

Udo Thiel

# Unities of the Self: From Kant to Locke

**Abstract:** This paper re-evaluates the relation between Kant and some of the most important philosophers traditionally labelled ‘empiricists’ on the topic of the unity of the self. Although Kant was familiar with at least some of the writings of the philosophers dealt with here, this paper’s concern is not with the question of influence or development, but with systematic aspects of Kant’s relation to the empiricist tradition. It is argued that Kant’s relationship to empiricist thought on this issue is more complex than one might be tempted to think. There are several different notions of unity within the empiricist tradition. Moreover, the philosophers considered here, thinkers as diverse as Locke, Condillac, Hume, Feder, Priestley, Reid and Tetens, work with more than one notion of the unity of the self, as does Kant. Locke’s contribution at the beginning of early modern thought about unity turns out to be closer to Kant’s account than that of other empiricists in that Kant develops further the Lockean idea of consciousness as a unifying activity. In general terms Kant’s account can be seen as continuous with the debate about unity among empiricist thinkers, it does not constitute a simple break with that tradition.

## 1 Introduction

What is the unity of the self? Indeed what is the very notion of unity? In a paper entitled ‘What is the unity of consciousness?’ Tim Bayne and David Chalmers note that “the idea of unity is multifaceted, and has been understood in many different ways by different thinkers” – and who would want to disagree with that. The authors proceed “to distinguish between varieties of unity, and to isolate those varieties that pose the most important questions” (Bayne and Chalmers 2003, 23). While their account is most interesting and important, distinguishing for example between what they call ‘objectual unity’, ‘spatial unity’ and ‘subject unity’,<sup>1</sup> most of what they have to say is, unsurprisingly, not relevant to Kant, as they treat of unity and consciousness purely in terms of empirical

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<sup>1</sup> “Two states are *objectually unified* when they are directed at the same object”, Bayne and Chalmers (2003, 24). “We can say that two conscious states are *spatially unified* when they represent objects as being part of the same space” (ibid., 24). “Two states are *subject unified* when they are had by the same subject. So all my current experiences [...] are subject unified, simply because they are all *my* experiences” (ibid., 25).

phenomena. Still, Kant does make an appearance in their account as a proponent of the view according to which consciousness is necessarily unified:

Some thinkers (Descartes and Kant, for example) have argued that some sort of unity is a deep and essential feature of consciousness. On this view, the conscious states of a subject are necessarily unified: it is impossible for there to be a subject whose conscious states are disunified. (Bayne and Chalmers 2003, 23)

The authors contrast this view with that of Nagel who holds that the unity of consciousness can break down, so that there are cases in which a subject's states of consciousness are disunified. They also mention Dennett who holds more strongly that consciousness is often or usually disunified, and that much of the apparent unity of consciousness is an illusion. Readers of Descartes and Kant may be surprised to see the two lumped together in this way, and they may also argue that the contrast between Kant on the one hand and Nagel and Dennett on the other goes much deeper than Bayne's and Chalmers' comments suggest. Of course, their analysis is not meant to provide a scholarly account of Kant, but the way in which Kant features in their account is noteworthy and suggests ways in which to relate Kant's account to empiricist notions of the unity of consciousness.

This paper attempts to re-evaluate the relation between Kant and some of the most important philosophers traditionally labelled 'empiricists' on the topic of the unity of the self. Although Kant was familiar with at least some of the writings of the philosophers dealt with here, this paper's concern is not with the question of influence or development, but with systematic aspects of Kant's relation to the empiricist tradition. We shall see that within this tradition, too, there are several different notions of unity. Moreover, the philosophers considered here work with more than one notion of the unity of the self, as does Kant. It will become clear that Kant's relationship to empiricist thought on this issue is more complex than one might be tempted to think.

## 2 Kant and the Question of Unity

The question of unity plays a crucial and systematic role in Kant's critical philosophy. It arises at three different levels – the empirical, the transcendental and the noumenal. 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, which, on its own, does not provide us with the idea of unity.

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” (*Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR) B 133).

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**. (CPR A 107)<sup>2</sup>

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” (CPR B XXXIX). 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” (CPR A 381). Empirical apperception, then, is just a consciousness accompanying different perceptions and it is, for that reason, “forever variable” (CPR A 107). Kant refers to the self of empirical apperception or inner sense as the “psychological self” (AA 20:270).

As the searched for unity cannot be found in experience or the psychological self, we must look elsewhere. Why is unity required for thought and cognition? 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” (CPR B 130). 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” (CPR B 131). Kant speaks, therefore, of a “necessary unity of apperception” (CPR B 135) as a condition of “thinking in general” (CPR B 423). 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” (CPR B 130), it “cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility” (CPR B 132). It is “impossible to derive this necessary unity of the subject, as a condition of the possibility of every thought, from experience. For experience gives us no cognition of necessity, to say nothing of the fact that the concept of absolute unity is far above its sphere” (CPR A 353). That is why this necessary unity needs to be distinguished from empirical apperception and is called ‘pure apperception’ and belongs to the

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2 See also Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (AA 7:117–333 at 134).

understanding. There is of course an objective empirical unity of consciousness but that kind of unity is dependent on the transcendental unity of apperception (*CPR* A 123).<sup>3</sup>

Pure apperception is “that self-consciousness which [...] produces the representation **I think**” (*CPR* B 132). The ‘I’ in the proposition ‘I think’ is a ‘purely intellectual’ representation precisely because it necessarily “occurs in all thinking” (*CPR* B 400). For that reason it is logically prior to the latter, it “precedes *a priori* all **my** determinate thinking” (*CPR* B 134). That is what Kant means when he says that the *I* of pure apperception is only of “logical significance” (*CPR* A 350). And that is why in contrast to the *I* of empirical apperception, the *I* of pure apperception is called “the logical self” (AA 20:270). The *I* of pure apperception is “the constant logical subject of thinking” (*CPR* A 350).

Several times Kant characterizes the *I* of pure apperception or the logical subject of thinking as “simple” (*CPR* B 135, 404, 419, 420). This means that in all thought it “is a single thing that cannot be resolved into a plurality of subjects” (*CPR* B 407). The *I* of apperception must be one because otherwise a multiplicity of representations could not be combined into the unity of a thought. That the *I* of apperception is such “a logically simple subject, lies already in the concept of thinking, and is consequently an analytical proposition” (*CPR* B 407–408; cf. A 355). Moreover, simplicity here means that the *I* of pure apperception is empty of content (*CPR* B 404). And this in turn means that through the *I* of pure apperception (in contrast to the psychological self) “nothing manifold is given” (*CPR* B 135). “The I [...] is simple only because this representation has no content, and hence no manifold” (*CPR* A 381). The logical subject is simple “just because one determines nothing at all about it” (*CPR* A 355). “Through this I, or He, or It (the thing), which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts = x” (*CPR* B 404). 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” (*CPR* A 355; cf. A 356). And this “absolute unity of apperception, the simple I, in the representation to which every combination or separation constituting thought is related, also becomes important for its own sake” (*CPR* B 419).

