

Stéfano Straulino  
Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México

# Practical and Theoretical Reason in Modern Philosophy

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**Series in Philosophy**

 **VERNON PRESS**

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[www.vernonpress.com](http://www.vernonpress.com)

*In the Americas:*  
Vernon Press  
1000 N West Street, Suite 1200  
Wilmington, Delaware, 19801  
United States

*In the rest of the world:*  
Vernon Press  
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,  
Malaga, 29006  
Spain

Series in Philosophy

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023949183

ISBN: 978-1-64889-736-8

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## Abbreviations

### Works by Hume

Treatise/THN = Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

EHU = Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter Millican. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

### Works by Locke

Essays = Locke, J. *Ensayos Sobre El Entendimiento Humano*. Translated by E. O'Gorman. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2013.

### Works by Leibniz

AG = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Philosophical Essays*. Edited and translated by R. Ariew and D. Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986.

A = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Sämtliche Schriften Und Briefe*. Edited by the Akademie der Wissenschaften. Darmstadt-Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1875-1890.

GP = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Leibniz*. Edited by C. I. Gerhardt. 7 vols. Berlin: Hildesheim, 1960-1961.

M = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. "Monadologie" in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Leibniz*, ed. C. I. Gerhardt, vol. 6 (Berlin: Hildesheim, 1960-1961).

Couturat = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Opuscules et Fragmentes Inédits de Leibniz. Extraits Des Manuscrits de La Bibliothèque Royale de Hanovre*. Edited by L. Couturat. Hildesheim: Olms, 1991.

Grua = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Textes Inédits d'après Les Manuscrites de La Bibliothèque Provinciale de Hannover*. Edited by Gastón Grua. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948.

Finster = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Der Briefwechsel Mit Antoine Arnauld*. Translated by R. Finster. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1997.

Robinet I = Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Principes de La Nature et de La Grâce Fondés En Raison. Principes de La Philosophie Ou Monadologie*. Edited by André Robinet. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954.

### Works by Immanuel Kant

BDG = Kant, Immanuel. "The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God." In *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

GMS = Kant, Immanuel. "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals." In *Practical Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

KrV = Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

KrP = Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Practical Reason*. Translated by Lewis White Beck. Indianapolis: H. W. Sams, 1956.

KU = Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Edited by Paul Guyer. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

MF = Kant, Immanuel. "Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science (1786)." In *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, edited by Gary Hatfield, Henry Allison, Michael Friedman, and Peter Heath, 171–270. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511498015.004>.

OP = Kant, Immanuel. *Opus Postumum*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

WDO = Kant, Immanuel. "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" In *Religion and Rational Theology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

### Works by Charles Sanders Peirce

EP 1 = Peirce, Charles S. "Grounds of Validity of the Laws of Logic: Further Consequences of Four Incapacities." In *The Essential Peirce*, edited by Nathan Houser and Christian J. W. Kloesel, 1:56–82. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.

EP 2 = Peirce, Charles S. "Pragmatism and Abduction." In *The Essential Peirce*, edited by Peirce Edition Project, 2:226–240. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998

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## Chapter 7

# Apperception and Self-Knowledge in Kant

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**Abstract:** The aim of this work is to analyse these two senses of consciousness and show that, for Kant, self-consciousness does not occur unrestrictedly: a relation with something other than consciousness is needed for it to become conscious of itself. I carry out these objectives throughout six sections. In the first one, I lay out the Kantian principle of pure apperception. In the second one, I present the limits of pure perception through Kant's critique of rational psychology. Then, in the third section, I set the basis to understand the relation that Kant establishes between the I think and the I exist. In the fourth one, I show that pure apperception, despite being pure, is not possible without the opportunity of perception. Next, in the fifth one, I introduce the notion of empirical apperception, establish its relation with pure apperception, and elucidate its meaning. Finally, in the last section, I explain the way in which empirical self-consciousness is determined, in relation to the knowledge of objects of the external sense.

**Keywords:** apperception, self-consciousness, rational psychology, perception, Kant.

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### 1. Introduction

In several places of his work, Kant distinguishes between two senses of self-consciousness: a pure one and an empirical one. This distinction is recorded in various formulations that Kant uses to refer to both types of self-consciousness. He calls the first one transcendental, pure or original apperception, synthetic unity of consciousness, transcendental unity of consciousness, transcendental subject = x, I think. Although these formulations capture different nuances, they all refer to what Kant calls properly "pure apperception". On the other hand, Kant refers to the second sense of self-consciousness as a subjective unity of consciousness, an empirically determined consciousness of my own

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existence, and inner experience. These notions, whose various formulations should not be ignored either, refer to what Kant calls “empirical apperception”. According to the first sense of self-consciousness, we are aware of ourselves as subjects. According to the second sense, we are aware of ourselves as objects, that is, we know ourselves.

The aim of this work is to analyse these two senses of consciousness and show that, for Kant, self-consciousness does not occur unrestrictedly: a relation with something other than consciousness is needed for it to become conscious of itself. I carry out these objectives throughout six sections. In the first one, I lay out the Kantian principle of pure apperception. In the second one, I present the limits of pure perception through Kant’s critique of rational psychology. Then, in the third section, I set the basis to understand the relation that Kant establishes between the *I think* and the *I exist*. In the fourth one, I show that pure apperception, despite being pure, is not possible without the opportunity of perception. Next, in the fifth one, I introduce the notion of empirical apperception, establish its relation with pure apperception, and elucidate its meaning. Finally, in the last section, I explain the way in which empirical self-consciousness is determined, in relation to the knowledge of objects of the external sense.

