Pre-conceptual Aspects of Self-consciousness in Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason

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A question that has gone unasked for a long time in Kant research is whether and to what extent, in the Critique of Pure Reason, the central concept of apperception or the so-called transcendental or original self-consciousness implies a form of concrete consciousness beyond purely formal and functional characteristics. It is thought to be entirely uncontroversial that that which produces objective knowledge and which Kant denoted with the concept of apperception only has transcendentally necessary significance and is entirely inaccessible to concrete consciousness. This deeply entrenched interpretation can be explained by programmatic reasons above all, whereby the lesson of the paralogisms chapter in the Critique of Pure Reason plays an important role. Here Kant shows that there can be no justification for assuming a Cartesian soul that would be accessible to knowledge. This can only make it seem substantively wrong-headed to wish to interpret the consciousness involved in apperception, which according to Kant underlies all structured thought, as a form of phenomenal consciousness that could somehow be made apparent from the first-person perspective. One could even argue that the very attempt to locate any phenomenal self-consciousness in the Critique of Pure Reason is contrary to the entire project of the critique of knowledge, since Kant is concerned to justify propositional knowledge through conditions that are independent of experience and can be legitimately applied to the material of empirical intuition. This sort of approach necessitates a strict distinction in the theory between a priori structures on the one hand and empirical or psychological aspects of the consciousness of objects on the other hand—a distinction famously reflected in the Critique of Pure Reason in the sharp terminological oppositions of attributes such as “empirical” and “pure/transcendental”, “a priori” and “a posteri-

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ori”, etc.\(^2\) A “phenomenal consciousness” that is neither conceptually structured experience nor purely aprioristic in form clearly cannot be sensibly incorporated into the underlying Kantian epistemological structures.

If we accept the theoretical necessity of Kant’s dualistic structure of principles, it does in fact seem rather logically doubtful to offer, alongside the purely principle-oriented description of apperception, an explanation of it as being at the same time phenomenal consciousness, since apperception is explained as being absolutely simple in its essence and the condition of all concrete consciousness.

However, the past years have seen individual interpretations here and there that at least point towards the idea that Kantian apperception involves more than just the analytic characteristics of purely logical self-consciousness—that in contrast with concrete empirical self-consciousness, apperception also introduces a pre-theoretical component. This is suggested by the interpretations of Konrad Cramer and Dieter Sturma, for example, who draw in particular on Kant’s statements in the paralogisms chapter.\(^3\) The following will examine whether these text passages are sufficient to support the thesis of a pre-theoretical self-consciousness. However, this also raises the question of what could have led Kant to refer to a phenomenal self within the framework of his rigorous critique of knowledge, since the programmatic goal of that critique is precisely to ascertain whether the phenomena of consciousness can be justified as instances of knowledge whose objects can be described by means of specific characteristics.

However, in looking for evidence of a theory of phenomenal, pre-theoretical self-consciousness it would be amiss to restrict oneself to the A and B editions of the paralogisms chapter.\(^4\) To avoid a reductionist interpretation it is necessary to turn as well to Kant’s arguments from the deductions of the pure concepts of understanding in the transcendental analytic, where he establishes the consciousness he calls apperception as the highest principle of thought presupposed by the concepts of the under-

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\(^2\) Citations from Kant’s works, except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, are by volume and page numbers of the *Akademie* edition of *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1900); the *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR) is cited by the standard A and B pagination of the first (1781) and second (1787) editions respectively. The translations are taken from Guyer and Wood, 1998.

\(^3\) Cf. e.g. Cramer, 1987 and 2003; Frank, 1993; Sturma, 1997.

\(^4\) Rolf-Peter Horstmann has quite correctly made this point. Cf. Horstmann, 1993, p. 409.
standing. Thus my first step will be to analyze Kant’s basic argumentative strategy for the assumption of this consciousness as well as its functional characteristics. The preliminary goal of this analysis is to bring to light those aspects that already, taken on their own, can point to a phenomenal content of apperception accessible in the first-person. The second step will be a closer reading of those passages from the paralogisms chapter where Kant turns to the theoretical features of the judgment ‘I think’. Here I will argue that the *Critique of Pure Reason* does in fact speak of a phenomenal self-consciousness—if only in a limited sense—which, however, stands in an irresolvable tension to the program of the critique of knowledge.