Kant appeals to his arguments about empirical and transcendental apperception in his critique of the rationalist doctrine of the soul in the Transcendental Dialectic. He argues that for the rational psychologist the ‘I think’ or pure apperception not only assures us of our own existence, but can also be used to

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of this, see for example Kitcher (2011, 158–159).

prove *a priori* what the nature of our self or soul is, for example that it is a substance characterized by simplicity. The aim of rational psychology, then, is to arrive at synthetic knowledge of the soul that “independently of all experience [...] can be inferred from this concept I” (CPR A 342/B 400). Rational psychology makes knowledge claims about the self-in-itself beyond possible experience, thus moving “beyond the sensible world, entering into the field of **noumena**” (CPR B 409–410). Now Kant argues that rational psychology illicitly infers the substantiality and simplicity of the soul from the *I* of apperception or the “constant logical subject of thinking” (CPR A 350). The soul as considered by rational psychology is an idea of reason, Kant holds, but not a possible object of knowledge. It does however function as a regulative idea for our empirical study of the soul.<sup>4</sup>

According to Kant, rational psychology treats the logical *I* of apperception as an object that exists as “a self-subsisting being or substance” (CPR B 407). This means that the transcendental ground of the rationalist error is that the logical unity of consciousness “is here taken for an intuition of the subject as an object, and the category of substance is applied to it” (CPR B 421). An analytical truth about the *I* as subject of thoughts is illicitly used to extend our synthetic knowledge about the *I* as an object. In terms of the rationalist claim about simplicity, Kant argues that the rational psychologist misreads the analytic truth about logical simplicity as a synthetic truth about the simple nature of the self as a substance (CPR B 408). As Kant points out, “the simplicity of consciousness is [...] no acquaintance with the simple nature of our subject” (CPR A 360).

It is certain, Kant argues, “that through the I, I always think an absolute but logical unity of the subject (simplicity), but I do not cognize the real simplicity of my subject” (CPR A 356). The unity of apperception is a formal condition of thought and cognition, and we are acquainted with it “only because we have an indispensable need of it for the possibility of experience”, but it is not possible for us on this basis “to extend our cognition to the nature of all thinking beings in general” (CPR B 420). Pure or transcendental apperception does not provide me with cognition of the manner of my existence. “It is not possible at all through this simple self-consciousness to determine the way I exist, whether as substance or as accident” (CPR B 420).<sup>5</sup>

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4 “We will [...] (in psychology) connect all appearances, actions, and receptivity of our mind to the guiding thread of inner experience **as if** the mind were a simple substance” (CPR A 672/B 700).

5 Thus, contrary to some recent interpretations, Kant’s pure apperception has a purely formal, not a metaphysical significance. Julian Wuerth, for example, holds that pure apperception is the apperception “of ourselves as a thing in itself”, Wuerth (2014, 122).

Thus Kant distinguishes between (1) an empirical apperception or inner sense which “is by itself dispersed” (*CPR* B 133) and does not provide us with the notion of unity, (2) a logical or *a priori* (and transcendental) unity of apperception as the formal condition of thought and cognition, and (3) a substantial unity or simplicity of the self as a soul, as claimed by rational psychology.

### 3 Unity as an Object of Inner Sense and as a Fiction of the Imagination

Kant’s observations about empirical apperception and unity sketched above relate to empiricist thought in more than one way. His observations contrast with a then widespread view among philosophers, including empiricists, according to which inner sense or a certain ‘feeling’ provides us with cognition of our own self as a simple substance. David Hume’s critique of this view is compatible, however, with Kant’s comments on empirical apperception and unity.

One could list many proponents of the view that a unitary, substantial self is an object of inner sense, feeling or observation. For our purposes it is sufficient to cite a couple of thinkers. One is Johann Georg Heinrich Feder, an empiricist philosopher of the second half of the eighteenth century based in Göttingen. “The soul”, Feder writes in his influential *Logik und Metaphysik* of 1769, derives “the notion of itself, the distinct thought of the self and its properties” through inner sense.<sup>6</sup> He distinguishes between the immediate feeling of self and the concept of our own self or person which we acquire through a process of abstraction.<sup>7</sup> Feder maintains, however, that even inner sense or the mere feeling of self reveals at least some aspects of the nature of the soul.<sup>8</sup> Inner sense leads to the notion of the self as a soul or unitary substance that is distinct from mat-

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<sup>6</sup> “Ein grosser Theil unserer Begriffe rühret aus den Empfindungen her, die wir vermöge des **inneren Sinnes** haben. Daher hat die Seele die Notion von ihr selbst, den deutlichen Gedanken vom **Ich**, und von ihren Eigenschaften”, Feder (1769, 134).

<sup>7</sup> Feder (1768, 25; 1769, 134).

<sup>8</sup> “Unterdessen ist es gewiß, daß wir nichts von denkenden Substanzen und ihren Eigenschaften wissen würden, wenn uns nicht durch das Selbstgefühl und die Reflexion über dasselbe einiges von der Natur der Seele bekannt wäre. Hierinne also liegt der Ursprung aller unserer pneumatologischen Begriffe, und hieraus schöpfen sie ihr Licht”, Feder (1769, 400). Vgl. Feder (1769, 55; 1768, 25) und Basedow (1764 II, 109–114).

ter.<sup>9</sup> Feder argues in addition that, as consciousness is a single or simple phenomenon, it can only exist in a single and simple entity.<sup>10</sup>

In England Joseph Butler put forward a version of this view which may have been the target or one of the targets of Hume's critique. Hume knew Butler and sent him a copy of his *Treatise of Human Nature* after the first two volumes had appeared in 1739. In his Dissertation 'Of Personal Identity' of 1736 Butler had argued for the immaterial nature of the soul, rejecting the Lockean account of personal identity in terms of consciousness. Although Butler focuses on the issue of identity, Hume took this kind of argument to apply similarly to the notion of unity or simplicity. Butler says that "upon comparing the consciousnesses of one's self, or one's own existence, in any two moments, there [...] *immediately arises to the mind the idea of personal identity*".<sup>11</sup> Butler speaks of our conviction of our own personal identity as of "*that certain conviction, which necessarily and every moment rises within us, when we turn our thoughts upon ourselves*". This is part of our "natural sense of things".<sup>12</sup> Therefore, "it is ridiculous to attempt to prove the truth of those perceptions, whose truth we can no otherwise prove, than by other perceptions of exactly the same kind with them".<sup>13</sup>

Hume seems to have this kind of view in mind in his critique.<sup>14</sup> He argues that, if we appeal to experience, as he thinks we should, then it is plain that we have no idea of the self "after the manner it is here explain'd" (*Treatise*, 251). We have no such idea of the self because there is no impression, no experiential evidence, from which such an idea could be derived. According to Hume, there is no idea of a simple and identical self as understood and explained by the position he attacks. Appealing to inner experience, Hume argues that the latter presents us only with a multiplicity of different perceptions. This is consistent with Kant's point about inner sense. As Hume says in a famous and much quoted passage, in inner experience "I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can

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9 "Wenigstens, dünket mich, unterscheidet sich, vermöge desselben [d.i. des Selbstgefühls, U.T.], die Seele genugsam von der ganzen Masse organisirter Materie, die ihren Körper ausmachet", Feder (1769, 403).

