Kant’s Sensationist Conception of Particularity in the Critique of the (Reflecting) Power of Judgment

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Abstract

A crucial but neglected passage in Kant’s introduction to the Critique of the Power of Judgment reveals that the standard interpretation of Kant’s conception of ‘reflecting’ (according to which reflecting is a cognitive operation involved in the formation of empirical concepts) entails a contradiction. An alternative interpretation emerges upon considering that the philosophical problem to which Kant’s conception of reflecting responds is not how empirical concepts are formed but how un-synthesized, non-referential sensory states (what Kant calls ‘the particular as such’) first become synthesizable. The presence of this problem—together with the sensationist conception of particularity on which it is predicated, and the non-standard conception of reflecting its resolution requires—saves Kant from contradiction and provides insight into basic principles governing his philosophical vocabulary in the third Critique.

Keywords:
reflecting; the particular; transcendental chaos; sensationism.
1. Introduction

A fact rarely mentioned but well worth noting about Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is the imprecision of its title.¹ The central novelty in the third *Critique* is Kant’s introduction of a new form of judgment (*reflecting judgment*),² along with a new cognitive power that allows us to make judgments of that form (the *reflecting power of judgment*) and a new transcendental principle governing that power (the *principle of purposiveness*). Kant pointedly introduces reflecting judgment as a species of judgment distinct from determining judgment, which is associated with the understanding, and the only form of judgment Kant had recognized up to this point. Importantly, Kant does not believe that determining judgment admits of a transcendental deduction.³ Since it is thus misleading to say that judgment in a generic sense, comprehending both reflection and determination, admits of a critique,⁴ and since Kant does not countenance other forms of

¹ All references to Kant’s works are to *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, 29 vols., Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1902 –) with the exception of references to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which, following standard practice, will be to the pagination of the A and B editions. All translations from Kant’s works follow (with occasional slight modifications) Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, eds., *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, 17 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1995 –).

² On the use of the present participle ‘reflecting’ (as opposed to the adjective ‘reflective’) in order to characterize this new form of judgment and the associated power of judgment, see Guyer, Wood (1995 –), vol. 5 (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*), xlvi.

³ This can be seen in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most straightforward of these is that according to Kant, the determining power of judgment has no principle of its own: “it does not need to think of a law for itself in order to be able to subordinate the particular in nature under the universal” (5:179; see also 20:212). And where a cognitive ability is not governed by a principle, there cannot be a transcendental deduction of the principle governing that cognitive ability.

⁴ Although that continues to be the standard position, see, e.g., Henry Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Taste* (Cambridge University Press, 2001),18; Beatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge* (Princeton University Press, 1998),

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judgment, the only form of judgment that can properly speaking be up for a critique in the third Critique is reflecting judgment. Accordingly, Kant should have titled the book: Critique of the Reflecting Power of Judgment.6

With reflecting judgment thus pivotal to the third Critique—as witnessed, moreover, by the fact that the two sub-species of judgment that are the focus of Kant’s book (judgments of taste and teleological judgments) are forms of reflecting judg-

163; Paul Guyer, Kant’s System of Nature and Freedom (Oxford University Press, 2005), 12.

5 This can be seen clearly from the table that concludes Kant’s introduction (see 5:198). Kant there classifies the “Power of Judgment” (ibid.) as a distinct “Faculty of Cognition” (ibid.), uniquely associated with a distinct faculty of the mind (“Feeling of Pleasure and Displeasure,” ibid.), and governed by its own distinct a priori principle (“Purposiveness,” ibid.). The ‘Power of Judgment’ thus described is evidently the reflecting power of judgment, since the determining power of judgment is neither associated with pleasure (which, Kant insists, accompanies acts of reflection but not acts of determination; specifically, it does not accompany acts of either a priori or empirical conceptual determination; see 5:187), nor governed by the principle of purposiveness (or any other principle of its own; see note 3, above), and, instead, has the law “sketched out for it” (5:179) by the understanding. I take the fact that the principle of purposiveness is, thus, the principle of the reflecting power of judgment only—and not of the (principleless) determining power of judgment—to be evidence against the view, held, among others, by Paul Guyer, that reflecting and determining judgment are “two different uses or applications of the [same] power of judgment, but not two different faculties of mind” (Guyer, Wood, 1995 –, vol. 5, xlvii, my emphasis). Kant’s innovation in the third Critique is—precisely—to split off a reflecting power of judgment and its transcendental principle from what had been considered judgment before (and even now, as we will see, includes the concept-forming employment of the understanding) and to assign this new form of reflecting judgment to a ‘different faculty of mind’ altogether. Reflecting and determining judgment may, to be sure, still be considered forms of judgment in a generic sense (see 5:179), but this is a philosophically toothless sense that ignores their difference as, respectively, transcendentally grounded and not transcendently grounded.

6 Of course, the charge that Kant did not title thus is not entirely accurate. In his discussion of the subdivision of the work into Aesthetics and Teleology in the final section of the First Introduction, Kant does indeed refer to his new book as the “critique of the reflecting power of judgment in regard of nature” (20:251, my emphasis).
— it is of no small concern to understand just what sort of cognitive operation reflecting is supposed to be. Kant’s central pronouncements on the matter can be found in §§ IV and V of the Introduction to the Critique of the Power of Judgment. In § IV Kant explains what reflecting is; in § V he presents its transcendental principle. Astonishingly, Kant’s accounts there contradict each other flatly. The very cognitive operation that Kant, in § IV, identifies as the operation of reflecting and bills as the distinctive task of the reflecting power of judgment—the operation of “ascending from the particular to the universal” (5:180) or of “finding the universal [for the particular]” (5:179)—he bills, in § V, as “the necessary business of the understanding” (5:186). But the operation cannot be central to both faculties without openly undermining Kant’s aim of installing reflecting judgment as a separate power, alongside reason and the understanding, in the firmament of higher cognitive faculties.

The interest that the contradiction between Kant’s positions in §§ IV and V has generated among commentators—none—is inversely proportional to its significance. Either Kant is very seriously confused about the nature of reflecting in his Critique of the (Reflecting) Power of Judgment, or there is more (potentially much more) to reflecting than first meets the eye.

I divide my investigation into an analysis of the contradiction at hand (see 2), an exposition of Kant’s notions of ‘the particular’ and ‘reflecting’ which hold the key to its resolution (see

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7 See, e.g., 5:247, 360. This is evident, also, because both are governed by the principle of the reflecting power of judgment—the transcendental principle of purposiveness—and thus do not belong to the necessarily principle-less determining power of judgment which is subsidiary to the understanding.

8 Kant also addresses the operation of reflecting in the First Introduction to the Critique of the Power of Judgment: 20:201, 202, 209, 210, 214, 215, 248. No problem similar to the one I discuss below emerges from these passages, since all are essentially equivalent to Kant’s account of reflecting judgment’s task in § IV—and none to Kant’s account of that task in § V—of the Introduction to the Critique of the Power of Judgment.
3), and a short section on that resolution (see 4). I begin with a discussion of Kant’s characterization of the operation of reflecting in § IV of the Introduction (see 2.1), followed by a discussion of his conflicting characterization of that same operation in § V and a formal presentation of the contradiction between those characterizations (see 2.2). Due consideration shows that Kant is genuinely committed to each of the propositions whose conjunction entails the contradiction (see 2.3). It follows that unless Kant is equivocating on one or more of the terms entering into those propositions—that is to say, unless the contradiction is merely apparent—Kant is saddled with an irresolvable conflict at the very heart of the philosophical project of his third and final Critique. Further consideration shows that there is only one candidate-term on which Kant can, in the context of the third Critique, plausibly be equivocating: the notion of ‘the particular’ (see 2.4).

This plots the road ahead. The only way in which the contradiction between Kant’s claims in §§ IV and V can be resolved is if Kant there operates with two notions of particularity sufficiently different from each other to make the ascent from the particular to the universal discussed in § IV and the ascent from the particular to the universal discussed in § V different kinds of ascent. This alone can warrant Kant’s assignment of the two ascents to different cognitive faculties—turning the former into the distinctive task of the reflecting power of judgment and the latter into a distinctive task of the (fully distinct) understanding. Conversely, if no two sufficiently different notions of particularity (issuing in two sufficiently different notions of reflecting) were present in the third Critique, then—given the consequent absence of a difference in the distinctive cognitive tasks of the reflecting power of judgment and the understanding—no firm distinction could be drawn between these faculties. Kant’s philosophical project of a
Critique of the (Reflecting) Power of Judgment would ipso facto be doomed.

I begin my investigation of Kant’s pivotal notions of ‘the particular’ and ‘reflecting’ with an overview of the evolution, over the course of the third Critique, of Kant’s conception of the cognitive threat the transcendentally grounded operation of reflecting is supposed to address (3.1). Following this, I offer a close textual analysis of Kant’s statements in §§ 76-7 about the peculiar type of particularity he detects at the root of the most serious form of that threat—Kant’s sensationist conception of ‘the particular as such’ (which contrasts with Kant’s standard, objectual conception of particularity; 3.2). Next, I contend (referencing Kant’s related account of syntheses of the imagination in the first Critique) that this type of particularity does indeed give rise to that type of threat (3.3). Finally, I argue that the transcendentally grounded cognitive act of reflecting required in order to overcome the threat in question is a type of ascending from the particular to the universal fundamentally distinct from the concept-forming type usually mistaken for it (3.4). I end with a brief discussion of how, armed with two conceptions of particularity and two conceptions of reflecting, Kant avoids the otherwise devastating contradiction with which I began (see 4).

2. The Contradiction

2.1 § IV: The Task of the Reflecting Power of Judgment

Kant’s official account of the reflecting use of judgment in the Critique of the Power of Judgment can be found in the opening paragraphs of § IV of the Introduction. Kant begins by reminding his readers that the power of judgment in the broadest sense—covering both its reflecting and its determining variety—is the cognitive capacity to connect repre-
sentations through a relation of ‘containment’: “[t]he power of judgment as such is the capacity of thinking the particular as contained under the universal” (5:179). Three elements are thus involved in any exercise of the power of judgment: 1. the universal; 2. the particular; 3. thinking the latter as contained under the former (that is to say, subsuming the one under the other).

