufficient to prove real possibility. We suggested that the first commitment threatens to make the connection to actuality superfluous in the case in which intuition of an object proves its real possibility. And we suggested that the second commitment can be supported by those who hold that cognition is not only sufficient for proving the real possibility of objects but, in the theoretical sphere, also necessary. These are quite different approaches and we treat them separately.

Consider the first form of the Object-Dependent view. This is the combination of the views that intuitions depend for their existence on the presence of their objects and that formal possibility suffices for real possibility. On the face of it, this view incurs no more commitments than the Object-Independent view, since it allows that there are ways to prove the real possibility of objects which do not require being related to something actual in intuition. But if the view is to take account of Kant's claim that TD shows "from the way in which the empirical intuition is given in sensibility that its unity can be none other than the one the category prescribes to the manifold of a given intuition", it must hold that showing the objective validity of the categories requires showing that all intuitions are presented as falling under the categories. And since intuitions depend for their existence on the presence of their objects, this amounts to the claim that TD, as characterised above, is secured when it is shown that there are actual objects to which we are related and which are presented to us as instantiating the categories. This is stronger than the reading given by the Object-Independent theorist, though it does not entail that there are objects which actually fall under the categories.

What about the second form of the Object-Dependent view? This is the combination of the Object-Dependent view with the claim that formal possibility is insufficient to prove real possibility. We noted above that this supplementation looks plausible if one holds that cognition is both sufficient and necessary for proving the real possibility of objects, which is to say if one holds that the modal condition on cognition is not intended simply as a one-way condition but also to draw attention to some very special connection between cognition via intuition and proofs of real possibility.[16] Let showing the objective validity of a concept be equivalent to showing the real possibility that an object falls under that concept. Let cognition be necessary to prove the real possibility of an object falling under a concept. And let cognitions be representations which concern only actual objects. Then showing the objective validity of a concept requires showing that there are actual objects to which one can be related which instantiate the concept. Thus showing the objective validity of the categories involves showing that there are objects which instantiate the categories. The Object-Dependent view, when supplemented with the claim that cognition is necessary for proving real possibility, takes Kant's project in TD to require showing that there are actual objects which instantiate the categories.

Actually, this is too quick. For although the Object-Dependent view is committed to intuitions depending for their existence on the presence of their objects, and thus to all cognitions picking out some actual object and predicating a property of it, it is not committed to any such predication being true. So it follows only that TD is secured when it is shown that there are actual objects to which we are related and which are presented to us as instantiating the categories, as on the first form of the Object-Dependent view. This is weaker than the claim that we are related to actual objects which do instantiate the categories. And it is stronger than the claim that all objective representations which purport to represent objects necessarily present objects as falling under the categories since this claim is compatible with there being no actual objects to which we are related.

[16] Remember that our focus is on theoretical cognition; see above.

Can the Object-Dependent view be supplemented so as to entail the stronger conclusion? Well, any form of the Object-Dependent view which entails the existence of both the object of the intuition and its properties will entail the stronger conclusion. Those views which take *Erkenntnis* to be a form of knowledge are such. But note also that the form of the Object-Dependent view we are considering is one which takes cognition to be necessary for proving the real possibility of objects. And we suggested above that this view draws support from Kant's claim that establishing the objective validity of a concept requires the possibility of giving it an object in intuition—but only if the notion of possibility at play here is one on which possible cognition does not outstrip what is actual. If cognition requires that the attributes predicated of objects be true at least some of the time, then we do indeed have the result that the objective validity of the categories is shown only if we are (sometimes) related to actual objects which do instantiate the categories.[17]

This gives us three ways of understanding TD's aim of showing the objective validity of the categories. According to the Object-Independent view, this task is secured when we are shown that all objective representations which purport to represent objects necessarily present objects as falling under the categories. According to the first version of the Object-Dependent view, the task is secured when we are shown that there are actual objects to which we are related and which are presented to us as instantiating the categories. And according to the second version of the Object-Dependent view, the task is secured when we are shown that we are sometimes related to actual objects which do instantiate the categories. Only the last of these claims is incompatible with there being no actual objects which instantiate the categories.

The three readings have different implications for how we should understand TD's relation to "Hume's Problem" (Prol, 4:259–61) and its place and role in the *Critique* as a whole, in particular its relation to the Refutation of Idealism. We shall just say something brief about the first. On one reading of Hume's Problem, a satisfactory response to Humean scepticism involves showing not just that we are able to apply pure

[17] See Beck (1978) and Strawson (1966) for versions of this move. One source of support for the antecedent are Kant's claims about the dependency of inner intuitions on outer intuitions, e.g. at Bxli; see McLear (forthcoming b).

concepts to the objects given to us in intuition, but that the categories really do so apply.[18] Only the second form of the Object-Dependent view has TD, as characterised above, provide such a response. On another reading, Hume's Problem is already solved when it has been shown that we are able to apply the pure concepts to the objects given to us in intuition. That they may not be so applicable is the worry raised by Lambert and Herz in response to the "Inaugural Dissertation" and one can read TD as attempting to explain how a priori representations can apply to external things at all.[19] The Object-Independent view and the first form of the Object-Dependent view have TD, as characterised above, provide responses to this problem. This does not preclude these views from also taking Kant to want to show that the categories really do apply to the objects given to us in intuition, for they may hold that answering this version of Hume's problem requires a further step in a differently characterised TD, or else that we must draw on material beyond that of TD. Nevertheless, the different views on the nature of intuition imply differing interpretations of the structure of TD and its relation to Humean scepticism.

3.5 Conclusion

One important issue which divides accounts of Kantian intuition is the question of whether intuitions depend for their existence on the existence of their objects. We have suggested in this chapter that one's stance on this question will determine a stance on the nature of Kantian cognition. And one's stance on the nature of Kantian cognition will likewise shape a stance on the nature of real possibility, its relation to formal possibility and actuality, and an account of the purpose and structure of TD. It is on this ground, we suggest, that debates about the nature of Kantian intuition are to be decided.[20]

---

[18] See Gomes (2010, 2014) and Van Cleve (1999) for readings of TD in this vein.

[19] See Lambert's letter to Kant of 13 October 1770, in Br, 10:105, and Herz's *Observations on Speculative Philosophy*, in Watkins (2009:299). See Laywine (2001) for an account of the role Lambert's letter plays in Kant's intellectual development.

[20] For comments on earlier drafts, our thanks to Thomas Land, Colin McLear, Dennis Schulting, Clinton Tolley, an anonymous referee and especially to Daniel Sumner Smyth. Andrew Stephenson gratefully acknowledges the support of the Leverhulme Trust.