1. Apperception and the First-person Perspective

In § 16 of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant defines pure apperception as the identity of consciousness and the synthetic unity of the manifold, which is given a priori and produces “the representation ‘I think’”. This characterization of the original self-consciousness, as Kant calls it, follows from the transcendental arguments in §15, which display a specific theoretical perspective: the structural conditions of concrete mental acts are brought into view from the objective third-person perspective in order to justify the transcendental necessity of assuming an “original” self-consciousness. Although the thinking subject is here the object of the theory, §15 avoids any reference to the perspective of the thinking subject in discussing the acts of the understanding that “combine” the manifold, which combination (“synthesis”) has to be seen as an act of spontaneity that at the same time implies the concept of unity: “Combination is the representation of the synthetic unity of the manifold. The representation of this unity cannot, therefore, arise from the combination; rather, by being added to the representation of the manifold, it first makes the concept of combination possible.” (CPR B131)

Thus Kant’s justification starts from the structure of the mental acts that bring the manifold of the data given in intuition under a concept and combine multiple representations with each other. To explain this

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5 While Heiner Klemme has emphasized that the arguments of the paralogisms chapter of the later edition no longer directly connect up with the deduction of the table of categories, this aspect is not relevant here, as I am not concerned with the systematic consistency of the various parts of the critique. Cf. Klemme, 1996, p. 289 f.
structure, a spontaneous synthesis and unity that is detached from all empirical implications is assumed to underlie the concrete act of thinking—thus, put in coarse outline, is the general argumentative goal of §15.

Now §16 begins to approach the (first-person) perspective of the subject of knowledge, as it seeks to justify the central thesis that the ‘I think’ produced by apperception “must be able to accompany all my representations”. (CPR, B 131 f.) Here Kant describes two functional characteristics in particular that he ascribes to the “original self-consciousness”: synthesis and unity. Synthesis describes the central and foundational function of cognitive activity, namely the rule-bound combination of data received by the senses and considered by means of this process under a specific general aspect, i.e. a concept of the understanding. This active rule-bound combination of the disordered material of intuition is, for Kant, the very act of acquiring knowledge: an object of knowledge is a data set combined into a unity according to rules. However, the fundamental significance of this function of synthesis only becomes sufficiently clear once we see how it explains the thesis that the judgment ‘I think’ must be able to accompany all my representations. For this thesis expresses the requirement of the theory of consciousness that various representations must all belong to one self-consciousness, for which the function of synthesis of apperception is a precondition: “this thoroughgoing identity of the apperception of a manifold given in intuition contains a synthesis of the representations, and is possible only through the consciousness of this synthesis.” (CPR B133) Kant then goes on to explain how this consciousness arises: “The latter relation [to the identity of the subject] therefore does not yet come about by my accompanying each representation with consciousness, but rather by my adding one representation to the other and being conscious of their synthesis.” (CPR B133) The point, then, is that when in the course of a complex cognitive act I bring together various representations and relate them to each other according to a rule, I have not only a consciousness of the unity of these representations, but at the same time a consciousness of myself as the same subject bearing different representations. Thus it is a condition of this consciousness of identity that representations are added together and combined with one another according to a rule. I only attain to a unified consciousness of myself in the course of this active rule-bound combina-
In contrast to a sense-data model of a Humean bent, Kant’s theory of apperception implies the consciousness of a subject understanding itself as the same throughout the changes of various acts of thought. Thus it is that Kant can write: “The synthetic proposition that every different empirical consciousness must be combined into a single self-consciousness is the absolutely first and synthetic principle of our thinking in general.” (CPR, A 117, note) Moreover: “It is [...] absolutely necessary that in my cognition all consciousness belong to one consciousness (of myself).”

In the justification outlined here for assuming the a priori consciousness that is apperception, the primary theoretical emphasis is clearly on the internal characteristics of apperception in terms of the functional architecture of conditions. In contrast, the question of to what extent this consciousness can be described from the first-person perspective—from the perspective of the subject that has representations and performs acts of thinking—is almost entirely neglected.

