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Articles

Why Kant is a Weak Conceptualist

Kodėl Kantas yra silpnasis konceptualistas

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Abstract: The question whether Kant is a conceptualist has attracted significant attention of Kant scholars in recent decades. I present all three dominant positions in the debate (strong conceptualism, weak conceptualism, nonconceptualism) and argue that strong conceptualism and nonconceptualism are less plausible interpretations of Kant's philosophy. I argue that the first cannot explain Kant's commitments related to the incongruents, animals, and infants. The second one, meanwhile, cannot explain Kant's argument on causation against Hume. At the end of the paper, I try to show that the key to a plausible and convincing interpretation of Kant as a weak conceptualist is the distinction between categories and empirical concepts.

Keywords: Kant, Weak conceptualism, Non-conceptualism, Categories, Empirical concepts.

Summary: Santrauka. Klausimas, ar Kantas yra konceptualistas, yra vienas gausiausiai nagrinėtų Kanto studijų klausimų pastaraisiais dešimtmečiais. Aš pristatau tris šiuose debatuose dominuojančias pozicijas (stiprųjį konceptualizmą, silpnąjį konceptualizmą ir antikonceptualizmą) ir teigiu, kad stiprusis konceptualizmas ir antikonceptualizmas yra mažiau pagrįstos Kanto filosofijos interpretacijos. Teigiu, kad pirmasis negali paaiškinti Kanto įsipareigojimų, susijusių su nekongruentiškais vaizdiniais bei gyvūnais ir kūdikiais, o antrasis – Kanto polemikos prieš Hume'ą. Straipsnio pabaigoje bandau parodyti, kad raktas į įtikinamą Kanto kaip silpnojo konceptualisto interpretaciją yra perskyra tarp kategorijų ir empirinių sąvokų.

Keywords: Kantas, Stiprusis konceptualizmas, Antikonceptualizmas, Silpnasis konceptualizmas, Kategorijos, Empirinės sąvokos.

The debate on conceptualism in the analytical philosophy prompted Kant scholars to ask whether Kant was a conceptualist in regard to experience. To explore this question, I will first present preliminary definitions of the main positions in the debate: strong conceptualism, weak conceptualism, and nonconceptualism. Then, I will reconstruct these positions along the most common arguments they use, rather than relying on close reading of any single text. Finally, my aim is to show that weak conceptualist interpretation of Kant is preferable to the other two. At the end of the paper, I argue that the key to a plausible and convincing interpretation of Kant as a weak conceptualist is the distinction between categories and empirical concepts.

Preliminary Definitions

In the debate analyzed in this paper, conceptualism is usually defined as the claim that any perceptual experience is possible only if conceptual capacities are at work in that experience. Those who see Kant as a strong conceptualist, then, argue that, for Kant, the conceptual apparatus (first and foremost, categories) determines all content of experience (McDowell 1994; Land 2011; Ginsborg 2008). One possible motivation for this position is the fact that, in Kant, the only possible alternative source of determination is sensation. For a strong conceptualist, to claim that experience is determined by sensation would mean claiming that some mysterious and inexpressible givens, later somehow transformed into judgments expressed in language, determine the experience. At the beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant uses the distinction between form, which gives unity to the manifold in the intuition, and matter, which is given by the sensation (Kant 1998: 155-6). As concrete finite subjects, we never confront pure matter of experience – all we ever come into contact with is always given to us in form. Those who posit Kant as a strong conceptualist claim exactly this, as they state that it is necessary to have the concept "tree" in order to experience concrete trees. For the strong conceptualist, the limits of my concepts are the limits of my world. Weak conceptualist makes a weaker claim. This interpretation claims that for Kant concepts always play a role in experience but do not necessarily define the whole perceptual content. For example, Luca Forgione claims, that "contrasted to McDowell's strong conceptualism here the intuition makes a notionally separable representational contribution to cognition" (Forgione 2015: 58) and "in contrast to Allais's non-conceptualism, this epistemic contribution cannot be realized without at least *the concept of the transcendental object*" (ibid).

