

Fichte on Intellectual Intuition & Self-Consciousness

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In these notes I discuss some of the particulars of Fichte's conception of self-positing, along with his view of intellectual intuition, and the comparison of these ideas with Kant's conception of the self-consciousness of "pure apperception."

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1 Explaining Self-Consciousness

Fichte's doctrine of intellectual intuition is complex and, in many ways, obscure. But one issue it clearly addresses is the issue of how and in what way we are conscious of ourselves. Fichte recognizes that there is a way in which we can all be conscious of ourselves as *objects*. We can look at our bodies in a mirror. We can see our bodily position on a map. But Fichte contends we are also aware of ourselves as *acting subjects*, and this awareness he argues is basic and irreducible to any awareness of an object.

In a conscious act, such as making a judgment, or moving one's body in an intentional manner, one need not employ an explicit representation of oneself (e.g. one need not judge *I think that it is*

raining in order to consciously judge that *It is raining*. However, it is also true that in any such act one *can* be conscious that it is oneself that is so acting. How is this possible? How is it that one can be conscious of some act or state as one's own?

Fichte contends that the dominant model of how such acts or states become self-conscious is a “reflective” one. According to this reflective model one becomes self-conscious through a process of attending to a conscious experience and reflecting on it. One is conscious of oneself (the referent of ‘I’) insofar as one is able to reflect on and abstract from some conscious state or act to the awareness of that act or state as one's own. Both the Wolffian and Reinholdian conceptions of self-consciousness endorse this reflective model. For such models self-consciousness is derivative from conscious experience of an object as such. According to Wolff, to be conscious of an object is to distinguish it from others. In distinguishing an object from others we become aware of our own activity of distinguishing, and thereby, of ourselves. This could not happen without an awareness of outer objects. According to Reinhold self-awareness is made possible by distinguishing the “representing thing that thinks from the representing thing that is thought” (NE 1:197). So Reinhold, like Wolff, also construes self-consciousness as dependent on prior (metaphysically if not temporally) mental acts.

It is Fichte's contention that the reflection theory of self-consciousness is entirely wrong-headed. On the one hand it presupposes what it seeks to explain. We see this by asking what it is that is reflected up in order to achieve consciousness of oneself? If it is the subject—the referent of ‘I’—then we already have that which we seek to explain. On the other hand, if reflection provides a consciousness of self through representation of some object, then we have failed to capture the *subjectivity* of being the subject.¹

What “I” is Kant talking about [in his discussion that the “I think” must be able to accompany all of one's representations]... ? Is this perhaps the I that the Kantians have so confidently pieced together from the manifold of representations, an I that is not contained in any of these individual representations but is contained within all of them taken together? If this were so, then the words we have quoted from Kant would mean *this*: “I who am thinking of D am the same I who previously thought of C, B, and A; and it is by thinking of my various acts of thinking that I first become for n an I — i.e., that which remains identical within this manifold.” If this is what Kant means, then he too would be as wretched a babbler as the “Kantians” whom we are discussing; for he would then be contending that the very possibility of all thinking is itself conditioned by another act of thinking, and indeed, by the act of thinking of this act of thinking. If so, then I should like to

¹ This dilemma for the reflection theory is forcefully argued in (Henrich 1982). See also (Kriegel 2004; Bayne 2004; Duncan 2019).

know how we are ever supposed to be able to accomplish a single act of thinking!
(1:475-6)

Fichte thus contends that the regress involved in the reflection theorist's thinking of oneself is vicious, and can never explain what it seeks to explain. Fichte argues that instead of treating self-consciousness as in some way derivative of our conscious acts or states we should be construing it as *fundamental*. As Fichte puts it at one point:

the presupposition that self-consciousness is the foundation of all consciousness completely coincides with the thought of the I as originally posited by itself (SI 1:462)

The act of "self positing" referred to here is that also referred to by the moniker of "intellectual intuition". It is the fact that we are aware of ourselves via intellectual intuition that makes possible the explicit or reflective awareness of ourselves using the first-person concept 'I'.