Transcendental apperception is brought somewhat closer to the first-person perspective in being described in § 16 as that a priori consciousness that produces the representation ‘I think’, which Kant says must be able to accompany all of my representations. Thus under a certain point of view the initial interpretation of the relation between the abstract concept of transcendental apperception and the representation ‘I think’ would be that the transcendental apperception, as an a priori structure of consciousness that we must necessarily assume, expresses itself in the proposition ‘I think’, which Kant describes as a “representation”. In calling this a “representation”, does Kant wish to point to what might be an empirical-phenomenal aspect of the proposition ‘I think’? There has been a great deal of debate in the literature about this very singular application of the concept of representation to the ‘I think’.

6 The difference between the original synthetic unity of apperception and the identity of self-consciousness is not always made sufficiently clear in the Kantian terminology. For a more detailed examination of this see Sturma, 1985, p. 70 f.


8 For Rohs, the representation of the ‘I think’, in contrast to empirical representations, has to be credited with intertemporal identity, which is not possible in the case of empirical representation: Rohs, 1988, p. 62 f. Against this Malte Hossenfelder has argued that the ‘I think’, as a representation, could have consistently been called ‘I represent’. He justifies this with a quotation from the CPR where Kant argues that without the ‘I think’ there would be “representations” in me that were not mine (Hossenfelder, 1978, p. 100). However, as Cram-
it seems natural, *prima facie*, to read the concept of representation analogously to Kant’s use of the concept in the context of empirical consciousness, in the sense of an object-oriented representation, intuition or appearance. However, it speaks strongly against such an interpretation that that which accompanies cognitions “as their vehicle” cannot itself be a conscious representation and thus cannot be intentional in nature. Kant makes this unmistakably clear when he writes that the ‘I think’ is that representation that “must be able to accompany all others and which in all consciousness is one and the same, cannot be accompanied by any further representation.” (CPR B132)

If we look at the specific relation implied by the multiple-place predicate “accompany”, it expresses a very characteristic function of the ‘I think’ in the theory of consciousness. “[A]ll manifold of intuition has a necessary relation to the I think in the same subject in which this manifold is to be encountered.” The ‘I think’ corresponds to the postulate of a thoroughly identical self and is thus to be understood as a moment of formal self-reference that immanently structures concrete predicative thought. For this reason the ‘I think’ has to underlie intentional cognitions whose objects are determined by means of concepts, and thus predicatively, and this relation is a logical relation due to its “necessity”. But how are we to understand this from the perspective of the ‘I’ that thinks and produces mental acts?

Since a formal self-ascription occurs in all of my mental acts, they are acts that are *for me*, that I see as *mine* and that I can relate to *as mine*. In terms of the theory of consciousness, the ‘I think’ refers to the thought of the *mineness* of concrete acts of thought and representation, which means that I have a consciousness of performing mental acts. Cramer rightly objects, it cannot be derived from the judgment ‘I represent’ that a representation is not just in me but something for me. Cramer, p. 62 f.

9 This reading is plausible at least in the context of Kant’s systematic development of object-oriented thought in the transcendental analytic. A more in-depth analysis of the concept of representation, aimed at distinguishing it from the concept of idea, is found in the first book of the transcendental dialectic, where Kant defines representation as the general category for (empirical) cognitions of various degrees of clarity: from conscious representation, sensation, and knowledge. CPR, B376 f.

10 CPR, B405.

11 CPR, B132.

12 Cramer offers a pertinent interpretation of the function of the mineness of a mental event: “A representation in me is something for me precisely when I do not just have it but have a consciousness that I have it.” Cramer, 1987, p. 171.
Now, Kant does make it clear that the ‘I’ emphasized in the subject role of the proposition ‘I think’ has no descriptive or empirical content of its own apart from the empirical acts of thought that I call mine by means of this judgment. This is very clear from the often-quoted footnote in the paralogisms chapter: “For it is to be noted that if I have called the proposition “I think” an empirical proposition, I would not say by this that the I in this proposition is an empirical representation; for it is rather purely intellectual, because it belongs to thinking in general.” (B 423)

