KANT ON THE SPONTANEITY OF MIND

I

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant refers often and with no apparent hesitation or sense of ambiguity to the mind (*das Gemüt*). He does so not only in his justly famous destruction of rationalist proofs of immaterialism, but throughout his own positive, transcendental account in the Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic. In the first edition of the *Critique*, he even proposed what he adventurously called a "transcendental psychology," and, although this strange discipline seemed to disappear in the second edition, he left in that edition all his frequent references to forms "lying in the mind," and to the mind, or the self, or the subject of experience, or the ego, doing this or that. Curiously, though, despite an extensive secondary literature, there is in that literature relatively little discussion of what these expressions, in a proper, strictly Kantian sense, are supposed to refer to. There are two imaginative, extremely suggestive articles by Sellars, some hints at connections with eighteenth-century psychology offered by Weldon,

1 References to the first *Critique* are to the standard first and second edition pagination. I have used R. Schmidt's edition of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1954). Translations are from Norman Kemp Smith's *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: St. Martin's, 1929), except where an alteration has been made and indicated by a T after the page citation.
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a tenacious book by Heidemann, and some recent attention to the general issue of "Kant's theory of mind" by Ameriks and Kitcher.²

By and large, however, if the question is, within the limits of transcendental philosophy, What should we say about the nature of the mind? or even more simply, What are thoughts? many commentators have rested content with the following answers, all clearly present in the text: (i) We do not know what thoughts or selves are "in themselves"; for all we know, they could be in themselves, be either material or immaterial, or neither (the noumenal ignorance thesis); (ii) as empirical events, thoughts or subjects of thoughts are known, like all empirical events, as "phenomena," as objects of experience. In this case, the events are primarily contents of inner sense, in time but not in space, and like all alterations, they take place in "conformity with the law of cause and effect." Thus, empirically, a duality of material and mental is true (the empirical dualism thesis); or (iii) transcendentally, thoughts and the subjects of thoughts are misclassified if thought to raise any metaphysical problems. They are just "formal conditions for the possibility of experience"; for example, the logical subject of experience is just "that which experiences" and should not be construed as a type of being (the metaphysical neutrality thesis).³

The question I want to ask in the following is simply whether these well-established Kantian positions exhaust what Kant has to say about the "I that thinks," or the mind. I am especially interested in how we are to understand (iii), particularly in whether the distinction between the logical (or "transcendental logical") and the metaphysical is strictly adhered to by Kant himself. The main motivation for raising this issue is that when Kant defines thinking (for example, when it is opposed to intuiting) he not only makes use of such synonyms as "understanding," and "apperceiving" and "judging" and "synthesizing," he also calls thinking "spontaneity," and the issue I want to pursue is why he uses that term and what conclusions, logical and/or metaphysical, he draws from it.

After all, that characterization certainly leaps out from this list of equivalent terms. In many other contexts it is clear that for Kant a spontaneous activity is always a "self-causing" activity, as, for example, in the case of the "unconditioned causality" of freedom, also called the "causality of reason" (B561 = A446, where a cause of "absolute spontaneity" is said to begin "of itself"). Or, when God's intuition is said to be "spontaneous," Kant means that it "creates" (a sufficient but not necessary condition of spontaneity) the instances or objects it intuits; it is independent of any causal interaction with such particulars.⁴ At the very least, then, the term suggests that, if it is logically necessary that the thinking involved in knowledge be a kind of spontaneity in order to be such a thinking, then although we may not know what a thinking subject is noumenally, we do know that whatever it is, it must be capable of spontaneous activity. And if that is true, then some recently suggested links between Kant's formal/material approach to epistemology and contemporary functionalism (or more broadly the software/hardware approach) cannot be made, at least not given any current hardware candidates.⁵ That is, if the formal conditions of knowledge require that the content of cognition be actively conceptualized in a way that is finally, at some stage, causally independent of the causally produced reception of that material, and of any initial causal-series processing of that information, then a thinker cannot really be a causal system, whatever the system is made of. So the relevant questions are, Does Kant claim that epistemic mental activity must be spontaneous? Does he draw any substantive conclusions from that claim? Is he entitled to these conclusions?

Finally, there is another, very different but equally important reason for

² I discuss the work by Sellars, Heidemann, Ameriks, and Kitcher in the following notes. See also T. W. Vechten, Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958). (Since this article was written in 1983, interest in Kant's philosophy of mind has grown significantly. A fuller survey of the literature would now have to include, at least, Patricia Kitcher, Kant's Transcendental Psychology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Thomas C. Powell, Kant's Theory of Self- Consciousness (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Wayne Waxman, Kant's Model of the Mind (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), and Andrew Brook, Kant and the Mind (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).)

³ It should be noted that metaphysical neutrality by itself does not entail noumenal ignorance. We might think it possible to present an epistemology that involves no commitment to a position on what kind of thing thinks, without at all thinking that nothing can be said about that issue, as a separate topic.


⁵ One of the first suggestions about such an approach can be found in Wilfrid Sellars, "Metaphysics and the Concept of a Person," in The Logical Way of Doing Things, ed. by Karel Lango (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), pp. 219–52. See also Patricia Kitcher, "Kant's Real Self," in Kant on Self and Nature, ed. by Allen Wood (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 111–45; and, for a much broader point of view, Daniel Dennett, "Artificial Intelligence as Philosophy and as Psychology," in Brainstorms (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), pp. 109–26, especially 111 and 122–6. I might note that a fuller demonstration of why Kant cannot be enlisted into Dennett's project would have to take account of what he says in ch. 5 of this book, his argument that the restriction of artificial intelligence (AI) to some form of mechanism is, given Church's theorem, no real restriction. See also p. 85.
pursuing the implications of the spontaneity characterization. I shall not be able to pursue the issue here in any detail, but it should at least be noted that it is by far the most important Kantian notion picked up and greatly expanded by later German Idealists. For Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, it was Kant's characterization of the subject as spontaneously apperceptive that, more than anything else, convinced them that Kant had not simply destroyed the classical metaphysical tradition, but had begun a new kind of "philosophy of subjectivity," and the a priori restrictions set by such an apperceiving subject for what could count as an object of knowledge. Primarily because such a thematic link has not received much of a contemporary hearing, there has been little carryover from the recent extensive attention to nearly all aspects of Kantian philosophy into post-Kantian areas. After Kant, it would seem, we face only romantic metaphysics, and uncritical speculation, as little up to its Kantian heritage as neo-Platonist theology was to Plato. So, for example, when Hegel remarks in his Differenzschrift "That the world is the product of the freedom of intelligence, is the determinate and express principle of idealism," his remark can seem like a distorted application of only a vaguely Kantian idea (the spontaneity of thinking). Part of what I want to begin to show is that the application is not distorted, and the idea is genuinely Kantian.

