

Kant on Self-Consciousness

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Empirical Apperception

'That which determines the inner sense is the understanding and its original faculty of combining the manifold of intuition, i.e., of bringing it under an apperception'.^[1] This remark introduces to the reader the idea that the determination of the inner sense by the understanding is done by means of an initial, original, *combining*. We shall see that this combining uses a type of memory which therefore is antecedent to inner sense, for it cannot be derived therefrom. Inner sense will thereby be *determined* as an intuition of a manifold of objects (rather than *being* an intuition of a manifold of objects).

Inner sense alone represents the form of intuitions,^[2] i.e., in time. However, inner sense *alone*, therefore, cannot be *aware of* (understand) this succession – it *is* the succession. The understanding is therefore required for this awareness. Further, to be aware of succession means to be aware of the moments in succession – to be aware merely of one moment, and then the next, with no link, is *not to be aware of succession, but of successors*. Inner sense being succession (time) therefore requires an understanding of this *whole*. To be aware of moments *linked*, rather than moments *per se*, would thus be an understanding of inner sense. In other words, the manifold must be combined for the determination of inner sense. Moreover, this combining must be one of memory and synthesis: to link moments means to remember the moments past, and then synthesize them. Kant calls this original action of the understanding on the inner sense the *transcendental synthesis of the imagination* (or *synthesis speciosa*).^[3]

Imagination is the word Kant uses for this type of memory: '**Imagination** is the faculty for representing an object even **without its presence** in intuition.'^[4] *Synthesis* is the *a priori* act of combining representations (i.e., representations are not combined *a posteriori* – they do not in themselves contain the link to other representations).^[5] *Synthesis speciosa* is transcendental because, first, it is as mentioned *a priori*, second, it is a condition of knowledge.^[6] Kant also calls *synthesis speciosa* the *productive imagination* to distinguish it from the merely *reproductive imagination*. The latter is merely the memory of association, or recollection; it does not *produce* the possibility of knowledge but only *reproduces* what has already been known.^[7] Since the latter does not belong to transcendental philosophy, I will henceforth refer to the former when I use the word 'imagination.'

Now the understanding of the inner sense through *synthesis speciosa* is a '**subjective unity** of consciousness, which is a **determination of inner sense**, through which that manifold of intuition is empirically given for such a combination.'^[8] Kant needs to define this understanding as a subjective unity in order to distinguish it from an objective unity of consciousness. It is *subjective* because the intuition it receives *empirically* (i.e., as the objects of the intuition of inner sense, not the *a priori* forms of intuition which are universal), which it synthesises as its self-determination, are contingent on the empirical circumstances of *each* person. The unity is not one which is universal for every self and thus not objective,^[9] but one which is particular to every self and is thus subjective. *Apperception* means the determination of the self;^[10] the determination that is *synthesis speciosa* is therefore called *empirical apperception*.

It should be noted that although empirical apperception is the everyday self-consciousness that is contingent on empirical circumstance and therefore subjective, its *method*, the transcendental synthesis of imagination, is universal to all. Its *content* (of objects) is subjective. Everyone has the imagination, but everyone applies it differently.

The determination of inner sense is therefore an act of the understanding (*synthesis speciosa*) which is empirical apperception. This is the ordinary self-consciousness that is subjective to each person and thus dealt with in psychology. It is a cognition of the self as appearance (as inner sense),^[11] not a cognition of the self as it would be in-itself – its intuition is appearance, inner sense, *not* an intuition of the transcendental condition of appearance (which would not be sensible).^[12] As Kant states, 'the determination of my existence can only occur in correspondence with the form of inner sense [*synthesis speciosa*], according to the particular way in which the manifold that I combine is given in inner intuition, and I therefore have **no cognition** of myself **as I am**, but only as I **appear** to myself.'^[13] Empirical apperception is a *cognition* of the self as appearance, it is not the appearance itself (as is the undetermined self of inner sense).

This explication of empirical apperception has, however, posed two other questions: what is the *objective* unity of self-consciousness which he draws in distinction to the subjective unity, and can we cognise our self as we are in ourselves? The answer to the first question is, to be concise, *pure apperception*; we will find that its explication answers the latter question, concluding with the necessary exposition of intellectual intuition.

Pure Apperception and the 'I think'

Empirical apperception is the *subjective* unity of consciousness because its object (the self) is not the condition for objects. If something is the condition for objects it is called *objective* – as transcendental and therefore universal to all selves. The self of empirical apperception is not transcendental but empirical – therefore subjective.

Consequently the *objective unity of self-consciousness* must be transcendental, not being determined *a posteriori* but *a priori* (therefore *pure* as opposed to empirical).

