

Transcendental Self and the Feeling of Existence

El sí mismo transcendental y el sentimiento de la existencia

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Abstract

In this essay, I investigate one aspect of Kant's larger theory of the transcendental self. In the *Prolegomena*, Kant says that the transcendental self can be represented as a feeling of existence. In contrast to the view that Kant errs in describing the transcendental self in this fashion, I show that there exists a strand in Kant's philosophy that permits us to interpret the representation of the transcendental self as a feeling of existence—as the obscurely conscious and temporally inaccessible modification of the state of the discursive subject, which is built into all the representations of such a subject. I also provide an account of how the transcendental self can be legitimately understood both as an epistemic condition for the possibility of experience as well as the representation of a non-naturalistic feeling of existence.

Keywords

Kant; Transcendental Self; Apperception; Consciousness; Feeling of Existence; *Empfindung*

Resumen

En este escrito investigo un aspecto de la teoría, más amplia, del sí mismo transcendental. En los *Prolegomena* Kant dice que el sí mismo transcendental puede ser representado como un sentimiento de existencia. Frente a la consideración de que Kant yerra al describir al sí mismo transcendental de esta manera, muestro que existe una posibilidad de interpretar la representación del sí mismo trascendental como un sentimiento de existencia, como la modificación consciente oscura y temporalmente inaccesible del estado del sujeto discursivo, construido dentro de todas las

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representaciones de tal sujeto. También suministro una valoración de cómo el sí mismo transcendental puede ser entendido legítimamente como una condición epistémica para la posibilidad de la experiencia, así como en los términos de la representación de un sentimiento de existencia no naturalista.

Palabras clave

Kant; sí mismo trascendental; apercepción; conciencia; sentimiento de existencia; *Empfindung*

Kant describes the transcendental unity of apperception (or self-consciousness) as the highest point of discursive cognition (*KrV*, B135).¹ Yet he does not offer a fully worked out theory of self-consciousness. My purpose here is not to offer a comprehensive account of Kant's theory of self-consciousness.² Instead, I shall focus more narrowly on exploring the textual and philosophical viability of Kant's statement that the transcendental self can be represented as a feeling. Kant says in the *Prolegomena* (henceforth, IV:334n):

«If the representation of apperception, the I, were a concept, through which anything were to be thought, then it could also be used as a predicate of other things, or contain such predicates in itself. Now it is nothing more than a feeling of existence [*Gefühl eines Daseins*] without the least concept and only a representation in relation to which all thinking stands (relationae accidentis)» (AA IV:334n).

In this passage, Kant explicitly speaks of the representation of the transcendental self as a feeling.³ Yet, barring a few commentators on Kant (Makkreel 1990, 105; Klemme 1996, 401; Carr 1999, 65; Frank 2002, 44ff.), most Kant-interpreters have generally avoided commenting on Kant's undoubtedly provocative claim that the transcendental self can be represented as a feeling of existence.⁴ Indeed, good reasons may be provided to explain the

¹ See bibliography for abbreviations. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the German are my own. I cite the relevant passages in German wherever required.

² Several recent commentators have interpreted Kant's transcendental self as what Guenter Zoeller calls the "third self"—as neither the empirical self of introspection nor the noumenal self. In these interpretations, Zoeller discerns three approaches to understanding Kant's transcendental self. (1) The transcendental self is entirely a priori and divorced from consciousness. (2) The Kantian self is "co-original" with other kinds of "worldly" knowledge. (3) Self-consciousness is the condition for the possibility of ascribing mental states to oneself. See Zoeller (1993, 460-61). I will not discuss these approaches, since I do not aim to provide a full-fledged reconstruction of Kant's transcendental self.

³ It is fairly clear that Kant refers to the transcendental self at IV:334n. While Kant does speak of "internal" or inner sense in the main text to which this footnote is attached, his main theme here is not the empirical self, construed as the object of inner sense. For, Kant describes the self as "only the relationship of objects of inner sense." Since Kant similarly describes the transcendental self as unifying the objects of inner sense in other passages (e.g., *KrV*, A107), he must be interpreted as referring to the transcendental rather than the empirical self at IV:334n.

⁴ This includes the most influential Kant scholars writing on the transcendental self in Anglo-American philosophy (Allison 1996; Allison 2004; Ameriks 2000; Aquila 1983; Aquila 1989; Guyer 2006; Keller 2001; Brook 1994; Kitcher 1990; Strawson 1966; and Kemp Smith 1962).

general reluctance to discuss this claim. Dieter Sturma cites two such reasons for why Kant should not have said that the transcendental self can be represented as feeling. He argues:

«Confronted with the consequences of his ‘critique of the subject’, Kant does not go back here [in this passage from the *Prolegomena*] to an epistemological level of abstraction, like say in TD B and in the paralogisms, rather he makes descriptively instead of argumentatively the assumption of a feeling of the existence of the ‘I’. In the perspective of naturalistic consciousness, this is surely plausible, but [this] is undercut by the systematic way of posing the problem which Kant himself introduces [*in Ansatz bringen*]» (Sturma 1985, 116-17).

In this passage, Sturma asserts that Kant’s “description” of the transcendental self as feeling is at odds with key propositions of the Kantian system. First, describing the transcendental self as feeling is inconsistent with the logical-abstract way in which Kant characterizes the transcendental self in the B-deduction and the B-paralogisms of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Since Sturma believes that the epistemological or logical account of the transcendental self should be considered Kant’s official account, he considers it odd that Kant would describe the transcendental self as feeling. Second, Sturma contends that Kant’s description of the transcendental self as feeling undermines Kant’s whole transcendental approach. According to Sturma, the transcendental self can be described as a feeling only if we take the perspective of what he calls “naturalistic consciousness.” If by “naturalistic” Sturma means empirical or psychological, then he is making an exclusively disjunctive claim here. Either the transcendental self must be logical and abstract, a mere epistemic condition for the possibility of experience, or it can be described as a conscious feeling. In other words, the transcendental self cannot be both an epistemic condition and a conscious feeling at the same time, since conscious feelings are always empirical for Kant. Therefore, Sturma seems to posit a strict dichotomy between the epistemological-abstract and the descriptive in Kant’s philosophy of the subject.

In my view, however, Sturma’s position may be challenged on purely textual grounds. In the B-deduction of the first *Critique*, in a passage which has no counterpart in the A-deduction, Kant explicitly characterizes the transcendental self in “descriptive” rather than abstract terms. In this passage, Kant specifies the transcendental self as the mere consciousness of the fact “that I am” (*KrV*, B157). If, as I will show in §2, the term “consciousness” can be said to have descriptive content, then it can be asserted that Kant construes the transcendental self as descriptive. Further, in the B-paralogisms, Kant adds a footnote, which again has no counterpart in the A-paralogisms of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he suggests that the transcendental self can be represented as an “indeterminate empirical intuition.”⁵

⁵ I argue in §2.2 that this claim is continuous with both IV:334n and the B-deduction claim that the transcendental self can be described as the consciousness “that I am.”

Hence, *pace* Sturma, Kant can be interpreted as endowing the transcendental self with representational content in the B-edition of the first *Critique*, although he also characterizes it in abstract-epistemological terms in the same text. Consequently, there appears to be enough *prima facie* evidence to warrant an investigation into the question of how the Kantian self could be considered both abstract-epistemological and descriptive at the same time.

In what follows, I will provide an argument for the claim that the transcendental self can be legitimately understood both as an epistemic condition for the possibility of experience as well as the representation of a non-naturalistic feeling of existence. More specifically, I will show that, for Kant, the transcendental self can be represented as the obscurely conscious and temporally inaccessible modification of the state of the discursive subject, or what I shall call the “bare feeling of existence,”⁶ which is built into all its representations.

The claim that the transcendental self can be represented as the bare feeling of existence forms only a part of Kant’s theory of transcendental subjectivity, which includes, importantly, Kant’s characterization of the transcendental self as activity.⁷ If this felt-existence claim is accepted, then it would entail a comprehensive re-examination of (1) Kant’s concept of the self, and (2) his theory of cognition. Regarding (1), the transcendental self could no longer be described merely as activity, as many commentators have assumed, but must also be described as the feeling of existence; and the key question now would be the relationship between these two aspects of the self. Resolving this question will have consequences for addressing the regress and circularity problems that beset theories of self-consciousness. As for (2), in the B-deduction, while explicating the role of the faculties in the cognition of objects, Kant characterizes the “I think” as the “act of spontaneity” (*KrV*, B132), but also describes the “I” as self-identical and conscious (*ibid.*, B135, B157 *op. cit.*). If, as I will argue, we take the latter as representing the feeling of existence, any theory of Kantian cognition would now have to include an account of the roles that the activity- and feeling-aspects of the transcendental self might play in our cognition of objects. A similar account would be required for the cases of perception and sensation. Further, since the transcendental self remains relevant in Kant’s ethics, the task would be to understand the nature of the involvement, if any, of the feeling-aspect in our giving ourselves the moral law.