It is easiest and best to define nonconceptualism as the opposite of conceptualist thesis, that for Kant conceptual apparatus always constitutes perceptual content of experience[1]. Non-conceptualist interpreters of Kant claim that perceptual experience is not determined by the subject's conceptual capacities and that there is an essentially nonconceptual (with regard to form or content)

perceptual experience (Hanna 2008; 2011; 2016; Grüne 2011; Allais 2009). According to this interpretation, no conceptual capacities are required to intuit a tree – conceptual capacities are only added later, when meaningful judgments are formed. Viewing Kant from this position, it is possible to intuit a tree without conceptual capacities, although they are still needed to experience it.

One can also summarize the debate as one between the autonomy of the senses (non-conceptualism) versus their dependency on conceptual apparatus (strong conceptualism), with weak conceptualism taking the middle position.

What Does the Text Say?

The debate whether Kant is a conceptualist is especially problematic because certain fragments of Kant's writings seem to support each of the three interpretations.

For example, Kant's dictum at the beginning of *the first Critique* states that "objects are therefore given to us by means of sensibility and it alone affords us intuitions; but they are thought through the understanding" (Kant 1998: 155). Whichever way one chooses to interpret this "givenness", it seems quite certain that Kant is clear on distinguishing two stems of cognition and emphasizing the autonomy of sensibility. Moreover, Kant claims that "objects can indeed appear to us without necessarily having to be related to functions of the understanding" (Kant 1998: 222). Autonomy and independence of sensibility are also implied in Kant's comments in "Transcendental logic", where he argues that "appearances would nonetheless offer objects to our intuition, for intuition by no means requires the functions of thinking" (Kant 1998: 223). However, Kant's notions of the synthesis and imagination, "deduction of pure concepts of understanding", and especially the so-called B-deduction of the second edition, seem to point to the opposite direction. We even find him claiming explicitly that all sensible content is determined by categories: "Consequently all synthesis, through which even perception itself becomes possible, stands under the categories, and since experience is cognition though connected perceptions, the categories are conditions of the possibility of experience and are thus also valid a priori of all objects of experience" (Kant 1998: 262). All the seemingly contradictory accounts provided above come from *the first Critique* alone. The same fundamental ambiguity is also found in his pre-critical texts and in the *Critique of Judgment*. It appears that Kant has not resolved this tension even by his late and unfinished *Selbstzetsungslehre*. This may suggest that Kant himself does not recognize the problem, as no reflection on it appears in the entire Kantian oeuvre.

This means that there is enough textual material to ground all three interpretations – but also that consulting textual evidence alone is not enough. The way to tackle this debate, then, is to find a way to interpret the central terms of Kantian philosophy – intuition,

appearing, experience and concepts – in a coherent way while being faithful to Kant's thought.

Nonconceptual Content of Experience: Nonconceptualists' Arguments

Nonconceptualist interpreters stress the separation of "the two stems of cognition". In defending their interpretation, they mostly rely on the "Transcendental aesthetics" part of *the first Critique*. The nonconceptualist reading of Kant begins with establishing that intuition or sensibility is the first, independent, and self-sufficient basis of human cognition. As one of the leading nonconceptualist interpreters, Hanna emphasizes, "first, Kant says explicitly in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that intuitions of outer sense or inner sense, which pick out appearances—the undetermined objects of empirical intuitions (KrV: A20/B34)—are possible for us independently of the functions of our understanding, that is, independently of our concepts" (Hanna 2016: 108). A certain picture emerges out of such emphasis on "Transcendental aesthetics". Nonconceptualists tend to present Kant as defending "layer-cake theory of mind". Though they may not be keen to embrace this label, it is not unfair to their position. According to the "layer-cake theorist" Kant, first, we get intuitions through sensibility, which are later transformed by transcendental imagination according to the categories to constitute experience. From this, it follows that Kant can actually be read as a common-sense-respecting naturalist. Hanna puts this point clearly:

> According to conceptualism, human minds are basically intellectual in character, having nothinginherently to do with the embodied, sense-perceiving, affective, desiring, animal sideof human nature. By contrast, according to (essentialist content) nonconceptualism, humanminds are basically bound up with the embodied, sense-perceiving, affective, desiring, animalside of human nature, and are not basically intellectual in character. (Hanna 2016: 101-102)

Since Hanna takes the second description to be true about the world in general, for him, "Kant's (essentialist content) nonconceptualism is foundational for any philosophically defensible version of his transcendental idealism" (Hanna 2016: 104). While Hanna provides a relatively original extrinsic motivation for the nonconceptualist reading of Kant, many find nonconceptualism inherent to his philosophy simply because Kant needs to follow the nonconceptualist thesis so not to fall back into full-blown idealism. If even intuition is always already conceptual, what remains of Kant's empiricist side? Nonconceptualists agree with van Mazijk, who claims that "Kant needs intuition to be non-conceptual to retain the critical function of the Critique" (van Mazijk 2014: 191).

