

PART I

Chapter One

Identity, Difference, and the Problem of Subjectivity

The philosophical problem of identity and difference has a long and intriguing history, from Platonic dialectic and Aristotelian metaphysics to its modern formulation within Kantian and post-Kantian idealism. The historico-conceptual background of this problem, however, is often neglected or else subsumed within an assumed narrative of the history of metaphysics.^[1] For this reason, our study of the Hegel-Heidegger relationship requires an abbreviated recollection of the history of this problem-complex and a discussion of how it comes to be connected with the problem of subjectivity. In summary form, we can identify at least five significant moments in the history of the identity/difference problematic: 1) the Platonic conception of unity in plurality, or negation as otherness, which articulates determinate beings such that they are unified and rendered intelligible according to their Idea; 2) the Aristotelian concept of identity that designates the underlying unity of selfsame substance and that allows us to identify and distinguish entities according to genus and differentia; 3) the empirical concept of personal identity or unity of one's consciousness over time as a function of memory, association, or habit (Locke, Hume); 4) the Kantian concept of the identity (synthetic unity) of the transcendental ego as the condition of possibility of categorically structured experience and knowledge; 5) the speculative identity-in-difference of universality, particularity, and individuality in the Hegelian Concept.

This conceptual-historical background supplies a context for Hegel's and Heidegger's explicit approaches to the problem of identity and difference, and will enable us, in the rest of this thesis, to discuss the implications of this problematic for both the overcoming of metaphysics and the critique of modernity. In our present context, it is not possible to give more than a very general account of some important moments in the complex history of this problematic, and no attempt is made here to offer a comprehensive treatment of major thinkers within the complex history of this problematic. Indeed, as many commentators indicate, we still lack a satisfactory and comprehensive history of the philosophical concepts of unity or identity, while a philosophical history of the concept of difference still remains to be written.^[2] Nonetheless, in schematic terms, we can formulate the transition from the ancient to the modern conception of the problem of identity and difference in the following

manner.

Ancient philosophy emerges with the recognition of the possibility of rationally distinguishing knowledge from opinion, well-grounded *episteme* from ungrounded *doxa*. Ancient thought, more concretely, commences with an inquiry into the ontic constitution of what exists (namely things) and then considers the question of their intelligibility for human beings (where such things can belong to natural kinds or else point towards higher categories of being). The possibility of higher kinds of knowledge, moreover, involves the intellection of ‘eternal’ unchanging truths such as those of mathematics and geometry. In this sense, the Platonic-Aristotelian approaches to the problem of unity and plurality established the basic metaphysical paradigm for the subsequent history of the identity/difference problematic. In very broad terms, the Platonic-Aristotelian solution to the problem of the unity in plurality of individuated beings lay in the doctrine of Ideas (for Plato) and the metaphysics of substance (for Aristotle). By interpreting difference as otherness, the non-being that articulates determinate being, Plato represents a pivotal point in the history of the problem of identity and difference: non-being is defined as *otherness*, and negation is presented as the operation that marks the determinate identity of something in contrast with an other. The apparent opposition between what is and otherness is therefore intrinsic to being itself.[3]

This Platonic line of inquiry was continued by Neoplatonists such as Plotinus, who developed the concepts of otherness, diversity, and difference into constitutive concepts of Neoplatonic philosophy.[4] For Aristotle and Porphyry, on the other hand, difference signified *specific difference*, the difference between species or kinds belonging to the same genus; nonetheless, difference also had the further sense of the otherness of things that share something in common. Medieval scholasticism, Aquinas in particular, adopted and extended this Aristotelian account of the varieties of identity and difference. Christian theology, moreover, integrated the Neoplatonic unity of the One, which reflects difference within itself, into a Trinitarian conception of a creative God, one in whom difference becomes a necessary element of the act of *creatio*, as the free positing of difference out of a reflexive Trinitarian unity.[5]

In the modern period, however, with the rise of the empirical natural sciences and mathematical-experimental approach to nature, attention increasingly turned towards the problem of the subjective conditions of knowledge. Indeed, the decisive shift from ancient to modern conceptions of identity and difference—from the principle of the unity of being to the unity of self-consciousness—occurred with Descartes’ reformulation of metaphysics according to the principle of the *ego cogito*. In this respect, the ancient understanding of being as independent substance gradually gave way to the Cartesian and then Kantian grounding of the unity of subject and object in transcendental self-

consciousness. The unity of thought and being thus began to shift from the doctrine of substance to that of self-conscious subjectivity. Consequently, the identity/difference problematic no longer simply articulated a principle of ontological intelligibility. Rather, the primacy of the self-consciousness, as the modern principle of identity and difference, brought the practical-moral aspects of subjectivity increasingly to the fore. Following from this, the identity of the autonomous subject of modernity within a highly differentiated social, historical, and cultural world increasingly became a pressing issue for modern thought. As we shall see, Hegel took up the challenge of suspending the ancient and modern versions of the identity/difference problematic—the substance/subject opposition—in order to engage in a critique of metaphysics that was at the same time a critique of modernity.

Identity, Difference, and Self-Consciousness

This movement towards a critical-reflective approach to the cognitive subject of knowledge was, however, by no means uniform. On the one hand, starting with Descartes and Locke, modern thought began to focus on the subjective possibility of acts of consciousness (raising the issue of the constitution of the cognitive subject) and thence considered the issue of how things (namely what exists for us) can and must be conceived, and, hence, the issue of the possibility of genuine scientific knowledge (of natural ‘laws’). On the other hand, equally modern thinkers such as Spinoza and Leibniz focussed on the systematic character of rational knowledge as comprising a logically interconnected whole of necessary truths, a system comprehensible within a rational metaphysics of monistic substance (as in Spinoza) or monadic individuals (as in Leibniz). Throughout the history of the identity/difference problem—with the notable exception of Spinoza and Leibniz—the individuality of *things* was either simply assumed (as by the empiricists or within nominalism) or else was analysed in terms of cognitive experience that allows us to discern and conceptualise differences in what is sensuously perceived. In summary form, we can say that the (ancient) unity of thought and Being in the *logos* was transformed into the (modern) unity of the subject-object relationship in cognitive experience. Indeed, Kant and the post-Kantians explicitly engaged with this problematic: the shift from identity and difference in things as they are intelligibly apprehended by the intellect to the identity and difference of the cognitive and transcendental subject and its relation to the world of objects.

This schematic overview, of course, cannot do justice to the complex interplay between Greek metaphysics, scholasticism, modern mathematics, mechanism, and experimental-scientific method in the crucial transitional period of seventeenth century philosophy. In this context it is Spinoza who plays a pivotal role, particularly for German Idealism and romanticism, in providing an alternative approach to the epistemologically oriented philosophy of consciousness stretching from Descartes and

Locke through Hume and Kant. Indeed, the influence of Spinoza's system of reason and overcoming of the mind/body opposition would become crucial, in quite divergent ways, for the post-Kantian projects of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.

Having said this, however, it is Kant who remains the decisive figure for the development of the problem of identity and difference as it is connected with the modern paradigm of subject and object. The following chapter therefore concentrates on the general problem-complex of identity and difference within the context of modern philosophy from Descartes to Kant and indicates how it becomes increasingly connected with the problematic of self-consciousness and empirical subjectivity. In the modern context, this ancient metaphysics of substance underwent a "Copernican" turn: the *unity of self-consciousness* was now taken as the principle underlying the intelligibility and unity of beings as experienceable and knowable for a self-reflective cognitive subject. Cartesian metaphysics, with its principle of the *cogito* as a "thinking substance," marked the beginning of this transition between the metaphysics of substance and that of subjectivity. Along with Descartes' 'subjectivist turn,' however, a related problematic began to emerge within the empiricist tradition. With the gradual shift from substance- to subject-metaphysics, the problem of identity and difference became inextricably linked with the question of the identity of the self, its unity over time, and the relation between Self and Other. The key figures in this regard are Locke and Hume, who developed and dissolved, respectively, the problematic of personal identity: Locke argued for a "loose" identity of the person over time as a function of memory and reflection, while Hume sceptically undermined the personal ego into a merely transient bundle of impressions held together by habit and association. Kant's critique of the Cartesian "substantialist" *cogito*, along with his transcendental-critical response to Humean scepticism, then constituted the modern version of the identity/difference problematic: the intelligibility of being now becomes grounded in the identity (or synthetic unity) of the transcendental ego.

It is important to underline that the notion of "subjectivity" (understood in a 'transcendental' rather than empirical sense) arose as a critical response to the problem of *personal identity* explored (and skeptically undermined) by Locke and Hume. The principle of subjectivity was supposed to provide a solution not only to the problem of the unity and knowability of beings, but also a secure ground for our experience of moral-practical autonomy. The ancient problem of the unity of thought and being was thereby recast in the modern paradigm of subject and object, the modern version of the dichotomy between reason and passion, freedom and nature, self and other which already occupied Plato and the Greeks.

With the rise of the natural sciences, mathematical-scientific method, and instrumental approach to nature, however, overcoming these traditional dichotomies became increasingly urgent, as evinced in the romantic reaction to the emerging formalist conception of reason and its explicitly

instrumental relation to nature. Indeed, the subject-object paradigm seemed to exacerbate some of the traditional dichotomies—between nature and freedom, reason and passion, self and other—that had already preoccupied ancient thought. Even with Kant, traits of Aristotelian substance were surreptitiously ascribed to the transcendental ego, which remained, despite its apparently formal-transcendental character, thus tethered to the categorical logic of identity and difference and residually committed to a metaphysics of substance. As distinct from the subject-object dualism of Cartesian (and Kantian) thought, however, Spinoza’s metaphysics sought to resolve the opposition between reason and passion. For Spinoza, passion could not be fundamentally opposed to reason since the passion of joy could itself enhance the development of rationality. Indeed, Spinoza’s overcoming of this opposition provided a major stimulus for the post-Kantian efforts to retain the methodological, epistemological, and critical insights of the Cartesian-Kantian “Copernican” turn, without remaining burdened by the seemingly irresolvable dichotomies associated with the modern subject-object paradigm.