II

Although there are frequent references in the Critique of Pure Reason to the spontaneity of the mind, there is no independent discussion of that issue. The first definition of the term is typical.

If the receptivity of our mind, its power of receiving representations in so far as it is in any wise affected, is to be entitled sensibility, then the mind's power of

6 This relation is quite an important subtheme in Ingeborg Heidemann's Spontaneität und Zeitlichkeit (Cologne: Kölnner Universitäts-Verlag, 1958), although at times she makes Kant far more of a "dialectical" and "historical" thinker than he is, cf. pp. 13-14, 86, and 260. The issue pursued here - Kant's case against the possible phenomenality of the transcendental subject, and his denial that such a subject could be a causal system - is also an important element of her discussion, but is couched in terms of what she calls the necessary "duality" of "temporality" and "spontaneity," what she eventually calls the "Distanz der Spontaneität zur Zeitlichkeit," p. 224.


producing representations from itself (Vorstellungen selbst heranzubringen), the spontaneity of knowledge, should be called the understanding. (B175 = A151)

Later, concepts are said to be "based on the spontaneity of thought," sensible intuitions on the receptivity of impressions (B93 = A68). What is typical of such passages is that Kant leaves unexplained the meaning of some phrases as "producing representations from itself" and concepts being "based on" spontaneity, apparently confident that the contrast with receptivity clarifies what he's trying to get at. This contrast appears to commit Kant to the claim not only that our intellectual faculties cannot be receptive (no Aristotelian nous pathetikos), but that there is some kind of necessary discontinuity between the receptivity of sensation and the activity of thinking about sensory matter. Sensory impressions, it would appear, cannot be said simply to engage the mind in the sense of producing representations, with these representations subsequently producing or giving rise to "ideas." We (any thinker) produce something "from ourselves," and it is this initially somewhat metaphorical notion of spontaneity that Kant introduces so casually.

It is the nature of the epistemic claim that our minds are spontaneous in knowledge that looks so abruptly asserted. It is not, strictly speaking, a logical claim in the sense in which Kant usually uses his notion of transcendental-logical "formality." It may be a logically necessary attribute of the concept of experience that all experience involve both concepts and intuitions, that nothing can be a representation of mind unless it can be united synthetically with other representations, and that such synthetic unification cannot go on unless there are pure rules for such activity. But if in such arguments the notions of concept, synthetic unification, and application of pure concepts are to be truly formal, we should be neutral about such issues as whether the occurrence of sensations alone causally produces a certain conceptual activity (a specific unifying activity) or whether "we" do, in some causally independent way. All that should be important is that a connecting of representations goes on, a uniting not completely attributable merely to the occurrence of sensory impressions. Of course, if the spontaneity characteristic only means to refer to the necessity for some contribution by the subject over and above sensory receptivity, whatever the nature of this activity, then there is no problem to discuss. But, as befits the much stronger sounding implications of the term spontaneity, Kant struggles to find a way to express it so that it is stronger, and yet consistent with the tripartite division sketched previously.

Perhaps the most involved claim occurs at a well-noted note at B158:
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Now since I do not have another self-intuition which gives the determining in me (I am conscious only of the spontaneity of it) prior to the act of determination, as time does in the case of the determinable. I cannot determine my existence as that of a self-active being; all that I can do is to represent to myself the spontaneity of my thought, that is, of the determination; and my existence is still only determinable sensibly, that is, as the existence of an appearance.

But it is owing to this spontaneity that I entitle myself an intelligence.

Kant seems aware in this passage that claiming the mind to be spontaneous involves much more than claiming that something must be contributed to experience beyond the reception of impressions. In this language, the spontaneity claim certainly appears to be a "determination of my existence" and it is against this obvious impression that Kant is working. But in doing so, he just muddies the waters. I do not have an "intuition" of my active "determining" capacities (although why I do not must await a later discussion), but I am "conscious of the spontaneity of it." What is that, particularly if it is an instance of consciousness, not a merely possible representation (as occurs, for example, in my representation of practical autonomy)? Further, I cannot determine my existence as a self-active (a nice Fichtean word here, selbsttätig) being, but I am a self-active being. I can call myself an intelligence because that is what I am, although how I know I am, and what exactly that means, remain obscure.

At other points, Kant seems quite willing to wander far from the strict divide of formal–logical versus substantive. This passage from the Antinomies in which Kant seems to make quite a substantial claim about "man" (Mensch) is perhaps the strongest indication of such non-formalist temptations.

Only man, however, who knows all the rest of nature solely through his senses, knows himself also through simple apperception, and this indeed in every inner determinations which he cannot regard as impression of the senses, and is indeed to himself on the one hand, phenomenon, but on the other hand, namely in respect of certain faculties (because their action cannot at all be ascribed to the receptivity of sensibility), a simply intelligible object. (B574–5 = A549–7, T)

Again the problem is the status of the claim that our being apperceptive beings establishes that we are "intelligible objects" or an Intelligenz.

Another indication of how far he is willing to go to make this claim, and how many of his own distinctions he is willing to hedge in order to make it, is given (again in a footnote) at B422n. The whole footnote is an attempt to differentiate his own position from that of Descartes, and the main issue concerns what Kant regards as Descartes's "inference" from "I think" to "I exist." In denying that there could be such an inference, Kant is called on to present what he does think is given in what he admits is an "empirical proposition," "I think." This "I think," he says, "expresses an undetermined [unbestimmt] empirical intuition, i.e., perception (and therewith proves that sensation, which accordingly belongs to sensibility, already lies at the ground of this existential proposition)" (T).