10 "Denn, können wir uns die Gewahrnehmung oder das Bewußtseyn wohl gedenken, als etwas, welches, wo es nur einmal vorhanden, dennoch vertheilt und ausgebreitet wäre? Ist es nicht vielmehr etwas ganz einfaches und untheilbares? Also kann es ja auch nicht anders vorhanden seyn, als in einem Subjecte welches selbst untheilbar, genau eins, einfach ist", Feder (1769, 325).

11 Butler (1897, 317); my italics.

12 Butler (1897, 323); my italics.

13 Butler (1897, 325).

14 For a more detailed account, see Thiel (2014a, 385–398).

catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception” (*Treatise*, 252). There is no inner experiential evidence of a simple soul or mind that remains the same through time. And so, all we can say on the basis of introspection or inner experience is that the mind is “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (*Treatise*, 252). This is of course the view that has become known as Hume’s ‘bundle theory’ of the mind – a view that continues to be debated in a number of versions today. Hume says that “they are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind”, and that “there is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different” (*Treatise*, 253).

Hume points out, however, that in spite of the lack of empirical evidence we have a “natural propension” to believe in the simplicity and identity of our own selves (*Treatise*, 253). His main task then is to give an account of what gives rise to this propension: how do we come to believe in our own simplicity and identity given that inner experience provides no evidence for this belief? If inner experience suggests that the mind is a “compound and changeable” thing (*Treatise*, 259), what is it that makes us attribute unity and simplicity to the mind? Hume argues that, like identity, unity or simplicity is “merely a quality, which we attribute to them [the perceptions, U.T.], because of the union of their ideas in the imagination” (*Treatise*, 260). The imagination, rather than direct experience, gives rise to the notion of a unitary entity to which all the experienced perceptions belong as their bearer. Hume explains at great length how on his view the imagination comes up with this fiction of a unitary self. The details of these mechanisms need not concern us here. His critical reflections on his own account of personal identity in the Appendix to Book III of the *Treatise* relate to explanation in Book I of how the imagination feigns the idea of a unitary self. He still adheres to the view that inner experience reveals only perceptions, not a unitary self.

It would seem obvious that Kant’s notion of the *I* of pure apperception as the “constant logical subject of thinking” (*CPR* A 350) or the “logical self” (AA 20:270) implies a rejection of Hume’s understanding of the self in terms of a ‘bundle’ of perceptions. And it is true that if we accept Kant’s arguments about pure apperception, we cannot also accept Humean ideas about self-consciousness without qualification. However, given what Kant says about empirical apperception or inner sense he can agree with Hume that direct inner experience provides no evidence for a unitary self; we encounter only perceptions or representations, “for in that which we call the soul, everything is in continuous flux” (*CPR* A 381). For Kant, Hume is right in arguing that we cannot find the impression of a self among the perceptions of inner sense. Inner sense, on its own, ac-

quaints us only with constantly changing perceptions, but not with a constant, unchanging self. Recall Kant's statement that empirical apperception is "forever variable" and "can provide no standing or abiding self in this stream of inner appearances" (*CPR* A 107). Kant would argue, however, that Hume is mistaken in his view that all we can learn about the unity of the self must be based on experience. For Kant, the understanding must think or presuppose a unity which makes the combining of representations possible. The understanding, rather than inner sense, provides the idea of a unitary and identical self. Hume and Kant are, however, in agreement, if for very different reasons, that we cannot discover the real nature of this self – what it is 'in itself'. Indeed, Hume points out in the Introduction to the *Treatise* that "it seems evident, that the essence of the mind" is "equally unknown to us with that of external bodies" (*Treatise*, xvii).<sup>15</sup> Thus, Hume's account of the mind as a bundle of perceptions relates to the self insofar as it is accessible through inner experience, it does not attempt to provide a metaphysical truth of the self, and so Hume does not deny the existence of a self apart from the perceptions.<sup>16</sup>

Nothing in Hume seems to correspond to Kant's necessary unity of apperception as a formal condition of thought. Hume's notion of a fictional unity of the self is not, however, an arbitrary notion. Rather, he insists that we have a 'natural propension' to come up with this fiction. Hume argues that the belief in a unitary self develops from our awareness of the interrelatedness of our perceptions and through certain mechanisms of the imagination. Moreover, he holds

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15 Whatever the notion of 'essence' may be that Hume appeals to here, it is of course unlikely to be the same as Kant's notion of the thing- or self-in-itself given that Kant accounts for latter in non-spatial and non-temporal terms.

16 This is of course a matter of interpretation. Most readers from the eighteenth century to the present read Hume as adopting the bundle theory as a position that represents an ontological truth about the nature of the mind. I have argued in detail elsewhere that this reading is mistaken (Thiel 2014a, 418–422). All Hume is saying in the passage in which he introduces the bundle view of the mind or self is that it is suggested by inner experience or introspection. He does not deny a self beyond the perceptions. Does Hume even affirm a self beyond the perceptions? Galen Strawson holds that prior to his second thoughts about personal identity in the *Appendix* to Book III of the *Treatise* Hume is agnostic about a self beyond the perceptions. But he thinks that Hume realizes in the *Appendix* that his philosophy does not allow him to remain agnostic and requires him to endorse a self beyond the perceptions. Strawson suggests that "one might say that what Hume sees is that his philosophy allows (demands, constitutes) a transcendental argument in Kant's sense, an argument of a sort that is strictly forbidden for empiricists" (Strawson 2011, 134). This would mean, however, that Hume's second thoughts on identity would undermine the very foundation of his philosophy as a whole. It is doubtful that his critical reflections on his own account of personal identity were meant to do that.

that we require such a belief in our everyday lives in terms of both theoretical and everyday matters.

In Hume, then, the question of unity arises in three different ways. (1) There is his rejection of the claim that there is direct experiential evidence for the idea of a unitary and simple mind or soul. (2) There is his thesis that inner experiential evidence reveals the mind to be a bundle of perceptions; and (3) there is his account of a necessary fictional belief in a simple and identical self in spite of the lack of direct empirical evidence. (1) and (2) seem to be compatible with Kant's comments on what inner sense provides us with. (3) is transformed by Kant into an account of a formal condition of thought that belongs to the understanding, rather than the imagination. Both Hume and Kant believe that in some sense the notion of a unitary self is inevitable or necessary. Hume thinks it develops inevitably through the activity of the imagination, operating on experiential material. Kant argues that it is a necessity of thought, agreeing with Hume that direct inner experience does not reveal such a notion. He can also agree that this is not to deny the existence of a self beyond the perceptions. Nor does he say that the notion of necessary unity proves anything about the reality of the self as a substance. Kant differs from Hume, however, by moving away from the question about the empirical source of the idea to an account in terms of an *a priori* or logical condition of the possibility of thought in general.

