

The Pittsburgh Kantians: Brandom, Conant, Haugeland, and McDowell on Kant

“The first segment of the Deduction [. . .] explains the problem of legitimating the pure concepts by broaching the possibility that objects might be presented to our senses whether they accord with the pure concepts or not. To put the worry another way: Why couldn’t there be sensible objects that aren’t subject to the conditions of the understanding?”

“Outline of the Transcendental Deduction” -
John Haugeland 2017: 341¹

1. Introduction

Over the last thirty years, a group of philosophers associated with the University of Pittsburgh—Robert Brandom, James Conant, John Haugeland, and John McDowell—have developed a novel reading of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (henceforth: CPR). Their interest turns on Kant’s problem of objective purport: how can my thoughts be *about* the world? As Kant puts it: “How and through what cause do the representations of our sensibility stand in combination with one another, so that those representations that we call outer intuitions can be represented according to empirical laws as objects outside us?” (A387).² This group—which I call the Pittsburgh Kantians—argue that Kant’s solution to the problem of objective purport in the Transcendental Deduction provides insights into how one should understand objective purport and objectivity today.

This essay has two main parts. In the first half, I summarize what I call the “Pittsburgh Reading” of the B-edition Deduction. My summary brings out how the Pittsburgh Reading is centered on the normativity of judgment: there is a right and wrong way to judge, and a right and wrong way to represent objects in a judgment, and these ultimately prove to be the same thing. (I do not claim their reading is *genuine* Kant; only that it is an original and fruitful reading of

¹ Quotation modified to remove the parenthetical remarks. All italics are in original, unless specifically marked.

² All Kant references are to the Cambridge Works translations, and all page numbers refer to the Akademie edition.

Kant.³) Having brought out what unities the Pittsburgh Kantian, I move on to discuss the differences between them, specifically regarding how they apply Kant to contemporary philosophy. I highlight an important distinction between those that hold a *quietist* response to Kant, evident in Conant and McDowell, and those that hold a *constructive* response, evident in Brandom and Haugeland. Thus, the first half of the paper reinforces the notion that there is a distinctive kind of philosophy found at the University of Pittsburgh, as evidenced by this shared approach to Kant, while the latter half highlights the diversity and disagreements within this school.

This list of Pittsburgh Kantians is perhaps surprising, since it includes the ex-patriates Conant and Haugeland and yet excludes the seminal figure of the so-called “Pittsburgh School” (Maher 2013; Sachs 2015; 2019), Wilfrid Sellars. There are three reasons for this. First, Sellars’s reading of Kant has been discussed at length by many others, including several of his former students (e.g., Rosenberg 2005; Gauker 2011).⁴ Second, despite Sellars focus on Kant throughout his life, his reading of Kant is especially idiosyncratic, focusing on topics which found little purchase among the other Pittsburgh Kantians: transcendental idealism, intuition, non-conceptual content, and with the thing-in-itself. Third, the Pittsburgh Kantian’s reading is distinctive, focused almost entirely on the B-edition Transcendental Deduction at the expense of many other aspects of Kant. This is especially pronounced in the outline of the Deduction that came out of a long running reading group with Conant, Haugeland, and McDowell (published as Haugeland 2017), as well as in numerous major texts by these figures in the 1990s and 2000s (e.g., Brandom 1994, 2009; Conant 1992/2020; McDowell 1994/6, 1998/2013; Haugeland 1998). For these reasons, it makes sense to treat the Pittsburgh Kantians separately.

This paper has seven sections. In the first section, I lay out Kant’s *problem of objective purport* and how it arises out of Descartes and Hume’s philosophy. I also show how the

³ These readings almost exclusively deal with Kant’s discussion of normativity and the B-deduction. Other topics—such as the remaining critiques, the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant’s metaphysical views, or his transcendental idealism—are largely ignored or maligned (e.g., McDowell 1996). A central contention—that empty concepts are nonsensical—is especially hard to square with Kant’s own remarks that such thoughts, while not amounting to knowledge, are thinkable (e.g., Bxxvi). It is unclear if these philosophers have a response to these concerns. For criticisms of some of these readings, see Bernstein (2002), Golob (2017), Hanna (2004; 2011), MacFarlane (2014), Pippin (2002), and Redding (2012).

⁴ A good overview of Sellars’s position is Rosenberg (2005). McDowell (1997) and Brandom (2015) discuss Sellars’s Kant and its distinction from their own. See also Redding (2012) and O’Shea (2018). Sachs (2019) highlights some of the differences between Sellars, Brandom, and McDowell’s readings of Hegel, with brief comments on the role of Kant in their accounts.

Pittsburgh Kantians' solution to this problem, and their reading of Kant, revolves around Sellars's central insight: the normativity of judgment and knowledge. In the second section, I present the Pittsburgh Kantian's reading of the Transcendental Deduction as seen in numerous texts, especially the shared outline. In the following four sections I lay out how Brandom, Conant, Haugeland, and McDowell each provides a separate—and often conflicting—Kant-inspired response to the problem of objective purport. This also highlights two distinct groups among these four: Conant and McDowell propose Kant's insight depends on abandoning the problem of objective purport—treating it as a pseudo-problem in need of dissolution, whereas Brandom and Haugeland both think inheriting Kant requires developing a constructive philosophical program, one which accounts for how objectivity can arise from intersubjectivity. In the third section, I present Conant's dissolution of the problem of objective purport by seeing it through a Wittgensteinian lens, in which the intelligibility of the very problem is dissolved. In the fourth section, I lay out McDowell's contention that the problem of objective purport is a symptom of the Cartesian picture's gap between mind and world, one which should be undermined through an Aristotelian view in which norms of objectivity are simply "second nature," the result of our enculturation into the human form of life. In the fifth section, I argue Brandom's solution to the problem follows Rorty in abandoning Kant's picture of representing the world in favor of an inferentialist solution, where the norms of objectivity are implicit in our intersubjective practices of claim-making. In the sixth section, I present Haugeland's view, which shifts Kant's focus on the understanding as a source for propositional judgments to a Heidegger-inspired account of understanding as know-how for successfully using objects. The upshot is that the Pittsburgh Kantians have a distinctive approach to Kant, but also radically different responses to his problem of objective purport.

2. Kant and the Problem of Objective Purport

The problem of objective purport arises out of Descartes's mind-body dualism, which takes the mind as an immaterial substance distinct from the material world. This introduces a puzzle: how can we be sure our mental states accurately represent the external world? This Cartesian split between mind and world is still visible in contemporary philosophy (McDowell 1996), cognitive science (e.g., Howhy 2010: ch. 1), and in the brute physicalism of physics and biology (e.g., Price 1997). But while Descartes struggled with bridging the gap between mind

and world, Kant recognized a deeper problem with the Cartesian picture: what warrant does one have for thinking that mental states represent mind-independent objects *at all*? This is the problem of objective purport.⁵ This problem stems from the two-fold nature of representations: on the one hand, they are human-dependent mental states governed by the activity of the mind, while on the other hand they purport to represent human-independent objects governed by mind-independent goings-on. The challenge is explaining how humans can make legitimate claims about objects and the laws of nature based on our mental states and cognitive processes.