Kant does not stop to explain why such a proposition expresses an undetermined empirical intuition if a self-perception really is involved. Presumably, such an inner sense could only be, determinately, of me. Instead he goes on to say that the category of existence in this existence claim ("I exist thinking") is not really a category. What then is an "indeterminate perception," presumably involved in all spontaneous apperception? It is "only something real [etwas Reales] that is given" and given only to thought in general, and so not an appearance, nor a thing in itself (noumenon) but as "something which actually exists, and which in the proposition 'I think' is denoted as such." This same suggestion of a fourth alternative to the transcendental position on mind (neither strictly phenomenal, noumenal, nor formal–logical) is hinted again a few pages later where Kant says that "in the consciousness of myself in mere thought I am the being itself [das Wesen selbst] although from this nothing is given to me" (B429).9

Similar, relatively confident references to what appear to be the metaphysical presuppositions of his epistemology also surface in the Prolegomena, when he writes, "When an appearance is given to us, we are still quite free as to how we should judge the matter,"10 and in various Reflexiones, such as "In order to judge objectively, universally, that is, apodictically, reason must be free of subjectively determining grounds; for if they did determine reason, the judgment would be as it is only contingently, namely because of subjective causes."11

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11 Reflexion 5413, AA, XVIII, p. 178; see also 5441, 182.
Finally, to cite a passage that claims much the same thing as the B474-5 passage quoted earlier, but with all the hedging gone, there is this claim from the 1785, *Groundwork*: "Man now finds in himself a faculty by means of which he differentiates himself from all other things, indeed even from himself in so far as he is affected by objects, and that faculty is reason. This, as pure self-activity (Selbstätigkeit) is elevated even above the understanding . . . with respect to ideas, reason shows itself to be such a pure spontaneity that it far transcends anything which sensibility can provide it." 12

III

So much for many of the most intriguing, even if confusing, passages on spontaneity. I have been suggesting that Kant's apparent hesitancy in these passages stems from his uncertainty about the status of his claims about our spontaneous mind within the established transcendental triad. I want to start now considering what kinds of problems such remarks cause for that schema by considering the two most obvious issues that arise. Both could be considered instances of what I have tried to argue elsewhere is a very broad Kantian problem – the purported formality of transcendental knowledge itself. 13 But in this context, both issues can be raised specifically with respect to the spontaneity characterization.

The first reason for Kant's apparent discomfort with claims about the nature of the thinking subject could be methodological. That is, one reason why Kant might well be hesitant to count any result of transcendental reflection on the conditions for the possibility of experience as knowledge of the thinking subject, or mind (as an object of knowledge), however mentalistic his own language, would be his clear belief that knowledge of any object, including the subject of experience, presupposes transcendental conditions. Such conditions cannot be counted as properties of the "real thing which thinks" without vicious circularity. So, at B422:

Therefore, the subject of the categories cannot, through the fact that it thinks, arrive at a concept of itself as object of the categories; for in order to think them, its pure self-consciousness, which is what ought to have been explained, must lie at the ground. (T)

So, the nature of the subject of experience, we ought still to say, really is unknowable.

If this is what is making Kant uneasy, one might respond to it as Patricia Kitcher recently has. She claims that the passage quoted here confuses the "order of proof with what we might call the order of conceivability." 14 We cannot *know* that all human experience is apperceptive by relying on the necessity for categories in experience (and so the necessity of apperception to explain the possibility of categories), because we can only know that the structure of human experience is categorial if we already know, and rely on, the fact that human experience is apperceptive. "None of this implies that we do not use the categories in thinking about thinking, however. In fact, if Kant is right, then we must use the categories in thinking about thinking because the only way we can think at all is through the categories." 15 What Kitcher is out to show throughout her article is that Kant should not have said either that the subject of knowledge was unknowable or that it must be a non-phenomenal subject. And so, in the preceding, she is trying to block possible Kantian methodological concerns about how a subject could know itself if such knowledge always presupposed "a subject."

But I see no evidence that Kant was worried (mistakenly) about how transcendental reflection could arrive at a knowledge of the structure of all thought and knowledge, if such reflection had to make use of such a structure. The fact that in the *Amphiboly* such reflection by a subject on its own sources of knowledge is just what the *Critique* is said to be doing, and Kant's frequent claims that, in philosophical knowledge "reason is occupied with nothing but itself" (B708 = A650), belie that view of Kant's worry. Kant is not worried about how a subject could attain knowledge of the subjective structure of experience; what he wants to make sure we understand is that this knowledge should not be taken to be knowledge about what an experience is. Thus the B422 passage only reminds us again that the subject referred to in transcendental reflection is not, in any usual sense, an object of knowledge.

Moreover, apart from the issue of transcendental reflection, the passage and several of the others quoted so far clearly point to a second kind of worry Kant has, and it is this worry that is of much more interest for the spontaneity issue. When he speaks of the subject's possibly being able to "arrive at a concept of itself," or of a possible "self-intuition," or of the "indeterminate" empirical intuition involved in any "I think . . . " he is point-


15 Ibid.
ing to the fact that his own theory of experience involves the mind in a relation to itself in all experience that would seem to tell us a great deal about what a subject of experience is, especially about what it cannot be. This is, I want to suggest, Kant’s motivation for so often denying that the subject of experience can simply be (that is, only be) phenomenal.

Since this is the issue of Kitcher’s article, I can introduce this point by reference again to her strategy. Suppose the question is, Why isn’t Kant willing to say that the “self” he is always talking about in the Transcendental Analytic is simply a phenomenal self, about which philosophical analysis may indeed discover necessary properties and capacities, even though it (analysis) cannot tell how these capacities are instantiated? Kitcher discusses at length why Kant might have been so unwilling, although the main reasons she suggests are the familiar ones. The first is a more sophisticated version of the methodology problem just mentioned. Since Kant seemed to believe that the subject of experience was responsible for the phenomenal world (there being such a subject is what makes the world phenomenal), he would find it impossible to consider that subject itself “really” phenomenal. Second, she discusses all the evidence that Kant, for reasons connected with the presuppositions of his moral theory, wanted to find a way to say that the real subject of experience is non-phenomenal, a thing in itself.

Now, what the spontaneity passages highlight, I believe, is a much more fundamental reason why Kant wanted to deny that the subject of experience was empirical or phenomenal, although, as already indicated, this reason also conflicts with the claims of metaphysical neutrality.\(^\text{16}\) Kant, that is, surely did believe that the subject of experience, a thinker, could be phenomenal; could be considered as a possible object of empirical knowledge (cf. the empirical dualism thesis). And he certainly believed that there were qualities of any possible subject of experience that we did not come to know empirically, but by philosophical analysis (or “reflection,” to use his term). So far, none of this is inconsistent with Kitcher’s analysis. But what the spontaneity passages reveal is that Kant also thought that such analysis revealed that there was one feature of any such subject that could never be the kind of property a phenomenal subject could have — spontaneity. (All phenomenal subjects are necessarily and completely parts of causal series.) And, as many of the previously quoted passages have already indicated (especially B422n.), Kant is eager to insist as well that proving in this way that the subject of experience cannot be exclusively phenomenal is not equivalent to proving that it is a thing in itself, and should not be inconsistent with the claim that the self is completely unknowable. But the potential violation of this classificatory schema is, I am arguing, the true source of his hedging.