Section 1 draws on Kant’s unpublished works to provide textual support for the proposition that the transcendental self can be seen as a type of *Empfindung*, or bare feeling, if we take *Empfindung* to mean modification of the subject rather than the physiological effect of the object upon the subject.⁸ In Section 2, I offer philosophical arguments to show that conceiving of the transcendental self as *Empfindung* (=bare

⁶ I employ the term “bare” to match Kant’s reference to the “mere (*bloß*) [...] consciousness of existence” (AA V:278)—to mean consciousness of existence in general, and not any particular sort of consciousness.

⁷ For a discussion of this aspect of Kant’s transcendental self, see Melnick (2009) and Horstmann (1995). I will not discuss this topic in this essay.

⁸ Since the issue is terminological, I will use “*Empfindung*” without translation.

feeling) can help account for two of Kant's key claims regarding the transcendental self—that it is atemporal, and that it is built into all possible representations of the subject. In this section, I will also offer a fresh perspective on the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical self. In Section 3, I will provide an interpretation of what Kant means by the term “existence” in the formulation “feeling of existence.”

Before I begin, a word about methodology. First, Kant does not provide a fully worked out theory of the transcendental self in his published works. In fact, he characterizes the transcendental self in a variety of ways: as merely logical, as an activity, as a perception, (representationally) as a feeling, and as consciousness. Given these seemingly irreconcilable descriptions of the transcendental self, one way of proceeding would be to ascertain whether Kant's claim that the representation of the transcendental self can be characterized as the feeling of existence can be justified from within the conceptual resources of the Kantian system. This is my general strategy in this essay. In §1, I textually defend the claim that the transcendental self can be represented as *Empfindung*, construed as a bare, and merely subjective feeling. In §2, I offer philosophical grounds for supporting this view by showing that it is consistent with key features of Kant's theory of the self.

Second, in making this case, I employ Kant's *Reflexionen* and lecture notes wherever necessary. However, I follow strict criteria in the use of these notes. I restrict myself to: (a) notes dated around the time of the first publication of the first *Critique* (1781), unless Kant repeats the same claim in both the pre-critical and critical periods; (b) unpublished claims that Kant makes more than once; and (c) unpublished writings that are consistent with Kant's published works.

1. The Textual Argument

In this section, I enumerate passages that aid my interpretation that the transcendental self can be represented as an *Empfindung*, or more specifically, as a bare feeling. Anyone with even a passing acquaintance with Kant's works should find this claim provocative for two reasons. First, many Kant commentators like Lorne Falkenstein take *Empfindung* (sensation) to be the physiological affection of the subject by the object (Falkenstein 1995, 121).⁹ Kant states explicitly that pure or transcendental representations are pure only if they are unsullied by sensations (*KrV*, A11/B24). Therefore, given that the transcendental self is a pure representation, it cannot be represented as *Empfindung*. Second, one could make the further claim that the transcendental self cannot be represented as a feeling either. Given the contours of Kant's system, one thinks of feelings as empirical, because feelings cannot be universalized. They are unique to each individual subject. Since Kant thinks that the transcendental self is supposed to be universal, it cannot therefore be represented as feeling.

⁹ For a more detailed discussion of Falkenstein's view, see §2.2.

In countering these objections, I now offer textual evidence to show that the representation of the transcendental self can be glossed as *Empfindung* in the context of Kant's system if we take *Empfindung* to mean the modification of the state of the subject, rather than the physiological affection of the subject by the object. Further, as we will see, Kant sometimes uses the terms *Empfindung* and feeling interchangeably, where feeling must be understood as neither the aesthetic feeling of pleasure and displeasure, nor the moral feeling of respect.

In both the A- and B-editions of the first *Critique*, Kant describes the transcendental self in terms of the concept of consciousness, and as built into all possible representations of the discursive intellect. In the A-edition, he says that transcendental apperception is the pure, original and unalterable consciousness that is a correlate of all possible representations.

«Now we could have no cognition, no combination and unity of cognitions, without the unity of consciousness (*Einheit des Bewusstseins*), which precedes all data of intuitions, and in relation to which all representations of objects (*Gegenständen*) are alone possible. I want to call this pure original, unalterable consciousness transcendental apperception» (*KrV*, A107; henceforth, A107).

In the B-edition, Kant explicates the transcendental self in similar fashion. He asserts again that the transcendental self is some sort of consciousness, and goes on to gloss this notion further.

«I am conscious [*bewusst*] of myself in the transcendental synthesis of the manifold of representations in general, therefore in the synthetic original unity of apperception, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am myself, but only that I am [*nicht wie ich mir erscheine, noch wie ich an mir selbst bin, sondern nur dass ich bin*]» (ibid., B157).

In this passage, Kant characterizes the transcendental self as the consciousness that I am, or that I exist in some fashion. In another passage from the B-edition, Kant seems to make a similar point when he says that the pure consciousness of the "I" is the "mere" (*bloss*) consciousness of the representation of objects in general.¹⁰ Similarly, Kant asserts elsewhere in the B-edition that the pure self is the "consciousness of my thinking" (*KrV*, B143). Combining these two claims from the B-edition—that the transcendental self is the consciousness that I am, and that it is the consciousness of my thinking—we arrive at the proposition that the transcendental self, construed as the awareness "that I am," is built into all my thinking, since it is the consciousness of my thinking. This claim appears to be

¹⁰ "I am' is therefore not cognition of the subject, rather merely the consciousness of the representation of the object in general" ('Ich bin' ist also kein Erkenntnis des Subjects [*sic*], sondern blos [*sic*] das Bewusstseyn der Vorstellung des Objects [*sic*] überhaupt) (E CLXXX, handwritten note to A592).

another way of saying what Kant says in the A-edition, that the transcendental self, construed as unalterable consciousness, is a correlate of all possible representations.¹¹

If the transcendental self is a type of consciousness, then it is essential to understand how Kant employs the term “consciousness” to clarify further how the transcendental self is to be conceptualized in Kant’s system. Kant provides a classification of the terms in his epistemology at A320/B376 of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Here Kant classifies a conscious representation (*Perzeption*) as either a cognition or an *Empfindung*.¹² *Empfindung* is a conscious representation that relates solely to the subject as the modification of its state, while cognition is a conscious representation that is objective and involves the coming together of concepts and intuitions. Thus, a conscious representation can be either a cognition or an *Empfindung* in Kant’s system.

If the transcendental self is a conscious representation, and such representations are either *Empfindungen* or cognitions, must the transcendental self be represented as a cognition or as an *Empfindung*? The transcendental self cannot be a cognition, because cognition requires both concepts and intuitions. In an oft-quoted passage, Kant asserts that concepts without content are empty, and intuitions without concepts are blind (*KrV* A51/B75). In addition, Kant also concludes in the paralogisms of the first *Critique* that the categories cannot aid in cognizing the self as an object. In fact, it is the violation of this dictum that leads Kant to reject the understanding of the self in rational psychology (*ibid.*, B406-07). Thus, if cognitions require the conceptualization of intuitions, and no such conceptualization is possible in relation to the transcendental self, we can conclude that the transcendental self cannot be considered a cognition in Kant’s view.

Consequently, we arrive at the following disjunctive syllogism. Either the transcendental self as a conscious representation must be a cognition or an *Empfindung*. It cannot be a cognition. Therefore, it must be an *Empfindung*. Prima facie, though, the conclusion of this syllogism may seem dubious. The term *Empfindung* is translated as sensation, and it is mostly taken to refer to the sensory affections of the subject by an outer object. Interpreted in this fashion, it would be un-Kantian and phenomenologically unsound if we were to think of the transcendental self as associated in its nature with the five senses, viz. sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. After all, we cannot see, smell, hear, taste, or touch the “I.” However, as I have pointed out elsewhere, *Empfindung* can be considered a multi-faceted term in the context of Kant’s writings. It can mean the affection of the sensory organs by an outer object, but it can also mean the modification of the state of the subject without any reference to an object (see Kumar 2014). Building on this claim, I will argue that Kant can be seen as characterizing the transcendental self as an

¹¹ In contrast, Tobias Rosefeldt (2000, 11) focuses on the link between judgment and apperception rather than on the term “consciousness.” While Kant does relate the “I” to judgment as activity, I am bracketing this aspect of the “I” in this essay. I am also bracketing Kant’s characterizations of the “I” as merely logical and empty (*KrV*, A355), because I consider these formulations as relating to the “I” as activity.

