

Pure Apperception

Kant Seminar

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1 Uniformity & Difference

Uniformity Thesis: the nature of self-consciousness is fundamentally uniform in the manner that it provides knowledge of the self¹

The Difference Thesis: Introspection provides a relation to ourselves as subjects that is epistemically/psychologically distinctive from our relation to any other part of nature

2 Two Kinds of Self-Consciousness

- The “critical” Kant rejects the Uniformity Thesis – self-consciousness is fundamentally *bifurcated*

Inner sense (empirical apperception): passive sensory representation of the subject as object²

Pure Apperception: *sui generis*, active, non-sensory (intellectual) representation of the subject as a subject³

- Sensory introspection provides only awareness of states of thinking, feeling, sensation, etc., not the subject of those states⁴
- We have a purely intellectual and non-sensory awareness of ourselves as subjects⁵
- Kant denies that empirical apperception is an epistemically or psychologically distinctive kinds of awareness (i.e. he denies the “Difference Thesis” is true of empirical apperception)
- However, the Difference Thesis is true of pure apperception

3 Questions About Inner Sense & Pure Apperception

- Q₁: What kinds of subjective states are candidates for awareness in inner sense?
 - feelings, pain & pleasure
 - sensations
 - thoughts/judgments?
- Q₂: If inner sense provides only a consciousness of discrete subjective states, then how could it ever provide first-person knowledge?⁶
- Q₃: In what way does inner sense (empirical apperception) depend on pure apperception?⁷

¹ The assumption underlying these criticisms is evidently that we should seek some common explanation of all of the cases in which we can speak immediately and authoritatively about our own mental states. We could call this the *Uniformity Assumption*, for it amounts to the demand that a satisfactory account of our self-knowledge should be fundamentally uniform, explaining all cases of “first-person authority” in the same basic way. (Boyle 2009, 141)

² The consciousness of oneself in accordance with the determinations of our state in inner perception is merely empirical, forever variable; it can give no standing or abiding self [*stehendes oder bleibendes Selbst*] in this stream of inner appearances, and is customarily called **inner sense** or **empirical apperception**. (On the Synthesis of Recognition in a Concept, A107)

³ now I want to become conscious of myself only as thinking; I put to one side how my proper self is given in intuition, and then it could be a mere appearance that I think, but not insofar as I think; in the consciousness of myself in mere thinking I am the being itself, about which, however, nothing yet is thereby given to me for thinking. (B-Paralogisms, General Remark B429)

⁴ the empirical consciousness that accompanies different representations is by itself dispersed and without relation to the identity of the subject. (Transcendental Deduction §16, B133)

⁵ The consciousness of myself in the representation I is no intuition at all, but a merely intellectual representation of the self-activity of a thinking subject. (Refutation of Idealism, B278; see also B132, B157, B423)

⁶ [representations] could still (I consider myself as an animal) carry on their play in an orderly fashion, as connected according to empirical laws of association, and thus they could even have influence on my feeling and desire, without my being conscious of my own existence (assuming that I am even conscious of each individual representation, but not of their relation to the unity of representation of their object, by means of the synthetic unity of their apperception). This might be so without my cognizing the slightest thing thereby, not even what my own condition [*Zustand*] is (To Marcus Herz, May 26, 1789; C 11:52).

⁷ All empirical consciousness, however, has a necessary relation to a transcendental consciousness (preceding all particular experience), namely the consciousness of myself, as original apperception. (Transcendental Deduction A117, note)

4 What Role for Pure Apperception?

- Pure apperception marks a clear difference between human and non-human animals⁸
- Pure apperception is necessary for first-person (self-)knowledge
- Pure apperception plays a central role in the argument of the Transcendental Deduction for the legitimacy of the categories⁹

Source Thesis: The content of self-consciousness is the source of the content of (at least some of) our metaphysical concepts

Priority Thesis: Self-consciousness is prior to, and necessary for, knowledge in metaphysics

4.1 The Leibnizian Strategy

- We have an epistemically unique relation to ourselves¹⁰
- The concepts necessary for metaphysical theorizing are acquired via self-conscious reflection on one's own nature
- Knowledge in metaphysics depends on the content of self-consciousness¹¹

4.2 Kant's Revision of the Leibnizian Strategy

- Kant appeals to reflection on the structure of self-consciousness rather than one's own nature as the source of the content for acquisition of the requisite metaphysical concepts like that of <substance>
- But how can apperception as the basis for deriving the categories?