## 2. Transcendental apperception as the synthetic unity of consciousness

Kant’s most famous treatment of transcendental apperception is undertaken in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in paragraphs §16 to §18 of the Transcendental Deduction. Kant begins his argument by stating:

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. That representation that can be given prior to all thinking is called *intuition*. Thus all manifold of intuition has a necessary relation to the *I think* in the same subject in which this manifold is to be encountered.<sup>1</sup>

I intend to highlight two aspects of the way in which Kant approaches the theme of pure apperception in this passage and in the ones that follow it. First, it is necessary to point out that when Kant says that “the *I think* must be able to accompany all my representations”, he is not saying that by having a representation, I must be immediately aware of my thought as a thought. When

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). From here on, “KrV”. (KrV B131-132).



I think something, it is not necessary that I should, at the same time, think that I am thinking that representation. Rather, what is established here is that a representation is not mine unless I can ascribe it to myself, *i.e.*, I can say that I think it, that I am aware of it.<sup>2</sup> In other words: if I cannot say that I think a representation, then it cannot be the case that such representation is mine or means something to me.

Second, I want to highlight that this principle is also what allows me to gather a manifold in a single consciousness. “[T]he manifold of representations that are given in a certain intuition would not all together be my representations if they did not all together belong to a self-consciousness [...] because otherwise they would not throughout belong to me”.<sup>3</sup> That is, all representations must belong to the same and only consciousness. Therefore, Kant also calls this principle “transcendental unity of consciousness”. All my representations are in fact mine because they belong to the same consciousness:

The thought that these representations given in intuition all together belong to me means, accordingly, the same as that I unite them in a self-consciousness, or at least can unite them therein [...] only because I can comprehend their manifold in a consciousness do I call them all together my representations.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the *I think* is the consciousness of unity that makes synthesis possible. This self-consciousness occurs in relation to the consciousness of a plurality, and in it, it becomes clear that the consciousness of particular representations is not possible without the consciousness of the unity that allows them to be linked.<sup>5</sup> If the understanding is to execute its acts of synthesis on a manifold, that manifold must be gathered in the same consciousness. This is what Kant means in §15 when he explains that the possibility of a combination in general needs a previous unity.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Béatrice Longuenesse, “Kant’s ‘I Think’ versus Descartes ‘I Am a Thing That Thinks’”, in *Kant and the Early Moderns*, ed. Béatrice Longuenesse and Daniel Garber (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 15.

<sup>3</sup> KrV B132.

<sup>4</sup> KrV B134.

<sup>5</sup> Pedro Stepanenko, *Unidad de La Conciencia y Objetividad. Ensayos Sobre Autoconciencia, Subjetividad y Escepticismo En Kant* (UNAM: Instituto de investigaciones filosóficas, 2008), 39.

<sup>6</sup> KrV B131.

In this sense, it is possible to understand Kant's treatment of the synthetic unity of consciousness as a response to a Humean problem.<sup>7</sup> Kant would have agreed with Hume's stance,<sup>8</sup> according to which the possibility of being aware of our representations does not imply the perception of the self that has these representations:

The consciousness of oneself in accordance with the determinations of our state in internal perception is merely empirical, forever variable; it can provide no standing or abiding self in this stream of inner appearances, and is customarily called inner sense or empirical apperception. That which should necessarily be represented as numerically identical cannot be thought of as such through empirical data.<sup>9</sup>

Since representations are given to us in the inner sense as a rhapsodic succession, the mere empirical consciousness of these cannot account for an identical self. Without the transcendental apperception as a synthetic unity of consciousness, "I would have as multicoloured, diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious".<sup>10</sup>

If the only possible consciousness were the empirical one, the self would not be more than a rhapsodic flow of representations. But then, the very possibility of connecting these with each other could not be explained; it would not be possible to link different representations in a unitary experience. Hence, the *I think* as an identical consciousness that accompanies all my representations is a condition of the possibility of the combination of these representations. Not only is the synthetic unity of consciousness necessary to be able to say that a representation is mine, but it is also a condition to which all intuitions must be subjected in order to be an object: without this synthesis, the manifold would not be united in a consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

These two remarks (that the *I think* indicates both that a representation is mine and that I am aware of it, and that it allows the unity of all my representations in a consciousness) allow us to establish plainly that the focus of Kant's treatment of the transcendental apperception is not placed on the I that thinks itself, but on the necessary unity in which all my representations

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia Kitcher, "Kant on Self-Identity," *The Philosophical Review* 91, no. 1 (1982): 41–72, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2184668>.

<sup>8</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1.4.6, 3–4. From here on, "Treatise".

<sup>9</sup> KrV A107.

<sup>10</sup> KrV B134.

