Kant’s Definition of Sensation

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My aim in this essay is to clarify certain issues relating to Kant’s definition of sensation. I will argue that even though sensation can occur in Kant’s system only if the subject is physiologically affected by some kind of object, Kant defines sensation non-referentially, that is, as relating entirely to the subject without reference to the affecting object. In the process, I will also demonstrate that sensation for Kant is the feeling accompanying the non-durational and obscurely conscious alteration or modification in the representational state of the subject.

1 Introduction

In the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant characterizes sensation [Empfindung] in two different ways.¹ In the Transcendental Aesthetic, he describes Empfindung as the “effect of an

¹ I will employ the German term Empfindung instead of sensation throughout this essay. Since the concept of sensation is itself at issue here, I wish to avoid any terminological confusion. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the German are my own. I cite the relevant passages in German wherever required. Passages from Kant are cited according to the following key: Kant’s gesammelte Schriften, hrsg. von der königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Band I-XXIX (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1917) [AA Vol.: page(s)]; Kritik der reinen Vernunft (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1998) [KrV, A/B]; Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) [CPR, A/B]. I will cite the Reflexionen (reflections) by volume number of the Akademie edition, and by placing an “R” in front of the number given to the reflection by the editors of this edition. All references to Kant’s handwritten notes to the first Critique are from Benno Erdmann, ed., Nachträge zu Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft (Kiel: Lipsius & Tischer, 1881) [E (Roman numeral)].
object [Gegenstand] upon the representational ability [of the subject] insofar as the [subject is] affected by it.2 In this passage, Kant describes Empfindung in referential or interactional terms as the effect of the object upon the subject (henceforth, the “referential” definition of Empfindung).3 On the other hand, Kant says elsewhere that Empfindung (sensatio) is a “perception [Perzeption] which relates solely to [sich beziehen auf] the subject, as the modification of its state,” where Perzeption means any “representation with consciousness.”4 (I call this definition “non-referential.”) Here, Kant seems to characterize Empfindung in non-referential fashion as “solely” the modification of the state of the subject, without any reference to an object. In other words, Kant appears to be suggesting that even if a subject may necessarily require an

2 “Die Wirkung eines Gegenstandes auf die Vorstellungsfähigkeit, so fern wir von demselben affiziert werden, ist Empfindung” (KrV, A19-20/B34).
3 Although Kant says explicitly at A19-20/B34 that an Empfindung comes into being when the subject is affected by the “object,” he does not clarify the nature of this object. Kant uses two different terms in German—Gegenstand and Objekt—to signify an object. In addition, the term “object” has several different senses—the cognized object, the object of appearance, and the thing in itself. While the object involved in the process of generating an Empfindung cannot be taken as the cognized object, it is unclear whether it should be seen as the spatiotemporal object of appearance or as the thing in itself. In this essay, I will not attempt to resolve this difficulty. Instead, bracketing the task of specifying it further, I will take the object—which affects the subject in order to give rise to an Empfindung—as a mere something (etwas). For more on the problem, and one attempted solution (the “double affection theory”), see Moltke Gram, “The Myth of Double Affection,” in Reflections on Kant’s Philosophy, ed. W. H. Werkmeister (Gainsville: University Presses of Florida), 29-64.
4 “Eine Perzeption, die sich lediglich auf das Subjekt, als die Modifikation seines Zustandes bezieht, ist Empfindung (sensatio)” (KrV, A320/B376). In this passage, Guyer and Wood translate “sich beziehen” as “refers” (CPR, 398-99). Since I translate the same term as “relates,” it may be said that I have translated the term to suit my purposes. But this is not the case. I employ the term “referential” as a term of art in this essay. In the referential view of Empfindung, Empfindung is to be defined in terms of the interaction between the subject and the object such that it is in the relationship between the subject pole and the object pole that an Empfindung is. In contrast, in the non-referential view, Empfindung is defined only in terms of the subject pole, despite the fact that the object pole may somehow also be involved. Consequently, even if we translate “sich beziehen” as “refer” in this passage, this would not entail that Kant wishes to define Empfindung in referential terms. In my view, “refer” here simply means “relating to the subject.”
object in order to have an *Empfindung*, the object side of this interaction is somehow not essential to defining *Empfindung*.

Hence, we can find two incompatible descriptions of *Empfindung* in Kant’s writings. On the one hand, Kant characterizes *Empfindung* in terms of the interaction between the subject and the object, i.e., as the effect of the object upon the subject.\(^5\) On the other hand, he sees *Empfindung* in merely subjective terms, as the modification of the state of the subject, without any reference to the object. In other words, (a) the interaction between the subject and the object, taken by itself, would not give us the definition of *Empfindung*, as it does in the case of the referential definition above; and (b) *Empfindung* is to be defined in entirely subjective terms as the modification of the state of the subject.

Kant himself does not explicitly formulate, let alone answer this question of whether *Empfindung* is essentially referential or not. With respect to Kant scholarship, an interpretation of Kant can avoid asking this question in at least two ways. In the first place, it might be baldly asserted that the description of *Empfindung* in referential terms at A19-20/B34 should be taken as Kant’s official definition of *Empfindung*.\(^6\) However, given that Kant does seem to describe an *Empfindung* as non-referential at A320/B376, such a strategy would lead at best to only a partial understanding of Kant’s notion of *Empfindung*. A

\(^5\) This, as I have said, is the referential definition of *Empfindung*. By “referential,” I do not mean “intentional” here, as is the case with Rolf George and Richard Aquila (see the characterization of George’s position in this section as well as fn 10 below). I am bracketing the question of intentionality, because my goal is far more limited here: to ascertain whether *Empfindung* must be defined in terms of the subject only, or some combination of the subject and the object. The question of whether or not *Empfindungen* are intentional is beyond the scope of this essay.

\(^6\) In the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, O. Neumann privileges the A19-20/B34 characterization of *Empfindung* over the A320/B376 characterization without any justification. According to Neumann, Kant, following Tetens, conceives of *Empfindung* as the objective representation of the senses in that the subject is affected by the object [weist auf den Gegenstand und macht den objektiven Bezug der Affizierung aus] (O. Neumann, “Empfindung,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, volume 2, ed. Joachim Ritter [Basel: Schwabe & Co. Verlag, 1972], 456-74, 463). For a contrary view on Kant’s relationship to Tetens, see §3 of this paper.
second strategy might be to assume without sufficient argumentation that the referential and the non-referential depictions of Empfindung are compatible with each other. However, such an interpretation would also be problematic. Since the terms “referential” and “non-referential” are class complements, any interpretation that does not take a position on whether Empfindung is referential or not would simply fail to appreciate the difficulty of the task of defining Empfindung in Kant’s philosophy.

Some Kant interpreters have addressed this question of referentiality in Kant’s definition of Empfindung. According to Rolf George, Kant defines Empfindung as non-referential:

It seems that Malebranche was the first to hold that external impingements upon the senses must initially result in sensations, merely subjective modifications of the mind. The important insight here is not that all knowledge of external things begins with sensory awareness—many others held this view—and that some elaboration of the sensory input by central functions of the mind is needed before one can properly speak of knowledge or perception. It was, rather, that the mental states initially induced are non-intentional or non-referential.8

In this passage, George accepts the A19-20/B34 characterization of Empfindung as the effect of the object upon the

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7 In the Enzyklopädisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie, Mellin glosses Empfindung as the effect of the object upon the subject, but “also” as the modification of the state of the subject due to its affection by the object. Interpreting the A19-20/B34 passage, Mellin says that I can represent the moon, because there is some object “moon” that causes (verursacht) my representational ability to represent it. Hence, he interprets an Empfindung as the interaction between me, construed as the subject, and the object. Then, citing the A320/B376 characterization, he adds that an Empfindung can also (auch) be considered solely (lediglich) as a modification of the state of the subject, because my representational ability undergoes (leidet) an alteration owing to its interaction with the object “moon” (G. S. A. Mellin, Enzyklopädisches Wörterbuch der kritischen Philosophie, volume 2, Neudruck der Ausgabe Jena 1799 [Darmstadt: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1971], 283-89, 283).

8 Rolf George, “Kant’s Sensationism,” Synthese 47, no. 2 (1981): 229-55, 229; my emphasis.
subject. Nevertheless, he thinks that *Empfindungen*, when viewed in themselves ("initially"), are non-referential mental states. In other words, they are defined merely subjectively without reference to the object. Further, George even finds this view of *Empfindung* embedded in the A19-20/B34 claim that an *Empfindung* is the effect of the object upon the subject:

“The effect of an object upon the faculty of representation, so far as we are affected by it, is sensation.” The rider “so far as we are affected by it” is crucial. It is to convey that if merely a sensation is present in the mind, no object is represented.  

In this passage, George reads the qualifier “insofar as” at A19-20/B34 as showing that *Empfindungen* are merely subjective or “in the mind,” and do not “represent” an object. He argues that *Empfindung* must be seen as merely subjective without reference to the affecting object, or, as George says, in “non-referential” terms, because the subject can have an *Empfindung* only *insofar as* it is affected by the object.  

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9 Ibid., 239.

10 Kenneth Westphal and A. C. Ewing take a position similar to George’s. Westphal suggests that sensations in Kant have a “basic kind of intensionality” which is non-intentional: “Kant’s considered view is that sensations, or rather acts of sensing, have a basic kind of intensionality (roughly, they carry information about a particular sensed object), though their basic intensionality is insufficient for them to be intentional” (Kenneth R. Westphal, *Kant’s Transcendental Proof of Realism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 45). According to Ewing, Kant views an *Empfindung* as sheer presence for the subject, which does not require a corresponding object to exist in the world (A. C. Ewing, *A Short Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950 (1938)], 94). Richard Aquila explicitly supports George’s position: “Like George, I connect Kant’s need to introduce an element of intentionality with the fact that ‘sensation’ as such does not constitute mental ‘reference’” (Richard Aquila, *Representational Mind: A Study of Kant’s Theory of Knowledge* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983], 186n). Patricia Kitcher accepts George’s argument that sensations are non-referential for Kant. She says: “In describing sensations as the ways we are affected by objects (A19-20/B34) and in denying that sensations are objective representations, Kant seems to adopt the sensationist position” (Patricia Kitcher, *Kant’s Transcendental Psychology* [Oxford: Oxford
As opposed to George’s view, Lorne Falkenstein interprets Kant’s definition of \textit{Empfindung} as referential. Denying George’s claim that “Kant took sensations to be ‘non-intentional’ in the sense that they do not refer to anything other than themselves,”\textsuperscript{11} Falkenstein draws on Kant’s anthropology lecture notes to support his interpretation that Kant essentially views \textit{Empfindung} as the physiological effect of the object upon the subject. According to Falkenstein, “there is strong evidence … that Kant did indeed take sensations, as ‘effects on the representative capacity’ arrayed in space as well as time, to be physiological states of the body of the perceiver.”\textsuperscript{12} Hence, considering that he interprets Kant’s definition of \textit{Empfindung} in interactional terms as the physiology of the subject being affected by the object, Falkenstein appears to be supporting the view that Kant defines \textit{Empfindung} in referential terms.