¹² Kant defines consciousness as “a representation that another representation is in me” (*Jäsche Logik*, AA IX:33). I will not discuss this passage here, because I am merely trying to ascertain what sort of consciousness the transcendental self is.

Empfindung, or more specifically, as a particular kind of feeling without any reference to an object.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant characterizes *Empfindung* in two different ways. In the Transcendental Aesthetic, he describes *Empfindung* as the “effect of an object (*Gegenstand*) upon the representational ability [of the subject] insofar as the [subject is] affected by it” (*KrV*, A19-20/B34). In this passage, Kant describes *Empfindung* in what I call “referential” or interactional terms: as the effect of the object upon the subject.¹³ Here Kant seems to be speaking about *Empfindung* as the sensory affection (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch) of the subject by an outer object. On the other hand, Kant also characterizes *Empfindung* (*sensatio*) as a “perception (*Perzeption*) which relates solely to [*sich beziehen auf*] the subject, as the modification of its state,” where *Perzeption* means “any representation with consciousness” (*KrV*, A320/B376). Here Kant seems to characterize *Empfindung* as “solely” the modification of the state of the subject without any reference to the object (I call this the “non-referential” characterization of *Empfindung*).¹⁴ In other words, this passage appears to open up the possibility that Kant may allow for *Empfindungen* that need not necessarily refer to any outer objects.¹⁵

¹³ It is unclear whether this object, which affects the subject to engender an *Empfindung*, is the spatiotemporal object of appearance or the thing in itself. Without attempting to resolve this difficulty, I take this object to be a mere something (*etwas*).

¹⁴ The discussion of *Empfindung* in this essay draws substantially on arguments earlier presented in my paper “Kant’s Definition of Sensation” (see Kumar 2014).

¹⁵ Many Kant scholars underplay the importance of the A320/B376 passage for defining the notion of *Empfindung*, and therefore would resist the non-referential definition of *Empfindung*. Lorne Falkenstein provides the most detailed defense of this position. Falkenstein argues that Kant is not defining *Empfindung* at all at A320/B376. Instead, his primary aim in this passage is to distinguish his own use of the term “idea” from that of empiricists like Locke and Hume, and not to explain the essential nature of sensation (Falkenstein 1995, 114).

One can, however, challenge Falkenstein’s argument that Kant is not defining sensation at A320/B376, because Kant defines it in the same way in a reflection from 1770s. He says:

«1. *repraesentatio*. 2. *perceptio* (with consciousness). 3. *cognitio** (relation with consciousness to the object) (*perceptio obiective spectate*). (a perception [*perception*], which is related merely to the subject as a state of the same [the subject] is sensation; [that] which is related to the object: cognition.)» (AA XVI:R2836, comment in Meier’s logic text; 1770s; errors in original)

At A320/B376, Kant says,

«The genus is representation in general (*repraesentatio*). Under it stands the representation with consciousness (*perceptio*). A perception [*Perzeption*] which relates solely to the subject as the modification of its state is sensation (*sensatio*), an objective perception [*Perzeption*] is cognition [*Erkenntnis*] (*cognitio*)».

In both these passages, A320/B376 and R2836, Kant speaks of *Empfindung* as a representation and a *perceptio* (representation with consciousness); and defines *Empfindung* as a perception related merely to the modification of the state of the subject. Since Kant does not mention the term “idea” at R2836, Falkenstein’s

To be sure, Kant does speak of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure and the moral feeling of respect as *Empfindung*. But does he also allow for non-referential *Empfindung* relating to the process of cognition? To answer this question, I turn to Kant's unpublished writings. First, relying on Kumar (2014, *passim*), I show that Kant does possess a concept of *Empfindung* as bare feeling (§1.1), and that this bare feeling, which is associated with the process of cognition, can be described further as the shift of representation (§1.2). Subsequently, by building on this claim in §1.3, I will argue that the representation of the transcendental self can be specified in terms of this notion of non-referential *Empfindung* (=bare feeling).

1.1 Non-Referential *Empfindung* as Bare Feeling

By far the most telling evidence that *Empfindung* can be considered merely subjective (or non-referential) comes from a passage in which Kant distinguishes inner and outer *Empfindungen*. In a reflection on anthropology dated 1769, Kant says:

«The first building block (*Grundstück*) of our cognition is *Empfindung*. One designates the representations [= *Empfindung*], in which the mind is viewed as merely passive, to the extent it is effected (*gewirkt*) by the presence of a thing. [The *Empfindungen*] constitute at the same time the material of all our cognition. Because the form is given here through the operations of the soul. These *Empfindungen*, to the extent they denote (*andeuten*) the state of the subject, are called feelings (*Gefühl*); if, however, they relate to an outer object, then they are called appearance (*Erscheinung*). It follows from this that all our representations are accompanied by a feeling, to the extent they are affections of the state of the soul» (AA XV:R619).¹⁶

In the first part of this passage (henceforth R619), Kant relates *Empfindung* to the passivity of the mind that enables it to be affected by something. This suggests the referential notion of *Empfindung*. But then Kant broadens his approach in the latter half of this passage, where he seems to suggest that there are two types of *Empfindungen*. While it is uncertain how these two parts of this passage must be reconciled, it is clear that Kant distinguishes two kinds of *Empfindungen* in the second part of R619. One sort of *Empfindung* is characterized as a feeling associated with the affections of the soul (=non-referential), which Kant distinguishes from those *Empfindungen* that relate to an outer object

rejection of the A320/B376 characterization of *Empfindung* on the grounds that Kant is here concerned mainly with the term "idea" can be challenged.

¹⁶ «Die ersten grundstücke [*sic*] unserer Erkenntnis [*sic*] sind Empfindung. So nennet man die Vorstellungen, bey denen das Gemüth als bloß leidend angesehen wird, indem sie durch die Gegenwart einer Sache gewirkt werden. Sie machen gleichsam die Materie alles unseres Erkenntnisses aus. Denn die Form wird hernach durch die eigene Thatigkeit [*sic*] der Seele gegeben. Diese Empfindung, so fern sie bloß [*sic*] den Zustand des subjects [*sic*] andeutet, heißt Gefühl; gehet sie aber (^e ist sie in Verheltnis [*sic*]) auf einen äußeren Gegenstand, so heißt sie Erscheinung. Daraus sehen wir, daß alle unsere Vorstellungen mit einem Gefühle begleitet seyn, indem sie affectionen [*sic*] von dem Zustande der Seele sind.»

(=referential). Kant designates the latter sort of *Empfindung* as appearance (*Erscheinung*). Thus, Kant allows for non-referential *Empfindungen* that can be designated as feelings, and distinguished from referential *Empfindungen*, which he calls appearance (*Erscheinung*).

The fact that Kant makes this distinction between non-referential *Empfindung* and appearance more than once after 1769, which is generally regarded as the beginning of the critical phase, shows that this could well have been Kant's considered view of *Empfindung*. In a reflection from 1769/1770, Kant says "Appearance (*Erscheinung*) is a representation of the senses, to the extent it relates to an object; *Empfindung*: if it relates merely to the subject" (AA XV:R683, reflection on anthropology; my emphasis). Elsewhere, in the late 1770s/early 1780s, he says something similar: "cognition by which we differentiate what something is, is an objective representation; the subjective is *Empfindung*" (AA XVI:R1685; also AA XXII:487, 479). In these reflections, Kant describes *Empfindung* not with reference to an object, but as relating "merely" to the subject. In other words, he characterizes *Empfindung* as non-referential in these passages. By contrast, in these same passages, he also describes both appearances (in R683) and cognitions (in R1685) as referential, i.e., in terms of the subject's relationship to the object. Hence, in addition to R619, we can find other passages which directly attest to the fact that Kant allows for a type of *Empfindung* that is merely subjective, or non-referential.