<sup>11</sup> KrV B138.

must be placed. It is necessary to be clear, then, that this self-consciousness is not a perception of the self, but rather it is the consciousness of the unity of all my representations in a single consciousness. Certainly, in the *I think* I am aware of myself as a subject and as an existence.<sup>12</sup> But that consciousness is not the axis on which the elucidation of the transcendental apperception revolves. Kant is not interested in showing that the awareness I have of a representation can show the certainty of my existence. He is interested in showing that all my representations are placed under the unity of a single act.<sup>13</sup> In other words: apperception, as explained by Kant, is not an act whose object is the self. Rather, the *I think* becomes apparent as long as I have representations and I become aware of a pre-categorical unity among these representations: the unity that makes them belong to the same consciousness.

### 3. Rational psychology

Although the paragraphs related to transcendental apperception are not posed as a response to rational psychology, in the sketch we have just outlined we can already find that Kant approaches this topic differently than the rational psychologist would. For Kant, the *I think* is the condition of possibility of the unity of all thoughts. Consequently, no judgment can be made about this “I”, since as a unity that finds all combinations, it is already implied in any judgment. The rational psychologist, on the other hand, tries to establish the knowledge of the self-starting precisely on the *I think*.

As it is well known, in the chapter on Paralogisms included in the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant aims to show the illusory nature of rational psychology's knowledge of the soul. Rational psychology, or rational doctrine of the soul, is the study of the soul as a thinking self, independently of all experience. Thus, rational psychology would be the science built on the single proposition “I think”.<sup>14</sup> It cannot contain any object of perception, no empirical predicate, without immediately becoming empirical psychology.

Kant links the conclusions of rational psychology, that is, the supposed properties of the soul, with the four titles of the table of categories. Thus, rational psychology attributes substantiality, simplicity, personality and separate existence to the soul.<sup>15</sup> Attributing these characteristics to the soul is the same as saying that we have knowledge of the soul. This, from Kant's point of view, is impossible. Knowledge can only occur insofar as understanding and

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<sup>12</sup> KrV B418-422, B422 note.

<sup>13</sup> Longuenesse, “Kant's ‘I Think’ versus Descartes ‘I Am a Thing That Thinks’”, 16.

<sup>14</sup> KrV A342-A343 / B400-401.

<sup>15</sup> KrV A403-404.

sensibility work together. There is only knowledge in the proper sense if the understanding exercises an act of synthesis on a manifold given by the sensibility. Knowledge of the self would imply the consciousness of an intuition of myself as determined with respect to a function of thinking (which, incidentally, is possible if that intuition of myself is given to my inner sense). But this is impossible for the *I think*, since there is no intuition of it.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, the conclusions of rational psychology cannot be valid and are due to some error in the argumentation.

This error in argumentation is what Kant calls a “transcendental paralogism.” A paralogism is an incorrect syllogism from the point of view of the form. In the case of transcendental paralogisms, which are the ones that concern us here, this error occurs when the middle term is used with two different meanings in both premises. Kant calls this a *sophisma figurae dictionis*, that which we could call a fallacy of amphibology. The transcendental aspect of paralogism consists in the amphibology occurring because the middle term is used in a transcendental sense in one premise and in an empirical sense in the other.<sup>17</sup> In this ambiguity lies the inevitability of the illusion of paralogism outside of critical philosophy. The confusion of rational psychology lies, then, in trying to apply categories that only have significance on the empirical level to a purely intellectual representation. It treats the transcendental self as if it were the noumenal self.<sup>18</sup>

In any case, the starting point of rational psychology is not questioned by Kant: the consciousness of the *I think* is undoubted. But it is inevitable to make a mistake if one tries to know something about this self. For example: the category of substance cannot be applied to it since the condition for this application is something permanent in the phenomenon,<sup>19</sup> but the unity of consciousness does not offer any intuition to which the category of substance may be applied.<sup>20</sup> Thus, rational psychology slips from the fact that the “I” of the *I think* is necessarily a subject (in a logical sense) and not a predicate, to the thought that it is a substance. It also slips from the fact that the I is not a multiplicity in a logical sense, to the idea that it is a simple substance. It passes from the fact that the I is one and the same in each thought, to the idea of personal identity through time. Finally, it passes from the fact that I can

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<sup>16</sup> KrV B406-407.

<sup>17</sup> KrV A341 / B399, A402, B411.

<sup>18</sup> Alejandra Baher, “La relación entre autoconciencia pura y existencia en la segunda edición de la Crítica de la razón pura,” *Revista de Estudios Kantianos* 3, no. 2 (October 30, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.7203/REK.3.2.12776>, 209.

<sup>19</sup> KrV A183 / B226.

<sup>20</sup> KrV B421-422.

distinguish my existence as a thinker from the things I think, to the existence of a thinking substance independent of what it thinks.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, rational psychology aims to take the I as an object of possible knowledge. “Yet this I is no more an intuition than it is a concept of any object; rather, it is the mere form of consciousness, which accompanies both sorts of representations”.<sup>22</sup> It is the representation of an I from which nothing can be said, a “transcendental subject of thoughts = x”.<sup>23</sup> Thus, whatever the transcendental subject is in itself, we are only authorised to say that we know it as an “x” that executes certain functions. But the nature of “x” cannot be established from these functions, nor it can even be assured that there is a nature behind these functions.<sup>24</sup> Then, this self-consciousness is empty of any content whatsoever. There is nothing to think in it other than that all the possible representations that can be thought of as its own agree in the predicate of being a representation of the self and harmonising with the conditions of such unity.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. The existence of the thinking self

Contrary to the expectations of rational psychology, transcendental apperception cannot be the foundation or the object of any knowledge since it offers no intuition. Yet, Kant states that the “I think” is an empirical proposition and contains within itself the proposition “I exist”.<sup>26</sup> I do not intend here to fully elucidate the sense of existence that Kant attributes to the *I think*.<sup>27</sup> What I intend to do next is to lay the basis for a correct understanding of the empirical character of the proposition “I think”. And then, from that point on, to show that pure apperception, despite being pure, is not possible without the opportunity of perception.