IV

Understanding Kant’s argument for this non-phenomenality claim involves coming to terms with another of his names for the spontaneity of thinking, introduced at B132. The representing or “act of spontaneity” that “cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility,” he calls “pure apperception.” With that equivalence introduced, he can then move on to introduce the “highest” principle of knowledge, the transcendental unity of apperception. (A few pages later, Kant reminds us again of the equivalence between thinking, an act of spontaneity, and apperception by claiming, “Indeed, the faculty of apperception is the understanding itself” [B134n.1].) Accordingly, the first task in uncovering Kant’s mostly implicit argument for the spontaneity characterization involves understanding his view of thinking as “apperceiving.”

Kant’s clearest expression of the apperception thesis occurs in the same passage where the preceding definitions above occur, section 16 of the second edition of Deduction. There Kant states and explains the claim that “It must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all my representations” (B191), and goes on to assert that “The principle of apperception is the highest principle in the whole sphere of human knowledge” (B135). I shall take this “absolutely fundamental” highest principle to assert that all human experience is ineliminably reflexive. It is reflexive because, according to Kant, whenever I am conscious of anything, I also “apperceive” that it is I who am thus conscious. And all the problems arise from trying to understand what he means by this. He at least means that, in any, say, remembering, thinking, or imagining, while the object of my intending is some state of affairs or other, I am also aware as I intend that what I am doing is an act of remembering, thinking, or imagining, and that I bring to these acts a sub-

\(^{16}\) Moreover, there is fairly persuasive evidence that Kant fully realized after 1785 that he could get no moral mileage out of his transcendental philosophy, even though he continued to use such non-phenomenal terms as Spontaneity in the second edition of the Critique. However, establishing that, as a matter of fact, Kant did not argue against the possible phenomenality of the transcendental subject because he thought he thereby would establish some sort of noumenal agency does not of itself address Kitcher’s central and quite appropriate question: Why didn’t Kant not identify the transcendental and phenomenal subject, while admitting the difference between transcendental and empirical claims about this subject?
ject identical with the subject of prior acts of intending. My asserting that S is P is not an assertion of mine unless I am aware that I am asserting, not entertaining the possibility of S is P, and no such complex judgment, requiring, as Kant thinks he can show, continuity over time is possible unless there is one continuous subject of experience over time, aware of its continuity in any conscious act. This apperceptive characteristic does not mean that the fact that I am perceiving rather than imagining is itself directly attended to, but that such an awareness is an inseparable component of what it is consciously to perceive, imagine, remember, and so on. Or: in trying to recollect the name of a friend who is approaching me, I am aware that I, the subject of all past instances of contact with the friend, am trying to recollect, without a second-order judgment, “I am recollecting,” occurring. One could say that without my continuous act of recollecting somehow being “held in mind” the pursuits undertaken within that context would be unineligible. (Or: I can “consciously follow” a rule without “always consciously applying” a rule. This must be possible if any rule following that is not an explicit constant application is to be distinguished, as it should, from behavior that ought to be explained by reference to natural laws.)

Admittedly, at this point, a variety of thorny, long-debated problems arise. It is difficult, apart from a major commentary, to develop this line of interpretation adequately, as a plausible view of the issue itself, and as what Kant meant by the apperception condition. I should note, however, that this claim for an inherent reflexivity in consciousness should be distinguished from two other possible approaches that the cited passages have been taken to support. The first, most famously identified with Strawson, attempts an “austere,” non-idealistic interpretation of the Critique by constraining the Deduction argument to be based only on the logical possibility of the self-ascription of all my representations. This approach, built around the problem of skepticism, makes no general claim about the nature of consciousness or “subjective conditions for the possibility of experience,” but seeks a transcendental argument to show how the possibility of self-ascription requires the objectivity of certain pure concepts.

This interpretation has many problems, much discussed in other contexts, not the least of which is that it confuses just where and how the issue of skepticism about the external world arises for Kant, and so misconstrues the Deduction as a way of arguing Kant himself only introduces in the Refutation of Idealism. But at least the claims themselves, supposedly extracted from Kant, are plausible claims. At the other end of the extreme in interpretations about the role of apperception in the Deduction is the so-called conflation interpretation, the claim that Kant is somehow arguing that consciousness is self-consciousness, that in any conscious intending, I am aware of my own activity of creating or imposing my order on the world. There are passages (e.g., A108, A116) that seem to support such a view, but almost all of them tend to drop out in the second edition, where there is a good deal more stress on the implicitly apperceptive character of all consciousness, and much less on some putative awareness of my identity and my constituting activity in every conscious representing. In that edition, instead, we find passages like “As my representations (even if I am not conscious of them as such) they must conform to the condition under which alone they can stand together in one universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not all without exception belong to me” (B1529). In terms of this passage, the phrase “even if I am not conscious of them as such” indicates that Kant takes himself to be avoiding the conflation thesis, and the claim that all my representations must be subject to the conditions of “universal self-consciousness” indicates he is making a claim much stronger than the austere interpretation allows (i.e., he is not relying merely on what is required in any case of self-consciousness or self-ascription). As indicated earlier, the reason that all my representations must conform to such conditions is that consciousness itself is inherently even if not explicitly self-conscious.

Admittedly, relying on Kant’s discussion of apperception to explain his characterization of thinking as spontaneous can appear a classic case of the

17 Since apperception is a component of consciousness, or, as Kant says, the “vehicle” of concepts, and not itself a mental act accompanying consciousness (or the mental act that is consciousness), Kant is not committed to various claims about the self-conscious transparency of mental life, or its incorrigibility, and so forth. He is not, therefore, subject to the kind of complaint offered against his theory by Hans Georg Hoppe in Synthese bei Kant (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), pp. 113–72. Indeed, the claim for the necessity of such an implicit self-construal in cognitive consciousness opens wide the door to realizing the profoundly mediated (and so corrigible) character of conscious activity, a fact that becomes the methodological fulcrum of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit.