Intellectual intuition is the immediate consciousness that I act and of what I do when I act. It is because of this that it is possible for me to know something because I do it. ... I cannot take a single step, I cannot move my hand or foot, without the intellectual intuition of my self-consciousness in these actions. It is only through such an intuition that I know that *I* do this. Only in this way am I able to distinguish my own acting (and, within this acting, my own self) from the encountered object of this acting. (SI 1:463)

Fichte contends here that we have an immediate and basic awareness of ourselves in acting that is presupposed by any further complex representational acts or states of consciousness. Though we only have this sort of first-person "action awareness" insofar as we also are aware of some object of consciousness, the self-consciousness we have in and through intellectual intuition is not reducible to any form of object consciousness or any more basic act or state of the mind.

2 Fichte's Characterization of Intellectual Intuition

What is intellectual intuition for Fichte? First, it is *immediate*:

Intellectual intuition is the immediate consciousness that I act and of what I do when I act. It is because of this that it is possible for me to know something because I do it. (1:463)

Second, intellectual intuition is *ubiquitous*:

intellectual intuition occurs at every moment of...consciousness. I cannot take a step, move hand or foot, without an intellectual intuition of my self-consciousness in these acts; only so do I know that I do it, only so do I distinguish my action, and myself therein, from the object of action before me. (1:463)

Third, it is always *conjoined* with a sensory representation:

Like sensory intuition, which never occurs by itself or constitutes a complete state of consciousness, this intellectual intuition never occurs alone, however, as a complete act of consciousness. ... intellectual intuition is always conjoined with some *sensory* intuition. (1:463-4)

Fourth, there is an identity of intuition and the subject so intuited:

In the case of the kind of acting now requested of him [i.e. intellectual intuition], however, the act of thinking and what is thought of within this act are one and the same, and thus his activity must here turn back upon or revert into itself. (1:462)

Fifth, intellectual intuition is active or “spontaneous”:

We do not, however, here wish to limit ourselves simply to drawing inferences; instead, let us cite Kant’s own words. On p. 132 he writes: “This representation ‘I think’ is an act of spontaneity; that is, it cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility.” (And consequently, I would add, neither can it be ascribed to inner sensibility, to which the sort of identity of consciousness described above does indeed pertain.) “I call it ‘pure apperception,’ to distinguish it from (the just mentioned) empirical apperception; because it is that self-consciousness which, while generating the representation ‘I think’ (a representation which must be capable of accompanying all other representations, *and which in all consciousness is one and the same*), cannot itself be accompanied by any further representation.” Here we have a clear description of the nature of pure self-consciousness. This pure self-consciousness is the same in all consciousness, and thus it is not determinable by anything contingent within consciousness. The I that appears within pure self-consciousness is determined by nothing but itself, and it is determined absolutely. (1:476)

In sum then, intellectual intuition has five features:

1. Immediacy
2. Ubiquity
3. Empirical Conjoinment

4. Identity

5. Spontaneity

How is this different from Kant's conception of intellectual intuition?

3 Kant on Intellectual Intuition

Recall that Kant thinks that the concept of a discursive intellect (i.e. our kind of mind) brings with it a contrast case, that of a *non-discursive* intellect, or as Kant calls it, an intuitive intellect or intuitive understanding. For this kind of mind, in contrast with ours, intellectual intuitions *are* possible. This is Kant's conception of the intuitive intellect.² Kant construes the intuitive intellect as a non-discursive intellectual faculty—"an understanding which should cognize [*erkennen*] its object, not discursively through categories, but intuitively in a non-sensible intuition" (A256/B312). There are four key features of the intuitive intellect—viz. it is (i) intellectual, (ii) comprehensive, (iii) productive, and (iv) non-discursive. Let's review what each of these means.

First, a non-sensible intuition, as *intellectual*, would be entirely actively produced, its intellectual representations a product of its "absolutely spontaneous" pure "self-activity" (*Selbsttätigkeit*). This means that the intuitions of an intuitive intellect would be self-produced rather than derived from affection by independent beings (or distinct faculties of oneself, as with affection in inner sense; see B72).

Second, being perfectly active in this manner the intuitive intellect would also thereby be perfectly *comprehensive*, in cognizing all things from their grounds or causes rather than their effects, for only a receptive faculty would cognize something from its effect(s) (*Religion Pölitz* 28:1111 (1783/84); JL 9:65; C 10:130).³

Third, the intuitive intellect is *productive* of its objects. The productivity of the intuitive intellect is a correlate of the two features just discussed. Since the intellectual intuitions of the intuitive intellect are purely a function of its spontaneous self-activity, and intuition is defined by Kant as a relation to an actuality (Pr 4:481-2), the intuitive intellect must be able to produce the very beings

² For discussion of the German rationalist conception of an intuitive intellect see (Winegar 2017). I take the intuitive understanding as a faculty for generating intellectual intuitions. Thus there is a conceptual, but not a real, distinction between the intuitive intellect (as ground or faculty) and intellectual intuition (as act of that faculty). For an alternative reading of Kant that sees these terms as marking two distinct faculties see (Ch. Förster 2012, 6).