Whenever Kant says that the *I think* includes the I exist, he clarifies that this existence is indeterminate. Since the determination of existence as a category relates to an object of which one has a concept, and since the *I think* as

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<sup>21</sup> KrV B407-409; Longuenesse, “Kant’s ‘I Think’ versus Descartes ‘I Am a Thing That Thinks’”, 22-25.

<sup>22</sup> KrV A382.

<sup>23</sup> KrV A346 / B404.

<sup>24</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 161.

<sup>25</sup> Baher, “La relación entre autoconciencia pura y existencia en la segunda edición de la Crítica de la razón pura”, 209; Dieter Henrich, *The Unity of Reason. Essays on Kant’s Philosophy*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 29.

<sup>26</sup> KrV B422 note, see B418-422, B429-430.

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed account on this matter, see Baher, “La relación entre autoconciencia pura y existencia en la segunda edición de la Crítica de la razón pura”, 208-223.

consciousness of the unity of representations cannot offer such an object, the existence of the *I think* is always indeterminate. To establish how my existence is to be determined, I need an intuition of myself given to me in the inner sense.<sup>28</sup> But if the latter were given to me, then I would know myself as a phenomenon and we would no longer be talking about pure apperception.<sup>29</sup>

However, according to Kant, the awareness of my own existence (as it occurs in transcendental apperception) already contains an indeterminate intuition that gives me notice of my own existence.<sup>30</sup> For that reason, Kant says that the *I think* is an empirical proposition and encloses an existence.<sup>31</sup> What needs to be elucidated is how it is possible to be aware of the existence of the *I think* if it is an intellectual representation and, even more, how an intellectual representation can give rise to an empirical proposition. Following Baher,<sup>32</sup> we can find the key to this question in the footnote to KrV B422:

[The I think] expresses an indeterminate empirical intuition, *i.e.*, a perception (hence it proves that sensation, which consequently belongs to sensibility, grounds this existential proposition), but it precedes the experience that is to determine the object of perception through the category in regard to time; and here existence is not yet a category, which is not related to an indeterminately given object, but rather to an object of which one has a concept, and about which one wants to know whether or not it is posited outside this concept. An indeterminate perception here signifies only something real, which was given, and indeed only to thinking in general, thus not as appearance, and also not as a thing in itself (a noumenon), but rather as something that in fact exists and is indicated as an existing thing in the proposition “I think”.<sup>33</sup>

If the proposition “I think” expresses that something in fact exists (*etwas, was in der That existirt*), then that “something real” which is given to thinking in general must be the activity of the understanding (the thinking in the *I think*), and it is given insofar as it affects the inner sense. That is to say, Kant alludes here to self-affection, although this can only occur with the opportunity of a

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<sup>28</sup> KrV B157, B420, B422, B429-430.

<sup>29</sup> KrV B155-156.

<sup>30</sup> KrV B422 note, A343/B401.

<sup>31</sup> KrV B418, 420.

<sup>32</sup> Baher, “La relación entre autoconciencia pura y existencia en la segunda edición de la Crítica de la razón pura”, 213-218.

<sup>33</sup> KrV B422-423 fn.

perception on which the synthesising activity of the understanding is executed.<sup>34</sup> Follow Kant:

For it is to be noted that 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. Only without any empirical representation, which provides the material for thinking, the act I think would not take place, and the empirical is only the condition of the application, or use, of the pure intellectual faculty.<sup>35</sup>

Although this corroborates the fact that some empirical representation must serve as an opportunity for the action of the understanding of the inner sense, there are still questions to be answered: in what sense does the proposition “I think” is empirical? Does the need for an empirical representation as the opportunity for thinking makes the proposition “I think” empirical? I do not believe this to be the case, because the empirical representation on which the act of understanding is executed is not itself the content of the proposition “I think”. It is empirical because something affects the inner sense, but in this case, what affects it is the act of understanding (although this act certainly cannot be performed if it is not over the matter that is offered by perception). Now, although the inner sense is affected by the act of the understanding, no manifold is offered in this self-affection that can be in turn linked by the understanding. Then, it is not possible to exercise an act of synthesis. Therefore, Kant says that the existence denoted in the “I think, I exist” is not yet a category. Thus, it should be noted that although in the statement “I think, I exist” the self appears as the logical subject, there is not a true reference to the self: the agent of the act expressed in that proposition is not given, only the act is given. That is, with the “I” I do not mean the synthetic unity of consciousness, but the specific exercise of an act. The *I think* is not about the unity of consciousness in a purely formal sense, but about the concrete exercise of an act. It is that act, executed on an empirical representation, that gives the empirical character to the proposition “I think”. Precisely, the proposition “I think” is empirical if I formulate it while I think and I refer to that same act of thinking. But it would not be an empirical proposition when it is only mentioned, without referring to the very act of thinking in which it is thought. For example, when I say, “I think that...”, that “I think” is empirical because its formulation already

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<sup>34</sup> Baher, “La relación entre autoconciencia pura y existencia en la segunda edición de la Crítica de la razón pura”, 216-217.