19 Dieter Henrich, Identität und Objektivität (Heidelberg: Carn Winter Universitäts-Verlag, 1975). Ulrich Pohast, in Über einige Fragen der Selbstbeziehung (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1971), has tried to argue that Kant was simply ambiguous about whether apperception was an explicit self-perception or the implicit form of all thinking, cf. p. 13. I am claiming that Kant rather clearly intended the latter option, and do not see how the passages Pohast cites as evidence of the former view (A342 and A344) support his reading, since they are clearly preparing the way for what rational psychologists believe.
obscure through the more obscure. Not only is the textual material scanty, but, whatever Kant means by insisting on the requirement that any "ϕ-ing x" involves "My taking myself to be ϕ-ing x," he does not feel compelled to argue for the connection. There are some indications, from his infrequent discussion of animal consciousness, that he does not regard this reflexivity to be a necessary condition of consciousness per se, but only of cognitive consciousness: that is, cases of intentional awareness that can be said to be, and to be experienced as, possibly true or false intendings. In such cases, Kant appears to believe it is criterial that we must be implicitly aware of our having "taken" the world to be such and such, and thereby of its possibly not being such and such. The veridicality of, say, our sensory perceptions must be able to be, at least in some weak sense, held open, in cognitive consciousness, and that feature of such consciousness requires, Kant appears certain, that consciousness be apperceptive.

Further, there are some clarifications about what the apperception thesis does not claim, indications that Kant does not want his position on my continuously taking up and uniting my experiences to be confused with cases of empirical self-awareness or attempts at self-identification. The "identity" Paralogism states the latter point clearly, insisting in a way similar to that used by contemporary Wittgensteinians on self-awareness, that I can be aware that I am ϕ-ing without knowing who I am, or even if I am mistaken about my identity.20 The detailed discussion in the second edition Deduction on the "apperception—inner sense" distinction, as we shall see in more detail shortly, makes the former point, less clearly, but equally strongly. Roughly, that claim is that any attending to my own thoughts as empirical events is a cognitive claim like any other, and so already presupposes my taking myself to be attending to, and making claims about, my mental states. In fact, marking out these differences among self-awareness, self-identification, and apperception, all rests on a similar claim, what one could call an insistence on the non-isolatability of "apperception" as an event, that apperception cannot be a relation between me and my thoughts that "occurs" in addition to the causal and/or intentional relation between my thoughts and what they represent. It is because of this non-isolatability that this apperceptive component of experience cannot be regarded as, say, an inference I make about what I am experiencing, or as a causally result of some state or series of mental states. So, one could perhaps imagine an unusual example where I do not know, say, whether I am perceiving or hallucinating, and where I try to infer from the evidence what I am doing or undergoing, but even in that example what I originally experience already includes my apperception of being in an unfamiliar state, and no later judgment about what is the case could be said to "add" apperception to my experience. One way of stressing this would be to suggest, in a Chisolmian way, that this apperceptive feature of experience is "adverbial," that when I perceive, think, imagine, and so forth, I apperceptively perceive, think, imagine.21

V

My claim thus far has been that understanding Kant’s characterization of thinking as apperceptive might be of some help in filling out the meaning of his other enigmatic synonym for thinking, spontaneity. In the last section, I presented a brief interpretation of the apperception claim that both makes the most sense of the many different, often conflicting, things Kant says about apperception, and would begin to connect up with the claim for spontaneity. We have already seen one indication of the latter connection. Kant holds that experience requires my taking up a manifold and uniting its elements in judgment. But the way he describes such a condition makes it very hard to describe it as a kind of mental state—activity that could be regarded as produced by some other mental state or by some interaction with objects. To revert to a well-known Reflection about this issue, apperceptive thinking cannot be said to be an "experience" at all, but a necessary component of any possible experience of objects.22 Thinking may indeed be empty without intuitions, but, Kant appears to be assuming, nothing about my having intuitions, or the characteristics of the intuitions, can be said to provide a matter-of-fact explanation for my taking myself to be experiencing (intuited) objects of this or that kind. That, he keeps trying to find a way to say, is something I must do.


21 Although in such an account apperception is a necessary condition for conscious (cognitive) perception, one should not conclude that the position thereby limits all sentient interaction to such conscious perception. There can indeed be all sorts of "nonapperceptive" ways in which information of a sort about the external world is received and processed. But, even if the perception of such information might affect behavior, the position holds that it would not be conscious perception.

It is this view of apperception that is, I submit, behind such claims as the B574–5 assertion that the apperceptive faculty "cannot be ascribed to the receptivity of sensibility," and thereby renders us an "intelligible object." Kant is claiming not only that thinking is not a kind of sensibility (contra both, say, Locke and Leibniz) but that it cannot be said to owe its occurring to sensibility, and is therefore "spontaneous." A similar remark could be made about the B158n. passage that mentions spontaneity as the "determining" in experience, never the determinable.23 Finally, it is this view of apperception and spontaneity that seems to be involved in one of the few arguments about the claim. Again in the second edition Deduction, Kant's way of arguing that apperception must be spontaneous - not finally due to intuition or to the mental events caused by intuitions - is that apperception must not be confused with "inner sense."

To understand what Kant means by this claim, something needs to be said about what he means by the notion of inner sense. This doctrine is one of the darkest in Kant, but its basic elements can be sketched in this context.24 Kant, as we all know, argued that the human intellect can supply itself with no content, but must be supplied it "from without." But it is obvious that what thought is about need not just be an object of the five senses of the body, or in Kant's more general terms, an object of outer sense (although Kant did believe that the content of all thought is ultimately supplied by outer sense). We can also think about, perhaps even formulate causal laws about, our thoughts, perceptions, memories, wishes, dreams, and so on; or about the contents of inner sense. But it is still true, according to Kant, that

23 In his recent Kant über Freiheit als Autonomie (Frankfurt am M. Klostermman, 1983), Gerald Pruss has attempted a new, reconstructive interpretation of the theory of activity that Kant, it is claimed, late in his career realized was at the foundation of and unified his accounts of "knowing" (Erkennen) and "acting" (Handeln). For Pruss, that theory (sometimes called a theory of spontaneity) involves a complicated analysis of the intentional, purposive (absidificiell) character of knowledge claims; their possible "succeeding" or "failing"; and the derived status of practical actions that "depend" on the results of such intentions. My interpretation differs from his in presenting the problem of apperception as more fundamental to the issue of spontaneity, and so freedom, than intention, and in arguing that the chief reason Kant was hesitant and often confused about developing such a unified theory explicitly was his realization that it would require massive alterations in his transcendental program itself, and not a pre-critical allegiance to the "parity of theory" (cf. p. 110). In general, Pruss, it seems to me, takes off some Kant's claims on the "freedom" or spontaneity of thinking, and omits discussing whether Kant was entitled to such metaphysical sounding claims, and if so, how they would square with transcendental idealism.


although we do not sense these contents in the usual or straightforward manner, we must still consider our apprehension of such contents as analogous to such sensing - that we possess an "inner" sense. What Kant means to stress by this analogy is, as he puts it, that we are still "passively" affected by our own inner states when we are aware of them, they are still part of a given manifold, passively apprehended under the form of inner sense, time, and thereby still "phenomena," not things in themselves.