In contrast to empirical consciousness, which makes an object determinable by predicates and which is characterized differently depending on what objects it turns to, no further characteristics can be predicated of the ‘I think’, i.e. of the thought of the mineness of representations. However, it also follows from the fact that it is not an empirical and independent representation that the “representation” of the ‘I’ can not be the sort of consciousness that is based on sensible data. The “representation” ‘I’ involved in concrete and direct self-ascriptions such as “I know that I φ” does not, in and of itself, refer to any sensory data. As Kant says, the ‘I’ is “the simple and in content for itself wholly empty representation […] of which one cannot even say that it is a concept, but a mere consciousness that accompanies every concept.”13 The representation described here has no sensible content and is therefore entirely without content; thus it lacks a decisive requirement of concrete consciousness, the content of which could be analyzed and described by means of predicates. According to the basic underlying assumption of Kant’s theory of knowledge, this would only be the case when a mental state is based on data given to sensibility that can be considered under categorical aspects, which is clearly not true in the case of the ‘I’.14 Thus the ‘I’ cannot be seen as a single mental act, which is why Kant famously refers to the ‘I’ as a simple representation.15 This means that the self-ascription of representations occurs in formal and invariant fashion—in a process that is not bound to any data given to sensibility. In the B edition Kant makes

13 CPR, B404.
14 “For the I is, to be sure, in all thoughts; but not the least intuition is bound up with this representation, which would distinguish it from other objects of intuition.” (CPR, A350) The subject as transcendental apperception and manifold representations are in a relation of mutual dependence. Rolf-Peter Horstmann has brought out this point very well by comparing the I with an (immortal) center of gravity that relies on bodies subject to gravity in order to ‘exist’ (Horstmann, 2007).
15 CPR, B135.
it clear that the mere thought of the I by itself is to be seen as an act of spontaneity and that it explicitly has no content that could be presented in a sensible representation. It only describes a purely ‘logical’ consciousness, not a consciousness of something or even of itself in a phenomenological sense. The majority consensus in Kant research has been to adhere to this passage, and to consider apperception as an exclusively logical self-consciousness and leave it at that.

However, authors such as Konrad Cramer, Dieter Sturma and Manfred Frank have noted that although the ‘I’ in the subject role of the judgment ‘I think’ is empty of content, Kant does attribute it with a sort of content that eludes the epistemological framework of the critique of knowledge, both terminologically and theoretically. Such a “content”, under the conditions described above, could only be such that presents a phenomenon that resists any further analysis.

2. The Relation between the Judgments ‘I think’ and ‘I exist’

The textual basis for this thesis consists essentially of Kant’s formulations in the paralogisms chapter of the B edition, which culminate in the statement that the proposition ‘I think’ implies the sentence ‘I exist’: “The “I think” […] contains within itself the proposition “I exist.”” (CPR B422 note) Here Kant speaks of an entirely distinct type of consciousness that evidently goes beyond the formal characteristic of the attributability of acts of thought (“mineness”). Whenever I execute any act of thought or representation, I am also thereby conscious or can be conscious of the fact that I exist; hence this fact presents itself somehow in consciousness. But how can we get a more precise handle on the possible content of this “phenomenon”, the “representation” of the ‘I’?

The first question that arises concerns the peculiar relation Kant has in mind in speaking of the proposition ‘I exist’ being “contained” in the proposition ‘I think’. Konrad Cramer has offered a practicable interpretation that explains the relation between ‘I think’ and ‘I exist’ in terms of the feature of simplicity that characterizes the “representation” ‘I’ for Kant. Cramer draws on three relevant citations from the A edition of the paralogisms chapter that claim this simplicity. Tellingly Kant

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17 Rohs puts a very fine point on this: Rohs, 1988, p. 76 ff.
18 Cramer, 2003, p. 66 f.
only offers negative determinations in this context. The concept of simplicity means, firstly, that the representation ‘I’ cannot be given in intuition so long as we accept Kant’s thesis that that which is given in intuition always contains a manifold of sensible data. Secondly it means that the representation ‘I’ cannot be conceived as an act of the understanding, the content of which would be describable by means of attributes; the representation ‘I’ is not a concept of something given in intuition, since it “never contains a synthesis of the manifold.” And thirdly it cannot be a form of intuition or representation, i.e. something within which intuitions could be given and that would be immutable due to its status of being form.