The question in this context was how well the modern paradigm of identity and subjectivity was able to preserve and comprehend difference and otherness. As we shall see, the divided Kantian subject—split between transcendental, empirical, and noumenal egos, between theoretical and practical reason, subject and object, freedom and nature—prompted a number of post-Kantian attempts to overcome these dichotomies in favour of a genuinely speculative system of reason, a rational system that would be adequate to the divided character of the modern subject and, moreover, to the increasingly fragmented, “dirempted,” historical experience of modernity. With Kant, however, the transcendental ego remained, despite its apparently purely formal character, marked by the problem of its relationship to the empirical ego as well as to the noumenal subject of freedom. As we shall see, this transference of the identity/difference problematic to the domain of self-consciousness, and the challenge of overcoming the unresolved antinomies within this modern subject-object paradigm of reflection, established the fundamental context for Hegel’s radical rethinking of the problem of identity and difference in his critical confrontation with Kant, Fichte, and Schelling.

Descartes’ ambiguous cogito

According to an influential account of the history of modern philosophy, one endorsed, as we shall see, by Heidegger, Descartes overturned the Platonic-Aristotelian paradigm and inaugurated the modern epoch of metaphysics by turning towards the *self-certainty* of the cognitive subject. The *ego cogito* now provided a new and indubitable foundation for the unity and intelligibility of beings, that is, for the rational justification and reconstruction of all knowledge. Descartes’ search for a reliable method and sure foundation for knowledge was prompted in part by the enormous success during the

seventeenth century of the emerging natural and mathematical sciences. As a result, the mechanistic and quantitative approach of the natural and mathematical sciences provided a paradigm or model for the development of a distinctly philosophical-epistemological method. This influential interpretation of Descartes, however, can also suffer from a failure to acknowledge the key methodological role of radical *doubt* in arriving at the self-certainty of the *ego cogito*. Even though the thought of myself as an embodied sensuous being may be first in the everyday order of sense-perceptions, Descartes' method of radical doubt attempted to show—by “the general demolition of my opinions” (Med 18/12)—that this sensuous awareness has its basis, according to the order of reason, in myself as a purely self-conscious subject. The Cartesian project thus epistemically challenged everyday sense-perception and our awareness of corporeality in order to arrive at an unshakeable foundation for the rational reconstruction of systematic scientific knowledge. Pure self-consciousness is prior and more certain in the order of knowledge than what we cognize in the world of objects.

Indeed, it is worth mentioning that radical Cartesian doubt in fact presupposes that human beings are finite and prone to error, especially with respect to our knowledge, precisely because of our distance our separation from the infinite power of God. In contrast to the “Heideggerian” emphasis on the role of absolute self-certainty in Cartesian metaphysics, it could even be argued, as has been by Levinas, that the self-certainty of the Cartesian subject in fact presupposes a fundamental finitude, that is, a relation of dependency to God as the foundation of our knowledge and self-certainty as finite rational beings.^[6] This interpretation challenges the emphasis on eradicating finitude and grounding knowledge in the self-certainty of the cognitive subject that characterises the ‘standard’ depiction of Descartes as the source of the modern ‘epistemological’ and ‘foundationalist’ turn.

In any event, the role of radical doubt ushered a new paradigm of philosophical inquiry that was to shape much modern philosophy from Kant to Husserl. Through the hypothesis of the “malicious demon,” capable of producing entirely illusory beliefs and representations within us, the meditating subject comes to doubt the justifiability of all cognitive judgment. Nonetheless, my consciousness of doubting remains indubitably present throughout this process of radical doubt. Whatever judgments I might make, and whatever their validity, these judgments, while I maintain them, must also indubitably imply my own existence as a thinking being; cognition of any object implies, *a fortiori*, cognition of myself as a judging subject. Hence my *self-consciousness* within any conscious act—namely, “that this proposition *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind” (Med 25/17)—becomes the new Cartesian first principle. With this turn towards the self-certain *ego cogito*, however, arrived at through the *dubito* or method of radical doubt, Descartes did not completely abandon the Aristotelian paradigm of substance; for the Cartesian ego is itself a substance that underlies our perception and knowledge of the world. Acts of thinking or any

form of conscious awareness require “an intellectual substance to inhere in (Med 54/78): a conscious subject of possible judgments, a “thinking substance” that unifies our various cognitive acts. ‘First philosophy’ is thereby grounded in the *cogito* as thinking substance, the *fundamentum inconcussum* or indubitable foundation for the rational reconstruction of systematic scientific knowledge.

In our context, Descartes’ most interesting problem was to explain how the *ego cogito* was connected with the *personal identity* of the empirical subject: what is the connection Descartes makes between the subject of momentary self-awareness, the “I think”-something consciousness, and the empirical and enduring ego that maintains its own coherence and unity over time. As is well known, Descartes arrived at the indubitable *ego cogito* through a “bracketing” of the ordinary assumptions of empirical experience and by even doubting (momentarily) the validity of the truths of mathematics and geometry: only the indubitable consciousness of my own momentary self-awareness can be known without sceptical doubt. At the same time, however, Descartes also includes what we *seem* to perceive, what we merely *think* we are sensing, within the scope of certainty pertaining to the *ego cogito*.^[7] As Descartes remarks, it is the same ‘I’ that has the awareness of engaging in radical doubt as well as seeming to perceive the dubitable sensations and representations of internal states and external objects. Descartes himself poses the question concerning the nature of this “puzzling ‘I’ which cannot be pictured in the imagination” (Med 20/29). How is the subject of such momentary self-awareness, the puzzling “thinking thing,” also the changing empirical ego with its own enduring personal identity? The issue here is the *individuation* of the *cogito*: What individuates the *ego cogito* into my own particular empirical ego enduring over time?

Descartes’ general answer turned on the relationship between thinking and extended substance, the vexed question of the unity of mind and body. According to Descartes, my immediate consciousness of the act of doubting points to the fact that I can be certain of my thinking self in a manner in which I cannot be certain of my own body or states of bodily awareness. The sceptical argument concerning states of dreaming and radical sensory and cognitive deception establishes, according to Descartes, that my existence as a thinking substance is far more certain than the existence of my body or veracity of my sensory awareness. Indeed, Descartes will later attempt to show that thought is in fact independent of my body. In the “Sixth Meditation,” Descartes claims that the distinguishing criterion between them concerns the divisibility of the body as distinct from the indivisibility of the mind. Although parts of the body can be removed without a loss of conscious unity, the same cannot be said of the mind, for the latter comprises a singular and complete unity of perception, understanding, and willing (Med 59/86). This distinction between mind and body is supposed to show their independence of each other, even though Descartes acknowledges the intimate connection between the functioning of various parts of the brain and differences in conscious

awareness. If mental states are not always explicitly conscious, however, this also undermines Descartes' criterion for distinguishing mind and body.

The broader question arising at the point concerns the individuation of the *ego cogito* in respect of one's own temporal, corporeal existence. As Bourdin asks, if I cannot refer to mental states connected with my body, how do I know that it is in fact 'I' myself who thinks? My immediate self-awareness would seem to require reference to the perceived states of my body. Arnauld also questioned Descartes' seeming exclusion of the body from what indubitably belongs to one's essence. Doubting the body does not imply its radical independence from the mind; at best, Arnauld remarks, Descartes can argue "that I can obtain some knowledge of myself without knowledge of the body," but this is not sufficient to conclude that mind and body are radically separated. Besides which Descartes' attempt to recompose the "compound unity" of an individuated mind and body has recourse to the evidential power, however confused, of bodily sensations such as pain, hunger, and thirst (Med 56/80-1). Given the indivisibility of mind and divisibility of the body, and given the existence of a benevolent God who does not deceive me, Descartes concludes that I am indeed a unity of mind and body, that the natural belief that I am an individuated "combination" of mind and body must be true.

The identity of the *cogito* and empirical self becomes even more puzzling, however, once we consider the role of Descartes' peculiar 'atomic' theory of time (where each present moment is required to be created anew and sustained by the infinite power of God). Not only does God guarantee the veracity of our clear and distinct ideas, including the idea of unity of mind and body, God's "continuous creation" also ensures the temporal continuity of our finite existence. This problem of temporality and the *cogito* arose in the context of a discussion of the impossibility of finite human subjects existing independently of an infinite being, which, within the context of seventeenth-century rationalism, was simply assumed as necessarily true. As earlier remarked, Descartes repeatedly insisted on our finitude as cognitive subjects, prone to error and deception, who can only "touch" the Absolute in our thinking but can never adequately know it. In doing so, Descartes follows the seventeenth-century attempt to reconcile theology and the emerging natural sciences within a rationalism that embraces God and theology within, to use the Kantian phrase, the "bounds of reason" alone. Indeed, Descartes' key contention was that finite thinking subjects must necessarily depend on an infinite being for their continued existence. Our temporal continuity depends upon an infinite generative power: God's *sui generis* power of synthesis preserves the ongoing present, and thereby guarantees the temporal continuity of our existence.^[8] Having broached the issue of the temporal continuity, however, the difficulty still remained of explaining the *unity* of our self-awareness over time. Since memory remained suspended under radical and metaphysical doubt,^[9] only God's infinite synthetic power could guarantee the unity and temporal continuity of the thinking (and embodied) subject.