Little mystery initially attaches to these relata and their relation. First, by “the universal” under which the particular is to be subsumed, Kant understands a universal representation and, hence, an empirical or a priori concept or law. Second, since the sense in which universal representations contain their instances “under” them can only be logical—that is to say, it cannot be literally spatial—it follows that “the particular” we relate to a universal in a judgment cannot be an object, it must be a representation.\(^9\) As such, it can either be an intuition (whether sensible or pure) or another concept. If the particular subsumed under the universal in a judgment can thus itself be a universal—and, hence, as Kant understands conceptual universality, a representation of which universal use is made\(^10\)—then it is equally clear, however, that calling this representation ‘the particular’ is not meant to capture its logical use (or, else, no judgment could ever consist in the subordination of one concept under another). Instead, calling the subordinate representation ‘the particular’ is meant to characterize the thing that is presented in its representational content. Specifically, it is meant to highlight the fact that the individual object (or kind of object) a representation helps pick out is, eo ipso, a determinate object (or kind of object). This is Kant’s ‘objectual’ notion of particularity, mentioned above. Third, objects thus can be (logically) “contained under the universal,” but only indirectly, that is to

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\(^9\) See A68/B93.
\(^10\) See 9:91n.2.
say, only insofar as a representation that is thought, in judgment, as contained under the universal, itself has an intuitive relation to objects. The relation of ‘containment under’ that connects the universal with the particular is, accordingly, the logical relation of predication. For Kant, an exercise of ‘the power of judgment as such’ takes the form ‘This [representation of a determinate object (or kind of object)] is [universal representation],’ or ‘Fa.’ As is readily apparent, this account of judgment as the hierarchical interconnection of representations is fully consistent with Kant’s earlier characterization, in the Critique of Pure Reason, of judgment as “the mediate cognition of an object, hence the representation of the representation of it” (A68/B93).

What makes Kant return to the topic of judgment at the beginning of the third Critique is, ostensibly, that he now considers the relation between subject (“the particular”) and predicate (“the universal”) in a judgment (‘Fa’) not merely as a logical relation but also as a psychological one. That is to say, Kant now appears to consider judgments of the form ‘Fa’ diachronically—as mental processes—noting that we can arrive at them in two rather different ways. These two ways have to do with the availability of the universal under which the particular is to be subsumed: either that universal has already been formed, or it has not. In the former case, the psychological dimension is only implicit, as the judgment can still be captured in the essentially logical terms of Kant’s conception of “judgment as such.” Addressing this scenario first, Kant says that “[i]f the universal (the rule, the principle, the law) is given, then the power of judgment, which subsumes the particular under it … is determining” (5:179).

The idea of judgment as mental process comes to the fore when Kant considers predicative judgment from the ground-level up—from the perspective of particularity. Turning, thus, to the second of the above scenarios, Kant explains that “[i]f, however only the particular is given, for which it is to find the
universal, then the power of judgment is merely *reflecting*” (5:179). Kant’s point appears to be this: if determining judgment is concerned with applying an *extant* concept (*the universal*) to some one among a range of (representations of) objects (*the particular*), then there must be a converse mental operation—the operation of *reflecting*—concerned with taking up a range of (representations of) objects (*the particular*) in order to unify them in a *new* concept (*the universal*). Since reflecting’s task is that of “ascending from the particular to the universal” (5:180), and since the universal to which reflecting thus ascends is yet to be found—in and through that ascent\(^{11}\)—the task of reflecting appears to be the *logico-psychological* task of forming new concepts. A *reflecting judgment* is then simply an instance of this reflecting use of the power of judgment.

Kant, in his lectures on logic, had, of course, long talked about the role of just such a mental operation of reflecting in concept-formation.\(^{12}\) He there characterizes reflecting as the act of recognizing similarities among divers objects and, hence, as the central step in the formation of a concept (which, then, simply consists in disregarding the dissimilarities). The genuinely new idea in the third *Critique* thus does not appear to be that there is such a mental operation but that it is an exercise of judgment *sui generis*, distinct from the understanding (to which it had formerly been relegated).\(^{13}\) Kant’s theory of reflecting judgment in the third *Critique* then seems to be a straightforward development of his earlier account of the logico-psychological process of concept formation. While reflecting judgment’s task continues to be the formation of new concepts, that task is now considered to be the exercise of a

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\(^{11}\) See Longuenesse (1998), Ch. 6.


\(^{13}\) See 9:94.
unique cognitive capacity. The uniqueness of the operation of reflecting is readily apparent in structural terms. Reflecting’s ascent from the particular to the universal is the inversion of determining’s descent from the universal to the particular.

I believe that the neatness of this structural parallelism has been quite detrimental to interpretations of the opening paragraphs of § IV of the third Critique. There is a natural temptation to take Kant’s emphasis on the opposing directionalities of the two relations (reflecting judgment’s ascent vs. determining judgment’s descent) to imply that everything else about those relations—specifically, the relata—must be fixed. Yet, given how little Kant actually says about the nature of the particularity and universality at issue, there is no evidence beyond that parallelism for this interpretation. And that, it turns out, is an exceedingly weak and misleading foundation on which to rest so central a matter as the meaning of ‘reflecting’ in Kant’s Critique of the (Reflecting) Power of Judgment. For, as we will soon see, when Kant at last and at length addresses the nature of ‘the particular’ on which the reflecting power of judgment is exercised in §§ 76-7 (see 3.2-3, below), that particular turns out to refer to a very different sort of thing than the (representations of) spatio-temporally individuated, determinate objects that form the point of departure for empirical concept formation.

2.2 § V: The Task of the Understanding

Having described the task of the reflecting power of judgment in § IV of the Introduction, Kant proceeds, in § V, to explain its principle—the transcendental “principle of purposiveness” (5:184). Just why Kant should think that the cognitive operation of reflecting requires governance by a transcendental principle need not exercise us at this point. For, an answer to that question presupposes a working hypothesis of what the cognitive operation of reflecting is. And
while § IV, as we have seen, does furnish such a hypothesis (namely, that to reflect is to form empirical concepts), it is precisely this hypothesis that now, in § V, threatens to undermine the very nature of Kant’s philosophical project in the third *Critique*.

The problem begins when Kant, following his deduction of the principle of purposiveness, elaborates on the principle’s cognitive role by explaining that it is adopted “for our faculty of cognition,” that is to say, “for the human understanding” (5:186). The exercise of the reflecting power of judgment—governed by the transcendental principle of purposiveness—is thus not a cognitive end in its own right but a cognitive means that helps the understanding accomplish its end. Now, if the means to the understanding’s end is reflecting judgment’s ascent from the particular in nature to the universal, then what is the understanding’s end thereby served? Kant answers that reflecting judgment’s ascent is performed for the benefit of “… the human understanding in its necessary business of finding the universal for the particular that is offered to it by perception…” (5:186; my emphasis).

Kant’s claim, here, is rather surprising. Not only does the proposed means-end calculus appear to run in a circle (see 2.4.2, below); more importantly, by thus identifying the task of finding the universal for the particular (i.e., the task of reflecting judgment) as the necessary business of the understanding, Kant appears to contradict his earlier classification of that same task as the necessary business of the (fully distinct) reflecting power of judgment. This contradiction, if left unresolved, would fully undermine the critical aspirations of the third *Critique* as a *Critique of the (Reflecting) Power of Judgment*. Before discussing the contradiction further, a word is in order about why this potentially devastating inconsistency at the heart of Kant’s critical project in the third *Critique* should have gone unnoticed in the literature.
I think that there are two reasons for this oversight, one philosophical, one textual. The philosophical reason is that Kant’s intent to be providing a *Critique of the (Reflecting) Power of Judgment* has, even where acknowledged, not been taken very seriously by Kant’s commentators. It is, accordingly, not surprising that a claim that appears to contradict that critical intent would then either be overlooked or else deemed unworthy of remark. This is all the more so, since the upshot of Kant’s offending claim in § V (i.e., that ‘finding the universal for the particular is the necessary business of the understanding’) comes very close to the considered position usually attributed to Kant by his commentators, namely, that the tasks of reflecting judgment and the tasks of determining judgment are too closely linked to warrant assignment of the former to a power of judgment *sui generis*. This is not the place to discuss the merits and demerits of the consensus-view. Suffice it to say that the habitual dismissal of Kant’s critical aspirations in his capstone of the “entire critical enterprise” (5:170) is *prima facie* unsatisfying not merely on grounds of charity, but since it is

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14 Kant’s foundational view in the third *Critique* that the reflecting power of judgment differs fundamentally in both cognitive role and transcendental warrant from the understanding’s determining power of judgment (a view without which not much in the third *Critique* can be understood) has been called “somewhat misleading,” (Allison, 2001, 18) or “seriously misleading” (Longuenesse, 1998, 163), or altogether “unwarranted” (Guyer, 2005, 12). Even those who accept the reflecting power of judgment’s independence from the understanding do not automatically accept the reflecting power of judgment’s independence. Some commentators insist that reflecting judgment is governed by principles of the imagination. See Rebecca Kukla, “Placing the Aesthetic in Kant’s Critical Epistemology,” in R. Kukla, ed., *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant’s Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 12. Kukla, moreover, denies *a priori* status to those imaginative principles, therefore effectively rejecting any transcendental-philosophical role for the reflecting power of judgment at all. Others put reason in charge, similarly obviating the need for a faculty of reflecting judgment *sui generis*. See Rolf-Peter Horstmann, “Why must there be a transcendental deduction in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*?” in E. Förster (ed.), *Kant’s Transcendental Deductions* (Stanford University Press, 1989).

15 This is the view, in particular, of Allison (2001), Longuenesse (1998) and Guyer (2005); see preceding note.
based on a notion of reflecting that demonstrably stems from Kant’s Logic where it is antecedently—and explicitly—tied to the understanding. The consensus-view thus plainly begs the question against Kant’s stated critical ambition in the third Critique to be providing an account of the power of reflecting as distinct from the (necessarily principle-less) understanding—namely, governed by a transcendental principle all its own—as things get in critical philosophy.