## 4 Condillac versus Hume: the self as phenomenon and as substance

Other philosophers appealing to the empiricist tradition from Locke onwards seem to share with Hume the view that inner experience reveals nothing but a bundle of perceptions. This applies, for example, to Étienne Bonnot de Condillac. Condillac's empiricism is in some sense a development of Locke's philosophy, and Condillac explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to Locke. The early *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746) operates, in Lockean manner, with sensation and reflection as two independent sources of mental content. In his main later work, the *Traité des sensations* (1754) Condillac, working with the image of a statue that progressively comes to life, abandons the notion of reflection as independent. He attempts to reduce the origin of all thought to sensation. In terms of the issue of unity Condillac introduces notions such as that of a 'sentiment of our being' or 'sentiment of myself', and that of a 'connection that preserves the sequence of our perceptions'. He argues that prior to any sentiment of self and prior to any act of recalling the past and thus invoking the notion of a

continuous self, there is this sequence of connected perceptions as the basis of the sentiment of self and of memory.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed Condillac seems to regard the sequence of connected perceptions as fundamental. Does he reduce the mind to a sequence of connected perceptions, however? Is he, in other words, adopting a bundle theory of the self, according to which the self is essentially nothing over and above those related perceptions that he considers as basic to sensibility, to consciousness, memory and the recognition of personal identity? Some readers of Condillac have argued that he adopts such a view of the self, abandoning the notion of the self as a substance.<sup>18</sup> And there are passages in the *Traité des sensations* that seem to endorse a bundle view of the self. Thus he says about the statue that “its ‘I’ is only the collection of the sensations which it experiences, and those which memory (*la mémoire*) recalls to it. In a word it is immediate knowledge (*la conscience*) of what it is for itself, and remembrance (*le souvenir*) of what it has been”.<sup>19</sup> In the very last two sentences of the *Traité des sensations* he states: “The statue is therefore nothing but the sum of all it has acquired. May not this be the same with man?”<sup>20</sup> However, these passages need not be read as endorsing a bundle view. Rather, like Hume, Condillac is talking here about the self insofar as we can know it through inner experience; he is not saying that the self is nothing over and above the perceptions.

Condillac would disagree with Hume’s view, however, that we have to resort to the imagination as a source of the belief in a unitary self. For Condillac the fact that experience reveals only ‘a collection of sensations’ need not lead us to sceptical conclusions about unity and identity. On the contrary, Condillac argues that we must assume the self to be a unitary thinking substance. He argues, moreover, that this substance must be of a simple and indivisible nature. He states in the *Essai* that “we must admit a point of reunion, a substance that is at the same time a simple and indivisible subject [...] and [...] consequently dis-

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**17** For a more detailed discussion of Condillac on this and related matters, see Thiel (2014c).

**18** See, for example, Davies (1990, 81–82). Compare also Aliénor Bertrand, who seems to think that the main difference between Locke and Condillac is that the latter abandons the notion of self as a substance. She sees this as a ‘radicalisation of Locke’s theory’ that is linked to Condillac’s rejection of the autonomy of reflection in the *Traité des sensations* (Bertrand 1995, 483).

**19** Condillac (1754, I.vi.3; 1930, 44). Cf. Condillac (1754, 239): “Son *moi* n’est que la collection des sensations qu’elle éprouve, et de celles que la mémoire lui rappelle. En un mot, c’est tout-à-la-fois et la conscience de ce qu’elle est, et le souvenir de ce qu’elle a été”.

**20** Condillac (1754, IV.ix.3; 1930, 238). Cf. Condillac (1754, 314): “Elle n’est donc rien qu’autant qu’elle a acquis. Pourquoi n’en seroit-il pas de même de l’homme?”

tinct from the body – in short, a mind”.<sup>21</sup> It seems, then, that Condillac allows for a notion of a self in which perceptions or experiences are unified but which is not itself based on experience. Condillac differs from thinkers such as Butler and Feder, agreeing with Hume in that he rejects the idea that a unitary self is directly given in experience. He differs from Hume in that he holds that we are forced to think a unitary self as a ‘point of reunion’. Although the inner nature of this self remains unknown to us, Condillac argues that we must think of it as simple and indivisible, i.e. as an immaterial substance. Thus, Condillac’s ‘point of reunion’ is not a formal or logical self in a Kantian sense, as has sometimes been claimed.<sup>22</sup> Condillac’s ‘point of reunion’ is not a mere unifier of thoughts or perceptions. It could perhaps be argued that the ‘sentiment of our being’ fulfils such a role, as it is linked to our perceptions and makes memory and self-consciousness possible. This is a ‘sentiment’ in Condillac, however, not a formal notion of ‘self’. As noted, Condillac postulates a subject that underlies perceptions and that provides the ‘liaison entre des perceptions’ required for memory, self-consciousness and identity. This self beyond the perceptions however, is just the soul, as substance. Insofar as Condillac believes that a unitary self is required for thought, this idea of a unitary self collapses into the notion of an immaterial soul or thinking substance.

For Condillac, then, there are two aspects under which we may consider the self – (1) phenomenologically, as the collection of perceptions or experiences to which consciousness and memory have access, and (2) ontologically, as the underlying unitary thinking substance or soul. There is no third ‘formal self’ separate from the notion of the soul, as substance. While this latter notion may seem unexpected in a thinker considered to be an arch empiricist, it must be said that the notion of the soul, as substance, plays no explicit explanatory role in Condillac’s detailed account of the workings of the mind.

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<sup>21</sup> Condillac (1746, I.i.1, § 6; 2001, 13) “Il faudra donc admettre un point de réunion; une substance qui soit en même temps un sujet simple et indivisible [...] distincte, par conséquent, du corps; une ame, en un mot”, Condillac (1746, 7). See also *Traité des sensations* II.iv: “Since the sensations belong only to the soul, they can be modifications only of that substance.” (“Les sensations n’appartenant qu’à l’ame, elles ne peuvent être que des manières d’être de cette substance”, Condillac (1754, 254).)

<sup>22</sup> Ryding (1955, 129).

## 5 Unity versus Simplicity: The Materialist Argument in Priestley

Joseph Priestley is the most important and best-known British materialist of the eighteenth century. He argues vehemently for the view that the seat of thought is in the nervous system or brain. His argument appeals to experience.<sup>23</sup> In defending his position he objects to the then widely held view that the simple and immaterial nature of the mind is accessible directly through consciousness or inner experience. He holds that we cannot know the nature of the thinking subject through consciousness or inner experience at all. There is common ground, then, in this regard with Hume, Condillac and with Kant's comments on empirical apperception and there is disagreement with thinkers such as Butler and Feder. Priestley emphasises that we need to distinguish carefully between things of which we are conscious, and those that we infer from the things of which we are conscious.<sup>24</sup> In line with Hume he points out that we are conscious only of "our *ideas*, and the *various affections of our ideas*" (Priestley 1778, 283). The subject of thought itself is not an object of direct consciousness or inner experience. "All our knowledge of the *subject of thought*" is inferred. As Priestley makes clear, "what we *feel*, and what we *do* we may be said to know by intuition; but what we *are* we know only by deduction, or inference from intuitive observations" (Priestley 1778, 283). The view that the subject of thought is a simple and immaterial substance would require reason and argument; it cannot be accepted merely on the basis of an appeal to consciousness. Priestley argues of course that reason and argument (rather than feeling or consciousness) lead to the materialist, rather than to the immaterialist view of the mind.