One problem in Descartes' account is that the identity or individuality of the soul or mind in an ontological sense is here simply presupposed. Expressed differently, Descartes cannot adequately explain the transition from the *ego cogito* as designating an act of consciousness to the *res cogitans* as designating an individual substance. This knowledge of my identity as a thinking mind—beyond revelation and in its immortality—itself originates and is guaranteed in its truthfulness solely by God, who implants in me the natural belief that I am an individuated “combination” of mind and body. Nonetheless, Descartes' dogmatic recourse to God as guaranteeing the unity of thinking and extended substances failed to solve the problem of the individuated unity of the *cogito* and personal ego. Instead, Descartes attempted to account for the unity of our temporal existence by having recourse to God's infinite power of synthesis.^[10] Descartes' failure to resolve this problem of individuation, I suggest, was connected with his commitment to an underlying substance-accident model of consciousness. According to latter, the ‘accidents’ of sensory awareness and perception must inhere within an independent substratum or substance. States of awareness must be attributable to a substantial subject or, in Descartes' words, are properties of “a thinking thing”. The *ego cogito*, as thinking substance, is expressed in various accidental conscious states; but this raises the issue of accounting for the unity of these states within the one, self-same, thinking substance.

The difficulty here is that of Cartesian dualism generally: the Cartesian model of consciousness implies that the cognitive subject, as thinking substance, can exist and be known independently of the world of objects, or extended substance, as well as isolated from other thinking subjects. Thinking substance is distinct and independent of extended substance. How then to explain our knowledge of objects, our self-knowledge, and knowledge of other self-conscious subjects? In response, Descartes dogmatically asserts the cognitive unity of subject and object: the cognitive relationship with external objects is grounded in clear and distinct ideas, the veracity of which—via the intermediary of our native rationality or infallible power of the “natural light”—are grounded in God's benevolent power. We encounter here the famous “Cartesian circle”—namely, that clear and distinct ideas are true because God implanted in us the “natural light” of reason, and we know that God exists because we have a clear and distinct idea of His existence. As his early critics noted, Descartes appears to argue here in a circular manner: it seems that true knowledge, revealed through clear and distinct ideas, depends on God, and we know that God exists because we have a clear and distinct idea of Him. Descartes seems to lapse into vicious circularity concerning the crucial problem of the relationship between the veracity of clear and distinct ideas and the existence of God.

This account of Descartes has, however, been disputed by recent commentators. John Cottingham (1986) has argued that certain clear and distinct ideas, namely those that are immediately present to us, can be known to be true without recourse to God. In reply to his critics, Descartes points

out that in claiming that we can know nothing for certain until we know that God exists, he was referring only to knowledge of conclusions which can be recalled only when no longer attending directly to the argumentative steps by which we arrived at these conclusions. In other words, as Cottingham notes, this clearly implies “that at the time when I am clearly and distinctly perceiving a proposition, I do not need knowledge of God to be sure of its validity (1986, 66). Descartes attempts to avoid the circularity charge by maintaining that there are at least some propositions that are known to be self-evidently true, without divine guarantee, so long as we are mentally attending to them (as is the case with the “I am, I exist” associated with the *ego cogito*). Cottingham adds that the traditional charge of (vicious) circularity in Descartes is plausible only if one assumes that Descartes’ method of radical doubt suspends even the truths of mathematics and geometry. But to take this ‘extreme’ view of the extent of Cartesian doubt—that it extends even to one’s present intuition of clearly and distinctly perceived truths—would make unjustifiable even the elementary forms of cognition presupposed in the inquiry, and thus render virtually impossible the entire project of arriving at truth through the method of radical doubt. On this view, Descartes simply argues that God is required to ensure the veracity of knowledge in the broad sense, but is not required to guarantee the self-evidence of certain indubitable propositions being attended to by the thinking subject.[\[11\]](#)

Even if one accepts the claim that Descartes is able to avoid, or at least ameliorate, the charge of vicious circularity, the problem of explaining the unity and interaction between thinking and extended substances still remains. Descartes’ various attempts to explain the unity of mind and body, their co-ordination and interaction despite their radical distinction, failed to adequately meet the objections presented already by Descartes’ contemporaries. The radical distinction between consciousness and extended bodies, as Princess Elisabeth argued, raises the problem of explaining precisely *how* conscious subjectivity can interact with, and causally affect and be affected by, extended, non-conscious, bodies. Descartes response involved the claim that the mind and body are actually “very closely conjoined” or “intermingled” with each other, as can be shown by the examples of bodily pain, hunger, and thirst (Med 81?). Descartes’ claim is further developed in his account of the animal spirits and curious role of the pineal gland discussed in the *Passions of the Soul*.[\[12\]](#) Nonetheless, Descartes’ dogmatic recourse to God failed to explain the interaction between mind and body, unity-in-difference of the subject-object relationship, the relationship between the *ego cogito* and empirical ego, or, indeed, how the cognitive subject maintains its unity and continuity over time.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the Cartesian dualism of thinking and extended substance emerged in Spinoza’s metaphysical monism of absolute substance. Descartes’ error, according to Spinoza, concerned the positing of more than one substance, indeed, a conception that all finite individuals—which Spinoza called “modes” or modifications of substance—were themselves finite

substances. The result of such a “substantialising” of individuals was Descartes’ problematic dualism, in fine, his failure to account for the substantial unity of mind and body. For how could independent substances, that were really distinct from each other, somehow causally interact with one another? Spinoza’s solution was to argue for the existence of one substance, and one substance only, expressed and known (at least for us human beings) under two different attributes, namely thought and extension. Finite individuals are modes or modifications of the one ontologically and epistemically independent substance, *Deus sive Natura*, or what Spinoza otherwise called *natura naturans* or *causa sui*. The problem of the relationship between mind and body is resolved, for Spinoza, in that mind and body are different expressions, or independent but incommensurable descriptions, of the one existing substance, on the one hand understood under the attribute of thought, on the other grasped under the attribute of extension. Indeed, what we call “the mind” is simply the complex “idea” corresponding to the complex organization of our bodies; these are independent descriptions of one and the same entity as a finite modification of substance. Cartesian dualism is the effect of a faulty ontology that posits a real distinction between mind and body where there is rather only a conceptual one within a monism of substance.

Nonetheless, the scandal of Spinoza’s metaphysical monism was to be found in the problem of *self-consciousness*, the issue incited his admirers and enemies alike in the context of post-Kantian idealism and romanticism. How does Spinoza account for self-consciousness, the universality and individuation of self-conscious subjectivity, within the metaphysical monism of substance as God or Nature? The mind may be the idea of the body, and self-consciousness (at least in an empirical sense) may be accounted for as the reflexive “idea of ideas,” but how can Spinoza address, from within a system of metaphysical monism, the problem of self-consciousness as condition or principle of the coherent unity of empirical experience and knowledge? Moreover, Spinoza’s account of freedom as the recognition of rational necessity raised the thorny problem of accounting for our power of rational freedom of thought, which allows us to attain the third level of knowledge (rational intuition), as well as of accounting for our autonomy of judgment and action, the fundamental principle of rational moral-ethical action. For all Spinoza’s profound influence, it was the problem of the individuation of subjectivity that provided the impetus for further inquiry into the principle of self-consciousness as the condition of possibility of unified experience and moral autonomy. As Hegel was later to remark about Spinoza’s system, the standpoint of substance is a necessary one, but substance must also be thought as subject if we are to truly comprehend rational freedom as autonomy and self-realisation.

After Descartes and Spinoza, the problem of the identity and difference of self-consciousness developed along two distinct lines: Locke’s and Hume’s analyses of *personal identity*, and Kant’s *transcendental subject* as the principle of unity underlying our cognitive experience. For Locke and Hume,

the attempt to ground cognition in sense perception and reflection raised the problem of the *unity* of consciousness over time. For Kant and the idealists, by contrast, the problem of the unity of consciousness could be solved only by recourse to the unifying and synthesising activity of the transcendental ego. This in turn raised the problem of accounting for the relation between transcendental subjectivity, as the condition of possibility of all cognition, and the objectivity of the categories structuring our cognitive judgments. At the same time, the problem of how the general structure of subjectivity conditions not only personal identity but also the moral-practical experience of freedom became increasingly significant. In sum, Kant faced the problem of accounting for the relation between transcendental subjectivity and personal identity, the individuation of the subject in its identity and difference.

Personal Identity and its Dissolution: Locke and Hume

Locke critically questioned Descartes' assumption that the human mind could be known to be a thinking substance, namely, that which supports the various impressions and attitudes of consciousness. The concept of a pure substance, Locke argued, remains empty; it is a presupposition that we require but cannot demonstrate or determinately know. Analysing such a concept reveals nothing "but the supposed, but unknown support of those Qualities, we find existing, which we imagine cannot subsist, *sine re substante*, without something to support them" (Essay 296).[\[13\]](#) Nonetheless, although such a concept of substance is, strictly speaking, *unprovable*, this does not mean that it is *unreasonable*. Indeed, Locke himself operates with a modified version of the concept of substance as defining the spatio-temporal identity of a finite intelligence. Descartes, too, postulated an underlying mental substance that 'supports' the diverse mental states subsumed under the title 'thinking'. However, since we can give as little content to the concept of thinking substance as to that of extended substance, Locke argued that we can no more exclude the latter from our essence as define ourselves by the former (Essay 298). The concept of substance thus has no real use in respect of personal identity, since it does not ensure the personal identity of the Cartesian *ego cogito* as a thinking subject in general.