But speaking positively, what does correspond to the mental state that expresses the ‘I’? Cramer begins by concluding from the various negative specifications of simplicity that the mental state, in formal terms, has to have the status of a thought—a thought that is not directed either at something given or capable of being given in intuition, or at a rule-bound synthesis of sensible data. Thus the use of the indexical ‘I’, in the context of the self-ascription of mental acts, refers to something “that can only be thought and not intuited.” That which can be thought must have a form of intentionality and hence must have a content of some sort, even if, as in the case of the ‘I’, it cannot be any predicatively specifiable empirical content, since this latter would require a sensible intuition, which, however, as we have seen, Kant definitively rules out for the “representation” ‘I’.

More precisely, in determining the (non-sensible) content of this cognition Cramer introduces two aspects: the first aspect, which essentially corresponds to the argumentation in the B edition of the paralogisms chapter, is that Kant ascribes to the ‘I think’ the status of an “act of spontaneity”. Hence the point is that the “representation” ‘I think’ does not

19 CPR, A355
20 CPR, A356
21 CPR, A350
23 Ibid. It should be clear that this “thought” should not be seen in terms of the Fregean concept of the thought as an objective (common) content of propositions and representations.
24 CPR, B132. Rolf-Peter Horstmann has noted, quite rightly, that the B edition of the paralogisms chapter is particularly dominated by Kant’s thesis that the subject can only be conceived as an act or action; from which it follows that the question of the knowability of the ‘soul’ is made senseless from the very begin-
arise from an act of spontaneity, as in the case of predicatively determinable contents of representation, but rather is such an act. For Cramer this very decisive circumstance, along with the previously mentioned thesis that the content of the “representation” ‘I’ can only be thought and not intuited, suggests that I attribute acts of thought to myself and thereby make reference to myself as subject because “I possess a concept of myself that can be spontaneously generated in every self-ascription” [my emphasis].

It is at first glance rather surprising that Cramer speaks here of a “concept” that I (allegedly) must have of myself when in my self-ascription I make reference to myself as the subject of a propositional attitude. However, a closer consideration shows that the phrase “concept of myself” refers to the epistemic status of the consciousness I have when I attribute concrete representations to myself and consider them to be mine. Yet despite our fuller characterization of the ‘I think’ as an act of spontaneity, it remains unexplained what this “representation” of the ‘I’ is directed at, if we assume, as Cramer does, that the representation is (or must be) “about” something.

Here Cramer returns to Kant’s central claim that the ‘I think’ is a proposition that contains within itself the proposition ‘I exist’. I am the content of the thought of the ‘I’, insofar as I am aware of myself as the subject of acts of thought. This means, for Cramer, that the thought of the ‘I’ is directly related to the consciousness of my own existence. This consciousness of existence inevitably sets in as soon as I ascribe cognitive acts to myself and express (or am able to express) my consciousness of this ascription in propositional form. Hence we can say that, for Kant, the “representation” ‘I think’ corresponds to the consciousness “that can accompany all thinking”, and thus it is “that which immediately in-


26 Hence we should take into account Cramer’s systematic emphasis: he is concerned with the analysis of a specific function of the consciousness of apperception, of the judgment ‘I think’, insofar as it accompanies concrete and substantial representations, and specifically with the explication of the thought of the ‘mineness’ of representations. The question of what phenomenon of consciousness could correspond to the ‘I’ as the grammatical subject of the judgment ‘I think’ is not at the center of Cramer’s analysis.
cludes the existence of a subject in itself”. 27 “In the transcendental synthesis of the manifold of representations in general [...] hence in the synthetic original unity of apperception, I am conscious of myself not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am.” 28 It is important to note that in executing a mental act one is only conscious of one’s factual existence as the ‘unconcrete’ subject of mental states and acts. In other words: whenever I think or represent to myself anything, I am present to myself, but I lack any representation of myself as a spatio-temporally existing concrete individual.