Hands, Kids and Animals: Kant's Nonconceptualist Commitments

Kant's explicit commitments, when interpreted as nonconceptualist, play a great role in nonconceptualist arguments. The two most discussed examples in literature are related to animals and infants, and incongruents. My aim is to show that these commitments cannot be accounted for by interpretations of Kant as a strong conceptualist, although they could be by weak conceptualist interpretations. To do so, I will discuss both examples in turn.

The nonconceptualist interpreter has to find Kant explicitly committing to the thesis that it is possible to intuit or perceive without the conceptual capacities being at work. According to Hanna, one such example is Kant's remarks on animals and infants. To Hanna, "Kant explicitly claims in some pre-Critical writings and also Critical writings alike that at least some non-human animals (e.g. oxen) and some non-rational human animals (e.g. ordinary human infants) are capable of sense perception and thus capable of inner and outer sensory intuition, but do not possess conceptual capacities" (Hanna 2016: 108). One could argue that this does not prove anything because intuition in animal/infant case is qualitatively different to that of adult humans. Thus, Kant simply means something completely different by "intuitions", "perceptions", and "representation", when he admits that animals and infants can have them. However, such a way out for a strong conceptualist is denied by Kant himself; as he writes in the "Critique of power of Judgement",

> Yet from the comparison of the similar mode of operation in animals (the ground for which wecannot immediately perceive) to that of humans (of which we are immediately aware) we canquite properly infer in accordance with the analogy that animals also act in accordance withrepresentations [Vorstellungen] (and are not, as Descartes would have it, machines), and thatin spite of their specific difference, they are still of the same genus as human beings (as livingbeings). (Kant 2000: 328)

It is hard to see how this strong conceptualist interpretation can explain how infants and oxen can have perceptual experience in Kant's system – to strong conceptualists this is impossible without concepts. A possible way out is to say that infants at least have a disposition to learn concepts and as such, have the concepts *potentially*; still, this does not apply to oxen. Conceptualists might reply that although oxen do not have categories or concepts and cannot experience the world as we – the concept bearers – do, they simply have a different experience of the world. But as Hannah astutely observes, some of Kant's claims are not compatible with such an interpretation. According to Kant, representations we and animals or infants have are "of the same genus". To this day, I have not found any replies by Kant's strong conceptualist interpreters on how to account for this commitment.

However, even if we do not insist on the remark in *the third Critique,* the problem remains. Having in mind the criteria conceptualists have for perceptual experience, it seems that a "different perception of the animal" condemns the animal to the kingdom of determinism. In other words, to claim that animals and infants cannot have perceptions means to localize them in a

deterministic nature rather than in the kingdom of ends. It would be hard to defend such a position today. Therefore, (1) if Kant claims that animals and infants can have perceptual experience, and (2) if it can be inferred that they experience the world in similar ways to us, and (3) if this view seems true about the state of affairs in the world (*de re*), then Kant's claims used by Hanna should be incorporated into any good interpretation of Kant. By now, it seems that only anti-conceptualist and weak-conceptualist interpretations of Kant could do that[2].

Another famous problem nonconceptualists rely on is Kant's notion of incongruents. Incongruents are objects which share all conceptual predicates but still differ in regards to each other. Examples of them are left and right hands, left and right ears, and so on. In his recent paper, Hanna puts an argument from incongruents in the following way:

> P1: Incongruent counterparts, like our right and left hands, by hypothesis, are such that theypossess all their conceptually representable qualities in common, yet they still are essentiallydifferent because they are incongruent.
>
> P2: This incongruence and the essential difference between our right and left hands is immediatelyand veridically represented by human cognizers, but only by means of our empiricalintuition of real objects in physical space and also our pure sensory intuition of the structure ofspace, as necessarily conforming to the form of our outer sensibility or intuition.
>
> C: Therefore, our pure or non-empirical (hence a priori) representation of space is necessarilyunderdetermined by concepts". (Hanna 2016: 108)

