

Kant and Tetens on the Unity of the Self

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There can be no doubt that Johann Nikolaus Tetens (1736–1807) was one of Kant's most important German philosophical contemporaries. His main work, the huge and wide-ranging two-volume *Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung* (*Philosophical Essays on Human Nature and its Development*) of 1777, comprising a total of more than 1,600 pages in the original edition, made a significant impression on the philosophical scene in the late eighteenth century.¹ Although the work was criticised in relation to many points of detail and from a variety of perspectives, it was, on the whole, well received and reviewed extensively.² Kant, too, was impressed. Kant was critical of the work's unsystematic nature and style, and of aspects of its general approach; nevertheless, he thought of Tetens as one of the leading philosophers of the day, identifying him as one of the few thinkers of the time whom he could reasonably expect not only to understand but also to be able and willing to pursue the kind of project that he himself had developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant does not mention Tetens in any of his published writings, but he does in various letters and notes. There is, for example, a letter to Marcus Herz from 1778, another letter to Herz from 1781 and a letter to Garve from 1783, and there are Kant's marginal notes in his copy of Tetens's book and other *Reflexionen* referring to Tetens.³

¹ Johann Nikolaus Tetens, *Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung*, 2 vols, edited with commentary by Udo Roth und Gideon Stiening. This work is cited here according to volume and page number in the original edition of 1777, also given in the Roth and Stiening edition. Eric Watkins has translated selections from *Versuche* into English. See Watkins (ed. and transl.), *Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason': Background Source Materials*, pp. 353–91.

² See Roth and Stiening, 'Zur Einführung', in Tetens's *Versuche*, pp. xx–xxi.

³ Kant's letters to Marcus Herz are from April 1778 and May 1781 (Corr, 10:232, 270), and the letter to Garve is from 7 August 1783 (Corr, 10:341). Kant made marginal notes on pp. 19 and 131 in vol. 1 of his copy of Tetens's *Versuche* (R 4847 and R 4848, 18:5). Kant distinguishes his own project from that of Tetens in R 4900 and R 4901, 18:23.

It is plain that Tetens was of considerable importance to Kant. Manfred Kuehn has argued that Tetens provided a crucial link between earlier German empiricist thought such as Feder's, on the one hand, and Kant's, on the other.⁴ As Kuehn states, it is Tetens's philosophy 'that makes clearer than any other Kant's connections with his contemporaries'.⁵ Indeed, scholarly interest in Tetens seems to be inspired mainly by his obvious relevance to Kant's thought. There is comparatively little on Tetens's philosophy in its own right, although recently steps have been taken to rectify this.⁶ A somewhat neglected aspect of his relation to Kant is the impact that the early Kant, especially through the Dissertation of 1770, had on the development of Tetens's own thought.⁷ Yet most of the literature on Tetens focuses only on the relevance of his *Versuche* to Kant's Critical philosophy. There is a considerable, if not a huge, amount of work on various aspects of this relation, links between Tetens's and Kant's teachings being discussed on a number of issues.⁸

Indeed, it is not surprising that Kant became interested in Tetens while working on the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the late 1770s. It seems that Tetens's general project was very similar to Kant's, at least in some important respects. Both aimed, in different ways, at overcoming the divide between what later came to be called 'empiricism' and 'rationalism'. Much of early scholarship on Tetens did not sufficiently recognise his concern with this kind of project, however, as it saw him as a

⁴ Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768–1800*, p. 121. Kuehn provides a detailed account of the influence the Scottish Common Sense philosophy had on Tetens. For other literature on Tetens's philosophy in general, see Sommer, *Grundzüge einer Geschichte der deutschen Psychologie*, pp. 260–302; Uebele, *Johann Nicolaus Tetens nach seiner Gesamtentwicklung betrachtet*; Beck, *Early German Philosophy*, pp. 412–25; Barnouw, 'The Philosophical Achievement and Historical Significance of Johann Nicolas Tetens'; Rappard, *Psychology as Self-knowledge*, pp. 49–83; and Hauser, *Selbstbewußtsein und personale Identität*, pp. 124–51.

⁵ Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense*, p. 121.

⁶ Stiening and Thiel (eds.), *Johann Nikolaus Tetens (1736–1807)*.

⁷ Tetens refers to Kant's Dissertation in several places, for example in *Versuche* I, pp. 359–60, where he examines the question of how the concepts of space and time are acquired. Corey Dyck has recently dealt with this issue, arguing that Tetens not only identified problems with Kant's early analyses, but also offered his own solution, which in turn anticipated and might even have influenced Kant's thinking in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and after; cf. Dyck, 'Tetens as a Reader of Kant's Inaugural Dissertation'.

⁸ For the general relationship between Kant's and Tetens's philosophies, see, for example, Sommer, *Grundzüge einer Geschichte der deutschen Psychologie*, pp. 280–302; Seidel, *Tetens' Einfluß auf die Philosophie Kants*; and Carl, *Der schweigende Kant*, pp. 115–26. For more recent accounts of specific aspects of the relationship, see, for example, Heßbrüggen-Walter, 'Kant, Tetens und die Grundkraft der Seele'; Krouglov, 'Der Begriff transzendental bei J. N. Tetens'; Krouglov, 'Tetens und die Deduktion der Kategorien bei Kant'; Wunderlich, *Kant und die Bewusstseinstheorien*, pp. 69–81; Stapleford, 'Reid, Tetens, and Kant on the External World'; and Dyck, *Kant and Rational Psychology*, pp. 54–60.