In criticizing the immaterialist position and addressing the issue of the unity of the mind, however, Priestley appeals to consciousness as evidence for something that goes beyond 'our *ideas* and the *various affections of our ideas*' as direct objects of consciousness. He concedes that unity itself is given through consciousness. This seems to be inconsistent with his Humean account cited above of what is accessible through inner experience and with his view that everything we know about the subject of thought is inferred. Importantly, however,

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<sup>23</sup> He says, "as far as we can judge, the faculty of thinking, and a certain state of the brain, always accompany and correspond to one another; which is the very reason why we believe that any property is inherent in any substance whatsoever", Priestley (1777, 2). According to Priestley, then, matter is "capable of supporting all the known properties of man", including "the powers of *sensation* or *perception*, and *thought*", Priestley (1777, 24–25).

<sup>24</sup> Priestley (1778, 281).

he does not at the same time endorse the views of thinkers such as Butler and Feder who assume that the unity of the self can be accounted for only in terms of simplicity and indivisibility. For Priestley such simplicity is neither an object of inner experience, nor something that we are justified in inferring from our consciousness of unity. One cannot infer from the feeling of unity that the subject or self is indivisible and immaterial. Priestley argues that I have “a feeling or perception of the *unity of my nature or being*; but all that can be inferred from this is, that I am only *one person, one sentient and thinking being*, and not two persons, or two sentient or thinking beings” (Priestley 1777, 86). One cannot infer from the feeling of unity that this sentient being cannot be divided or that it cannot be a material being. It is true, he argues, that one sentient being cannot be divided into two sentient beings, because a division would destroy the “*system of intelligence which we call the soul of man*”, but “it may be so divided, or dissolved, as to become no system of intelligence at all” (Priestley 1777, 87). While unity is an object of ‘feeling’ or consciousness, an account of the essence of the self requires reason and argument. For Priestley reason and argument do not lead to simplicity, but to the self as a material system.

Priestley also argues that materialists are not committed to the absurd view, often ascribed to them, that the individual particles of which the brain consists are separately conscious so that one would have to postulate as many consciousnesses and minds as material particles (Priestley 1777, 87). If the nervous system as a whole has consciousness, it does not follow that the individual parts that constitute the nervous system must also have consciousness. He rejects the view, then, that there can be nothing in the whole that is not also in the parts that constitute the whole. Contrary to what the immaterialists of the mind claim, consciousness and the unity of the self are quite compatible with the materiality of the mind.<sup>25</sup>

In terms of the notion of unity Kant would side with Hume and Condillac, rather than with Priestley, as far as the evidence of inner sense, on its own, is concerned.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Kant’s account of the unity of the self of apperception

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<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Priestley argues that thought and consciousness even *require* a system of material particles. For, first, we know from experience that consciousness occurs only in conjunction with a material being; and second, this material being cannot be ‘simple’ because of the complex nature of consciousness. This complexity requires a material *system* of inter-connected and interacting material particles, i.e. the brain or nervous system. The unity of the self and the consciousness of this unity are not at all threatened, then, by the materialist view of the mind; indeed, it is the materialist view which has the better explanatory account of consciousness and the unity of the self, Priestley (1777, 87).

<sup>26</sup> Kant refers to Priestley’s materialism in general terms at *CPR* A 745/B 773.

leads him to reject an understanding of the mind that attempts to reduce all aspects of its nature and functions to matter. As his critique of rational psychology makes clear, however, he argues also that an alleged simple and indivisible nature of the self cannot be inferred from the logical unity of the formal self of apperception. Indeed, Kant seems to endorse Priestley's distinction between unity and simplicity. In an argument at least reminiscent of Priestley Kant states:

The unity of a thought consisting of many representations is collective, and, as far as mere concepts are concerned, it can be related to the collective unity of the substances cooperating in it [...] Thus there can be no insight into the necessity of presupposing a simple substance for a composite thought. (CPR A 353)

## 6 The Unity of Common Sense: Thomas Reid

Thomas Reid is a leading philosopher of the Scottish School of Common Sense. He is a critic of Locke, Hume and Priestley, and although he is also critical of Leibniz, he can hardly count as an empiricist. Still there are connections with the empiricist tradition relating to the question of unity. According to Reid, “we know certainly the existence of our present thoughts and passions” through consciousness (Reid 1785, 42). Unlike other Common Sense thinkers, such as Buffier, Kames and Beattie, however, Reid does not hold that the self as the subject of our ‘thoughts and passions’ is a direct object of consciousness. To him, “the objects of [...] [consciousness] are [...] all the passions, and all the actions and operations of our own minds, while they are present” (Reid 1785, 470). Thus, unlike Butler, Feder and Priestley, he rejects the idea that the unity of the self is a direct object of inner sense. In spite of his criticism of Hume's bundle theory of the mind (Reid 1785, 473–474), Reid appears to be in agreement with Hume that we are directly conscious only of perceptions.

Unlike Hume, however, he holds that we do and must believe in the reality of a unitary subject of thought and action and that this belief is not a mere fiction of the imagination. Moreover, for Reid this unitary subject is, in the last analysis, a simple immaterial substance. This notion of a unitary self is neither given in direct inner consciousness, nor does it develop through acts of reflection on our conscious thought. According to Reid, the unity of the self is not inferred. Rather, he argues that the notion is ‘suggested’ to us by our thoughts or perceptions. In the *Inquiry* of 1764 Reid argues that our “sensations suggest to us a sentient being or mind to which they belong: a being which hath a permanent existence, although the sensations are transient and of short duration” (Reid 1764, 60). What is this notion of ‘suggestion’ that he employs here?

The notion of suggestion is linked to what Reid calls ‘natural signs’. Perceptions function as ‘natural signs’ for the existence of a perceiving subject.<sup>27</sup> That is, Reid maintains that we owe many of our simple notions (which are neither impressions nor ideas) and original principles of belief to suggestion. There are suggestions which are the result of experience and habit, but there are also suggestions that are “natural and original” (Reid 1764, 38). Among the latter are those that lead to our belief in a self as a unitary mind or subject: “our sensations and thoughts do also suggest the notion of a mind, and the belief of its existence, and of its relation to our thoughts” (Reid 1764, 38). For Reid, this connection between thoughts and a self or subject “is the effect of our constitution, and ought to be considered an original principle of human nature” (Reid 1764, 61). Reid seems to be saying, then, that this belief is instinctual. Indeed, he explains the notion of instinct precisely in terms of propensities that are due neither to rational motives, nor to habit and experience, but to “the constitution of the animal”.<sup>28</sup> In short, Reid asserts that instinct, rather than direct consciousness, experience, habit or inference is the source of the belief in a self as a unitary subject of thoughts or perceptions. The problem is, of course, that he thereby concedes that an explanation of this unity is not available to him. As Reid notes “the first conception of it, as well as the belief of it, and of the common relation it bears to all that we are conscious of, or remember, is suggested to every thinking being, *we do not know how*” (Reid 1764, 60; italics UT). Reid seems to hold that the development of the notion of a unitary self remains, in a sense, inexplicable. He even refers to this process as a “natural kind of magic” (Reid 1764, 60).