<sup>35</sup> KrV 423 fn.

contains the execution of that same act of thinking. Therefore, in this case, it already contains the proposition “I exist”. But when I say for example “He thinks that...”, the proposition “he thinks” does not necessarily include the execution of that act of thinking and thus, is not included in it and is not an empirical proposition (against rational psychology, that identifies thinking with existing, and would make all thinking beings necessary beings<sup>36</sup>).

In short: an indeterminate empirical sensation of our own existence is given in the transcendental apperception, insofar as the understanding affects our inner sense. This sensation is not, however, of the self that thinks (which is impossible), but of the act of synthesis, while addressing an empirical representation. It is in this sense that the *I think* includes the I exist. But this does not mean that I know my existence (that is, this existence cannot be taken categorially) since, although I have notice of an act, I have no intuition of the self that exercises the act. Therefore, that existence is indeterminate: I cannot know anything about the “I” that I mention in the *I exist*. I do not know what exists, nor how it exists.<sup>37</sup>

### 5. Perception and apperception

In the passage of the second edition of the *Critique* in which the principle of the synthetic unity of apperception is introduced, Kant points out that transcendental apperception is original, which means that it cannot be derived from some other consciousness. That is, this consciousness cannot be accompanied, in turn, by any other.<sup>38</sup> This does not mean, however, that this act can be carried out unrestrictedly, without any condition. I intend to point out, on the contrary, that all we have said so far about apperception as a synthetic unity of consciousness, rational psychology and the existence contained in the proposition “I think” is enough to clearly establish the necessary intervention of perception in the act of pure apperception. Being transcendental apperception the consciousness that produces the representation of the *I think* that must be able to accompany all representation, it itself is not possible without other representations to accompany.

This is clear, for example, in the very principle of the synthetic unity of apperception. This is, according to Kant, “itself identical, thus an analytical proposition, yet it declares as necessary a synthesis of the manifold given in an intuition, without which that thoroughgoing identity of self-consciousness

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<sup>36</sup> KrV B422 fn.

<sup>37</sup> See KrV B420, B422.

<sup>38</sup> KrV B132.



could not be thought”.<sup>39</sup> But our understanding is of such a nature that, although it puts the connection, it does not put that which is connected: “An understanding, in which through self-consciousness all of the manifolds would at the same time be given, would intuit; ours can only think and must seek the intuition in the senses”.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the synthetic unity of consciousness cannot be thought of unless it accompanies our representations and, in the first place, our perceptions. The unity that is thought under the *I think* that can accompany all my representations is not perceived by itself, but, precisely, insofar as I can call *mine* multiple representations.

So, this *I think* that gives unity to my representations and enables me to say they are mine, is, in a way, more a “mine” than an “I”. Taken independently of my representations, it is nothing. The *I think* can only be stated insofar as it is making a synthesis, and it can only make a synthesis if the manifold that it synthesises is given. In this way, he can only say “I” if he can say “mine”, but it can never be acknowledged as an “I” independently of such representations. Without a manifold to unify, at best we could speak of a potential self without the possibility of displaying its synthesising action and, therefore, it could not be found as existing in the act of thinking.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps we should even say that the synthetic unity of apperception, considered independently of all perception, cannot be taken even as an *I think* (much less as an I exist). I can logically think of a synthetic unity of consciousness that synthesises nothing, as a merely formal condition of all thinking. But then I cannot say that such I or that such unity exists.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, this means that I could not even say “I”. It could not say, or think, anything. Without a manifold to be synthesised, the self could not affirm itself as a self.

This is precisely what the Kantian arguments against rational psychology make clear. Since rational psychology seeks to establish knowledge of the self independently of any reference to experience, its object of knowledge is some sort of nothingness. It lays for its foundation a representation devoid of any content:

I, of which one cannot even say that it is a concept, but a mere consciousness that accompanies every concept. Through this I, or He, or It (the thing), which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts = x, which is recognised only

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<sup>39</sup> KrV B135.

<sup>40</sup> KrV B135.

<sup>41</sup> Claudia Jáuregui and Alejandro Vigo, “Algunas Consideraciones Sobre La ‘Refutación Del Idealismo,’” *Revista de Filosofía* II (1987), 33.

<sup>42</sup> Baher, “La relación entre autoconciencia pura y existencia en la segunda edición de la Crítica de la razón pura”, 221.

through the thoughts that are its predicates, and about which, in abstraction, we can never have even the least concept [...].<sup>43</sup>

Even the immediate awareness of one's existence (which rational psychology admits regardless of whether external things are given or not<sup>44</sup>) requires the relation between consciousness and something other than itself. Certainly, what consciousness itself perceives when it affirms "I think, I exist" is its own activity, but this activity cannot be exercised if it is not through the opportunity of a given perception. "Without any empirical representation, which provides the material for thinking, the act I think would not take place".<sup>45</sup> Although the *I think* is an intellectual representation, it presupposes the relation with something given to sensitivity in general.<sup>46</sup> Thus, transcendental apperception, even as the plain recognition that my existence is given in the mere fact of thinking, requires perception to be able to execute the activity through which the self affects itself. And it is through this activity that the transcendental apperception takes notice of its own existence.