For Kant, Hume is the only predecessor who fully grasped this problem. Hume argued there is no warrant for thinking our mental states are representing something outside of us; they may just be curiously connected mental states that tell one nothing about anything outside the mind. This led to his famous skepticism about self-identity, the necessity of cause and effect, and the existence of the world. But Kant also recognized Hume's skeptical worries failed; Descartes showed all objects necessarily and universally conform to mathematical laws governing extended bodies, and Newton extended this to show the conformity of all possible massive bodies to specific interrelationships when operating in the same space and time. This means that it is somehow possible, based solely on my mental states and the rules governing them, to know something about external objects and the rules governing them. This results in what James Conant calls the "boggle" of objective purport (2016: 83): why does Humean skepticism seem plausible despite being wrong?

Kant's response—his "Copernican turn"—is to argue some knowledge about the objects represented in experience is possible *a priori*, just by investigating the nature of the human mind. He writes, "objects must conform to our cognition," making it is possible "to establish something about objects before they are given to us" (Bxx; see also McDowell 2017: 313; Brandom 2009: 29). This is because, in addition to passively received appearances given in intuition, humans possess a spontaneous understanding that can both make rules for ordering representations and also bind the subject to those rules. By investigating this spontaneous capacity, Kant held, one can discover certain necessary and universal rules for how the mind works and, thus, know something about how objects must be to conform to these structures to be represented by a subject.

⁵ This is also called the "problem of intentionality" or "representational purport." See Sachs 2015 provides a thorough discussion of this issue, especially as understood by Brandom, Haugeland, McDowell, and Sellars.

For the Pittsburgh Kantians, at the heart of Kant's solution is his innovation in the notion of *judgment*. Many of Kant's predecessors and contemporaries took judgment to simply mean connecting two or more representations. By contrast, Kant recognized that *mere* connection fails to account for the diverse kinds of judgment—conditionals, disjunctions, and so on. Instead, Kant argues there are two distinct aspects of judgment: the logical form of judgment and the spontaneous act of a subject in *affirming* a judgment. This allows Kant to distinguish two different dimensions of judgment: on the one hand, the logical norms governing what counts as making a judgment and the rules of inference which handle implications and incompatibilities of judgments; on the other, the responsibility of a subject for making judgments correctly, for ensuring their judgments—that is, their knowledge of the world—hang together as they should.

These dimensions together form the *normativity* of judgment. For Kant, judgments are not merely causal dispositions for connecting representations but require an act of the subject for connecting them according to logical rules and an endorsement by the subject for the truth of their claim. As Conant puts it, judgment is about “stick[ing] [our] neck out in thinking” (2016: 83; see also McDowell 1996: 6). This is a central feature of the Pittsburgh Kantians, one they inherit from Sellars. Sellars famously notes, “in characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says” (1956: §36). For Sellars, and for the Pittsburgh Kantians, the normativity of judgments and knowledge mean there is a way judgments and knowledge claims *should* be made. This means judgments stand as *reasons* for believing something, but at the same time, a requirement not to believe other things which are incompatible with that judgment. Subjects are thus responsible for abiding by these rules and accountable for getting them wrong. Such claims require reasons, and subjects are obligated by these rational norms to give up claims that prove to be indefensible.

For Kant, the normative character of judgments has two sides: subjective and objective. On the subjective side, there are norms governing the connections between mental states—ensuring that the connections cohere, accepting the implications of different connections between states, and ruling out incompatible conclusions. Kant calls these operations and their norms “syntheses,” which are the rules governing how a subject should connect mental states together. On the objective side, there are also norms concerning what is represented by these mental states, what Kant calls the “categories.” These are the necessary rules for constituting objects in a

judgment and specifying the kinds of behaviors objects they are capable of. Thus, there are norms for how to form judgments and norms for the objects represented in a judgment.

As the Pittsburgh School reads him, Kant's response to the problem of objective purport is to argue that both subjective and objective norms are different perspectives on the same act of judgment: the norms for synthesizing mental states are nothing but the necessary and universal categories to which all represented objects must conform. Kant writes, "the same function that gives unity to the different representations in a judgment also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations in an intuition" (A79/B105).⁶ Kant's radical move—and the one that necessitates a transcendental Deduction—involves showing that these norms coincide; "the norms of reason and of objective truth are ultimately the same [for Kant]" (Haugeland 1998: 317; see also Brandom 2009, 38). If this succeeds, then there is assurance that when mental states are connected as they should be, they are *representations*—they are about the objects they purport to represent.

The task of the transcendental Deduction, then, is to show that if one connects their mental states as they should, then the objects represented will conform to the norms of objectivity. In short, there is a right way to judge, and a right way for the contents of judgment to be constituted, and these are two-sides of the same coin. This view proposes to solve the problem of objective purport by showing that connecting representations together according to the norms of thought is sufficient for showing that they represent objects in the world.

3. Pittsburgh Deduction

Kant's B-Deduction is the heart of his critical epistemology because it demonstrates our entitlement to claim our judgments represent objects in the world.⁷ This involves thinking that *what we can judge*—that is, the world given in experience—always and necessarily conforms to the *structure of judgment*—the pure forms of judgment and the corresponding pure concepts of the understanding (i.e., the categories). As Conant puts it, "What is at issue in 'the Deduction' [. . .] are not claims about what is the case, but rather considerations regarding what is necessarily

⁶ This does not require an identity of contents of judgment and contents of intuition, as McDowell (1996) takes it. But it does require a shared conceptual unity. For discussion, see McDowell (2008) and Conant (2016).

⁷ The Pittsburgh Kantians largely ignore the A-Deduction, which is far more psychological compared to the B-Deduction, where normative considerations are more evident.

involved in the apprehension of anything's ever possibly being the case" (2016: 105). In this section I present the Pittsburgh Reading of Kant's Deduction, and how it shows the norms of thought ultimately ground the norms of objectivity—and vice-versa.

The central focus of the Pittsburgh Reading involves ruling out certain kinds of judgment as nonsense. As Haugeland writes, "[Kant's] main concern was the ease with which we can seem to talk (and even theorize) sensibly about things we cannot really understand" (2013: 68). A central worry is the seeming intelligibility of Hume's skepticism, where we might have no grounds for treating our mental states as representations—and, with it, no warrant for using the concepts of self, the necessity of causality, and the external world. The Pittsburgh Reading aims to prove this skepticism is, as Conant puts, "a miscarriage of thought [. . .] one that engenders the impression that we are able to step outside the space of what is thinkable, judgeable, or possible" (2016: 102-3). For the Pittsburgh Reading, Kant's solution to the problem of objective purport results in exposing Hume's worries as based on a nonsensical philosophical picture, on which thought is possible even if the objects represented in thought did not conform to the norms of objectivity.

