

# Kant's Categories Reconsidered

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## Kant's Categories Reconsidered

ABSTRACT: Adopting a Quinean criterion of ontological commitment, I consider the question of the ontological commitment of Kant's theory of our a priori knowledge of objects. Its direct concern is the customary view that the ontology of Kant's theory of knowledge in general, whether a priori or empirical, must be thought in terms of the a priori conditions or representations of space, time, and the categories. Accordingly, this view is accompanied by the customary interpretation of [ontology](#) as consisting of Kantian "appearances" or "empirical objects." I argue against this view and interpretation. My argument turns on the opposition between the necessity and universality of the a priori and the particularity and contingency of the existent. Its main point is that the a priori can remain necessary and universal only if the existence of objects is kept distinct from it.

### I. Introduction

To the extent that category theory, i.e. that there are certain predicates of things that are fundamental to our thought about objects in general, has been based on our thought of objects of possible experience, it has been highly suspect. This is the negative thesis of

this paper. Over the years, philosophical inventiveness has produced various schemes of predicates which challenge the claims of necessity that have been made on behalf of the scheme we employ for such objects—a scheme of substances that are involved in [causal](#) action and interaction. If no particular scheme is necessary, perhaps it is not necessary that we employ any scheme at all.

Kant's theory of categories is no different from any other category theory in this [regard](#). Its dependence on what Kant calls the logical functions of judgment do...

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...discussion. For an actual development of the proposal see Robert Greenberg, "The Content of Kant's Logical Functions of Judgment," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 11 (1994): 375-92.

(7) This interpretation of "transcendental content" seems to dispute that given by Darrell Johnson, viz., that it refers to the concept of an object in general. See his, "Kant's Metaphysical Deduction," *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995) Volume II, Part I, p 273.

(8) The by now widely accepted division of the B-Deduction into two steps was first introduced into the current commentary on the deduction by Dieter Henrich in his, "The Proof Structure of Kant's Transcendental Deduction," *Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1969): 640-59, reprinted in Ralph C. S. Walker, ed. *Kant on Pure Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

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