The point of Locke's critique was to suggest that other criteria of self-identification and individuation are necessary if we are to understand the unity of our consciousness over time. To do so, however, requires clarification of the various senses of the concept "identity," whose basic sense, according to Locke, refers to the *numerical identity* of a distinct, spatio-temporally located entity (Essay 328). Indeed, the concepts of identity and diversity arise in the act of comparing a spatio-temporally located entity with itself at a later moment in time. Identity is attributed to an entity that maintains its

numerical distinctiveness and specific qualities over changes in its spatio-temporal location. Entities that differ in spatio-temporal location from each another are numerically distinct. Further, the concept of “identity” is used differently when applied to various substances: there is God’s identity as infinite, unalterable and eternal substance; the identity of finite intelligences defined by their spatio-temporal origin; and the identity of material bodies defined by the stable configuration of a definite mass of atoms (Essay 329). The identity of a living creature or organism differs from the identity of an inert object or matter by virtue of the specific organisation and configuration of parts. In this case, identity refers to the particular organic disposition of elements, themselves changing and altering, that make up the enduring unity of the organism.

Locke’s innovation, however, was to consider the peculiarities of personal identity, which differs from the identity of objects, and hence to challenge the inappropriate attribution of “strict” identity to the (moral and psychological) person. Indeed, Locke argues that personal identity is “loose” rather than “strict; it has more a *practical-moral* than epistemological or metaphysical significance. Personal identity involves understanding oneself as a person, that is, as a unified locus of consciousness shaped by a memory of one’s past actions and mental states. *Reflection* provides for our consciousness of self within the singular present moment, while *memory* establishes our continuity of consciousness across the past, our orientation in the present, and our future expectations. Hence the description of oneself as a person with a definite identity is not a metaphysical claim about the identity of a substance, but rather a “Forensick” term designating moral and legal responsibility (Essay 346).^[14] Personal identity always involves the question of moral-practical responsibility for one’s actions, a question that simply did not arise in Descartes’ account of the substantial subject.

This problem is tantamount to the question of our knowledge of personal identity over time. Locke’s answer drew on two sources: reflection, the act of consciousness whereby a representation of a given perception (or other representation) is formed; and memory, as the psychological faculty of association and recollection that provides unity and continuity to one’s past representations and actions. There were difficulties, however, with each of these options: first, that Locke drew on a viciously “circular” model of consciousness in order to explain our consciousness of self and personal identity; and second, the problem, raised by Molyneux, of reconciling personal identity and personal responsibility with failures of memory and lapses of consciousness. How could one be responsible for acts performed but not remembered (for example, during drunkenness)? Locke maintained that personal identity extends only so far as the consciousness of one’s actions and mental states; nonetheless, Locke ultimately had to accept that lapses of consciousness or memory do not in fact exclude responsibility. Although Locke insisted that personal identity was a moral and legal concept, dependent on consciousness and memory, he did not adequately account for how losses of

consciousness or memory might complicate questions of moral responsibility.

Hume's sceptical response to the difficulties Locke encountered was to question our phenomenal descriptions of personal identity and conscious subjectivity. Hume did so, moreover, by assuming a radically perceptual model of self-consciousness, leaving only an associative, loosely unified subject that remained vulnerable to sceptical doubt. According to Hume, the concept of substance dissolves into nonsense the moment we ask what it signifies. For the meaning of any concept derives either from an impression of sensation or an impression of reflection, that is, either from immediate or reflexive perception (T 232-233). Since we cannot point to any perception corresponding to a substance, the concept of substance remains unacceptably obscure. Independence of existence cannot distinguish between a substance and its accidents, since thoughts, perceptions, and properties may exist independently without 'inhering' within a substratum.^[15] The concept of substance thus remains empty: "What possibility then of answering that question, *Whether perceptions inhere in a material or immaterial substance*, when we do not so much as understand the meaning of the question?" (T 234).

Hume thus cast the idea of an identical subject, enduring amidst the flux of sense impressions, under sceptical doubt. Cartesian philosophers may well believe that they are "every moment intimately conscious of what we call our SELF", that they are "certain, beyond the evidence of demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity" (T 251). They nonetheless lack any experiential basis for such a concept. If we are to clarify the concept of 'self', we must inquire after its phenomenal givenness in experience. Any representation of the 'I' could only derive from the flux of sense impressions, each of which remains temporally and numerically distinct; yet there are no constant impressions according to which we can justify the concept of a strictly identical self. Following Locke, Hume challenged not only the conceptual obscurity of the 'self', but the conception of the subject as an underlying substance 'supporting' a flux of perceptions. Within this flux there is no unified impression from which we could derive the representation of a "simple and continu'd" self (T 252). The conception of a substantial subject thus proves to be epistemically unfounded.

Hume offered as an alternative the so-called 'bundle' theory of the self. All that we can identify through 'inner perception' is a flux of associated perceptions lacking strict identity. What we call "the mind," Hume claims, consists in nothing but bundles of "different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (T 252). Perceptions do not inhere in any underlying substance, but rather subsist alone in variable configurations. Hume thus rejects any strict sense of identity (in the sense of a unique spatio-temporal location) in favour of an "imperfect identity" over time of loosely associated, successive perceptions. In Hume's famous formulation:

The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity (T 253).

We observe only a succession of perceptions, yet ascribe a fictitious identity to this succession as though it belonged to a substantial subject. We wrongly attribute substantial identity to a flux of perceptions that consists, rather, in diverse relations of succession.

This prompts the question as to *why* we conceive ourselves in terms of identity when this conception of the subject remains untenable. Hume's answer is that we confuse the identity of spatio-temporal objects over time with the relation and connection of successive subjective states. We erroneously ascribe 'strict' identity, which we normally attribute to objects, to the flux of successive perceptions which defines our subjective experience. We take distinct objects to be continuous and unchanging in their *identity* over time, but we also have the concept of *diversity*, the concept of "several different objects existing in succession, and connected by a close relation" (T 253). The concept of identity depends on the relations of *resemblance*, *contiguity*, and *causation*, relations which taken together result in our attribution of an "objective" identity to enduring objects. The resemblance between the perception of an uninterrupted object and the succession of related objects is the source of the confusion which results in the attribution of identity to the self (T 254). To account for the relation between successive diverse perceptions we similarly posit an enduring substrate or identical self.

Hume's complicated account of personal identity can only be briefly discussed here in terms of its most influential reception and understanding. To this end we can indicate two parts to Hume's account: an explanation of the identity of material objects persisting in time, which depends on the (imperfect) constancy of their impressions unified according to concepts of resemblance, contiguity, and causality; and the transference of this concept of identity to the *self*, such that the flux of successive sensations and representations gains a certain constancy from the attribution of the categories of resemblance, contiguity, and causality. Our objectification of the self is thus prompted by our psychological propensity to confuse the spatio-identity of objects with relations of successive perceptions. In this sense, we posit a 'fictitious' unifying principle as bringing together the often interrupted perceptions that make up our conscious awareness.^[16] The metaphysical fiction of an identical, enduring, "objectified" self is motivated by the need to account for the diversity and interrupted character of our perceptual-cognitive experience.

The flux of consciousness might well consist in relations of successive perceptions, yet these

'bundled' perceptions nonetheless cohere in the unity of my own consciousness. How then do we reconcile the flux of diverse perceptions with their unity within one consciousness? Hume's positive answer to this question is a psychological account of self-consciousness which points to the role of association by the imagination and the causal role of *memory* in generating the illusion of strict identity. The role of memory in both *discovering* and *constituting* personal identity becomes decisive here, for it is our memory of the similarity of past perceptions that facilitates their association and attribution to an identical subject. Hume argues, moreover, that the role of the memory-based *causal* relation provides the principle that unifies our disparate perceptual states. The true account of human consciousness is "as a system of different perceptions or different existences, which are link'd together by the relation of cause and effect, and mutually produce, destroy, influence, and modify each other" (T 261). Hume even argues that the origin of our concept of causation lies in our memory of past perceptions, the constant conjunction of various objects or states of affairs.

Hume's psychological account of the concept of causality nonetheless raises certain questions. There is the *psychological* sense in which we derive our concept of causality ("necessary connection") from the memory of repeated conjoined states of affairs, objects, and events (T 73-78). This psychological account presupposes a self-conscious subject capable of remembering the past. However, to explain this power of memory, Hume also appeals to a *non-psychological* sense of causality: memory is itself a productive, causal power that, "by producing the relation of resemblance among the perceptions" (T 261), contributes to our sense of personal identity. Memory causally produces and relates—in a non-psychological sense—past and present perceptual states. On the other hand, memory is the *psychological origin* of our concept of causality. This results in a certain tension between the role of memory and the concept of causation: the concept of causality presupposes memory, that is, a self-conscious subject capable of remembering; but the coherence of this subject is itself explained through the causal operations of memory in forging a coherent sense of self. To be sure, Hume never denies that the concept of "cause" can be used to explain human psychology. Indeed, his claim is simply that the concept of "cause" cannot be provided with any ultimate legitimation or justification that removes all sceptical doubt, and that this includes the use of causality with respect to memory and self-consciousness. Hume's account thereby points to the ambiguity of the psychological sense of 'causality' as association (presupposing the faculty of memory), and the non-psychological sense of 'causality' as a category (itself used in explaining memory). Such ambiguity, according to Hume's sceptical critique, renders problematic any simple psychological account of personal identity, and points to the difficulty of legitimating the concept of causality in respect of the unity of our psychological experience. The concepts of personal identity and causality in the psychological domain thus remain subject to sceptical doubt.