³ God's representation of all things is thus a priori in the "archaic" sense of representing a thing from its grounds. The influential *Port Royal Logic* of Arnauld and Nicole includes a definition of the a priori in terms of the 'demonstration of effects by their causes' (, Arnauld and Nicole 1683, 233). A version of this view arguably is accepted by Leibniz (, Adams 1994, 109; cf. Smit 2009; Hogan 2009, 53–54). Closer to Kant, Wolff provides a general definition of ground in terms of 'that through which one can understand why something [i.e. what is grounded] is the case' (, § Wolff 1720, 29). Moreover, Kant's pre-critical conception of an antecedently determining ground, as articulated in the *New Elucidation* and elsewhere also seems connected with these older notions (For discussion see Longuenesse 2001, 69–70; Hogan 2009, 53). For extensive defense of the critical Kant's acceptance of an "archaic" explanatory requirement on the notion of an a priori ground see (Smit 2009, 191–217).

it intuitively. And since this intuitive intellect would be completely comprehensive and creative, the things (actualities) it represents would be represented entirely from their grounds rather than their effects, and indeed as being grounded in the intuitive intellect itself. As Kant reportedly puts it,

God cognizes all things by cognizing himself as the ground of all possibility (*Religion Pölitz* (1783/4), 28:1052; cf. *Metaphysik L₁* (mid-1770's), 28:328-9; *Metaphysik L₂* (1790/1), 28:606).^a

^a The conception of God as the ground of the very possibility of any actual being is a tenet faithfully held by Kant at least from his 1763 *Bewesgrund* essay on the existence of God. For discussion see (Fisher and Watkins 1998; Adams 2000; Chignell 2009; Yong 2014; Stang 2016).

In cognizing things from their very grounds of possibility, the intuitive intellect would represent what is essential to any thing—i.e. in terms of that essence or nature that grounds all of a thing's other possible properties. Moreover, in representing created things from their essences, the intuitive intellect represents those things as they are in themselves. Kant therefore plausibly thinks that the only being that might have such an intellect is God. God would thus intuit reality as it is in itself. Indeed, Kant often characterizes God's intuition in this manner in his lectures—e.g., “God cognizes things in themselves” (29:833; cf. B71-2; A256/B311–312; A279–280/B335–336).

Finally, an intellect capable of non-sensible intuition would also be *non-discursive*. What does this mean? Kant characterizes intellectual activity as 'discursive' to denote the manner in which our discursive understanding acts—viz. moving to and fro, from part to part, in building a whole—rather than merely as a synonym for 'conceptual', 'linguistic', or 'rational'.⁴ It is this notion he means to indicate in his characterization of the discursive intellect's activity as that of “running through” and “gathering together” (A99) representations. A non-discursive intellect, in contrast, exhibits a whole-to-part grasp of its representations.⁵ This means that in an intellectual intuition the content of any representational component is determined by the content of the whole, which the intuitive intellect apprehends “all at once” (*Religion Pölitz* (1783/4), 28:1051) via grasp of what Kant sometimes calls a “synthetic universal” (CPJ 5:407; cf. RP 28:1267; *Metaphysik L₁* 28:328; R 4270, 17:489 (1769–76); R6174 18:478 (1780s)). So the intuitive intellect is non-discursive because it would not engage in the manner of part-to-whole unification characteristic of discursive activity, instead representing all things via its holistic comprehension of the synthetic universal.

Given this conception of an intuitive intellect, how different are its intuitions from Fichte's intellectual intuitions? Both are such as to be immediately related to their relatum. They are both also spontaneous. However, the similarities seem to end there, for Fichte's characterization of intellec-

⁴ So, *pace* (Westphal 2000), Kant's conception of the intellect (or the understanding in particular) does not require conceiving of it as a faculty for *concept* generation. Only discursive faculties are faculties for concept generation (and, correspondingly, for judgment and inference); cf. JL 9:36; CPJ 5:406.