In the case of the Deduction, the nonsense that must be rejected is the intelligibility of understanding either sensibility or understanding in isolation; Kant writes, "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (A51/B75). The direct challenge of this kind of nonsense is raised in Kant's thought experiment of so-called "rogue appearances," blind intuitions which could not be unified by any concept of category (A90/B123); as the outline frames it, "the possibility of appearances (objects of intuition) that are unintelligible" (Haugeland 2017: 346; see also epigraph). If rogue appearances are possible, then there are objects in the world which cannot be integrated into the subject's mental life, showing the existence of objects which do not conform to the norms of objectivity. At best, humans could know some things but not others, rendering all knowledge contingent. This would validate Hume's skepticism: knowledge is limited to whatever mental states are intelligible, but there is no assurance they represent objects, and clear grounds for denying they represent necessary and universal features of objects. The task of the Deduction is thus to undermine the possibility of rogue appearances; as the outline notes, "the question to be answered is whether the prospect [of rogue appearances] [. . .] is a genuine one. And the answer to that question is: No!" (Haugeland 2017: 342; 1996:3-4;

Brandom 2009: 43). The Pittsburgh Reading contends the Deduction will unmask these rogue appearances—and, with them, empty concepts—as nonsense.

The B-Deduction has two main steps. The first establishes “the conditions on anything being a *representation* at all;” the second solves the problem of objective purport by “show[ing] that what *we* have are representations” of the objects they purport to be about (Haugeland 2017: 342). The result is that “any object that is so much as presented to our intuition is subject to the categories—the conditions of the understanding” (Haugeland 2017: 342). This also shows categories and intuitions—and the corresponding concepts and objects—form the *extent* of the intelligible; everything else lies outside the bounds of the comprehensible. To briefly sketch out these two steps, it is helpful to see them as denying the intelligibility of Hume’s skeptical doubts: the first step undermines Hume’s doubts about the self, the second step doubts his worries about the necessity of causality; the conclusion undermines Hume’s doubts that our representations prove the existence of the world.

The first half of the Deduction amounts to a rebuttal to Hume’s claim that, when he introspects, he finds no persisting self. Kant argues Hume’s denial of the self is disingenuous; the random, discrete mental states from his past experience are all necessarily and universally *his*—they are all synthesized together as a condition for them being subject to *his* recall. As Kant notes, “for the manifold representations [. . .] would not all together be my representations if they did not all together belong to a self-consciousness [. . .] otherwise they would not throughout belong to me” (B132). Kant is arguing Hume mistakenly sought the “self” *in* his mental states when the self just is *the activity of unifying* his mental states. But Kant is also claiming this unity is not merely causal—a blind, automatic association of states—but logical: it is a *synthesis* that unifies mental states according to a rule. Kant calls this unity “original” or “transcendental unity of apperception” (TUA), which specifies, “the I think must be able to accompany all my representations” (B132). The rule of thought—the one guiding this synthesis—is that one *should* ensure all their mental states are consistently unified into a *single* synthesis—the synthesis of a coherent self.

The TUA is the most fundamental subjective norm, the one governing all my mental states: they must all be synthesized by me into a coherent, logical unity. But this is a logical point about mental states, independent of the content of those states—*what* they purport to represent. Nor is it clear how the rule for forming a coherent self is to be satisfied in connecting

representations. Still, Kant draws some positive implication from this move: if mental states are coherently ordered, the *content* of those mental states—what is purported to be *represented*—must also conform to this order. As outline notes, “in order for anything—in particular, [anything presented in] any intuition—to be a knowable Object [*Objekt*] for me, it must conform to the condition of the TUA” (2017: 352). Kant has not yet defined “object” here; his point is simply that our capacity to represent *any* object is *derivative* from our capacity to unify our mental states into a logical unity. Kant writes, “the unity of consciousness is that which alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object, thus their objective validity, and consequently is that which makes them into cognitions” (B137). The first half of the Deduction narrowly focuses on the conditions for something to be an intelligible part of my self-conscious mental life which are the preconditions for the content of those mental states being *about* an objective world.

The Deduction’s second half aims to make concrete how the TUA produces contents which obey the norms of objectivity. This requires combining the TUA with the results of the Transcendental Aesthetic: the subjective forms of intuition, pure space and time. Combining these provides clarity to the subjective norm of the TUA: synthesizing mental states into a coherent mental life means putting them in a clear succession, such that what they represent forms a unified space and time. But at the start of the second half, all these terms—“space,” “time,” “TUA,” “objects,” “categories”—are entirely abstract; they are, Kant notes, “merely empty concepts of objects [. . .] mere forms of thought without objective reality” (B148; see also B160-1n). The Pittsburgh Reading argues these are mere *words* with only the illusion of sense; imagining a mental life as consisting entirely of an unoccupied space and barren time is literally imagining *nothing*. These become intelligible—what Kant calls “cognition”—only when they involve a unity of the *content* of representations.

Kant contends that the minimal intelligibility necessary for the TUA is unifying a “formal intuition,” constructing a unified representation of spatio-temporality. But to give this representation content—to avoid imagining nothing at all—it is necessary to imagine *some* object:

In order to cognize something in space, e.g., a line, I must draw it, and thus synthetically bring about a determinate combination of the given manifold, so that the unity of this

action is at the same time the unity of consciousness (in the concept of a line), and thereby is an object (a determinate space) first cognized. B137-8

Kant's point is that the most basic experience imaginable already assumes certain necessary categories are being satisfied; as Brandom writes, "what [the categories] express are structural features of the framework within which alone it is possible to apply *any* concepts, make *any* judgments" (Brandom 2015: 174). In the case of the line, the framework requires the mental states must be ordered successively in a single self-consciousness, and the object must be a single extended body whose alterations accord with a rule. There is no possibility of imagining something, Kant contends, that fails these conditions.

This example concretizes the task of the second half by showing that it is the *same act* which unifies one's mental life and objects of experience. On the subjective side, the highest principle governing the TUA is ordering mental states into a succession. As the Outline puts it, "[the a priori thinkable horizon of time] is the condition under which all objects of our human intuition must necessarily stand [. . .] the horizon of time provides a unique 'locus' for each unification in a judgment" (2017: 360-1). But this ordering of states into a single sequence also has implications for what is represented in those states. On the objective side, the highest principles are those of the unity of intuition and categories in objects—spatial, persistent bodies standing in the proper relationships to one another—and changing accordingly over time. Kant gives the example of, "apprehend[ing] two states (of fluidity and solidity) as standing in a relation of time to each other" (B162-3). In order to perceive this, the subject must necessarily synthesize the mental states as necessarily preceding one another in their mental life, and this orders the objects represented in judgments as necessarily interacting in a specific way: an actual discriminable body at a specific location, both remaining the same in some sense and altering in others over time.