It is plain that, in spite of several crucial differences, there is common ground among philosophers such as Reid, Hume and Kant. All believe that in some sense the notion of a unitary self is inevitable or necessary. Reid and other Common Sense thinkers hold that this notion has an instinctive basis; Hume thinks that it develops inevitably through the activity of the imagination; and Kant argues that it is a necessity of thought. Kant agrees with Hume and Reid that direct inner experience does not reveal such a notion. Unlike Reid, both Hume and Kant would deny that experience suggests a unitary mind understood as a simple substance. Kant parts with both Reid and Hume, however, by introducing the notion of an *a priori* or logical condition of the possibility of thought in general.

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<sup>27</sup> For Reid’s discussion of the notion of natural signs in general, see Reid (1764, 58–61).

<sup>28</sup> Reid (1995, 141).

## 7 Unity and Overcoming the Divide between ‘Empiricism’ and ‘Rationalism’: Tetens

It is a well known fact among scholars that Kant was familiar with Tetens’ main work, the *Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung* of 1777. Although Kant does not mention Tetens in any of his published writings, there is ample evidence for his familiarity with the *Philosophische Versuche*.<sup>29</sup> As the letters and *Reflexionen* indicate, Kant, although critical of his approach, had a very high regard for Tetens. He thought of him as one of the leading philosophers of the time, and it is plain that Tetens was of considerable importance to Kant.<sup>30</sup> As Kant was studying the psychology of the day in the late 1770s,<sup>31</sup> it may well be that Tetens’ understanding of the unity of the self played a particularly important role in his development of that idea.

The label ‘empiricism’ is, however, problematic with respect to Tetens. Although once dubbed ‘the German Locke’, Tetens in fact attempts to overcome the divide between the ‘British philosophers’ and the ‘speculative philosophy’ of thinkers such as Leibniz and Wolff.<sup>32</sup> He describes his project in the Preface to his *Philosophische Versuche* as a “psychological analysis of the soul” (Tetens 1777 I, iv), explicitly appealing to Locke and saying that his method is observational. But the descriptive account is only Tetens’ 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” (Tetens 1777 I, iv). In short, Tetens’ aim is to establish a metaphysics of the soul, but to do so on an empirical basis. For Tetens the observational approach is merely the first step in his investigations; rational

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**29** See Kant’s letters to Marcus Herz from April 1778 and May 1781 (AA 20:232, 270), his letter to Garve from 7 August 1783 (AA 10:341). Kant made marginal notes on pages 19 and 131 in vol. 1 of his copy of Tetens’ *Versuche* (see *Reflexionen* 4847 and 4848, in AA 18:5). Kant distinguishes his own philosophical project from that of Tetens in *Reflexionen* 4900 and 4901, in AA 18:23.

**30** For the general relationship between Kant’s and Tetens’ philosophies, see Sommer (1892, 280–302); and Carl (1989, 115–126).

**31** Alois Winter points out that the terminology which Kant uses to discuss the subjective sources of knowledge is rather varied in the first edition version of the Transcendental Deduction. Winter regards this as evidence that Kant began his study of psychological terminology relatively late. See Winter (1984, 124). See also Brandt (1994, 2–6).

**32** The label ‘the German Locke’ was first used by Karl Rosenkranz in 1840 to describe Tetens’ philosophy. Recently this gloss has been questioned. See, for example, Stiening and Thiel (2014, 16). But the label is still popular.

‘speculation’ (“Spekulation aus allgemeinen Gründen”), too, is required for philosophy.<sup>33</sup>

Regarding the notion of unity, Tetens’ position is not easy to pin down. In some passages he claims, like Hume, that we are directly conscious only of our mental acts or ideas or “inner modifications” (Tetens 1777 II, 154) and that the notion of a subject or bearer of those mental operations is inferred.<sup>34</sup> At other times, he seems to suggest that the self as an embodied soul is an object of feeling.<sup>35</sup> In a passage criticizing Hume’s bundle view Tetens argues that a certain ‘feeling of self’ (“Selbstgefühl”) leads to the notion of a strictly unitary and identical self and maintains that Hume had simply ‘overlooked’ this fact (Tetens 1777 I, 393–394).<sup>36</sup> For Tetens it follows that the idea of the self is not a mere collection of a multiplicity of ideas which have been unified by the imagination, like soldiers are made into a unity of an army. Rather this unity is natural and not the result of the imagination’s association of ideas. This is why we have the idea of one subject with many modifications.<sup>37</sup>

In this context Tetens draws an important distinction between the unity of self or soul in a psychological sense (“im psychologischen Verstande”) on the one hand and in a metaphysical sense (“im metaphysischen Verstande”) as an

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**33** Tetens (1775, 86). See also pp. 73 and 89. Tetens emphasises: “Die Britischen Philosophen mögen unser Muster im Beobachten seyn; aber sie sollten es nicht seyn in der speculativischen Philosophie” (Tetens 1775, 87).

**34** Compare also Tetens (1777 II, 172).

**35** Tetens (1777 II, 170), says: “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” (“[...] wenn ich mich selbst und meine Aktionen fühle, was ist alsdenn das Objekt meines Gefühls? Die reine Beobachtung kann [...] nichts anders antworten, als es sey das Ich, was ich fühle, das fühlende, denkende und wollende Ganze, das aus einem Körper und aus einer einfachen Seele besteht, die eingekörperte Seele”). Compare also: “Es ist der *Mensch*, der von dem *Menschen* gefühlet wird”, Tetens (1777 II, 173).

**36** See also Tetens (1777 I, 261): “Begleitet nicht ein gewisses dunkles Selbstgefühl *alle* unsere Zustände, Beschaffenheiten und Veränderungen von der leidentlichen Gattung?” On Tetens’ notion of *Selbstgefühl*, see Thiel (2014b).

**37** “Eine [...] Folge davon ist, daß die Idee oder Vorstellung von meinem *Ich*, keine *Sammlung* von einzeln Vorstellungen sey, welche etwan die Einbildungskraft zu einem Ganzen gemacht hat, wie sie die einzelnen Vorstellungen von Soldaten zu einer Vorstellung von Einem Regiment vereinigt. Jene Vereinigung liegt in der *Empfindung* selbst, in der Natur, nicht in einer selbst gemachten Verbindung. Daher entsteht eine Vorstellung von *Einem* Subjekt mit *verschiedenen* Beschaffenheiten, das heißt, die aus der *Empfindung* unmittelbar entstehende *Vorstellung* muß so *gedacht*, und zu einer solchen *Idee* gemacht werden, wozu der gemeine Menschenverstand sie wirklich machet”, Tetens (1777 I, 394).

object of “theoretical speculation” understood as an incorporeal substance, on the other (Tetens 1777 I, 739–740). He suggests that we need to distinguish between what is accessible to consciousness and the ontological ground of the observable or ‘psychological self’. The real essence, as Locke would have put it, of the self or soul may be of this or that nature, but whatever it is, it is not an object of inner consciousness and thus not relevant to the self in an empirical or psychological sense. Strictly speaking, for Tetens, the soul ‘im psychologischen Verstande’ is a mere appearance (“Schein”): our immediate observation does not allow us to consider it as anything else but appearance (Tetens 1777 II, 212–213). Tetens maintains, however, that the appearances of inner consciousness relate indirectly to the qualities and powers of the soul in a metaphysical sense to which he refers as the “simple self” (Tetens 1777 II, 213). Thus, for him the soul is a “simple entity, distinct from the organised body”, an immaterial substance (Tetens 1777 I, 739). This reflects his assumption of a simple and unitary self in his critique of Hume.