What then is the condition for an object, bar the pure forms of sensible intuition already explained? First, these intuitions must be united under a concept.[14] But this is not possible without that manifold of intuition already being *presupposed as generally*[15] united. *Per se*, the intuitions are not united. This unity cannot be synthesised by *synthesis speciosa* because, as quoted, imagination is 'the faculty for representing an object even **without its presence**'. [16] That is to say, *synthesis speciosa* presupposes objects.[17] Therefore even empirical apperception is conditioned upon a higher synthesis, one which must be pure (it cannot be determined empirically, which empirical apperception is): '[a] pure synthesis of the understanding ... grounds *a priori* the empirical synthesis.' [18] This pure synthesis Kant calls *synthesis intellectualis*. [19]

'The **transcendental unity** of apperception is that unity through which all of the manifold given in an intuition is united in a concept of the object. It is called **objective** on that account, and must be distinguished from the **subjective unity** of consciousness'. [20] The transcendental unity of apperception, or *pure apperception*, is thus that *a priori* unity which grounds the possibility of objects. Thus it makes empirical apperception possible as the subsequent subjective synthesis of objects. But we shall find that it also conditions it in a more fundamental way.

Pure apperception is a *formal* condition of objectivity. The *sensible* condition of objectivity forms our intuition of an object (spatio-/temporal), the formal condition unites these intuitions for the possibility of their being subsumed under a concept (category). This unity must be prior to a synthesis of the imagination [21] in us because it must be presupposed that all of the intuitions, which could be synthesised as such, *all belong to me*. Without this latter possible thought, which posits the *identity* of the self throughout all intuitions, a subsequent synthesis would merely yield representations which, though combined with each other, would not belong to *me*. This apperception is thus pure because I cannot derive *a posteriori* an identical self through the cognition of objects themselves, if I did 'I would have as multicoloured, diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious.' [22]

Empirical apperception must thus presuppose pure apperception for, first, the possibility of objects, secondly, for the identity of the self throughout representations generally. Consequently, *the possibility for objects is also the possibility for self-consciousness*. The self-consciousness, however, is not *equal to* the (necessarily presupposed) identical self. That identity must necessarily be maintained for any consciousness of objects whatever (it is objective). The *consciousness of* that identity is only an *ability*, not a *necessary* consciousness which accompanies every object. [23] The

ability to be conscious of the identity of the self in every representation is expressed by '*I think*' (this or that object). The *I think* is therefore an *analytic proposition* which *can* accompany any represented object, analytic because, as mentioned, an object *contains* the necessary identity of the self for its possibility.

This possible analysis is self-consciousness as consciousness of the identity of the self throughout my representations. This *I think* therefore is also called the *analytic unity of consciousness* as distinct from that identity itself (pure apperception) which is called the *synthetic unity of consciousness*. The former is self-consciousness, the latter is the self. The analysis *I think* presupposes the synthesis pure apperception. The united subjective representations of empirical apperception *can* be accompanied by the *I think* which would determine the identical self that is pure apperception. *I think* is not equal to empirical apperception: the self-consciousness of the latter is necessarily subjective, the self-consciousness of the former is objectively possible.

Pure apperception is an *intellectual* synthesis of sensible intuitions (*synthesis intellectualis*). This means that its synthesis can only be *thought*, it cannot be intuited. This is because pure apperception is originally^[24] the identity amongst sensible intuitions and therefore cannot be sensibly intuited itself. If it were, then a contradictory infinite regress would occur whereby one would have to presuppose the *thought* of the identity again for this *intuited* identity to be possible as an object for me, *ad infinitum*. In other words, my intuitions must presuppose my self for the possibility of their cognition, therefore I can never intuit the self which is the condition for any intuitions being cognised. Hence the identity that is pure apperception is strictly *formal*, i.e., it cannot be cognised, only thought, for it cannot be sensibly intuited. This has essential implications for our self-consciousness, as we shall see.

I can have a cognition of the self, but this self is the self as appearance. Empirical apperception is the cognition of the self as appearance. But the *I think* is the thought of another self (pure apperception) which is the condition of the empirical self. Therefore we can *think* that the self is *necessarily* not an appearance, but the condition thereof. But now we cannot have a further *cognition* of this pure apperception because the intuition, which would be necessary, could not be sensible (this would be a contradiction as explained above – the self would be both the condition and the conditioned). Our human intuition can only be sensible and therefore our self-cognition can only be of ourselves as appearance. But we can *think* that we necessarily have an existence behind this as its condition (so we are not mere appearance), though we cannot *know* (cognise) what this existence is. Thus, *I think that I am, but I know not what. I have cognition of my self as I appear, but not as I am; and I am certain that I am because I can cognise.* Or as Kant puts it:

In the transcendental synthesis of the manifold of representations in general [*synthesis intellectualis*], on the contrary, hence in the synthetic original unity of apperception [pure apperception], I am conscious of myself [through the *I think*] not as I appear to myself [as in empirical apperception], nor **as** I am in myself, but only **that** I am.