straightforward empiricist. And Kant, too, when distinguishing himself from Tetens, singles out the empiricist aspects of Tetens's philosophy. Thus he says that '*Tetens* examines the concepts of pure reason merely subjectively (human nature), I objectively. The former analysis is empirical, the latter transcendental' (R 4901, 18:23; see also R 4900). And the label 'the German Locke', first used for Tetens by Karl Rosenkranz in 1840, remains popular, even though the appropriateness of this label has been questioned in recent years.⁹

It is true, however, that Tetens seems to commit himself to an empiricist or observational approach to philosophical problems. In the preface to the *Versuche*, he presents his work as a 'psychological analysis of the soul'.¹⁰ Explicitly appealing to Locke, he says that his method is observational. The basis for his 'psychological analysis' is the modifications of the soul as they are given through a 'feeling of the self' (*Selbstgefühl*). These are then to be repeated and modified, and attention is to be given to their genesis. The observations are to be compared and analysed so that the most basic faculties and operations and their relations to each other can be discovered.¹¹ It is plain that Tetens was strongly influenced by the Göttingen empiricist philosopher Johann Georg Heinrich Feder, whose very popular textbook, *Logik und Metaphysik* (*Logic and Metaphysics*), first published in 1769, Tetens used for his lectures from the winter term of 1769–1776.¹² Feder, in turn, was strongly influenced by British philosophy and later criticised Kant's philosophy from an empiricist standpoint.

Tetens's aim is not a mere natural history of the mind, however. He aims at going beyond a collection of observed facts or a mere description of the operations of the soul and their connections, a mere 'mental geography', as Hume put it. Rather, the descriptive account is only Tetens's starting point; his aim is to then discover principles which allow us to infer the causes of mental operations in order 'to establish something certain . . . about the nature of the soul, as the subject of the observed operations'.¹³ In short,

⁹ See, for example, Stiening and Thiel, *Johann Nikolaus Tetens*, p. 16. ¹⁰ *Versuche* I, p. iv.

¹¹ 'Was die *Methode* betrifft, deren ich mich bedient habe, so halte ichs für nöthig, darüber zum voraus mich zu erklären. Sie ist die *beobachtende*, die *Lock* bey dem Verstande, und unsere Psychologen in der Erfahrungs-Seelenlehre befolgt haben. Die Modifikationen der Seele so nehmen, wie sie durch das Selbstgefühl erkannt werden; diese sorgfältig wiederholt, und mit Abänderung der Umstände wahrnehmen, beobachten, ihre Entstehungsart und die Wirkungsgesetze der Kräfte, die sie hervorbringen, bemerken; alsdenn die Beobachtungen vergleichen, auflösen und daraus die einfachsten Vermögen und Wirkungsarten und deren Beziehungen aufeinander aufsuchen' (*Versuche* I, pp. iii–iv). See also *ibid.*, p. 170.

¹² See Sellhoff, 'Einleitung', in *Johann Nikolaus Tetens: Metaphysik*, pp. xlv–xlix. As Sellhoff points out, Feder refers to Tetens's *Versuche* in later editions of *Logik und Metaphysik* (e.g., 1783, §8, p. 31).

¹³ *Versuche*, I, p. iv.

Tetens's aim is to establish a metaphysics of the soul, but to do so on an empirical basis. In order to achieve this aim, obviously, reasoning (*Raisonnement*) is required in addition to observation. 'In the last analysis', Tetens argues, 'the reflections and inferences make the simple observations useful, and without them we would touch merely the surface of things'.¹⁴ Tetens would regard a mere mental geography as superficial, as he thinks that philosophy should dig deeper, go beyond the surface of things. Elsewhere, Tetens states explicitly that the observational approach is merely the first step in his investigations and that rational 'speculation' (*Spekulation aus allgemeinen Gründen*) is required for philosophy. Like Leibniz in his *Nouveaux essais*, he even states that one can learn from the 'scholastics' here.¹⁵ This sounds like a far cry from a 'German Locke'. Clearly, there are significant differences between Locke's and Tetens's projects.

To be sure, Locke, too, thinks that reason is just as important as experience in formulating hypotheses about the nature of things that are more probably true than other views. Importantly, however, unlike Tetens, Locke does not think that experience and reason can make out anything certain about the real nature of the soul (or the nature of matter). Its 'real essence', as Locke would have said, remains unknown to us. To describe Tetens's project as straightforwardly empiricist, then, is misleading to say the least. And yet, too often his arguments are said to be problematic because they are inconsistent with his (alleged) 'empiricism'. It may well be that there are inconsistencies in Tetens's account, but this would not be because of any purely 'empiricist' project that he endorsed. Also, his metaphysical conclusions may not be well warranted, or it may be difficult to see how precisely his synthesis of rationalism and empiricism is meant to work, but again, these are different points. Here we need to emphasise his metaphysical aim and his attempt to reconcile empiricist and rationalist strands of thought. Tetens was not a 'German Locke'; rather, like Kant, his project consisted in finding a way beyond the empiricism/rationalism divide, even if his method and the results are very different, indeed, from Kant's.

Unlike much Tetens scholarship, Kant must have recognised that Tetens pursued a project of that kind. Had he regarded Tetens as a mere empiricist concerned with nothing but the 'evolution of concepts' (R 4900, 18:23), he would hardly have thought of him as one of the very

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxx.

¹⁵ Johann Nikolaus Tetens, *Ueber die allgemeine speculativische Philosophie*, p. 86. See also pp. 73 and 89.

few thinkers of his day who would be able to ‘enlighten the world’ about the project of a *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹⁶ The fact that Kant was very disappointed when no such enlightening activity on Tetens’s part was forthcoming is just a further indication of the high expectations and regard Kant had for Tetens as a philosopher.