⁵ Kant understands the whole-to-part mereological structure of representation as a distinguishing feature of intuition as opposed to conceptual representation, which is part-to-whole. See (Aquila 2001; McLear 2015; Onof and Schulting 2015; McLear and Pereboom OBC) for discussion.

tual intuition as ubiquitous, conjoined to sense experience, and identical to its object do not seem to correspond with Kant's characterizations of intellectual intuition. But if this is right why might Fichte nevertheless take himself to be expounding a broadly Kantian position?

Fichte gives us some indication:

The intellectual intuition of which the *Wissenschaftslehre* speaks is not directed toward any sort of being whatsoever; instead, it is directed at an acting – and this is something that Kant does not even mention (except, perhaps, under the name “pure apperception”). (1:472)

If we're to take Fichte as his word then, the relevant comparison is not between Kant's meaning of “intellectual intuition” and that of Fichte's, but rather Kant's conception of “pure apperception” as compared with Fichte's “intellectual intuition”.

4 Kant on Consciousness & Self-Consciousness

In order to best understand Fichte's comparison of his philosophy with Kant's, and in particular with Kant's conception of pure apperception, we need to have a clearer understanding of Kant's view on consciousness and self-consciousness.

The notion of consciousness [*Bewußtsein*] plays an important role in Kant's philosophy. There are, however, several different senses of “consciousness” in play in Kant's work, not all of which line up with [contemporary philosophical usage](#). Below I detail several of Kant's most central notions and their differences from and relations to contemporary usage.

4.A Phenomenal Consciousness

Contemporary philosophical discussions of consciousness typically focus on phenomenal consciousness, or “what it is like” to have a conscious experience of a particular kind (e.g. seeing the color red, smelling a rose, etc.). Such [qualitative features of consciousness](#) have been of major concern to philosophers in the last several decades. However, the metaphysical issue of phenomenal consciousness is almost entirely ignored by Kant, perhaps because he is unconcerned with problems stemming from commitments to naturalism or physicalism. He seems to attribute all qualitative characteristics of consciousness to sensation and what he calls “feeling” (*Gefühl*) (CJ 5:206). Kant distinguishes between sensation and feeling in terms of an objective/subjective distinction. Sensations indicate or present features of objects, distinct from the subject of experience. Feelings, in contrast, present only states of the subject to consciousness. Kant's typical examples of such feelings include pain and pleasure (B66-7; CJ 5:189, 203-6).

Thus, while Kant clearly assigns a cognitive role to sensation, and allows that it is “through sensation” that we cognitively relate to objects given in sensibility (A20/B34), he does not focus in

any substantive or systematic way on the phenomenal aspects of sensory consciousness, or how it is exactly that they aid in cognition of the empirical world.

4.B Discrimination & Differentiation

The central notion of “consciousness” with which Kant is concerned is that connected with discrimination or differentiation. This is the conception of consciousness that was mostly in use in Kant’s time, particularly by his major predecessors [Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz](#) (1646–1716) and [Christian Wolff](#) (1679–1754), and he gives little indication that he departs from their general practice.

According to Kant, anything that a subject can discriminate from other things is a thing of which a subject is or can be conscious (An 7:136–8). Representations which allow for discrimination and differentiation are “clear” (*klar*). Representations that allow not only for the differentiation of one thing from others (e.g. differentiating one person’s face from another’s), but also the differentiation of parts of the thing so discriminated (e.g. differentiating the different parts of a person’s face) are called “distinct” (*deutlich*).

Kant does seem to deny, as against the Leibniz-Wolff tradition, that clarity can simply be *equated* with consciousness (B414–15, note). His primary motivation for this position seems to be that he allows that one’s discriminatory capacities may outrun one’s capacity for memory or even the explicit articulation of what is so discriminated. In such cases one does not have a fully clear representation.