This **representation** is a **thinking**, not an intuiting. Now since for **cognition** of ourselves, in addition to the action of thinking that brings the manifold of every possible intuition to the unity of apperception, a determinate sort of intuition, through which this manifold is given, is also required, my own existence is not indeed appearance (let alone mere illusion), but the determination of my existence can only occur in correspondence with the form of inner sense, according to the particular way in which the manifold that I combine is given in inner intuition, and I therefore have **no cognition** of myself **as I am**, but only as I **appear** to myself. The consciousness of oneself is therefore far from being a cognition of oneself'. (B157-58, pp. 259-60.)

Intellectual Intuition

We cannot cognise pure apperception because, as explained, the necessary sensible intuition corresponding to my thought of this self would have to belong to me, and therefore I have posited another self (me) which is not intuited, but thought. However, if, in theory, the thought (*intellectuality*) of my self (pure apperception) could also *immediately represent* (i.e., *intuit*) myself, then I would not require a separate mediating sensible intuition for the cognition of my thought. Such an *intellectual intuition* would, therefore, be the only way in which I could *cognise* my pure apperception. '[The self can] cognize itself merely as it appears to itself with regard to an intuition (which is not intellectual and capable of being given through the understanding itself), not as it would cognize itself if its **intuition** were intellectual.'^[25]

Such a faculty, however, is unavailable to humans because we intuit things in space and time, and these forms are transcendently ideal not real – i.e., things for us are *mediated* by space and time. Things cannot be given *immediately*, as would things in intellectual intuition, because space and time are given *a priori* – not therefore given in the immediate intuition of things themselves (*a posteriori*).^[26] In other words, because we humans have experience in space and time, intellectual intuition is impossible for us, according to transcendental idealism.

Kant, however, does not say that intellectual intuition is a contradiction, for there may be beings who do not have experience in space and time, and for whom intellectual intuition could therefore be valid. '[An] understanding that itself intuited ... as, say, a divine understanding ... would not represent given objects, but through whose representation the objects would themselves at the same time be given, or produced'^[27] Intellectual intuition is not a contradiction because transcendental idealism is merely a human condition.

Intellectual intuition is thus a faculty of direct knowledge, it knows the thing-in-itself. This is because the thing *is* the intuition, there is no dualism as in transcendental idealism. If I were to think something, that thought would *be* the something; *it would not be a thought the object of which was separate*. If I were to intellectually intuit my self, that intuition/thought would be my self. It is therefore absurd to posit the possibility of intellectually intuiting *pure apperception* (the human self identity) because pure apperception is the identity amongst sensible intuitions, the existence of the latter contradicts the intellectual intuition of the former (due to the mutual exclusivity of sensible and intellectual intuition). Intellectual intuition is impossible for the human, the self of which cannot be known.

F. W. J. Schelling believes that the human self, as the condition of knowledge, can be known; and indeed can do so only through intellectual intuition. In the following part we shall examine how he argues this and thus how he can escape the limits of self-cognition posited by Kant.

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NOTES

[1] *Critique of Pure Reason*: B153, p. 257.

[2] Of objects.

[3] Also called the *figurative synthesis* (see B151, p. 256).

[4] B151, p. 256.

[5] See B129-132, pp. 245-6.

[6] Could we not represent a plurality of objects, even without their actual presence, in a judgement, that judgement would not be possible; it would be a mere heterogeneity of objects without combination. Knowledge would thus be impossible. See B140-2, pp. 251-2.

[7] As Kant says, '[it] contributes nothing to the explanation of the possibility of cognition *a priori*, and on that account belongs not in transcendental philosophy but in psychology' (B152, p. 257).

[8] B139, p. 250.

[9] *Objective* specifically meaning the condition of objects, which therefore must be universal to all selves (who all experience objects). This definition will be thoroughly exposed in the following section on pure apperception.

[10] See B132, p.246.

[11] More specifically, the cognition of the self as the appearance of the manifold of objects.

[12] But *intellectual*. Here we have the beginning of the need to posit intellectual intuition as a possible non-sensible (i.e., non-human) faculty. Its full explication will be brought out in what follows.

[13] B157-8, p. 260.

[14] See A76/B102 onwards for how concepts interact with sensible intuition.

[15] I.e., as united prior to the *specific* concept. 'This unity, which precedes all concepts of combination a priori, is not the former category [concept] of unity ... The category therefore already presupposes combination.' (B131, p. 246).

[16] B151, p. 256.

[17] Plus the fact that it would not be able to store an object without it formerly being intuited.

[18] B140, p. 250.

[19] B151, p. 256.

[20] B139, p. 250.

[21] If, in theory, it could pertain to intuitions as well as objects.

[22] B134, pp. 247-8.

[23] 'The **I think** must **be able** to accompany all my representations'. (B131, p. 246).

[24] It also, of course, provides the identity between objects, therefore making judgements possible (see B141-2, pp. 251-2).

[25] B159, p. 260.

[26] See the above explication of the *Transcendental Aesthetic*.

[27] B145, p. 253.