Thus, the subject cannot satisfy the norms of thought without satisfying the norms of objectivity, and vice-versa, because *the same act* is responsible for both. Kant writes, "thus the apprehension in such an occurrence, hence the occurrence itself [. . .] stands under the concept of the relation of effects and causes" (B163). This does not specify what the relation of cause and effect consists in; it just shows that, "as intelligible (in terms of judgeable unities), nature must be law-governed, somehow or other" (Haugeland 2017: 362). The TUA must synthesize past and

present mental states according to a necessary rule, and this same synthesis is also a judgment, one representing objects accord to a necessary rule (i.e., the law of causality, which must be fleshed out empirically). Thus, Hume got it wrong: one could not experience anything if the objects experienced were not governed by the necessary rules specified by the categories, including the necessity in cause and effect; as Brandom puts it, “Kant’s response to the proposed predicament is that we cannot be in the position Hume envisages” (2009: 54).

From this, Kant contends the categories applied in judgment to represent an object are nothing other than the flip-side of the synthesis of the TUA. In Kant-speak, constituting the TUA into a consistent temporal horizon necessarily requires unifying the objects represented together into a single, orderly spatio-temporal whole; if someone could not do the one, they also could not do the other, because they both depend on the same act of unification.⁸ This allows Kant to directly address what he calls the “scandal of philosophy [. . .] that the existence of things outside us [. . .] should have to be assumed merely on faith” (Bxxxix). For Kant, if the objective world did not exist as a regular totality—as capable of being ordered into a single, coherent space and time—then the TUA could never order their mental states into a coherent succession; there could never be enough unity for an “I think” to be possible.

In other words, the existence of rogue appearances would not mean, as Hume thought, the occasional disconfirmation of the necessity of this or that causal rule; it would mean *nothing thinkable could exist*, because no subject could ever exist. Hence, Kant concludes, “the mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me” (B275). Hasty as it may be, his point is that the possibility of satisfying the norms of thought by being able to say “I think” depends on the existence of a rule-governed spatio-temporal world existing; the norms of thought are intelligible only when combined with the norms of objectivity, and both sets of norms are satisfied only if there is a mind-independent world much as mental states purport to represent it. As McDowell writes, “the possibility of understanding experiences [. . .] as glimpses of objective reality is interdependent with the subject’s being able to ascribe experiences to herself; hence, with the subject’s being self-conscious” (1996: 99). Both “subject” and “object” are mere nonsensical terms on their own; the

⁸ This does not mean the judgments are true; simply that they are warranted (what Kant calls “objectively valid”). They might be false for many different empirical reasons. But they count as an objective judgment, and thus I am responsible if it misrepresents what it purports to be about.

Deduction shows they are intelligible only as a unity. The fact that Hume could doubt *anything* proves that the subject represents an objective, mind-independent, world to themselves.

The upshot of the Deduction is that the norms of reason and the norms of objectivity coincide: the normative duty for the subject to render the TUA a coherent unity according to the laws of thought ensures the objects represented conform to the norms of objectivity. Thus, for the Pittsburgh Kantians, Kant shows the ability to coherently think the world requires the world exist as it purports to be in thought.

4. Critique as Philosophical Fiction

While the Pittsburgh Kantians share a similar reading of the Deduction, these philosophers take different conclusions from Kant's work. These different conclusions reveal sharp differences between the Pittsburgh Kantians. Two main camps are visible: on the one hand, Conant and McDowell each endorse a *quietist* response to Kant, encouraging us to see the problem of objective purport as a pseudo-problem in need of dissolution; on the other hand, Brandom and Haugeland each embrace a *constructive* approach, arguing the need for an account of objective purport that replaces Kant's ahistorical, asocial transcendental subject with historically contingent intersubjective practices. The following sections highlight each distinctive response, beginning with the quietists and ending with the constructivists.

Both Conant and McDowell argue that Kant's Deduction dissolves the problem of objective purport into a mere pseudo-problem—nonsense masquerading as sense. The Deduction, then, is meant to help us see through the Cartesian picture and grasp how it gives rise to a certain kind of nonsense. The Cartesian brand of nonsense is the notion that one can step outside one's thoughts and take a "sideways-on" view of how the mind relates to the world. Both philosophers broadly endorse Kant's account of experience, self-consciousness, and judgment as a remedy for the Cartesian picture. But whereas McDowell takes Kant's Deduction as a starting point for a broad rethinking of contemporary philosophy, Conant's reading suggests this understates its force. For Conant, Kant intends for the Deduction to be read "resolutely," where the goal is forcing the reader to go through the motions of thinking something absurd in order for them to give up an illusory picture of thought.

For Conant, reading a philosopher resolutely means taking them entirely at their word *especially* when they are saying something deeply absurd—that struggling with the absurdity is

essential for the whole project.⁹ This kind of resolute reading Conant is encouraging is most evident in his reading of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Most readers (e.g., Hacker 1986) refuse to take Wittgenstein seriously when he claims the propositions of the text are nonsense, as he does in the preface and at the end. Conant characterizes these non-resolute readings as claiming, “[Wittgenstein's propositions] are not mere nonsense. Through the manner in which they fail to make sense, they make certain features of the logical structure of reality perspicuous” (1992/2020: 88). These readings regard the propositions as philosophically deep, providing important insights into the nature of logic, while also playful hinting at the limits of language. But Conant contends this is simply wrong-headed: “the nonsense we are attracted to is plain unvarnished nonsense—words that do not express thoughts” (93). Conant contends taking the nonsensical nature of the propositions seriously is essential to understanding the task of the *Tractatus*.

But Conant would be deeply unhappy with this simple gloss on the *Tractatus*. This is because the *Tractatus*—as well as many of the texts Conant reads resolutely, such as those in Socrates and Nietzsche—are examples of “philosophical fictions,” a kind of thought experiment which involves the illusion of sense:

When we engage in the “contemplation” of the “scenario” put forward in a philosophical fiction, we only apparently grasp what it would be for it to obtain: Its real possibility can be only seemingly grasped in thought. To show that a particular scenario is a philosophical fiction therefore involves showing that its initially seemingly genuine possibility amounts to nothing more than just that: a seeming possibility. 2016: 102.

The *Tractatus* is littered with temptations for the reader, where the notion of a limit to language—or something on the opposite side of the limit—seems to be intelligible. Conant argues reading resolutely involves taking these as seriously as possible until each proposition, in turn, ceases to make sense. He writes,

⁹ For criticisms of Conant's views on Kant, Wittgenstein, and the idea of resolute readings, as well as Conant's reply, see Miguen (2020).