The textual reason why the contradiction has been overlooked is, I suspect, more pedestrian. Kant’s remark is located in the wordy and difficult antecedent of a wordy and difficult conditional, itself situated in the final paragraph of what is, by any measure, a wordy and difficult section. The task of the consequent of Kant’s conditional is to explain the striking idea of the heautonomy of the principle of purposiveness. The far less glamorous task of Kant’s antecedent is to summarize the conclusion of his transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness and to characterize its overall cognitive role (such summaries are not infrequent in the third Critique16—little wonder one’s attention should wander). Moreover, Kant’s claim about the “necessary business” of the understanding, tucked away, as it is, deep inside this summary, has the look and feel of a throwaway remark—a casual reminder of some matter-of-course doctrine—hardly that of a potentially game-changing proclamation. As a result, Kant’s claim is much more likely to set lids aflutter than brows a-raisin.’ Kant’s sentence reads, in full:

Thus if one says that nature specifies its universal laws in accordance with the principle of purposiveness for our faculty of cognition, i.e., into suitability for the

16 They can, for example, be found at: 5:179-80, 184, 185, 186, 188, 404, 406, 407.
human understanding in its necessary business of finding the universal for the particular that is offered to it by perception and, again, [of finding] connection in the unity of the principle for all that is different (though for each species universal), then one is thereby neither prescribing a law to nature nor learning one from it by means of observation (although that principle can be found by the latter). (5:186)

Riveting reading it is not. Still, Kant’s unequivocal announcement that the task of finding the universal for the particular is the necessary business of the understanding, once properly taken note of, cannot fail to surprise.¹⁷ Explain it or explain it away, reckon with it, we must. For, the claim, as presented, means that Kant embraces three, mutually incompatible positions:

i. The task “of ascending from the particular in nature to the universal” (5:180) is the “obligation” (ibid.) of the reflecting power of judgment;

ii. The task “of finding the universal for the particular that is offered to it by perception” (5:186) is the “necessary business” (ibid.) of the understanding (see also 5:187);

iii. The reflecting power of judgment and the understanding are fully distinct—both in their cognitive task and in the principle governing that task. (See, for example, 5:169, 198).

¹⁷ Kant, moreover, makes a similar remark in § VI, where he claims that the “discovery [of the order of nature in its particular laws] is a task for the understanding” (5:187). One should have thought that—given Kant’s conception of the operation of reflecting as ‘finding’ the universal—the discovery of order was a task for the reflecting power of judgment.
These claims do not (yet) formally contradict each other because of the terminological discrepancies between i. and ii. But these discrepancies are easily shown to be merely superficial, whence the conflict is shown to be serious. Most importantly, perhaps, the putative conflict between the three claims cannot be resolved by pointing out that the tasks at issue are different (that is to say, it cannot be resolved by pointing out that the reflecting power of judgment is charged with ‘ascending to the universal’ while the understanding is charged with ‘finding the universal’). Kant, after all, characterizes the task of the reflecting power of judgment in both ways. \[18\] Similarly, even though the contradiction can ultimately be shown to be merely apparent because Kant operates with two different notions of ‘the particular’ (see 3, below), the difference between these notions cannot be gleaned from Kant’s alternate characterizations of the particular as ‘in nature’ and as ‘offered by perception.’ Since our access to empirical particularity is sensibly mediated, ‘the particular in nature’ and ‘the particular offered by perception’ are, for all practical purposes, the same thing. Finally, there is no substantive difference between the ‘necessary business’ and the ‘obligation’ of a cognitive faculty. Both expressions refer to the cognitive function that a given cognitive faculty is to execute and without which it would not be that faculty.

If the terminological differences between Kant’s claims in §§ IV and V are, thus, merely superficial, then we can formalize Kant’s claims there as follows. Let ‘a’ stand for the operation of ‘ascending from the particular to the universal’ (or ‘reflecting’); let ‘r’ stand for ‘the reflecting power of judgment’; let ‘u’ stand for ‘the understanding’; and let ‘N’ be the two-place

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\[18\] See 5:179 and 5:180. In order to achieve uniformity of exposition, I will, from here on, refer to the cognitive operation of reflecting as tasked with ‘ascending from the particular to the universal’ and to the accomplished task as an ‘ascent.’
predicate ‘... is the necessary business of ....’ Kant, it appears, is committed to all three of the following claims:

i. Ascending from the particular to the universal (reflecting) is the necessary business of the reflecting power of judgment (‘aNr’);

ii. Ascending from the particular to the universal (reflecting) is the necessary business of the understanding (‘aNu’);

iii. Whatever is the necessary business of the reflecting power of judgment is not the necessary business of the understanding (‘(x) (xNr → − xNu)’).

Kant, in short, appears committed to the conjunction: ‘aNr & aNu & (x) (xNr → − xNu)’—thereby contradicting himself. In order to avoid the contradiction, we must then either reject one of the three conjuncts (2.3) or, else, show that the contradiction is in fact only the appearance of a contradiction, hence, that its formulation involves an equivocation on either ‘a,’ ‘r,’ ‘u,’ or ‘N’ (2.4).

2.3 The Three Conjunctions

2.3.1 Kant’s Commitment to ‘aNr’ and ‘(x) (xNr → − xNu)’

Of particular interest, naturally, is whether Kant is committed to the claim, so seemingly out of step with the rest of the Introduction, that ascending from the particular to the universal is the necessary business of the understanding (‘aNu’). But it will be helpful to begin, simply, by assuming that Kant is indeed so committed. If we follow standard practice and assume, further, that Kant operates with a uniform notion of reflecting (reflecting = concept formation) in the third Critique, Kant’s commitments then either entail i. that,
although there is need for a new transcendental principle in the third Critique, this can be billed to the understanding after all (i.e., ‘aNr’ is true but ‘(x) (xNr → − xNu)’ is false; the previously unrecognized transcendental dimension of judgment is thus absorbed into the determining power of judgment), or ii. that there is no such new transcendental dimension at all (i.e., ‘aNr’ is false; there is no genuine innovation in Kant’s theory of judgment in the third Critique). The truth of either of these consequences would be devastating for Kant’s philosophical project of a Critique of the (Reflecting) Power of Judgment.

It is, of course, quite possible that Kant’s conclusions regarding the reflecting power of judgment’s distinctness from the understanding or regarding the transcendental status of its principle turn out to be ill-founded. But it is not plausible that Kant would openly undermine those conclusions—and the official raisons d’être for the third Critique at large—at the very moment at which he ostensibly seeks to draw them: at the end of § V, immediately following the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness, where he asserts ‘aNu’.

If Kant must, thus, be firmly committed to the first and third conjuncts, then the natural route by which to try to save him from contradiction is to deny Kant’s commitment to the middle conjunct in our schema, namely, to the claim that ascending from the particular to the universal is the necessary business of the understanding (‘aNu’). The idea here would be that this claim—at least when put forth in the context of the Critique of the Power of Judgment—must be a mistake.
2.3.2 Kant’s Commitment to ‘aNu’

There are two ways in which Kant’s identification of reflecting as the necessary business of the understanding (‘aNu’) could be a mistake. First, and simplest, it could be what we might call an honest mistake. On this view, Kant’s identification would neither be consistent with nor expressive of his actual position in the third Critique—it would have simply slipped into Kant’s exposition unintended, unwarranted, and undetected. Kant’s offending claim (‘aNu’) would be a matter of simple oversight. Accordingly, there would be no need to reconcile that claim with Kant’s official philosophical doctrines in the third Critique, since we may ignore honest mistakes. While this version of events is not inconceivable, it is highly implausible. To be sure, Kant was working on the introduction to the third Critique under great pressure. It was the last part of the manuscript to be sent off to his publisher Lagarde, and while Kant was keen on submitting the introduction in time for inclusion of his new Critique in the Frankfurt book fair of April 1790, Kant kept working on that introduction—paring down an earlier, “disproportionately wide-ranging,”\(^{19}\) draft—until it was practically too late to make the cut (he managed). It is, perhaps, not too hard to imagine that, in the hectic days leading up to the completion of the introduction, a careless formulation crept in unnoticed.\(^{20}\) Certainly, no parallel formulation can be found in the earlier version of the introduction which was presumably produced under more relaxed circumstances.\(^{21}\) And yet, as an explanation of the offending passage in § V, this will not do. We are not, after all, dealing with a minor oversight. Kant

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\(^{19}\) Letter 549, 11:396.

\(^{20}\) One might, of course, argue for the opposite conclusion, noting that the attention Kant evidently devoted to the introduction would have made this sort of mistake all the less likely.

\(^{21}\) It was posthumously published and is now known as the First Introduction to the ‘Critique of the Power of Judgment.’
expressly discusses the cognitive ascent from the particular to the universal—definitive of the operation of reflecting in the *Critique* devoted to that operation—in only three places in the final manuscript.\(^{22}\) No matter how rushed Kant may have been, the idea that, in one of those places, he somehow simply got confused about which cognitive faculty he had assigned the operation of reflecting to, defies belief.\(^{23}\) Besides, and this I take to be decisive evidence against the idea, the passage remains unchanged in the 2\(^{nd}\) and 3\(^{rd}\) editions of 1793 and 1799, even as Kant makes “numerous”\(^{24}\) other (by no means merely stylistic) revisions, adding a total of six pages to the final tally.

The second sense in which Kant’s identification of reflecting as the necessary business of the understanding could be a mistake is that it is not so much an honest mistake as a more complicated and revealing one: an inadvertent slip of the pen, allowing us to glimpse Kant’s true thoughts on the matter of reflecting. On this view, Kant (whether he knew it or not) did not actually believe that the reflecting use of judgment has transcendental grounds or that it belongs to a cognitive faculty distinct from the understanding. Unable fully to suppress them, Kant’s actual beliefs burst forth in the passage at hand. This, too, however, will not do. Not only is this account psychologically jejune, but, given the magnitude of the inconsistency between the ‘secret’ and the ‘official’ position, it is simply implausible that Kant would not have noticed it. Having noticed, plausible responses would then have been either to face the music and rework the *Critique* (namely, to re-

\(^{22}\) Those places are the places that have already been discussed: 5:179, 180, 186. As we will see, the idea of such an ascent is, however, implicit throughout much of § 76-7. Kant, moreover, discusses the ascent at 20:201, 202, 209, 210-11, 214, 215, 248.