Thus, at least one class of objects – incongruents – is indiscernible by predicates represented by concepts. However, according to Kant, we have no problems in discerning them (in this case, our right and left hands) in our experience. Kant notes this in *Prolegomena*: "Now there are no inner differences here that any understanding could merely think; and yet the differences are inner as far as the senses teach" (Kant 2004: 37). This shows that Kant does not think that the entire scope of our experience is determined solely by the conceptual apparatus we have. Or, to put it differently, at least in some cases (like in the case of left and right hands) non-conceptual content defines the content of experience. *Ergo*, strong conceptualist interpretations of Kant seem wrong. Can a strong conceptualist interpretation explain how two phenomena with identical predicates expressed in concepts could be discerned? It is possible that some *ad hoc* decision could be found. However, for a strong conceptualist, it seems natural to claim that there can be no two phenomena sharing predicates because they would be one and the same object. But Hanna reminds us that Kant explicitly rejects this when he gives a list of works in which Kant employs the argument from incongruents (Hanna 2019: 109). These include both pre-critical and critical works. The works are "On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World" (known as "Inaugural dissertation") (1770), "Prolegomena" (1783) [*sic*], "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself

in Thinking?" (1786). Once again, according to Hanna, this shows, that for Kant "our pure or nonempirical representation of space picks out egocentrically centered, orientable, asymmetric structural topological *properties* of space *that cannot be represented by the understanding and concepts*" (Hanna, 2016: 108). Again, to my knowledge, the strong conceptualist interpreters of Kant have not given any answers to this, while the weak conceptualist interpreters of Kant, like van Mazijk, think that this argument is valid but compatible with the weak conceptualism (van Mazijk 2014: 172-177).

An attentive reader has probably already noted that Kant's argument from incongruents is directed against Leibniz and the Wollfian school. In this case, it is not important if Kant's argument is true and spatial predicates cannot be translated into conceptual ones, as it they often are in the contemporary debate on the identity of indiscernibles. What is important is that Kant's non-conceptualist commitments are necessary for his debate with Leibniz and the Wollfian school. The same idea is explicitly directed against Leibniz in "On The Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection". There Kant writes,

> If an object is presented to us several times, but always with same inner determinations (qualitaset quantitas), then it is always exactly the same if it counts as an object of pure understanding,not many but only one thing (numerica ideentitas); but if it is appearance, then the issueis not the comparison of concepts, but rather, however identical everything may be in regardto that, the difference of the places of these appearances at the same time is still an adequateground for the numerical difference of the object (of the senses) itself. (Kant 1998: 368)

Kant's argument seems to be pretty simple: if we think about aforementioned objects with regard to our understanding, then two objects with the same properties *is* one object. However, if we talk about objects in experience, it is position in time and space that distinguishes these objects with regard to one another. Again, could this be explained by a strong conceptualist interpretation, one taking into account conceptual content? Would not Kant, as a strong conceptualist, be committing the same exact crime, of which he accuses Leibniz? Kant writes: "Lacking such a transcendental topic, and thus deceived by amphiboly of the concepts of reflection, the famous Leibniz ... believed himself able to cognize the inner constitution of things by comparing all objects only with understanding and the abstract formal concepts of it is thinking" (Kant 1998: 371-2). *Summa summarum*, nonconceptualist commitments Kant takes and their role in his polemic with Leibniz puts the soundness of a strong conceptualist interpretation of Kant in strong doubt.

The Trouble with Causation

In spite of its many virtues, the nonconceptualist interpretation of Kant also exhibits critical flaws. The main one concerns Kant's

argument on causation. He presented this argument as central to *the Critique of Pure Reason* and is seen as such in most of analytic Kant scholarship. The problem, however, is that the nonconceptualist interpretation seems at odds with this argument. I will follow the summary of Kant's argument as presented by Ginsborg (2008). Ginsborg argues that (1) in transcendental deduction, Kant wants to prove the universal and necessary validity of causation, that (2) Hume claims we cannot apply causation to perceived things because we do not have any experience of necessary relation, and that (3) "Kant's strategy in response, again very crudely, is to claim that even though we have no sensory impression corresponding to the concept of causality, causality as necessary connection nonetheless figures in the content of perception" (Ginsborg 2008: 70). This is true for Kant because all sense data are only given to us through the synthesis of perception, which works according to the rules of understanding. One of these rules is causation. As (4) causation must be universal and necessary, (5) "only by thus explaining 'the a priori validity of the category in regard to all objects of our senses' will the aim of the deduction be fully attained" (Ginsborg 2008: 69). If this is the case, there could be no nonconceptual experience, because to this experience, the law of causation would not apply, and causation would lack universal validity. Or, put differently, all objects of experience have to be determined by categories (at least to some extent), because causation (which is a category) is universal.

