

# Two Charges of Intellectualism against Kant

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## Abstract

The contemporary discussion of non-conceptual content inaugurated by Gareth Evans and John McDowell has generated a range of differing views as to Kant's position on the issues raised. I argue that for Kant perception is prior to thought and that it is as being prior that perception connects us to reality in outer intuition. I then argue that for Kant thought relates to perception by being the rule for perceptual procedures. This accounts for thought's extending in scope beyond what we actually perceive to all that is manifest in space and time. As against Merleau-Ponty this Kantian understanding of thought beyond perception does not distort the nature of reality which remains essentially that which can be engaged.

**Keywords:** intellectualism, Kant, Merleau-Ponty, non-conceptual content, perception, reality-for-us

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Kant is frequently charged with excessive intellectualism. In this paper I focus on two forms of this charge as put forth by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. First Merleau-Ponty charges Kant with intellectualizing perception (Merleau-Ponty 1958: 351). I shall argue that this charge shows there to be an important gap in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that requires a significant revision; a revision, however, that goes beyond what Merleau-Ponty has in mind. Second, as against Kant, Merleau-Ponty holds that thought distorts our connection to reality (1958: 149). I shall argue that this second charge depends on a complete failure to understand Kant's conception of thought, and that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy suffers an enormous gap due to this misunderstanding.

## 1. The Charge that Kant Intellectualizes Perception

The charges Merleau-Ponty raises against Kant broach the issues of how perception relates to reality and then how thought relates

to perception. It is such issues that formed the context of McDowell's seminal discussion of non-conceptual content (1994). This discussion has developed in the literature along several different lines. One development considers whether sensory information outstrips either actual or possible conceptualization. This is discussed in relation to Kant by Robert Hanna (2005). Another development considers whether and how perception has intentional content apart from conceptualization. This is discussed in relation to Kant by Ginsborg (2008) and Allais (2009), who give opposing answers. It is this development of the issue which most concerns Kant and is the focus of the discussion to follow.

Charging Kant with intellectualizing perception seems odd, since Kant holds that concepts or thoughts without intuitions are empty. He holds that thoughts that do not ultimately relate to empirical intuitions have no objective reality, and are senseless or meaningless (Kant 2003 A157/B196).<sup>1</sup> This seems to imply that empirical intuition, which is just perception, has to provide a manifold of its own for thought. Further, for Kant empirical intuition involves a synthesis of its manifold that is distinct from the synthesis of thought. If so, then Kant holds that perception involves a unity or structure that is non-intellectual.

Not only does perception have a structure of its own for Kant, but this structure has affinities with Merleau-Ponty's own views about perception. Kant's account of perception, terse though it is, is to be found in his doctrine of the three-fold empirical synthesis (*CPR* A99–101). Although this three-fold synthesis is not explicitly mentioned in the B edition deduction, the synthesis of apprehension or perception prior to conceptualization is retained (*CPR* B160). Prior to any synthesis there is what Kant calls a synopsis, which is a momentary unity. Though he does not spell it out, I take this synopsis to be a complex, multi-modal discernment of the surroundings. For example, I catch a glimpse of a dog on the lawn with tail wagging as I feel the wet grass under my feet, all in a momentary state. I call such a multi-modal momentary discernment a percept. The synopsis pertains to the fact that various sensations are unified into a single conscious state or experience. For Merleau-Ponty such a synopsis is anchored in a bodily unity (1958: 352–3). In any percept my body is always present in my orientation, my gaze, how I am reaching out, etc. It is always in terms of the body that the elements of the percept are organized. The dog is glimpsed front and centre beyond my body, parts of the scene are out of reach and so on. Kant clearly does not go into the bodily nature of the synopsis. For now, we can say that he

abstracts from this nature and that this abstraction is at least consistent with Merleau-Ponty's account.

Perception, or empirical intuition, for Kant is not just a matter of having a percept. I can catch a glimpse of a dog without perceiving it to be a dog. The latter requires a synthesis of apprehension which in turn proceeds by reproduction according to association. I have to successively attain further percepts that are appropriate for perceiving dogs. Without at least the tendency or proneness to attain such percepts, a momentary glimpse is not a case of perceiving something to be a dog. What I now reproduce is a series of percepts, and the unity of that series is simply which percepts customarily go with dog-perceiving. However terse, this understanding of perception is in line with Merleau-Ponty's own account according to which perceiving involves bodily intentionality towards attaining further glimpses or percepts from other vantage points (1958: 10). Kant clearly does not go into the body's involvement in such a synthesis of apprehension. We can say that he abstracts from this involvement, but that his view is otherwise consonant with Merleau-Ponty's view.

Given the consistency so far of Kant's view of perception with Merleau-Ponty's account, the charge of intellectualizing perception seems to have little force. At most there is the charge that Kant abstracts from the bodily nature of percepts and perceptual episodes. Merleau-Ponty's point, however, is that such an abstraction is impossible. If it were simply a matter of the phenomenology, all Kant could be charged with is missing the bodily aspect. For Merleau-Ponty however, to abstract from the bodily character of perception precludes perception revealing external reality. It is bodily intentionality by which perception reveals the world around me. He says: 'appearances are always enveloped for me in a certain bodily attitude', and 'through that body I am at grips with the world' (1958: 352–3). According to Merleau-Ponty, 'Kant is right to say that perception is, by its nature, polarized toward the object. But what is incomprehensible in his account is appearance as appearance' (1958: 351). What is incomprehensible, that is, is how anything beyond the percepts shows up or appears in them. If Merleau-Ponty is right about this, then the abstraction from the body divorces Kant's synthesis of apprehension from external reality.