The aim is not to take us from a piece of deep nonsense to a deep insight into the nature of things, but from a piece of apparently deep nonsense to the dissolution of the *appearance* of depth. This brings us to a second important continuity in Wittgenstein's work—his conception of the aim of philosophy. In the *Investigations*, he writes, “My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is undisguised nonsense ([1953/:] §464).” Conant 1992/2020: 97

For Conant, there cannot be any shortcuts to the conclusion; it is only the continual failure of understanding the parts which allows us to finally see how absurd the whole thought-experiment is.

This connects his reading of Kant and Wittgenstein. For Conant, the Deduction is a philosophical fiction, an attempt to highlight the impossibility of “rogue appearances.” This cannot be accomplished (as I try to above) by listing the logical steps and allowing the reader to follow the inferences. Rather, the reader needs to legitimately go through the absurdity of actually trying to imagine an object might be given that can in no way be subject to the categories. Imagining an object outside the structures of the understanding *seems* possible—except what it is possible to imagine is wholly relative to our understanding. The task implodes in on itself; Conant writes, “for Kant logic involves an essentially self-conscious first-person present indicative form of understanding—not a perspective ‘onto’ the exercise of those powers, but rather a form of understanding achievable only from within a certain form of exercise of that power” (2020: 606). The reader must themselves expose the initial scenario as deceptive by attempting to think it through until they grasp the absurdity of the task and recognizing they are imagining *nothing*. Conant writes, “One does not reach the end by arriving at the last page, but by arriving at a certain point in an activity—the point when the elucidation has served its purpose: when the illusion of sense is exploded from within and one has arrived at the center of the onion” (1992/2020: 98). For Conant, reading Kant and Wittgenstein resolutely does not result in a deep philosophical epiphany, but instead a recognition of the absurdity of the task.

It might be asked, why bother reading Kant if the Deduction is nonsense? But Conant, far more than most contemporary philosophers, endorses a Socratic approach to philosophy: understanding something is a dialectical process one must *go through*. The text is meant as an exercise in philosophizing conscientiously, ensuring one is not seduced by fancy language or

clever arguments into accepting nonsense. The activity of going through the Deduction resolutely highlights the ineliminability of subject and object, mental life and external world, unwinding the illusion by moving through the predictable stopping points, preventing the reader from getting comfortable at any step. It is only by having tried desperately to imagine blind intuitions and empty concepts that the reader finally understands why neither is intelligible. Conant argues this approach to philosophizing reveals what he calls “the truth in idealism:” “there is no explaining something that belongs to the order of knowledge from outside that order” (2020: 776). Although not always stated by self-proclaimed idealists, this easily-stated truth is always the key insight of a philosophical fiction—but is only internalized by reading it resolutely.

For Conant, the temptation to think it is possible to step outside our understanding of the world—imagine life outside the limits of thought or language—is pervasive. For Conant, the history of philosophy—at least the philosophy he argues must be read resolutely—is a history of philosophers helping us avoid this temptation in all its possible forms.

5. Constitution is Second Nature

McDowell’s reading is similar to Conant’s, though there are important differences. A central worry McDowell expresses is that Kant, in a sense, never fully appreciated his own Deduction. McDowell takes this to be Hegel’s insight: Kant’s theory of intuition and, with it, the “thing in itself” are impossible on Kant’s own account.

For McDowell, Kant’s theory of intuition retains an unnecessary Cartesian element: that sensibility must be purely passive and merely causally affected by things, resulting in a brute given, which must then be transformed by the understanding into normatively accountable representations. McDowell writes,

[Kant’s] transcendental perspective embeds this potentially liberating picture [i.e., the inseparability of sensibility and understanding] within a peculiar version of the sideways-on view I mentioned earlier, with the space of concepts circumscribed and something-the-supersensible in this version, not the ordinary empirical world-outside its outer boundary.

1996: 41

McDowell argues this misses Kant's own insight: intuiting *anything*, simply by being a recognizable part of my mental life, implies it conforms to the norms of reason. McDowell argues that, if Kant had abandoned mere passive sensibility, "he could have depicted the independent layout of the world we experience as the medium within which the freedom of apperceptive spontaneity is exercised" (2009: 86). Sensibility cannot be *merely* passive; in order for me to be aware of anything, it must already be, at least minimally, actively understood and thus governed by norms specifying what is intelligible. The mere notion of something lying *outside* the space of reasons is incoherent.

While McDowell often pairs his reading of Kant with Hegel, the deeper influence comes from Aristotle. In contrast to Hegel, who focuses on overcoming the Cartesian picture, Aristotle is simply *indifferent* to the post-Cartesian dualisms of mind and world, individual and society, rational and natural, language and thought. For Aristotle, the rational dimensions of the world—the social, ethical, political, linguistic, aesthetic, and so on—are not human-impositions on an otherwise inert material universe; they are *objective features* of reality, every bit as real as objects and properties. Speaking of Aristotle's ethical view, he writes,

Aristotle's picture can be put like this. The ethical is a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them. We are alerted to these demands by acquiring appropriate conceptual capacities. When a decent upbringing initiates us into the relevant way of thinking, our eyes are opened to the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons. Thereafter our appreciation of its detailed layout is indefinitely subject to refinement, in reflective scrutiny of our ethical thinking. 1996: 82

McDowell encourages re-entering the Aristotelian picture by focusing on the notion of "second nature," the way in which a "decent upbringing" informs a child involves "having [their] eyes opened to reasons at large" (1996: 84). Acquiring second nature, McDowell argues, is "an element in the normal coming to maturity of the kind of animals we are. Meaning is not a mysterious gift from outside nature" (1996: 88). This involves becoming the kind of person who can make rational assertions—can state facts, defend claims, and so on. For McDowell, these judgments—as well as their correlates in perceiving-as or thinking-that—directly represent the world itself, since reasons, meanings, and social and moral facts are all objective features—

perceptible, judgable and thinkable parts of the world.¹⁰ McDowell contends this picture should seem common-sense: the world is not an unknowable, merely causal otherness humans project reasons onto. Persons are instead embedded into a lifeworld where meaningfulness and reasons are part of the furniture, and these are intelligible naturally in our enculturation.

This Aristotelian approach allows us to reject the Kantian problem of objective purport. For Aristotle, human mindedness is not separate from and outside the world but is *part* of the natural world—it is just the kind of being we are that we can perceive not just objects, but also social facts, moral norms, and other rational features of the world. Once we abandon this Cartesian gap, the Transcendental Deduction no longer seems pressing. McDowell writes:

Things change if we stop supposing that the formal character of the power of thought can be understood in abstraction from something that plays the role of sensibility in Kant. [. . .] This opens up the possibility of a version of the [identity of judgment and world] for which no analogue to the Deduction's question arises. 2017: 320.

