

**Mind and the World**  
**Kant on “self”**  
**February 26, 2007**

On the “Paralogisms of Pure Reason”

The “I” plays a major role in philosophy of mind. Descartes’ so called “cogito argument” led him to one of the crucial premises in resolving his *problematic empirical idealism*. He could not doubt, however he might be deceived, the truth of the belief “I am” no matter how doubtful any other thought he called to mind. And something about this claim is right. What Descartes drew from it, of course, was a good deal: “But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions.” And he goes on to argue that this must be the same “I” that does all these things. The self is a single, simple substance.

Hume, building on Locke’s empiricism, attempted to undercut Descartes’ position with his “bundle theory” of the self. See *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part IV, Section 6. He struggles with his “bundle theory” in the Appendix.

Work through the first paralogism and the equivocation Kant identifies. The paralogisms are deceptive syllogisms aimed at establishing three things about the “self”: (1\*) the “I” is a substance; (2\*) the “I” is simple; (3\*) the “I” is a unity; [(4\*) the “I” as standing in relation to possible objects in space.]

The first paralogism (B411):

What cannot be thought otherwise than as subject does not exist otherwise than as subject, and is therefore substance.

Now a thinking being, considered merely as such, cannot be thought otherwise than as subject.

Therefore, it also exists only as such a thing, i.e. as substance.

The problem with this syllogism, Kant argues, is a fallacy of equivocation ( *per Sophisma figurae dictionis*, or “by a sophism of a figure of speech,” p. 448n)

At A350, p. 417, he put his criticism this way, “...the first syllogism of transcendental psychology imposes on us an only allegedly new insight when it passes off the constant logical subject of thinking as the cognition of a real subject of inherence...”

Show the difference between reading “thought” as “cognition” or not. “I” is not cognized; rather all we are given is its “logical grammar,” i.e. (1) it cannot be

predicated of anything ; (2) it cannot be analyzed or defined; (3) it is univocal for a given speaker; (4) it can be a subject term in relational statements.

One way to go at this, a Sellarsian way, is to see the second premise as “formal” point. The ‘I’ (the role played by “I” in English, “ich” in German, etc.) cannot be predicated of anything, cannot be used in the context “x is \_\_\_\_\_,” where ‘is’ occurs predicatively (not the “is” of identity).

Thought is apperceptive: If I (actively, not dispositionally) think that “x is  $\emptyset$ ,” then I know I think that “x is  $\emptyset$ .” This does not depend on the truth of “x is  $\emptyset$ .”

What’s at stake in this? If the “self” is cognizable (not just thought) as a substance insofar as the “I” occurs univocally in all thoughts, then we have knowledge of a thing-in-itself, i.e. the “self-in-itself,” independently of intuition, not as appearance, and Descartes has his way. Kant is clear, however, that the univocality of “I” of itself does not establish the substantial singularity of the self.

He says at A363 (p. 423), “The identity of the consciousness of Myself in different times is therefore only a formal condition of my thoughts and their connection, but it does not prove at all the numerical identity of my subject...” [see note at A364]