Although through this section we have spoken of the necessity to have representations in general for the exercise of pure apperception, it is worth mentioning that perceptions, before other representations, have primacy here. Of course, the unity of consciousness puts all representations under itself. However, it is not necessary to have conceptual representations or representations of determined objects for the self-consciousness of apperception. However, perceptions are essential, because without them there would be no material for thinking, without which the act *I think* would not take place.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, since pure apperception does not refer to indeterminate intuition, it is not necessary to establish determinate objects of the senses, but simply to aim to perception.

I conclude this section with a brief summary: pure apperception is not knowledge, since through it I do not know myself nor anything else. But through it, I am aware of the unity that all my representations must have in a single consciousness, which is what is expressed in the principle "the I think must be able to accompany all my representations". Now, in so far as I am aware of my own thinking and, therefore, of the synthetic unity of consciousness, I am aware of my own existence. But this existence cannot be taken as knowledge in

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<sup>43</sup> KrV A346 / B404.

<sup>44</sup> KrV B417.

<sup>45</sup> KrV B423 note.

<sup>46</sup> Baher, "La relación entre autoconciencia pura y existencia en la segunda edición de la Crítica de la razón pura", 216; Jáuregui and Vigo, "Algunas Consideraciones Sobre La 'Refutación Del Idealismo'", 33.

<sup>47</sup> KrV B423 note.

the proper sense, since it is always indeterminate. In this way, the self-consciousness that is given in this act of consciousness is, above all, consciousness of the unity of my representations and, through it, awareness of my existence. But the consciousness of my existence does not occur without the consciousness of the unity of my representations since the act by which I unify my representations is the act that gives me notice of my existence. In this way, without perceptions to unify, there would be no transcendental apperception.

### 6. Empirically determined self-consciousness

Thus far, we have talked about self-consciousness as pure apperception. However, Kant points out that there is another way of understanding consciousness. For example, in the *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of View* he distinguishes between a consciousness given by an act of reflection that is a consciousness of the understanding (pure apperception), and another one given through apprehension and that is an empirical apperception:

In psychology we investigate ourselves according to our ideas of inner sense; in logic, according to what intellectual consciousness suggests. Now here the “I” appears to us to be double (which would be contradictory): 1) the “I” as subject of thinking (in logic), which means pure apperception (the merely reflecting “I”), and of which there is nothing more to say except that it is a very simple idea; 2) the “I” as object of perception, therefore of inner sense, which contains a manifold of determination that make an inner experience possible.<sup>48</sup>

With this distinction, Kant opens a door that had been closed in the treatment of pure apperception: taking the self as an object of knowledge. However in this case, the *I think* does not know itself as a mere logical function, but as an object of perception. Since intuition takes part here, it is possible to determine existence and, therefore, the actual knowledge of it is also possible. But this implies that self-knowledge is knowledge of itself as a phenomenon and not as a thing in itself<sup>49</sup>:

But how the I that I think is to differ from the I that intuits itself (for I can represent other kinds of intuition as at least possible) and yet be identical with the latter as the same subject, how therefore I can say that I as intelligence and thinking subject cognise myself as an object that is thought, insofar as I am also given to myself in intuition, only, like other

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<sup>48</sup> AA 7:134 note.

<sup>49</sup> KrV B430, AA 7: 142.

phenomena, not as I am for the understanding but rather as I appear to myself, this is no more and no less difficult than how I can be an object for myself in general and indeed one of intuition and inner perceptions.<sup>50</sup>

These two ways of understanding self-consciousness restrict the pretension of accessing the self as it is in itself. Pure apperception cannot take the *I think* as an object of knowledge. Empirical apperception, which presents itself as self-knowledge, requires something more than just thinking, that is, it requires intuition. It is the knowledge we have about our own self through the representations that are given to us in the inner sense, that is, in time. Consequently, the self is known, in this case, only as it appears to itself, not as it is in itself. In other words, self-knowledge is phenomenal.

That we can distinguish these two senses of consciousness does not imply that the self itself is double (which would be contradictory, as Kant points out in the passage of the *Anthropology*). On the contrary, as indicated in the passage just quoted from the *Critique*, they are identical. Rather than a distinction between two senses of the self, Kant distinguishes the points of view from which the subject is considered. In the *Anthropology*, for example, Kant describes pure apperception as the consciousness of one's activity, that is, what the human being *does*, and the inner sense as the consciousness of what he *undergoes*, in so far as he is affected by the play of his own thoughts.<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, Kant states that the empirical unity of apperception is derived from the original unity of consciousness.<sup>52</sup> We can speak of the self as an object of perception according to our representations of the inner sense only because there is already a certain unity that cannot be given by those same representations.<sup>53</sup> This relationship between pure apperception and empirical apperception can be observed in some passages in which Kant expresses the possibility of determining the indeterminate consciousness of the existence of the *I think* in so far as it is put in relation with what is given to the inner sense.<sup>54</sup>

We should now show, then, how self-consciousness can be empirically determined and what the conditions of possibility of this determination are. But, before that, I think it is pertinent to briefly explain what I think Kant means by an empirically determined self-consciousness.