For McDowell, the interpenetration of mind and world means there is no *need* for a Deduction. What is needed is therapy to avoid thinking there is a problem of objective purport. For McDowell, Kant rightly notes Descartes's picture invents the problem of explaining how our thoughts can be about the world, and the Deduction effectively argues this puzzle arises solely because of the illusion one can understand either mind or world in isolation from the other. But, despite his own insight, Kant fell back into an appeal to the given and the thing in itself—trapping him in the Cartesian picture he sought to escape.

This may seem to suggest McDowell encourages ignoring Kant and simply forgetting about the problem of objective purport. This misunderstands the necessity of therapy for philosophy in McDowell. Given the role of the Cartesian picture in contemporary philosophy and science, it is inevitable philosophers will occasionally lapse into thinking of mind and world as separate domains. When this happens, they often find themselves with the boggle Kant identified, the worry about how thoughts can be about the world in the first place. Kant is essential for helping make sense of this boggle and points the way on how to overcome it. The

¹⁰ For a critical discussion of this aspect of his Hegelian reading, see Bernstein (2002).

takeaway is that, after Kant, “we should try to reconcile reason and nature [. . .] [to aim for] a frame of mind in which we would no longer seem to be faced with problems that call on philosophy to bring subject and object back together” (1996: 86). If we get rid of the thing in itself, McDowell argues, the mind and world constitute each other and there ceases to be anything mysterious about that.

The upshot is McDowell’s account argues Kant provides a helpful therapeutic role, but one that is a prelude to overcoming the dualisms of the Cartesian picture found in contemporary philosophy and science. He instead promotes an abandoning of this whole picture and instead embracing, as Aristotle long held, humans are principally *rational* beings, for whom reasons are as essential, ineliminable, and obvious as any other facts about the world.

6. Constitution is Social Institution

Unlike Conant and McDowell, both Brandom and Haugeland argue the problem of objective purport is still pressing but that Kant’s response to it is insufficient to address contemporary philosophical concerns. Brandom and Haugeland contend this is necessary because Kant took the cognitive act of representing the world to be a native feature of human beings. Both philosophers argue, by contrast, that representing the world is a *product* of our social lives, a derivative result of the more primary norms governing our social life. This is part of what they inherit from Sellars: a view in which intersubjective practices are the ultimate source of normativity. As Haugeland frames it in an early essay,

The extant normative order in the communal pattern is *sui generis* and self-sustaining, via the mechanism of conformism; it is the fountainhead of all [objective purport], public and private. Thus, insofar as this order is imposed on the behavior or states of individual community members in such a way as to confer [objective purport] also on them, that resulting private [objective purport] is *derivative*. 1990/1998: 156

Whereas, for Kant, the capacity to judge objects derives from its unity within a single mental life, for Brandom and Haugeland the capacity to judge derives from the intersubjective practices of a community. This transforms how normativity works. While an individual’s judgments are still normative, the norms arise socially in the rules governing how individuals are supposed to

behave. This results in the social pressure that ensures those within the community behave *properly*: perform rites correctly, obey the right people, and use tools as they are supposed to.

This shared critique results in an important transformation of Kant's picture concerning the nature of the mind and, with it, the possibility of conceptual change. Minds cease to be personal and instead become interpersonal, extending into the social practices governing our behavior—those norms for proper tool-use, game play, assertion making, and so on. Since social groups change over time, their concepts will also change and adapt as their use is updated to handle different situations; Brandom writes, “concepts are not fixed or static items. Their content is altered by every particular case in which they are applied or not applied in experience” (2002: 215). The norms of thought Kant places in his ahistorical transcendental subject can be instead replaced with the changing social norms a society as it evolves in time. The puzzle both Brandom and Haugeland wrestle with, *their* problem of objective purport, is accounting for “how *objectivity* can arise as a structure within *intersubjectivity*” (1998: 607). Each intends to provide a Deduction explaining why an intersubjective community is entitled to claim its thoughts are about an objective world.

At the heart of this shift in Brandom's account is Richard Rorty's push for philosophers to abandon their desire to authorize knowledge through anything non-human—and, with it, abandon the concepts of “experience,” “representation,” and “objectivity.” Rorty regards these as artifacts of an outdated approach to cognition as focused on the individual subject and their experience, where objectivity is ultimately just a matter of ensuring our subjective experience accurately depicts the world. Instead, he contends the principal feature of our social life is its practicality—the need to accomplish tasks by relying on each other. Rorty notes,

The arts, the sciences, the sense of right and wrong, and the institutions of society are not attempts to embody or formulate truth or goodness or beauty. They are attempts to solve problems—to modify our beliefs and desires and activities in ways that will bring us greater happiness than we have now. 1972: 665

Rorty proposes a radical rejection of the whole idea of “getting it right”—of representing an objective world or discovering the truth—in favor of taking our social practices, including science, to be contingent and optional institutions which should be embraced only if they

improve life. For Rorty, this means language is not about representing the world, but determining what the group wants and how they plan to get it, and this involves inferring from their claims what they believe and desire.

Brandom follows Rorty in taking social life as principally pragmatic—focusing on bringing people together for accomplishing tasks—and the social use of language as centrally a matter of understanding others’ desires and beliefs well enough that everyone can accomplish those tasks. Brandom also firmly rejects the idea that knowledge is centered around experience, mental representations, and a correspondence of subjective beliefs and an objective world. But unlike Rorty, Brandom argues the pragmatic use of language *is* capable of preserving a notion of objectivity—though in a non-representational way. Brandom calls his non-representational approach *inferentialism*: “applying concepts paradigmatically in describing how things are, is inseparable from the inferential activity of giving and asking for reason” (2009: 8). Brandom also contends the outline of his position is evident in Kant’s Deduction; he argues the Deduction shows that, “in being able apply any ground-level empirical concepts, one already knows how to do everything one needs to know how to do in order to apply the categorial concepts” (2015: 174). For Brandom, Kant shows that the norms of inference governing ensuring commitments stands in a rational relationship with each other ground the norms of objectivity ensuring the conceptual contents implied by those commitments stand in compatibility relationships with one another.

Brandom’s inferentialist reading of the Deduction ignores the issues of experience and representation and instead focuses on the individual’s task in rendering their judgments consistent. He argues, “[for Kant] the responsibility one undertakes in judging [. . .] is generally a kind of *task* responsibility: the responsibility to *do* something. Specifically, it is the responsibility to *integrate* the judgment into a *unity of apperception*” (2009: 35). Brandom argues Kant’s TUA is a norm for ensuring the subject’s judgments are logically consistent—as incompatible with some judgments, implying other judgments, and entitling the subject to still others. This task-responsibility grounds the task of ensuring the *contents* of those judgments cohere: objects specified in judgments must have non-contradictory properties (e.g., both square and circular) and must stand in possible relationships to one another. Brandom writes, “objects play the conceptual functional role of *units of account for alethic modal incompatibilities*. A single object just is what cannot have incompatible properties” (2009: 48). This reading avoids

Kant's approach of treating objectivity as a matter of unifying sensory states in one's head to mirror properties of external objects in favor of a purely rational connection, in which properties of objects are determined by the inferences implied by—and excluded by—that judgment. For Brandom, this means applying concepts in *any* judgment requires the individual must grasp what their judgments commit them to and ensure they all hang together, and in doing so they reveal objects as being a certain way and incompatible with certain kinds of properties or behaviors.