Further, it is especially significant that Kant describes *Empfindung* as a feeling at R619. Since he is speaking of *Empfindungen* as the "*Grundstücke*" of cognition in this passage, this feeling—which can only be thought of as a feeling involved in cognition—cannot be the same as either the aesthetic feeling of pleasure and displeasure or the moral feeling of respect.¹⁷ Lastly, at R619, Kant also says that *Empfindungen* as feelings are

¹⁷ Historically speaking, *Empfindung* has been a multifaceted term, variously denoting aesthetic and moral feelings; sensory affections by outer objects; and modifications of the perceiving faculty of the subject (Neumann 1972, *passim*). Meier, Sulzer, Winckelmann, and Mendelssohn viewed *Empfindung* as an aesthetic concept; Eberhard and Malebranche thought of it as a modification; and empiricists like Locke understood it as sensory affection in physiological terms (*ibid.*).

Kant distinguishes between practical and theoretical *Empfindung* in both his published and unpublished works. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant characterizes the moral feeling of respect as "*Empfindung*," the cause of which, he says, lies in pure practical reason and not in the process of cognition (AA V:75).

In the *Critique of Judgment*, including the first introduction, Kant says that *Empfindung* is the feeling of pleasure and displeasure that determines something as beautiful, but that it can never become the concept of an object (AA XX:224; *CJ*, 413; also AA XVI:R2365, R2366). In the same text, Kant makes a distinction between objective *Empfindung*, defined in referential terms, and subjective *Empfindung* exemplified in this passage as the feeling of pleasure/displeasure. To distinguish between these two senses of *Empfindung*, Kant decides to reserve the term "*Empfindung*" to mean objective *Empfindung*, and denotes subjective *Empfindung* as feeling (AA V:206). The fact that Kant does not mention subjective *Empfindung* as bare feeling here, as he does in R619 (see §1.1), does not mean that *Empfindung* cannot be thought of as non-referential bare feeling, as I have suggested.

Finally, in several unpublished reflections, Kant seems to characterize feeling (*Gefühl*) and desire (*Begierde*) as inner *Empfindung*—AA XV:R230, where he seems to speak of inner *Empfindungen* as *Gefühl* (feeling) and *Begierde* (desire); *Metaphysik K2*, AA XXVIII:737; AA XV:R227; AA XXII:530; AA XVI:R1864.

supposed to “accompany” all our representations to the extent our soul has been affected in some way.

Hence, it can be said that the term *Empfindung* need not only denote the affection of the bodily senses by something.¹⁸ Instead, as I have shown, Kant does allow for non-referential *Empfindungen*, or “bare” feelings that are distinct from the feeling of pleasure and displeasure and the moral feeling of respect, and that accompany all affections of our soul.¹⁹

1.2 *Empfindung* as Differential

I will now supplement the conclusion of §1.1 by giving further content to the notion of *Empfindung* as a non-referential bare feeling accompanying all affections of the soul. By analyzing a significant passage from Kant’s reflections, I show that Kant appears to think of *Empfindung* in general as a differential, or shift (=modification/movement/alteration) of representation. Alternately stated, the term *Empfindung* marks the contentual difference between representations, where the content may or may not include affection by an outer object.

In a reflection from 1778-79, just prior to the publication of the A-edition of the first *Critique* in 1781, Kant characterizes *Empfindung* as a “differential.” In my view, this notion of differential can be interpreted as the shift (modification/alteration/movement) in the representational profile of the subject. Kant writes:

«The *qvan*ta are different with respect to quantity, [but] same with respect to quality, that is, [with respect to] decomposition with absolutely no first parts. However, the *qvan*tum of absolute position or reality (*Empfindung*), which is different from other *qvan*tis in that nothing disappears in the case of the former, but in the case of the latter there is a positive border although no part remains. The borders of space (three [dimensions]) and time (one [dimension]). The forging of reality has a moment (*Moment*), of extensive quantity, a quasi element: a differential [...]. Just like a different moment brings about a different magnitude of speed, in the same way the difference in impression (*Eindruck* [*sic*]) brings about a different degree of *Empfindung* [...]. We have 3 *qvan*ta: Space, time and *Empfindung* (*Bewegung*, *Realität*). The first has a positive border, which is a quantum; the second, which is not a quantum, the third [has] nothing positive and no border, rather bounds» (AA XVIII:R5582, 1778-79).²⁰

¹⁸ In several passages, Kant suggests that even bodily sensations are ultimately non-referential—*KrV*, A166/B207-08; AA XV:R650, 1769/early 1770; also AA XV:R698. I have discussed this elsewhere (see Kumar 2014).

¹⁹ Phenomenologically, too, this can make sense: my awareness “that I am” does not involve moral respect or any kind of pleasure/displeasure in any intrinsic way.

²⁰ AA XVIII:R5582, 1778-79. “Die *Qvan*ta sind in Ansehung der *qvan*tität verschieden, in ansehung der *qvan*tität einerley, nämlich der decomposition ohne absolut erste theile. Doch ist das *qvan*tum der absoluten position oder realität (^g *Empfindung*) darin von anderen *qvan*tis unterschieden, daß jenes in nichts verschwindet, diese aber doch eine positive Grenze, obzwar keinen theil übrig lassen. Grenzen des Raumes

In this passage (henceforth R5582), Kant characterizes *Empfindung* as a differential. Such a characterization of *Empfindung* is not unusual in Kant's writings. In addition to "differential," Kant uses the terms "alteration" (*Veränderung*) and "movement" (*Bewegung*) to express the same idea—that *Empfindung* may be defined as the shift in the representational profile of the subject.²¹ One can argue for the synonymy of these terms as follows. At R5582, Kant employs the term "movement" (*Bewegung*) to characterize *Empfindung*. In fact, he often uses this term to describe *Empfindung* in the reflections from 1778-79.²² This is especially significant since these reflections, similar to R5582, were also written just prior to the publication of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The temporal proximity of these reflections to the first *Critique* makes it more likely that Kant does view *Empfindung* as a movement.

Now, we have seen that Kant characterizes *Empfindung* as a differential at R5582. Further, the terms movement and differential appear to be semantically analogous, and Kant uses both these terms at R5582. Therefore, it is not too far-fetched to infer that Kant uses the term "movement" to refer to the movement in the representational state of the subject. Since Kant uses the term "modification" when he glosses *Empfindung* as the modification of the state of the subject at A320/B376, and employs the term "alteration" (*Veränderung*) to describe an *Empfindung*,²³ it is fair to say that Kant employs three interchangeable terms—"modification" (*Modifikation*), "alteration" (*Veränderung*), and "movement" (*Bewegung*)—to characterize *Empfindung*. Each of these terms means the same: the alteration of the representational profile of the subject.

In other words, the term "*Empfindung*" marks the difference between representations. It marks the shift/movement from one representation to another

(dreierley) und der Zeit (eine). Die Erzeugung der Realität hat ein Moment, des quanti extensivi ein (^g quasi) element: differentiale. (Jenes ist wie die Linie anzusehen, die in einer Zeit [mit Beschleunigung] eine flache beschreibt.) Wie ein verschiedenes Moment verschiedene Grade der Geschwindigkeit erzeugt, so verschiedenheit des Eindrucks verschiedenen Grad der Empfindung [...].* (^g Wir haben 3 quanta. Raum, Zeit und Empfindung (Bewegung, Realität). Die erste hat ein positives der Grenze, was quantum ist; die zweyte, was kein quantum ist, die dritte gar nichts positives und keine Grenze, sondern Schranken. Realität transcendental genommen ist nicht verschiedener Art)" (errors in original).

²¹ I exemplify this below.

²² "*Empfindungen* move indeed, but they do not animate [*beleben*], because they do not have a constant principle of animation" (AA XV:R948, late 1770s). Again, in the same period: "*Empfindungen*," he says, "move, ideas animate [*beleben*] from out of principle" (AA XV:946, 1776-78); and "*Empfindung* and spirit [*Geist*] move" (AA XVI:R1844, 1776-78).

²³ In a reflection, Kant uses *Veränderung* (alteration) and modification interchangeably to describe an *Empfindung*: "Principle of the mathematical knowledge of appearances: All appearance has an extensive magnitude and as *Empfindung*, a degree. Because (concerning the latter) this is the way each *Empfindung* originates from not being, because it is a modification. Hence, through alteration (*Veränderung*). All alterations however go from 0 to *a* through to infinitely many small levels (*Stufen*)" (AA XVIII:R5585, 1770s). Here, Kant also seems to characterize *Empfindung* non-referentially, as mere modification.