Now Kant admits that this notion of being passively affected by ourselves, in any way that is analogous to sensibility, is quite odd, and he tries to defend the notion in various complex ways that are not relevant here. What is relevant is Kant's claim that we must not confuse inner sense and apperception, more particularly that we must not confuse being reflectively aware of the objects of inner sense with the apperception that, for Kant, is implicit in all acts of awareness. That is, even in such direct, reflective awareness of the contents of inner sense, the synthetic unity of such awareness (say, the mere awareness of succession) cannot itself be a "content" that is apprehended. It too must be effected by the mind's activity, and so in such awareness there is both direct perception of, say, a stream of images now, and implicit apperception that I am attending to my mental states. Thus what Kant is pointing to in the passages where he distinguishes apperception and inner sense is crucial for understanding all the spontaneity passages quoted earlier. That is, I can not only be aware of, say, drums and then a noise produced with them; I can also be aware, from another point of view, of the empirical events that occur in my mind in such awareness - the sight of the drums and the hearing of noise (i.e., I can date, catalogue, and perhaps causally relate these contents of inner sense). But I can also think together these events ("spontaneously") in thinking that the drums produced the noise (or that the sound followed the sight in my experience). This cannot just be a passive awareness of a state or doing of my mind, conceptualized in judgment, since it is a thought made possible by my active understanding in the first place.25

Now these passages also create their own problems, since Kant seems perfectly willing to admit that all the mental states and activities of the empirical subject (including, for example, its judgments) occur because caused to occur, and seems content to say that, on this empirical level, there is no problem in claiming I am caused to represent S by the physical interaction between my body and S.26 This generous admission appears flatly

25 Of course, in some obvious sense, such a "thought that..." could be such an event; in that case though, such a "happening" could not count thereby as a judgment.

26 Cf., for example, Kant's remarks about complete causal determinism for all appearances.
inconsistent with the claim that mind must be represented as a Spontaneität. Moreover, the passages about spontaneity might be admitting what Sellars has called only a "relative spontaneity" of the mental. That is, Kant could admit that many states of mental life are causally necessary consequences of antecedent states, where all that means is that, relative to that antecedent state, it could not have been the case that the system did not come to be in its subsequent state. The system need not be directly caused to be in that state by some immediately antecedent "foreign cause." The mind could have a set of dispositions, much like a computer program, that requires external input to start whirring away, but once started would be, and might appear to itself to be, only relatively spontaneous. Or: I might see that drum, then think of all sorts of things, perhaps even seem to myself to be searching my memory actively for some other datum, or even to be actively investigating some other phenomenon, and it may turn out that these events are caused, though not caused along the direct, one-to-one foreign cause model. Sellars even goes on to point out that if Kant's arguments against the rational psychologists are considered here (their confusing what is true of our representations of the self with what is true of the self) and the First Analogy, interpreted by Sellars to mean that "all change is a change of (portions of) material substance," then Kant has no reason to hold to his empirical dualism or metaphysical neutrality thesis, and should, at least empirically, have been a materialist (broadly construed).

However, apart from that issue, the problem of reconciling Kant's willingness to treat mental events causally, and his claims about spontaneity must still be faced. And Sellars's "relative spontaneity" will not do. Kant, from all the passages we have seen, also wants to argue for a non-relative or absolute spontaneity in apperception, one in principle not susceptible to this kind of indirectly causal analysis. His apperception—inner sense discussion points this out, in a way deeply characteristic of his epistemological turn—for instance, arguing that even such mental events as described previously must finally also be considered as known to a subject as caused, and this is only possible by virtue of that subject and its thoughts not being considered part of the original causal order. This supreme condition for knowledge can be called absolute spontaneity because Kant takes it as criterial for knowing whether this sequence (again, one of Sellars's relative spontaneity sequences) is a causal sequence that I be able to decide whether it is or not, to be able to distinguish objective from subjective succession, and this condition could not be satisfied if we were simply caused to represent some succession as objective. (That could occur, but it would not be judging.) Or, to invoke a limited version of the noumenal ignorance thesis, even if that (as a Sellarsian sequence) were true of all mental activity, I could not be said to know its truth, and in that sense, the sequence could not count as an object of knowledge, but as a non-knowable noumenal relation between a noumenal subject and things in themselves. Of course, some state or series of states in a causal system could be said to have truth conditions. But Kant would clearly challenge any claim that such conditions could constitute the state's being a case of knowing, or "empirical experience." The latter requires an explanation of how a representing or judging could represent an object or state of affairs independently of knowing whether the truth conditions are satisfied. For this to be possible, Kant argues, the judging must be self-conscious, not just another in a series of causally produced states.

Finally, this emphasis on the necessity of the spontaneity condition (as a condition of the possibility of knowledge, as opposed to causally produced mental states that, it might happen, correctly correspond to what is the case) also makes unlikely reconstructions of the synthetic unity of apperception claim that make it more consistent with recent functionalist research programs, that is, like the one offered in another article by Kitcher. She argues that we can recast Kant's claims about synthesis "in modern terminology," as

\[
M_1 \text{ and } M_2 \text{ stand in the relation of synthesis } \overset{\text{def}}{=} \text{M}_1 \text{ is the synthetic product of } M_2, \text{ or } M_2 \text{ is the synthetic product of } M_1, \text{ or } M_1 \text{ and } M_2 \text{ are synthesized.}
\]

Or, "Put more simply, the relation of synthesis among mental states is a relation of contentual dependence." On this view, then, the necessity for apperception or the "I think . . ." refers to the general anti-Humean point that representations, in order to be my representations, must be regarded as

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27 Wilfrid Sellars, "... this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks . . ." Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association 14 (September 1971): 20.
29 This is the summary version of her thesis presented in "Kant's Real Self," 115. For a full exposition of her interpretation, see Patricia Kitcher, "Kant on Self-Identity," Philosophical Review 91 (January 1982): 41–72.
"belonging to a contentually interconnected system of mental states, an I
that thinks."