My focus in this paper is on an issue that seems to have been somewhat neglected in the literature on Tetens and Kant. It is a central issue for both thinkers, even if Tetens at least does not explicitly describe it as a central topic. This is the notion of the unity of the self. My aim is not to show that Tetens had said what Kant later said, only less precisely, but rather to account for the notion of unity in both thinkers and highlight the similarities and differences and thereby illuminate both thinkers’ accounts and their relationship to one another.

I. Tetens on Inner Sense, Consciousness and *Selbstgefühl*

In the comments cited above on his observational method, Tetens makes use of the notion of a ‘feeling of the self’, or *Selbstgefühl*. It turns out that this notion is of central importance to his overall project and to the issue of unity in particular. What is this *Selbstgefühl*, and how is it related to notions such as consciousness and apperception that Tetens also makes use of? The notion of *Selbstgefühl* is somewhat uncommon in present-day philosophical debates, though it was a popular term in late eighteenth-century writings on empirical psychology and anthropology. It seems that Johann Bernhard Basedow had introduced the term into the philosophical terminology in 1764.¹⁷ Obviously, similar expressions, such as ‘*inneres Gefühl*’, had been used much earlier,¹⁸ but ‘*Selbstgefühl*’ became popular when Feder took over the term from Basedow in his influential *Logik und Metaphysik*, mentioned earlier as a textbook that Tetens used for his lectures.¹⁹ Very probably, then, Tetens adopted this term from Feder. It is not easy, however, to determine the exact meaning of ‘*Selbstgefühl*’, as it was used in several different ways by a variety of thinkers.²⁰ Here, we focus on Tetens.

¹⁶ Letter to Herz, May 1781 (Corr, 10:270). See also the letter to Garve, 7 August 1783 (Corr, 10:341).

¹⁷ Johann Bernhard Basedow, *Philalethie*, vol. 2, §10.

¹⁸ See, for example, Georg Friedrich Meier, *Metaphysik*, vol. III, pp. 10 and 21.

¹⁹ Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik* (1769), pp. 116 and 267f.

²⁰ For a detailed account of the notion of *Selbstgefühl* in eighteenth-century thought, see Thiel, ‘Varieties of Inner Sense’, and for a discussion of Tetens, see Thiel, ‘Zwischen Empirischer Psychologie und Rationaler Seelenlehre’.

Tetens seems to connect *Selbstgefühl*, considered as a faculty of the soul, with inner sense. *Selbstgefühl* is ‘the feeling of any kind of inner states and modifications considered in themselves, as they exist in us’.²¹ Inner sense is conceived more broadly than *Selbstgefühl*, however, for the objects of inner sense include ‘the relations of objects that are in us, such as the feeling of identity and diversity’ as well as the feelings of the beautiful, the morally good and the true. *Selbstgefühl*, then, considered as a faculty, is a kind of inner sense but not identical with it. Tetens also distinguishes *Selbstgefühl* from the consciousness of our own mental states, as it denotes the immediately felt presence of mental states, in the sense of what is today called a first-order model, according to which this feeling or awareness is an essential and immanent feature of the mental states themselves. Consciousness, by contrast, understood as a relating to our own mental states, is a secondary act through which those states become conscious in the first place. This is why Tetens argues that consciousness can relate only to past states, not to the immediately present ones: ‘One is not conscious to oneself that one is conscious of some object, [one is] not in the former [state], that is, at the same moment at which one is the latter state. We do not reflect on our own reflection at the same moment at which our reflection is occupied with a particular object.’²² That Tetens uses the terminology of ‘reflection’ here to account for the consciousness of mental states indicates that he thinks of the latter in terms of a second-order model. In other contexts, however, he appears to account for consciousness in terms of an immediate ‘feeling’, as we shall see below.

2. Tetens on Apperception and the Consciousness of Objects

In accounting for apperception and the consciousness of objects, Tetens seems to follow Christian Wolff rather than the tradition of Locke or Hume, although he uses the terminology somewhat differently from Wolff.²³ In Tetens, ‘apperception’ does not stand for self-consciousness, but for ‘*Gewahrnehmen*’, or awareness, and is closer to Wolff’s ‘*Bewußtseyñ*’, or consciousness.²⁴ Like Wolff in his remarks on consciousness, Tetens

²¹ *Versuche* I, p. 190. ²² *Versuche* I, p. 46.

²³ On this latter point, see Wunderlich, *Kant und die Bewußtseinstheorien*, pp. 75f., and Thiel, ‘Zwischen Empirischer Psychologie und Rationaler Seelenlehre’, p. 94. For Wolff, see also Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, pp. 304–11. For a detailed discussion of Tetens’s notion of apperception as *Gewahrnehmen*, see Kitcher, ‘Analyzing Apperception (*Gewahrnehmen*)’.