One might respond that for Kant it is only when thought is added to perception that there is connection to external reality. This position would indeed make Kant subject to a charge of intellectualism, since for

Merleau-Ponty it is perception in its own right that connects us to reality. But now, as a matter of fact Kant does not hold that it is the addition of thought that first puts us in touch with reality. He holds that intuition is already an immediate relation to an object, not a mere modification of the subject, and part of what this means is that the relation is not mediated by concepts. This pertains to empirical intuition and even to the momentary percepts that go into an empirical intuition. He says in the Anticipations of Perception that in all appearances the real is an object of perception, and that in all appearances there is sensation and the real that corresponds to it in the object (*CPR* A166 B208), and he says in the Fourth Paralogism that outer perception yields immediate proof of something real in space (*CPR* A375).

As mentioned, Kant retains the synthesis of apprehension prior to categorization in the B edition deduction. I shall not go into a complete textual defence of the view that Kant does not intellectualize perception. A thorough and convincing defence is given by Allais (2009). What is important for my purposes is defending both Kant and Merleau-Ponty on the reality of non-conceptual perceptual content, and then defending Kant against Merleau-Ponty's second charge of intellectualism that thought only obfuscates this connection of perception to reality (a defence that elaborates upon my previous interpretation of Kant: Melnick 2004).

For my purposes, Kant's most telling statement of the view that perception prior to thought connects us to reality is in the footnote to the B edition of the Refutation of Idealism where he says we have an outer sense not merely an outer imagination, but then goes on to say that we do not understand how such outer sense is possible (*CPR* B277).

It is here I believe that Merleau-Ponty would say that Kant's abstraction from the bodily nature of percepts prevents him from accounting for perception revealing Being or external reality. Indeed, this abstraction makes it impossible for perception to reveal external reality, since for Merleau-Ponty it is the body that has what he calls a 'momentum toward existence' (1958: 159). This is not quite a charge of intellectualism any more, but it does seem to imply that Kant's abstraction from the body undermines the role of perception in connecting us to reality.

Merleau-Ponty himself is never quite clear as to how bodily perception reveals external existence in other than a phenomenological sense.

Percepts have within them a beyond-the-body quality, and Merleau-Ponty may very well be right that, phenomenologically, this is the basic sense of externality. Kant characterizes outer intuition as putting me in relation to objects outside me. But the very sense of ‘outside me’ is something like ‘projected out from my body’, so that without the bodily aspect of a percept there is no sense of beyond-the-body and so no sense of reality outside me. Even granting this phenomenological point, it nevertheless remains the case that a percept seems to be a state of the subject even if that subject is bodily and the percept has beyond-the-body character. The question then is how a supposedly monadic state of the subject reveals a relation of the subject to external reality, as opposed to merely seeming to reveal it. A. D. Smith (2003: 258–9) puts the issue as follows: ‘If intentional objects are superior to sense-data and sensations as far as the phenomenology of perceptual consciousness is concerned ... we may still seem to be confined within a “veil of perception”. Not, indeed a veil of sense-data or sensations, but an equally impenetrable veil of intentional objects.’ What Smith is calling superior to sense-data includes Merleau-Ponty’s bodily intentions of extra-bodily reality. Perhaps Merleau-Ponty wants to deny there is any such ‘veil’ once the phenomenology of perception as purporting external reality is laid bare. However, for Merleau-Ponty perception does not only reveal what is for us, but it reveals the ‘in-itself-for-us’. In perception, that is, the external is present in its material being or, as Husserl (1977) puts it, the external is present in the flesh. But how can what is external be revealed in the flesh in perception if perception consists of percepts that are seemingly monadic states of the bodily subject?

Merleau-Ponty would probably deny that percepts are monadic states, holding instead an externalist view of perception, according to which percepts are relational states. This is a view akin to disjunctivism, according to which perception is a different kind of state from monadic states such as hallucinations, even if the difference cannot be detected phenomenologically. On this view to be a perception involves a relation to external reality. However I claim that it still does not reveal that relation to the subject if there is no monadic character of the state differentiating it from possible hallucination. Without such character the external relation is opaque to the subject undergoing perception, but revelation cannot be something opaque or hidden. Equivalently, without some differentiating monadic character the fact that I am perceiving is not itself discerned, and so reality is not revealed to me. Since Merleau-Ponty clearly holds that perception is supposed to reveal reality, his views must go beyond mere externalism about perceptual states.

Kant likewise is an externalist regarding perception or outer intuition, but he sees that there still remains the issue of how immediate consciousness of outer things is possible (*CPR* B277 footnote a), which in turn is the question of whether we have merely an outer imagination, where the latter includes dreams and delusions (*CPR* B278). The connection to reality for Kant must be an immediate consciousness which in effect is a demand that percepts reveal reality to the subject – once again taking the issue beyond mere disjunctivism. The problem of hallucination then remains both for Kant and for Merleau-Ponty. What is needed is some monadic character of perceptual states which constitutes their connection to reality. Only so does perception reveal reality.