On the one hand, as we appreciated when analysing the existential content of the proposition "I think", it is not possible to understand existence there as

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<sup>50</sup> KrV B155.

<sup>51</sup> AA 7: 161.

<sup>52</sup> KrV B140.

<sup>53</sup> KrV B134.

<sup>54</sup> KrV B157 -158, B406-407, B420.

a category, because the experience that gives rise to that proposition is an indeterminate intuition. On the other hand, since we now speak of an empirically determined consciousness, it is necessary to take the existence of which we have consciousness categorially. Therefore, we must also take the intuition that is an occasion of this consciousness as a determinate intuition (or as one that is to be determined in this act) given to the inner sense. This does not mean that pure apperception can do without something given to the inner sense, but that it has no need to determine intuitions. For pure apperception, a rhapsodic succession of representations in the inner sense that can be taken, all of them, as mine is enough. It is not necessary to determine these representations in a specific order under categorical links: as we have pointed out before, what gives rise to the consciousness of the *I think* is the self-affection that takes place on the inner sense in the act by which the understanding gives unity to these representations. This unity does not need a previous act of liaison, it is a condition of it.

Furthermore, if the consciousness of one's own existence is to be determined, there must be something on which an act of determination can be exercised. This cannot be the *I think*. The only thing on which an act of synthesis can be exercised is, then, the representations that I have in the inner sense. In this way, I understand that what is determined cannot be, obviously, the self as a noumenon nor the synthetic unity of apperception, but the inner sense, putting a given place in time to each one of the representations that are otherwise given to me as a rhapsodic succession. To put it another way: what is determined is the stream of my consciousness.

This is what I understand Kant wants to point out when he relates the knowledge I have of myself as the object of intuition and of my internal perceptions with the act by which I draw a line.<sup>55</sup> In this example, Kant explains that we represent time by drawing a line, and in the drawing of the line we know the unity of its dimension, the determination of its temporal extension and the places that occupy the internal perceptions in time.<sup>56</sup> Now, the act of drawing the line (in our mind) is an action of the subject by which the manifold of the inner sense is synthesised, determining the latter.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the empirically determined consciousness entails self-affection once more. However, in this case, the self-affection does not have an opportunity for its action the recollection of a manifold in the original unity of consciousness, but the determination of the order in the representations of the inner sense, that is, the production of a link in the manifold. Through this action, we intuit ourselves

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<sup>55</sup> KrV B155-156.

<sup>56</sup> KrV B156.

<sup>57</sup> KrV B154-155.

through the inner sense insofar as we are internally affected by ourselves. And what we intuit about ourselves is the order that we produce in the determinations of the inner sense, as phenomena, in time.<sup>58</sup> This intuition of myself allows what was forbidden in the transcendental apperception: “I cognise myself not by being conscious of myself as thinking, but only if I am conscious to myself of the intuition of myself as determined in regard to the function of thought”.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the empirically determined consciousness of my own existence is, in the proper sense, self-knowledge. Phenomenal self-knowledge, of course, and not knowledge of the self as a thing in itself.

### 7. Knowledge and self-knowledge

In the example we discussed in the previous section, it is not irrelevant for Kant to choose the line as an external representation of time. It is by drawing the line, which is properly a spatial object, that the inner sense is determined. The drawing of the line, as the action of the subject, exerts a synthesis of the manifold in space. But in this action, the inner sense is also determined.<sup>60</sup> This should not surprise us if we consider that, according to Kant, every object of the external sense is necessarily also the object of the inner sense.<sup>61</sup> In any case, the underlying thesis is that the determination of the inner sense cannot be exercised if representations are not given to the external sense. Thereby Kant writes:

[...] we must always derive the determination of the length of time or also of the positions in time for all inner perceptions from that which presents external things to us as alterable; hence we must order the determinations of inner sense as appearances in time in just the same way as we order those of outer sense in space.<sup>62</sup>

It is not possible, thus, to establish an order in the representations of the inner sense without reference to the order of spatial objects.

This last idea, that the order of the representations of the inner sense needs the order of the objects of the external sense, can be approached referring again to the discussion with rational psychology. The fourth paralogism of rational psychology, as presented in the first edition of the *Critique*, holds that the consciousness of one's existence is immediate, while the existence of external phenomena must be inferred as the cause of our perceptions. According to this,

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<sup>58</sup> KrV B156.

<sup>59</sup> KrV B406.

<sup>60</sup> KrV B155.

<sup>61</sup> KrV A34 / B52.

<sup>62</sup> KrV B156.

the existence of external objects is doubtful.<sup>63</sup> In the second edition of the *Critique*, Kant describes this same stance in other terms: I distinguish my own existence as a thinking entity from other things outside of me. Therefore, I could exist as a thinking entity independently of those other things.<sup>64</sup> To this second formulation of the paralogism, Kant answers with something that we have already discussed in this work: the consciousness of one's existence in the *I think*, as a consciousness of a synthetic unity, is not possible without the representations on which the unity is exerted. Therefore, one cannot deduce the existence of the self as a thinking entity from the consciousness of existence given in apperception. However, what I am interested in discussing now is the idea that underlies both formulations of the fourth paralogism: the conviction that self-knowledge is immediate and knowledge of external objects is mediate. This conviction of the rational psychologist converges with another stance that Kant also tries to refute: problematic idealism. If knowledge of external objects is mediated, their existence must be inferred and, therefore, it is doubtful and indemonstrable.