His notion of the self in a psychological sense suggests, however, that there is unity even at the level of inner consciousness and observation. Indeed he speaks explicitly of an “observed unity of the self” (Tetens 1777 II, 175). Tetens accounts for the self in a metaphysical sense in terms of the “substantial unity of the soul” (Tetens 1777 II, 175). But how do we arrive at this notion of a metaphysical, substantial unity according to Tetens? 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 the 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.<sup>38</sup> The notion of suggestion here is of course reminiscent of Reid. And clearly, if experience *suggests* the idea of unity, then this idea is not itself an *object* of experience. Moreover, Tetens seems to be saying elsewhere that “theoretical speculation” (Tetens 1777 I, 740) is required in order to arrive at the idea of a substantial unity of the soul. Indeed Tetens attempts to argue for the idea of a unitary soul by way of reflecting on the conditions of experience and thought in general.

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**38** “Sobald das Gefühl von unserm Ich, das klare Bewußtsein unser selbst, unsers innern Wohls und Wehs, unsers Denkens und Wollens und unserer Freyheit wieder lebhaft wird, so drängt sich uns auch wiederum der Gedanke auf: dieß sey doch mehr als ein Spiel der Fasern, mehr als ein Zittern vom Aether und als Gehirnsbewegungen, was dahinter stecke. Mein Ich ist Eins, nicht ein Haufen von mehrern Dingen”, Tetens (1777 II, 178).

Tetens himself asks at one point how the substantial unity can be derived from the observed unity. He argues that in order to have representations of external objects, the activity of judging or forming propositions is required and that in order to be able to do this, an activity of distinguishing between the external thing, the representation and my own self is required.<sup>39</sup> Clearly, he introduces a notion of the self here that is not an object of feeling or experience, but 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 a necessity of thought), as distinct from the representation of other things, the possibility of forming propositions about the existence of external things could not even be entertained.

Next, Tetens attempts to show that the required notion of 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”.<sup>40</sup> Even individual operations presuppose such a unity, he argues. Such operations consist of a multitude of elements. These elements can become one single act only if they belong to a substantial unity (Tetens 1777 II, 197). He argues even that the very act of forming a judgement or proposition (“Urteil”) 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 belong (Tetens 1777 II, 195).<sup>41</sup>

In short, there are three notions of unity in Tetens: observed unity, substantial unity and unity as a necessary condition of mental activity. In this regard at least his account can be linked to that of Condillac. While Tetens’ 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 logical self and the

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**39** “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”, Tetens (1777 I, 344).

**40** “Die *kollektiven* Kräfte und Wirkungen setzen eine *substantielle Einheit* voraus, in der die *Kollektion* geschieht, und in Hinsicht auf welche sie nur solche Kräfte und Wirkungen sind, als sie sind”, Tetens (1777 II, 175).

**41** This idea, that a unitary and identical self is presupposed by our very activity of forming judgements or propositions, is present also in Rousseau and in other thinkers such as Kant’s teacher Martin Knutzen. See Thiel (2014a, 329–331; 2014c).

noumenal self, and Tetens' notion of unity as a necessary condition of thought as corresponding to the logical self of apperception in Kant, there are crucial differences. First, for Kant, there is no 'observed unity' of the psychological self based on inner sense alone. The psychological self is 'by itself dispersed'. Second, substantial unity in the noumenal realm is not a possible object of knowledge for Kant. We have no knowledge of the self-in-itself. Third, and perhaps most importantly, 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. To him, the unity of self as a necessary condition of thought is to be accounted for in terms of the unity of the soul as a substance. Kant, by contrast insists on keeping the idea of a unity as a formal condition of thought distinct from the notion of substantial unity. The latter cannot be derived from the former. We are acquainted with "the unity of consciousness", as Kant says in a passage quoted above, "only because we have an indispensable need of it for the possibility of experience" (*CPR* B 420).

## 8 The Unity of the Self and the Activity of Consciousness: Locke

Finally turning to the beginnings of early modern empiricist thought about unity, there can be no doubt about the importance of John Locke's contribution to this topic. In the chapter 'Of Identity and Diversity' which he added to the second edition of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* of 1694 Locke's focus is on diachronic identity, but several of his arguments are equally relevant to the question of unity.

In order to determine the criteria for personal identity Locke insists that we need to be clear about the concept of a person and to distinguish it from other closely related notions, i.e. the notion of the soul, as substance, and that of 'man' or human being (*Essay* II.xxvii.15). "In the ordinary way of speaking", Locke points out, we may use 'person' and 'man' interchangeably (*Essay* II.xxvii.15), but on reflection, "*Person, Man, and Substance, are three Names standing for three different Ideas*" (*Essay* II.xxvii.7). Accordingly, Locke distinguishes between three kinds of unity. He accounts for 'man' in terms of an organic body of a particular kind, i.e. of the "unity of life" (*Essay* II.xxvii.10).<sup>42</sup> Locke does not reject the notion of a thinking substance or soul but he argues that the soul, as

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<sup>42</sup> "Different Bodies, by the same Life are untied into one Animal, whose Identity is preserved [...] by the unity of one continued Life" (*Essay* II.xxvii.10).

substance, is unknown to us as far as its real essence or metaphysical make up is concerned. We have access only to its states and operations through inner sense. In short Locke leaves open the question of its inner nature, and, that is, the question of its simplicity and its immateriality.

According to Locke, we must nevertheless assume or presuppose the “Unity of Substance” (*Essay* II.xxvii.7) in order to account for mental activity. What constitutes this unity, however, is not a possible object of human knowledge, and it plays no explanatory role for our experiential self. Locke accounts for the latter in terms of the notion of a person or personality. The unity of a person, Locke argues, is brought about by the consciousness of one’s own thoughts and actions.<sup>43</sup> The function of this self-relating consciousness is to bring about a unity of the self or person that is distinct from the pre-given unities of life and substance. Neither of the latter unities is co-extensive with that unity which consciousness creates. Locke emphasises the constitutive function of consciousness. “That with which the *consciousness* of this present thinking thing can join it self, makes the same *Person*, and is one *self* with it, and with nothing else” (*Essay* II.xxvii.17). The unity of the human subject as a person is not somehow constituted prior to acts of consciousness but rather exists only by virtue of its being constituted by consciousness. Thus, for Locke, the same consciousness that accompanies or is present in all thoughts and actions also fulfils an active, unifying function. Locke does not distinguish explicitly between these two roles of consciousness; he seems to think that consciousness, simply by being present in thoughts and actions, combines the latter into the unity of a person. It is important to emphasise also that, for Locke, consciousness insofar as it fulfils this unifying role does not so much discover a pre-existing and unitary experiential self, but establishes the latter in the first place. “Consciousness [...] is that alone which makes what we call self” (*Essay* II.xxvii.21).<sup>44</sup>

Like others before him Locke emphasises the moral and legal aspects of the notion of a person, but in Locke these aspects acquire a new quality due to his new account of the person as distinct from both man and thinking substance. Locke emphasises that the moral features of human subjectivity relate only to the unity of a person, as constituted by consciousness and the self-concern which accompanies consciousness. This and several other features of Locke’s ac-

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<sup>43</sup> “Consciousness”, Locke says, “unites Existences, and Actions [...] into the same Person” (*Essay* II.xxvii.16).