Kant's transcendental idealism represents a turning point in the history of the problem of identity and difference. Kant transformed the traditional substance model of beings into a critical inquiry into the conditions of possibility of experience grounded in the identity of self-consciousness. Descartes inaugurated the modern turn to the thinking subject as the principle of the unity of knowledge; Locke and Hume then criticised Descartes' substantial subject, but still assumed inner perception could reveal the constitution of personal identity. Kant's 'Copernican' revolution then challenged both substantial and perceptual models by inverting the traditional subject-object relationship: objects of experience must conform to the subject's conditions of cognition, instead of the reverse. The subject-object relation no longer meant that knowledge ought to correspond to things in themselves, but rather that the subject's self-relation provides the certainty which grounds objective cognition. Kant thus brings the problems of subjectivity and identity together in a profound and consequential way: The subject-object relation finds its principle in the *a priori* synthetic unity of self-consciousness; the identity of the transcendental ego grounds the objective validity of the categories that condition and structure all possible experience.

Kant's transcendental breakthrough resolved Hume's conflict between the disparity of singular presentations and the unity of their connection within one consciousness. According to Kant, Humean analysis was unable to attain the level of *transcendental* apperception, the *a priori* condition of the possibility of empirical consciousness and self-consciousness (KRV A106-107).^[17] The identity of the transcendental ego, however, remains inaccessible to empirical self-consciousness. We cannot empirically experience the "necessary" identity of pure self-consciousness, since it remains an *a priori* transcendental condition of experience in general. Against empiricist scepticism, Kant claimed that the identity of pure self-consciousness—the "synthetic unity of apperception"—is the "highest point" of transcendental philosophy (KRV B134 n.), indeed the "supreme principle in all human cognition" (KRV B135). As we shall see, the difficulty Kant faced was that of accounting for the comprehensive unity of the transcendental ego, the empirical self, and the noumenal self of moral freedom. The same problem of individuating self-consciousness returns in Kant's account of the transcendental ego and its relation to practical reason.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant proposed to undertake a self-critique of the power of reason as such and of the cognitions that reason may arrive at "*independently of all experience*" (KRV Axii). This meant an inquiry, based on principles, into the possibility of metaphysics itself, where "metaphysics" referred to that inquiry aiming at "speculative cognition by reason": "a cognition through mere concepts" (KRV Bxiv) that transcends experience in order to attain "the unconditioned"

that reason demands (KRV Bxx). Kant's task was to provide a critical analysis of the possibility and limits of speculative metaphysics, and thereby to set metaphysics, purified through the critique of reason, "onto the secure path of a science" (KRV Bxxiii). Central to this project was the principle of unity to which pure reason must conform, the unity of the system of reason which reason, as the power of *a priori* principles, aims to construct.^[18] The question to consider is whether Kant can adequately account for the putative unity of pure self-consciousness as the highest principle of transcendental idealism, and thus whether Kant's articulation of the relationship between theoretical and practical reason can fulfil reason's own demand for unity.

Of most interest in our context is Kant's account of pure apperception as the condition of the possibility of empirical consciousness and self-consciousness. Kant argued that we cannot address the problem of self-consciousness simply through recourse to empirical intuition or 'introspection'. Rather, in order to justify our claims to objective knowledge, we must justify our concept of an identical subject of judgments enduring amidst the perceptual and temporal flux. Against the empiricist recourse to inner perception, Kant employed the method of transcendental argumentation: we can account for empirical self-awareness only by investigating its transcendental, that is, *a priori*, conditions of possibility. Kant's threefold task was to show that the possibility of our cognitive experience, especially our capacity for making *a priori* synthetic judgments, depends upon three basic features of human cognition: a) that all experience presupposes the *pure a priori* forms of intuition (space and time); b) that the *pure a priori* concepts of the understanding (the categories) subjectively structure our cognition of objects, taken strictly as appearances; and c) that we must delimit, organise, and unify the application of these concepts, within possible experience, under principles of pure reason. In sum, the critique of pure reason must explicate the subjective *a priori* conditions of experience (the spatio-temporal givenness of objects unified according to discursive concepts) in order to account for the coherence of our cognition of objects and of ourselves as unified subjects. To this end, Kant proposed the "transcendental unity of apperception" as the basic principle grounding the various syntheses that make up our cognition of objects of experience.

Cognition through human understanding, for Kant, is a *discursive* cognition through *concepts*, where concepts are based on the spontaneity of thought rather than the receptivity of sensibility. Concepts are predicates of possible judgments; they rest on the logical *functions* of judgment, where "function" refers to "the unity of the act of collecting various presentations under one common presentation" (KRV A 68/B 93). Judgments are functions of unity among presentations in which many presentations are drawn together and unified in the cognition of an object. The understanding [*Verstand*], in turn, is the power of judgment or rather of *rules* governing judgment.^[19] The logical functions of thought in judgment can be brought under the four headings of *quantity, quality, relation,*

and *modality* (KRV A70/B95).^[20] Kant then defines, on the basis of these logical functions, the categories as *pure concepts of the understanding*: the categories are *a priori* functions that give unity to the various presentations in a judgment, and also to the mere synthesis of presentations in an intuition, and which apply *a priori* to objects of intuition as such (KRV A79/B104-105). Kant's famous table of categories corresponds to the logical functions of judgment, with four headings each containing three categories: hence there are categories of *quantity* (unity, plurality, allness), of *quality* (reality, negation, limitation), of *relation* (substance and accident, cause and effect, community between agent and patient), and of *modality* (possibility-impossibility, existence-non-existence, necessity-contingency).^[21] The categories are the *a priori* concepts of synthesis belonging to the understanding *a priori*, pure concepts synthesising empirical presentations and concepts in our cognition of objects of experience.

In short, Kant's categories were supposed to provide the necessary subjective conditions for the possibility of objective knowledge. The difficult task of justifying "how *subjective conditions of thought* could have *objective validity*" (KRV A89/B122) fell to the notorious *transcendental deduction*. Kant sought to demonstrate, in the latter, the necessary conditions for the possibility of all cognition of objects, and thus to explain "in what way concepts can refer to objects *a priori*?" (KRV B117/A85). The aim of the deduction was to demonstrate the objective validity of the categories, and to show that their transcendental ground or condition was to be found in the *a priori* synthetic unity of apperception. Kant's infamously difficult and obscure argumentation in the transcendental deduction cannot be reconstructed here.^[22] Instead I shall emphasise a number of salient points pertinent to our discussion of Kant's contribution to the problem of identity and difference and its connection with the principle of self-consciousness in modern thought.

In very schematic terms, Kant claimed that the identity of self-consciousness was expressed by the 'I think' that (potentially) accompanies every conscious presentation [*Vorstellung*]. In Kant's words:

The *I think* must be *capable* of accompanying all my presentations. For otherwise something would be presented to me that could not be thought at all—which is equivalent to saying that the presentation would either be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me (KRV B131-132).

All human thought, in other words, is potentially self-reflexive. Given this reflexivity of consciousness, the objective validity of the categories, according to Kant's transcendental argument, depends upon the *a priori* identity (understood as synthetic unity) of the transcendental ego. Presentations must be capable of being *combined* in one consciousness such that they can be *thought* and experienced as belonging to one and the same conscious subject (that is to say they have the act of apperception, the 'I

think', in common). The "manifold" that is passively given in sensuous intuition must also have this necessary reference to the *I think* in one and the same subject that experiences this manifold. Because this *I think* is an act of spontaneity or apperception that does not belong to intuition, Kant calls it *original apperception*, the a priori self-consciousness or spontaneous activity that "produces" the presentation *I think* to which all sensuous intuition and presentations are referred (KRV B132). Kant further specifies that this *unity* of apperception is a *transcendental* unity of self-consciousness because it is what makes possible any *a priori* cognition of which we might be capable. The manifold presentations in any experience could only be apprehended as *my own* if we presuppose the synthetic unity of originary apperception. This capacity for a priori synthetic unity, Kant will go on to argue, is the condition for all use of the understanding as the faculty of rules. This transcendental unity of pure self-consciousness conditions the application of the discursive categories, such that the latter can discursively unify manifolds of intuition under concepts in order to establish objective cognition. Hence the objectivity of our subjective presentations and cognitive judgments, Kant will conclude, is justified by reference to the transcendental unity and spontaneous activity of originary apperception.