The contrast with the "spontaneity" view of apperception is, I assume,
clear-cut. On the latter view, there can indeed be a relation of existential
dependence among mental states, such that a later (M2) could not be a
mental state of a subject unless an earlier had occurred (M1), and psychology
might eventually determine which kinds of such dependence there are.
But on the spontaneity view, nothing about that relation of dependence
accounts for M2’s being a representation of an object. The dependence of M2’s
occurrence on other mental states is one thing, but M2’s being a representa-
tion of, say, m is quite another. For that to be explained, I must be said to take
the individual representation to be in a connection with other representa-
tions, or possible representations, as a condition of such possible inten-
tionality. Or, for a judgmental representing to be an epistemic claim ("objec-
tive" in Kant’s language), I must take up the contents of intuition and the
mental states that can be said to be produced by such intuitions, and make
such a claim. It cannot both be said simply to occur in a relation of existen-
tial dependence on other mental states, and to be "objective" (possibly true
or false) representing of mind, unless I so "take" it. (Put a different way, even
if it is empirically true that A causes both the representation B and my
representation that A caused B [in my mental life], there would still be no
knowable connection between the last representation and the first two
unless I "take it" that the "A" and "B" of the last representation were the A
and B that I had experienced and that a claim about them was being made.)

VI

All of which raises the question: If Kant is denying that apperceiving could
ever be construed as a matter-of-fact or empirical relation among mental
states (or as completely "instantiated" in a causal system of some kind), if he
is arguing that spontaneity is a necessary property of any thinking subject,
what could this be but a claim about our non-phenomenal natures, our
noumenal selves, and what does that to the noumenal ignorance thesis? I
have been suggesting that the claims collected previously about spontaneity,
and the scattered arguments in favor of it, do offer a claim about necessary
features of any "subject of experience," but that such a claim does not
violate Kant’s restriction that we do not know our substantial "selves," when
"self" is considered apart from all relation to finite conditions of know-
ability. These arguments could be said to admit a non-noumenal relativiza-
tion of the spontaneity claim to "subject qua possible knowing subject," and
so can be said not to violate that restriction on knowledge of the subject
simply as it is in itself, even if all this does complicate Kant’s official state-
ments of the metaphysical neutrality thesis. (And, to recall an earlier point,
understanding the status of this claim as a claim about what normative
commitments and capacities are necessary in order for anyone to count as
the subject of one’s thoughts and deed, and not as a claim about a thinking
being or substance, is all a necessary introduction to understanding later
Idealist reflections on the subject, and to seeing them as following in this
Kantian spirit, rather than as violating the noumenal restriction everywhere
with talk of "egos," "absolutes," and "spirits." 30

However, coming up with a more positive way of explaining the transcen-
dental status of these claims does invariably create problems within Kant’s
triadic separation of ways of talking about mind, and these should be noted
and addressed. For one thing, there is ample evidence that Kant often
thought one way to resolve the ambiguities was just to state flat out that the
transcendental subject was the noumenal self. Perhaps his most famous
such statement is the Reflexion, "The soul in transcendental apperception is
substantia noumenon, hence it has no permanence in time, since this belongs
only to objects in space." 31 The same identification between the "self
proper, as it exists in itself," with "the transcendental subject" occurs in the
Critique at B520 = A492. But this occasional identification has so many
problems (many trenchantly pointed out by Strawson) 32 that it cannot
(and, I have been arguing, need not) have been Kant’s considered position.

To cite the most obvious problem, it is completely inconsistent with the
continually invoked anti-rationalist strategy of the Paralogisms. After all, the
achievement of that justly praised section of the Critique was to show that

30 To be sure, this issue of Kant’s positive philosophy of subjectivity was widely influential in
the German tradition, even beyond Kant’s Idealist successors. Its legacy is apparent in any
number of contexts. Cf., for example, this typical claim by Alfred Bäumler: "Nach der Kritik
der reinen Vernunft gibt es keinen mundus intelligibilis mehr. Aber es gibt eine rein intellek-
tuelle Synthese. Der Substanzenbegriff des noumenon hat sich in einer Funktionstheorie
verwandelt. Im Begriff der reinen intellektuellen Synthese, dem Urbild der Kategorien,
erkennen wir die letzte Sublimierung der Verstandeswelt im Gegenatz zur Sinnwelt." Kritik der
Urteilskraft, Ihre Geschichte und Systematik, Band 1: Das Irrationalitätsproblem in
der Ästhetik und Logik des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zur Kritik der Urteilskraft (Halle: Niemeyer,
1929), p. 346. I think the basic point expressed here is correct, but that Bäumler (and
Heidemann) greatly confuse their own case by adopting a "noumenal" language to refer
to the subject’s activity, and so they perpetuate the notion that post-Kantian idealism
requires a pre-critical metaphysics.
31 Reflexion 6001, AA, XVIII, pp. 420–1.
32 Strawson, Bounds of Sense, pp. 248 ff.
(i) I am indeed aware of all my thoughts as one and all my thoughts, as belonging to one subject of experience (in the sense of: I could not doubt that they were all my thoughts, that some might be somebody else's),

but that (i) is not equivalent to, nor does it imply nor presuppose:

(ii) I am aware of myself as a simple, non-corporeal substance (i.e. that in being aware of all my thoughts as mine, I am aware of them as “determinations” of one simple, thinking substance),

or even

(iii) I am aware of my “personal identity” (the referent of my name) in being aware of my thoughts as belonging to one subject.

This strategy makes it imperative that Kant hold fast to the strongest statements on noumenal ignorance, as, perhaps most strongly, at A350.

Partly, this tendency to equate transcendental subjectivity with the noumenal self stems from Kant’s not distinguishing between the claims that (a) the self in itself is unknowable because we do not have the proper “intellectual equipment” (intellectual intuition) for knowing it, and (b) the transcendental subject could not be, given its logical status, an object of either intellectual or sensible intuition. 33 And it is not hard to appreciate why Kant was reluctant to develop (b) into a separate kind of “transcendental knowledge,” and why he alternated instead between strong claims of noumenal ignorance and equally strong but more infrequent claims of transcendental-noumenal equivalence. That is, Kant thought that his critical theory had forever destroyed the possibility of any purely rational determination of the real, so he would have obviously resisted the suggestion that his denial that a phenomenal theory could account for the epistemic subject, and his denial that we have any intellectual intuition of a non-phenomenal subject, still left open another possibility for an a priori deter-

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33 For a fuller discussion of this distinction, see Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, ch. 15, especially pp. 232–3. My differences with Allison on this issue turn on an ambiguity in his overall account of apperception: his willingness on the one hand to concede that apperception provides us with something that "cannot be accounted for in terms of the mechanism of nature or the empirical character of the subject" (321), and, like Kant, his continuing insistence on strict metaphysical neutrality (325–7). For a fuller discussion, see my review of *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, *Kant-Studien* 77, nos. 3 (1986): 368–71.

it is logically possible for a knowing subject to be instantiated in a causal system, even if an unknowably noumenal system, whose causality need not be the efficient causality specified by the Second Analogy.

