

**What Can Humans Cognize about the Self from Experience?
Comments on Corey Dyck's "The Development of Kant's
Psychology during the 1770's"**

*¿Qué conocen los humanos del sí mismo a partir de la
experiencia? Comentarios sobre "El desarrollo de la psicología de
Kant durante la década silenciosa" de Corey Dyck*

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Abstract

I agree with Dyck's basic claim that Kant follows the methodology of Rational Psychology in setting up his critique of it: He starts as it starts, with an existential proposition 'I think.' On the other hand, I am not convinced of Dyck's use of the Dreams essay in establishing a timeline for the development of Kant's views on inner sense. That essay is evidence that Kant thinks that Schwendenborg's metaphysics is ungrounded, because he has a crazy sort of inner sense, but it does not show that Kant rejected a more standard internal sense at this time. I also suggest that some of Kant's vacillation about inner sense depends on an unusual feature of his doctrine of the representations of space and time: They are composed of both sensory and *a priori* elements. My hypothesis is that the seeming vacillation about inner sense may be a reflection of whether whether he is considering it broadly, as a faculty that provides intuitions with a particular form, or whether he is restricting what it provides to what can be sensed.

Keywords

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Kant; Rational Psychology; I ; Schwedenborg; Inner Sense

Resumen

Estoy de acuerdo con la tesis de Dyck según la cual Kant sigue la metodología de la psicología racional al plantear la crítica de esta disciplina: en efecto, comienza precisamente con la proposición existencial ‘Yo pienso’. Por otro lado, no estoy convencida del uso que Dyck hace del ensayo *Sueños de un visionario*, estableciendo un calendario de evolución de la consideración kantiana del sentido interno. Ese ensayo evidencia que Kant piensa que la metafísica de Schwedenborg carece de fundamento, pues es una especie disparatada de sentido interno, sin mostrar por ello que Kant rechazara una posición más estandarizada del sentido interno en ese momento. También sugiero que algunas de las vacilaciones de Kant sobre el sentido interno dependen de una dimensión inusual de su doctrina de la representación del espacio y el tiempo. Ambas están compuestas de elementos que son a la vez sensibles y *a priori*. Mi hipótesis es que la aparente vacilación sobre el sentido interno puede reflejar bien una consideración más amplia de ese sentido, como una facultad que provee intuiciones dotadas de una forma particular, bien una restricción introducida en lo que puede ser sentido.

Palabras clave

Kant; Psicología racional; Yo; Schwedenborg; sentido interno

Corey Dyck’s thesis is that Kant was influenced by the methodology of the ‘impure’ Rational Psychologists in holding that Rational Psychology must be based on the results of Empirical Psychology. (Pure Rational Psychologists would have no such basis.) More precisely, Dyck’s thesis is that Kant’s attitude towards Rational Psychology varied over the years—and that it varied with his changing views about what could be cognized about the self by Empirical Psychology with the aid of inner sense.

Kant seems fairly consistent through the years that inner sense enables humans to cognize their thoughts and perceptions and the temporal succession of their thoughts and perceptions. So I cognize through inner sense that I am having thoughts about Dyck’s thesis and that my state changes from thoughts about his thesis to perceptions of his reactions to my statement of his thesis, and back to the thesis and so on. On Dyck’s view, where Kant vacillates on inner sense is about the self or soul and its activities. Does inner sense allow humans (including Empirical Psychologists) to have any cognition of their mental activities and of themselves as subjects or consciousnesses in the ‘strict sense,’ i.e., as souls and not merely as human beings with a soul and body (28.265¹)?

¹ References to Kant’s works other than the *Critique of Pure Reason* will be given in the text by the volume and page of Kant (1900-). I use the standard R numbers to refer to unpublished *Reflections*. Translations are from the Cambridge Edition volumes listed in the bibliography. Citations from the *Critique of Pure Reason* are in the text with the usual A/B pagination. The translations are from Pluhar 1996, but I indicate Kant’s emphases through bold not italics.

Dyck considers five different moments in the development of Kant's views: the attack on Rational Psychology in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, his apparent restrictions on the cognitions of inner sense in the *Inaugural Dissertation*, the lifting of those restrictions in the *Anthropology* lectures of the early 1770's; the wider scope for Empirical Psychology and the (consequently) friendlier treatment of Rational Psychology in *Metaphysics* lectures given around 1778 (*Metaphysics* L1); and the sustained attack on Rational Psychology in the *Paralogisms of Pure Reason* after inner sense is again limited in its scope, because it is now pure apperception that provides cognition of mental acts and subjects.