\textsuperscript{11} Lorne Falkenstein, \textit{Kant’s Intuitionism: A Commentary on the Transcendental Aesthetic} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 387n.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 123. I discuss Falkenstein’s view in detail in §3. Hans Vaihinger also seems to take the A19-20/B34 characterization of \textit{Empfindung} as primary, but, unlike Falkenstein, does not provide any justification for his view (Hans Vaihinger, \textit{Kommentar zu Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft}, volume 2 [Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1922], 26-29).
especially since he explicitly denies George’s position that Empfindung is non-referential for Kant.13

While George and Falkenstein differ on whether Empfindung is referential or non-referential, both agree that an Empfindung can arise only if the subject is affected by the object. Their convergence on this proposition is hardly surprising, given that Kant makes this claim almost throughout his career.14 The fact that the object must necessarily affect the subject for an Empfindung to arise is, however, insufficient to define the nature of Empfindung in the context of Kant’s writings. For, the real question here is whether Kant defines Empfindung with or without including the object. In other words, if, as both George and Falkenstein agree, the interaction between the subject and the object is a necessary condition for an Empfindung to arise, and given that Kant makes incompatible statements regarding whether to define Empfindung with or without reference to the affecting object, then the question regarding Kant’s definition of Empfindung can be articulated as follows: Does Kant wish to define Empfindung exclusively in terms of the subjective appropriation of the interaction between the subject and the object, that is, in non-referential or merely subjective terms? Or does he think that the mere interaction between subject and object gives us the complete metaphysical profile of an Empfindung, in which case

13 I will explicate, and further critique, Falkenstein’s position below; see §2, and fns 54 and 84.
14 Apart from A19-20/B34 in the first Critique, Kant takes this view in several reflections. He says that sensation depends on the difference in the movement of body parts (Aa XIV: R112-113.36, between 1770 and 1775; also see AA XIV: R115-116.38, 1770-75); that sensation is an affection by the object (KrV, B207-8; AA XVIII: R6314, 1790-91; Opus Postumum, AA XXI: 537); and that affection requires the actual presence of the object (KrV, A50/B74; AA XVI: R2843, mid-1750s; the anthropology notes: AA XV: R695, 1760 or 1770; and AA XV: R650, 1769, or early 1770s; AA XXVIII: 850, lectures on metaphysics from 1782-83). Kant also uses the term Empfindung to describe aesthetic feelings and the moral feeling of respect, but a consideration of these two senses of Empfindung is beyond the scope of this essay. Here I am concerned only with Empfindung as it relates to the subject’s representation of an outer object.
Kant holds what I am calling the referential definition of *Empfindung*?\(^{15}\)

In what follows, I offer new arguments to support the view that Kant defines *Empfindung* as non-referential. In the following section, §2, I will criticize Falkenstein’s claim that Kant is not offering a definition of *Empfindung* at A320/B376, where *Empfindung* is described as solely the modification of the state of the subject. Drawing upon the *Nachlaß*, I will provide textual evidence to show that Kant’s characterization of *Empfindung* at A320/B376, as the modification of the state of the subject, should be considered the official definition of this term in Kant’s system. What emerges from this analysis is a picture of *Empfindung* as a feeling accompanying the alteration or modification of the representational profile of the subject. Subsequently, in §3, through an examination of how Kant relates *Empfindung* to other sensibility terms like perception and consciousness, I undertake a philosophical reconstruction of Kant’s definition of *Empfindung*. I argue that, for Kant, *Empfindung* is to be defined as the feeling attendant upon the non-durational and obscurely conscious modification or alteration of the state of the subject without any reference to the object, even though the subject must be physiologically affected.

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\(^{15}\) Several excellent studies relating to Kant’s metaphysics and epistemology do not treat of the question of the referentiality of *Empfindung*. I think this is significant because it reveals that the question of the referentiality of *Empfindung* has not been widely discussed in the Kant literature, at least not in the way several other aspects of Kant’s philosophy have been debated. See for instance, Henry Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, revised and enlarged edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004); Karl Ameriks, *Kant’s Theory of the Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Graham Bird, *Kant’s Theory of Knowledge: An Outline of One Central Argument in the Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1962), and *The Revolutionary Kant: A Commentary on the Critique of Pure Reason* (Chicago: The Open Court, 2006); Andrew Brook, *Kant and the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Jonathan Bennett, *Kant’s Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); Ralph C. S. Walker, *Kant* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978); and Eric Watkins, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For a brief discussion of other important works on Kant’s theoretical philosophy that also ignore the referentiality issue, and focus instead on resolving Kant’s seemingly conflicting statements regarding what kind of matter an *Empfindung* is, see §4 below.
by the object for an *Empfindung* to arise. In order to bolster this interpretation, I demonstrate its consistency with Kant’s overall theory of cognition. Finally, in §4, I indicate briefly that Kant’s seemingly conflicting statements on the nature of the matter of *Empfindung* can be reconciled if, based on my interpretation in §2 and §3, we understand the matter of *Empfindung* as the matter of consciousness.

Resolving the question of the referentiality of *Empfindung* is important not only to understand further the nature of Kant’s idealism, but also to evaluate the relevance of Kant’s thought for contemporary philosophy of mind. First, there is a long-standing controversy among Kant scholars regarding what Kant takes to be the matter of sensation. Answering the question of whether an *Empfindung* is referential or not promises to contribute to the resolution of this controversy, and consequently to illuminate Kant’s views on the mind-brain relationship as it relates to the case of sensation.\(^{16}\) Second, the relationship between the subject and the thing in itself can appear circular in Kant’s system. As Fichte says, the thought of the thing in itself is based on sensations in Kant’s system, but Kant can also be read as saying that sensations are based on the thought of the thing in itself.\(^{17}\) This problem relating to the nature of Kant’s transcendental idealism can be addressed more adequately if we could determine whether sensations are in themselves referential or non-referential.\(^{18}\)

Before I begin, a word about methodology. As I have indicated, not only does Kant not provide an unambiguous theory of *Empfindung* in his published works, he also employs two opposed definitions of this notion in these works. One way of proceeding in such a circumstance would be to consult Kant’s unpublished writings to ascertain which of these defini-

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\(^{16}\) I briefly discuss the question of the matter of sensation in §4 of this essay.


\(^{18}\) I discuss this issue in a general sense in §4 below, see fn 97.
itions could be taken as Kant’s official definition of Empfindung. This is my general strategy in this essay. In §2, I include some evidence from Kant’s unpublished notes to conclude in favor of the view that Empfindung should be defined non-referentially. Subsequently, in §3, I consolidate this conclusion by providing a philosophical argument for it. Here too I have relied on Kant’s unpublished writings to bolster and supplement the picture of Empfindung that emerges from the philosophical analysis of Kant’s published writings. The overall result is an argumentative reconstruction that should be evaluated on the basis of logical coherence and plausibility rather than on the basis of some perfect correspondence with what Kant might have actually thought about this issue.

2 Falkenstein’s Interpretation of A320/B376

At A320/B376, Kant characterizes Empfindung as relating solely to the state of the subject. Falkenstein admits that Empfindung is characterized as a subjective feeling in this passage, although it is not clear why he thinks A320/B376 can be taken to support the claim that an Empfindung is a feeling. However, Falkenstein rejects the idea that this passage represents Kant’s official definition of Empfindung. In fact, he argues that Kant is not interested in defining sensation at all at A320/B376. Kant’s primary aim here is rather to distinguish his own use of the term “idea” from that of empiricists like Locke and Hume, and not to explain the essential nature of Empfindung. Thus, according to Falkenstein, the characterization of Empfindung in this passage should be discounted if our aim is to comprehend Kant’s definition of Empfindung:

Thus, the “classification” passage [A320/B376] has little to do with explaining the role of sensation, intuition, or concepts in cognition. It was not written for that purpose,
but for the purpose of correcting the tendency—most vicious in Locke and Hume—of employing the term “idea” to designate almost any mental representation. In accord with this purpose, one of Kant’s concerns is to point out that “idea” should not be employed to designate a state of feeling in the subject, and to this end he distinguishes “idea” from “sensation.” It is just that “subjective feeling” is not the only sense of “sensation.” But Kant does not remark on that here because his purpose is to explain, not what sensations are, but what ideas are.  

There are two problems with this argument. First, as I will argue in §2.1, Falkenstein’s specific argument that the A320/B376 passage should not be taken as Kant’s considered definition of Empfindung is unconvincing. Second, I will demonstrate in §2.2 that several passages from Kant’s published works and the Nachlaß support and further clarify Kant’s A320/B376 claim that Empfindung must be defined non-referentially as the merely subjective modification that excludes any reference to the object. In addition, the fact that this characterization of Empfindung also finds an echo in Tetens’ conceptualization of the same term makes it likelier that Kant does mean to define Empfindung non-referentially.

2.1 Arguments against Falkenstein’s Interpretation

In my view, Falkenstein’s argument for rejecting the claim that the A320/B376 passage should be taken as Kant’s official definition of Empfindung is unconvincing for three reasons.

First, even if Falkenstein is correct in thinking that Kant’s main interest at A320/B376 is in clarifying the term “idea,” it

19 Falkenstein, Kant’s Intuitionism, 114.
does not necessarily follow that other terms in this passage, like *Empfindung*, must thereby be defined in only a partial manner.

Second, instead of invalidating the significance of the A320/B376 passage for defining *Empfindung*, Falkenstein’s emphasis on context could in fact support the opposite view: that the A320/B376 characterization of *Empfindung* ought to be taken as Kant’s official definition of the term. It could be argued that context actually shows the primacy of A320/B376 over A19-20/B34 in resolving the question of how Kant might have wanted to define *Empfindung*. The A19-20/B34 characterization occurs in the context of the Transcendental Aesthetic, where Kant is engaged in the specialized task of delineating sensibility as receptive. It is with this specific purpose in view that Kant characterizes an *Empfindung* as the effect of the object upon the subject. By contrast, at A320/B376, Kant provides a *Stufenleiter* to explicate the basic terms of his philosophy in a general sense. Since definitions are best formulated in general rather than specific contexts, it might be expected that the *Stufenleiter*—the only classification of terms provided in the first *Critique*—would be the best place for Kant to define his philosophical vocabulary. Hence, the characterization at A320/B376 could be taken as the primary definition of *Empfindung*, even if we pay attention to the particular context in which this characterization appears in Kant’s text.

Finally, and most crucially, in a reflection from the 1770s, when he was preparing to write the first *Critique* (published 1781), Kant characterizes *Empfindung* in the same way as at A320/B376. In this reflection, he writes:

1. *repraesentatio*. 2. *perceptio* (with consciousness). 3. *cognitio* (relation with consciousness to the object) (*perceptio objective spectate*). (a perception [*perception*], which is related merely to the subject as a state of the
same [i.e., the subject] is *Empfindung; [that] which is related to the object: cognition.*)

At A320/B376, Kant says,

The genus is representation in general (*repraesentatio*). Under it stands the representation with consciousness (*perceptio*). A perception [*Perzeption*] which relates solely to the subject as the modification of its state is *Empfindung* (sensatio), an objective perception [*Perzeptio*] is cognition [*Erkenntnis*] (cognitio).