It may be objected that Kant also uses *Veränderung* to characterize a referential *Empfindung*—for instance, *Empfindung* is the "alteration (*Veränderung*) of the senses" (AA XV:R756 [1764-65]; AA XVII:R3958 [1769]). But this does not mean that he cannot also employ this term in connection with non-referential *Empfindungen*, which, as I have shown in this footnote, he does.

representation, or the alteration of the content of representation from content1 to content2. For instance, suppose I am representing “red” at a point of time. The modification of this representative state from red to blue marks the emergence of the *Empfindung*, that is, the new representation “blue.” Hence, *Empfindung* is a type of representation, but it must be distinguished from the term “representation” in that Kant says at A320/B376 that representations are always “representations in general” (*Vorstellungen überhaupt*)—irrespective of whether this “content” may be non-referential or referential. Alternatively put, in Kant’s view, representations are generic placeholders. On the other hand, *Empfindung* represents the shift of representation, which essentially means the movement from one representational content to another, irrespective of whether it is referential or non-referential.²⁴

1.3 Transcendental Self as Non-referential *Empfindung* (=Bare Feeling)

I began this section, §1, by pointing out that Kant characterizes the transcendental self as unalterable consciousness in both the A- and B-editions of the first *Critique*. In addition, I offered a prima facie argument for specifying it further as *Empfindung*. The rest of this section has been devoted to exploring the viability of this position. Section 1.1 provided textual evidence for the claim that *Empfindung* can be understood as non-referential, and as a bare feeling in Kant’s writings. Then, in §1.2, the notion of non-referential *Empfindung* was given further content through an interpretation of *Empfindung* as the modification/alteration/movement of the representational profile of the subject. On the basis of these two sections, I precluded the objection that the transcendental self can never be represented as a feeling, because *Empfindung* can only be conceived as referential in Kant’s system—that is, as the sensory affection of the subject by the object.

I will now address the question of whether we could interpret the representation of the transcendental self as a non-referential *Empfindung*. It is clear that Kant does not make this claim explicitly. However, since my object here is to explore whether Kant’s statement that the transcendental self can be represented as a feeling is defensible within the contours of Kant’s philosophy, I think we can argue for the claim as follows. If, as I have indicated, the transcendental self is a conscious representation for Kant, and more particularly, as I have argued, an *Empfindung*; and if Kant’s writings allow for the distinction between referential and non-referential *Empfindung*, then we can raise the following question: Is the representation of the transcendental self best described as a referential or a non-referential *Empfindung*? It is fairly obvious that the transcendental self cannot be characterized as a referential *Empfindung*, since Kant himself points out that the “I” is not diminished if certain parts of the body are subtracted (AA XXVIII:225, *Metaphysik LI*). Alternatively stated, if the excision of certain body parts does not diminish the “I,” then the representation “I” cannot be characterized in referential terms, as the causal affection of the

²⁴ For an outline of the relationship between transcendental self-consciousness and *Empfindung* as contentual differential, see §2.2.

subject by an outer object.²⁵ This is in contrast to sensory affection, where the subject can only be affected by the object through causal interaction. Therefore, if the transcendental self can indeed be classified as *Empfindung*, as I have suggested, and if it cannot be conceptualized as referential, it must be considered non-referential. Further, if, as we have seen, non-referential *Empfindung* can legitimately be characterized as bare feeling, then transcendental feeling can also be represented as a bare feeling. More specifically, it can be glossed as the bare feeling “that I am” for the following reason. Kant suggests that the transcendental self can be represented as the consciousness “that I am” accompanying all possible representations of the discursive subject (*KrV*, A107, B157 op. cit.). In this subsection, §1.3, I established that the transcendental self as conscious representation can be specified as non-referential *Empfindung*, or bare feeling. Therefore, the transcendental self can be represented as the bare feeling “that I am” that accompanies all possible representations of the subject.

Against this interpretation, it could be argued that even if non-referential *Empfindungen* are admissible in Kant’s system, they may refer only to representations like pain or sorrow. Thus, the representation of the transcendental self need not be characterized as a non-referential *Empfindung*, or bare feeling. In my view, such an objection is problematic for three reasons.

First, Kant explicitly says at IV:334n that the transcendental self can be represented as a feeling. Kant thinks of feeling in a finite number of ways—bodily feeling, moral feeling of respect, feeling of pleasure and displeasure, and what I have called bare feeling.²⁶ I have shown that the transcendental self cannot be represented as a bodily, moral, or aesthetic feeling (see §1.1). Therefore, if the transcendental self is a feeling, as Kant says it is, it must be a bare feeling, or, as I have shown, a non-referential *Empfindung*. Second, Kant’s description of the transcendental self is analogous to his characterization of bare feeling at R619 in an important respect. Like the transcendental self, the notion of bare feeling is supposed to accompany all representations of the discursive intellect (see §1.1). Thus, this bare feeling, or non-referential *Empfindung*, could be taken as characterizing the representation of the transcendental self. Third, I think that one would have to argue for the claim that pain and sorrow are non-referential. But even if they are non-referential, representations like pain and sorrow are not suitable for describing the representational content of the transcendental self. As I have indicated, Kant thinks of the transcendental self as accompanying all representations of the discursive intellect. Pain and sorrow can never accompany all representations of such an intellect, and therefore cannot describe the representation of the transcendental self.

²⁵ If, as some Kant commentators believe, the “I” is co-original with the world, then one could object to my argument that the “I” cannot be thought of in referential terms. However, since co-originality does not necessarily entail causal interaction, the “I” could be considered co-original with the world (including the body), but not as referential.

²⁶ Kant also speaks of the feeling of life, and the feeling of orientation. Both relate to what I am calling the “bare feeling of existence” here. I do not have space to elaborate on this point. Also see Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation*, Chapter 5.

In sum, there is enough textual evidence to conclude provisionally that the representation of the transcendental self may be glossed as non-referential *Empfindung*, or the bare feeling “that I am,” accompanying all possible representations of the discursive subject. In §2, I will provide philosophical arguments to bolster this conclusion by showing that if we interpret the transcendental self in this manner, we can offer a coherent account of why Kant takes the transcendental self to be atemporal, and why he thinks of it as accompanying all possible representations of the subject.²⁷

²⁷ Rudolf Makkreel takes as significant Kant’s IV:334n assertion that the transcendental self can be represented as the feeling of existence. Makkreel (1990, 103) states that “biological life obtains its meaning from the feeling of mental life.” He characterizes this feeling of mental life as the “aesthetic feeling of life,” and distinguishes it from the aesthetic feeling of pleasure/displeasure, or the “feeling of the enhancement of life” (ibid., 104). The former is the “transcendental point of unity for both the spontaneity of the understanding and the receptivity of sense” (ibid., 105). Makkreel justifies this interpretation as follows. In §29 of the third *Critique*, Kant speaks of the aesthetic feeling of life as the “bare consciousness of existence” (ibid.). At IV:334n, Kant describes the “transcendental ego” as the feeling of existence. Therefore, the transcendental ego can be viewed as the aesthetic feeling of life.

However, Makkreel does not explain what the term “aesthetic” adds to our understanding of the transcendental self as the “feeling of existence,” or, to use Makkreel’s phrase, the “feeling of life.” Why not simply construe the transcendental self as representation of the feeling of existence? Makkreel could be thinking of “aesthetic” in the way Kant employs the formulation “*ästhetische [...] Empfänglichkeit des Gemüts*” (aesthetic receptivity of the mind) (AA VI:399). This is interesting but requires detailed investigation, which I cannot undertake here.

David Carr (1999, 51) agrees with Makkreel’s suggestion that the transcendental self may be construed as the aesthetic feeling of life, or bare consciousness of existence. However, he avoids the term “aesthetic” when stating his own position. In fact, he does not even speak of the transcendental self as a feeling. Instead, he concludes that the “transcendental self-consciousness brings with it, at least implicitly, a *description* of the ‘self of which I am conscious’” (ibid., 65).

I support the general conviction—which Makkreel and Carr share—that the transcendental self can be characterized as a conscious representation. My task in this essay has been to develop this claim further.

Heiner Klemme and Manfred Frank, too, argue for a similar position. Klemme argues that the “I think” can be described as “familiarity with oneself.” He says: “[I]t is emphasized in the handwritten notes to the *Anthropology* (Rostock) that the ‘I think’ as such is not a determinate object in inner sense, which signifies self-perception or apperception, but a familiarity with oneself (*Vertrautheit mit sich selbst*), which is unmediated (*unmittelbar*) and complete (*vollständig*)” (Klemme 1996, 401).

