

Reflection

PHIL 971 Kant Seminar

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1 Reflection & Self-Consciousness

- Kant often describes “reflection” [*reflexio*, *reflexion*, *Überlegung*] as the central cognitive power of the intellect^{1,2}
 - Q₁: Why is reflection so important/distinctive?
 - Q₂: What role might reflection play in the critical project?

2 Reflection & Concept Acquisition

- Kant clearly identifies reflection as a central component in concept formation/acquisition³
 - “reflection” here refers to the identification of shared properties: “from reflection, one cognizes that which many things have in common” (*Wiener Logik* 24:909)
 - “reflection” also sometimes refers to the becoming conscious of, and paying attention to, the features of objects (*Logik Pölitz* 24:566; *Logik Busolt* 24:654)
- Reflection is also the means by which the “pure” a priori concepts are acquired as well^{4,5}

3 Reflection & Cognitive Agency

- Kant closely links the possession of “cognition” with a reflective cognitive faculty⁶
 - Q₃: Is there a single or generic sense of “reflection” that we can attribute to Kant?
 - Q₄: Is reflection, for Kant, always a form of ‘higher-order’ representation?
 - Q₅: How should we understand the connection between reflection, apperception, and cognition?
 1. Concept acquisition/possession
 2. Reflective control
 3. Reflective connection

¹ the reflective cognition, which arises when several appearances are compared by the understanding, is called experience. Thus, there is no way from appearance to experience except by reflection in accordance with the logical use of the understanding. (ID §5, 2:394)

² consciousness of oneself (apperceptio) can be divided into that of reflection and that of apprehension. The first is a consciousness of understanding, pure apperception; the second a consciousness of inner sense, empirical apperception. (An §4, On self-observation, 7:135, note)

³ (1) comparison [*die Comparison*, d.i. *die Vergleichung*] of representations among one another in relation to the unity of consciousness; (2) reflection as to how various representations can be conceived in one consciousness; and finally (3) abstraction of everything else in which the given representations differ (*Jäsche Logik* 9:94).

⁴ Our understanding is the power [*Vermögen*] to reflect, and pure concepts of the understanding (transcendentale) are mere abstract concepts of reflection. (Ref. 409 (1772–1779?), 15:165–6)

⁵ in the case of these [pure] concepts, as in the case of all cognition, we can search in experience, if not for the principle of their possibility, then for the occasional causes of their generation, where the impressions of the senses provide the first occasion for opening the entire power of cognition to them and for bringing about experience, which contains two very heterogeneous elements, namely a matter for cognition from the senses and a certain form for ordering it from the inner source of pure intuiting and thinking, which, on the occasion of the former, are first brought into use and bring forth concepts. (A86/B118; see also B1, A66/B91; On a Discovery, 8:222–3)

⁶ cognition (since it rests on judgments) requires reflection (*reflexio*), and consequently consciousness of activity in combining the manifold of ideas according to a rule of the unity of the manifold; that is, it requires concepts and thought in general (as distinct from intuition). Thus consciousness is divided into *discursive* consciousness (which as logical consciousness must lead the way, since it gives the rule), and *intuitive* consciousness. (An §7, On sensibility in contrast to understanding, 7:141)

3.1 *The Control Model*

- Features of reflective control:⁷
 1. Independent of the thinker's will
 2. Based on the thinker's conception of what her theoretical reasons are, which includes her (if only implicit) grasp of "general principles of empirical thought" (312) as well as more subjective "principles for judging" that "attribute evidential significance to certain recurring perceptual patterns and that control the automatic formation of specific beliefs" (311)
 3. Manifests in the taking of an attitude towards some truth-apt content by deeming that attitude as *appropriate* to the content—e.g. that one is *entitled* to take the attitude (310)
 4. Is not required/necessary for attitude formation; it is rather a "normative demand" (310)
 5. Is not higher-order; reflection on the reasons for believing *p* is constituted by (i.e. is "transparent to") reflection as to whether *p* (312)
 6. Presumes a form of "negative freedom", viz. the freedom from one's doxastic attitudes being formed purely via external causes

PROBLEMS:

- There is no clear connection between the proposed view and the kind of "reflection" that is part of content-formation
- The account does not explain why Kant would connect reflection so closely to *cognition* in particular. Cognition is a property of (the content of) representational states. It is not itself an epistemic attitude towards the content of a mental state.
- There is no explanation of why self-consciousness is necessary for rational attitude formation—why couldn't there be a "cognitive zombie" for whom such attitudes are formed "in the dark" as it were?

3.2 *The Connection Model*

- Rather than construing reflection as a process of controlling one's formation of doxastic attitudes, one might construe it as a way of *connecting* one's representational states (note that Kitcher does not characterize her view as specifically a gloss on *reflection* but rather *self-consciousness*)⁸
- Features of reflective connection:
 1. Concerns *representation* (concepts, judgment) rather than doxastic *attitudes*
 2. Required for one representation to be *based on* another⁹
 3. Basing relation is understood in terms of a recognition, on the part of the subject, of the inferential role of the representation

⁷ our beliefs about the world are governed by, or subjected to, our representation of what our evidence is. It is by virtue of my endorsement of some perceptual datum as a sufficient reason for a belief that *p* that I bring it about that I believe that *p*; it is by virtue of my doubt about whether a perceptual datum supports the belief that *p* that I bring about a suspension of judgment; and it is by virtue of my verdict that a given perception which represents *p* as being the case is illusory that I bring about a belief that not-*p*. Thus, thinkers exercise a form of agency over assent-formation by virtue of controlling their epistemic states through reflection on their evidence. This form of agency may be called "reflective control." (Kohl 2015, 309)

⁸ Kant's theory should not be characterized as requiring second-order consciousness of mental acts. As noted, what he means by 'apperception' is not being conscious of a self, but recognizing (by having produced) necessary connections across mental states. (Kitcher 2014, 153)

⁹ 'One,' 'two,' etc. are partial representations that belong to the whole representation 'four.' To cognize through concepts humans must not merely have representations that lead to other representations—as they might in the case of animals (2.60)—they must also recognize those partial representations as the grounds of cognition of the whole representation (judgment) (Kitcher 2013, 203-4)

4. Does not construe the ‘subject’ as anything above and beyond the connected system of representations itself

PROBLEMS:

- Fails to explicitly connect the activity of the understanding, and self-consciousness in particular, with *reflection*
- Fails to explain why self-consciousness is necessary for cognition to occur – why aren’t there “cognitive zombies”?

3.3 *Desiderata on an Interpretation*

1. Connects reflection with the fundamental activity of the intellect
2. Shows how reflection is central to cognition and concept formation
3. Is appropriately connected with Kant’s conception of the freedom of the intellectual faculty
4. Explains the connection between reflective self-consciousness and cognition in a manner that is not susceptible to “zombie” objections

References & Further Reading

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