In this way Dyck argues against two received interpretations. One, which is encouraged by Kant's words in the *Paralogisms*, is that he regards Rational Psychology as a purely rational discipline with no relation to Empirical Psychology. The second is Wolfgang Carl's (1989) hypothesis that Kant was fairly sympathetic to the idea of a *res cogitans* at least through the time of the *Duisburg Nachlaß* (around 1775) and then discovered the 'paralogistic' character of the arguments of Rational Psychology after L1. I agree with Dyck's central thesis that neither of these accounts does justice to Kant's understanding of Rational Psychology: It was able to consider metaphysical questions (substance or accident? material or immaterial?) only about a subject whose existence had already been established on the basis of some sort of empirical evidence. In a way the *Paralogisms* chapter says as much, since Kant maintains that 'I think' is the sole text of Rational Psychology (A343/B401) or the sole proposition from which all its inferences must be drawn (B406). It is easy to read these statements as suggesting that there is no empirical basis at all; but I think that Dyck's basic insight is right. In putting matters this way, Kant is following the methodology of Rational Psychology in setting up his critique of it: He starts as it starts, with an existential proposition 'I think.'

Since I agree with Dyck's main thesis, my comments will take two forms. I'll question two details of his account of the developmental timeline and I'll try to advance the discussion by offering a hypothesis about one factor that may help explain why Kant changed his mind about what inner sense (and so Empirical Psychology) could cognize. Having laid out that hypothesis, I'll briefly indicate how it illuminates Kant's diagnosis of the error the Rational Psychologists fell into when reasoning about the cognitive subject.

There is a sense in which *Dreams of a Spirit-Seeker* perfectly exemplifies Dyck's thesis. Kant is scathing about the metaphysical claims made by Schwendenberg. He compares the realm Schwendenberg describes to a cuckoo-land that belongs in fairy tales (2.356). And he claims that "this inner sense is unknown to man" (2.364). But Schwendenberg's inner sense, which makes material objects the products of spirits (2. 364) or which receives information from the spirit world (2.362), is not the familiar Lockean internal sense. So although the *Dreams* essay is evidence that Kant thinks that Schwendenberg's metaphysics is ungrounded, because he has a crazy sort of inner sense, it does not show that Kant rejected a more standard internal sense at this time.

Further, when Kant is speaking in his own voice in the third, concluding chapter, he maintains that he knows that thinking and willing move his body, [because]

«I cognize [erkenne] the alterations that take place within me as within a living subject; in other words, I cognize my thoughts, my willing [Willkür] etc.» (2.370)

The problem is that although he cognizes these phenomena, he has no insight into them (2.370).

This discussion from 1765 raises two questions: First, how does Kant think that he cognizes these facts about himself? It is hard to see what answer he might give at this point other than ‘inner sense,’ since he has not yet introduced the power of apperception. The second question concerns the claim of no further insight into thinking and willing. At least at first look, this seems to be just the doctrine he will hold in the Critical period. We know that we think, that we combine representations, but we have no insight into how this is possible (e.g. B158). So I want to suggest that this odd essay does not indicate a rejection of Lockean inner sense and, further, that it seems to indicate considerable continuity in Kant’s views about our ability to cognize—and our inability to understand—thinking and willing, though with inner sense supplying cognition of thinking, a role that will later be assigned to apperception.

My second question about Dyck’s developmental account concerns the Inaugural Dissertation. As he notes, Kant’s discussions of whether the soul or its actions fall under the purview of inner sense are in tension with each other. But I take a different message from the principal text, viz., 4.406. In this passage Kant is trying to defuse the charge that the representations of space and time are innate. They are not innate, but acquired in an odd way:

«Each of these concepts has, without any doubt, been acquired, not indeed by abstraction from the sensing of objects (for sensation gives the matter and not the form of human cognition) but from the very action of the mind, which coordinates what is sensed by it ... Each of the concepts is like an immutable image, and, thus, each is cognized intuitively. For sensations, while exciting this action of the mind, do not enter into and become part of the intuition. Nor is there anything innate here except the law of the mind, according to which it joins together in a fixed manner the sense-impressions made by the presence of an object».

This account of the reason why the representations of space and time should not be considered innate is, of course, exactly the same as the one that he will give 20 years later in his so-called ‘Reply to Eberhard.’ But in that essay the focus is on the representations of space and time, whereas this passage is, as Dyck suggests, also concerned with acts of mind.

The problem I see for Dyck's claim that Kant seems to be appealing to an intellectual intuition concerns the grounds for claiming that we are in the realm of intuition. Space and time are cognized intuitively, not because there is some sort of intellectual intuition of the mental action of coordinating sensations, but because each concept is 'like an immutable image.' Dyck's claim follows from the fact that the immutable image is intuitive and it does not come from sensation, which seems to leave intellectual intuition as the only possible option. But I think there is another way of looking at Kant's view here. It can be brought out by considering the case of time.