Nonconceptualist interpreters propose two ways of getting out of this problem; as I argue below, both of them ultimately fail. Stefanie Grüne tries to show that Kant's argument on causation does not necessarily imply that nonconceptualism is a wrong interpretation of Kant. According to her, "that we can have experiences of objects without possessing any of the concepts (if there are any) that characterize the experience's content clearly does not imply that the object of the experience does not belong to the extension of any concepts" (Grüne 2008: 472). In other words, Grüne suggests us to have our cake and eat it too. We can be nonconceptualists and claim that our conceptual apparatus does not determine the perceptual content – but we can also be conceptualists and claim that the category of causation is applied to all objects of experience at the same time. The difference would be that of one's knowledge: although it is given to me as nonconceptual, it actually falls under the extension of a category. This argument shows how psychologized Kant is in contemporary discussions. Grüne's argument is invalid because for Kant, transcendental consciousness constitutes all experience of the empirical consciousness, regardless of the perspective of the empirical consciousness. If we have the concept of causality at the transcendental level, as Kant thinks we do, our knowledge of it is of absolutely no importance. We do not have to consciously apply the idea of causation in the constitution of perceptual experience, everything happens anonymously and by necessity. Braver puts this point beautifully when he states that "the ordering of experience is an autonomic process like regulating one's heart rate that constantly

operates in the background rather than an attitude consciously taken on" (Braver, 2007: 35). But even if Grüne were right, it would be hard to imagine what the object not synthesized according to the categories would look like, given that it could be neither one, nor real, nor caused, nor self-subsistent (as all these are categories). As Kant famously puts it, such an object would be "less than a dream" (Kant 1998: 235).

Hanna offers another way out: in his view of Kant, concepts are only necessary for the experience which grounds valid judgments (Hanna 2005: 257)[3]. As Hanna sees it, the object of *the first Critique* is the conditions of the possibility of knowledge. This allegedly allows the claim that our everyday perception, which does not aim at grounding objective knowledge, is outside of the scope of *the first Critique* itself. Hence, Hanna tries to convince the reader that Kant simply does not talk about everyday sense experience at all (ibid). If that is true, it may just be that the everyday sense experience, which does not have to be a part of our scientific endeavor, does not necessarily have to be determined by our conceptual apparatus. And yet there are a few reasons to drop this argument. First of all, as van Mazijk reminds us, nowhere does Kant claim "that there is a special sort of receptive sense making that could do without synthesis" (van Mazijk 2014: 192). Secondly, Hanna's distinction between everyday sense experience and an epistemically oriented one means that categories do not apply to the entire spectrum of possible experience. This would mean that we could have experience of natural processes to which the category of causation would not apply. Such a conclusion is irreconcilable with Kantian commitments described above; hence it should be dropped. In other words, although Kant is first and foremost in epistemic subject, his argument requires the epistemic conditions to hold in all experience. Therefore, the distinction between epistemic and nonepistemic life of the subject in regard to perception cannot be made.

At the end of the presentation of the nonconceptualist interpretation of Kant, we areleft in a strange situation. On the one hand, nonconceptualist interpretations cannot explainKant's arguments against Hume, while conceptualism cannot explain Kant's anti-Leibnizianstance. On the other, both are necessary for the first Critique to work. Thus, it appearsthat both interpretations can explain only a part of the Critique of Pure Reason and areone-sided. Therefore, if a weak conceptualist interpretation could accommodate bothmoments in a coherent way, it would be preferable to the other two. Consequently, I hopethe reader will agree that weak conceptualism is the only game in town.[4] What remains tobe done, then, is to discuss how the weak conceptualist reading of Kant can maintain thespecificity of his transcendental philosophy. This is the task of the last part of the paper.