²⁴ Thus Watkins translates Tetens’s *Gewahrnehmen* as ‘awareness’; cf. Watkins, *Background Source Materials*, p. 361.

accounts for apperception in terms of the notion of distinguishing between things: 'Being aware is a distinguishing.'²⁵ We apperceive an object when we become aware of its distinctness from other objects; the function of apperception is to distinguish objects from each other.²⁶ As the act of distinguishing is an activity of the power of thought, Tetens ascribes apperception to thought (*Denkkraft*). The faculty of thought consists in cognizing 'relations among things'.²⁷ For Tetens, then, apperception is an intellectual faculty. Also, like Wolff (in regard to consciousness), he argues that attention and reflection are necessary conditions of apperception,²⁸ and that reflection is to be understood in terms of comparing things or ideas of things.²⁹ Tetens points out that what he calls '*Bemerken*' involves more than distinguishing among objects; it picks out the characteristics of an object that can serve for re-identifying it in the future.³⁰

The consciousness ('*Bewußtseyn*') of objects, however, is equivalent neither to apperception nor to *Bemerken*. For Tetens, the consciousness of objects does involve the act of distinguishing (and thus *Gewahrnehmen*, or apperception). Consciousness of an object, however, is a mental state in which one not only feels (through acts of distinguishing) the object or its representation, but also one's own self as the subject of these activities. Consciousness in this context is a feeling that combines the feeling of the object and the feeling of one's own self. It involves an act of distinguishing between the felt thing and one's own self.³¹ This idea is also present in Wolff. Wolff held that it is through our consciousness of objects that we become conscious of ourselves as something that is distinct from the objects of which we are conscious. Tetens, too, argues that relating to objects and to one's own self belong 'inseparably' together, as he puts it. Without relating to objects, there could be no relating to one's own self.³²

²⁵ *Versuche* I, p. 262. ²⁶ *Ibid.* ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 295. ²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 282–5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

³⁰ 'Das Bemerken will etwas mehr sagen, als Gewahrnehmen. Wer etwas bemerkt, sucht an der wahrgenommenen Sache ein Merkmal auf, woran sie auch in der Folge gewahrnommen und ausgekannt werden könne' (*ibid.*, p. 263).

³¹ 'Sich einer Sache bewußt seyn, drucket einen fortdauernden Zustand aus, in welchem man einen Gegenstand oder dessen Vorstellung unterscheidend fühlet, und sich selbst dazu. Das Bewußtseyn ist von Einer Seite ein Gefühl, . . . mit dem ein Unterscheiden der gefühlten Sache und Seiner selbst verbunden ist. Gefühl und Gewahrnehmung sind die beiden Bestandtheile des Bewußtseyns' (*ibid.*).

³² See *ibid.*, p. 379. Wolff does not merely say that the two concepts are inseparable, however, and that we cannot relate to our own self without also relating to an object, but also that without relating to our own self, we could not relate to objects. Thus he suggests a relation of mutual dependence, though without explaining this idea in any detail (see Wolff, *Deutsche Metaphysik*,

In the previous section, we noted that *Selbstgefühl* and being conscious of one's own mental states are two distinct ways of relating to one's own self for Tetens. In the present context, Tetens thinks of consciousness as a complex feeling that involves *Selbstgefühl* but, again, is not identical with it. Here, consciousness involves a feeling of the apperceived object and the feeling of one's own self.³³ However, Tetens does not seem to elaborate on the function *Selbstgefühl* is meant to fulfil for the consciousness of objects. He does not explain why he thinks the feeling of self is involved in our consciousness of objects.

3. Tetens on the Unity of the Self and *Selbstgefühl*

What, precisely, is the object of *Selbstgefühl*? Tetens does not seem to be clear on this. Sometimes, following Hume, he claims that only our mental acts or ideas constitute the immediate objects of *Selbstgefühl*,³⁴ and that the notion of a subject or bearer of those mental operations is inferred. This is implied by his definition of *Selbstgefühl* as a feeling of 'inner modifications' of the soul, i.e., not of the soul itself as the bearer of those modifications.³⁵ At other times, he seems to suggest that the self as an embodied soul is an object of feeling.³⁶ And against Hume, Tetens argues that *Selbstgefühl* even leads to the notion of a strictly unitary and identical self and maintains that Hume had simply 'overlooked' this fact. This can be maintained, Tetens believes, by accepting no more as real than Hume does – that is to say, by relating only to those items of which we are immediately conscious. We feel, as Hume would concede, a multiplicity of perceptions; but, Tetens maintains, we feel more than that.³⁷ For whenever I feel a

§730). Compare Thiel, 'Zum Verhältnis von Gegenstandsbewußtsein und Selbstbewußtsein bei Wolff und seinen Kritikern'; Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, pp. 304–11; and Wunderlich, *Kant und die Bewußtseinstheorien*, p. 77.

³³ Note that Tetens does not equate *Selbstgefühl* with self-consciousness. In contrast to the former, the latter is a mediated relating to one's own self. Compare *Versuche* I, pp. 298–9. For a discussion of this, see Thiel, 'Zwischen Empirischer Psychologie und Rationaler Seelenlehre', pp. 95–6, and Wunderlich, *Kant und die Bewußtseinstheorien*, pp. 77–8.

³⁴ See again the passage from *Versuche* I, p. 190.

³⁵ 'Die innern Modifikationen, deren Gefühl unser *Selbstgefühl* ausmacht' (ibid., p. 154). Compare also ibid., II, p. 172.

³⁶ See *Versuche* II, p. 170: 'What is the object of my feeling when I feel myself and my actions? Pure observation can only answer that I feel the self, the feeling, thinking, and willing whole which consists of a body and a simple soul, the embodied soul.' Compare also: 'Es ist der *Mensch*, der von dem *Menschen* gefühlet wird' (ibid., p. 173).