Peter Strawson has also mentioned this form of (possible) immediate self-reference in executing concrete acts of thought, and emphasized that this corresponds to the peculiarity of our use of ‘I’ that we do not need to specify who is meant by it. 29 This is exactly what Kant means when he says about the relation of the proposition ‘I think’ and the spontaneous judgment ‘I exist’, i.e. the judgment of my factually experienced existence, that they are ultimately identical. 30 Thus Dieter Sturma is right to insist on seeing the relation of identity as identity of the act of consciousness involved, and to emphasize “that the experiential evidence of self-consciousness includes, uno actu, the explicit consciousness of one’s own existence, which is evidently empirically determined.” 31

All in all Kant’s argument does in fact represent a substantial expansion, in terms of the perspective of first-personal experience, compared to the purely functional description of apperception in the transcendental analytic.

However, does the discovery that the ‘I think’ represents immediate self-certainty entitle us to speak of a form of pre-theoretical self-consciousness in Kant? For the moment, at least, we can note that the mental mode of immediacy that is characteristic of experiential evidence represents a conceptual contrast to mental acts that are reflective and thus the-

27 CPR, B277.
28 CPR, B157. We should also note that ‘existence’ does not represent a real predicate, but rather something that can be added to a representation qua sensible perception (according to the premise of Kant’s refutation of the ontological proof of God in the transcendental dialectic, CPR, B620 ff.)
29 Strawson, 1987, p. 211.
30 “Hence my existence also cannot be regarded as inferred from the proposition “I think,” as Descartes held (for otherwise the major premise, “Everything that thinks, exists” would have to precede it), but rather it is identical with it.” CPR, B422 note.
31 Sturma, 1997, p. 121.
oretically anchored; and thus we can take the characteristic of immediacy to be an important indication in favor of the thesis. However, a satisfactory answer to the question requires a closer look at the type of cognition that Kant associates with the ‘I think’ in the sense of ‘I exist’.

3. The ‘I think’ as “Indeterminate Perception”

The decisive textual reference for this is found in the above-mentioned note to the paralogisms chapter in the B edition. Here Kant describes the form of cognition underlying the judgment ‘I think’ as an “indeterminate perception”. The comment immediately following is supposed to explain how this is meant, but we cannot deny that Kant finds himself in very difficult conceptual straits here: “An indeterminate perception here signifies only something real, which was given, and indeed only to thinking in general, thus not as appearance, and also not as a thing in itself (a noumenon), but rather as something that in fact exists and is indicated as an existing thing in the proposition “I think.” These vague formulations suggest that Kant has evidently left the firm foundation of his clear, systematically anchored epistemological terminology, and is confronted by phenomena that elude his sharp analytical gaze. After all, an “indeterminate perception” is not a concept, and it is only “indeterminate” in contrast to a determinate perception, a sensible intuition organized by the activity of the understanding; this follows unmistakeably from the quotation above, according to which the indeterminate perception is not an appearance. But this contrast is by no means trivial: for an indeterminate perception is not nothing just because it is epistemologically underdetermined; rather, it has to be seen as a pre-reflexive mental state in which the subject is aware of itself, or rather present to itself, in a minimal sense. Although Kant does not offer any more detailed statements, we can interpret this as a basal consciousness, an experience of the self immediately given with the first-personal perspective. That this is very much a phenomenon of consciousness is made clear by further statements that are quite problematic for the Kantian theory of knowledge. For example, in summarizing the paralogisms in the *Prolegomena*, Kant emphasizes: “The representation of apperception, the I, […] is nothing

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32 CPR, B422 ff.
33 CPR, B424.
more than a feeling”. 34 We see the same tendency in the statement that a “sensation, which consequently belongs to sensibility, grounds this existential proposition”, i.e. the ‘I think’ in the sense of ‘I exist’. 35 However, Kant immediately notes that this sensation is not logically situated at the level of structured thought, of experience, since the sensation of ‘I think’ precedes experience. This brief hint of a return to the logical significance of apperception also makes it clear, however, that the ‘I think’ as a phenomenon of consciousness cannot be understood in purely empirical and psychological terms. And it seems quite appropriate to speak here of a pre-theoretical self-consciousness which at the same time forms the foundation of object-oriented thinking.