As noted, Kant always maintains that humans are conscious of the alterations in their thoughts and perceptions. So are they aware of time through inner sense? Kant's answer has to be a firm: 'yes and no.' 'Yes,' because time is the form of inner sense and through inner sense one is aware of the succession of one's states. 'No,' because time cannot be sensed at all; a fortiori, it cannot be sensed by inner sense. In the *Metaphysics* notes L1, he is presented as giving the answer to the conundrum:

«We must not believe that all cognitions of the senses come from the senses; but rather also from the understanding ...» (28.232)

This passage foreshadows the famous opening warning of the Introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the fact that all cognition must begin with sensation does not imply that it all comes from sensation. So I think we have a pretty firm grasp of the doctrine behind the difficulty in the *Inaugural Dissertation* passage. Although temporal relations cannot be sensed, humans cognize their thoughts and perceptions as successive through inner sense. A parallel claim would be made for space: Although humans cannot sense spatial relations, they cognize objects as standing in spatial relations through outer sense.

What do humans cognize when, for example, they intuit successive states through inner intuition? Clearly they cognize the states, but what can be said about the relation of succession? Kant does not want to class it with illusions, since his point in the *Inaugural Dissertation*, underscored in the passage, is that these representations are produced by stable and innate laws of mental action. In his well-known letter to Herz, Kant suggests that a standard view was that what representations represented (and so what was cognized through representations) were their causes:

«If a representation comprises only the manner in which the subject is affected by the object, then it is easy to see how it is in conformity with this object, namely, as an effect accords with its cause, and it is easy to see how this modification of our mind can represent something, that is, have an object ...» (10.130-31)

On a causal theory of representation/cognition, inner sense would provide cognition of the actions of the mind that coordinate sensations, through providing intuitions of images that invariably exhibit temporal relations. And there would be no need for an intellectual intuition, even though the temporal relations are not strictly sensory. For this reason, I'm not sure that Dyck is right that this passage offers evidence that Kant took the possibility of

an intellectual intuition of mental action seriously at this point. I think that he is saying, rather, that humans intuit spatial and temporal arrays and thereby cognize the mental actions that produced these constant forms of intuition.

Further, I think this passage suggests a difficulty with Kant's use of 'inner sense' that has implications about how he can practice Empirical Psychology. The difficulty is that, on his view, what is cognized through inner sense and is thus a contribution to Empirical Psychology is not merely sensory and so not merely empirical. As he became clearer about his doctrine of the forms of intuition and in particular, when he came to believe that coordinating sensory materials in spatial and temporal arrays was carried out by the activity of the imagination under the guidance of the categories of the understanding, then the deliverances of inner sense—insofar as it is a merely a conduit for sensory materials—would seem far more meager. It is not supplying any information that contributes to the spatial and temporal representations of objects; a fortiori, it is not a means for cognizing the mental activities that produce those representations. My hypothesis, then, is that some of Kant's vacillation about inner sense depends on whether he is considering it broadly, as a faculty that provides intuitions with a particular form, or whether he is restricting what it provides to what can be sensed.

Strictly construed, inner sense is even less helpful in providing cognition of an identical cognitive subject through time. Even if the cognition of a thought or perception entitles the subject to infer that the state must inhere in some substance, there can be no inference to a common subject for the different states. And even if we broaden the deliverances of inner sense to include not just sensory materials, but also the form of time, the cognition of one thought or perception after another still provides no indication of a common subject that perdures, while something changes, because there are just the changing perceptions and nothing that is common to a run of them.

Given the absence of any sensory evidence for a continuing subject, Kant argues that cognizers must come to understand themselves as perduring thinkers through their self-understanding of the requirements of thinking, of combining some representations in others.

«[T]his reference [to an identical subject] comes about not through my merely accompanying each representation with consciousness, but through my adding one representation to another and being conscious of their synthesis. Hence only because I can combine a manifold of given representations in one consciousness, is it possible for me to represent the identity of the consciousness itself in these representations». (B133, my italics)

How exactly the combining of representations is related to the recognition of the existence of a single consciousness is, I think, debatable. Many believe that it is a necessary condition for combining mental states that they (already) belong to a single consciousness; I think that the combining of representations and recognizing them as combined produces

the relation of recognized necessary connection across the states that is the basis of their being understood as states of one consciousness, but these differences do not matter for my present purposes.

The important point is that when Kant observes that ‘I think’ is the sole text of Rational Psychology, he is both employing the methodology of impure Rational Psychology and, simultaneously, exposing its Achilles heel. It is an empirical proposition that I think, but as he explains in a note

«[w]hen I called the proposition I think an empirical proposition, I did not mean that the I in this proposition is an empirical representation». (B423a)

Humans cognize through experience that, e.g. their thought about a thesis is followed by a perception of the author of that thesis, and they cognize through experience that they are continuing selves. For one who has fully grasped Kant’s theory of the forms of intuition, the categories of the understanding and the transcendental concept ‘I-think’ (A341/B399), however, these propositions cannot be understood as purely empirical. I take it that one robust strand in Kant’s complicated dismantling of Rational Psychology is his insistence that the proponents of this theory did not understand the true source of their representation ‘I think,’ and so mistakenly took it to be purely empirical.

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