Categories and the Weak Conceptualism

The interpreter who argues that Kant is a weak conceptualist has to provide an interpretation, according to which concepts always play a role in the experience but do not necessarily define it. There have been various attempts to achieve this. Van Mazijk, for example, uses a distinction between the general and the real content of experience from Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (Mazijk 2014: 192-194). The general content of experience is the "what" that is given in experience, while the real content is "how" this "what" is given. According to this distinction, one can have an intuition of one and the same table (general content), but, depending on their position in space, light conditions, and so on, the table will be given in different ways, or in *husserlese*, in different profiles. According to Van Mazijk, Kant is a conceptualist regarding the general content and a nonconceptualist regarding the real one. Although I agree with Van Mazijk in general, I doubt that an interpretation based on the distinction that Kant never made is sufficient to convince the opposing camps – indeed, the use of this distinction seems quite arbitrary. Forgione avoids this problem by grounding his interpretation of Kant in the "theory of a transcendental object" (Forgione 2015). His weak conceptualist interpretation agrees that for Kant, everything we experience is objects (in the widest sense of the term), and that this feature of our experience, namely, that all phenomena are objects, is constituted by the categories of understanding. Therefore, in all experience, categories are at work. Still, in some cases this categorical determination does not go beyond a bare minimum of determining the experienced thing as an object. Believing that Kant grounds experience in indexicals, Forgione argues that phenomena can be determined simply as "this" or "that". However, *contra* Kripke, Forgione maintains that Kant thinks of indexicals as a conceptual relation: "The concept of the transcendental object is, therefore, a pointer, although conceptual rather than relational by definition" (Forgione 2015: 55). I think this option is preferable to Van Mazijks, as Forgione employs Kant's own conceptual tool. However, the theory of a transcendental object seems to be of rather secondary importance when compared to A and B deductions strong conceptualist analyze, or the transcendental aesthetics on which nonconceptualists rely.

Therefore, I propose that the ground for a well-argued and convincing weak conceptualist interpretation of Kant is rather the distinction between categories and empirical concepts (which is simply Kant's technical name for words). The basic claim here is that categories simply do not denote language processes. Although I will only provide an outline of this distinction in this paper, I think it will be sufficient for the reader to understand the role it plays in this debate. To ground the weak conceptualist reading of Kant I offer in this paper, below I compare categories and empirical concepts along their role as rules. It is important to keep in mind that I do not investigate whether this Kantian distinction is philosophically defendable *per se* (and probably it is not).

1. In the second edition of *the first Critique*, Kant is clear on the fact that he draws categories directly from the table of judgements: "The same function that gives unity to the different representations in a judgement also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations in an intuition, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of understanding" (Kant 1998: 211). Following Kant, if understanding is responsible for both judgements and categories, then for every type of judgement there has to be a corresponding category. I do not consider this a convincing argument. As Hegel reminds us again and again, Kant simply borrows categories and judgements from logic textbooks and does not bother to prove why the specific number of categories he uses – or any concrete number for that matter – should exhaust the categorical space[5]. It is important to notice that Kant defines categories as functions of unity,[6] or (and that is the same) a synthesis of the manifold in intuition (ibid). However, Kant does not have a whole lot to say about empirical concepts. It is a well-known fact that Kant did not develop any detailed philosophy of language[7]. We can infer that Kant, much as late Wittgenstein, thought that the primary and the most important bit of language is a sentence (judgement), and not a word. This view is attributed to Kant by Robert Brandom, when he claims that "Kant takes the whole judgment to be the conceptually and explanatorily basic unit at once of meaning, cognition, awareness, and experience" (Brandom, 2009: 33).

2. Kant presents categories as the most basic rules according to which experience (in the Kantian sense) must be ordered (Kant 1998: 231-232). Empirical concepts are also rules we use to sort our experiences. For example, when we call the appearance a table, we relate it to countless other objects (other tables) and differentiate it from even more appearances (not tables). The word "table" then becomes a rule on how to relate and differentiate phenomena. In this way, Kant avoids the problems characteristic to the early modern philosophy related with the likeness of ideas and things (consider Berkeley's critique of Locke). If the idea of "red" denotes the color red, is it itself red, and if not, on what ground does it denote red? In the model of concepts-as-rules, this problem does not arise. The rules of chess do not have to look like a chessboard or Gary Kasparov.