A question to consider further in our context is precisely what Kant meant by the necessary "identity" of pure self-consciousness, given that transcendental self-consciousness is defined as an "act of spontaneity" (KRV B132). Here one must distinguish between *personal* identity in Locke and Hume's sense and the *transcendental* identity of Kantian "pure" or "originary" apperception. Kantian apperception is that non-sensuous activity of thought or synthesis potentially connected with any of my conscious presentations; the synthetic activity combining all possible presentations as belonging to one and the same consciousness. The synthetic activity of self-consciousness combines all these presentations within the unity of my own individual consciousness. For any given manifold of presentations "would not one and all be *my* presentations, if they did not all belong to one self-consciousness" (KRV B132). The identity of the transcendental ego, in short, is not an analytic but rather a *synthetic unity*: the thoroughgoing identity of oneself in regard to all possible presentations that can ever belong to our cognition (KRV A116), the possibility or capacity of synthesising all possible presentations with each other within one and the same consciousness. The synthetic unity of apperception is the condition of possibility of the very concept of combination. This power of synthesis and combination is performed by the understanding, which Kant defines as "the power to combine a priori and to bring the manifold of intuitions under the unity of apperception" (KRV B134-135).[\[23\]](#)

The meaning of the identity of pure self-consciousness as a necessary synthetic unity nonetheless remains rather obscure. To clarify the issue, Kant draws an argumentative analogy between consciousness and self-consciousness in order to explain how the analytic unity of apperception

presupposes synthetic unity. Now the analytic unity of *consciousness* is that consciousness which accompanies different presentations gathered under a common concept, such as the concept 'red'. The synthetic unity of consciousness, by contrast, is that power of empirical synthesis that allows us to compare and combine these presentations with each other at all (KRV B133-134 n.). The analytic unity of consciousness thus presupposes synthetic combination or the synthetic unity of consciousness. Kant then compares and equates this case with *self-consciousness*: the necessary *analytic* unity of *self-consciousness* (namely, the possibility of 'I think' consciousness accompanying any one of my presentations) likewise presupposes the a priori *synthetic unity* of self-consciousness (the possibility of combining all possible presentations within one and the same unified self-consciousness). Kant concludes:

Hence only because I can combine a manifold of given presentations *in one consciousness*, is it possible for me to present the *identity itself of the consciousness in these presentations*. I.e., the *analytic* unity of apperception is possible only under the presupposition of some *synthetic* unity of apperception (KRV B133-134).

The synthetic unity of self-consciousness makes possible the attachment of the 'I think' to any of my presentations as belonging to the one and the same subject: synthetic unity of apperception conditions the analytic unity of apperception. To be sure, the thought of the *a priori* synthetic unity of self-consciousness does not imply that we are empirically conscious of the actual *synthesis* of these presentations.^[24] Nevertheless, if we are to account for our empirical self-awareness and objective cognition, we must presuppose the possibility of an *a priori identity* (synthetic unity) of self-consciousness. Otherwise, as Kant argues, "I would have a self as many-coloured and varied as I have presentations that I am conscious of" (KRV B134).

The problem that arose here, however, was the status of this synthetic unity or identity of self-consciousness, a problem which became the point of departure for the various post-Kantian versions of self-conscious subjectivity. Indeed, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel all insisted, in different ways, that we *can* have knowledge of pure self-consciousness, a possibility that Kant explicitly rejects. The nature of finite understanding, for Kant, is such that it can only actively synthesise a manifold of intuition given to it from passive sensibility: "Our understanding can only *think*, and must seek intuition in the senses" (KRV B135). For cognition to be possible, the understanding must synthesise and combine under discursive rules a manifold of intuition given through sensibility. This dualism between concept and intuition, however, rules out any knowledge of pure self-consciousness; since it is a non-sensuous act of spontaneity, pure self-consciousness is impossible to know.^[25]

Kant explicitly argues this claim in the B-version of the paralogisms of rational psychology. We are acquainted with the identity of pure self-consciousness “only by its being an indispensable requirement for the possibility of experience” (KRV B420), that is, by transcendental inference. The paralogism in the idea that we can know ourselves as substantial subjects occurs, Kant argues, when we take the unity of consciousness underlying the categories “to be an intuition of the subject as an object” (KRV B421). We then (illegitimately) apply the category of substance to this formal unity of thought as though we had an intuition of ourselves as unified subjects (KRV B421). This unity of apperception, however, is only a unity of *thought* to which no given intuition corresponds. We cannot, therefore, cognize the transcendental subject at all, except as a transcendently inferred condition of experience (KRV B420). Any attempt to know this purely formal subject by objectifying it into a substantial subject—as in Descartes—remains circular, for it presupposes precisely the thought of pure self-consciousness it seeks to explain.

Hence the subject of the categories cannot by thinking the categories acquire a concept of itself as an object of the categories. For in order to think the categories, this subject must use as a basis its pure self-consciousness, which—after all—was to be explicated (KRV B422).

After having ruled out knowledge of the transcendental subject, Kant then immediately claims, in a famous footnote, that we *are* capable of an empirical perception of pure self-consciousness.

The *I think* is, as has been said already, an empirical proposition, and contains the proposition *I exist*. [...] The proposition *I think* expresses an indeterminate empirical intuition, i.e., perception (and hence it does prove that sensation, which as such belongs to sensibility, underlies this existential proposition). But the proposition *I think* precedes the existence that is to determine the object of perception through the category with regard to time; and the existence is here not yet a category (KRV B422-423 n.).

Three significant difficulties arise from this passage: a) the ‘I think’ is here an empirical (that is, synthetic) proposition and yet elsewhere is described as an analytic one; b) the empirical perception and sensation attributed to the ‘I think’ seems at odds with its purely formal, logical character; c) the existence Kant attributes to the transcendental ego suggests a *third* kind of reality that is neither phenomenal nor noumenal.[\[26\]](#)

To begin with a), Kant claims here that the ‘I think’ is an empirical proposition, which means it is *synthetic* (Cf. KRV B420, B428); yet Kant elsewhere suggests that the “necessary unity of apperception” is an *analytic* proposition.[\[27\]](#) This confusing situation calls for some clarification. The originary *identity* of pure apperception, according to Kant, is “entirely independent of all conditions of

sensible intuition” (KRV B137). But this necessary unity of apperception is not to be confused with the “I think” as an empirical proposition. The necessary unity of apperception referred to above is the *synthetic* unity of apperception that is necessary for any experience to be possible. The “I think,” by contrast, is the *analytic* unity that must be capable of attaching to our representations but does not have to do so; indeed, when the “I think” does in fact accompany our representations, it does so at definite *time* and is hence a synthetic or an empirical proposition (hence Kant’s reference in the footnote at B422-423 n. quoted above to the determination of the category with respect to time).

This interpretation goes some way towards removing some of the difficulty and confusion arising from Kant’s apparent description of the “I think” as both an empirical and an analytic proposition. Nonetheless, Kant’s account is hardly clear and unequivocal. Indeed, as Kant argues, the “simple presentation” ‘I think’ cannot belong to sensibility, unless we entertain the possibility of an intuitive understanding capable of *intellectual intuition*, namely “that understanding through whose presentation the objects of this presentation would at the same time exist” (KRV B138-139). Kant argues, however, that ordinary, non-sensible intuition—through which the existence of an object is also given (KRV B72)—is impossible for finite subjects such as ourselves.^[28] The use of our understanding is dependent upon the existence of objects and “the object’s affecting the subject’s capacity to present” (KRV B72). If pure self-consciousness is devoid of any element of sensibility, then it remains unknowable; we cannot have any (synthetic) knowledge of pure self-consciousness.

This point brings us to the next difficulty, namely b), that the ‘I think’ expresses an empirical perception but also designates a purely logical subject. Kant notes that the ‘I think’ expresses an empirical perception of oneself that “contains,” that is, implies or presupposes the truth of, the existential proposition ‘I exist’ (KRV B 423 n.); but it also designates “a logically simple subject” that is analytically implied by the very concept of ‘thought’ (KRV B 407-408). In the footnote we have been considering (B 423n.), Kant writes throughout about the transcendental unity (which precedes experience, and so on) that is purely intellectual, but also that this intellectual presentation requires some empirical material in order for the *I think* to take place as an *I think something*. Here we could perhaps suggest that Kant assumes two senses of the ‘I think’: an empirical (synthetic) and a logical (analytic) sense, which correspond to empirical self-perception and the conceptual unity of thought respectively. Indeed, Kant argues that we must not confuse the identity of the logical subject—as “a logical qualitative unity of self-consciousness in thought as such” (KRV B413)—with the empirical identity of the person. Personal identity, as the empirical intuition of oneself over time, has nothing to do with the analytic or logical sense of self-identity—the possible reflexivity of all presentations belonging to one and the same self-consciousness. Logical self-identity cannot mean personal identity, since we cannot establish the latter by analysing the proposition *I think*; rather, we establish it according

to various synthetic judgments based on empirical intuition (KRV B408).

How then are logical and personal identity related? Kant's answer is clear: the former conditions the latter. The formal identity of the logical transcendental subject is the condition of possibility of empirical consciousness and its personal identity. The paralogism involved in ascribing substantial identity to the subject consists in taking the "logical exposition of thought" (the logical subject) for a "metaphysical determination" of myself as an empirical subject (KRV B409). What is more difficult, however, is to account for the precise relationship between the formal-transcendental ego and individuated empirical ego: as with Descartes, the problem of individuating the subject returns once again. The purely formal transcendental subject requires some sort of empirical presentation or intuition to attach to the "I think" in order to form a determinate thought or judgment, namely "I think that P or Q". Kant accounts for the unity between the transcendental subject—the "I think"—and the particularity and personal identity of the empirical ego, by arguing that the former conditions the latter and makes it at all possible. Transcendental apperception is the formal condition that enables me to unite all my empirical representations into one coherent experience and sense of personal identity. More difficult is the issue of explaining the "amphibious" character of the rational subject as both transcendental and empirical. For I am not only an epistemic subject but also a moral subject that is both noumenally free and phenomenally conditioned. How does the formal transcendental ego as condition of empirical self-consciousness then connect with the transcendental freedom underlying my experience of moral judgment and action?