\(^{23}\) Moreover, as noted before, he seems to be committing a closely related mistake at 5:187.

assess his commitment to the first or third conjuncts in our schema), or to hide the inconsistency (at least in subsequent editions) in order not to tank the project of a *Critique of the (Reflecting) Power of Judgment*, whatever private misgivings he may already have had about it. The latter would have been easy enough to do. Kant could have simply dropped the middle conjunct: the passage in § V and a similar-sounding passage in § VI (see n. 17) are the only places in the third *Critique* in which Kant identifies ‘ascending from the particular to the universal’ as the task of the understanding. The one course of action that makes no sense, on this scenario, is the course of action that Kant actually took: to let the contradiction stand, unresolved, and in plain view.

Now, in one sense, Kant’s claim, in § V, that ascending from the particular to the universal is the task of the understanding is, of course, not shocking at all. It is simply Kant’s long-held position that reflecting is but one among the syntheses carried out by the understanding. Kant not only held this view long before and long after the publication of the third *Critique* but makes explicit reference to it, also, in the *First Introduction* to the book itself (the one he deemed disproportionately long). Kant explains that one of the two types of reflecting he recognizes there is the ability “to compare and hold together given representations with others … in regard of a concept thereby made possible” (20:211). This plainly refers to the

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25 Kant’s characterization of “Reflection” as an “act of the understanding” (9:94; see n. 13, above) appears in the Jäschke Logik of 1800.

26 The second type is “to compare and hold together given representations … with one’s cognitive faculty in regard of a concept thereby made possible” (20:211, my emphasis). The fact that Kant here presents two types of reflecting—as opposed to the single type interpreters ordinarily find in this passage (see, e.g., Allison, 2001, 18)—has been seen clearly in Helga Mertens, *Kommentar zur Ersten Einleitung in Kants Kritik der Urteilskraft* (München: Berchmann, 1975), 95. Mertens nevertheless misses the systematic significance of her discovery when she continues to insist—without supporting argument—that the form of reflecting
concept-forming type of reflecting from Kant’s Logic that is not in need of transcendental backing—and, hence, does not belong to the reflecting power of judgment—because it is in fact a kind of determination (the determination of a concept). This, combined with the implausibility of the idea that Kant’s offending claim (‘aNu’) is either an honest mistake or an inadvertent disclosure, demands that we take the claim at face value. Kant, in § V, really does state the matter-of-course doctrine that his casual manner suggests. Kant, I propose, never actually changed his position that some forms of reflecting (specifically, the form involved in forming concepts) are the task of the understanding. The claim that ascending from the particular to the universal is the necessary business of the understanding (‘aNu’) is, then, Kant’s considered view as well.

2.4 Equivocation

If Kant is thus committed to all three conjuncts discussed, then their joint contradiction is, on the face of it, genuinely worrisome. If Kant’s seemingly inconsistent commitments are not to wreak havoc in the third Critique, then we must show that Kant uses at least one of the terms in the three conjuncts in more than one sense—hence, that Kant is equivocating. Given the earlier schematization, there are four terms that occur more than once in the conjunction discussed and, hence, four terms that Kant can conceivably be equivocating on: the name ‘a’ (‘ascending from the particular to the universal’); the name ‘r’ (‘the reflecting power of judgment’); the name ‘u’ (‘the understanding’); the predicate ‘N’ (‘… is the necessary business of’…’). I address them in reverse order.

judgment relevant to Kant’s third Critique is the first, concept-forming type. For discussion of the second type of reflection, see § 3.4, below.

2.4.1 Necessary Business (‘…N…’)  

C onsistent with the earlier assumption that there is no substantive difference in meaning between the application to cognitive faculties of the two-place predicate ‘… is the necessary business of …’ and the alternate predicate ‘… is the obligation of …,’ I assume, further, that Kant is not equivocating on the notion of a cognitive faculty’s ‘necessary business’ itself. The necessary business of a cognitive faculty refers, uniformly, to the cognitive function that makes that faculty the faculty it is and in the absence of which it would not be that faculty (and possibly not be at all, if this cognitive function were its sole business).

2.4.2 The Understanding (‘u’)  

I nitially perhaps the most attractive route for resolving the contradiction by appeal to equivocation is to see whether Kant equivocates on the notion of the understanding (‘u’). Kant, after all, sometimes uses the notion of the understanding “in a wider sense” (20:222), in which it refers to the “upper cognitive faculty in general” (20:223), as opposed to the usual narrower sense, in which the notion refers specifically to the faculty of concepts. Kant uses the notion of the understanding in this wider sense, when he wants to distinguish the upper cognitive faculty, as a whole, from the lower cognitive faculty (from sensibility). Now, since the upper cognitive faculty comprises not only reason and the faculty of concepts but also the new reflecting power of judgment, it is clear that both reflecting judgment’s task of ascending from the particular to the universal and the transcendental principle governing that task do indeed belong to the understanding, taken in that ‘wider’ sense. From this perspective, Kant’s claim that ‘ascending from the particular to the universal is the necessary business
of the understanding’ (‘aNu’) seems unproblematic: it is an uncontroversial reminder that reflecting is, inevitably, an exercise of our cognitive and not of our sensible powers. Moreover, so long as Kant, in his simultaneous insistence on the difference between the reflecting power of judgment and the understanding (‘∀x (xNr → – xNu)’), takes the notion of the understanding (‘u’) in the narrower sense (as referring to the faculty of concepts), no contradiction looms.

Unfortunately, while this appeal to Kant’s distinction between a wider and a narrower construal of the notion of the understanding resolves the contradiction between Kant’s positions in §§ IV and V formally, it fully undermines the philosophical point Kant is trying to make in the passage at the end of § V, in which he asserts ‘aNu.’ Kant there explains that if the transcendental principle of the reflecting power of judgment (i.e., the principle of purposiveness) is—as the transcendental deduction Kant just gave of it demands—exercised for the benefit of the understanding (‘in its necessary business of finding the universal for the particular’), then we must consider this principle of purposiveness one by means of which judgment legislates to itself. What is important, for present purposes, is not Kant’s point about the ‘heautonomy’ of the principle of purposiveness in the consequent, but the instrumental claim in the antecedent. If Kant there did indeed use the notion of the ‘understanding’ in a wider sense inclusive of the reflecting power of judgment—reminding us that the reflecting power of judgment’s ascent from the particular to the universal is eo ipso an exercise of our upper cognitive faculty—then Kant’s instrumental claim would become plainly tautologous. It would be the claim that reflecting judgment’s ascent from the particular to the universal is exercised for the benefit of our upper cognitive faculty’s (and here: reflecting judgment’s!) ascent from the particular to the universal. This cannot, in all seriousness, be what Kant is trying to say, whence the contradiction between
Kant’s positions in §§ IV and V cannot be resolved by appeal to Kant’s wider sense of ‘the understanding.’

2.4.3 The Reflecting Power of Judgment (‘r’)

The alternative that Kant equivocates on the notion of ‘the reflecting power of judgment’ (‘r’) in the first and last conjuncts of our schema (‘aNr’ and ‘(x) (xNr → − xNu)’) makes even less sense. For, while there certainly are competing conceptions of ‘the understanding’ in Kant’s third Critique, there simply is no basis in the text for an equivocation on the notion of ‘the reflecting power of judgment’ itself. Kant entertains only one conception of that power in the Critique of the (Reflecting) Power of Judgment. Indeed, carving out even that one sense of a reflecting power of judgment as genuinely distinct from the understanding is difficult enough. The point of my analysis is to show that, on a uniform conception of reflecting as concept formation, that distinction is in fact impossible. The idea that Kant’s Introduction contains two senses of reflecting (distinct from each other and from the understanding) is without warrant.

2.4.4 Ascending from the Particular to the Universal (‘a’)

The only remaining term in our schema on which Kant can possibly be equivocating is the name ‘a’—the name for the cognitive operation of reflecting or of ‘ascending from the particular to the universal.’ If Kant did not equivocate on the notion of ‘ascending from the particular to the universal,’ then the contradiction between the three conjuncts would be irresolvable within the context of the third Critique, since Kant’s commitment to the three conjuncts is genuine (by 2.3, above) and since there are no other sources of equivocation (by the results of the current section, thus far).
The notion of ‘ascending from the particular to the universal’ (‘a’) is, of course, itself composed of three sub-expressions: i. the two-place predicate ‘ascending from … to …’; ii. the name ‘the universal’; iii. the name ‘the particular.’ Each of these sub-expressions is a prima facie candidate for an equivocation. But only an equivocation on the notion of ‘the particular’ can be the source of the genuine difference in meaning—necessary in order to save Kant from contradiction—between the respective ascents from the particular to the universal in §§ IV and V. The reason for this is twofold.

First, while the resolution of the contradiction at hand does demand that Kant equivocate on the relational expression ‘ascending from … to …’ in the two occurrences of ‘a’ in our schema, the question whether he does in fact so equivocate depends entirely on whether he equivocates on at least one of the two relata. Without equivocation on the relata, there would be no non-arbitrary way in which one case of ‘ascending from the particular to the universal’ could be different in kind from another.