In both these passages, A320/B376 and R2836, Kant considers *Empfindung* to be a representation and a *perceptio* (representation with consciousness); and he defines *Empfindung* as a perception related merely to the subject as its state. However, Kant does not mention the term “idea” at R2836. Therefore, Falkenstein’s rejection of the A320/B376 characterization of *Empfindung* on the grounds that Kant is here concerned mainly with the term “idea” can be challenged.

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20 “1. repraesentatio. 2. perceptio (mit Bewustseyn). 3. cognitio* (Beziehung mit Bewustseyn auf Gegenstand) (perceptio objective spectata). (* eine perception, die blos aufs subject als ein Zustand desselben bezogen wird, heißt Empfindung; die aufs object bezogen wird: Erkenntnis [sic].)” (AA XVI: R2836 [henceforth, R2836], comment in Meier’s logic text; difficult to date exactly, but from the 1770s).
21 Kant is not always consistent with his classification schema. For instance, in a reflection from around 1771, he speaks of *Empfindung* as one of three kinds of cognition (*Erkenntnisarten*) (AA XVII: R4440, around 1771). My aim here is to problematize Falkenstein’s argument that the A320/B376 characterization is not the official definition of *Empfindung*. As a result, Kant’s inconstant use of concepts is irrelevant for my present purposes.
2.2 Empfindung as Non-referential: Textual and Historical Justification

One can plausibly classify the passages in which Kant characterizes *Empfindung* as non-referential into three groups. First, there are passages in which Kant speaks directly of *Empfindung* as merely subjective without reference to an object. Second, in some other passages, Kant describes *Empfindung* as the alteration or movement in the subject. The concepts of alteration or movement appear to be alternative ways of describing what, at A320/B376, Kant calls the “modification of the state [of the subject].” Finally, and most crucially, some passages show that the modification of the state of the subject is a feeling different from the feelings of pleasure and displeasure as well as the moral feeling of respect. I will now discuss each of these sets of passages in detail.

2.2.1 The Merely Subjective Nature of Empfindung

In the first set of passages, Kant speaks of *Empfindung* as merely subjective. The fact that he does so quite consistently after 1769, generally regarded as the beginning of the critical phase, shows that this could well have been Kant’s considered view of *Empfindung*. In a reflection from around 1769/1770, Kant says, “Appearance is a representation of the senses, to the extent it relates to an object; *Empfindung*: if it relates merely to the subject.”22 Elsewhere he says something similar: “cognition by which we differentiate what something is, is an objective representation; the subjective is *Empfindung*.”23 In these reflections, Kant describes *Empfindung* not with reference to an object, but as relating “merely” to the subject. In other words, he characterizes *Empfindung* as non-

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22 AA XV: R683, reflection on anthropology; my emphasis.
23 AA XVI: R1685, late 1770s or early 1780s; also see AA XXII: 487, 479.
referential. By contrast, in the same passages he characterizes both appearances (in R683) and cognitions (in R1685) as referential, i.e., in terms of the subject’s relationship to the object.

In the chapter titled “Anticipations of Perception” in the Critique of Pure Reason, where Kant argues that we can cognize a priori that sensations have a degree, Empfindung is described as “merely a subjective representation, of which one can only be conscious that the subject is affected, and which one relates to an object in general.”\(^\text{24}\) Here, Kant is clear that an Empfindung can arise only if the subject is affected by the object. Nevertheless, in describing Empfindung as “merely subjective,” Kant appears to conceive of Empfindung as essentially non-referential. Similarly, in a reflection on anthropology, he says that an Empfindung is the alteration (Veränderung) of the state of the subject, but this alteration occurs due to the presence of the object.\(^\text{25}\) Here again, Kant characterizes an Empfindung in terms of the alteration of the subject, although this alteration is supposed to occur “due to the presence of the object.”\(^\text{26}\)

Despite asserting that the object must affect the subject for an Empfindung to arise, Kant states in these passages that an Empfindung is “merely subjective.” It follows that: (a) Kant can be said to view Empfindung as non-referential; and (b) the affection of the subject by the object is the necessary condition for an Empfindung to arise.

\(^{24}\) KrV, A166/B207-8.
\(^{25}\) “Sensible representations are either Empfindungen and require the senses, or appearances and have intuitions as their ground; the former are (represented) alterations (Veränderung) of the state of the subject by the presence of the object; the latter: representations of object itself, insofar as it [the object] affects (aussetzen) the senses” (AA XV: R650, 1769 or early 1770; also see XV: R698).
\(^{26}\) Veränderung and “modification” are synonyms, see AA XVIII: R5585 (quoted below in fn 33).
2.2.2 Empfindung as Alteration or Movement

In a reflection from 1778-79, just prior to the publication of the A edition of the first Critique in 1781, Kant characterizes Empfindung as a “differential.” In my view, this differential can be interpreted non-referentially as the shift (modification/alteration/movement) in the representational profile of the subject, without reference to the object that makes this shift possible. Kant writes:

The quanta are different with respect to quantity, [but] same with respect to quality, that is, [with respect to] decomposition with absolutely no first parts. However, the quantum of absolute position or reality (Empfindung), which is different from other qvantis in that nothing disappears in the case of the former, but in the case of the latter there is a positive border although no part remains. The borders of space (three [dimensions]) and time (one [dimension]). The forging of reality has a moment [Moment], of extensive quantity, a quasi element: a differential…. Just like a different moment brings about a different magnitude of speed, in the same way the difference in impression [Eindruk] [sic] brings about a different degree of Empfindung…. We have 3 quanta: Space, time and Empfindung [Bewegung, realität]. The first has a positive border, which is a quantum; the second, which is not a quantum, the third [has] nothing positive and no border, rather bounds.27

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This passage (henceforth R5582) can be shown to support the claim that an *Empfindung* must be defined as non-referential rather than as referential for two interrelated reasons.

First, Kant describes an *Empfindung* as the “absolute position (or reality)” at R5582; and as the “real” (*Real*) material of perception.\(^\text{28}\) Reality is always associated with consciousness. Kant says this clearly in the first *Critique*:

The quality of *Empfindung* is always merely empirical, and cannot be represented a priori at all (e.g. colors, taste, etc.). But the real, which corresponds to *Empfindungen* in general, in contrast to the negation = 0, represents something whose concept in itself contains a being, and signifies *nothing but the synthesis in an empirical consciousness* in general.\(^\text{29}\)

On the basis of this passage, the real of consciousness must be considered merely subjective, since the notion of synthesis is merely subjective for Kant. Thus, if *Empfindung* is real, and the real when associated with consciousness is merely subjective, then *Empfindung*, construed as a differential at R5582, must also be merely subjective (= non-referential). This is despite the fact that Kant also remarks in the same passage that the subject

\[^{28}\text{KrV, A166/B207-8.}\]

\[^{29}\text{KrV, A176/B217, my emphasis.} \text{Die Qualität der Empfindung ist jederzeit bloss empirisch, und kann a priori gar nicht vorgestellet werden, (z. B. Farben, Geschmack etc.). Aber das Reale, was den Empfindungen überhaupt korrespondiert, im Gegensatz mit der Negation = 0, stellet nur etwas vor, dessen Begriff an sich ein Sein enthält, und bedeutet nichts als die Synthesis in einem empirischen Bewusstsein überhaupt.”}\]
requires impressions (Eindrücke) of the object existing independently of itself in order to have an Empfindung at all.\(^{30}\)

Second, Kant’s characterization of Empfindung as a differential at R5582 is analogous to Kant’s delineation of Empfindung as the modification of the state of the subject at A320/B376. He also uses the terms “alteration” (Veränderung) and “movement” (Bewegung) to express the same idea—that Empfindung may be defined as the shift in the representational profile of the subject. One can argue for the synonymy of these terms as follows. At R5582, Kant employs the term “movement” (Bewegung) to characterize Empfindung. In fact, he often uses this term to describe Empfindung in the reflections from 1778-79.\(^{31}\) This is especially significant since these reflections, similar to R5582, were also written just prior to the publication of the first edition of the Critique of Pure Reason. The temporal proximity of these reflections to the first Critique makes it more likely that Kant wished to describe Empfindung as a movement. Now, we have seen that, at R5582, Kant also characterizes Empfindung as a differential—as the non-referential change in the representational reality of the subject. Thus, given that a movement and a differential could be considered semantically analogous,\(^{32}\) and since Kant uses both these terms at R5582, it is not too far-fetched to infer that Kant uses the term

\(^{30}\) I do not have space to address this issue here, but it must be noted that the relationship between impression (Eindruck) and Empfindung is not entirely clear in Kant’s writings. Kant sometimes uses these two terms synonymously (see for example, AA XX: 26; also he could be seen as using it synonymously in the first Critique—compare Kant’s use of Eindruck at B1 and his characterization of Empfindung at A20/B34). On the other hand, there are passages in the reflections where this is not the case—for instance, AA XV: R292, late 1770s or early 1780s. Finally, there are passages indicating that impressions represent the object-pole in the interaction between the subject and the object, while Empfindung forms the subject-pole of this interaction, see AA XVIII: R5926, 1784-85.

\(^{31}\) “Empfindungen move indeed, but they do not animate [beleben], because they do not have a constant principle of animation…” (AA XV: R948, late 1770s). Kant makes this claim more than once during this period. “Empfindungen,” he says, “move, ideas animate [beleben] from out of principle …” (AA XV: R946, 1776-78); and “Empfindung and spirit [Geist] move …” (AA XVI: R1844, 1776-78).

\(^{32}\) For more on this issue, see fn 34 below.
“movement” to refer to the movement in the representational state of the subject. Since this is how Kant uses the term “modification” when he glosses Empfindung as the modification of the state of the subject at A320/B376, and when he uses the term “alteration” (Veränderung), I think it is fair to say that Kant uses three interchangeable terms—“modification” (Modifikation), “alteration” (Veränderung) and “movement” (Bewegung)—to characterize Empfindung in non-referential terms. Each of these terms means the same thing: the alteration of the representational profile of the subject.  

33 Kant uses the term Veränderung (alteration) to describe an Empfindung. In a reflection from the 1770s, he uses Veränderung and Modifikation interchangeably. He says, “Principle of the mathematical knowledge of appearances: All appearance has an extensive magnitude and as Empfindung, a degree. Because (concerning the latter) this is the way each Empfindung originates from not being, because it is a modification [sic]. Hence, through alteration [Veränderung]. All alterations however go from 0 to a through to infinitely many small levels [Stufen]” (AA XVIII: R5585). Here, if we accept my argument vis-à-vis R5582 that Kant is defining Empfindung non-referentially when he says that it is a differential, then Kant seems to be conceptualizing Empfindung in the same merely subjective way that he did at A320/B376.

It could be argued that Kant does not always use Veränderung in this way. Sometimes he suggests that Empfindung is the “alteration [Veränderung] of the senses” (AA XV: R756, 1764-65; and AA XVII: R3958, 1769). These passages could be seen as evidence for Falkenstein’s view that an Empfindung is the physiological effect of the object upon the subject. However, there is nothing in these passages to preclude the view that while Empfindung necessarily requires the alteration of the senses, it is still defined by Kant as the non-referential modification of the state of the subject. I discuss Falkenstein’s physiological and referential characterization of Empfindung in §3.