Merleau-Ponty would probably respond that the very raising of the question of hallucination presupposes the context of unqualified acceptance of perception's connecting us to reality. Therefore, hallucination cannot raise any spectre of scepticism regarding the external world. The issue however is not scepticism, but consistency. Granting that perception connects us to external reality, reflection on the possibility of hallucination leads to the idea that percepts have no monadic character differentiating them from possible hallucination, which makes their revelation of reality problematic on a reflective level. Even if such reflection only takes place in the context of perception as connecting us to reality, it raises an inconsistency or tension between perceptual phenomenology on the one hand and reflection on perception on the other. The point of giving an account of how perceptual states can directly reveal reality is not to first bring us to accept that they do, but to make this acceptance intelligible in the light of reflection that seems to go against it. The situation is somewhat similar to Frankfurt's (1970) understanding of Descartes's reasoning to God's existence to validate the reasoning faculty. The point is not to first establish trust in reasoning, but to show that such trust is not made problematic by further reflection upon reasoning. Whereas Descartes's concern was the harmony of the reasoning faculty with itself, I am suggesting there is a similar concern regarding the harmony of the faculty of perception with the faculty of reflection. Merleau-Ponty no more than Kant secures this harmony or shows in Kant's terms how outer intuition as opposed to outer imagination is possible. For Merleau-Ponty acceptance of perception as revealing reality is the *sine qua non* of all reflection or questioning, and is simply our inviolable existential condition. For Kant perception's connecting us to external reality is the *sine qua non* of the indubitable truth of our own inner states being determinable in time. Even if we take each of these positions in their

own way to refute scepticism, the problem remains of how this connection holds up at a reflective level that includes the recognition that perceptual states apparently have no monadic character that reveals reality. I want now to offer a solution to this problem, and then argue that, though Kant had all the tools for this solution, both he and Merleau-Ponty can be charged with a certain kind of abstraction that precludes them from solving the problem.

## **2. Revising Kant: How Perception Reveals Reality**

Suppose that I push an object with my body so that it moves off. There will be a recoil within my body of a change of momentum of my body in the opposite direction to balance the change of momentum of the object. Within my body alone there is excess momentum, i.e. an increase in momentum that is not balanced by any other loss of momentum within my body. This excess momentum is a bodily state that can be experienced. I call this experience an excess-momentum percept or a momentum percept for short. By Newton's laws such a percept has a character that cannot exist without the existence of an external bodily reality that balances the excess momentum. There is no way that this bodily state can be internally induced without the existence of external material reality balancing the excess momentum. A momentum percept then has a monadic character that ontologically entails that the organism or subject is in relation to external material existence. This relation is not mediated by concepts, but holds simply because of the Newtonian nature of material reality.

Suppose next that as the object moves away I visually or tactilely discern its motion. What is visually or tactilely discerned is apparently (or phenomenologically) an external body moving so as to balance the excess momentum of my bodily state. I seem to be pushing on a body and seem to see it moving away from me as I discern the internal excess momentum within my body in the opposite direction. Because of the coordination with this contemporaneous-momentum percept within my body, not only does there visually or tactilely seem to be a moving body outside me, but in fact there is one. If now I keep moving the body, say by dragging it along or lifting it up and down or turning it around and around while also reaching out visually with my gaze or tactilely with my fingers to discern its motion, then I have an ongoing series of percepts. By the visual or tactile components this seems to be a series discerning continued external bodily motion, and by the ongoing momentum components within my body it is in fact a series that tracks

external bodily motion. Thus as I push a body harder the visually discerned apparent greater motion of the external body coordinates with the discerned greater recoil within my body. In this way the various momentum components within my body coordinate with visual or tactile percepts of apparently balancing external momentum. By Newton's laws this seeming externality is in fact the case. I call such a series of continuing momentum percepts (percepts with monadic excess-momentum character) that coordinate with continuing visual or tactile percepts of balancing momentum a basic perceptual episode. For basic perceptual episodes there is no veil of perception. Phenomenologically they seem to track continuing external reality and ontologically the very existence of such episodes entails that continuing external reality. This accounts for how outer sense is possible. Any individual momentum percept which is a modification of the bodily subject is, at the same time, a relation to external material existence. Equivalently, it accounts for such existence showing up 'in the flesh' – what exists externally quite literally shows up in the excess-momentum percept of the subject.

It is clear that Kant has the resources for such an account of lifting the veil of perception in *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. Although he does not explicitly give this account there, it is an application of his views on perception in the *Critique* once the abstraction from material existence is relaxed – in the way that his view on substance in *Foundations* is an application of his view of substance in the *Critique*. Kant, however, would not have accepted this account as part of the *Critique* (though he does at least mention impenetrability as an example in regard to outer empirical intuition: CPR B278). This opens him to the charge that by abstracting from material existence and its laws in the *Critique* Kant has no account there of how outer sense or outer empirical intuition is possible. But outer intuition is crucial to Kant's entire account of cognition in the *Critique* and also to his distinction between transcendental idealism and empirical idealism. Abstracting from the laws of material reality, then, is an impossible abstraction. The level of abstraction in the *Critique* is a self-defeating one. Merleau-Ponty, as well as Kant, abstracts from any scientific laws of material reality in his account of perception with the same consequence; namely, that he has no account of how a series of percepts by their monadic character can reveal external reality in fact. A similar charge applies to Husserl's bracketing of scientific laws.

Kant's motive for abstracting from the moveable in space and the laws of what is moveable in space is that these are not absolutely *a priori*,



and metaphysics demands absolutely *a priori* synthetic knowledge. In some ways, this is not so far from Merleau-Ponty's motive for abstracting from laws of material reality. Such laws are not evident phenomenologically, and metaphysics demands phenomenological necessity.