Turning to the relata, we are reminded, second, that Kant’s notion of “the universal” refers to concepts, conceived as abstract rules of synthesis, or “analytical universal[s]” (5:407), and, hence, conceived in contradistinction to the sensible contents of intuitions that fall under those concepts. While there certainly are different types of concept—for example, empirical concepts (‘dog’) and pure concepts of the understanding (‘cause’)—shifting between these types does not amount to an equivocation on the notion of ‘the universal’ itself. It is, however, possible that Kant on occasion takes the notion of ‘the universal’ in a broader sense than merely to refer to some type of concept or other. In this broader sense of ‘the universal,’ the ascent from the particular to the universal would refer to an ascent to cognition as such. Thus, even if Kant (as we saw) does not take the notion of ‘the understanding’ (‘u’) in a ‘wider’
sense, he may very well use the notion of ‘the universal’ as it occurs in ‘a’ in such a wider sense (as referring, jointly, to principles for as well as products of any kind of cognition at all) in one of the two occurrences of ‘a’ in our schema. Unfortunately, even if this were the case, this would still not, by itself, settle the question whether the respective ascents in §§ IV and V—thus differently characterized—are two different kinds of ascent. After all, the task of concept formation is not only the task of finding an individual concept (‘the universal,’ in the narrower sense) but, eo ipso, an instance of cognition as such (‘the universal,’ in the wider sense). Thus, even if Kant, in §§ IV and V, had alternately broader and narrower conceptions of ‘the universal’ in mind (as I in fact believe he does; see 3.4, below), he could very well be describing the same kind of ascent. An answer to the question whether Kant operates with two genuinely different conceptions of ‘ascending from the particular to the universal’ can, then, only ride on an answer to the question whether Kant operates with two different conceptions of ‘the particular.’

3. The Particular

In the third Critique, Kant considers the particular—and, more precisely, what is given when “only the particular is given” (5:179) for which ‘the universal’ has not (yet) been found—the source of a threat of serious cognitive disunity or ‘chaos.’ Contrary to his first-Critique view, Kant now believes that, when only the particular is given, the universal could not be found if our minds were equipped with sensibility, understanding, and reason alone. Kant argues that a transcendentally grounded operation of reflecting (assigned to an ‘upper’ cognitive faculty distinct from reason and the understanding) is needed in order to address and overcome this threat to conceptual cognition.
As noted above, Kant’s idea of the continued presence, in his critical philosophy, of a cognitive threat of this magnitude—the basic design-principle of Kant’s Critique of design-principles—has not been popular with the critics. I take it, that this is the result of a fairly common tendency among commentators to try to get to the philosophically ‘juicy’ (aesthetic and teleological) parts of the third Critique quickly—perhaps coupled with a belief that Kant left no fundamental epistemic problem unsolved (or at least un-addressed) in the Critique of Pure Reason. This tendency has too often come at the expense of sustained investigations of what Kant’s critical ambitions in the third Critique might actually be;28 not to mention how they actually govern the theories of beauty and organic life that—at least for Kant—are very much the fruit of those ambitions. A methodologically sound approach must, at any rate, go the other way around. We must get clear about the nature of Kant’s critical ambitions first and worry about their aesthetic and teleological implications later. This is not to deny that those implications might, in turn, further illuminate Kant’s ambitions—nor is it to deny that those implications are what is ultimately of interest in the third Critique. It is, however, to deny that the investigation of those implications can be anything other than a subsequent step that presupposes—and is not itself presupposed by—the first. Kant was, after all, a systematic philosopher, most certainly in his Critique of systematicity. In order to understand what Kant is really up to in the aesthetic and teleological parts of the third Critique we must thus attain an antecedent and (at least provisionally) independent understanding of the nature and transcendental-philosophical role of the conceptual resources in his employ. Principal among those resources, are the notions of

28 Notable recent exceptions include Rachel Zuckert, Kant on Beauty and Biology (Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Angelica Nuzzo, Kant and the Unity of Reason (Purdue University Press, 2005).
‘reflecting’ and ‘the particular,’ which are, for those reasons, my sole focus here.29

3.1 Three Kinds of Chaos

Over the course of the third Critique, Kant gives three main accounts of the cognitive threat he believes is raised when ‘only the particular is given.’ Two of these accounts are located in § V of the Introduction, one is located in § 77. In § V Kant first presents the threat as one concerning disunity among empirical cognitions. Kant explains that there may be such diversity among the “particular beings of nature” (5:183) that “no thoroughgoing interconnection of empirical cognitions into a whole of experience would take place” (5:183). The threat Kant detects, here, is notably not that there would be no interconnection among empirical cognitions, only that there would be no ‘thoroughgoing’ one. How severe a threat this is, accordingly, depends on the level of empirical cognition at which the problem of disunity is supposed to strike. Kant’s discussion suggests that it strikes at a relatively low level.30 We are supposed to imagine a case of spatio-temporally determinate objects, available for categorial synthesis, that are each “specifically distinct” (5:183) from the other—each, as it were, a lowest species all to itself.31 While we are not to imagine these objects as either un-conceptualized or non-conceptualizable (or, else, we could not have empirical cognitions of them), we are to imagine that the conceptual determinations they do afford (including law-like generalities)

29 The other, often ill- or mis-understood foundational concepts in the third Critique are ‘purposiveness’ and ‘regulativity.’ I address the meaning of Kant’s notion of purposiveness in Thomas Teufel, “Kants Non-Teleological Conception of Purposiveness,” Kant-Studien (2011, forthcoming).
30 Although Kant considers alternative scenarios. See 5:188.
31 Cf., 20:216.
are infinitely manifold. More to the point, we are to imagine
that one is as good as the other, hence, that we can discern no
grounds for hierarchical subordination among them. As a result,
the conceptualizations such objects would afford would yield at
best fleeting groupings but not stable subdivisions into genera
and species and, hence, no thoroughgoing interconnection
between our cognitions of those objects. It is important to
emphasize that despite Kant’s suggestion that the threat has to
do with diversity among beings in nature, Kant ultimately
conceives of it as an epistemic—not an ontological—threat. Or,
else, the heautonomous transcendental principle that Kant offers
as an antidote to that threat would be powerless to overcome
it. As such, the predicament can perhaps be compared, by way
of pathological analogy, to severe forms of agnosia. Henry
Allison has, evocatively, called it the specter of “empirical
chaos.”

If this predicament sounds bad enough, there is another,
deeper concern discernible in Kant’s second appeal to the threat
of disunity among our cognitions in § V. Kant there notes that
“given perceptions” (5:184) may present us with “material” that
would make it “impossible for our understanding to discover
[among empirical laws of nature] an order that we can grasp …
and to make an interconnected experience out of [this] material”
(5:185). At first, the threatened impossibility to make an
interconnected experience out of empirical cognitions sounds
like a mere reminder of the earlier passage. But the threat has, in
fact, evolved from the threat of an impossibility of discovering a
thoroughgoing interconnection among empirical cognitions to
the threat of an impossibility of discovering any interconnection
at all among empirical cognitions. Note that it is unclear
whether fully non-interconnected cognitive episodes—resulting

32 See 3.3, below.
33 Allison (2001), 38.
from our intellect’s encounter with an infinitely manifold nature “not fitted for our power of comprehension” (5:185, my emphasis)—could continue to be cognitive episodes (let alone empirical cognitions of causally interacting substances in space and time, hence, self-conscious experience), at all. The philosophical power of Kant’s scenario here comes up hard against the rhetorical limitations of his presentation: it is difficult to see how material that is truly “impossible” for us to grasp could still yield “empirical laws” (5:185)—let alone an infinite manifold of empirical laws—for our understanding to ponder. The scenario, as Kant presents it, is, accordingly, somewhat unstable. Let’s call it the specter of ‘phenomenal chaos’ (on the assumption that the supposedly non-interconnected mental episodes continue to convey a modicum of phenomenal object-awareness, but little beyond that).

Turning to § 77, we find that Kant further disentangles the philosophical point of the threat of disunity from the limitations of his presentation. He now explains simply and categorically (not to mention, three times) that “our understanding … determines nothing with regard to the manifoldness of [the particular]” (5:407.13-9, my emphasis).\(^\text{34}\) The threat, as Kant now presents it, is then emphatically not (as the first specter has it and as the second continues to suggest) that the understanding’s power of determination is effective at a ground level of synthesisization, at which it helps us cognize individual objects, but that it then (somewhat inexplicably) looses its effectiveness when it comes to groups of such objects. The threat, as Kant now presents it, is that—for lack of determinable particularity—the understanding’s power of determination determines nothing at all. This specter is not the trivial one that, absent the power of concept-forming reflection, empirical or pure concepts must fail to determine sensible particulars because, without concept

\(^{34}\) The other two places are 5:406.11-4, 406.34-7.
formation, there would be no concepts (pure or empirical). It is, rather, the considerably more daunting threat that—absent a transcendentally grounded power of reflecting—even extant concepts would fail to determine sensible particularity in judgment because sensible particularity is by its very nature, not determinable by the understanding. It is, in short, the threat of a fundamental incompatibility between our ‘upper’ cognitive faculty and the ‘material’ on which that faculty is supposed to be exercised (see 3.2, below).

Kant’s conception of the threat, which the reflecting power of judgment is tasked to overcome or neutralize, has thus evolved from a threat that there may be no stable interconnections among cognitions (‘empirical chaos’), to a threat that there may be no interconnections among cognitions (‘phenomenal chaos’), to a threat that there may be no cognitions. This most severe threat of disunity addressed in the third Critique is then not so much a threat of disunity among the products of our cognitive faculties as a threat of disunity among our cognitive faculties. The specter of “empirical chaos” has morphed into a specter of “transcendental chaos.”

Now, I take it that Kant, over the course of the third Critique, simply states ever more clearly what had been his considered view of the problem of disunity all along. But even if the three versions of a cognitive threat noted did present three bona fide and independent difficulties (all of which Kant intended the reflecting power of judgment to address), it is clear that in order to understand the nature of the operation of reflecting, we must

35 See Longuenesse (1998), Ch. 6 and Allison (2001), Ch. 1.
36 My use of this term differs significantly from Allison’s, who reserves it for the very different worry that the categories might not find thoroughgoing application with regard to already intuitively synthesized spatio-temporal events. For a conception of transcendental chaos related to the one discussed here, see Kenneth R. Westphal, “Kant, Wittgenstein and Transcendental Chaos,” *Philosophical Investigations* 28.4 (2005): 303-323.
first consider it in light of the most serious and fundamental of
the cognitive threats it is supposed to help overcome.

