

# Self-Consciousness & Self-Knowledge in the Pre-Critical Kant

PHIL 971 Kant Seminar

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## 1 Leibniz's Criticisms of Locke

### 1.1 Is Reflection Empirical?

- Locke characterizes reflection as a form of *experience*, an “inner” kind of perception. But is one’s awareness of one’s mind something that is really “given” to us, as the senses provide information of external objects?<sup>1</sup>

### 1.2 Reflection's Reach

- Locke construes reflection as providing only an awareness of the mind’s *operations* but why not think we have access to ourselves as subjects?<sup>2</sup>

### 1.3 Reflection & Regress

- Leibniz takes to Locke as equating reflection with a form of higher-order consciousness of our own thoughts (or mental operations) and considers consciousness to accompany all thought. But this generates a vicious regress.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 Leibniz on Self-Consciousness

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

*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

- Leibniz’s position:
  - We have an epistemically unique relation to ourselves as substances
  - The concept <substance> is acquired via reflection on one’s own nature
  - Knowledge in metaphysics depends on the content of self-consciousness<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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*)

<sup>2</sup> It is very true that our perceptions of ideas come either from the external senses or from the internal sense, which one may call reflection; but this reflection does not limit itself solely to the operations of the spirit, as is said [in Locke’s ECHU II.1.4]; it extends to the spirit itself, and it is in apperceiving it that we apperceive substance. (Leibniz 1698, *Echantillon de reflexions sur le II. livre [of Locke’s Essay]*).

<sup>3</sup> It is impossible that we should always reflect explicitly on all our thoughts; for if we did, the mind would reflect on each reflection, ad infinitum, without ever being able to move on to a new thought. For example, in being aware of [‘en m’appercevant de’] some present feeling, I should have always to think that I think about that feeling, and further to think that I think of thinking about it, and so on ad infinitum. It must be that I stop reflecting on all these reflections, and that eventually some thought is allowed to occur without being thought about; otherwise I would dwell for ever on the same thing (Leibniz 1996, 118)

<sup>4</sup> 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 1699, 645–6, *Monadology* §§29–30)

### 3 Kant's Pre-Critical Theory of Cognition (1755-80)

#### 3.1 Spontaneity & Receptivity

*Spontaneity*: the exercise of a mental faculty/power [*Vermögen*] that is wholly in accordance principles that are “internal” or essential to the faculty<sup>5</sup>

*Receptivity*: Power (capacity [*Fähigkeit*]) of the mind to generate representations (or engage in mental action more generally()) on the occasion of being affected

- Is the fact that receptivity is a capacity and not a power/faculty significant?
- It is not altogether clear whether Kant also thinks that *receptivity* is to some extent spontaneous

#### 3.2 Transition to the Two-Stem Doctrine (1762)

- Discursive/conceptual representation is representation of the ground of difference between things, not just that they are different<sup>6</sup>
- Discursive representation depends on the capacity for self-consciousness<sup>7</sup>
  - Self-consciousness is identical to inner sense; inner sense is necessary for all “higher” (i.e. rational/intellectual) forms of cognition

#### 3.3 The Separation of Sense & Intellect (1770)<sup>8</sup>

*Sensibility* passive/receptive; sensory intuitions arise from the affection of sensibility by objects

*Understanding*: active/spontaneous; conceptual judgments arise via discursive acts of the understanding

#### 3.4 The Independence of the Stems

- The two stems of cognition play different functional roles with respect to cognition<sup>9,10</sup>
  - The senses present only “appearances” (i.e. non-fundamental/relational aspects of reality)
  - The intellect presents intelligible objects as they really are in themselves

### 4 Kant's Pre-Critical View of Intuition (c. 1769-1780)

- Outer sensory representation presents only (relational) properties of objects, never the underlying subject of those properties<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> spontaneity is action which issues from an inner principle. When this spontaneity is determined in conformity with the representation of what is best it is called freedom. (NE I:402)

<sup>6</sup> it is one thing to differentiate things from each other, and quite another thing to recognise the difference between them. The latter is only possible by means of judgements and cannot occur in the case of animals, who are not endowed with reason. (FS 2:59)

<sup>7</sup> this power or capacity is nothing other than the faculty of inner sense, that is to say, the faculty of making one's own representations the objects of one's thought. This faculty cannot be derived from some other faculty. It is, in the strict sense of the term, a fundamental faculty [*Grundvermögen*] which, in my opinion, can only belong to rational beings. But it is upon this faculty that the entire higher faculty of cognition is based. (FS 2:60)