Turning first to Kant, my reply is that metaphysics seeks necessary truth or essences, but following Kripke rather than Kant, necessity can be *a posteriori*. For Kripke (1980), H<sub>2</sub>O is the real essence of water. Further, following Westphal (1997) *a posteriori* necessities should form part of Kant's transcendental account of cognition. I suggest that Newtonian-like conservation of momentum laws are part of the essence of being a material particular at all (or at least a macroscopic material particular). Given this, and given that material reality moveable in space is our only understanding of external reality, it follows that the entailment of external reality by excess-momentum percepts is a necessary truth. I am not suggesting that Kant should have established Newton's laws even in a relatively *a priori* way in the *Critique*. Rather I am suggesting that he should have included these empirically verified fundamental laws, since they are necessary truths, and so truths suitable in a treatise on general metaphysics. For Kant, general metaphysics, in distinction from science, involves the necessary ways in which the subject is related to reality. So, as with the case of perception, it is up to the metaphysician to establish that connection, and doing so in terms of Newton's laws is perfectly general metaphysics, if coming under these laws is a perfectly general necessary truth; if, that is, all possible external reality comes under those laws.

Turning now to Merleau-Ponty, he too is after necessary truth which he mistakenly identifies with what is ascertainable simply by phenomenological analysis. Both Kant and Merleau-Ponty, then, are subject to the charge of abstracting what is *a posteriori* or empirically ascertainable from what is necessarily true. In both cases the abstraction precludes them from lifting the veil of perception that arises upon reflection, and in both cases this undermines their metaphysics.

### 3. The Charge that Thought Distorts the Connection to Reality

The first aspect of Merleau-Ponty's charge of intellectualism is that bodily perception on its own without the intellect connects us to reality. The second aspect is that, once we have this perceptual connection, there is nothing for thought to do but obscure or distort our true connection to reality. The intellect, as against perception, falsifies our connection to, and the nature of, reality. For Merleau-Ponty the way we

stand with respect to reality is different for thought than it is for perceptual engagement. Perceptual engagement is definitive of there being reality for us at all, and the nature of thought obfuscates such reality, because thought, by its nature, stands apart from engagement. In thought we are like universal spectators, with the objects of thought that stand against us existing in their own right. In thought we are detached from perception and our situation in the world. We traverse objects at will from no particular standpoint, as though these objects are indifferent to any and all engagement. As such, an object does not have the status of being for us or being in relation to us, but the status of being in itself. Merleau-Ponty says (1958: 373): ‘The function of [objective thinking] is to reduce all phenomena which bear witness to the union of the subject and the world, putting in their place the clear idea of the object as in itself and of the subject as pure consciousness.’ Heidegger (1990) makes a similar charge of intellectualism against Kant in his accusation that in the second edition of the *Critique* Kant steps back from, or abandons, the centrality of transcendental imagination in favour of the understanding or the intellect. Heidegger at this time probably thought of Kant’s transcendental imagination in terms of his own understanding of non-conceptual engagement. For Heidegger, this would include not just perceptual engagement (the present-at-hand), but also practical engagement (the ready-to-hand) and Being-with-others. His charge then would be similar to Merleau-Ponty’s that Kant abandons non-conceptual engagement as what basically reveals reality, in favour of thought.

This second charge of intellectualism is a far more serious disagreement with Kant than is the charge that he intellectualizes perception, because it calls into question the entire relevance of the understanding (the faculty of thought) in the *Critique*. Further, it is a somewhat shocking charge, since it claims that the understanding can only grasp reality that has ‘in-itself’ status rather than ‘for-us’ status. This charge, it is fair to say, completely stands Kant on his head. There could not be a more un-Kantian view of the nature of thought than this one. If anything, this charge applies to the Kant of the *Inaugural Dissertation*, not the Kant of the *Critique*. Unlike the first charge, this one I believe completely mistakes Kant and it is a complete mistake in its own right. For Kant, thought is essentially involved in our connection to reality and does not have the disengaged character (*vis-à-vis* perception) that Merleau-Ponty claims. That status rather belongs only to thought carried out by what Kant calls the faculty of reason, not to thought generally.

Before turning to Kant's account of thought, I want to lay out a crippling consequence of Merleau-Ponty's characterization of thought. Perception is restricted to the proximate environment, but reality extends remotely in space and time. Since this reality cannot be perceptually engaged, it seems it can only be an object of thought. But if thought has a disengaged character, then remote reality does not have 'for-us' status, but exists in-itself as a spectacle for thought to grasp. This is true even if the thought is of possible occurrences of remote perceptual interactions, since I still stand detached from both the subject and object components of the interaction, which both exist in their own right.

Merleau-Ponty (1958: 117, 483) does hold that perception itself includes indeterminate spatio-temporal horizons which are pre-conceptual, and which, though indeterminate, set us in a wider world. Indeed, the world for Merleau-Ponty is the horizon of all horizons. The example he gives of a spatial horizon is that in looking at a landscape I always have a sense of an indeterminate beyond that awaits further perceptual determination. The example of a temporal horizon that he borrows from Heidegger is that in any perception I have a sense of where I am or what I am up to in my day. Both spatial and temporal penumbra embed my perceptual engagement within a world, or within a wider scope of engagement. He further holds that any attempt to conceptually determine these horizons inevitably distorts the world's being for us (its being the context of our engagement). He says (1958: 387): 'if the spatio-temporal horizons could, even theoretically be made explicit and the world conceived from no point of view then nothing would exist. I should hover above the world, so that all times and all places ... would become unreal, because I should live in none of them and would be involved nowhere.'