Kant offers proof of the existence of external objects in a passage of the second edition of the *Critique* entitled "Refutation of idealism".<sup>65</sup> I cannot undertake here a detailed reconstruction of the argument,<sup>66</sup> but reviewing the central points of Kant's strategy can be fruitful in understanding the relation between self-knowledge and knowledge of external objects.

The theorem that Kant intends to prove is: "the mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me".<sup>67</sup> By taking self-consciousness as the premise, Kant establishes as a starting point for the argument the only knowledge that the problematic idealist accepts as doubtless. It should be noted, however, that Kant is not talking of self-consciousness as transcendental apperception, but of the consciousness of my existence as determined in time, that is, of empirical apperception.

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<sup>63</sup> KrV A355-367.

<sup>64</sup> KrV B409.

<sup>65</sup> KrV B274-279.

<sup>66</sup> Different attempts at a reconstruction can be found in: Henry Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism. An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 121–125; Efraín Lazos, *Disonancias de La Crítica. Variaciones Sobre Cuatro Temas Kantianos* (UNAM: Instituto de investigaciones filosóficas, 2014), 196–199; Jorge Ornelas, "La disolución kantiana del idealismo," *Revista de filosofía DIÁNOIA* 50, no. 55 (November 3, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.21898/dia.v50i55.354>, 101–104.

<sup>67</sup> KrV B275.

But would the problematic idealist be willing to grant this starting point? Or would he argue that the certainty of self-consciousness is exhausted in the *I think* of transcendental apperception? It seems to me that he must accept Kant's premise: by saying "I think", the problematic idealist is presupposing more than he would recognise.<sup>68</sup> Only empirical apperception allows the possibility of self-knowledge. Denying it and admitting only the *I think* of transcendental apperception would nullify self-knowledge, something that the problematic idealist does not do.<sup>69</sup> That said, it might seem that Kant can only use the self-consciousness determined in time as the premise of his argument because the problematic idealist does not want to give up self-knowledge. But what would happen if the idealists were willing to do it and accept only the *I think*? The question is rather if he can do it. Accepting "the empirically determined consciousness of my own existence" is not more than accepting that there is a certain temporal order in the representations of my inner sense (that is, that the "stream of my consciousness" is not just a rhapsodic flow of representations). Being able to question this premise already implies that my internal representations have a certain order. Only someone who did not know the order of their mental states could legitimately doubt this. But such a person would not be able to raise such a doubt. To say that self-knowledge is the existence determined in time is simply to accept that the knowledge of one's existence implies a sequence of representations among which a certain order can be established.

After stating his premise, Kant affirms that all temporal determination presupposes something permanent in perception.<sup>70</sup> So, if there is order in the representations of the inner sense, there must be something permanent. This premise, which is the cornerstone of the argument, is based on the first analogy. There it is established that, given that our apprehension of the manifold of appearance is always successive and changing, it does not allow itself to establish an objective order in the succession of our representations. Therefore, something permanent is needed as a criterion of the objective order of succession.<sup>71</sup> But, the proof continues, I do not find anything permanent in my internal experience, because it is precisely what is to be determined. If I accept: a) that my internal experience is determined, *i.e.*, that it is not rhapsodic, b) that something permanent is required as a criterion for that determination and

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<sup>68</sup> Alejandro Escudero Pérez, "El idealismo trascendental y el problema del mundo externo," *ENDOXA*, no. 18 (January 1, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.5944/endoxa.18.2004.508> 5, 143.

<sup>69</sup> Lazos, *Disonancias de La Crítica. Variaciones Sobre Cuatro Temas Kantianos*, 200.

<sup>70</sup> KrV B275.

<sup>71</sup> KrV A182 / B225-226.



c) that there is nothing in my internal experience that is permanent, then one should conclude, as Kant wants, that the determination of my inner sense is only possible if there are external objects that provide me with the perception of the permanent that serves as a criterion of determination. The empirically determined consciousness of my existence would then imply the immediate awareness of the existence of external objects.<sup>72</sup>

In this proof, Kant does not demonstrate inferentially from my self-knowledge the existence of external objects. It shows, rather, that self-knowledge, the experience that I have of myself, is only possible if I have immediate experience of external objects. Thus, the culmination of the test is not the demonstration of the existence of objects, but of the immediate experience we have of them. I cannot examine this argument thoroughly here. But the above is enough to clarify the thesis with which we began this section: self-knowledge is not possible without knowledge of external objects. It is necessary to emphasise that perceptions are not enough here (in contrast with what we said about transcendental apperception). The empirically determined consciousness needs knowledge of objects to which it can attribute permanence and, therefore, objects which can be determined under categories of relation. And insofar as it can execute these determinations on the objects, it determines accordingly the order and place that representations of the inner sense occupy in time. Therefore, without knowledge of external objects, there will be no self-knowledge.

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<sup>72</sup> KrV B275-276.

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