Brandom generally pairs his reading of Kant with the Hegelian response to Kant. For Brandom, Hegel “brings things back to Earth” by showing, “all transcendental constitution is social institution” (2002: 47-8; 216; see Haugeland 1982/2015: 8).¹¹ Brandom's Rortyan reading of this is shifting the task-responsibility of integrating judgments from the TUA to social institutions, where the subject is understood as an assertion-maker responsible for their claims. As Brandom notes, to participate in a social institution—to be an expert in that field—Brandom contends speakers must recognize, and be recognized, by the other participants in that institution. Brandom writes, “[t]he distinction between the experts, the ones who have authority [. . .] and those who are subject to that authority [. . .] is a normative distinction, a distinction of normative status” (Brandom 1998: 40). It is by engaging in these practices and recognizing each other as authoritative that the institution is constituted, but also with it the subjects of that institution are *also* constituted. Being a subject in a community means being recognized as responsible for upholding the norms of the community in their assertions, and also being recognized as someone who will demand others conform to the norms on threat of sanction. Kant's norms of thought are replaced with the social norms for holding oneself and others' accountable for their claims, and thus integrating one's claims as a subject is accountable to integrating those claims also with the claims of others in the community.

These same practices also constitute what the participants are talking *about*—ensuring speakers have the same conceptual contents in their assertions. Brandom argues these conceptual contents should not be understood representationally, but inferentially: “grasping a conceptual content is a kind of practical know-how: mastery of an inferential role. That is being able to discriminate good and bad material [. . .] inferences in which it plays an essential role either in the premises or conclusion” (2011: 201). Brandom rejects the picture of judgments as mental

¹¹ Brandom (2020) provides the most thorough account of his views on Hegel, and Bouche (2020) compiles a collection of criticisms of this reading.

states representing a mind-independent world; instead, the conceptual contents applied in assertions determine the space of compatible—and incompatible—possibilities for the object. He writes, “what one is describing something *as* is a matter of what *follows* from the classification—what *consequences* falling in one group or another has” (2015: 180). This treats objectivity as a matter of the *inferential relationships* involved in making assertions about objects—specifically, what follow from, and is incompatible with, asserting some fact. This means that, in order for the subject to follow the social norms governing the institution, the speaker must also ensure the content of their claims follows the objective norms governing whatever they are talking about.

Unlike Rorty, however, Brandom does not feel this account requires him to abandon Kant’s central categories and metaphysical notions—such as representation, causality, necessity, and laws of nature. Brandom instead contends these all belong to a *pragmatic expressive* meta-vocabulary, the ability to talk about what one is doing when they commit to some conceptual content. This treats these locutions as providing a way of explaining or justifying what is happening in claim-making, making explicit why certain claims are incompatible or highlighting when someone is unreliable. For example, the language of mental representation (e.g., representations, thoughts, beliefs) is necessary for ascribing and understanding the false beliefs of others, such as “John thinks the green tie as blue.” Other Kantian categories, such as concerning properties, causality, and necessity, should be understood as making explicit the subjunctive and counterfactual supporting dependencies which hold between commitments. The success of a social institution depends on discovering and ensuring how the objects being talked about conform to these categories, by figuring out which properties are incompatible and what counterfactuals hold. These expressive terms are not to be understood in abstraction from the practice of assertion-making, but as a way of making intelligible how assertions track facts and explicate their conceptual relations to each other.

Brandom argues his expressivism does not commit him, as it does Rorty, to anti-realism; on the contrary, he argues his view *depends* on realism concerning what claims are about. He writes,

Determining and applying descriptive concepts inevitably involves committing oneself to the subjunctively robust inferential and incompatibility relations they stand in to one another. Rectifying concepts, determining facts, and establishing laws are all projects that

must be pursued together. Empirical evidence bears on all of the semantic, epistemic, and explanatory tasks at once, or it bears on none of them. 2015: 214

This performs the same function as the Deduction: it cannot be the case one can successfully make claims about the world unless one understood the norms for claim making and could grasp what is entailed by making that claim, and these all depend on the world being as we take it to be. The norms of claim-making and the norms of objectivity thus coincide, and each is necessary for the intelligibility of the other.

The upshot is a radical shift in the problem of objective purport. Following Rorty, Brandom rejects the attempt to ground objectivity in experience or representation; instead, he grounds it in the social practice of assertions and the meanings of a community. This shifts objectivity from a fundamentally experiential or representational notion concerning accurately mirroring the world, and instead turns it into a practical dimension of discourse.

7. Constitution is Bringing into Being

Like Brandom, Haugeland grounds his account of objectivity in intersubjectivity. Haugeland also rejects the Kantian notion that objectivity depends on experience or mental representations. However, unlike Kant and Brandom, Haugeland denies judgments or assertions are at the heart of objectivity; on the contrary, he argues, “understanding is not the same as, or any species of, propositional knowledge” (2017: 303). Haugeland contends the focus on propositional judgments or claims fundamentally privileges a “cognitivist” epistemology—centered around language and knowing-that—as well as a “positivist” ontology—of logically representable properties, objects, and facts. For Haugeland, this is an overly intellectualized, academic approach to knowledge.

Haugeland instead endorses a Heideggerian account of understanding and objectivity, centered on *know-how*. Know-how concerns the skills for recognizing, coping with, and using objects. What makes something an object, for Haugeland, is that it is *pertinent* to these skills—it is the kind of thing which a person might need to interact with. Know-how does not involve *representing* objects, but instead is a matter of finding them meaningful—hammers are for hammering, they should be grabbed by the handle, nails should be hit like so, and so on. In his dissertation, he argues, “one genuinely understands an instrument as such, or ‘grasps’ its

intelligibility, by acquiring the skills of working with it and using it properly” (1976: 130). These are socially acquired skills governed by norms for proper and improper usage, learned by conforming to the practices of the group. They provide persons with the basic set of “mundane skills” (1998: 323) for being a member of society—for interacting with each other and with the shared objects of their pre-reflective social world.