In this context, Klemme also criticizes Frank’s interpretation of Kantian self-consciousness. According to Klemme, Frank argues that Kantian self-consciousness must be understood in terms of the concept of “intellectual intuition,” since Kant assumes a non-categorical existence in his notion of self-consciousness. But Klemme argues that, contra Frank, the Kantian self can possess a familiarity with itself unmediated by intuition. He says: “The unmediated ‘familiarity’ (*Vertrautheit*) with oneself, which according to the *Critique* of 1787 occurs in mere self-consciousness, has, as has been shown, no empirical content, and cannot therefore be determined in the form of a cognitive judgment. If an empirical cognitive judgment occurs, I would cognize myself as [an] object of inner sense, whereby, however, a ‘third’ [feature], namely intuition, is necessary” (Klemme 1996, 403, 402).

In this essay, I have attempted to support Klemme’s notion of self-familiarity by arguing that the transcendental self can be represented as a “bare feeling” in a non-empirical sense. A fuller examination of Klemme’s position is beyond the scope of this essay, as it requires an investigation of concepts like “I” as activity, and spontaneity (see Klemme 2012, 207ff).

2. Philosophical Justification

As indicated in the introductory remarks above, in both the A- and B-editions of the first *Critique*, Kant conceives of the transcendental self as the unalterable consciousness built into all representations of the subject. In addition, Kant asserts that the transcendental self is atemporal.²⁸ I will now argue that we can account for both these features of the transcendental self in a coherent manner if we interpret Kant's notion of the transcendental self as *Empfindung* (=bare feeling). Section 2.1 shows that the notion of *Empfindung*, construed as non-referential modification of the state of the subject, can be considered atemporal. Next, in §2.2, I will argue that if we accept the claim that the transcendental self can be represented as non-referential *Empfindung*, we will be able to make better sense of the passages like *KrV*, A107 in which Kant says that the transcendental self accompanies all representations of the subject.

2.1 The Atemporality Question

Kant says that all real representations have intensive magnitude, that is, a degree of influence on the senses (*Sinn*) (*KrV*, A166/B208).²⁹ *Empfindung* forms the real (*Real*) material of perception. Therefore, *Empfindung* must have intensive magnitude, which means that it can have varying degrees of reality (*Realität*). On the other hand, Kant asserts

Frank (2002, 49) characterizes the “pure I” as the pre-conceptual and pre-reflective acquaintance (*Kenntnis*) with oneself. Further, he says that it exists as an unmediated and non-inferential acquaintance (*Kenntnisnahme*) comparable to “what has been termed ‘*Empfindung*’ in the empiricist tradition” (Frank 2007, 192). However, Frank does not provide a detailed justification for this view. To the extent he does defend his position, it is at odds with my argument in this paper—see fn 48 below.

Finally, Christian Onof (2010, 163) distinguishes two sorts of self-consciousness—(a) the “ego-less self-consciousness in inner sense,” and (b) the “unifying act of apperception in which the manifold is related to the ‘I.’” The unifying act of apperception [= (b)] is “performed” only if the ego-less self-consciousness [= (a)], and the material that goes with it, is given. It is the relation between (a) and (b) that makes the “I exist” possible. According to Onof, this (a)-(b) relationship not only explains Kant's B422-23n assertion that sensation grounds the proposition “I exist,” but also explains why Kant speaks of the “I” of apperception as the feeling of existence in the *Prolegomena*. Onof writes: “[T]his feeling of existence is that of being affected and accompanying this with the ‘I think’” (ibid.).

Onof appears to take the “‘I’ of apperception”—presumably the transcendental self, since Kant uses “‘I’ of apperception” at IV:334n—as the unifying activity, and believes that the “feeling of existence” only emerges in the relation between the ego-less self-consciousness and the unifying activity of the “I.” But if the feeling of existence emerges only in this relationship between two sorts of self-consciousness, then it is unclear how Onof would classify the feeling of existence—as transcendental or as empirical? Thus, Onof's account does not help resolve the question of whether the transcendental self can be represented as the feeling of existence.

²⁸ “[The transcendental self] precedes the experience that is to determine the object of perception through the category in regard to time” (*KrV*, B423n; *CPR*, 453).

²⁹ The arguments in this section were made earlier in relation to the question of the definition of *Empfindung* in Kumar (2014, §3.1.1).

that *Empfindung* does not have extensive magnitude, and therefore cannot be spatiotemporally extended. He says: “Now since *Empfindung* in itself is not an objective representation, and in it neither the intuition of space nor that of time is to be found, it [*Empfindung*] has no extensive magnitude” (ibid.; A167/B209; handwritten note to A143, E LX). Thus, *Empfindung* is neither spatial nor temporal for Kant.

Furthermore, according to Kant, an *Empfindung* would merely (*bloss*) fill a moment (*Augenblick*) if it could be abstracted from the succession of *Empfindungen* to which it belongs.³⁰ A moment (*Moment*) for Kant is the initiation of an intensive magnitude,³¹ and all existence in this moment must be construed as existence without duration (*Dasein ohne alle Dauer*).³² Therefore, if an individual *Empfindung* can only fill a moment, and if this moment is without duration (=non-durational), then an *Empfindung* must be considered non-durational.

Thus, since *Empfindung* possesses no extensive magnitude, it must be understood as atemporal. Moreover, although *Empfindung* possesses intensive magnitude, it must still be considered non-durational.

A passage seems to go counter to my claim here that *Empfindungen* be seen as atemporal. At A98-99 of the first *Critique*, Kant says that all our representations, irrespective of whether they arise out of inner or outer causes, are modifications of the mind, and therefore “subsumed under the formal condition of inner sense, namely time.” If all representations, including *Empfindungen*, must belong to inner sense, then *Empfindung* must be considered temporal. Thus, it could be said that Kant is contradicting himself, since he seems to be characterizing *Empfindung* as both temporal and atemporal at the same time.

However, this need not be the case. Given that Kant characterizes time as transcendently ideal, i.e., as constitutive of the receptivity of the discursive subject rather than as a thing in itself existing independently of the subject, *Empfindung* can be thought of in two different ways vis-à-vis the notion of time. On the one hand, all representations of the subject, including *Empfindungen*, can be considered (potentially) temporal, because all representations must be received in the form of a temporal succession in inner sense. In this sense, *Empfindung* could be considered temporal, because the reception of every potential *Empfindung* in inner sense must occur in the form of a succession, which is the form of time. On the other hand, if we view *Empfindung* as an isolated representation rather than as part of a succession of *Empfindungen*, and if we take into account the fact that time is subjective for Kant, we could argue that it must be considered atemporal and

³⁰ “The apprehension, merely (*bloss*) by means of *Empfindung*, only fills a moment, (if I abstract from the succession of several *Empfindungen*)” (*KrV*, A167/B208).

³¹ “The magnitude (*Grösse*) of a whole is extensive, the magnitude of a ground is intensive, or degree (*Grad*). The beginning of a degree (minimum) is moment (*Moment*)” (AA XVII:R4411, early 1770s).

³² “The moment (*Augenblick*) is existence (*Dasein*) without all duration (*Dauer*); eternity is existence with all duration” (AA XVII:R4121, 1769). Also: “Time has no duration. Its being (now, later, at the same time, before, after) is the moment (*Augenblick*)” (AAXXII: 5. Siebentes Convolut [Aus dem Nachlaß: April 1800–Februar 1803]).

non-durational in the following way. According to Kant, *Empfindung* has no extensive magnitude, which implies that it must be atemporal. Kant also says that a single *Empfindung* constitutes a moment; and a moment is without duration. On the basis of these premises, it could be argued that, given the subjective nature of temporality, a single *Empfindung* can be viewed as atemporal and non-durational from the vantage point of the subject.

In sum, while the manifold of *Empfindungen* must always be received successively, that is, in the form of time, *Empfindung* can be viewed as atemporal, because each individual *Empfindung* must be temporally unextended and without duration from the perspective of the subject.³³ Hence, if we construe the transcendental self as *Empfindung*, then it can be plausibly considered temporally unextended and non-durational in Kant's system.³⁴

2.2 Transcendental Self as Non-referential *Empfindung* Is Built into All Representations

As I have argued in Kumar (2014), an *Empfindung* as modification of the state of the subject must always be obscurely conscious, and must be built into all representations.³⁵ If the representation of the transcendental self is interpreted as an *Empfindung* of this sort, then we can account for Kant's A107 statement that the transcendental self is built into all representations.³⁶

Kant repeatedly characterizes *Empfindung* as the material to be combined, or synthesized, in accordance with time (and space) construed as a priori forms of intuition (*KrV*, A20-23/B34-38, A42/B60, A267/B323). How can *Empfindung*, which is supposed to be non-durational, form the real material of temporal synthesis? To answer this question, we must first explicate the distinction between perception (*Wahrnehmung*) and *Empfindung* in Kant's writings.