A version of this recognition is already implicit in Allison’s
account of the threat of “empirical chaos.” Perhaps suspecting
that the terms of the specter haunting § V of the Introduction
might ultimately fail to warrant (or be impervious to) transcen-
dental address, Allison claims that, in the recapitulation of the
transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness in §§
76-7, Kant addresses the “even more fundamental [and]
endemic … contingency that the ‘particular, as such’ (als ein
solches) has with respect to the universal supplied by the
understanding.”37 While Allison remains sketchy on the details,
he notes (correctly) that Kant’s ‘particular as such’ is not to be
considered “qua spatiotemporal entity or event.”38 Accordingly,
the threat of cognitive disunity this form of particularity
presents concerns intuitive manifolds considered untouched by
spatial and temporal syntheses. Allison, to be sure, never
distinguishes clearly between this deeper cognitive threat and
the one he originally identified in § V of the Introduction
(incongruously calling the ‘more fundamental and endemic’
threat emerging in §§ 76-7 one of “empirical chaos,” even after
conceding that it does not presuppose the ground-level of
spatio-temporal synthesization which necessarily is presup-
posed by disorder at the empirical level). Still, Allison’s
important insight is that there is a deepening, over the course of
the third Critique, of Kant’s presentation of the cognitive threat
that the principle of purposiveness (and, a fortiori, the operation
of ascending from the particular to the universal governed by
that principle—hence, the operation of reflecting) is supposed
to overcome.

37 Allison (2001), 38.
38 Allison (2001), 39.
3.2 The Particular ‘As Such’

3.2.1 The Particular Qua Sensible Intuition

Kant, not surprisingly, addresses the nature of the particularity that gives rise to the specter of transcendental chaos in the part of the text in which he presents that specter—in the pivotal §§ 76-7. § 76, entitled simply “Remark” (5:401), is an extended aside in the Dialectic of the Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment. The ostensible purpose of this remark is to recapitulate and (more importantly) recalibrate the original transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness in § V of the Introduction, in order to prepare its results for their application—in § 77—to the main line of argument in the Dialectic. In the process, the noted deepening of Kant’s earlier characterization of the threat that reflecting judgment’s ascent from the particular to the universal is supposed to address occurs.

The central difference between Kant’s presentation in § V and § 76 is that Kant now characterizes the cognitive predicament that makes a transcendental principle of purposiveness necessary as a limitation of our understanding in its relation, specifically, to sensibility (and not in its relation to the diversity of low-level empirical conceptualizations). Kant begins his account of the sort of particular that makes a principle of reflecting judgment necessary by invoking his foundational point, from the Critique of Pure Reason, that cognition depends on both “concepts and sensible intuitions” (5:401), noting that these are “two entirely heterogeneous elements” (Ibid., my emphasis). The clear suggestion is that ‘the particular’ that gives

39 That is to say, it is not surprising that Kant does not already address the nature of this sort of particularity in great depth in § V of the Introduction, where his characterization of the cognitive threat that the operation of reflecting is supposed to address remains at the level of Allison’s “empirical chaos.”
rise to the specter of transcendental chaos (hence, ‘the particular’ from which the reflecting power of judgment takes its ascent) consists of sensible intuitions.

This is a fair start but the point needs to be developed. First of all, the ‘entire’ heterogeneity between two elements of cognition can only go so far: without some commonality, no commerce between the two elements would be possible at all—the specter of their utter incompatibility could not be exorcised. And, indeed, both concepts and sensible intuitions certainly are representations for Kant, understood here in a broad sense that covers any mental episode whatever (including non-referential ones). Granting this minimal homogeneity to the two elements, the question then becomes just how incommensurable these two kinds of representation really are.

Cutting to the heart of the matter, Kant explains that sensible intuitions, by themselves, “give [geben] something without thereby letting us cognize [erkennen] it as an object” (5:402). Concepts, by contrast, lack intuitive content and hence “concern merely the possibility of an object” (Ibid.). Intuitions present mere unspecified ‘somethings’ as actual—but they are not cognitions of objects. Concepts are cognitions of objects—but they do not present those objects as actual. Unfortunately, this way of setting up the supposedly near abyssal difference between two elements of cognition is still somewhat unconvincing—not so much because it misrepresents the nature of the ‘heterogeneity’ the reflecting power of judgment is called upon to overcome, but because it overstates the difference between concepts and intuitions.

First of all, sensible intuitions, qua singular representations, hardly lack cognitive reference to objects. They do not give amorphous somethings. Instead, thanks to their essentially
indexical form of reference, sensible intuitions very much do present objects. They give what can perhaps best be described as Sellarsian ‘this-such’ things: not yet conceptually specified but nevertheless spatio-temporally (and on some accounts categorically) fully determined individuals. Now, one might respond that, in pointing to the ‘entire heterogeneity’ of concepts and intuitions, Kant surely does not mean to deny that intuitions have reference to objects, only that intuitions alone—without intervention by empirical concepts—can make the ‘this-such’ things they represent objects of empirical cognition. But, second, even if this were Kant’s position (and Kant’s famed point about the blindness of intuitions is prima facie evidence in favor), intuitions are no different in this regard from concepts, which equally fail in making the things they represent objects of empirical cognition (if for opposite reasons). Both concepts and intuitions make cognitive reference to objects, neither can generate empirical cognition without the other—it is hard to see how these two features could support a near unbridgeable gulf between the two kinds of representation.

Still, even if concepts and intuitions are not nearly as heterogeneous as Kant suggests, they certainly do differ: one is an abstract universal representation, the other a concrete singular representation. One may wonder if this difference does not already suffice to give rise to the cognitive threat that Kant hopes to neutralize through the intervention of the reflecting power of judgment. The answer is that it does not—on neither of the three construals of the threat discussed. Initially, the ‘this-such’ things sensible intuitions present (namely, not-yet conceptually specified, but spatio-temporally individuated and,

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42 Hanna (2001), 197.
arguably, categorically determined objects) seem to be just the sort of particulars Kant had in mind in the second incarnation of the threat to cognition that I called the specter of ‘phenomenal chaos.’ Sensible intuitions make cognitive reference to objects (whether they are fully self-conscious empirical cognitions of objects, or not), yet, they are fully conceptually isolated from each other. But further consideration shows that there is nothing about a range of given ‘this-such’ things that would make it “impossible for our understanding to discover in [them] an order that we can grasp” (5:185, my emphasis) or that could reveal them as somehow “not fitted for our power of comprehension” (Ibid., my emphasis). The entirely straightforward reason is that sensible intuitions are already products of synthesis—namely, of an “aggregation and coordination of sensory impressions”—and, a fortiori, products of the understanding. Accordingly, they very much do present us with an order subject to our cognitive grasp. Ferreting out similarities and differences between such ‘this-such’ things (hence, concept formation), while surely an open-ended task, is then simply the continuation of something (namely, synthesizing) our restless minds already do (and well)—without the need for transcendental guarantees that the activity we thought we had down pat was not actually (and unbeknownst to us!) impossible after all.

Much the same must be said when considering whether the difference between concepts and sensible intuitions could give rise to the specter of transcendental chaos. Since sensible intuitions and the ‘this-such’ things they present are products of

43 For an argument against the view that ‘this-such’ things are categorically determined, see Christian Wenzel, “Spielen nach Kant die Kategorien schon bei der Wahrnehmung eine Rolle? Peter Rohs und John McDowell,” Kant-Studien 96 (2005).
45 On the identity of the synthesis of the (productive) imagination with the understanding, see Jay Rosenberg, Accessing Kant (Oxford University Press, 2005), 96, 113.
the mind’s synthetic activity, it would simply be false to say that the understanding determines *nothing* with regard to them and, consequently, fully arbitrary to say that although the understanding does determine individual ‘this-such’ things it determines *nothing* when presented with a range of them.

While concepts and sensible intuitions are thus (*qua* products of synthesis) much too *homogeneous* to present us with either of the two more serious versions of the threat to cognition that Kant hopes to expel with the reflecting power of judgment, they are much too *heterogeneous* to present us with the first version. Sensible intuitions are simply too little synthesized (they are not yet conceptualized) to count as the “empirical cognitions” of objects which (this version of the threat maintains) cannot be unified.

I conclude that sensible intuitions (and the ‘this-such’ things they represent) cannot be ‘the particular’ that the reflecting power of judgment is called upon to reflect on. The particular that is given when ‘only the particular is given’ must, accordingly, be a particular of a different sort.

### 3.2.2 The Particular ‘As Such’ *Qua* Unsynthesized Sensory State

Textual evidence for the idea that Kant operates with a more rarefied conception of ‘the particular’—one that supports the contention that the understanding determines nothing in it—can be found at the end of § 76. As already noted (see 3.1, above), Kant there refers to the kind of particular he means to contrast with concepts as “the particular *as such*” (5:404, my emphasis). This expression, with its overtones of *un-*compounded purity, suggests that what Kant has in mind by the particular on which the reflecting power of judgment is exercised is not so much a *sensible intuition* (thus, a product of the synthetic, compounding activity of our mind) as
the sensory content that enters into such an intuition—considered in itself, hence, unmolested by the schemes (and schemata) of our upper cognitive (synthetic) abilities.

That the alleged ‘entire heterogeneity’ between concepts and intuitions is best understood in terms of sensibility’s delivery of un-synthesized candidate material for intuitive uptake is further supported by Kant’s next appeal to ‘the particular,’ in § 77.46 In one of the central passages of that crucial section—the one in which Kant makes the specter of transcendental chaos fully explicit—he refines his account of the heterogeneity of the two elements involved in cognition. Kant says:

Our understanding, namely, has the property that in its cognition, e.g., of the cause of a product, it must go from the analytical universal (from concepts) to the particular (of the given empirical intuition), in which it determines nothing with regard to the manifoldness of the latter, but must expect that determination for the power of judgment from the subsumption of the empirical intuition (when the object is a product of nature) under the concept. (5:407.13-9)

For present purposes, the most important aspect of this passage—aside from Kant’s appeal to transcendental chaos (“[o]ur understanding … determines nothing”)—is that Kant sharpens his conception of ‘the particular.’ Specifically, Kant’s

46 I deliberately abstract from Kant’s tactical aim in § 77, namely, to make the results of the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness work for his resolution of the Antinomy of the teleological power of judgment in the Dialectic. What is of interest, for present purposes, is that Kant here characterizes the results of the deduction (specifically, the limitation of our understanding which first makes a principle of reflection necessary), in the strongest terms found in the third Critique. It is methodologically appropriate to pause and consider what this characterization tells us about the nature of reflecting and its principle without immediately jumping to the question how this characterization serves Kant’s concrete aims in the Dialectic.
expression ‘the particular (of the given empirical intuition)’ entails that the particular in question cannot be identified with empirical intuition per se but that it must, instead, be identified with the content of empirical intuition.