Once again explicit objective thought is said to distort world-hood, including its scope beyond the proximate. But these horizons of Merleau-Ponty do not extend very far. Beyond the perceived landscape simply means more opportunity for engagement, but not an opportunity that extends across limitless space. The temporal horizon of where I am in my day (how far I am in my daily engagement) does not extend back to historical and pre-historical time. Animals seem to have exactly these horizons. When an animal is perceptually engaged in hunting, it has a horizon of more territory beyond, and animals have a sense of where they are in their day, as they expect it to be time for certain things to happen. Despite having these horizons, animals do not have any

sense at all of a wide world encompassing limitless reaches of space and past eons of time. In line with Max Scheler (1961), animals live in their environment whereas humans live in or have a world. Unlike animals I can grasp what goes on around me as having a place in the history of the cosmos. Merleau-Ponty cannot claim to have revealed this about us if all there is beyond perception in the context of limited horizons is detached thought that is inadequate for revealing reality.

A similar sort of issue arises in Heidegger. For Heidegger discourse, or thinking, is supposed to show or lead the way to Being. Within the proximate environment this seems to make sense. If I say or think that there is a hammer over there, what I say can reveal Being by its directing me there to pick it up, examine it and otherwise engage it. It is not clear, however, how assertions or thoughts can show or lead the way to reality in the past. Heidegger (1962: 430) considers the case of standing before a Greek temple. I supposedly understand it as something that has a past, by understanding that it is not of my world, but belongs to the world of a different *Dasein*. But suppose I go to a theme park and visit a gingerbread house on a gingerbread street. I surely understand that it belongs to the world of a quite different *Dasein*. Heidegger's account of the Greek temple fails to differentiate that case from this one and so fails to differentiate reality in the past from mere fiction. He needs a present understanding of it belonging to the world of a *past Dasein* with a mode of comportment unavailable because it is past. But this would seem to require a present thought of past engageability. It seems, however, that in having that thought, the engagement is just part of a spectacle for my present thinking, detached from any engagement on my part. The thought then would fail to show reality as having the 'for-us' character that Heidegger equates with all Being. Because of this, in Heidegger's own terms, all discourse purportedly concerning remote reality is just idle discourse.

Writing within the Merleau-Ponty tradition, Naomi Eilan (1995: 354–6) says that what has to be shown is that a 'detached reflective level will provide materials for beginning to understand the relation between being the point of view from which one has first-order experience, and the capacity for detached reflection on oneself and the world'.

But there is no way for detached reflection to extend the engagement of what Eilan calls first order experience. What I want to claim now is that for Kant thought is a kind of engagement distinct from, but connected

to, perceptual engagement, and that this conceptual mode of engagement extends to all reality, proximate or remote. In a word, thought for Kant is not detached reflection, but a further mode of engagement.

#### 4. Kant's Response: A Conception of Engaged Thought

The understanding for Kant is the faculty of thought and what the understanding does is combine or unify intuitions. Ultimately, if it is to have any objective sense it pertains to empirical intuitions (*CPR* A156/B195). It does so via combining pure intuition, but I leave this latter aside as it is not essential to the present discussion. The understanding applies to all possible experience or to all possible empirical intuiting. Finally, it combines empirical intuition under what Kant calls necessary unity. This does not mean that it is necessary for the understanding to combine, but that necessity is the kind of unity the understanding introduces. Since Kant also characterizes the understanding as the faculty of rules, I equate necessary unity with the unity of a rule, where a rule purports what has to be done or what must be done. Putting this all together, Kant holds that thoughts or judgements are rules for empirical intuiting, and such rules pertain not just locally, but to all empirical intuiting, however remote spatially and temporally.

Consider first the local case of perceiving a dog. To think that is a dog before me is to think that a certain series of percepts has to be attainable: those percepts that are aspects of dog-perceiving. One has the thought when the rule for attaining those percepts is operative. I will express this by saying the thought is that it is proper to attain a dog-series of percepts. Equivalently, the thought is that a certain kind of perceptual engagement is proper or in force. On this conception thoughts are not detached from engagement, but rather are our grasp of how to engage. Of course, they are detached from actually engaging since I can have the rule without actually acting in accord with it. Nevertheless, licensing perceptual interaction is a mode of engagement; just not the mode of actually engaging.

The rule-mode of engaging has a scope that extends beyond actual engagement. Suppose that I survey my surroundings. I will have various percepts, such as a dog-like percept, a tree-like percept and so on. These, recall, are momentary states having what Kant calls synoptic unity. Each such percept may call up a rule for how to perceptually interact. This is just my grasp that there are various options in the situation for engaging. These options are incompatible in the sense that

keeping hold or keeping track for further tree-percepts may preclude me from keeping in touch for further dog-percepts as the dog moves away from the tree. Although actually engaging in both ways is not possible, these are still two proper ways to behave. It is proper to attain further tree-percepts and it is also proper to move off to attain further dog-percepts. As another example, if I left my dog at home and I am now in my office, I have as an option an engagement that takes me out of my local office surroundings altogether; namely, I might have a rule for how to move off and resituate myself so as to attain a series of dog-percepts. Theoretically, the scope of my options extends as far as all the ways of moving off and resituating. For example, I now have a grasp of how to resituate myself in order to attain Parthenon-percepts. In this fashion, following Scheler, I now live not just in my local environment but in a world that fans out remotely in all different directions.

Although the rule is for attaining a series of percepts, if the series of percepts constitutes what I have called a basic perceptual episode (i.e. attaining percepts contemporaneously with ongoing excess-momentum percepts), then it is a rule for interacting with external reality. This validates Kant's view that thoughts unify empirical intuitions that put us in relation to what is external or outside us. Without the immediate external import of momentum percepts, the thought of attaining a series of percepts would not have external import. It is not thought as opposed to intuition that gives us our connection to reality. Rather, thought extends the scope of that connection.