However, it is important to note that for Kant nothing follows, systematically, from this finding—unlike for Fichte. Fichte’s writings on the Wissenschaftslehre around 1798, in particular, show a systematic consideration and integration of the immediate, pre-conceptual consciousness. Unlike for Kant, in Fichte’s theory of consciousness the justification of subjectivity can and must be realized from the first-person perspective. This thesis goes hand-in-hand with the claim that the content of transcendental principles can be demonstrated in consciousness itself. 36 In other words: the “original self-consciousness”, the self-positing I, is a transcendental principle that one can summon to consciousness. In the Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo Fichte says quite unambiguously: “We have to know something about this final ground, since we talk about it.” 37 For this reason, for Fichte the structural conditions of self-consciousness cannot only be functional in the transcendental sense; and consistency then requires that the phenomenal content of self-consciousness in an original sense, as an immediate awareness of intuition, has to also be bound to the justificatory conception of subjectivity. 38

The Kantian text, in contrast, does not offer any more precise specification concerning pre-theoretical self-consciousness, which, however, is not surprising given his theoretical strategy. Quite the contrary: that Kant

34 “[D]ie Vorstellung der Apperzeption, das Ich, […] ist nicht mehr als ein Gefühl”. AA 4:334 note; English translation by Karsten Schöllner.
35 CPR, B423
36 For more on this point see Crone, 2005, p. 47 ff.
37 “Wir müssen etwas von diesem letzten Grund wissen, denn wir sprechen davon.” WLnm 31; English translation by Karsten Schöllner.
38 Whether such an approach can, in fact, live up to the claim of a priori justification is definitely more than doubtful from the viewpoint of Kantian transcendental philosophy; however, I cannot pursue this problem here.
keeps the pre-theoretical self-consciousness so well under wraps should be taken as an indication that he knew he was leaving the clearly delimited framework of the critique of knowledge, which is the central concern of Kant’s theoretical philosophy.

4. Conclusion

The foregoing considerations can be summarized as follows: alongside the purely functional characteristics of logical self-consciousness, Kant’s theory of apperception also implies a form of immediate consciousness that can be called a phenomenal, pre-conceptual self-consciousness. This thesis is founded on several points of textual evidence. For one thing, the relation of the judgments ‘I think’ and ‘I exist’ refers to the mental state of experiential evidence, more precisely to the spontaneously generated, immediate consciousness of one’s own existence. For another, the cognition associated with the ‘I’ is characterized as an “indeterminate perception”, hence as a consciousness that cannot be interpreted either as a conceptually structured experience or as an a priori form or structural condition. However, it needs to be emphasized that we cannot speak of a fully developed Kantian concept of phenomenal self-consciousness. Rather, what we have are several remarks that can be taken as indications that Kant was fully aware of the issue as well as of the fact that the realm of consciousness located between non-sensible structural conditions and (empirical) propositional attitudes is conceptually very hard to get a handle on. Unlike in Fichte’s conception of subjectivity, the phenomenal character of the ‘I think’ does not have any significance within the theory, since Kant, in his critique of knowledge, is essentially interested in the functional significance of apperception, particularly with a view to the structural conditions of contentful, predicatively determinable mental acts. Thus it is entirely irrelevant to Kant’s aim whether the “indeterminate perception” could be somehow described more precisely and put to theoretical use: “Now it does not matter here whether this representation be clear (empirical consciousness) or obscure, even whether it be actual; but the possibility of the logical form of all cognition necessarily rests on the relationship to this apperception as a faculty.”

Finally we can say that the consciousness of apperception—within the framework of the critique of knowledge—is to be exclusively understood

39 CPR, A117 note.
as an epistemological principle of formal self-reference that grounds the circumstance that I attribute representations to myself and call them mine. Within this framework the ‘I think’ expresses the mere logical unity of the subject—a unity that is not a product of experience but given prior to all experience. The phenomenal ‘I’ as “indeterminate perception” lies beyond this framework.

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