³⁷ 'The matter is not as Mr. Hume says it is, and one can assert this without assuming that something more is actually present than what he himself recognises, namely, only as much as we are aware of *immediately*. But Mr. Hume overlooked one important circumstance. I feel one representation, and

perception, I am also conscious, he holds, that this feeling is part of a 'larger' and 'stronger' but 'obscure' feeling of a 'ground' (*Grund*) of my perceptions, which remains the same in all changes of perceptions. This is Tetens's notion of an 'obscure ground', or core, of all our perceptions. Tetens argues:

As often as I have an impression of, am aware of, or become immediately conscious of a representation I am to that extent also conscious that this feeling of my modification is only a prominent aspect of a much larger, more extensive, stronger feeling, though one that is, in its other parts, obscure or at least less clear. And I am just as conscious of this latter [feeling] and in the same way that I can always be with respect to each individual feature of which I become aware, in the same way, namely, that one can ever become immediately conscious of something. Thus I have such an impression that carries me to the thought that a *thing* and a *feature* in this thing is present, in the very same way that I can arrive at this thought according to Mr. Hume's own explanation: a *feature* is actual. And in this whole impression the *obscure* [*back*]ground for it is always *the same*, if I am aware of one aspect of it as presently actual in me instead of another that has faded away. This [*back*]ground for the whole impression . . . is *the same* throughout *all* of the particular changes that occur in the impression and the representation.³⁸

Tetens's statements about the feeling relating to an 'obscure ground' as a 'larger' and 'stronger' but 'less clear' feeling that is part of any particular perception we feel are left unexplained, however.³⁹ In the end, it remains unclear whether Tetens wants to say that we are directly conscious of this 'obscure ground' or that it is suggested to us somehow by the immediate consciousness or feeling of particular perceptions.⁴⁰

Still, for Tetens it follows from this observation that the self is not a mere collection of a multiplicity of ideas that the imagination may then combine into some fictional unity. Rather, there is a natural and real unity of the self. This is why we have the idea of *one* subject with many modifications. Tetens argues that it is a consequence of his observation about the 'obscure ground',

another, also an activity of thinking, an expression of the will, etc., and these impressions are different and actual. But I have even more impressions' (*Versuche* I, p. 393; the translation of this passage is from Watkins, *Background Source Materials*, p. 370).

³⁸ *Versuche* I, pp. 393–4. The translation of this passage is from Watkins, *Background Source Materials*, p. 370.

³⁹ Compare Baumgarten, who calls the totality of our obscure perceptions the 'ground of the soul' (*fundus animae*; *Grund der Seele*). Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, §511. For this issue, see also Frank, *Selbstgefühl*, pp. 203–4.

⁴⁰ See also *Versuche* I, p. 261: 'Begleitet nicht ein gewisses dunkles Selbstgefühl *alle* unsere Zustände, Beschaffenheiten und Veränderungen von der leidentlichen Gattung?'

that the idea or representation of my *I* is not a collection of individual representations that our imagination might have turned into a whole just like it unifies the individual representations of soldiers into a representation of one regiment. That unification lies in the *impression* itself, in nature, and not in a combination that it makes itself. For this reason a representation of *one* subject with *different* features arises, that is, a *representation* that immediately arises from the *impression*, must be *thought* in this way and turned into an *idea* such that the common human understanding actually does form it in this way.⁴¹

4. Tetens on the Unity of the Self as Appearance and as Substance

It was a common view in eighteenth-century philosophy that the soul, as a simple substance, is the object of an immediate feeling. In some passages at least, Tetens, too, seems to hold this view. Obviously, however, it is highly problematic to assert that we simply ‘feel’ that the soul is such an entity. Elsewhere, Tetens argues more cautiously, suggesting that he is aware of the problematic nature of this claim and is attempting to remain metaphysically neutral as to the object of *Selbstgefühl*. In this context, it is important to highlight a distinction Tetens draws between two ways of thinking about the self. He distinguishes between the soul in a psychological sense (*‘im psychologischen Verstande’*) and in a metaphysical sense (*‘im metaphysischen Verstande’*). The latter is not an object of *Selbstgefühl*, but of ‘theoretical speculation’, and is thought of as an incorporeal substance.⁴² This, as we shall see, is relevant to the issue of unity.⁴³ The human self or soul, considered in a psychological sense, is that self that we feel directly through *Selbstgefühl*.⁴⁴ Regarding the psychological self, it does not matter, Tetens seems to hold, if the soul consists solely of a simple immaterial essence, of such an immaterial essence in combination with an inner corporeal instrument of feeling and thought, or of only an ‘inner organised body’.⁴⁵ Tetens suggests that we need to distinguish between what is accessible to *Selbstgefühl* and the ontological ground of the empirical or ‘psychological’ self. The real essence, as Locke would have put it, of

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 394. The translation of this passage is from Watkins, *Background Source Materials*, pp. 370–1.

⁴² *Versuche* I, pp. 739–40.

⁴³ For a general account of Kant’s and empiricists’ conception of unity, see Thiel, ‘Unities of the Self: From Kant to Locke’.

⁴⁴ ‘Die menschliche Seele im *psychologischen* Verstande genommen, ist das *Ich*, das wir mit unserm *Selbstgefühl* empfinden und beobachten können ... Genug es ist das fühlende, denkende und wollende Eins, der innere Mensch selbst’ (*Versuche* I, p. 740).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the self or soul may be of this or that nature, but whatever it is, it is not an object of *Selbstgefühl* and thus not relevant to the self in an empirical or psychological sense. Strictly speaking, for Tetens, the soul 'in a psychological sense' is mere appearance ('*Schein*'): our immediate awareness of the self does not allow us to consider it as anything else but appearance.⁴⁶ As his critique of Hume suggests, however, for Tetens there is unity at the level of inner consciousness and observation. He speaks explicitly of an 'observed unity of the self'.⁴⁷ Our very *Selbstgefühl*, Tetens holds, indicates that the self is more than a play of fibres in the brain; it is a unitary entity, not a 'heap of several things'.⁴⁸ Tetens thinks it is a matter of observation that the self that sees is the same as that which tastes, thinks, wills, etc.; there is one unitary entity involved in all mental operations.⁴⁹ Of course, this notion of an empirical unity of the self raises questions: Is this unity really an object of mere observation or feeling, as Tetens maintains? Do we feel this unity, or do we feel only the various inner modifications, as Hume would have objected to Tetens's thesis? In short, is Tetens's alleged 'observed unity' perhaps merely an asserted unity and not a matter of experience at all? Further, even if we assumed with Tetens that there is a feeling of unity, such a feeling could deceive us. We may think, on the basis of inner experience or feeling, that we are unitary beings, without in fact being unitary at all. Tetens would probably have argued that such a feeling, if it exists, cannot be illusory, but indicates the existence of a real unity. If there were no real unity, the feeling of unity would disappear.⁵⁰