Haugeland contends these basic social norms and skills make possible “constituted domains.” For Haugeland, “to constitute is to bring into being” (1998: 325), which means taking a particular stance towards a class of skills and objects. The objects are defined by the specific role assigned by the constituted norms, the rules governing what are the necessary properties, uses, and behaviors that are acceptable for a specific kind of object. Haugeland takes these constituted domains as ubiquitous, covering everything from the broad practices of relationships, morality, and etiquette, to the narrower practices of teaching philosophy and chess. But a typical example for Haugeland is baseball: by the players according with certain rules, they bring into being new entities—umpires, strikes, outs, and errors—which accord with specific skills—calling balls, throwing sliders, catching pop-ups, and throwing past second. However, these rules and skills depend upon and ultimately are intertwined with more mundane skills and mundane ontology: it is only because the player has the mundane skills for recognizing, catching, and throwing mundane objects that they can recognize strikes, catch pop flies, and throw to first. Thus, the norms of objects in the constituted domain are derivative from, and coincident with, the social norms governing proper behavior.

Mundane skills are also essential for discerning whether the constituted rules are being followed by other participants and objects of the game, ensuring everything obeys the rules. Haugeland argues that this opens a gap—which he calls the “excluded zone” (1998: 347)—between what is illegal according to the constituted rules but still possible and detectable by mundane skills. For example, if a pitcher is spitting on the ball, the other players might detect the tampering through abnormal movements of the ball. These spitballs are *impossible* as part of the constituted ontology; they cannot count as legal moves in the game and must be ruled out. They are a kind of “rogue appearances,” moments when objects do not adhere to the constituted norms of baseball. Watching out for illegal moves is essential for the participants in any domain; part of their role as baseball players is ensuring everything behaves appropriately and watching out for incompatible behaviors that indicate cheating.

For Haugeland, this account of constituted domains is also capable of explaining the objectivity of scientific practices. The constituted domains involve taking a stance towards certain mundane skills and objects—treating the visible movements under a microscope, for example, as a certain kind of bacteria specified by the norms of biology. These practices bring objects into being because phenomena conform to the constituted norms and play their expected role: showing up in experimental results, chemical reactions, mathematical findings, or predicted behaviors. In cases of rigorous science, this involves a two-fold cooperation. On the one hand, practitioners cooperate with each other, ensuring everyone adheres to the social norms governing the skills for that domain and holding one another to account for mistakes in how they practice science. On the other, when science goes well, there is a cooperation between practitioners and objects, since the objects of a domain exist only by conforming to the norms governing them. For Haugeland, “constituted objects participate in [the] achievement” (1998: 353). The success of empirical science involves the constituted skills, such as experiments, better allowing the object to be itself—for it to reveal its rule-governed nature.

At the same time, there remains the possibility of the object failing to abide by the constituted norms yet being detectable according to mundane skills. Taking something as an object is treating it as essentially *incompatible* with a whole host of possible—but detectable—behaviors. Haugeland writes, “constituted objective phenomena are the loci of these potential incompatibilities. Such loci are what constitution *lets* phenomena *be*—namely [. . .] empirical *objects*” (1998: 337). But science is full of objects behaving illegally, showing up in the excluded zone as anomalies relative to how the object should behave. This ability to detect impossibilities ensures constituted objects are *autonomous* and thus will not always conform to our norms: “by not cooperating, [objects] have the power to bring [the whole constituted domain] down” (1998: 353). This potential incompatibility is essential for keeping science honest: objects need not behave as the domain purports. For Haugeland, constituted objectivity is an *accomplishment*, but a fragile one. Unlike Kant, Haugeland takes the possibility of “rogue appearances”—of phenomena which do not conform to norms—as a pervasive and real worry for participants of scientific domains.

This pushes Haugeland to argue more fully for Kant’s notion that humans are required to *bind* themselves to their norms and take responsibility for them. Norms are authoritative because objects behave as expected, and participants bind themselves to these norms because they take

them to accurately reveal the objective world. For Haugeland, the objects, by acting in ways incompatible with expectations, have “the capacity and authority to expose failings, all the way from routine mistakes up to and including systematic incompatibilities that undermine the whole” (1998: 347). Participants must determine, when encountering rogue appearances, what is just human error, experimental artifact, or general threat to a hypothesis or theory. If impossible phenomena become pervasive, the scientist is required to question whether the norms are tracking something. If they decide the constituted norms are no longer tenable, they have a responsibility to give those norms up. Without participants engaged in the practice, the domain becomes akin to a “dead language,” one with only historical significance. The objects the domain purported to reveal, such as phlogiston or ether, cease to exist; they are recognized as mere illusions, the deceptive appearances of objects where none existed. In the case of a scientific domain, one in which a scientist invested their whole life and self-identity, this poses an *existential* challenge: “accepting this responsibility is peculiarly personal not merely because it is so risky but also because what is at stake in it is the individual’s own professional self-understanding.” (2012: 271). Responsible participants in these fragile practices must maintain a Heideggerian “being-towards-death,” always bearing in mind objects can take down the domain and, in doing so, render unlivable the practices which give the scientists their identity.¹²

The upshot is that Haugeland’s account provides a distinctive response to Kant. His emphasis on constituted domains and their corresponding objects—understood as compatible and incompatible possibilities—provides a novel account for how objectivity arises from social normativity. But his account of impossible phenomena and the excluded also clarify how the world can push back against norms.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have sketched out a shared reading of Kant by the Pittsburgh Kantians—Bandom, Conant, Haugeland, and McDowell. I showed these figures read Kant as essential for introducing the problem of objective purport, and his focus on the normativity of judgment as a

¹² This is not to say *only* science faces these challenges. Haugeland notes that many domains of human life—religion, family, teaching, and so on—face existential commitments that will, when encountering persistent anomalies, provide no norms for what one should do. Any encounter with persistent impossible phenomena that require subjective decision has the potential to raise these demands. See Adams and Browning (2017:40-1), Blattner (2017: 65-6), and Rouse (2017).

solution points the way to their own approaches. I have also showed how these figures diverge in how they inherit Kant in their own projects. Conant and McDowell propose a more quietist approach in which Kant's central insight is that the problem of objective purport is ultimately a non-problem—the illusion of a problem resulting from a bad picture of thought. By contrast, Brandom and Haugeland both affirm the need for a solution to the problem of objective purport, but one that no longer adheres to Kant's picture—focused on consciousness, experience, and representations. They instead propose a picture in which the normativity of judgment is transformed into the normativity of social communities and their practices. They argue the success of these practices depend on the world being as it is taken to be.

An important take-away of this paper is a shift in our understanding of the “Pittsburgh School.” I show it involves more figures than often conceived, concerns much more than the myth of the given, and highlighted divides—between quietists and constructivists—which correspond to questions about the role of perception, judgment, and representation in contemporary philosophy. I show a shared, but often overlooked, commitment by Brandom, Conant, Haugeland, and McDowell to seeing their contemporary projects as helpfully prefigured in Kant's work. However, these figures also show a split in how we should bring Kant to bear: either as an important figure for *undermining* the problem of objective purport, or rather as setting out and modelling a solution that can be reapplied today in light of understanding normativity as a result of sociality. The result is a fuller picture of the philosophical richness coming out of the University of Pittsburgh in the last few decades.

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