I can only plead here that, from the evidence collected, this is not what Kant should have said. All that he should have said is perfectly analogous to what he eventually did say later in his practical rejection of the preceding noumenal possibility. That is, if it turns out we really are causal systems on the noumenal level, then the states, beliefs, and judgments produced by such systems would not be epistemic claims, even if the beliefs can be said to correspond to both phenomenal and noumenal reality. (The analogue in practical theory is the practical necessity for assuming that our noumenal agency could not turn out to be “nature again,” could not, that is, if there still is to be practical agency.)

Thus Sellaris, for whom the possibility of “noumenal science” is so important, is quite right to insist on the distinction between the “conceptual framework of which nature was the cause” and the “freely elaborate conceptual frameworks with which we now challenge Nature,” and can even be right to suggest in his terms that the latter framework must be “free” because the noumenal reality about which it offers theories is in principle unobservable and incapable of effecting a causal alteration in theories. But this still cannot mean (for Kant) that the latter framework is “free” only relative to the objects it is about (uncaused by them) and in itself a really (noumenally) causal system in which its theories can be said to be “produced,” that “In the Paralogisms Kant has kept the way clear for the view that in reality the ‘I’ is a system, and, in particular for the view that it is a system of scientific objects, the true counterparts of Kant’s things-in-themselves.”

Kant’s remarks on spontaneity reveal that he would argue that no account of how such a system of scientific objects could know itself to be such a system could eliminate the characteristic of spontaneity from such a system. Although his own remarks often seem close to modern distinctions between “function” and “content,” on this issue there cannot be a complete independence between them, something Sellaris himself stresses when he admits that “we can conceive of the functioning in ways which abstract from specific embodiments, though they lay down abstract requirements which any specific embodiments must satisfy.”

Finally, one might think that these arguments about transcendental spontaneity ought to have a noumenal payoff in Kant’s moral theory, particularly since so many of the uses of “spontaneity” carry over from one domain to the other.

38 It can seem natural that Kant would argue that, since spontaneity is a condition for the possibility of knowledge, we have thereby proved that we must be free in a practically relevant sense, the kind of being capable of acting uncaused. And again, there are scores of indications in the Politz lectures, various and numerous Reflexionaem, the 1783 review of Schulz’s Sittenlehre, and in the Grundlegung, that Kant was confident that he could make such an argument. But, first, nothing in what has been presented so far would either legitimate such an inference or necessarily tie the claim for transcendental spontaneity to such a practical issue. Simply put, it is quite possible that any action relevant to ethical judgment might be, say, “caused by sensual impulses,” and yet that the spontaneity of the epistemic subject is a necessary condition for knowing that to be so. Proving that reason in one context must be assumed spontaneous does not prove that in other contexts, say where reason is a motive for action, it must be spontaneous there too.

Second, there is good evidence, cited persuasively by Ameriks and Allison, that Kant abandoned any such connecting arguments after 1785, although he clearly did not abandon, in the second edition, his insistence on the spontaneous nature of thinking. If anything, that emphasis is stronger.

7 VII

Of course, the logical independence of these topics does not preclude the possibility that there might be interesting and important connections between the varieties of Kantian spontaneity. In the preceding, I have been concentrating on defending an interpretation of the spontaneity of apperception and the implications of that interpretation for some contemporary reconstructions of Kant. But it should also be noted, as a brief conclu-

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., p. 248, my emphasis.
38 Heidegger is a typical example of someone who connects, somewhat quickly and carelessly, I think, the issues of Spontaneität and noumenale Erkennung, pp. 212, 214, for example.
39 The best summary discussion of these passages can be found in Ameriks, Kant’s Theory, pp. 197–202.
40 This is relevant to a point that Pruss often makes: that Kant ought to have altered his formulations about impulses’, needs’, and desires’ simply determining behavior causally in heteronomous action, because his own theory commits him to the view that for an impulse to affect my behavior, I must freely “allow it to,” and that what the desire is for can be understood only if the free self-determination of purposeful conduct is introduced (cf. pp. 294–95).
41 Ameriks, Kant’s Theory, p. 195; Allison, Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, pp. 310–29.
sion, that there are a variety of reasons for pursuing the issue of the more comprehensive account of subjectivity and spontaneous activity at the basis of what Kant wants to say in his different critical contexts. Understanding the similarities between Kant’s views on apperceptive spontaneity and on autonomy, and eventually on the spontaneity of reflective judgment, might not only contribute to an understanding of the common view of subjectivity behind all of them, and might not only point to deep similarities in how Kant argues for the undeniability of such subjective conditions for experience, action, and reflection, but could clearly contribute to an understanding of the architectonic issue of the unity of all three Critiques, since so much in the enterprise of each is tied to the notion of spontaneity.42

Moreover, to return again to an earlier suggestion, attending to the fundamentality of the spontaneity of subjectivity in Kant’s project can illuminate what we might vaguely call the direction of a post-Kantian philosophy. In investigating such matters as why we categorize the world the way we do, think we ought to direct our action the way we do, or reflect on the whole or unity of nature as we do, and whether any of those ways is legitimate or justifiable, viewing such ways as activities by a subject, or even a self-determination or “self-legislation” by a subject, at the very least suggests an explanatory category and justificatory strategy that cannot be completely exhausted by what we turn out to know about the laws of thought or the nature of the brain. What such a category ultimately does involve is, of course, impossible to state here. One can only note a similar kind of claim in all the Kantian contexts for its independence – that in any competing claim about the ways in which a subject is supposedly determined by something other than its own spontaneity (physical objects, sensuous impulses, beautiful things), there must always also be ways in which the subject takes itself to be so determined, at least if such a determination is to be known by a subject or experienced in a way relevant to its action or judgment. And, again, in all the contexts, this claim just raises the issue of what this spontaneous, self-determining subjectivity is supposed to be. Being able to demonstrate that such an activity could not be instantiated in a causal system tells us little about the positive nature of such activity, and it certainly does not entail that we ought to view that spontaneity as an arbitrary, or ex nihilo act of will. There may very well be inherently necessary constraints on such activity, such that it could count as an attempt at knowledge, or free action. And those constraints or norms might not be derivable from reflection on the

42 See the remarks at the end of the Critique of Judgment on the “causality of man” (Kausalität der Menschen), AA V, p. 484; Cf. p. 337.