34 It could be said that, unlike the terms “differential” and “modification,” the terms “movement” and “differential” may not be synonymous. The term “movement,” it could be contended, has spatial connotations. Hence, a fuller account would be required to show how this term can be employed to describe the modifications of the state of the subject. This is clearly an important issue. While I do not have space to explore this issue adequately here, I do think that Kant seems to be using movement in some non-spatial sense in the passages I have quoted here. In my view, Kant seems to employ the term “movement” to mark the shift from one representation to another, akin to the way we speak, metaphorically, of “moving on” after a traumatic experience. When we “move on” from an experience, we are implying that we have moved away from thoughts, that is, a shift from one set of thoughts to another has taken place.

A more complete defense of this general view would require further historical-textual work. One would have to investigate the way Kant and his contemporaries used the term “Bewegung” in connection with the concepts “mind,” “soul,” “representation,” “Empfindung,” etc. But this task is beyond the scope of this essay.

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2.2.3 Empfindung as a Neutral Feeling

By far the most telling evidence that *Empfindung* is merely subjective (or non-referential) comes from a passage in which Kant distinguishes inner and outer *Empfindungen*. A reflection on anthropology dated 1769 says:

The first building block [*Grundstück*] of our cognition is *Empfindung*. One designates the representations [*Emp-findung*], in which the mind is viewed as merely passive, to the extent it is effected [*gewirkt*] by the presence of a thing. [The *Empfindungen*] constitute at the same time the material of all our cognition. Because the form is given here through the operations of the soul. These *Empfindungen*, to the extent they denote [*andeuten*] the state of the subject, are called feelings [*Gefühl*]; if, however, they relate to an outer object, then they are called appearance [*Erscheinung*]. It follows from this that all our representations are accompanied by a feeling, to the extent they are affections of the state of the soul.\(^{35}\)

According to this passage, the subject can have an *Empfindung* only if it is affected by the presence of the object. Yet Kant here defines *Empfindung* as a feeling relating merely to the state of the subject, and therefore as non-referential.\(^ {36}\) In fact, it is the term “appearance” that denotes the referential relationship between the subject and the object in this passage. This position

\(^{35}\) AA XV: R619, 1769. “Die ersten grundstücke [*sic*] unserer Erkentnis sind Empfindung. So nennen man die Vorstellungen, bey denen das Gemüth als blos leidend angesehen wird, indem sie durch die Gegenwart einer Sache gewirkt werden. Sie machen gleichsam die Materie alles unseres Erkennnisses aus. Denn die Form wird hernach durch die eigene Thatigkeit [*sic*] der Seele gegeben. Diese Empfindung, so fern sie blos den Zustand des subject des andeutet, heißt Gefühl; gehet sie aber (\(^{6}\) ist sie in Verhelt in auf einen äußeren Gegenstand, so heißt sie Erscheinung. Daraus sehen wir, daß alle unsere Vorstellungen mit einem Gefühl begleitet seyn, indem sie affectionen von dem Zustande der Seele sind.”

\(^{36}\) See fn 38 for a brief discussion of how this notion of *Empfindung* as feeling differs from the aesthetic feeling of pleasure and displeasure, and from the moral feeling of respect.

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is diametrically opposed to Falkenstein’s view that *Empfindung* must be defined as the physiological effect of the object upon the subject, even though he admits that it is also a subjective feeling.\(^{37}\)

Further, Kant describes *Empfindung* as a feeling in this passage, despite speaking of *Empfindungen* as the “Grundstücke” of cognition here. This feeling—which can be thought of only as a feeling involved in cognition—is not the same as either the aesthetic feeling of pleasure and displeasure or the moral feeling of respect.\(^{38}\) Therefore, since *Empfindung* as a

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37 I discuss the difference between *Empfindung* and appearance further in §3.

38 Historically speaking, *Empfindung* has been a multifaceted term, variously denoting aesthetic and moral feelings; sensory affections by outer objects; and modifications of the perceiving faculty of the subject—see Neumann, “*Empfindung*,” passim. Meier, Sulzer, Winckelmann, and Mendelssohn viewed *Empfindung* as an aesthetic concept; Eberhard and Malebranche thought of it as a modification; and empiricists like Locke understood it as sensory affection in physiological terms.

Kant distinguishes practical (conceived broadly to include the feeling of pleasure and displeasure) and theoretical *Empfindung* in both his published and unpublished works. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant characterizes the moral feeling of respect as “*Empfindung*”; but says that the cause that determines this feeling lies in pure practical reason, and, thus, must be distinguished from the process of cognition (AA V: 75). In the “First Introduction” to the *Critique of Judgment*, he says that *Empfindung* is the basis for determining something as aesthetic, but adds that this *Empfindung* is the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, and can never become the concept of an object (AA XX: 224; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar [Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1987], 413; also AA XVI: R2365, R2366 – these reflections are difficult to date). In the third *Critique*, Kant also appears to distinguish practical from theoretical *Empfindung*. The latter he calls an objective *Empfindung*, and says that the emergence of this type of *Empfindung* requires the subject to be affected by an outer object. To distinguish this objective *Empfindung* from subjective *Empfindung*, which relates to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure and can be seen as practical *Empfindung*, Kant decides to reserve the term “*Empfindung*” to mean objective *Empfindung*, and denotes the subjective *Empfindung* as a feeling (AA V: 206). The fact that Kant reserves the term “*Empfindung*” to mean objective *Empfindung* in this passage may give the impression that Kant wants to define *Empfindung* referentially. But this is not the case. As I have pointed out in this essay, the affection of the subject by the object is necessary for an *Empfindung* to emerge. The real question, however, is metaphysical: Does this interaction between subject and object define an *Empfindung*? Or does Kant define it in merely subjective terms, as the subject’s version of its interaction with the object? The passage under discussion does not help answer this question. Finally, in several unpublished reflections, Kant seems to characterize feeling (*Gefühl*) and desire (*Begierde*) as inner *Empfindung*; see AA XV: R230, where he seems to speak of inner *Empfindungen* as *Gefühl* (feeling) and *Begierde* (desire); also see *Metaphysik K2*, AA XXVIII: 737; AA XV: R227, 1790s; AA XXII: 530; AA XVI: R1864, 1780s.

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merely subjective modification of the subject is neither an aesthetic nor a moral feeling, it can be thought of as a neutral feeling.

Hence, as I have shown in §§2.2.1–3, enough textual evidence exists to support the claim that Kant does mean to define Empfindung non-referentially.

2.2.4 A Historical Argument for the Non-referentiality of Empfindung

In the preceding discussion, I provided evidence to support the view that Kant can be read as defining Empfindung in non-referential terms. I showed that, while an Empfindung necessarily involves the affection of the subject by the object, Kant can be said to conceive of it as a neutral feeling that is concerned neither with pleasure or pain nor with any other kind of emotion. It accompanies all modifications (alterations/movements) in the representational state of the subject, excluding any reference to the object.

Further support for this position comes from the fact that Tetens, whose book is supposed to have been before Kant’s eyes while he was writing the Critique of Pure Reason, takes a remarkably similar view of Empfindung. Both Tetens and Kant define Empfindung non-referentially and as a neutral feeling, and both hold that the subject must necessarily be affected by the object for an Empfindung to arise. According to Tetens,

In Empfindung comes [entsteht] an alteration [Veränderung] of our state, a new modification [Modification] in the soul. I direct my eyes to the sun. Something happens here, and I feel something, empfinde it. The impression [

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It is apparent from this passage that Kant and Tetens define Empfindung in a remarkably similar fashion. Tetens holds that the impression (Eindruck) of the sun comes from outside the subject and forms the basis for an Empfindung. As we have seen earlier in this section, Kant may not be entirely certain about the relationship between impression (Eindruck) and Empfindung. Nevertheless, he holds the view that the subject can have an Empfindung only if it has been affected by an object. Hence, for both Kant and Tetens, the affection of the subject by the object is a necessary condition for an Empfindung to arise.

Further, Tetens and Kant both characterize Empfindung as non-referential rather than referential. Kant thinks of Empfindung as the neutral feeling attendant upon the modification (Modifikation/Veränderung/Bewegung) of the state of the subject. Tetens employs the same words—Modification and Veränderung—to make exactly the same point. He says that an Empfindung is a neutral (gleichgültig) feeling, and a felt alteration. Since Tetens views Empfindung as a felt alteration, it is clear that he defines it as non-referential, even though he thinks that the object must affect the subject for an Empfindung to arise.

to originate. Here again, Tetens’ position is exactly like Kant’s.\footnote{It is unclear how much Kant was influenced by Tetens. In a reflection, Kant says that “Tetens investigates the concepts of pure reason merely subjectively (human nature), I objectively. The former analysis is empirical, the latter transcendental” (AA XVIII: R4901, 1780s; also see R4900, 1780s). For my present purposes, this reflection is not significant. I am merely pointing to some marked similarities between the views of Kant and Tetens regarding the definition of \emph{Empfindung} without claiming that Tetens necessarily had a direct influence on Kant.}

Hence, given that Tetens most likely influenced Kant, the similarities between their views on the nature of \emph{Empfindung} bolsters my argument here that Kant intended to define \emph{Empfindung} non-referentially.\footnote{I am exploring the relationship between Kant, Malebranche, Reid and Tetens in more detail elsewhere.}

To summarize, I have shown in §2 that Falkenstein’s denial that the definition of \emph{Empfindung} at A320/B376 could be taken as Kant’s official definition of \emph{Empfindung} is debatable, because there is sufficient evidence to support this non-referential definition in the context of Kant’s writings.

3 \emph{Empfindung} as Non-durational and Obscurely Conscious

In §2.2, I provided direct textual evidence to demonstrate that, while \emph{Empfindungen} cannot arise without the object affecting the subject, we may interpret Kant as defining \emph{Empfindung} non-referentially as the modification of the state of the subject without any reference to the object. In contrast, Falkenstein argues that an \emph{Empfindung} is ultimately to be defined referentially as the physiological effect of the object upon the subject, though he admits that an \emph{Empfindung} is also a subjective feeling for Kant.

In this section, I provide further support for the non-referential definition of \emph{Empfindung} in Kant’s system. Both referentialists and non-referentialists agree that the object must necessarily affect the subject for an \emph{Empfindung} to arise. In fact,
given what Kant says in the anthropology notes, one can agree with Falkenstein that the object must affect the subject physiologically for an Empfindung to be generated.\footnote{AA VII: 153-57, discussed in Falkenstein, Kant’s Intuitionism, 120ff.} But this is not the end of the story. I will argue in §3.1 that, pace Falkenstein, an Empfindung must be characterized as the obscurely conscious and non-durational alteration or modification of the state of the subject. Here, Empfindung is defined in merely subjective terms without reference to the affecting object. Subsequently, in §3.2, I will show that this non-referential definition of Empfindung is consistent with Kant’s overall theory of cognition, thus reaffirming the validity of adopting it as Kant’s official definition of Empfindung.