4.3 Apperception & Substance

1. The capacity for thought requires the capacity for representation of oneself as the subject/thinker of thought¹²
2. The representation of oneself as the thinker of a thought requires representation of oneself as a <substance>_M^{13,14,15}
3. Sense experience cannot provide a subject with representation of a <substance>_M
4. Other than the subject of thought, there are no relevant a priori sources of representational content
 - a. There are no innate ideas/concepts, only innate capacities
 - b. Representation of mental activity alone cannot be sufficient for acquiring the concept <substance>_M
5. All representational content is based either on a priori or a posteriori (experiential) sources
6. ∴ The only possible source of the representational content for the concept <substance>_M is the purely intellectual representation of oneself in the act of thinking—i.e. pure apperception, or intellectual self-consciousness, provides us with the content of the concept <substance>_M

⁸ The fact that the human being can have the "I" in his representations raises him infinitely above all other living beings on earth. Because of this he is a person, and by virtue of the unity of consciousness through all changes that happen to him, one and the same person—i.e., through rank and dignity an entirely different being from things, such as irrational animals, with which one can do as one likes. This holds even when he cannot yet say "I," because he still has it in thoughts, just as all languages must think it when they speak in the first person, even if they do not have a special word to express this concept of "I." For this faculty (namely to think) is understanding. (An 7:127)

⁹ the unity of consciousness is that which alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object, thus their objective validity, and consequently is that which makes them into cognitions and on which even the possibility of the understanding rests. (Transcendental Deduction, B137)

¹⁰ Now, reflection is nothing other than attention to what is within us, and the senses do not give us what we already bring with us...can anyone deny that there is a great deal innate in our mind, since we are innate to ourselves, so to speak, and since we have within ourselves being, unity, substance...and a thousand other objects of our intellectual ideas? (Leibniz 1996, 294, Preface to the *New Essays*)

¹¹ it is the knowledge of necessary and eternal truths which distinguishes us from simple animals and gives us reason and the sciences, lifting us to the knowledge of ourselves and of God...it is thus, as we think of ourselves, that we think of being, of substance, of the simple and the compound, of the immaterial, and of God himself...These reflective acts provide us with the principal objects of our reasonings (Leibniz 1969, 645–6, *Monadology* §§29–30)

¹² The **I think** must be able to accompany all my representations (Transcendental Deduction §17, B131)

¹³ Now in all our thinking the **I** is the subject, in which thoughts inhere only as determinations, and this **I** cannot be used as the determination of another thing. Thus everyone must necessarily regard Himself as a substance, but regard his thinking only as accidents of his existence and determinations of his state. (First Paralogism, A349)

¹⁴ my own self-consciousness testifies that I do not relate all my actions to God as the final subject which is not the predicate of any other thing, and thus the concept of a substance arises when I perceive in myself that I am not the predicate of any further thing. For example, when I think, I am conscious that my **I**, and not some other thing, thinks in me. (*Pölitz Religion*, 28:1042 (1783/84))

¹⁵ [The conception of myself as accident] contradicts my concept of my **I**, in which I think myself as the ultimate subject which is not the predicate of any other thing. (*Pölitz Religion*, 28:1052–3 (1783/84))

4.4 Objections

1. What about the First Paralogism?
2. What does this mean for the role of the “Metaphysical Deduction” in Kant’s argument?

(1) THE FIRST PARALOGISM

- Against the rational psychologist, Kant denies that we can legitimately infer anything about the nature of ourselves as persisting substances
- The disputed issue is one of *persistence*, not substantiality per se^{16,17}
 - Kant is concerned in the Paralogisms with the conditions of *cognition* of the persistence self, not self-representation more generally
 - * Kant only denies that we could ever have *cognition* [*Erkenntnis*] of the self as a *persisting substance*¹⁸
 - Kant’s stance regarding the epistemic status of the content of self-consciousness is sometimes quite strong, such as the claim that “in the consciousness of myself in mere thinking I am the **being itself**” (Paralogisms, General Remarks, B429)

(2) THE METAPHYSICAL DEDUCTION

- The aim of the MD is to show that we can determine which concepts are necessary and a priori by examining the structure of thought (judgment) — is this rendered otiose by Kant’s appeal to apperception?
- **No:** Assuming such a derivation were possible the MD is still necessary to *delimit which concepts* are a priori & necessary¹⁹
 - Kant requires a principled and a priori basis for determining which concepts count as categories.²⁰

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¹⁶ But now what sort of use am I to make of this concept of a substance? That I, as a thinking being, **endure** for myself, that naturally I **neither arise** nor **perish** - this I can by no means infer, and yet it is for that alone that the concept of the substantiality of my thinking subject can be useful to me; without that I could very well dispense with it altogether. (First Paralogism, A349)

¹⁷ This thinking self (the soul), as the ultimate subject of thinking, which cannot itself be represented as the predicate of another thing, may now indeed be called substance: but this concept nonetheless remains completely empty and without any consequences, if persistence (as that which renders the concept of substances fertile within experience) cannot be proven of it. (*Prolegomena* §47, 4:334)

¹⁸ If [in apperception] I represent myself as **subject** of a thought or even as **ground** of thinking, then these ways of representing do not signify the categories of substance or cause, for these categories are those functions of thinking (of judging) applied to our sensible intuition, which would obviously be demanded if I wanted to **cognize** myself. (Paralogism, General Remark, B429)

¹⁹ Transcendental philosophy has the advantage but also the obligation to seek its concepts in accordance with a principle, since they spring pure and unmixed from the understanding, as absolute unity, and must therefore be connected among themselves in accordance with a concept or idea. Such a connection, however, provides a rule by means of which the place of each pure concept of the understanding and the completeness of all of them together can be determined *a priori*, which would otherwise depend upon whim or chance. (On the Clue, Introduction, A67/B92)

²⁰ [We must be sure that the list of categories] has not arisen rhapsodically from a haphazard search for pure concepts... (On the Clue §10, A81/B106-7)

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