³³ Falkenstein defends the diametrically opposed view, that *Empfindungen* are temporal. His general position is that sensations, as effects on the representative capacity arrayed in space and time, are physiological states of the body of the perceiver (Falkenstein 1995, 121). On the question of the temporality of sensation, Falkenstein (1990, 77) states that sensations can be temporally successive without having temporal magnitude. However, Falkenstein leaves unexplained how sensations can be temporally successive and yet without temporal magnitude (=unextended). In contrast, I have shown that while sensations must always be successive, individual *Empfindungen* must be atemporal in sense of being non-durational.

³⁴ The question of how, phenomenologically speaking, an *Empfindung* can occur without extensive magnitude requires further clarification, which I cannot provide here. A fuller account would also require revisiting an existing debate in the Kant literature—on whether sensation is the matter of appearance, corresponds to the matter of appearances, or the matter of intuition.

³⁵ For a more detailed exposition of this claim involving the relationship between *Empfindung*, perception and consciousness, see Kumar (2014, §3.1.2 and §3.1.3).

³⁶ Kant also says that the “I think” must be able to accompany (*begleiten können*) all representations (*KrV*, B132). This is at odds with my claim here, that the transcendental “I” must accompany all representations. In such passages, however, Kant is speaking of the transcendental self as activity, which I have bracketed in this essay.

Perception, for Kant, is empirical consciousness, and combines the formal intuitions of space and time with the “real” of *Empfindung*.

«Perception is empirical consciousness, that is, something [*ein solches*] in which *Empfindung* occurs [*ist*] at the same time. Appearances, as objects of perception, are not pure (merely formal) intuitions, like space and time, (because [space and time] cannot be perceived at all). Therefore, they [appearances as objects of perception] contain apart from the intuitions [of space and time] the materials for any object in general (by means of which something existing is represented in space or time), that is, the real of *Empfindung*, thus merely subjective representation, of which one can only be conscious that the subject has been affected, and which one relates to an object in general» (*KrV*, A166/B207-08).³⁷

In this passage, Kant seems to argue in the following manner. Perceptions are always accompanied by *Empfindungen*. Since perceptions are spatiotemporal, they must possess extensive magnitude. Thus, they differ from *Empfindungen*, which, as we have seen, have intensive but not extensive magnitude. In addition, as opposed to *Empfindungen* that are always real (*Real*), Kant describes the object of perception as “*wirklich*” (actual).³⁸ Hence, the term “perception” always relates to spatiotemporal objects in some not yet cognizable way. An *Empfindung*, however, relates solely to the subject and captures the “material” aspect of the subject’s representations of objects, even though it is aspatial, and non-durational.³⁹ It is the degree of reality present in all syntheses of perception of (spatiotemporal) objects of appearance.⁴⁰

³⁷ Also see ELXVI (note to *KrV*, A162), where Kant speaks of perceptions as the determination of time, and as that which happens “in” time.

³⁸ “Perception represents therefore [...] something actual (*wirklich*) in space” (*KrV*, A374). In the B-deduction, Kant uses the terms “*wirklich*” and “*Empfindung*” while speaking of space and time, and says that *Empfindungen* form the material, and the real (*Real*) aspects of actual (*wirklich*) objects of perception (ibid., B147).

³⁹ It could seem that Kant must refer to referential *Empfindung* when speaking of the “material” of *Empfindung*. But if, as I have argued, *Empfindungen* can be referential or non-referential, then “material” could refer to either referential or non-referential content.

⁴⁰ Some passages appear to contradict this strict division between *Empfindung* and perception, for which I have argued in this section. At *KrV* A324/B286, Kant says that an object of “perception (or an *Empfindung*, as the material of the senses)” becomes “*wirklich*” (actual) by means of the understanding. Here, it may appear that Kant equates perceptions and *Empfindungen*, but this is not the case. Since, as I have shown, perceptions are always accompanied by *Empfindungen*, Kant seems to be using shorthand when he carelessly writes “*Wahrnehmung* (*Empfindung*, als *Materie der Sinne*)” at A234/B286 instead of saying “perceptions (accompanied by *Empfindungen*).” This is a plausible interpretation. Given that Kant’s theme here is the application of the category of modality to perceptions, and since perceptions are always accompanied by *Empfindungen*, it matters little whether Kant uses “*Empfindung*” or “perception,” because both these terms relate to the lower cognitive level of receptivity upon which the higher-level spontaneity of the category is to be applied. Elsewhere, Kant says: “*Realitas phaenomenon oder noumenon*. The former is that which in appearance corresponds to perception (*Empfindung*), or to the lack of perception. *Noumenon* is that which is position (*position [sic]*) in the object (*Gegenstand*) in itself” (AA XVII:R4817, 1775-76). Here again, since all perceptions include *Empfindungen* and the task in this passage is to make the distinction between

If *Empfindung* is always non-durational while perception must be temporal, and if *Empfindung* must accompany perception, how does atemporal (=non-durational) *Empfindung* accompany temporal perception?

Kant relates both *Empfindung* and perception to the concept of consciousness. Perception, he says, is the empirical consciousness of an appearance prior to all concepts (*KrV*, A166/B207-08, op. cit.). In addition, he characterizes “*Perzeption*” as a “representation with consciousness,” and classifies *Empfindung* as a “*Perzeption*” (ibid., A320/B376). Therefore, *Empfindung* must be a kind of consciousness. Further, Kant distinguishes between obscure, clear, and distinct consciousness. A representation, he says, is clearly conscious if it includes the conscious specification of the difference between itself and other representations. On the other hand, a representation is obscurely conscious if it includes the consciousness of this difference, but without the conscious specification of what the difference is.⁴¹

Interpreting the terms *Empfindung*, perception, and cognition in light of Kant’s distinction between obscure, clear, and distinct consciousness, it can be argued that

phenomena and noumena, it does not really matter whether one uses the term perception or *Empfindung*, since they both represent phenomena. Such carelessness in writing is not unusual for Kant. Consider another passage in which he speaks of cognition as demanding the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of things and, thus, *Empfindung* (“fordert Wahrnehmung, mithin *Empfindung*” [*KrV*, A225/B272]). It is relatively clear here that “therefore” means “accompanied by,” and that Kant does not mean to equate perception and *Empfindung*.

⁴¹ “A representation is clear, in which the consciousness suffices for the consciousness of the difference between [the representation itself] and other [representations]. But (*zwar*) if this [representation] suffices for the difference, but not for the consciousness of the difference, then the representation must be said to be obscure” (“[E]in Vorstellung is klar, in der das Bewusstsein zum Bewusstsein des Unterschiedes derselben von andern zureicht. Reicht diese zwar zur Unterscheidung, aber nicht zum Bewusstsein des Unterschiedes zu, so müsste die Vorstellung noch dunkel genannt werden”) (B414-15n; also *Jäsche Logik*, AA IX:62). Earlier in the same passage, Kant makes the following disjunctive argument: Either obscure representations must have a degree of consciousness or we cannot make any distinctions in a complex of obscurely conscious representations. But we can make such distinctions; e.g., a musician can hit many notes at the same time while improvising. Therefore, obscure representations must have a degree of consciousness.

Apart from obscure, clear and distinct representations, Kant also mentions “indistinct” (*undeutlich*) and “confused” representations. In the *Jäsche Logik*, he says: “All clear representations, to which alone logical rules can be applied, can now be distinguished with regard to distinctness and indistinctness” (AA IX:34). From this passage, it appears that indistinct representations relate to the higher faculty of reasoning (logic), and perhaps advanced scientific-experimental thinking. Kant also speaks of confused representations as complex representations. In the anthropology lectures, he says that confused representations are always complex, because there can be no confusion or order in simple representations (AA VII:138). Further, in the *Jäsche Logik*, he speaks of confused representation as relating to cognition (AA IX:35). Excluding confused representations, I will, henceforth, speak only of obscure, clear and distinct representations for two reasons. First, I am concerned with the lower representational levels of consciousness and perception in this paper, and not higher intellectual activities like cognition, to which confused representations are supposed to relate. Second, in the present context, even if one were dealing with confused perceptual representations, such representations could be accommodated as clear representations given that perceptions are always clear representations.