This interpretation of Empfindung as an obscurely conscious and non-durational modification of the subject—which cannot be more than an argumentative reconstruction since Kant himself does not provide us with an unambiguous definition of Empfindung—offers further support for my contention that Kant wishes to define Empfindung in non-referential terms. The justification for this is as follows. A conscious representation is always synthetic for Kant.\footnote{KrV, A176/B217, quoted and discussed above, see §2.2.2 above.} This synthesis must reflect the nature of the discursive subject, and, in this sense, must be considered merely subjective, or non-referential. In other words, the metaphysical constitution of the synthesis must be independent of all that it synthesizes, viz., the un-synthesized stuff, whatever that may be, even if it were the case that this un-synthesized stuff is necessary for the synthesis to occur. Further, in this section, we will see that an Empfindung is to be characterized as obscurely conscious. Therefore, given that Empfindung is a form of consciousness, and consciousness is always merely subjective, Empfindung must also be characterized in merely subjective or non-referential terms, even though
the subject must be affected by an object for an *Empfindung* to arise.\(^{45}\)

3.1 The Non-referential Definition of Empfindung

In this sub-section, I delineate the definition of *Empfindung* that emerges through a philosophical examination of how Kant relates this term to closely related terms like perception and consciousness. On the basis of this analysis, I suggest that *Empfindung* must be defined as obscurely conscious and without duration, and therefore in non-referential terms.

3.1.1 The Relationship between Empfindung and Temporality

Kant says that all real representations have intensive magnitude, that is, a degree of influence on the senses (*Sinn*).\(^{46}\) *Empfindung* forms the real (*Real*) material of perception.\(^{47}\) Therefore, *Empfindung* must have intensive magnitude, which means that it can have varying degrees of reality (*Realität*). On the other hand, Kant asserts that *Empfindung* does not have extensive magnitude, and so it cannot be spatiotemporally extended. He says: “Now since *Empfindung* in itself is not an objective representation, and in it neither the intuition of space nor that of time is to be found, it [*Empfindung*] has no extensive magnitude....”\(^{48}\) Thus, *Empfindung* is neither spatial nor temporal for Kant.

Further, according to Kant, an *Empfindung* would merely (*bloss*) fill a moment (*Augenblick*) if it could be abstracted from

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\(^{45}\) In contrast to this position, if it could be established that *Empfindung* is not a form of consciousness, then *Empfindung* would have to be defined as the causal interaction between the subject and the object, that is, referentially, in the context of Kant’s system. I am arguing against this position in this essay.

\(^{46}\) *KrV*, A166/B207-8.

\(^{47}\) Ibid.

\(^{48}\) *KrV*, A166/B208; also A167/B209; handwritten note to A143, E LX.
the succession of *Empfindungen* to which it belongs. A moment (*Moment*) for Kant is the initiation of an intensive magnitude, and all existence in this moment must be construed as existence without duration (*Dasein ohne alle Dauer*). Thus, if an individual *Empfindung* can only fill a moment, and if this moment is without duration (= non-durational), then the notion of *Empfindung* must be considered non-durational.

Therefore, since *Empfindung* possesses no extensive magnitude, Kant can be understood as viewing it as atemporal. Moreover, even though *Empfindung* does have intensive magnitude, it must still be considered non-durational.

One could raise an objection here that Kant also implies in his writings that *Empfindung* is temporal. He says that all our representations, irrespective of whether they arise out of inner or outer causes, are modifications of the mind, and therefore “subsumed under the formal condition of inner sense, namely time.” If all representations, including *Empfindungen*, belong to inner sense, and time is the form of inner sense, then *Empfindung* ought to be considered temporal. Thus, it appears to be the case that Kant is contradicting himself, since he seems to be characterizing *Empfindung* as both temporal and atemporal at the same time. However, this need not be the case. Given that Kant characterizes time as transcendentally ideal, i.e., as constitutive of the receptivity of the discursive subject rather than as a thing in itself existing independently of the

49 “The apprehension, merely [bloss] by means of *Empfindung*, only fills a moment [*Augenblick*], (if I abstract from the succession of several *Empfindungen*)” (*KrV*, A167/B209).

50 “The magnitude [*Grösse*] of a whole is extensive, the magnitude of a ground is intensive, or degree [*Grad*]. The beginning of a degree (minimum) is moment [*Moment*]” (AA XVII: R4411, early 1770s).

51 “The moment [*Augenblick*] is existence [*Dasein*] without all duration [*Dauer*]; the eternity is existence with all duration” (AA XVII: R4121, 1769). Also: “Time has no duration. Its being (now, later, at the same time, before, after) is the moment [*Augenblick*]” (AA XXII: 5. Siebentes Convolut [Aus dem Nachlaß: April 1800–Februar 1803]).

subject, Empfindung can be thought of in two different ways vis-à-vis the notion of time. On the one hand, all representations of the subject, including Empfindungen, are temporal, because all representations are received in the form of a temporal succession in inner sense. In this sense, Empfindung could be considered temporal, because the reception of every Empfindung in inner sense must occur in the form of a succession, which is the form of time. On the other hand, Empfindung could be considered atemporal in the sense of being non-durational. According to Kant, each Empfindung constitutes a moment, and a moment is without duration; and an Empfindung has no extensive magnitude. Therefore, Empfindung must be considered non-durational.\(^{53}\)

It follows that we can consider Empfindung as atemporal, because each individual Empfindung must be temporally unextended or without duration from the perspective of the subject. Yet it can also be viewed as temporal in the sense that a manifold of Empfindungen must always be received successively, i.e., in the form of time.\(^{54}\)

\(^{53}\) To make the issue more complex, some relatively direct textual evidence for the claim that representations can exist that are not in inner sense comes from the Dohna-transcribed lecture notes from 1790-91. In this passage, Kant speaks of a manifold of feelings that do not form the multitude of inner sense (“Mannigfaltigkeit der Gefühle giebt noch nicht eine Menge innerer Sinne,” see AA XXVIII: 615-702, 672, lectures on metaphysics, 1792-93). In other words, these feelings are representations and yet do not form the multitude of inner sense. In the same passage, Kant also says that inner sense is the “ability [of the subject] to be conscious of its own existence [Dasein]” (ibid.). From these two propositions, and given that the form of inner sense is time, one can conclude that Kant allows for representations that are atemporal in some way.

A more detailed philosophical analysis of the relationship between Empfindung and temporality would require a rigorous investigation into Kant’s notion of intensive magnitude, and his general theory of time. Such a detailed interpretation is not necessary here. It is enough to argue at present, as I have done, that Kant essentially views Empfindung as non-durational, and to show that this need not necessarily conflict with Kant’s statement that all our representations may be “subsumed under the formal condition of inner sense, namely time” (KrV, A98-99). For more on the relationship between non-durational Empfindung and temporal perceptions, see §3.2 of this essay.

\(^{54}\) Falkenstein defends the diametrically opposed position, that Empfindungen are both spatial and temporal. He argues that sensations, as effects on the representative capacity arrayed in space as well as time, are physiological states of the body of the perceiver (Falkenstein, Kant’s Intuitionism, 121). Since sensations are states of the body, Falkenstein concludes that
3.1.2 Empfindung and Wahrnehmung

Kant repeatedly characterizes *Empfindung* as the material for temporal synthesis.\(^{55}\) How does *Empfindung* form the real material of temporal synthesis? In order to answer this question, we must first explicate the distinction between perception (*Wahrnehmung*) and *Empfindung* in Kant’s writings.\(^{56}\)

Perception, for Kant, is empirical consciousness, and combines the formal intuitions of space and time with the “real” of *Empfindung*.\(^{57}\) Since perceptions are spatiotemporal, they

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\(^{56}\) Both *Perzeption* and *Wahrnehmung* are translated as perception. Unless otherwise indicated, I am referring to the latter whenever I use the English term “perception.”

\(^{57}\) “Perception is empirical consciousness, that is, something *[ein solches]* in which *Empfindung* occurs [ist] at the same time. Appearances, as objects of perception, are not pure (merely formal) intuitions, like space and time, (because [space and time] cannot be perceived at all). Therefore, they [appearances as objects of perception] contain apart from the intuitions [of space and time] the materials for any object in general (by means of which something existing is represented in space or time), that is, the real of *Empfindung*, thus merely subjective representation, of which one can only be conscious that the subject has been affected, and which one relates to an object in general” (*KrV*, A166/B207-8). Also see Apaar Kumar, *Kant’s Definition of Sensation*, KSO 2014: 262-311, Posted October 3, 2014, www.kantstudiesonline.net © 2014 Apaar Kumar & Kant Studies Online Ltd.
must possess extensive magnitude. Thus, they differ from *Empfindungen* which, as we have seen, have intensive but not extensive magnitude. As opposed to *Empfindungen* that are always real (Real), Kant describes the object of perception as “wirklich” (actual). Further, Kant asserts that the sensory object can be an *Empfindung* and a perception at the same time (zugleich), because a perception must always be “accompanied” (begleiten) by an *Empfindung*. Hence, the term “perception” always relates to spatiotemporal objects in some not yet cognizable way. An *Empfindung*, however, relates solely to the subject and captures the “material” aspect of the subject’s representations of objects even though it is aspatial and non-durational. It is the degree of reality present in all syntheses of perception of (spatiotemporal) objects of appearance.

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ELXVI (note to KrV, A162) where Kant speaks of perceptions as the determination of time and as that which happens “in” time.

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58. “Perception represents therefore … something actual [etwas wirkliches] in space” (KrV, A374). In §22 of the B Deduction, Kant uses the terms “wirklich” and “Empfindung” while speaking of space and time. He writes: “Sensible intuition is either pure intuition (space and time) or empirical intuition of that which is represented immediately as actual (wirklich) in space and time by means of an *Empfindung*” (KrV, B147). An empirical intuition is “wirklich” and represented through “Empfindung.” Here, empirical intuitions are no different from perceptions, since both of these terms combine the real (Real) material of *Empfindung* with the forms of space and time. Thus, *Empfindungen* form the material and real (Real) aspects of actual [wirklich] objects of perception.

59. “[I]t [cognition] is empirical, if the object [occurs] in the representation of the senses (which therefore contains at the same time *Empfindung* and this in combination with consciousness, that is, perception [welche also zugleich Empfindung und diese mit Bewusstseyn verbunden d. i. Wahrnehmung enthält] …” (AA XI: 315-16, letter to Beck, 1792).

60. “Things in space and time, however, are only given, to the extent these are perceptions (representations accompanied with *Empfindung*), therefore through empirical representation” (KrV, B147).

61. Some passages seem to contradict the strict division between *Empfindung* and perception for which I am arguing here. At A324/B286 of the first *Critique*, Kant seems to equate these two terms. He says that an object of “perception (or an *Empfindung*, as the material of the senses)” becomes “wirklich” (actual) by means of the understanding. We need not, however, read this passage as equating *Empfindung* and perception. Since, as I have pointed out, perceptions are always accompanied by *Empfindungen*, Kant seems to be using shorthand when he carelessly writes “Wahrnehmung (*Empfindung*, als Materie der Sinne) …” at A234/B286 instead of saying “perceptions (accompanied by *Empfindungen*)….” This is a
3.1.3 Empfindung as Obscurely Conscious Material of Perception

I have shown that Kant conceives of Empfindungen as the temporally unextended and non-durational material of temporally extended and durational perceptions. The task now is to investigate how non-durational Empfindungen can accompany temporal perception. To accomplish this we must take into account Kant’s characterization of clear and obscure consciousness.