3. If both categories and empirical concepts are rules, then what distinguishes them? I frame the main difference as follows: the categories, for example, unity, reality or necessity, do not provide the identity conditions for objects. As such, they do not provide us with rules for differentiating objects either. Or, to put it in other words, conditions of the possibility of knowledge do not themselves provide any knowledge whatsoever. If you propose that an object is one, possible, or real, you do not know anything about this particular object, because all objects of experience share these predicates. In his book *Goodbye, Kant!*, Maurizio Ferraris reminds us that this is the exact meaning of the word "transcendental":

> Perhaps for us, the word "transcendental" seems like a Kantian term of art, a neologism thatis now a bit long in the tooth, dating as it does to the eighteenth century. But in point of fact,the tooth is a fossil: the medieval Schoolmen, building on Boethius (ca. 480-526), already hadtheir transcendental or, rather, their transcendentals. In their account of logic, the transcendentalsare the features of objects that are so general as to be broader in scope than the categoriesthemselves, because they apply to all objects whatsoever. Unlike the categories, they do notclassify anything whatsoever because they list the properties of any being whatsoever. (Ferraris2013: 25)

Without a doubt, Kant drops such transcendentals as "Good". He also thinks of them as structures of the transcendental subject rather than being itself, but for Kant, as in medieval scholasticism, they still "do not classify anything". However, the case is different with empirical concepts: to say that the table is brown is to know something about the world. Yet another way to put it is this: categories provide the conditions of possibility of "what-it-is", while empirical concepts supply the descriptions of "what-it-is." In this way, categories are conditions of the possibility of language but do not completely determine it.

Conclusions

Having shown the difference between the categories and the empirical concepts, I can finally present how the distinction between them can ground the interpretation of Kant as a weak conceptualist. First, I acknowledge that a strong conceptualist is right in that categories are at work in all and every experience. They constitute the unity and reality of appearance, their succession in time (causality), and so on. However, I also agree with Hanna that neither categories nor empirical concepts alone determine the content of experience Kant's sense. For Kant, a person can easily decide whether he sees the right or the left hand because of the nonconceptual content of experience. However, the fact that instead of the stream of content from my five senses (the Kantian "manifold of intuition") I see a unified object, is due to the work of categories. What is more important still is that the distinction between categories and empirical concepts both shows how Kant thinks he has answered Hume and makes his critique of Leibnizian metaphysics intelligible. Arguing against the former, Kant shows that every phenomenon is organized according to the categories (thus providing the conditions of possibility of "what-it-is"), therefore, causality is necessary. Arguing against the latter, he maintains that nonconceptual content helps discern phenomena with otherwise identical conceptual content (providing concrete determinations of what a thing is). This also helps to explain how infants and animals can experience the world – although they do not possess language, this does not mean that infants and animals do not possess categories, as these are not identical with language.

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Notes

1 Like in many other debates between two alternatives, positions have a somewhat parasitical relationship. They look the best when they expose the weaknesses and absurdities of the other position.

2 For more on Kant and animal consciousness see Mclear (2011).

3 Hanna uses the word "experience" in a broader sense than Kant. For Kant, the experience is always objective and epistemically oriented.

4 Of course, I presuppose that Kant's philosophy is consistent.

5 In the customary treatment of logic, a variety of classifications and species of concepts are adduced. It immediately strikes one as inconsequential that the species are introduced in this way: 'There are, as regards quality, quantity, etc., the following concepts.' The 'there are' conveys no other justification than that we find the named species and that they show up in experience. What we have in this manner is an empirical logic – an odd science indeed, an irrational cognition of the rational. In this the logic sets a very bad precedent for compliance to its own teaching; it allows itself to do the opposite of what it prescribes as a rule, namely, that concepts should be derived, and scientific propositions (therefore also the proposition: 'There are such and such species of concepts') demonstrated. – In this context, the Kantian philosophy incurs a further inconsequence by borrowing the categories for the transcendental logic, as so-called root concepts, from the subjective logic where they were assumed empirically.37 Since the Kantian philosophy admits the latter fact, it is hard to see why transcendental logic resorts to borrowing from such a science rather than directly helping itself from experience" (Hegel 2010: 541).

6 Kant uses the word *Einheit*, which translates directly into oneness, not unity.

7 For more on this see Forster (2012).