Kant does not explicitly answer this question. Instead he both discloses the circular and aporetic character of self-consciousness while at the same time reproducing this aporetic structure as an explanation of self-consciousness. This circularity of pure self-consciousness proves insurmountable, and provides the point of departure for the theorisation of self-consciousness by Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. As we have seen, the concept of an identical subject, for Kant, is a necessary condition of our empirical experience; but since it is a concept that "forever revolves around itself," it cannot synthetically expand our self-cognition through pure reason. What the transcendental subject is "in itself" remains unknown. It is simply "a transcendental subject of thoughts = x" (KRV A346=B404); a purely formal, logical subject, whose conceptualisation remains unavoidably circular:

This subject is cognized only through the thoughts that are its predicates, and apart from them we can never have the least concept of it; hence we revolve around it in a constant circle, since in order to make any judgment regarding it we must always already make use of its presentation (KRV A346=B404).

This circularity or conceptual “inconvenience” is inseparable from transcendental self-consciousness, Kant claims, since “consciousness in itself” is not a presentation distinguishing an object, but rather the “form” of cognitive presentation as such (KRV A346=B404). Kant’s conclusion is that the theory of self-consciousness is aporetic: since pure self-consciousness is always already at the basis of any of our conscious states, we cannot conceptually thematise pure self-consciousness without presupposing what we want to explain.[\[29\]](#)

The question still remains as to how this aporetic structure of self-consciousness is to be conceived, which brings us to point c), the reality attributable to the transcendental ego. Kant’s response to this question is indeed ambiguous. He claims that we have an indeterminate empirical perception of our own existence as “something real”, but that the reality of this pure self-consciousness is neither phenomenal nor noumenal.

An indeterminate perception signifies here only something real that has been given—and given only for thought as such, and hence not as appearance nor as thing in itself (noumenon), but as something that in fact exists and is marked as such in the proposition *I think* (KRV B 423 n.).

Kant clearly suggests here that there is a *third* type of “reality” beyond the phenomenal and noumenal; the real existence given in the act of thinking is neither appearance nor noumenon. We have instead an “indeterminate perception” of “something real” that is given only to thought. But what kind of reality can we attribute to this transcendental subject, if it exists neither phenomenally nor noumenally? There is no clear answer to this question within the *Critique of Pure Reason*. As I discuss below, Kant’s remarks on the use of *practical* reason and the experience of moral freedom (Cf. KRV B430-431) point to this difficulty in accounting for the unity of the ‘three’ Kantian selves, empirical, transcendental, and noumenal.

In the context of *theoretical* reason, Kant suggests that the transcendental ego has a *pre-categorical* existence given only to thought, but that we are aware of the reality of this activity only through empirical intuition or perception.[\[30\]](#) In pure self-consciousness, “I am not conscious of myself as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but am conscious only that I am” (KRV B 157). What mode of consciousness, then, could correspond to this pre-categorical existence? It cannot be intuition, since the existence of the transcendental ego is devoid of any element of sensibility; nor can it be thought, since thought always mediates objects through discursive concepts (KRV A 68-9 = B 93-4), and the existence here is pre-categorical. Kant insists that “[t]his *presentation* is a *thought*, not an *intuition*” (KRV B 157), yet maintains that it involves an “indeterminate intuition” of pure self-activity [*Selbsttätigkeit*]. As an inconsistent compromise, Kant thus states that we have an “indeterminate perception” of this pre-

categorical existence that is also purely intellectual. On the one hand, the transcendental ego of the ‘I think’ is a “purely intellectual” presentation belonging only to thought (KRV B 423 n.). On the other, the purity of this intellectual presentation is vitiated by empirical intuition, since it is only through this empirical perception that I can be at all aware of the self-activity of thought.

Kant’s ambiguous response suggests that there are in fact *three* Kantian selves: the empirical self of inner sense, the transcendental subject of pure apperception (that is ‘real’ but neither phenomenal nor noumenal), and the noumenal self of moral freedom and autonomy. We can summarise this difficulty as the problem of the *ambiguous identity of the Kantian subject*: What identity, if any, exists between phenomenal, transcendental, and noumenal selves? Either these three selves can be unified within the structure of autonomous subjectivity, or else Kant must explain how these three selves can remain independent without undermining the unity of reason. Human beings are both phenomenal and noumenal, natural and moral beings, yet the reality Kant attributes to the activity of the transcendental ego is neither phenomenal nor noumenal. To be sure, Kant elsewhere argues that the ‘I think’ is only taken “problematically,” not insofar as it may contain “a perception of an existent [*Dasein*] (the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum*)”, but rather only as concerns its “mere possibility” (KRV A347=B405). [31] Nonetheless, as we have seen, the spontaneity of apperception is attributed a certain ambiguous reality that is neither phenomenal nor noumenal. Although Kant asserts an *identity* between empirical and transcendental subjects, the obscure status of the transcendental ego—real but neither phenomenal nor noumenal, or else postulated as a problematic concept—undermines the intelligibility of this identity.

The limitations of Kant’s model of the cognitive subject suggested the need to supplement the cognitive with the practical dimensions of self-consciousness. Indeed, Kant was not unaware of this possibility; the concept of freedom, as Kant remarks in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, was the “keystone” of the entire system of pure, speculative reason (KPV 4). For in practical autonomy, we discern in ourselves a spontaneity that allows us to determine our existence beyond the conditions of sensible intuition, that is, in terms of the intelligible idea of freedom. This practical awareness of moral autonomy

... would then uncover in us a spontaneity whereby our actuality would be determinable without our needing for this determination the conditions of empirical intuition. And here we would become aware that the consciousness of our existence contains something that, although our existence can be determined thoroughly only through sensibility, can yet in view of a certain inner power serve to determine it in reference to an intelligible (although only thought) world (KRV B430-431).

Kant likewise acknowledges the tension that arises with the transcendental idea of freedom, the “stumbling block proper for philosophy” (KRV A448=B476). For we are not only phenomenal appearances in nature, but also noumenal originators of events.[32] By exercising practical reason, we enact freedom, the supersensible object of the category of causality. Freedom, moreover, is what Kant curiously calls “a fact of reason,” thereby confounding phenomenal and noumenal domains, which seems to undermine the very claim to spontaneity and autonomy that defines moral freedom. As a phenomenal being I am an empirical consciousness subject to causal laws of nature, but as a noumenal self I am an autonomous subject of freedom guided by the moral law. Knowledge of noumena, of course, is impossible for finite subjects. How then do we discern our spontaneous power of self-determination? As Fichte pointedly asked: “Since Kant, we have all heard, surely, of the categorical imperative? Now what sort of consciousness is that?” (WL I 472/46).

For Fichte, Kant’s silence on this question marked the *practical* limits of Kant’s transcendental idealism; the latter was committed to freedom and the autonomy of reason without being able to reconcile its cognitive and moral-practical aspects. Indeed, there are several hints in Kant’s discussion of practical reason and aesthetic-teleological judgment that suggest the possibility of intellectual intuition or, in Kant’s words, an “intuitive understanding” capable of overcoming the dichotomy between concept and intuition. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant remarked that although our understanding is finite and discursive, one can still think the possibility of a non-discursive understanding capable of moving from “the *synthetically universal* (the intuition of a whole as a whole) to the particular, i.e., from the whole to the parts” (KU 407/291). This *intellectus archetypus* would enable us to think the relation between whole and parts such that the possibility of individual parts is made dependent upon the whole (KU 407/292). It would enable us to think organisms and the whole diversity of nature *teleologically*, that is, in terms of “the causality of purposes and final causes” (KU 408/292). This would also provide a different way of conceptualising identity and difference or the relation between universal and particular, one that would compensate for the subordination and subsumption of particularity to universality in determinative judgment.[33] Kant’s third *Critique* as a whole could be regarded as an attempt to overcome the limitations of a onesided emphasis on determinative judgment, wherein the particular is subsumed under a given universal, in favour of an emphasis on reflective judgment, in which a given particular must be matched with an appropriate universal. Such reflective-teleological judgment is intimately related to the organic understanding of nature and aesthetic pleasure in art, both of which attempt to counterbalance the abstract or formal identity implied by the mathematical-scientific paradigm of knowledge. Indeed, Kant’s “organic” model of reflective judgment inspired the post-Kantian quest to embrace identity *and* difference in the unity of self-consciousness and of theoretical and practical reason.

Despite the efforts of the third *Critique*, the identity of the Kantian subject remained ambiguous. At best, there were suggestive hints that reflective-teleological judgment and the Idea of an intuitive understanding might harmonise the division between the domains of nature (theoretical reason) and freedom (practical reason).^[34] The critique of reflective-teleological judgment was supposed to provide a bridge linking the separate worlds of nature and freedom, with Kant even postulating a third “aesthetic” supersensible that would bind phenomenal and noumenal worlds. Nonetheless, these enigmatic hints do not resolve the fundamental ambiguities in Kant’s account of the identity of the autonomous subject as the highest principle of cognition, moral action, and judgment. The ambiguous Kantian subject remained divided between transcendental and empirical, theoretical and practical, phenomenal and noumenal worlds, without any means of overcoming these intractable dualisms and reconstituting the sundered unity of reason. Kant ultimately lacked an account that might explain how the formal identity of the transcendental ego could be reconciled with the particularity of empirical experience, the formality of moral autonomy, and teleology of reflective-aesthetic judgment.