I turn now to the more interesting case of extending this connection to past reality. Suppose that I come home and see my dog on the couch with pillow stuffing all over the room and in his mouth. I may have the thought that it is proper to be at a late stage, or far along, in a basic perceptual episode of dog-perceiving that begins with a glimpse of the dog getting a pillow. I have the thought, that is, of properly being far along in an episode of keeping track and attaining dog-percepts from an initial percept. This thought pertains to what went on in the past by being a thought of what I am properly past, so far as a certain episode of dog-perceiving is concerned. The thought is not a detached reflection upon an episode existing from the past to the present. Rather, it is a mode of engagement in that it positions me as to where I should be in dog-engaging. Similarly, spotting the rings on a tree may prompt the thought that it is proper (required, necessary) to presently be past various stages of keeping track while attaining percepts of fewer tree rings.

As another sort of non-perceptual example, consider an actor who comes late to the theatre, and is about to take over from his understudy at a certain point in the performance. He may situate where he is in his lines by running through his part in his mind from the opening until he gets as far as the performance has proceeded. He does not run through those lines, of course, by actually saying them on stage. The run-through is just to situate where he properly is in relation to his present surroundings. He is rushing through his lines in order to gauge how to properly perform given his present circumstances. The fact that he stops rushing himself along at a certain line shows his thought to be that he is properly that far along in saying lines. This thought does not detach him from engaging in saying lines. It is just a different mode of engagement than actually saying the earlier lines; a mode, that is, of situating himself as past or beyond saying those lines.

Consider finally Heidegger's example of coming upon the ruins of a Greek temple. As I do I may have the thought of being properly so far along in keeping track while attaining percepts, the first of which are percepts of people beseeching statues, etc. In having this thought I situate myself past or beyond such beseeching. This is not the kind of thought I would have upon coming across a gingerbread house. In both cases there is a kind of comportment (or world in Heidegger's sense) that is not available to me, but it is only in the case of the ruins that it is unavailable for my being too late for it or past it. I grasp *Dasein* for whom there is such comportment as *Dasein* that I am properly past engaging.

In each of the cases of the dog, the tree and the ruins the thought is, in Kant's terminology, a unity of empirical intuitions, or better a unity of the activity of empirical intuiting. Further, in all these cases, as well as in cases of percepts in a surveyed scene calling up options for how to go ahead and interact, there is a comprehensive grasp of an entire procedure. This is not the case *per se* in simply actually engaging in a procedure. I may automatically, without thought, simply go from one stage to the next in a routine of attaining percepts, without ever holding all stages together in mind. Engaging in a whole perceptual episode does not require ever being in a state that comprehends it all. On the other hand, in having the thought of properly being so far along in proceeding a certain way, that way of proceeding is grasped or comprehended all at once. Recall the actor who situates himself by rushing through all the missed lines, and so has a grasp of the whole procedure of saying those lines.

Suppose again that I observe the dog with pillow stuffing in its mouth, and thereupon think that it is proper to be so far along in keeping track and attaining percepts. To have this thought, I claim, is exactly to think that what is presently engaged is a *substance*. If what is engaged is a momentary existent, like a dog-flash, then I cannot presently be in the course of tracking *it*. Any stages of keeping track that I am properly past would be stages at which it, literally, did not yet exist, and there can be no tracking of what does not yet exist. Further, what is tracked is spatially proximate matter, not matter distributed across space. The reason for this is that tracking is simply attaining excess-momentum percepts, and these percepts import a relation only to a local body: that body whose motion balances the excess momentum within my own body. Any dog-like stuff or dog-matter down the next block is nothing that my excess-momentum percept is intrinsically related to. Thus the thought of being in the course of tracking, where tracking signifies attaining excess-momentum percepts, is a thought of spatially proximate matter that endures, and this is just what a substance is.

The account of substance I have given makes the concept of substance a concept by which empirical intuiting can be unified in a thought. In Kant's terminology, it is a concept by which empirical intuitions are brought to the comprehending unity of apperception. The concept does not emerge in actually perceptually engaging, since I can actually keep track (attain momentum-percepts) of a series of dog-flashes just as well as of a single enduring dog. I cannot, however, think of properly being in the course of tracking a series of dog-flashes ending with the present flash, unless I have some way of thinking of entities that no longer exist (i.e. earlier dog-flashes). This would require some sort of direct reference to past reality independent of engagement, with respect to which I would then think of being properly beyond engaging. But there is no such direct reference to an intrinsic reality standing apart from engagement.

The category of substance is not an empty conceptual positing of reality divorced from empirical intuiting, but a mode of organizing such intuiting. Going back to the first objection, if percepts did not already entail external reality, thereby making rules that unify percepts rules of engagement with reality, then since substances do not exist within percepts, any application of this concept in a rule for percepts would have to be an application that *first posits* external reality. But this would be a case of thought of reality without any intuition. It is thus crucial for Kant that percepts import external reality. As I suggested in relation



to the first objection, thought does not first provide for outer sense, but presupposes it.