Kant does not provide a systematic discussion of consciousness in his published works. In my view, his characterization of consciousness in the student-transcribed metaphysics lectures from 1782-83 (henceforth, the “Mrogovius passage”) can be seen as the foundation upon which the largely unarticulated relationship between consciousness, perception and Empfindung rests. In this passage, Kant describes consciousness “as the condition for the possibility of the understanding, but not of the sensibility.”

In other words, consciousness is necessary for plausible interpretation. Since Kant is here speaking of the application of the category of modality to perceptions, and given that perceptions are always accompanied by Empfindungen, it does not really matter whether he uses the word Empfindung or perception, since both these terms are associated with the lower cognitive level of receptivity upon which the higher-level spontaneity of the category is to be applied. Similarly, he says in a reflection “Realitas phaenomenon oder noumenon. The former is that which in appearance corresponds to perception [Empfindung], or to the lack of perception. Noumenon is that which is position [position] in the object [Gegenstand] in itself” (AA XVII: R4817, 1775-76). Here again, since all perceptions include Empfindungen and the task in this passage is to make the distinction between phenomena and noumena, it does not really matter here whether one uses the word perception or Empfindung, since they both represent phenomena. Such carelessness in writing is not unusual for Kant. Consider another passage in which he speaks of cognition as demanding the actuality (Wirklichkeit) of things and, thus, Empfindung (“fordert Wahrnehmung, mitihin Empfindung ....” KrV, A225/B272). It is relatively clear that “therefore” here means “accompanied by,” and is not an equation of the terms “perception” and “Empfindung.”

62 “Das Bewusstsein ist Princip der Möglichkeit vom Verstande, aber nicht von der Sinnlichkeit” (AA XXVIII: 878).
understanding something, but it is not necessary for having sensible representations. At first sight, this passage seems to contradict Kant’s A320/B376 claim that an Empfindung is a type of consciousness. How can Empfindung be understood as a type of consciousness if Kant clearly views it as a representation belonging to the sensibility, and if, going by the Mrongovius passage, consciousness is not supposed to be necessary for the representations of sensibility? However, we can resolve the tension between these two passages if we interpret Kant as saying that clear consciousness is a necessary condition for the understanding but not for the sensibility. I justify this interpretation in what follows.

Perception (Wahrnehmung) is defined as the empirical consciousness of an appearance prior to all concepts (see §3.1.2 above). In addition, Kant characterizes a “Perzep- tion” as a “representation with consciousness,” and classifies Empfindung as a “Perzeption,” from which it follows that Empfindung must be a kind of consciousness. Therefore, Kant relates both Empfindungen and perceptions to the concept of consciousness. Further, Kant also distinguishes between obscure, clear and distinct consciousness. A representation, he says, is clearly conscious if it includes the conscious specification of the difference between itself and other representations. On the other hand, a representation is obscurely conscious if it includes the

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63 Kant seems to be saying the same thing in the Dohna-transcribed metaphysics lectures. Here he refers to a manifold of feelings that do not form the multitude of inner sense (“Mannigfaltigkeit der Gefühle giebt noch nicht eine Menge innerer Sinne”), and describes inner sense as the capacity which the discursive subject has to be conscious of its own temporal existence. Further, he says that perceptions are not cognitions, since the latter require the application of a priori concepts (AA XXVIII: 615-702, 672, 1792-93). In this passage, the “feelings” (Gefühle), whatever they may be, are not conscious in the way that representations of inner sense, which form the basis of cognition, are supposed to be conscious. Since these “feelings” can only belong to sensibility within Kant’s framework, this passage seems similar to the Mrongovius passage. In both passages, the representations of the understanding (that is, cognition) require consciousness, but representations of sensibility do not necessarily require consciousness. The fact that Kant seems to hold the same view in two different sets of lecture notes makes it more plausible that he did indeed endorse this claim in the critical period.

64 KrV, A320/B376.
consciousness of this difference, but without the conscious specification of what the difference is.\textsuperscript{65}

Interpreting the terms perception, cognition and \textit{Empfindung} in light of Kant’s distinction between obscure, clear, and distinct consciousness, it can be argued that perceptions are always clearly conscious, cognitions always distinctly conscious and \textit{Empfindungen} always obscurely conscious.\textsuperscript{66} I begin with the case of perception. Kant thinks that a representation is clear if the consciousness of the difference between itself and other representations is built into it, while a representation that does not contain the consciousness of this difference is obscure. On the basis of this characterization of clear and obscure consciousness, it seems obvious that a perception must be clearly conscious. Either a perception includes the clearly conscious specification of the distinction between itself (act of perception) and its object (object of perception/appearance), or it would be reasonable to suppose that a perception cannot be object-

\textsuperscript{65} "A representation is clear, in which the consciousness suffices for the consciousness of the difference between [the representation itself] and other [representations]. But \textit{zwar} if this [representation] suffices for the difference, but not for the consciousness of the difference, then the representation must be said to be obscure" ("[E]in Vorstellung ist klar, in der das Bewusstsein zum Bewusstsein des Unterschiedes derselben von andern zureicht. Reicht diese zwar zur Unterscheidung, aber nicht zum Bewusstsein des Unterschiedes zu, so müsste die Vorstellung noch dunkel genannt werden") (B414-15n; also see \textit{Jäsche Logik}, AA IX: 62). Earlier in the same passage, Kant makes the following disjunctive argument: Either obscure representations must have a degree of consciousness or we cannot make any distinctions in a complex of obscurely conscious representations. But we can make such representations; e.g., a musician can hit many notes at the same time while improvising. Therefore, obscure representations must have a degree of consciousness.

\textsuperscript{66} Apart from obscure, clear and distinct representations, Kant also mentions “indistinct” (\textit{undeutlich}) representations in the \textit{Jäsche Logik}. He says: “Clear representations, to which alone logical rules can be applied, can now be distinguished in regard to distinctness and indistinctness” (AA IX: 34; Immanuel Kant, \textit{Lectures on Logic}, ed. J. Michael Young [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 545). From this passage, it appears that indistinct representations relate to the higher faculty of reasoning (logic), and perhaps also advanced scientific-experimental thinking. In the present essay, however, I am not concerned with these higher intellectual activities, but with the perception of objects. In the latter context, one does speak of distinct representations, but only in a minimal sense: that is, insofar as the categories are applied to make a perceptual object distinct—to cognize or see it as something. Therefore, in subsequent references, I will speak only of obscure, clear and distinct representations.
directed. In other words, if a representation is not clearly conscious, i.e., it does not include within itself the distinction between the act and the object of perception, it cannot be object-directed. But Kant says that all perceptions are object-directed (see §3.1.2 above). Therefore, by modus tollens, a perception must be clearly conscious.

When Kant says in the Mrongovius passage that the subject must necessarily be conscious of something in order to understand it, he must mean that it is necessary for the subject to have a clear (empirical) consciousness (or perception) of it. For instance, in order to understand the workings of a computer in such a way that I can explain how its parts combine to make a functioning whole, I must necessarily be clearly conscious of the relevant parts. Therefore, understanding something distinctly as something (knowledge or cognition) necessarily requires clear consciousness (= perceptions).67 Kant says unambiguously that perceptions form the material of cognition.68 However, this does not entail that all sensible representations must also be clearly conscious. In fact, as I now argue, Empfindung must be construed as obscurely conscious for two reasons.

First, Kant thinks that there are only three degrees of consciousness: obscure, clear and distinct. Since perceptions and cognitions are clearly and distinctly conscious respectively, and since, according to Kant, obscurely conscious representations exist,69 the remaining sensibility term “Empfindung” must be obscurely conscious.

Second, textual support can be adduced for this argumentatively inferred claim. In a reflection dated 1769, Kant

67 Kant says that cognitions are distinctly conscious: in cognizing, the subject is not merely conscious of the difference between itself and other representations, but it can also provide a rational account of this difference (Jäsche Logik, AA IX: 62, 64).
68 “Because [the fact] that concept is prior to perception means that the concept is merely possible; however, the perception [Wahrnehmung], which provides the stuff [Stoff] for the concept, is the only character of reality [Wirklichkeit]” (KrV, A225/B273; also A374).
69 KrV, 414-15n; Metaphysik LI, AA XXVIII: 228; Jäsche Logik, AA IX: 33-34.
makes a distinction between Empfindung and appearance (Erscheinung). He says: "The representation of the senses as something belonging to the state of the subject is Empfindung; however, as something, which relates to an object [Gegenstand], appearance [Erscheinung]." As discussed earlier in §2, Kant is clearly defining an Empfindung in non-referential terms in this passage. Kant says further that there are "Empfindungen without noticeable [merkliche] appearances and appearances without noticeable Empfindungen," but that "both exist together at the same time." Interpreting "merklich" as clearly conscious, we may read Kant as saying here that the subject can represent the object of appearance without clear consciousness of the Empfindungen constituting it. Since Empfindungen and appearances are merely two aspects of the same representation of the object, and given that appearances are objects of perception and thus clearly conscious, Empfindung must be taken as obscurely conscious.

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70 AA XV: R620, 1769.
71 Ibid. "Die Vorstellung des Sinnes als etwas zu dem Zustande des Subjekts gehoriges heißt Empfindung; als etwas aber, was sich auf einen Gegenstand bezieht, Erscheinung. Es giebt Empfindungen ohne merkliche Erscheinung und Erscheinungen ohne Merkliche Empfindung; doch sind beyde jeder zeit beysammen."

Another passage bolsters the claim that Empfindungen are obscurely conscious. In the Pädagogik, Kant says "Children cannot see well [recht] in the first months, approximately in the first 3 months. They have indeed Empfindung of light, but [they] cannot differentiate the objects from one another" (AA IX: 460). This passage shows Kant’s implicit acceptance of the fact that Empfindungen can be obscurely conscious, and in addition illustrates the nature of these representations in Kant’s system. If children cannot distinguish objects, they cannot be said to have clearly conscious representations, since a clearly conscious representation requires the consciousness of the difference between the act and object of perception. If children cannot have clear consciousness, they cannot be said to have distinct consciousness either, since the latter is a higher level representation than the former. However, if they can nevertheless have Empfindung of light, then this representation can only be seen as obscurely conscious. The reason for this is that representations can only be clear, obscure or distinct. An Empfindung of light can be neither clearly nor distinctly conscious for a child, and therefore must be obscurely conscious.