Tetens maintains, moreover, that the appearances of *Selbstgefühl* relate indirectly to the qualities and powers of the soul in a metaphysical sense, to

⁴⁶ 'Was endlich die Natur unsers Selbstgefühls und der Vorstellungen betrifft, die wir von unsern eigenen Wirkungen haben, so können sie . . . nichts mehr als *Schein* seyn; so wie die unmittelbare Beobachtung uns auch nicht berechtigt, sie für etwas mehr anzusehen . . . Denn wir empfinden die Aktus unsers Gefühls, und des Denkens, und des Wollens nur in ihren Wirkungen, das ist, in den Veränderungen und Folgen, die davon in dem gesammten Seelenwesen, das *ist*, in einem zusammengesetzten Wesen abhängen' (*Versuche* II, p. 212).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 175. ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 178 and 183.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 191. Tetens does not deal in any detail with the issue of diachronic personal identity. Although he holds that our very *Selbstgefühl* leads to the notion of an identical self or 'obscure ground' underlying our perceptions, he is not saying that our identity through time is known to us through a direct feeling. Rather, he argues that the concept of the identity of the self is derived from comparing the present feeling of one's own self, as a subject with certain characteristics, with a similar past feeling that is being reproduced. ('Daher der Begriff von der *Identität unsers Ichs*, aus der Vergleichung eines gegenwärtigen Gefühls von unserm *Ich*, als einem Subjekt mit seiner in ihm vorhandenen Beschaffenheit mit einem ähnlichen vergangenen Gefühl, welches reproduciret wird,' *Versuche* I, p. 394.) Note that Tetens comments here on the way in which we develop the concept of our own identity. He does not seem to explain how the diachronic identity of the self is constituted. Rather, he seems to take diachronic identity for granted.

⁵⁰ *Versuche* II, p. 197.

which he refers as the ‘simple self’.⁵¹ The soul in this sense is a ‘simple entity, distinct from the organised body’, an immaterial substance.⁵² Tetens accounts for the self in a metaphysical sense in terms of a ‘substantial unity of the soul’.⁵³ But how, according to Tetens, do we arrive at the notion of a metaphysical and substantial unity? His critique of Hume’s bundle account of the mind suggests that the simple, incorporeal self is itself an object of inner experience and is part of that totality that we feel when we are conscious of ‘inner modifications’. Elsewhere, however, Tetens argues that immediate experience merely ‘suggests’ the notion of an incorporeal self or, more strongly, that we are ‘forced’ to come up with this notion from immediate experience.⁵⁴ Clearly, if experience merely suggests the idea of unity, then this idea is not an object of direct experience or *Selbstgefühl*. Moreover, Tetens seems to be saying in another passage that ‘theoretical speculation about the nature of the soul’ is required in order to arrive at the idea of a substantial unity.⁵⁵

Indeed, Tetens seems to argue for the idea of a unitary soul by way of reflecting on the conditions of experience and thought in general. This argument appears in the context of his attempt to answer his own question about how we arrive at the notion of a substantial unity. Again, if the substantial unity has to be inferred, then it is not immediately given in experience or *Selbstgefühl*. Clearly, as we shall see, Tetens employs a method that goes well beyond the empiricist strands of his thought.

Tetens’s first step in answering his question about substantial unity is to show that in order to have representations of external objects, an activity of judging or forming propositions is required, and that in order to be able to do the latter, an activity of distinguishing between the external thing, the representation, and one’s own self is required.⁵⁶ Tetens does not mention the notion of substantial unity here, but he introduces a notion of a self that is not an object of feeling or experience. Rather, it is the notion of something that we have to think in order to be able to explain representations of external objects. Without such a notion of the self, as distinct from

⁵¹ ‘Erscheinungen . . . , die sich . . . mittelbar auf die Beschaffenheiten, Kräfte und Vermögen des einfachen Ichs beziehen’ (ibid., pp. 212–13).

⁵² *Versuche* I, p. 739. ⁵³ *Versuche* II, p. 175. ⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 178. ⁵⁵ *Versuche* I, p. 740.

⁵⁶ ‘Mit allen Vorstellungen des Gesichts, des Gefühls und der übrigen Sinne wird der Gedanke verbunden, dass sie äußere *Objekte* vorstellen. Dieser Gedanke besteht in einem Urtheil, und setzt voraus, dass schon eine allgemeine Vorstellung von einem *Dinge*, von einem *wirklichen* Dinge, und von einem *äußern* Dinge, vorhanden, und dass diese von einer andern allgemeinen Vorstellung von *unserm Selbst*, und von einer Sache *in uns*, unterschieden sey’ (ibid., p. 344).

the representation of other things, the possibility of forming propositions about the existence of external things could not even be entertained. This notion is a requirement of thought.