Kant’s conception of “obscure” (*dunkel*) representation as that which allows the subject of the representation to discriminate differentially between aspects of her environment without any explicit awareness of the basis by which she is doing so, connects him with the Leibniz-Wolff tradition of recognizing the existence of *unconscious* representations (An 7:135–7). Kant conceives of the majority of representations that we appeal to in order to explain the complex discriminatory behaviors of living organisms as being “obscure” in his technical sense. Likening the mind to a map Kant goes so far as to say that

The field of sensuous intuitions and sensations of which we are not conscious, even though we can undoubtedly conclude that we have them; that is, *obscure* representations in the human being (and thus also in animals), is immense. Clear representations, on the other hand, contain only infinitely few points of this field which lie open to consciousness; so that as it were only a few places on the vast map of our mind are *illuminated*. (An 7:135)

Thus, obscure representations, i.e. representations of which we have no direct or non-inferential awareness, but which must be posited to explain our (and those of other living beings) fine grained differential discriminatory capacities, constitute the majority of the mental representations with which the mind busies itself.

Though Kant does not make this point explicit in his discussion of discrimination and consciousness, it is clear that he takes our capacity to discriminate between objects and parts of objects to be ultimately based on our sensory representation of those objects. This means that his views on consciousness as differential discrimination intersect with his views on phenomenal consciousness in the following manner. Since we are receptive beings, and the form of our receptivity is sensibility, the ultimate basis on which we differentially discriminate between objects must be sensory, and hence on what it is like to perceive those objects. Thus, though Kant seems to take for granted the fact that conscious beings are in states with a particular phenomenal character, it must be the clarity and distinctness of this phenomenal character which allows a conscious subject to differentially discriminate between the various elements of her environment (see Kant's discussion of aesthetic perfection in the 1801 *Jäsche Logic*, 9:33-9 for relevant discussion).

4.C Self-Consciousness

Kant believes that most of our representations are ones of which we are not directly aware. They are nevertheless to some degree conscious, since the condition of ascribing conscious representations to a subject is that they allow differential discrimination of elements of the subject's environment. Kant seems to think that the process of making a representation clear, or fully conscious, requires a higher-order representation of the relevant representation. As Kant says, "consciousness is really the representation that another representation is in me" (JL 9:33). Since this higher-order representation is one of another representation *in me*, Kant's position here suggests that consciousness requires at least the capacity for self-consciousness. This position is reinforced by Kant's famous claim in the Transcendental Deduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that

The **I think** must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me. (B131-2; emphasis in the original)

Kant might give the impression here of saying that for representation to be possible for a subject, that subject must possess the capacity for self-ascribing her representations. If Kant really did endorse this self-ascription condition, then representation, and thus the capacity for conscious representation, in either of the phenomenal or discriminatory senses outlined above, would depend on the capacity for self-consciousness. Since Kant ties the capacity for self-consciousness to spontaneity (B132, 137, 423), and restricts spontaneity to the class of rational beings, the demand for self-ascription would seem to deny that any non-rational animal (e.g. dogs, cats, birds, etc.), at least according to Kant's conception of such animals as lacking understanding and reason, could have phenomenal or discriminatory consciousness!

However, there is little evidence to show that Kant endorses the self-ascription condition. Instead, he distinguishes between two distinct modes in which one is aware of oneself and one's representations, via "inner sense" and via "apperception" (See @ameriks2000 for extensive discussion). Only the latter form of awareness seems to demand a capacity for self-ascription. We'll take these two notions in turn.

4.C.1 Inner Sense

Inner sense is, according to Kant, the means by which we are aware of alterations in our own state. Hence all sensations, including such basic alterations as pleasure and pain, as well as moods and feelings, are all the proper subject matter of inner sense. Ultimately, Kant argues that not only all sensations and feelings, but all representations attributable to a subject whatsoever must ultimately occur in inner sense and conform to its form, time (A22-3/B37; A34/B51).

Thus, to be aware of something in inner sense is minimally, and at least in the case of the awareness of sensations and feelings, to be phenomenally conscious. To say that a subject is aware of her own states via inner sense is to say that she has (at least) a temporally ordered series of mental states, each of which she is phenomenally conscious, though she may not be conscious of the series as a whole. This could still count as a kind of self-awareness, as when an animal is aware of being in pain. But it is not an awareness of subject as a *self*. Kant himself indicates such a position in a letter to his friend and former student Marcus Herz in 1789.

[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 aware of my own existence [*meines Daseins unbewußt*] (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 is (C 11:52, May 26, 1789).

Hence, according to Kant, one may be aware of one's representations via inner sense, but one is not and cannot via inner sense alone aware of oneself as the *subject* of those representations. That requires what Kant, following Leibniz [-@leibniz1996] calls "apperception".