72 Some passages in Kant’s writings seem to suggest that Empfindungen are not always obscurely conscious. Closer analysis reveals, however, that these passages do not actually counter the claim that Empfindungen are always obscurely conscious. In one such passage, Kant says: “Consciousness is the intuition of one’s self. It would not be conscious if it were an Empfindung” (AA XVIII: R5049, early 1780s). Given Kant’s dissociation of the term
Hence, perceptions are always clearly conscious; cognitions require perceptions and are always distinctly conscious; and *Empfindungen* must always be obscurely conscious.\(^{73}\) This proposition helps reconcile the A320/B376 passage with the *Mrongovius* passage. In the latter, when Kant says that the understanding necessarily requires consciousness but the sensibility does not, he must mean that: (a) the understanding requires *clear* consciousness, but (b) the representations of sensibility need not be clearly conscious, since some sensible representations can be obscurely conscious. Moreover, as I have shown, an examination of Kant’s writings also reveals that *Empfindungen* must be obscurely conscious. Hence, an *Empfindung* can be a type of consciousness, as the A320/B376 passage suggests, and, more specifically, it is an obscure consciousness. This claim is consistent with the *Mrongovius* claim that sensible representations need not be clearly conscious.\(^{74}\)

*Empfindung* and consciousness here, it could be argued that *Empfindung* cannot be characterized as an obscure consciousness, since it is not a type of consciousness at all. But such an interpretation would be erroneous. Since Kant is talking about intuiting the self in this passage, and since an intuition must always be clearly conscious, one can interpret this passage as saying that *Empfindungen* are not clearly conscious, from which it does not follow that *Empfindungen* cannot be obscurely conscious. Elsewhere, he says “The subjectively greater [größere] clarity (by means of *Empfindung*: because [an *Empfindung*] is not objective) is liveliness, the objectively greater, the understanding [verständlichkeit]” (AA XVI: R2365, difficult to date). Here it may seem that Kant characterizes *Empfindungen* as clearly conscious representations, but this is not the case. To say that the clarity of consciousness increases with the increase in *Empfindung* does not contradict the idea that *Empfindungen* are obscurely conscious, since it could be the case that the greater clarity of consciousness is achieved by the coming together of a number of obscurely conscious representations. Finally, in the anthropology lectures, Kant says “A representation through the senses, of which one is conscious as such, specifically [besonders], means sensation (*Sensation*), if the *Empfindung* at the same time directs [*erregt auf*] attention to the state of the subject” (AA VII: 153, §15). This statement also does not preclude the claim that an *Empfindung* is obscurely conscious, since one can after all attend to the state of the subject in an obscure way.

73 Kant also speaks of clear and obscure intuitions—see Stefanie Grüne, *Blinde Anschauung: Die Rolle von Begriffen in Kants Theorie sinnlicher Synthesis* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 2009), 76ff.

74 Van Cleve wonders whether there can be sensations without consciousness. Drawing on the A320/B376 passage in the first *Critique*, he distinguishes between “having sensations”
In sum, in this section, §3.1, I have argued that *Empfindung* can legitimately be defined non-referentially as the non-durational and obscurely conscious modification of the state of the subject.

### 3.2 Empfindung as Non-referential and Kant’s Theory of Cognition

In §2, I provided textual evidence for the claim that Kant characterizes *Empfindung* as the neutral feeling attendant upon the modification of the subject without any reference to the object. In §3.1, I clarified this non-referential definition of *Empfindung* further by arguing that *Empfindung* is non-durational and obscurely conscious. I will now show that this account of *Empfindung* coheres with Kant’s general theory of cognition. In my view, the fact that such coherence exists can be taken as another reason for accepting my interpretation here that Kant meant to define *Empfindung* non-referentially. The reason is that, since *Empfindung* forms one part of a larger theory of cognition, it would be impossible for this theory of cognition to be self-consistent if the definition of *Empfindung* were to be at odds with it.

According to Kant, an object represented by the senses can be both an *Empfindung* and a perception at the same time. Since a perception is clearly conscious and an *Empfindung* is and “having sensations and being conscious of them” (James Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999], 74-75). This distinction goes counter to my claim in this essay that *Empfindungen* are always obscurely conscious. I do not, however, think that there is any textual justification for making such a distinction. Van Cleve himself does not provide any justification for the view that sensations can exist without consciousness, except to suggest in a footnote that only sensations could be “examples of representations without consciousness” (ibid., 276n5). Furthermore, in the same footnote, he also states that he remains unsure about whether sensations are intrinsically conscious or not; and that if we take sensations to be intrinsically conscious, then we would have to make a distinction between “having representations” and “having sensations” instead of the distinction, which Van Cleve had earlier suggested, between “having sensations” and “having sensations and being conscious of them.”

75 AA XI: 315-16; letter to Beck, 1792, quoted earlier in fn 59.
obscurely conscious, a clear consciousness must always be accompanied by an obscure consciousness. If this is the case, then a representation must remain obscurely conscious unless it is brought to clear perceptual consciousness. Kant says as much in the reflections on anthropology: “Obscure [Dunkle] representations are pregnant with clear [representations]. To bring clarity [Klarheit] into [obscure representations]. The midwife of thoughts. All acts of understanding and reason can occur in obscurity.” Further, this move from obscure to clear consciousness must be an objectification because, unlike Empfindungen that relate solely to the subject, perceptions necessarily relate to an object. It must also be a move from a non-durational Empfindung to a perceptual representation that is temporally extended.

The transition from Empfindung to perception can be illustrated as follows. While it may be the case that a subject can be clearly conscious of something only as a temporal perception, one which has both intensive and extensive magnitude, this does not entail that the subject could not have been obscurely conscious of the same representation in a non-durational way as an Empfindung. Thus, an Empfindung may exist, but the subject cannot be clearly conscious of it until it can be perceived in durational time.

For instance, a minor figure in a Pieter Brueghel painting that has a plethora of shapes and colors can exist without my being conscious of it, even if I am clearly conscious of the painting as a whole. When I am clearly conscious of the whole painting, the minor figure cannot be considered a nothing for me, because it contributes to my experience of the whole painting. And yet it is not something for me either. It can become something for me only if I can perceive it clearly as an

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76 AA XV: R177, difficult to date, but around 1769. In this passage, Kant speaks of obscure and clear representations as they relate to the understanding. However, there is no reason to suppose that the relationship between obscure and clear representations, which Kant explicates here, would not also hold for cases of perceptual consciousness.
individual object. In other words, I am obscurely conscious of the minor figure in my clear consciousness of the painting as a whole, and I can become clearly conscious of this minor figure only if I make the effort to perceive it clearly.

Another example comes from Kant’s own writings. Kant says that “habit hinders consciousness.” Further, he characterizes “negative habit” as relating to things that one does not feel any more. His point is that we cease to be aware of something once we are habituated to it. In other words, habituation can make something obscurely conscious for us. For instance, if I am habituated to a dull ache in some part of my body, then I am only obscurely conscious of it most of the time, since I am not clearly conscious of how it is different from all my other representations. This does not however mean that this ache does not exist. Rather, it means that I am conscious of this ache in an obscure fashion at time t; i.e., while my consciousness of the ache is different from my other representations, I cannot distinguish the ache from these other representations at t. For instance, if I am focused on playing tennis at time t, then I will not be clearly aware of this ache to which I am habituated.

Therefore, given Kant’s view that space and time are transcendentally ideal, it is possible for a subject to remain forever obscurely conscious of a representation, and so never be able to perceive it clearly in time or in space. In order to perceive it, the subject would have to bring the non-durational,

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77 AA XV: R177, 1764-68 or 1771.
78 “Negative habit: what one does not feel any more” (AA XV: R261, reflections on anthropology, 1776-78).
79 In essence, when I am clearly conscious of something, I represent it as something that is temporally extended. This kind of representation has duration in the sense that I can be clearly conscious of the elapse of time. For instance, I can be clearly conscious of lingering before a painting. On the other hand, since an Empfindung is obscurely conscious for me, I can be aware of it as durational only if I can have a perception of it; but, as an Empfindung, it cannot be durational for me. Another way of saying this is that the moment of Empfindung is fleeting, and forever beyond the grasp of the subject. Hence, Empfindungen must always be non-durational for the subject. Whether or not such a view is phenomenologically sound requires further thought, but this question is beyond the scope of the present essay.
obscurely conscious representation into the clarifying domain of clearly conscious and full-fledged temporal representation.

Conceiving of perception and Empfindung in this fashion is not only consistent with the way Kant conceptualizes the process of cognition, but also helps make phenomenological sense of Kant’s theory of cognition. For Kant, a perception must always be accompanied by an Empfindung, and involves the application (anwenden) of an Empfindung to an object in general, thereby engendering an “indeterminate” object.\textsuperscript{80} Indeterminacy here means that the subject can perceive a spatiotemporal object, but cannot represent it as something, or cognize it.\textsuperscript{81} Further, empirical cognition is the determination of an object by the understanding. The understanding cannot relate directly to obscurely conscious Empfindungen, but synthesizes the clearly conscious indeterminate objects of perception.\textsuperscript{82} Therefore, perception must mediate between Empfindung and cognition.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{80} KrV, B147.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., KrV, A374; A145/B184; object of the synthesis of apprehension, B162.
\textsuperscript{82} See §3.1.3; KrV, A225/B272.
\textsuperscript{83} A good summary of Kant’s theory of cognition appears in the late-career draft essay “What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?” Here Kant says: “The empirical, however, that is, that by means of which an object is represented as given in accordance with its existence [Dasein], is called Empfindung (sensatio, impressio), which constitutes the material of experience, and, combined with consciousness [on the basis of the evidence provided in this essay, reading “consciousness” as clear consciousness here], is called perception [Wahrnehmung], to which still the form, that is, the synthetic unity of apperception of the same in the understanding, which [refers back to “form”] is thought a priori, must be added [hinzukommen], in order to generate [hervorbringen] experience as empirical cognition…” (AA XX: 276, 1790). The contours of this theory—that the categories are applied to perceptions that are accompanied by Empfindungen—seem stable from the mid-1760s onwards until the end of Kant’s career. He says, sometime between 1766 and 1768, that the categories can be applied to appearances (Erscheinung) that include Empfindungen (AA XVIII: R5652). In the B deduction, 1787, Kant says more generally that all perceptions stand under the categories (KrV, B164-65). In another somewhat convoluted reflection, he says that the categories are applied to perceptions (Wahrnehmung): “For the putting together of the manifold of intuition according to a rule, which is contained in the concept, belongs to the synthesis of the manifold of intuition in accordance with [zu einem] the concept (category), and in this way [dann] the [synthesis] of perceptions [makes] experience possible [zur Möglichkeit einer Erfahrung]” (AA XVIII: R6358, 1797).
This theory also coheres in a phenomenological sense. Suppose that I am seeing an object from a distance at time \( t \), and, prima facie, I believe that it is a table. This shows that a set of \( \text{Empfindungen} \) (color, material, shape, etc.) accompany my clearly conscious representation, or perception, of that indeterminate object, possibly-table, at \( t \). But I cannot be clearly conscious of the \( \text{Empfindungen} \) making up this perception, since an \( \text{Empfindung} \) is always obscurely conscious. Thus, I can only perceive the indeterminate object, possibly-table, at \( t \), while the \( \text{Empfindungen} \) that constitute this perception remain obscurely conscious for me. If, at \( t_1 \), I were to direct myself to a particular feature of the indeterminate object, possibly-table, say the color, I would cease to have an \( \text{Empfindung} \) of the color. Instead, I would now perceive it, i.e., have clear consciousness of it. Finally, when I am able to see the table as a table, i.e., when I am able to cognize the table as an object, I accomplish this by attending to its indeterminate perception with the help of the faculty of the understanding instead of attending to the set of \( \text{Empfindungen} \) that accompany the indeterminate perception of the object, possibly-table.