This point holds even if Kant is right in the B edition Refutation of Idealism that the concept of substance must apply if there is even to be inner sense (a series of monadic percepts) determined in time. Without some percepts (namely, excess-momentum percepts) that are already connected to external reality, the concept of substance, however ‘necessary’ for time determination, would have to be, *per impossibile*, a conceptual positing of reality distinct from and beyond having empirical intuitions or percepts. It would have to be the positing of an objective, intrinsic reality as ‘grounding’ in some way the propriety of undergoing percepts, and thereby unifying them as the proper ones. This is not far from the way causal dualists think of the relation between percepts and external existence, and Kant is no causal dualist. On the other hand, once there is outer sense or outer intuition, the concept of substance simply becomes a mode of unifying such intuitions. In thinking of the dog before me as one single enduring reality as opposed to an ongoing series of distinct flashes, I am just conceptualizing what would be the same external reality in actual engagement one way rather than another. Kant’s point in the Refutation is that I must conceptualize it in the substance way if there are to be thoughts of past reality at all; i.e. if there are to be thoughts of properly being past previous stages of tracking what I presently engage. The first objection, that Kant cannot abstract from matter and its Newtonian nature, cannot be circumvented just by holding that the category of substance is necessarily applicable.

Allais rightly emphasizes the distinction between perceiving what is external reality versus representing it ‘as an object in the full blown sense’ (2009: 405); viz., as a determinate particular with the identity condition of a substance. In the B edition deduction Kant says: ‘All synthesis, therefore, even that which renders perception possible, is subject to the categories’ (CPR B161). The reason however is not so that perception can represent what is real externally, but rather that only as subject to the categories can perception or the synthesis of apprehension represent this reality ‘as determined in space or in time’. In other words, if what an actual perceptual episode reveals as external is also to be something represented as having position in the course of ongoing time, then the categories must apply to it. Equivalently the categories are required if my actual perceptual engagement is to fit within a context of potential engagement extending throughout space and time. But if perception itself was not already a kind of engagement

revealing external reality, then rules for the full scope of potential perception would not be rules for the full scope of engaging with reality, and the categories as such rules would not pertain to (engaged) reality at all. Since perception being thus a mode of engagement requires, as we have seen, that matter is subject to Newton's laws, our first objection that Kant cannot abstract from matter and its Newtonian nature cannot be circumvented by just holding that categories (in particular the category of substance) are applicable.

Merleau-Ponty's second objection against Kant is thus a dramatic failure. Kant has an account of thought according to which it, too, is a mode of engagement; the mode being how it is proper to engage or to be in the course of engaging. The reality that is represented by such thought, as something internal to engagement, has the same 'for us' status as actual perceptual engagement. Thought does not obfuscate or distort this status by detached reflection. It extends the status to the full scope of spatio-temporal reality. Lacking such an account of thought, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger have no way to effect this extension of scope.

## 5. First- and Second-Order Thought

I want to suggest now that Kant does accommodate detached thought or detached reflection, but only as the province of the faculty of reason, not the faculty of understanding. When we are reasoning abstractly, that is, our thinking is detached, not a mode of being engaged with the world. Kant says that when it comes to reason: 'there is no reference to a time order in the connection of the conditioned with its condition; they are presupposed as given with it' (*CPR* A500/B528). This, for Kant, is a bogus use of reason in regard to the world being a totality, because there is no collective intuition by which all conditions are given. He says (*CPR* A522/B550): 'since the world can never be given as complete ... the concept of the magnitude of the world is given only through the regress and not in a collective intuition prior to it [the regress]'. In such a bogus use of reason I am not thinking in terms of a rule for a regress or a rule for engagement. Rather I am thinking of the world as something that can be traversed collectively by thought – as though my thinking could survey it and hold it in its grasp. Such thinking is exactly a detached reflection.

In the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic Kant identifies the proper use of reason as being directed towards the understanding. He says (*CPR* A643/B671): 'Reason is never in immediate relation to an

object, but only to the understanding ... It does not therefore *create* concepts [of objects], but only orders them.' It is only as thus directed to concepts that there can be this detached mode of thinking. He says (CPR A644/B672): 'reason unifies the manifold of concepts by means of ideas, positing a certain collective unity ... of the understanding'. In other words, reason for Kant is detached reflection, but its objects are concepts or thoughts. It does not unify intuitions or unify engaging reality. It is not the world that is traversed or surveyed in a detached mode, but concepts. For Kant, that is, the detached mode of thinking is second-intentional; its objects are thoughts, not things. To characterize all thinking as detached reflection would be equivalent, then, to holding that there is only second-order thinking without any first-order thoughts – since for Kant detached reflection never creates concepts of objects.

We can put Kant's response to Merleau-Ponty's second objection as follows: Merleau-Ponty confuses reason with understanding or second-intentional thinking with first-order thinking. It is only second-intentional thinking that is detached or disengaged. Kant would agree with Merleau-Ponty that such detached reflection distorts or obfuscates any connection to reality, if such thinking is taken as first-order. Taking it this way is just Kant's conception of the bogus use of reason. As against Merleau-Ponty, however, without first-order thoughts detached reflection has nothing to reflect on, and has not even indirect connection to things or to the world. All Merleau-Ponty provides for is perception as actual engagement, and a detached holding together and surveying as a spectator, but nothing to hold together or traverse. Equivalently, Merleau-Ponty has actual engagement (with limited horizons) and everything else is a mere play of thoughts with none of these thoughts having real significance. Merleau-Ponty is right not to confuse thinking of thoughts with thinking of things, but wrong to hold, in effect, that there is only second-intention thinking of thoughts.

I end by considering another charge against Kant that overlooks his distinction between first-order thoughts of the understanding and second-order thoughts of reason. This charge made in different ways by Carnap (1964) and Quine (1969), and to some extent by Putnam (1981), is that there are alternative ways of conceptualizing or categorizing the formal structure of reality, so that Kant's categories do not necessarily apply to possible experience. These philosophers share with Merleau-Ponty the idea that there is a full scope of not yet conceptualized reality that thought can then pertain to. For Merleau-Ponty this is the horizon of all perceptual engagement, whereas for Carnap

and Quine it is instead all possible sensory stimulation throughout space and time. On both views, thought is an imposition on what is already a full scope of Being.