Next, Tetens attempts to show that the required notion of the self is that of a unitary substance or a 'substantial unity'. Without such a unity, the operations of the soul would not be possible. He argues that 'the collective powers and operations presuppose a substantial unity in which the collection is performed and with respect to which they are only such powers and operations as they are'.⁵⁷ Even individual operations presuppose such a unity, Tetens argues. Such operations consist of a multitude of elements. These elements can become one single act only if they belong to a substantial unity.⁵⁸ He argues, further, that the very act of forming a judgement or proposition presupposes the unity of the self. In order to form even the most basic proposition, we need to combine subject, predicate and the relation between the two. This combination would not be possible if there were no unitary self to which these various thoughts belonged.⁵⁹

In sum, there are three notions of the unity of the self in Tetens. First, there is the empirical, observed or observable unity relating to the self in a psychological sense, a unity that is simply a fact of consciousness or inner experience.⁶⁰ Second, as Tetens obviously thinks that the observed unity of the psychological self is not sufficient, there is the idea of substantial unity that relates to the self in the metaphysical sense, understood as an immaterial entity. Rational reflection, rather than merely feeling and observation, is required to arrive at the notion of a substantial unity. As we saw, one reflection that is relevant here is that the nature of having representations or mental activity leads, third, to the idea of unitary self as a necessary condition of such activity. Importantly, for Tetens, the notion of the unity of the self as a necessary condition of mental activity collapses into the second, the substantial unity. For Tetens, the unity of the self as a necessary condition of mental activity can be none other than the unity of the soul as a substance, the self in a metaphysical sense.

⁵⁷ *Versuche* II, p. 175.

⁵⁸ 'Denn wenn die verschiedenen Bestandtheile des Aktus durch mehrere verschiedene Wesen vertheilt sind, davon jedes einzeln, nur einen einzelnen von jenen Aktus hervorbringt: so ist zwar ein Haufen von *Elementen des Gefühls* in mehrern Dingen vertheilt vorhanden; aber nirgends ist ein *Gefühl*, nirgends das vereinigte Ganze aus ihnen, das nach der Voraussetzung, heterogen von seinen Elementen, erst ein Gefühl wird, wenn jene Elemente zusammen genommen werden' (ibid., p. 197).

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 195.

⁶⁰ 'So zeigt sich unmittelbar aus den Beobachtungen eine gewisse Einheit unsers Ichs' (ibid., p. 191).

5. Tetens's Conceptions of Unity and Kant

Like Tetens, Kant distinguishes between three conceptions of the unity of the self, if in a very different systematic context. Kant distinguishes between what he calls the psychological or empirical, the logical or transcendental and the noumenal self.⁶¹ There seem to be some significant similarities between Tetens's and Kant's distinctions. Thus Tetens's distinction between the self in a psychological sense and the self in a metaphysical sense may be seen as corresponding to Kant's distinction between the psychological self and the noumenal self, and Tetens's notion of unity as a necessary condition of mental activity as corresponding to the transcendental unity of apperception in Kant. On the other hand, the three conceptions and their relationships to one another are not equivalent in Kant and Tetens. Let us look, first, at Kant's notion of the empirical or psychological self in comparison with Tetens's notion of the soul in a psychological sense.

Kant argues that unity is required for thought and cognition to be possible. This leads to his notion of the transcendental unity of apperception in the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories. In order to introduce and clarify this notion, he contrasts it with empirical apperception, or inner sense. Empirical consciousness of oneself, or apperception, is the actual awareness of particular mental states. Kant says that empirical apperception 'accompanies different representations'. This means that it 'is by itself dispersed' (B133): 'The consciousness of oneself in accordance with the determinations of our state in internal perception is merely empirical, forever variable; it can provide no standing or abiding self in this stream of inner appearances, and is customarily called *inner sense*, or *empirical apperception* (A107)',⁶² Inner sense, or empirical apperception, does not provide us with the notion of a unitary self or subject, because 'all the determining grounds of my existence that can be encountered in me are representations' (Bxxxix). I do not encounter a unitary self beyond the representations. Rather, 'in that which we call the soul, everything is in continual flux', and inner sense 'gives cognition only of a change of determinations' (A381). Empirical apperception, then, is just a consciousness accompanying different perceptions and is, for that reason, 'forever variable' (A107).

⁶¹ Kant distinguishes between the self of empirical apperception or inner sense and the self of pure apperception in terms of the notion of the 'psychological self' and the 'logical self' in RP, 20:270.

⁶² See also Anth, 7:134.

In contrast to Tetens, then, for Kant there is no ‘observed unity’ of the psychological self based on inner sense alone. The psychological self, rather, is ‘by itself dispersed’. In terms of the psychological self, Kant appears to side with Hume rather than Tetens. Like Hume, he holds that direct inner experience provides no evidence for a unitary self; we encounter only perceptions or representations. For Kant, Hume is right in arguing that we cannot find an impression of a self among the perceptions of inner sense. Inner sense, on its own, acquaints us only with constantly changing perceptions, but not with a unitary and identical self.

Second, how does Tetens’s idea of a unitary self as a necessary condition of mental activity compare with Kant’s doctrine of the transcendental unity of apperception? This question is directly linked to the third question: How does Tetens’s account of substantial unity of the self in a metaphysical sense compare with Kant’s reflections on the unity of the self in the noumenal sense?

