



Project
MUSE[®]

Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.

Kant's Theory of Self

Apaar Kumar

Journal of the History of Philosophy, Volume 48, Number 4, October 2010, pp. 535-536 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press



 For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/hph/summary/v048/48.4.kumar.html>

fication is “irrelevant” to human conduct (xv, 27, 29; see also 139, 141, 235). But it is not entirely clear what this irrelevance amounts to. McCarty once appears to say that if practical reason cannot both explain and justify action, conclusions of practical reasoning could nevertheless constitute “advice or recommendations about how we ought to act” (1). But are advice and recommendations genuinely *irrelevant* to human conduct?

Among the book’s limitations are that it engages somewhat sparingly with passages at odds with the author’s interpretations. It also sheds little light on the development of Kant’s theory of action, and devotes disappointingly little discussion to some highly relevant topics. For instance, despite the centrality of noumenal freedom, there is little exploration of Kant’s other notions of freedom (cf. 96–103). Also, its account of Kant’s theory of moral motivation does not systematically integrate the *Doctrine of Virtue* discussion of the four aesthetic predispositions of moral feeling, conscience, love of human beings, and respect (cf. 169, 175, 181 n.19). Least surprisingly, McCarty cannot—despite several worthy efforts—eliminate or much mitigate the profound strangeness of Kant’s practical philosophy as he interprets it. The single, timeless, free act that establishes our empirical character and on which our moral agency and responsibility depend seems far removed from the many discrete, individual actions within space and time for which we are praised and blamed.

LARA DENIS

Agnes Scott College

Arthur Melnick. *Kant’s Theory of Self*. New York-London: Routledge, 2009. Pp. viii + 186. Cloth, \$118.00.

Melnick interprets the Kantian self from the first-person perspective as real abiding intellectual action. It unfolds in time but does not arise in inner or outer attending. Hence, it is neither a noumenal entity nor Kantian intuitable substance. Melnick thinks that his interpretation not only clarifies Kant’s arguments in the Paralogisms of the first *Critique*, but also illuminates Kant’s positive theory of self.

Melnick argues that a thought is inchoate, unformed, and unsettled until the thinking self as intellectual marshaling action brings it into focus and “coalesces” around it a series of related but out-of-focus thoughts ready to replace the focal thought if necessary. This marshaling action is temporal because it shifts/adjusts (“accompanies”) progressive attending but cannot be intuited in time. Its shifting/adjusting constitutes its only reality, for it would have to be in objective time if it were intrinsically real, which Kant’s transcendental idealism does not allow.

As intellectual marshaling action, the thinking self cannot know itself as simple substantial entity. Instead, it knows itself as always-subject-and-never-predicate because it is constant and never swallowed up by particular thoughts, and as indivisible because its self-awareness as marshaling action in a whole thought is not the sum of its self-awareness in each part of that thought. Self-consciousness is a structural possibility of this marshaling action. It occurs when the subject has to report its thoughts, which it does by distancing-itself-from-but-still-encompassing its thought/s in reflection.

The same marshaling action makes for the identity of the cognizing subject by constantly regulating thinking. Thinking is “proneness” to standardize or regulate. If I am unifying/regulating a synthesis of outer apprehension (empirical-object-dog) through my prior grasp of a thought or rule (empirical-dog-concept), I am self-identical in empirical apperception. If I am unifying/regulating outer or inner attending *per se* according to pure rules of space and time in a synthesis of outer apprehension, then I am self-identical in pure apperception.

In the synthesis of inner apprehension, I can be self-identical only if I, as intellectual marshaling action, set representations of inner sense in time. Personal identity is the extension of this identity. It is to be construed as a “thin” capacity contingent upon the fulfillment of its activation conditions, rather than as a metaphysical entity. Given that time-

consciousness demands outer bodily representations in Kant, and bracketing his abstraction from the body, self-identical persons must necessarily be construed as embodied. Finally, contra the rationalists, intellectual marshaling action is neither material nor separable from material reality, and our capacity for such action relates immediately to the capacity of material things to affect us.

The problem with this argument, which Melnick admits Kant himself never articulated, is that at key moments, it is neither a comprehensive interpretation of Kant (especially since Melnick relies principally on the first *Critique*, but not exhaustively so: for instance, he does not discuss the important distinction between the analytic and synthetic unity of apperception, etc.), nor a stand-alone first-person account of the self.

First, Melnick's use of several Kant-independent spatial analogies to explain crucial mental concepts is disconcerting: to some extent, self as "marshaling" action, consciousness as "awning" that envelops affection from outside, and (most obscurely) self-conscious subjects ostensibly require reflection to "mirror" a thought into a verbal report (56–57), but it remains unclear what mirroring *into* involves.

Second, Melnick uncritically accepts Kant's obscure equation of the unities of act and consciousness (7–8, 97), and hence sidesteps the thorny problem of relating/distinguishing activity and consciousness. Since he categorically interprets self as activity, Melnick appears to presuppose the priority of activity over consciousness. But this needs justification, which, in turn, requires further investigating the relationship between attention, consciousness, and intellectual marshaling action.

Finally, although Kant never says this, Melnick offers a two-step argument that we possess a capacity for personhood, which seems rather unconvincing. The first step is a disjunctive syllogism: being a person is either an activity or a capacity; it cannot be an activity because persons undergo periods of inactivity (sleep, etc.); hence it must be a capacity (142). But the initial premise here is questionable, because Melnick does not separately establish that personhood must necessarily be described in terms of the activity-capacity framework. Then we get the following argument: if I can detect continuity in the outer world after episodes of inactivity, then I am continuous even during periods of inactivity; I can detect such continuity, and I am not active during periods of inactivity; therefore, I must be a capacity (155). The problem here is that detection of worldly continuity could just as easily be attributed to psychological continuity of some sort (particular mental features, etc.), and so it does not necessarily show that personhood is a capacity. Hence, despite criticizing psychological continuity theories of personhood (142–48), Melnick provides no non-arbitrary grounds for preferring his capacity theory to psychological continuity theories.

Despite these difficulties, Melnick's clear writing and rigorous phenomenological interpretation of the Kantian self as activity in the context of relevant contemporary Kant scholarship and philosophy of mind make this text essential reading for Kant interpreters, phenomenologists, and philosophers of mind.

APAAR KUMAR

Oxford College of Emory University

Julie E. Maybee. *Picturing Hegel: An Illustrated Guide to Hegel's Encyclopaedia Logic*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009. Pp. xxvii + 639. Paper, \$56.95.

If Hegel were alive to read an illustrated guide to his *Encyclopaedia Logic*, he might not immediately appreciate the project. Not only did he consider "picture-thinking" deficient in comparison to conceptual thinking, but he regarded the *Encyclopaedia Logic* as a text suitable for German students. In her recent book, *Picturing Hegel*, Julie Maybee acknowledges these ironies and proceeds to guide those of us who need a little extra help in understanding Hegel's speculative logic.

What results is a significant contribution to the literature, a step-by-step commentary