<sup>44</sup> Compare also: “The same consciousness uniting those distant Actions into the same Person” (*Essay* II.xxvii.10); “[...] that consciousness, whereby I am my *self* to my *self*” (*Essay* II.xxvii.24); “[...] consciousness [...] makes every one to be what he calls *self*” (*Essay* II.xxvii.9).

count have been the subject of a lively debate ever since these thoughts were published.<sup>45</sup> Here we focus on his distinction between three kinds of unity.

In terms of the unity of substance Locke's account seems compatible with that of Condillac, as he thinks we must assume such a unity even if we cannot account for its inner nature. In terms of inner sense or 'reflection', to use Locke's technical term, he would agree with the view that it relates only to the operations of the soul or thinking substance without revealing anything about the latter. He speaks of an intuitive knowledge we have of the existence of our own self (*Essay* IV.ix.3) but intuition tells us nothing about the nature of the self of whose existence we are certain. Locke's comments on the notion of the unity of the thinking substance correspond to some extent to Kant's notion of the noumenal self.<sup>46</sup> We must assume the existence of such a unity without however being able to determine anything about its nature. Locke's account of 'man' corresponds not to Kant's psychological self of empirical apperception but to his notion of the human being as an object of outer sense.<sup>47</sup>

Most importantly, when Locke accounts for the unity of the self as a person in terms of consciousness, he does not have in mind an 'observed unity' as does Tetens, for example. Nor does he see personal unity as a bundle of perceptions bound together by the imagination into a fictional unity. Rather, for Locke consciousness creates a real unity, distinct from that of a human being or a soul. It has, to use Kantian terminology, a synthetic function. To be sure, given that Locke defines consciousness as being merely the empirical "perception of what passes in a Man's own mind" (*Essay* II.i.19), he does not and perhaps cannot explain how consciousness can acquire such a unifying, active or synthetic function. It is clear, however, that he does ascribe such a function to consciousness. In this regard Locke's account is closer to Kant's than other, later empiricist theories.<sup>48</sup> The unity and identity of a person to whom we ascribe actions requires a prior unifying activity of consciousness.

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<sup>45</sup> For details, see Thiel (2014a, 127–131, 170–184).

<sup>46</sup> Again, as in the case of Hume (see footnote 15 above), 'inner nature' or Locke's 'real essence' is of course not the same as the Kantian thing- or self-in-itself.

<sup>47</sup> "The persistence of the soul [...] in life, where the thinking being (as human being) is at the same time an object of outer sense, is clear of itself" (*CPR* B 415).

<sup>48</sup> Manfred Baum, too, identifies a link between Locke and Kant, but he accounts for Lockean personhood in terms of the consciousness of diachronic identity. On our reading it is the consciousness of thoughts and actions that creates personal unity and makes it possible for us relate to our own selves as the same person at different times. See Baum (2002, 109). For other accounts of Kant and Locke on the self, see, for example, Brandt (1981; 1991).

Kant develops this idea further in a very different systematic context, but like Locke he emphasises the notion of a unifying activity or synthesis. In Kant, however, synthetic activity belongs to the understanding. Kant's notion that the *I* of apperception or the logical self is the same with regard to all particular thoughts (*CPR* B 132), is what he refers to as the identity or “analytical unity of apperception” (*CPR* B 133). He argues that this analytical unity is possible only on the basis of a (logically) prior synthetic unity. It is only because it is possible for me to combine representations in one consciousness and because I am conscious of this (possible) synthesis that I can be aware of the identity of apperception in a multiplicity of representations (*CPR* B 133). In order to be able to become aware of the identity of apperception I must have combined the various representations in *one and the same* consciousness and I must be able to become conscious of that synthesis. Moreover, as in Locke, the notion of a unitary subject of consciousness has significance for the idea of a moral personality (*CPR* A 365).<sup>49</sup>

Kant emphasises that the distinction between the “psychological self” and the “logical self” of pure apperception (AA 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”.<sup>50</sup> He hastens to point out that this does not mean that there are two selves or persons for each human individual (AA 20:268). Rather, the self as thinking subject and the self as a sensory being are “one and the same subject”.<sup>51</sup> The distinction concerns 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.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Locke's distinction between man, thinking substance and person is not a distinction between distinct beings but an account of three different ways in which the human subject may relate to his own self.

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<sup>49</sup> See the discussion in Baum (2002).

<sup>50</sup> “Ich bin mir meiner selbst bewußt, ist ein Gedanke, der schon ein zweifaches Ich enthält, das Ich als Subject, und das Ich als Object” (AA 20:270).

<sup>51</sup> “Ich, als denkendes Wesen, bin [...] mit Mir als Sinneswesen, ein und dasselbe Subject” (AA 7:142).

<sup>52</sup> “Es wird dadurch aber nicht eine doppelte Persönlichkeit gemeint, 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” (AA 20:270). Compare the distinction in the *Anthropologie* between “the self as the subject of thought” (AA 7:134), also referred to as “the self of reflection” (AA 7:141), and “the self as the object [...] of inner sense” (AA 7:134), also referred to as “the self of apprehension” (AA 7:142).

We have focused only on some views and arguments and some thinkers who are usually said to belong to the empiricist tradition. It has become clear, however, that Kant's account is continuous with a debate of this issue among empiricist thinkers and is not to be understood as simply a break with that tradition. A full discussion of the relevant background would of course have to include 'rationalist' accounts as well.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> One important thinker who commits himself to an empiricist approach on the issue of self-consciousness is of course Jean Bernard Mérian (1723–1807). Mérian undermines his own empiricist account, however, when dealing with this issue, and there seem to be several striking similarities (as well as important differences) with Kant's account. Mérian argues that the apperception of one's own existence is not only an independent act, but also prior to all other thoughts. He argues that the apperception of self is a necessary condition of all thought as such. He even refers to this apperception of self as an 'original apperception'. Mérian does not, however, elaborate on the notion of unity (Mérian 1751). Importantly, Michael Hissmann provided an early German translation of this piece in which the expression "ursprüngliche Apperzeption" appears in print for the first time. See 'Ueber die Apperzeption seiner eignen Existenz', in *Magazin für die Philosophie und ihre Geschichte. Aus den Jahrbüchern der Akademien angelegt*, ed. Michael Hissmann, vol. 1 (Göttingen and Lemgo, 1778), pp. 89–132. Tetens refers to Mérian's account of apperception in Tetens (1777 I, 46–47). I have discussed Mérian in detail elsewhere. See Thiel (1996; 2014a, 365–376).

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