Although Kant agrees with Hume in terms of the psychological self, he thinks that Hume is mistaken in his view that all we can learn about the unity of the self has to be derived from experience. Thinking consists in combining representations, and this combination would not be possible without a prior unity. ‘The concept of combination . . . carries with it the concept of the unity of the manifold’ (B130). Representations *a* and *b* could not be combined if they did not belong to one and the same consciousness or the same *I*. ‘The representation of this unity . . . first makes the concept of combination possible’ (B131). Kant speaks, therefore, of a ‘necessary unity of apperception’ (B135) as a condition of ‘thinking in general’ (B423). Moreover, as combination is not ‘given through objects’, ‘but can be executed only by the subject itself and is an ‘act of its self-activity’ (B130), it ‘cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility’ (B132). That is why this unity needs to be distinguished from empirical apperception, is called ‘pure apperception’ and belongs to the understanding. The *I* in the proposition *I think* is a ‘purely intellectual’ representation precisely because it necessarily ‘occurs in all thinking’ (B400). For that reason, it is logically prior to the latter; it ‘precedes *a priori* all *my* determinate thinking’ (B134). That is what Kant means when he says that the *I* of pure apperception is only of ‘logical significance’ (A350).

Kant emphasises that the distinction between the ‘psychological self and the ‘logical self’ of pure apperception (RP, 20:270) must not be understood in terms of an ontological distinction between two distinct beings. He states: that ‘I am conscious of myself is a thought that contains a twofold self, the self as subject, and the self as object’ (RP, 20:270),

but he insists that this does not mean that there are ‘two subjects in one person’ (RP, 20:268); rather, the self as thinking subject and the self as a sensory being are ‘one and the same subject’ (Anth, 7:142). The distinction between the two is one concerning two ways of relating to the self or of becoming conscious of oneself, the self as a subject of thought and the self as an object of possible experience.⁶³

Kant characterises the *I* of pure apperception or the logical subject of thinking as ‘simple’ (B135, B404, B419, B420). This means that in all thought it ‘is a single thing that cannot be resolved into a plurality of subjects’ (B407). The *I* of apperception must be one, because otherwise a multiplicity of representations could not be combined into the unity of a thought. Moreover, simplicity here means that the *I* of pure apperception is empty of content (B404). And this, in turn, means that through the *I* of pure apperception (in contrast to the psychological self), ‘nothing manifold is given’ (B135). Kant explains the simplicity of the logical subject in terms of logical *unity*. ‘*I am simple* signifies no more than that this representation *I* encompasses not the least manifoldness within itself, and that it is an absolute (though merely logical) unity’ (A355; compare A356).⁶⁴

We saw that for Tetens, too, the unity of the self is a necessary condition of mental activity, that is, of cognition. Tetens’s account of the unity of the self as a necessary condition of mental activity is not, however, transcendental in Kant’s sense of the term, but ‘transcendent’.⁶⁵ We saw that for Tetens, the notion of unity as a necessary condition of thought and cognition collapses into that of a substantial unity of the self in a metaphysical sense. For him, the unity of the self as a necessary condition of thought is to be accounted for in terms of the unity of the soul as a substance. Kant would reject this, of course. Indeed, some of Kant’s arguments against rational psychology would apply to Tetens’s position. Like rational psychology, Tetens’s account of the soul in the metaphysical sense makes knowledge claims about the self beyond possible experience,

⁶³ ‘Es wird dadurch aber nicht eine doppelte Persönlichkeit gemeynt, sondern nur Ich, der ich denke und anschau, ist die Person, das Ich aber des Objectes, was von mir angeschauet wird, ist gleich anderen Gegenständen außer mir, die Sache’ (RP, 20:270). Compare the distinction in the *Anthropology* between ‘the self as the subject of thought’ (Anth, 7:134), also referred to as ‘the self of reflection’ (Anth, 7:141), and ‘the self as the object . . . of inner sense’ (Anth, 7:134), also referred to as ‘the self of apprehension’ (Anth, 7:142).

⁶⁴ Beck suggests that Tetens’s *Selbstgefühl* can be linked to Kant’s unity of apperception, but this seems implausible, as the former, unlike the latter, is empirical and relates to the soul in a psychological sense; see Beck, *Early German Philosophy*, p. 419.

⁶⁵ For Tetens’s use of the term ‘transcendental’, see Krouglov, ‘Der Begriff “transzendental” bei J. N. Tetens’.

thus moving 'beyond the sensible world, entering into the field of *noumena*' (B409–10). Kant would argue that, like the rational psychologists, Tetens illicitly infers the substantiality and simplicity of the soul from what Kant calls the *I* of apperception, or the 'constant logical subject of thinking' (A350). Tetens's error is that he takes the logical unity of consciousness 'for an intuition of the subject as an object' and applies 'the category of substance . . . to it' (B421). In terms of the rationalist claim about simplicity that Tetens seems to adopt, Kant argues that here an analytic truth about logical simplicity is misread as a synthetic truth about the simple nature of the self as substance (B408). As Kant points out, 'the simplicity of consciousness is . . . no acquaintance with the simple nature of our subject' (A360).

In contrast to Tetens, then, Kant keeps the idea of unity as a formal condition of thought and cognition distinct from the notion of substantial unity. The latter cannot be derived from the former. We are acquainted with the unity of consciousness 'only because we have an indispensable need of it for the possibility of experience' (B420). Still, in spite of such significant differences, as Kant was studying the psychology of the day in the late 1770s, it may well be that Tetens's account of the unity of the self played a role in the development of his own ideas on this issue.⁶⁶ However, while Tetens aimed at developing a metaphysics of the soul on an empirical basis, attempting to combine 'empiricism' and 'rationalism' in this way, Kant argued against both empiricist and rationalist accounts in showing that neither experience nor pure reason could function as the basis of a rationalist metaphysics of the soul.

⁶⁶ On this topic, see Winter, 'Seele als Problem in der Transzendentalphilosophie Kants', especially p. 124.

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