The notion of the content of an intuition is, of course, itself ambiguous. It can, in the first place, refer to the intuition’s representational content (and, hence, to the ‘this-such’ thing it represents). If this were what Kant had in mind, he would be using the notion of ‘the particular (of the given empirical intuition)’ in the objectual sense discussed above (namely, as referring to the representation’s intentional object; see 2.1). The notion of the content of an intuition can, however, also refer, more elusively, to the sensory material the intuition synthesizes. And there are good reasons to believe that it is this latter sense of particularity that Kant has in mind in the passage at hand.47

First, it would be highly awkward if Kant’s genitivus possesivus in the expression ‘the particular (of the given empirical intuition)’ was supposed to single out the intentional object of the given empirical intuition. To understand Kant in this way would be to see him substitute the notion ‘the particular’ for the notion ‘object’ in expressions like “object of an intuition” (5:353). Such a substitution would be awkward since reference-talk is indelibly talk of the objects of (or things represented by) intuitions (or concepts, for that matter). To understand talk of ‘the particular of an intuition’ as reference-talk would lead to just as contrived a façon de parler as to propose ‘intentional particular’ as an alternative expression for our cherished ‘intentional object.’ Kant’s prose, of course, sometimes is awkward, but in this case a happier interpretation is available. It is that, in focusing on ‘the particular (of the given empirical intuition),’ Kant focuses on the sensory material

47 The following can be seen as just the sort of argument Allison should have given, but fails to give, in support of his declaration that the ‘particular as such’ is not the particular “qua spatiotemporal entity or event” (Allison, 2001, 39).
present in that intuition. On this interpretation, Kant considers
the content of the intuition in question formally, *qua* modification of the mind, and not in terms of what is *represented by* it
or in terms of its intentional object.

This is borne out, second, by the circumstance that, in raising
the specter of transcendental chaos, Kant says of ‘the particular
(of the given empirical intuition)’ that the understanding “deter-
mines nothing with regard to the manifoldness of the latter”
(5:407, my emphasis). Kant thus ties the specter not only to the
content of the given empirical intuition, but, specifically, to the
manifoldness of (or given in) that content. But the *representa-
tional* content of an empirical intuition (the thing represented)
is not a ‘manifoldness’—it is (on the Sellarsian picture adopted
earlier) a determinate ‘this-such’ thing. An empirical intuition
makes *singular* reference to an *individual*, not distributive
reference to a manifoldness. Thus, since the particular that,
according to Kant, gives rise to the specter of transcendental
chaos is the manifoldness of the given empirical intuition, that
particular cannot be the particular thing *represented by* that
intuition.

Third, since concepts and intuitions are homogeneous (*qua*
products of synthesis), it follows that the way in which they *do*
differ (namely, the circumstance that empirical intuitions con-
voy the *actuality* of their objects) cannot be due to the fact that
empirical intuitions are products of synthesis: it can only be due
to the *sensory nature* of the material they synthesize. Thus, it
can only be due to the nature of this material considered *independent* of that synthesis. The ‘entire heterogeneity’ of two
elements of cognition must then be the heterogeneity of
concepts and sensory manifolds, insofar as the latter are
considered *un*-synthesized. And since Kant, in § 77, now casts
this ‘entire heterogeneity’ as the heterogeneity of concepts and
‘the particular (of the given empirical intuition),’ it follows that
the latter expression must refer to *un*-synthesized sensory mani-
folds. Accordingly, it cannot refer to the *representational* content of empirical intuition (hence, the ‘this-such’ thing an intuition represents), since *that* is a product of synthesis.

Based on these considerations, it should be clear that by ‘the particular (of the given empirical intuition)’ Kant means the *unsynthesized manifoldness of the sensory material* that an intuition is called upon to synthesize—and *not* the spatio-temporally (and, possibly, categorically) determined ‘this-such’ thing that an intuition represents. Kant, however, also suggests that what he means by ‘the particular’ in the passage at hand are determinate objects (‘the cause of a product;’ “a product of nature”). But this is hardly surprising, given the transitional role of § 77, in which the findings of § 76 (concerning the understanding’s relation to sensible particularity) are to help support the idea that organic phenomena (hence, determinate processes in fully determined objects) must be judged teleologically. A certain degree of oscillation between ‘the particular as such’ (*qua* non-objective, indeterminate sensory state) and ‘the particular’ (*qua* determinate organic cause or effect) is thus fully to be expected. Even so, because of this peculiar dialectic, the notion that by “the particular (of the given empirical intuition)” Kant means an un-synthesized sensory manifold, however compelling, is only a possible—not the only possible—reading.

What tips the scales decisively in favor of that reading, is Kant’s conception of the threat of cognitive disunity that this sort of particular is supposed to raise. Not only are concepts and the *representational contents of empirical intuitions* (i.e., the objects presented) too *homogeneous* to give rise to the specter of transcendental chaos (as we saw above), but only deliveries of sense considered untouched by our upper cognitive faculty (that is, considered as un-synthesized candidate material for intuitive uptake) are *sufficiently different* from concepts to give rise to that specter. After all, the threat of a *fundamental* incompatibility between our synthesizing abilities and the
material they are given to work with is, *ex hypothesi*, the threat of an incompatibility between those abilities and material *not synthesized*.

I conclude that, since an un-synthesized sensory manifold is (on purely textual grounds) what Kant *likely* means by ‘the particular (of the given empirical intuition),’ and since it is (given his conception of the cognitive threat it poses) what Kant *must* mean by that notion, it is (ceteris paribus) what Kant *does* mean. Accordingly, Kant’s conception of ‘the manifoldness of the particular of the given empirical intuition’—i.e., his most elaborate account of the type of particularity responsible for the threat the reflecting power of judgment is to remedy—refers to *un-synthesized sensory manifolds*. *Un-synthesized sensory manifolds* thus are what is given when “only the particular is given” (5:179).

### 3.2.3 Kant’s Sensationist Conception of Particularity

That Kant’s conception of ‘the particular’ in the third *Critique* is a *sensationist* conception, readily follows. Sensationism, in Rolf George’s classic formulation, is the thesis:

… that there are non-intentional mental states in which no object, other than the state itself, is present to the mind, and that they are the foundations of empirical knowledge. (George, “Kant’s Sensationism,” 230)

Sensations, according to the sensationist thesis, are *non-referential* mental states from which any reference to objects (hence, any semantic normativity) must first be *generated* by the mind’s synthetic activities. Now, for Kant, all reference to
objects must be the product of synthesis—there is, for Kant, no such thing as primitive reference. An un-synthesized sensory manifold is then, ex hypothesi, a non-referential mental state. Since Kant’s conception of ‘the particular’ on which the reflecting power of judgment is exercised refers to just such unsynthesized sensory manifolds, Kant’s is a sensationist conception of particularity.

3.3 The Problem Posed by the ‘Particular As Such’

Having thus arrived at un-synthesized sensory states as a) the referent for Kant’s notion of ‘the particular as such’ in § 76-7 (see 3.2, above), as well as b) the culprit behind the threat of ‘transcendental chaos’ discussed in § 76-7 (i.e., that the understanding ‘determines nothing’ in ‘the particular as such’; see 3.1, above), we have yet to establish—positively—just how un-synthesized sensory states generate that threat. Kant is largely silent on this central issue. Kant’s silence, however, is not without justification. Once unsynthesized sensory states have been identified as the targets of Kant’s analysis, the cognitive problem they present ensues relatively straightforwardly.

The problem in question is a legacy of Kant’s treatment of the intersection of sensation and understanding in the Critique of Pure Reason. More specifically, it is a legacy of Kant’s treatment of the “threelfold synthesis” of the transcendental imagination in the A-Deduction of the Critique of Pure Reason—or what Kant jointly calls “synthesis speciosa” in the

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48 See B103. See also Hanna (2001), 48; Rosenberg (2005), 95-6; Kenneth R. Westphal, Kant’s Transcendental Proof of Realism (Cambridge University Press, 2004) 43ff.

49 In contrast to the sensationist thesis, however, such mental states are not, on Kant’s “considered view” (Westphal, 2004, 45), themselves objects of self-consciousness.
B-Deduction. More specifically still, it is a legacy of his treatment of the first of those three syntheses, the “synthesis of apprehension in intuition” (A99).

In the A-Deduction, Kant explains that both spatial and temporal syntheses are needed—in the form of a “run[ing] through and hold[ing] together” (A99), or apprehending, of sensibly given material—in order that the manifold that every intuition “contains in itself” (metaphysically) actually be ‘represented as manifold’ (epistemically). Without this foundational synthesis (itself evidently comprised of two cognitive acts since the ‘running through’ and the ‘holding together’ are distinctive syntheses), Kant insists, a sensibly given manifold, even if present as manifold (metaphysically), “cannot ever be anything other than absolute unity” (ibid., my emphasis) for us (epistemically). In the first Critique, Kant holds that we avoid the unhappy scenario of being confronted only by ‘manifolds not represented as manifolds’—a scenario on which no cognition at all would be possible for our finite, concept-forming intellects—at a relatively limited cost: by means of the epistemic assumption of the spontaneity of our synthetic capacities (issuing in the requisite, unprompted ‘running through and holding together’)\(^{51}\) coupled with the metaphysical assumption\(^{52}\) noted (ensuring that what is thus run through and held together is in fact a manifold).