Hence, perception is the clear consciousness of indeterminate spatiotemporal appearances, and \( \text{Empfindung} \) is the non-durational and obscurely conscious modification of the state of the subject. Since this non-referential definition of \( \text{Empfindung} \) is consistent with Kant’s theory of cognition, it gives us another reason to accept the claim that Kant meant to define \( \text{Empfindung} \) non-referentially.\(^{84}\)

\(^{84}\) For Falkenstein, sensation is the physical affection of the body of the subject by the object. This affection is a consequence of the alteration of the forces of attraction and repulsion in a body resulting from the attraction or impact of another body (Falkenstein, Kant’s Intuitionism, 133). On the other hand, Falkenstein views the sensible qualities not as the effects on the subject, but as the “intentional objects of such effects.” That is, a sensible quality is the thought or belief of a subject when it is in a particular state (ibid., 128). So, the quality of red is not an effect on me, but my thinking of red as an object of appearance (ibid., 129).

The interpretation which I have offered in this essay is textually more grounded than Falkenstein’s referential-physiological account of \( \text{Empfindung} \) for two reasons.
First, Falkenstein portrays sensation as a non-conscious physical affection. But Kant says at A320/B367 that an Empfindung is a type of consciousness. Falkenstein does not take this objection into account, while my interpretation here—that an Empfindung is an obscurely conscious representation—fits better with Kant’s writings in this regard.

Second, Falkenstein’s distinction between sensation and sensible quality has no parallel in Kant’s works. In fact, Falkenstein is forced to make this distinction, because he is unable to reconcile his physiological view of Empfindung (akin to Cartesian mechanical impressions) and the examples of Empfindungen that Kant provides—for instance, colors, sounds, feelings of temperature as sensations (KrV, B44); taste of wine and color as grounded [gegründet] on sensation (ibid., A29); for a complete list of such passages, see Falkenstein, Kant’s Intuitionism, 124. In contrast, while I admit that the object must affect the subject physiologically for an Empfindung to arise, my argument that Kant defines Empfindung non-referentially, or purely subjectively, dissolves the problem of explaining, as Falkenstein must, how an Empfindung construed as essentially physiological can, at the same time, be a sensible quality. In other words, if, as I have suggested, we define Empfindung as an obscurely conscious representation and not as the physiological effect of the object upon the subject (as Falkenstein does), we do not need to make the artificial distinction that Falkenstein makes between sensation and sensible quality. Instead, as I have argued in this section, we can consistently assert not only that (a) Empfindungen are physiological effects of the object upon the subject; but also that (b) since they are defined non-referentially, they are essentially sensible qualities that are obscurely conscious, and which can only become clearly conscious at the higher levels of representation, i.e., at the levels of perception and cognition. Hence, in my view, the difference between Empfindung and perception in Kant’s writings captures Falkenstein’s sensation-sensible quality distinction, which shows that my interpretation fits much better with Kant’s statements than Falkenstein’s discussion of this topic.

Unlike Falkenstein, Wayne Waxman does not offer an independent theory of Empfindung, and his general account of Empfindung is somewhat vague. He says that synopsis relates to “formless prime matter” (Wayne Waxman, Kant’s Model of the Mind: A New Interpretation of Transcendental Idealism [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], 288-89), and suggests that this synopsis cannot even be characterized as an obscure consciousness (“sensations in synopsis—which is not even so much as an obscure consciousness”—; ibid., 240). On the other hand, he says that sense-perception is obscure consciousness, and that obscure consciousness in its “root” meaning is the “apprehension of the bare synoptic manifold” (ibid., 228). In addition, Waxman thinks that the synthesis of apprehension involves pre-spatiotemporal imaginative synthesis that makes possible obscure consciousness as “genuine empirical awareness,” and that spatiotemporal synthesis is the further synthesis upon this manifold (ibid., 240, 241). Judging by these statements, Waxman seems to have three notions here: (a) “sensation” in synopsis that is not even obscure consciousness; (b) obscure consciousness; (c) consciousness relating to spatiotemporal synthesis by which he seems to mean Kant’s notion of “Wahrnehmung.” I have no quarrel with (c), but I think more needs to be said regarding the textual and/or philosophical basis for distinguishing (a) and (b). Further, even if we grant these distinctions, it is unclear which of these notions Waxman takes to be Kant’s notion of “Empfindung.” If he thinks that Kant’s notion of Empfindung is equivalent to “sensations in synopsis,” which in Waxman’s view are not even obscurely conscious, then his account of Empfindung is at odds with the one I have provided here.
In sum, it follows from the discussion in §2 and §3 that Kant can be understood as defining *Empfindung* non-referentially as the feeling attendant upon the non-durational and obscurely conscious alterations or modifications of the state of the subject, even though *Empfindung* necessarily requires the affection of the physiology of the subject by the object.\(^{85}\)

4 The Matter Issue

Unlike space and time, which are the forms of sensibility, Kant says that *Empfindung* is the matter of sensibility.\(^{86}\) But he does not clarify what sort of matter sensation is (henceforth, I refer to this question as the “matter issue”). Kant speaks of sensation variously as the matter of “sensible cognition;”\(^{87}\) the matter of sensible intuition;\(^{88}\) the matter of perception (*Wahrnehmung*);\(^{89}\) the matter of appearance;\(^{90}\) and as the matter which “corresponds” to appearance (*Erscheinung*).\(^{91}\) Interpreters have attempted to resolve this “matter issue” in different ways. Some argue that sensation is the matter of appearance;\(^{92}\) some interpret it as the matter of

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\(^{85}\) In this essay, I have been concerned with the narrow question of whether *Empfindung* should be defined in referential or non-referential terms. A broader, more consolidated, metaphysical account of Kantian *Empfindung* is beyond the scope of this essay. Such an account would have to include a more detailed philosophical explication of how the two aspects of *Empfindung*—that an *Empfindung* must be defined in non-referential terms, and that it can arise only if the subject interacts with an object—can be said to relate to each other in a coherent manner.

\(^{86}\) *KrV*, A19-21/B34-35.

\(^{87}\) Ibid., A50/B74.

\(^{88}\) Ibid., A267/B323.

\(^{89}\) Ibid., A42/B60, A167/B209.

\(^{90}\) Ibid., A267/B323.

\(^{91}\) Ibid., A20/B34.

intuition;\textsuperscript{93} and some focus on Kant’s claim that \textit{Empfindung} corresponds to the matter of appearance.\textsuperscript{94}

Without trying to resolve the “matter issue” fully here, I indicate briefly how Kant’s diverse statements regarding the nature of the matter of \textit{Empfindung} can be reconciled if we adopt the non-referential definition of \textit{Empfindung} offered here, i.e., \textit{Empfindung} is the non-durational and obscurely conscious modification of the state of the subject (§3 above). I suggest that \textit{Empfindungen} are essentially the matter of consciousness, but can also be described consistently as the matter of intuition and the matter of appearance.

Although Kant does not say this explicitly, \textit{Empfindungen} should be viewed essentially as the matter of consciousness. This claim follows directly from the A320/B376 claim that \textit{Empfindung} is a type of consciousness, and a fortiori from the arguments I have offered in §3.1 to support the contention that \textit{Empfindung} is always obscurely conscious. If \textit{Empfindungen} are obscurely conscious, they cannot be merely physiological, since Kant is unconvinced by materialism or the mind–brain identity.\textsuperscript{95} Therefore, the matter of \textit{Empfindung} must be considered as the matter of consciousness.

Interpreted in this way, \textit{Empfindung} can be described neither as the matter of appearance nor as the matter of intuition. If

\textsuperscript{93} Falkenstein “Kant’s Account of Sensation,” 69; Falkenstein, \textit{Kant’s Intuitionism}, 128-33; Richard Aquila, \textit{Matter in Mind} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 35.


\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Prolegomena}, §60, AA IV: 363; \textit{KrV}, Bxxiv, A383; also AA XXVIII: 225.
Empfindung is the matter of consciousness, and therefore conceived as merely subjective and without reference to the object, then it cannot be viewed as the “matter of appearance.” Here “matter of appearance” means “that in appearances for which responsibility is to be ascribed, not to our cognitive faculties [so it is unrelated to the subject], but to the object which affects them.”96 In addition, if Empfindungen lack extensive magnitude and are merely subjective modifications (§§2-3 above), they cannot be characterized as the matter of intuition either, because intuitions are fully temporal in the sense of having both extensive and intensive magnitude.

It follows that Empfindung should be viewed as the matter of consciousness. It is neither the matter of intuition nor the matter of appearance. Why then does Kant describe an Empfindung as both the matter of intuition as well as the matter of appearance? I think that the theory of Empfindung as articulated in §3 of this essay can help us resolve not only this particular difficulty, but also the “matter issue” in general, at least in a preliminary way.

I have said that, taken by themselves, Empfindungen are the matter of consciousness. However, since Empfindungen always accompany perceptions, and perceptions belong to the higher representational level of spatiotemporal objects as compared to Empfindungen, Empfindungen can also be characterized without inconsistency as the matter of intuition or the matter of perception. Further, bracketing the thing in itself,97 if

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96 Strawson, The Bounds of Sense, 59.
97 Bracketing the question of the thing in itself does not mean that the question regarding the relationship between Empfindung and the thing in itself ceases to be important. Must Kant be thought of as an empirical idealist like Berkeley if we interpret Empfindung as the matter of consciousness? How should we conceive of the relationship between Empfindung defined non-referentially, and the thing in itself? A detailed examination of these questions is beyond the scope of this essay. However, as I will now suggest in outline, if we take the non-referential definition of Empfindung as our starting point, we gain a new perspective on Kant’s motivation for holding the doctrine of transcendental idealism.

I have argued in this essay that Empfindung should be defined non-referentially as the matter of consciousness, even though the subject must be physiologically affected by the object for an Empfindung to arise. If Empfindung is merely subjective, and the matter of consciousness, its object, whatever it may be, must also be subjective and represented in the
Empfindungen can be considered the matter of intuited spatiotemporal appearances, they can equally be spoken of as the matter of appearance. Appearance here must be construed as the subject-constituted spatiotemporal object of perception, and not, as Strawson and Guyer would have it, the material features of the object that affect the subject. Finally, since cognition via the categories requires spatiotemporal objects of appearance, Empfindungen can therefore also be characterized as the matter of sensible cognition.

Hence, if, as I have argued, Empfindung is interpreted as the non-durational and obscurely conscious modification of the state of the subject, and as the matter of consciousness, then we can explain why Kant describes the matter of sensation as the “matter of intuition (or perception),” the “matter of appearance,” and the “matter of sensible cognition” at the same time.\(^98\)

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\(^{98}\) An adequate resolution of the matter issue requires exploring whether my general interpretation of the matter of sensation as the matter of consciousness fits well with Kant’s characterization of matter in his philosophy of science. How does Empfindung as the matter
5 Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that, contra Falkenstein’s view, Empfindung should be defined non-referentially as the neutral feeling accompanying the non-durational and obscurely conscious modification of the state of the subject without any reference to the object, even though the subject must be necessarily affected by the object for an Empfindung to emerge. While I do not have space to explore these issues here, this non-referential definition of Empfindung can not only help us reinterpret the vexed relationship between the discursive subject and the thing in itself; but the relationship between consciousness and Empfindung, as it has emerged in this essay, also promises to shed new light on the contemporary debate regarding whether or not Kant is a nonconceptualist.99

Bibliography


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