The challenge for the post-Kantians, therefore, was to account for identity *and* difference—the unity between theoretical and practical, subject and object, nature and freedom—while avoiding the positing of an abstract identity devoid of determinate content. For the predominance of an abstract identity or empty universality obliterates difference and particularity, recreates dichotomy, and thus fails to fulfil the demand for a genuine unity of reason. The post-Kantians therefore critically scrutinised and transformed the subject-object relation underlying Kant’s account of self-consciousness. Thanks to Kant, however, the problem of identity and difference became firmly established in connection with the modern autonomous subject. The issue was to account for the individuation of self-consciousness, the relationship of “identity-in-difference” between universal, particular, and individual aspects of the I, while overcoming the dichotomies generated by the traditional subject-object model of reflection, even in its formal-transcendental, Kantian version. This project of overcoming reflection was succinctly articulated in the Hegelian formula of comprehending the Absolute as an “identity of identity and difference”. As we shall see, it was precisely the dichotomous character of the modern subject and of Enlightenment culture generally that motivated Hegel’s project to comprehend the identity of self-consciousness beyond the dichotomies of the subject-object paradigm of reflection.

[1] Cf. Haas’ ‘Heideggerian’ account of the metaphysics of identity and difference from Aristotle to Hegel (2000).

[2] Cf. Manfred Zahn (1973) quotes Karl Rahner’s remark that “there is as yet no satisfactory history of the philosophical concept of unity and its various interpretations and the consequences of these for a great many individual philosophical problems” (1973, 320), a comment echoing D. Henrich’s

complaint: “To date there is no publication, not even in the lexical, with whose help it is possible to command an overview of the branching problematic that a theory of identity has to solve” (1979, 133).

[3] As stated in Plato’s *Sophist*, otherness “does not signify the contrary to what is, but only something other than what is” (258b).

[4] See Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI 9 I-vi. See also Beierwaltes (1980, 24-56). The unity of the transcendental One, according to Plotinus, is “different from all”—*heteron tauton*—i.e. from all other entities that are in accord with, but utterly distinguished from, the One itself.

[5] Nicolas Cusanus’s doctrine of the *coincidentia oppositorum* serves as the pinnacle of the Platonic and Neoplatonic conception of identity and difference. Along with the Christian thought of an “absolute trinitarian reflexion,” Cusanus’ doctrine of the unity of opposites anticipates the speculative thought of German Idealism. See Beierwaltes (1980, 3-4, 130-131) and Redding (1996, 24-28).

[6] See Emmanuel Levinas (Totality and Infinity)

[7] Cf. “For example, I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly *seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is called ‘having a sensory perception’ is strictly just this, and in this restricted sense of the term it is simply thinking” (Med 19/29).

[8] Cf. “Now I regard the divisions of time as being separable from each other, so that the fact that I now exist does not imply that I shall continue to exist in a little while unless there is a cause which, as it were, creates me afresh at each moment of time.” (Descartes 1984, 109, 111/78-9, 80)

[9] Cf. Descartes’ “Second Meditation”: “I will suppose then, that everything I see is spurious. I will believe that my memory tells me lies, and that none of the things that it reports ever happened.” (Med 24/16)

[10] As we shall see, Kant’s “transcendental turn” will transfer this power of *spontaneity* and *temporal synthesis* from God to the transcendental ego; yet the problem of individuating and unifying the empirical and transcendental subjects will persist.

[11] This elegant account of Descartes response to the charge of vicious circularity, however, does not really address the related problem of the “natural light” in Descartes. For Descartes, on this view, depends upon the notion of the “natural light” of reason by which clear and distinct ideas are recognised and understood to be true. It is the natural light, our native rationality, that guarantees the incorrigibility of certain (mathematical and intuitional) propositions, and it is God who endows us with the natural light, a God whose existence is attested to by idea we have of him as revealed through the natural light of reason. The problem of vicious circularity is thus transposed to the relationship between the natural light and God, or the relationship between our native rationality, given to us by God, and which also reveals the existence of God to us in our ability to apprehend clear and distinct ideas.

[12] Cf. *Passions of the Soul* I §31-32 (AT 351-355) and *Treatise on Man* (AT 129-130)

[13] Our concept of complex substance points towards the “unknown powers” that are the likely underlying causes of perceivable qualities.

[14] This moral and legal sense of ‘person’ within civil society becomes the point of departure for Hegel’s dialectic of autonomous subjectivity and rational social and political life in the chapter on ‘Abstract Right’ in the *Philosophy of Right*.

[15] Cf. Hume’s ‘archipelago’ view of the phenomenal world: “since all our perceptions are different from each other, and from everything else in the universe, they are also distinct and separable, and may be consider’d as separately existent, and may exist separately, and have no need of anything else to support their existence. They are, therefore, substances, as far as this definition explains a substance” (T

233).

[16] Cf. “Thus we feign the continu’d existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption; and run into the notion of a *soul*, and a *self*, and *substance*, to disguise the variation.” (I 254).

[17] Hume’s analysis remained at the level of what Kant called “empirical apperception” or “inner sense”: “This consciousness of oneself is merely empirical and always mutable; it can give us no constant or enduring self in this flow of inner appearances” (KRV A107).

[18] Cf. “pure reason is so perfect a unity that, if its principle were insufficient for the solution of even a single one of all the questions assigned to reason by its own nature, then we might just as well throw the principle away; for then we could not fully rely on its being adequate to any of the remaining questions either.” (KRV Axiiii).

[19] Cf. “We have earlier explicated the *understanding* in various ways: as a spontaneity of cognition (in contrast to the receptivity of sensibility); as a power to think; or as a power of concepts, or again of judgments. These explications, when inspected closely, all come to the same. We may now characterise the understanding as our *power of rules*.” (KRV A126).

[20] Each heading comprises three kinds of judgment: under quantity there are universal, particular, and singular judgments; under quality affirmative, negative, and infinite judgments; under relation categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive judgments; and under modality problematic, assertoric, and apodeictic judgments (KRV A70/B95).

[21] Each triad of concepts is an opposition of the first two which are synthesised in the third category; thus unity is “combined” with plurality in the category of “allness” or “totality” (KRV B110-111).

[22] This hotly debated issue in Kant interpretation continues to generate discussion. See Henrich’s analysis of the argumentative structure of the deduction (1969), Ameriks’ “regressive” approach to transcendental argumentation (1978), Pippin’s account of the problem of formalism in Kant’s deduction (1982, 151 ff.), and Allison’s “non-metaphysical” defense of Kant’s idealism (1983).

[23] Kant also confusingly states at one point that this capacity just *is* the understanding: “And thus the synthetic unity of apperception is the highest point, to which we must attach all use of the understanding, even the whole of logic, and in accordance with it transcendental philosophy; indeed, *this power is the understanding itself*” (KRV B134 fn. My italics). This passage raises the question whether the unity of apperception conditions the understanding or whether these are in fact the same.

[24] Kant leaves open the possibility of non-reflexive consciousness, stating that our conscious states are only potentially self-conscious: “I.e, as my presentations (*even if I am not conscious of them being mine* [my italics]), they surely must conform necessarily to the condition under which they alone *can* stand together in one universal self-consciousness, since otherwise they would not thoroughly belong to me” (KRV B132).

[25] Cf. “But this presentation [i.e., the *I think*] is an act of spontaneity; i.e., *it cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility* [My italics]. I call it *pure apperception*, in order to distinguish it from *empirical apperception*” (KRV B132).

[26] This footnote is explicitly discussed in Schelling’s critique of Kant (1985, I/1 402).

[27] Cf. “Now, it is true that this principle of the necessary unity of apperception is itself merely an identical and hence analytic proposition” (KRV B135 cf. B138, B407-408).

[28] For Kant, finite human subjects do not have an *intuitive* understanding but an understanding that only *thinks*. Our understanding only organises and combines material for cognition given to it from the empirical intuition of objects (KRV B145-146). Only God could have an intuitive understanding that

would *produce* objects through its own originary presentation or intellectual intuition; yet Kant contemplates just this possibility in the reflective-teleological judgment of nature in the *Critique of Judgment* (KU §§76-77).

[29] Cf. “But if I want to observe in the variation of my appearances the mere *I*, then I have no other correlate for my comparisons than again myself with the universal conditions of my consciousness. Hence I can give to all questions none but tautological answers, viz., by substituting my concept and its unity for the properties belonging to myself as object, and thus by simply presupposing what people wanted to know” (KRV A366).

[30] This pre-categorical, pre-propositional existence of self-consciousness is only “something real” that is given to thought. Now ‘existence’ is a category of modality, while ‘reality’ is a category of quality. As Kant argued in his critique of the ontological proof, existence (being) is not a real predicate; it is not a concept of something that can be synthetically added to the concept of a thing (KRV A598-9/B626-7). Existential judgments tell us nothing about the manner of being of something. ‘Reality’, on the other hand, is a category of quality that corresponds to sensation; that whose concept signifies a posited spatio-temporal entity (KRV A143=B182, A597=B625). Categories, like all other concepts, require a given sensible content in order to yield cognition. Since there is no sensible element in pure self-consciousness, we can have no knowledge of its reality.

[31] In this sense, the ‘I think’ of the transcendental subject is to be regarded as a necessary postulate; we assume it “in order to see what properties may flow from so simple a proposition to its subject (whether or not such a subject exists)” (KRV A347=B405).

[32] A human being “is to himself, indeed, on the one hand phenomenon, but on the other hand—viz., in regard to certain powers—a merely intelligible object, because his action cannot be classed at all with the receptivity of sensibility” (KRV A546=B574).

[33] Judgment in general, Kant writes, “is the ability to think the particular as contained under the universal” (KU 179/18).

[34] As Kant remarks, “an immense gulf is fixed between the domain of nature, the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, the supersensible,” a gulf that precludes any transition from theoretical to practical reason (KU 175-6/14-15).