\(^{50}\) Longuenesse, to be sure, takes Kant’s focus, in the B-deduction—on the capacity underlying all three of these syntheses (i.e., on the capacity for synthesis speciosa or figurative synthesis)—to be a “significant advance over the painstaking analyses of the A Deduction” (1998, 208). But this is clearly a matter of perspective. In order to unearth the presuppositions underlying the most fundamental relation human cognition takes to sensibility, those painstaking analyses are precisely what we must turn to.

\(^{51}\) Longuenesse helpfully characterizes this spontaneity in terms of a Spinozistic ‘conatus’ (see, 1998, 208).

\(^{52}\) Or, more accurately, the recognition of a transcendental, formal, yet material condition of the possibility of experience. See, Westphal (2004), Ch 3, §§ 22-23.
In the third *Critique*, Kant realizes that while this account might suffice as a descriptive characterization of the transcendental-logical *process* by which spontaneous syntheses wrest intuition of a manifold from a manifold of intuition, it omits an important epistemic *presupposition* of that process present in our confrontation of ‘the particular as such.’ After all, the assumption that what is given in sensation must in fact *be* a manifold (independently of being represented *as* a manifold), is an assumption on the part of the transcendental philosopher for the purposes of a critically chastened metaphysics. The spontaneous synthetic activity of the transcendental imagination which actually confronts what is given in sensation is not privy to such transcendental assurances—it confronts what, for it, must *ex hypothesi* be absolute unity.

Once this is understood, it becomes evident, first, that the logical structure of the transcendental imagination’s synthetic activity necessarily incorporates its own *epistemic* equivalent of the transcendental philosopher’s *metaphysical* assumption. The spontaneous activity of ‘running through and holding together,’ like all synthesis, exhibits a relational structure. It is, respectively, a ‘running from__through__to__’ and a ‘holding together of__with__.’ It may be spontaneous—and thus operate independently of metaphysical guarantees that sensation *in fact* presents synthesizable material—but it is not, therefore, presuppositionless. Specifically, it necessarily approaches whatever may be given in sensation *as if it did* contain discrete, re-identifiable elements (thus) suited to synthesization. Yet, second—and this is the important part—this epistemic presupposition of the synthesizability of un-synthesized sensory states is the very presupposition that the transcendental imagination *ex hypothesi* is not entitled to make, given that it confronts what must at this stage of the transcendental-logical process (i.e., independent of all synthesis) necessarily be
considered “absolute unity” and, therefore (if anything), devoid of identifiable elements.

The epistemic\(^{53}\) presupposition of the synthesizability of unsynthesized sensibly given material is thus marked by three characteristics. First, it is an assumption that is not isomorphic to the transcendental philosopher’s *metaphysical* assumption of similar description. It is a *subjective* and *regulative* transcendental principle, governing how we must necessarily *approach* what is given in sensation, not an objective transcendental principle (whether material or categorial), governing how what is given in sensation must necessarily *be*. Second, *qua* subjective transcendental assumption necessarily governing (hence, ‘for’) the exercise of our synthesizing capacity (the understanding), it is not itself a principle of the understanding, hence, not

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\(^{53}\) The fact that I call the transcendental presupposition of the synthesizability of un-synthesized sensory states, for lack of a better word, an ‘epistemic’ assumption, might lead one to think that this presupposition is, ultimately, concerned with the *felicity* of our syntheses of sensory material—hence, that the specter of ‘transcendental chaos’ it is supposed to address is really the threat that our attempts at finding order in the world might never reflect accurately a presumed *true* order of things. This impression would be mistaken. The transcendental presupposition in question is concerned with the possibility of any synthesis whatever—whether truth-tracking or not. It is a transcendental ‘epistemic’ presupposition to the specific extent that it is *regulative* or *judgment*-determining (i.e., determinative of what our *cognitive approach* to sensory states must be if there is to be any synthesis at all), hence, to the extent that it is not *constitutive* or *object*-determining (i.e., a categorial principle determinative of what the world must be like). By itself, this transcendental epistemic presupposition of the synthesizability of sensory states holds no guarantee that actual syntheses can or will take place. The latter requires the further *metaphysical* (better, transcendental material) assumption mentioned earlier (see n. 52). Together, these two assumptions do assure that our synthesizing capacities are exercised on at least a modicum of recognizable similarities and differences in sensation—sufficient to brand Kant’s position a form of realism (see Westphal, 2004, ch. 3). Whether the resulting syntheses provide (beyond this minimal point of contact with a world) wildly phantasmagorical or ultimately truthful cognitions, is a function of the reliability of our actual epistemic practices—something which cannot be the proper topic of Kant’s transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness in the third *Critique* (this, I take it, is the point of Allison’s noted dissatisfaction with his own account of ‘empirical chaos,’ see 3.1, above).
an assumption that a critical justification of the concepts of the understanding (like the justification presented in the transcendental deduction of the first Critique) could ground. Third, since it is, however, a transcendental assumption built into the very structure of our spontaneous syntheses, it is one without which there could be no synthesis (a fortiori, no determination in judgment of actually present manifolds) at all.

This last characteristic at once states the threat of transcendental chaos Kant worries about in § 76-7 of the third Critique and his deepest rationale for the transcendental deduction of the assumption at issue. Our intellects must be operating with an epistemic presupposition of the synthesizability of un-synthesized sensory states (i.e., by § 76, of ‘the particular as such’; or, by § 77, of ‘the manifoldness of the particular of the given empirical intuition’) — a presupposition that must, moreover, be billed to a new transcendental power of reflection and not to the understanding (since it is a subjective principle, or maxim, governing cognitive conduct and not a principle governing objects) — or else we could have no cognition at all. The presupposition of the synthesizability of un-synthesized sensory states, accordingly, just is the new subjective (i.e., not objective), necessary (i.e., not optional), regulative (i.e., not object-constituting), transcendental principle of the reflecting (i.e., not determining) power of judgment on which Kant relies in order to address the threat of cognitive disunity at its deepest level.54

54 This is a principle of ‘purposiveness’ because the presupposition of nature’s purposiveness is—according to Kant’s technical definition (and consistent use) of that term (see Thomas Teufel, “Kants Non-Teleological Conception of Purposiveness,” Kant-Studien, 2011, forthcoming)—precisely the presupposition of cognizable order in ‘the particular that is offered by perception.’
3.4 Ascending from the Particular to the Universal

The remaining task is to show that this presupposition of the synthesizability of ‘the particular as such’ in fact amounts to an ascent from the particular to the universal—hence, an operation of reflecting—that is prima facie different from the ‘ascent’ involved in the formation of empirical concepts. This is relatively easily accomplished. Sensory states utterly untouched by our synthesizing capacity (or what is given when only the particular is given) cannot, for our finite understanding, “ever be anything other than absolute unity” (A99)—regardless of whether they in fact harbor manifolds of discrete, re-identifiable elements (as the transcendental philosopher’s metaphysical assumption maintains they must), or not. Such states are, accordingly, strictly speaking unsynthesizable for our finite understanding (since an ‘absolute unity’ ex hypothesi lacks discrete, re-identifiable elements). The presupposition by the reflecting power of judgment (for the determining power of judgment) of the synthesizability of unsynthesized sensory states, accordingly, is a transcendental act of reflecting on sensible particularity that first turns what would otherwise forever have to be considered (and, so, would, for cognitive purposes, always be) un-synthesizable states—into candidates for synthesis. It is, accordingly, not an act of reflecting that turns a manifold (already represented as manifold apprehended and reproduced) into a manifold still more synthesized (recognized in a concept). The presupposition, instead, takes us from sensory states qua hermetic, unknowable ‘as such’ to sensory states considered aspiring representational states capable of referentiality, hence, considered capable of supporting object-cognition. The reflecting power of judgment’s operation of reflecting is, then, not an ascent from a spatial and temporal particular (or from a range of such particulars) to a universal, but (as Kant already puts the
point in his earliest characterization of the act of reflecting in § IV; see 2.1, above) an ascent from the Particular to the Universal. It is best described as an ascent from utter sensible particularity to “cognition overall [Erkenntnis überhaupt]” (5:217; to borrow Kant’s felicitous phrase from the Aesthetics)—hence, not as an act of concept-forming, object-determining synthesis, but as a cognitive operation that reflectively creates the conditions under which concept-forming, object-determining syntheses first become possible for us. The operation, in short, corresponds fully to the—generally overlooked55—second type of reflecting Kant registers in the First Introduction to the third Critique: the reflecting power of judgment “compare[s] and hold[s] together given representations … with one’s faculty of cognition in regard of a concept thereby made possible” (see 20:211, emphasis mine). That is to say, the reflecting power of judgment considers un-synthesized sensory states in relation to the nature of our conceptual capacities and, in so doing, treats the contents of those states as if they were synthesizable in order that the concept-forming task of those capacities may be rewarded at all.

4. Conclusion

Applying the distinction between these two notions of reflecting to the apparent contradiction between Kant’s positions in §§ IV and V, we find the following. When Kant, in § IV, explains that “[t]he reflecting power of judgment […] is under the obligation of ascending from the particular in nature to the universal …” (5:180, my emphasis), he refers to reflecting judgment’s task of neutralizing the specter of transcendental chaos by assuming the synthesizability of un-synthesized sensory manifolds. Let ‘a’ be the name of this first

55 See n. 26, above.
‘ascent to the universal.’ When Kant, in § V, explains that this task is itself carried out for the benefit of “… the human understanding in its necessary business of finding the universal for the particular …” (5:186, my emphasis), Kant is not double-booking the same cognitive operation. Kant is, instead, equivocating on the notion of ‘the particular’ and, a fortiori, on the conception of the ascent to the universal involved. By that ascent Kant now means the understanding’s bread-and-butter task of forming concepts from (representations of) empirical objects. Let ‘b’ be the name of this second ‘ascent to the universal’ qua formation of a concept. Since Kant recognizes two different sorts of ‘ascending from the particular to the universal’ (‘a’ and ‘b’), it follows that the Critique of the Power of Judgment does indeed contain the conceptual resources for a resolution of the contradiction between Kant’s positions in §§ IV and V. Returning to our earlier schema, Kant’s commitments can now be reformulated as the innocuous conjunction: ‘aNr & bNu & (x) (xNr → − xNu).’

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