<sup>8</sup> *Sensibility* is the *receptivity* of a subject in virtue of which it is possible for the subject's own representative state to be affected in a definite way by the presence of some object. *Intelligence* [*Intelligentia*] (rationality) is the *faculty* [*facultas*] of a subject in virtue of which it has the ability to represent things [*repraesentare valet*] which cannot by their own quality come before the senses of that subject. (ID 2:392)

<sup>9</sup> Cognition, in so far as it is subject to the laws of sensibility, is sensitive, and, in so far as it is subject to the laws of intelligence, it is intellectual or rational (ID §3; 2:392)

<sup>10</sup> whatever in cognition is sensitive is dependent upon the special character of the subject in so far as the subject is capable of this or that modification by the presence of objects... But whatever cognition is exempt from such subjective conditions relates only to the object. It is thus clear that things which are thought sensitively are representations of things as they appear, while things which are intellectual are representations of things as they are. (ID §4; 2:392)

<sup>11</sup> it is also no wonder that we do not cognize a subject prior to all predicates except the I, which nevertheless is no concept but rather [crossed out: a sensation] an intuition. ... by means of our senses only the relations of things can be revealed, and we can represent the absolute or the subject only from our selves. The idea of substance actually comes from the *repraesentatione sui ipsius*... (R3921, 17:345-6 (c. 1769); see also R4493, 17:571-2; R5290, 18:144; R5297, 18:146)

- Nevertheless, in inner sense we have a quasi-perceptual acquaintance with the self as subject, which is the source of the concept <substance><sup>12,13,14,15</sup>

#### 4.1 Questions about Inner Intuition

1. Is inner sense a kind of *intuitive* awareness (as opposed to conceptual awareness)?<sup>16,17,18,19</sup>
2. Is inner intuition a form of *intellectual* intuition?<sup>20</sup>
  - Kant needs some account of how metaphysical concepts are acquired that doesn't run afoul of his conceptual of their status as "intellectual" rather than "empirical" or "sensitive"<sup>21,22</sup>
3. If inner intuition is not intellectual, why/how is it different from outer intuition? – i.e. to what extent does Kant accept the Difference Thesis?
4. If inner intuition is different from outer intuition, then what qualifies it as either *sensory* or an intuition at all?
5. To what extent does Kant's view of inner sense/intuition align with the theoretical role Leibniz articulates for reflection?

#### References & Further Reading

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<sup>12</sup> We have no intuition in the whole world except the intuition of our self; all other things are appearances. (*Anthologie Collins* 25:15 (1772-3))

<sup>13</sup> The I is the intuition of a substance (R4493, *Duisburg Nachlaß* 17:571 (1772-5))

<sup>14</sup> [An] object can only be represented in accordance with its relations and is nothing other than the subjective representation of the subject itself, but made general, for I am the original of all objects (R4674, *Duisburg Nachlaß* 17:646 (1773-5))

<sup>15</sup> the I expresses the substantial; for that substrate <substratum> in which all accidents inhere is the substantial. This is the only case where we can immediately intuit the substance. (*Pölitiz Metaphysik* 28:226 (1777-80))

<sup>16</sup> There is (for man) no intuition of what belongs to the understanding, e but only a symbolic cognition; and thinking is only possible for us by means of universal concepts in the abstract, not by means of a singular concept in the concrete. (ID §10, 2:396 (1770))

<sup>17</sup> Time, on the other hand, more nearly approaches a universal and rational concept, for it embraces in its relations absolutely all things, namely, space itself and, in addition, the accidents which are not included in the relations of space, such as the thoughts of the mind.

<sup>18</sup> Intellectual intuition in human beings is absurd (*An. Korff* 28:179 (1770-5))

<sup>19</sup> I myself intuit myself, but bodies only as they affect me...if I want to go further in the determinations, then I deteriorate into mystical idealism. If I maintain thinking beings of which I have intellectual intuition, then that is mystical. But intuition is only sensuous, for only the senses intuit; the understanding does not intuit, but rather reflects. (*Metaphysik Pölitiz* 28:207 (1777-80))

<sup>20</sup> the concepts met with in metaphysics are not to be sought in the senses but in the very nature of the pure understanding, and that not as innate concepts but as concepts abstracted from the laws inherent in the mind (by attending to its actions on the occasion of an experience), and therefore as acquired concepts. (ID §8, 2:395 (1770))

<sup>21</sup> the fundamental concepts of things and of relations, and the axioms themselves, are given in a fundamental fashion by the pure understanding itself; and, since they are not intuitions, they are not immune to error. (ID §23, 2:411)

<sup>22</sup> each of the concepts has, without any doubt, been acquired, not, indeed, by abstraction from the sensing of objects (for sensation gives the matter and not the form of human cognition), but from the very action of the mind, which coordinates what is sensed by it, doing so in accordance with permanent laws. (ID Corollary, 2:406)

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