4.C.2 Apperception

Kant uses the term "apperception" to denote the capacity for the awareness of some state or modification of one's self as just such a state. For a being capable of apperception, there is a difference between feeling a pain, and thus being aware of it in inner sense, and apperceiving that one is in pain, and thus ascribing, or being in a position to ascribe, a certain property or state of mind to one's

self. In the example above, of a non-apperceptive animal as being aware of its own pain, while there is something (in this case rather unpleasant) it is like to be the animal, and the animal is itself aware of this – the pain, and its awareness is partially explanatory of its behavior (e.g. avoidance), Kant construes the animal as incapable of making any self-attribution of its pain. Kant seems to think of such a mind as incapable of construing itself as a subject of states, and thus as unable to construe itself as persisting through changes of those states. This is not necessarily to say that an animal incapable of apperception lacks any subject or self. But, at the very least, such an animal would be incapable of conceiving or representing itself in this way (See @naragon1990; @mclear2011).

Kant considers the capacity for apperception as importantly tied to the capacity to represent objects as complexes of properties attributable to a single underlying entity (e.g. an apple as a subject of the complex of the properties *red* and *round*). Kant's argument for this connection is notorious both for its complexity and for its obscurity.

At least by the publication of the first *Critique*, Kant denies that we can have anything like a privileged (empirical) *intuition* of the self. Despite this, the centrality of what Kant calls the “transcendental unity of apperception” cannot be denied. However, one important difference from Kant's pre-critical view, especially in the *Inaugural Dissertation*, is that the awareness in the pure apperception of oneself as subject is wholly intellectual rather than sensible. For example, Kant says,

this representation [viz. the “I think”] is an act [*Actus*] of spontaneity, i.e., it cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility. (B-Deduction §16, B132)

In the transcendental synthesis of the manifold of representations in general, on the contrary, hence in the synthetic original unity of apperception, I am conscious of myself not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am. This representation is a thinking, not an intuiting. (B-Deduction §25, B157)

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)

if I have called the proposition “I think” an empirical proposition, I would not say by this that the I in this proposition is an empirical representation; for it is rather purely intellectual, because it belongs to thinking in general. (Refutation of Mendelssohn's Proof of the Persistence of the Soul, B423)

Kant's position in these passages is that the awareness of oneself as the subject of mental activity is not sensory, but rather a special form of intellectual representation, one that is neither judgmental or conceptual but the basis for both. Kant terms this activity of intellectual self-consciousness “pure apperception.”⁶ The critical Kant thus endorses two important claims. First, he holds that self-consciousness is fundamentally *bifurcated* into sensory (i.e. inner intuition) and non-sensory

⁶ He also occasionally calls pure apperception “reflection” (e.g. An 7:135n) or “transcendental consciousness” (e.g. Ref 18:306 (1785–89)).

(i.e. pure apperception) modes.⁷ Second, he holds that the sensory mode does not present a meta-physical subject—indeed it presents no subject at all, and that it is only in pure apperception that one’s self is presented, albeit in not in a manner that supports various inferences of interest to the “rational psychologist” (more on this below).

5 Kant & Fichte

So how should we evaluate the question of whether Kant and Fichte agree concerning the nature of intellectual intuition? Certainly they would disagree concerning the *name* “intellectual intuition”. But, as Fichte says (echoing Kant), “there are no classical authors in philosophy” (1:472). He can use the term even if he uses it in a manner different from Kant.

Putting the terminological differences to the side, Fichte and Kant seem to *agree* concerning those aspects of self-consciousness that relate to what Kant calls “pure apperception”. Kant considers pure apperception to be an entirely intellectual awareness of one’s self-activity that is immediate and spontaneous. It is also ubiquitous in the sense that the “I think” must always be able to accompany one’s representations (B131-2). Kant also accepts that pure apperception must always be conjoined with some empirical consciousness.