For Kant the relational categories at least are first required in order for there to be any full scope of possible experience. Hence, there is no such scope for thought to be imposed upon. I claimed in regard to the category of substance, for example, that in order to have any connection to past reality, the category of substance must already be employed. I can only be connected to such reality if it is what I am properly past keeping up with by perceptual engagement. What is presently discerned has to be grasped as what properly sets me ahead in keeping track, or properly puts me beyond stages of tracking. This, I claimed, is equivalent to the thought that what I presently discern is a substance. The idea again is that a Quine-like momentary slice cannot be that which sets me past earlier tracking, and a Quine-Goodman (1977) fusion cannot be that which is revealed or guaranteed by perceptual engagement at all. These latter then are not alternative ways of conceptualizing all possible reality, if that conceptualization has to be in the form of rules for perceptual engagement.

Quine, rather, sees himself as a spectator of all possible stimulation throughout all space and time and, from this detached mode, sees no way of differentiating between substances on the one hand and slices or fusions on the other. But how do we get thus to stand in thought with all possible stimulation spread out before us? Once again from Kant's point of view, it is only at a second-intentional level of reason that the Carnap–Quine view makes any sense. For Kant, once we have a grasp of all possible experience by various thoughts or rules that already involve the category of substance, then we can traverse those thoughts or rules, hold them together in our mind, survey them, re-organize and recombine them. For example, once I have the thought of properly being beyond previous stages of tracking the tree with its rings that is before me, I can think about that thought (that rule or that propriety) of all the stages I am past as spread out before me. Then I can think to myself: I am past *that* stage of tracking and *that* second stage of tracking, and it seems that I do not have to identify what is tracked at the two stages as being the same. It seems, that is, that I can be tracking slices as well as a substance. Further, I can hold together several thoughts of properly going off in different directions so as to interact and attain momentum-percepts. Then, having all the stages of both rules present to mind I can think to myself that what is revealed by all

of those scattered percepts is just one thing, not several. It seems, that is, that the percepts can reveal a fusion, just as well as distinct substances. But in each of these cases I am simply recombining and re-organizing thoughts, not the structure of reality that is necessarily graspable only with the concept of substance. Kant would not object to systematizing our thoughts in all sorts of alternative ways if there should be some point to doing so. He would only object to hypostatizing this systematizing by the faculty of reason, and so holding that it says something about objects rather than concepts.

In effect Kant rejects the idea of a conceptual scheme imposed on an already given reality because conceptualization first gives us that reality. It is not the case that there is a realm of possible experience or possible engagement that thought then pertains to, because thought is already an essential part of the very idea of such a realm. When Kant says that thought applies to possible experience by being the condition of the possibility of experience, he means nothing less than that without thought there is simply no grasp of a field of possible experience. In contrast to both Merleau-Ponty and Quine, there is not a realm of Being prior to thought that detached reflection can either distort or grasp in alternative ways.

Kant distinguishes real possibility from logical possibility. One way of understanding this distinction is that real possibility is what can be conceptualized in first-order thinking while logical possibility is what can only be conceptualized in second-order or detached thinking. In this sense, real possibility is possibility regarding things, whereas logical possibility is possibility concerning thoughts of things. Something would be merely logically possible then if it can be conceptualized at a second-intentional level, but cannot show up in first-order thinking. The idea of a total realm or field of the given for conceptualization to be imposed upon (whether in alternative ways as for Carnap and Quine or in a distorting way as for Merleau-Ponty) is simply a logical possibility, not a real one.

## 6. Conclusion

In sum, Merleau-Ponty charges Kant with intellectualism in two ways. First he charges Kant with intellectualizing perception. Since Kant clearly accommodates perceptual synthesis prior to thought, the only truth in this charge is the claim that by abstracting from the bodily nature of perception Kant fails to give perception its due as that which on its own connects us to reality prior to being encompassed by

thought. Though Kant holds that there is outer intuition as opposed to outer imagination, for Merleau-Ponty this is only so if outer intuition has a bodily nature. I suggested that this objection of Merleau-Ponty's does not go far enough. If we are to reflectively understand how outer intuition is possible it is not enough that percepts have a bodily phenomenological character. The key rather is that excess-momentum percepts are by natural law impossible without the existence of external bodies. This reliance on natural law goes beyond Kant's absolute *a priori* as a philosophical grounding, and it also goes beyond Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological grounding. The second charge Merleau-Ponty makes is that thought distorts the connection to reality. Thought inherently has a detached or disengaged character, whereas reality has a 'for us' character of arising in and being inseparable from our modes of engagement. I claimed that Merleau-Ponty has no way of making good on the idea that prior to thought we have modes of engagement that extend to reality in the full stretches of space and time. Further, I claimed that Kant has an account of thoughts as rules uniting perceptual interaction, according to which thought is not detached, but is itself a conceptually mediated mode of engagement. Finally I contended that it is reason or second-intentional thinking, not understanding or first-order thinking, that is detached for Kant, and he would agree with Merleau-Ponty that such thinking, if mistaken for first-order thought, distorts the nature of reality. One significant such distortion I discussed was the idea of conceptual schemes, or the idea of the imposition of thought upon a field or realm of the given that is independent of thought.

### Notes

- 1 I use the standard A/B pagination for references to the *Critique (CPR)*. All translations are from the Kemp Smith edition (2003). Thanks to Richard Aquila for numerous helpful suggestions.

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