So Kant and Fichte agree that there is a kind of self-consciousness that is immediate, ubiquitous, empirically conjoined, and spontaneous. There are, however, two points concerning which it is much less clear that they agree. These are (i) whether the act of pure apperception is identical with what is apperceived; (ii) whether what is so apperceived is a *being* or an *activity*. Fichte is clear that what is purely apperceived or intellectually intuited is identical with the act of so intuiting and is an activity rather than a being.

no real *being*, no subsistence or continuing existence, pertains to the intellect; for such being is the result of a process of interaction, and nothing yet exists or is assumed to be present with which the intellect could be posited to interact. Idealism considers the intellect to be a kind of *doing* and absolutely nothing more. One should not even call it an *active subject*, for such an appellation suggests the presence of something that continues to exist and in which an activity inheres. (FI 1:440)

In contrast, Kant is much more equivocal as to the nature of the representational act and what it is one is conscious of in or through that act. Concerning the issue of act-object identity Kant says that “this representation [viz. the “I think”] is an act [*Actus*] of spontaneity” (B132), which would support agreement with Fichte. But Kant also says that “the representation I is no intuition at all, but a merely intellectual representation of the self-activity of a thinking subject” (B278), which

⁷ Kant rejects what, in contemporary discussion of this issue, has been called the “Uniformity Thesis” regarding self-knowledge. See, e.g., [boyle2009, 141]; cf. [shoemaker1988]; [burge1996; -@burge2013-ch16]; [moran2001].

seems best read as disintguishing the I, as representation, from what it is a representation *of*, viz. the self-activity of the subject.

Kant remarks concerning the priority of being over activity are also mixed. For example, he says that “in the consciousness of myself in mere thinking I am the **being itself**” (B429; emphasis in original) and that “I am conscious of myself not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am. This representation is a thinking, not an intuiting” (B-Deduction §25, B157). Both of these claims suggest that what it is one is conscious of is a being, of whose existence (though not its nature) one can be certain. Moreover, that Kant conceives of this consciousness in terms of the existence of a substance is indicated by remarks in the *Pölitiz Religion* lectures, where he says, for example, that

when I think, I am conscious that my I, and not some other thing, thinks in me. Thus I infer that this thinking in me does not inhere in another thing external to me but in myself, and consequently also that I am a substance, i.e. that I exist for myself, without being the predicate of another thing. (*Religion Pölitiz* 28:1042 (1783/84))

Here we see Kant claiming that in self-consciousness we are aware of ourselves as subjects of inherence rather than as inhering accidents. And in a lectures prior to the publication of the first *Critique* Kant says,

When I say: I think, I act, etc., then either the word I is applied falsely, or I am free. Were I not free, then I could not say: I do it, but rather I would have to say: I feel in me a desire to do, which someone has aroused in me. But when I say: I do it, that means spontaneity in the transcendental sense <*in sensu transcendentali*>, But now I am conscious to myself that I can say: I do; therefore I am conscious of no determination in me, and thus I act absolutely freely. (*Metaphysik L₁* (1777-80) 28:268)

If we don't reject the pre-critical text as a position Kant renounces, we can tie these remarks together with his remarks in the *Religion* and in the first *Critique* as follows. In the pure consciousness of one's self-activity one is aware of oneself acting, and thus is conscious of oneself as the ultimate causal locus for the act. This is equivalent to being determined by nothing else to act, and thus as being substantial (because ultimate) and free (because undetermined by anything external).

Further complicating matters is the fact that Kant construes the notion of an act (*Handlung*) as closely connected with the concepts of activity (*Tätigkeit*), substance, and force (*Kraft*).⁸ Kant's critical conception of causality is also closely linked to these notions. As he puts it, an act (*Hand-*

⁸ See A204/B250; R5289-90 18:144 (1776-78?); R5650 18:298-302 (1785-88).

lung) “already signifies the relation of the subject of causality to the effect” (A205/B250). What is an “act”? Kant provides the clearest description in metaphysics lectures from the Critical period:

Action [*Handeln*] and effect [*Wirkung*] can only be ascribed to substance. Action is the determination of the force [*Kraft*] of a substance as a cause of a certain accident [*accidentis*]. Causality [*Causalitas*] is the characteristic of a substance insofar as it is considered as the cause of an accident [*accidentis*] (*Metaphysik Pölitz* 28:564-5 (1790/1)).^a

^a For extensive discussion of this conception of an act, as well as the related notions of substance and power in Kant’s work see [@watkins2005, chs. 4-5; @smit2009; @wuerth2014, especially chs. 1, 6; @stang2019, 92-4].

Thus, while it is true that Kant, in contrast to Fichte, puts being rather than acting at the basis of one’s existence, it is actually difficult to determine whether this is a genuinely different position rather than a merely terminological difference. Kant, like Fichte, sees this being as essentially active and it is on the basis of this activity that such a being counts as a substance.