For a historical exposition of Kant’s theory of consciousness, see Wunderlich (2005).

perceptions are always clearly conscious, cognitions are always distinctly conscious (=seeing something as something), and *Empfindungen* are always obscurely conscious

I take up the case of perception first. Kant thinks that a representation is clear if the consciousness of the difference between itself and other representations is built into it, while a representation that does not contain the consciousness of this difference is obscure. On the basis of this characterization of clear and obscure consciousness, perception must be considered clearly conscious for the following reason. Either a perception includes the clearly conscious specification of the distinction between itself (act of perception) and its object (object of perception/appearance), or it would be reasonable to suppose that a perception cannot be object-directed. In other words, if a representation is not clearly conscious, that is, it does not include within itself the distinction between the act and the object of perception, it cannot be object-directed. But Kant says that all perceptions are object-directed. Therefore, by *modus tollens*, a perception must be clearly conscious.

On the other hand, *Empfindungen* must be construed as obscurely conscious for two reasons. First, in the present context, Kant thinks that there are only three degrees of consciousness: obscure, clear and distinct. Since perceptions and cognitions are clearly and distinctly conscious respectively, and since, according to Kant, obscurely conscious representations exist, the remaining sensibility term *Empfindung* must be obscurely conscious. Second, textual support can be adduced for this argumentatively inferred claim. In a reflection dated 1769, Kant makes a distinction between *Empfindung* and appearance (*Erscheinung*). He says: “The representation of the senses as something belonging to the state of the subject is *Empfindung*; however, as something, which relates to an object (*Gegenstand*), appearance (*Erscheinung*)” (AA XV:R620). Here, Kant clearly conceives of *Empfindung* in non-referential fashion. Subsequently, in the same passage, he says that there are “*Empfindungen* without noticeable [*merkliche*] appearances and appearances without noticeable *Empfindungen*,” but that “both exist together at the same time.”⁴² Interpreting “*merklich*” as clearly conscious, we may read Kant as saying that the subject can represent the object of appearance without clear consciousness of the *Empfindungen* constituting it. Since *Empfindungen* and appearances are merely two aspects of the same representation of the object, and given that appearances are objects of perception and clearly conscious, *Empfindung* must be taken as obscurely conscious.⁴³

⁴² “Die Vorstellung des Sinnes als etwas zu dem Zustande des Subjekts gehöriges heißt *Empfindung*; als etwas aber, was sich auf einen Gegenstand bezieht, *Erscheinung*. Es giebt *Empfindungen* ohne merkliche *Erscheinung* und *Erscheinungen* ohne merkliche *Empfindung*; doch sind beyde jeder zeit beysammen” (AA XV:R620). Also see *Pädagogik*, AA IX:460, where Kant says that children are obscurely conscious of light.

⁴³ Some passages in Kant’s writings seem to suggest that *Empfindungen* are not always obscurely conscious, but this is not the case. In one such passage, Kant says: “Consciousness is the intuition of one’s self. It would not be conscious if it were an *Empfindung*” (AA XVIII:R5049, early 1780s). Here, it could be suggested that *Empfindung* cannot be characterized as an obscure consciousness, since it is not a type of consciousness at all. But this would be erroneous. Since Kant is talking about intuiting the self in this passage, and since an intuition must always be clearly conscious, one can interpret this passage as saying that *Empfindungen* are not clearly conscious, from which it does not follow that *Empfindungen* cannot be obscurely conscious. In another passage, Kant says: “The subjectively greater (*größere*) clarity (by means of *Empfindung*: because

Hence, perceptions are always clearly conscious, while *Empfindungen* are always obscurely conscious.

If perceptions are always accompanied by the real of *Empfindung* (*KrV*, A166/B207-08; B147), and if, as we have seen, perceptions are always clearly conscious while *Empfindungen* are always obscurely conscious, then it must be the case that a clearly conscious representation must always be accompanied by an obscurely conscious representation. It follows that a representation must remain obscurely conscious unless it is brought to clear perceptual consciousness. Kant says as much in the reflections on anthropology: “Obscure (*Dunkle*) representations are pregnant with clear [representations]. To bring clarity (*Klarheit*) into [obscure representations]. The midwife of thoughts. All acts of understanding and reason can occur in obscurity” (AA XV:R177, 1769??). Further, this move from obscure to clear consciousness must be a move from a non-durational *Empfindung* to a perceptual representation that is temporally extended.

In essence, *Empfindung* is always built into all perceptual representations. While a subject could be clearly conscious of something only as a temporal perception, one which has both intensive and extensive magnitude, this does not necessarily entail that the subject could not have been simultaneously aware of the same representation as an obscurely conscious and non-durational *Empfindung*. Thus, an *Empfindung* can be said to exist even though the subject is not clearly conscious of it until it can be perceived in durational time. In other words, there are no clearly conscious *Empfindungen* because, as soon as an *Empfindung* becomes clearly conscious, it turns into a perception and ceases to be an *Empfindung*.

An example taken from Kant’s writings can help illuminate this claim. Kant says that “habit hinders consciousness” (AA XV:R177, 1764-68 or 1771, reflection on anthropology). Further, he characterizes “negative habit” as relating to things that one does not feel any more.⁴⁴ His point is that we cease to be aware of something once we are habituated to it. In other words, habituation can make something obscurely conscious for us. For instance, if I am habituated to a dull ache in some part of my body, then I am only obscurely conscious of it most of the time, since I am not clearly conscious of how it is different from all my other representations. This does not, however, mean that this ache does not exist. Rather, it means that I am conscious of this ache in an obscure fashion at time *t*. That is, while my consciousness of the ache is different from my other

[an *Empfindung*] is not objective) is liveliness, the objectively greater, the understanding (*verständlichkeit [sic]*)” (AA XVI:R2365, date uncertain). Again, it may seem that Kant characterizes *Empfindungen* as clearly conscious representations, but this would be incorrect. To say that the clarity of consciousness increases with (presumably) the increase in *Empfindung* does not contradict the claim that *Empfindungen* are obscurely conscious, since the greater clarity of consciousness could be achieved by the accumulation of several obscurely conscious representations. Finally, in the anthropology lectures, Kant says “A representation through the senses, of which one is conscious as such, specifically (*besonders*), means sensation (*Sensation*), if the *Empfindung* at the same time directs (*erregt auf*) attention to the state of the subject” (AA VII:153, §15). This statement also does not preclude the claim that an *Empfindung* is obscurely conscious, because one can after all attend to the state of the subject in an obscure way.

⁴⁴ “Negative habit: what one does not feel any more” (AA XV:R261, reflection on anthropology, 1776-78).

representations, I cannot distinguish the ache from these other representations at *t*. For example, if I am focused on playing tennis at time *t*, then I will not be clearly aware of this ache to which I am habituated.

In essence, when I am clearly conscious of something, I represent it as something that is temporally extended. This kind of representation has duration in the sense that I can be clearly conscious of the elapse of time. For instance, I can be clearly conscious of lingering before a painting. On the other hand, since an *Empfindung* is obscurely conscious for me, I can be aware of it as durational only if I can have a perception of it; but, as an *Empfindung*, it cannot be durational for me. In other words, the moment of *Empfindung* is fleeting, and forever beyond the subject's grasp. Hence, *Empfindungen* must always be non-durational for the subject.

We can now turn to the question of how the transcendental self can be seen as built into all representations if we interpret this notion of self as non-referential *Empfindung*. Given that *Empfindung* in general can be thought of as obscurely conscious and built into (or accompanying) all perceptions which are clearly conscious, and if we accept my interpretation in §1 that the transcendental self can be represented as non-referential *Empfindung* (=bare feeling), then we could legitimately argue that the transcendental self could be represented as the obscurely conscious and non-durational modification of the state of the subject, or bare feeling, built into all perceptual representations.⁴⁵

This conclusion is further underscored by a passage in the B-paralogisms of the first *Critique* which has no counterpart in the A-edition of the same work. In this passage, Kant characterizes the transcendental self as a perception, albeit an indeterminate one—a formulation which, as I now show, is in continuity with Kant's *Prolegomena* claim that the transcendental self can be represented as a feeling. Kant says:

«[The “I think”] expresses (*ausdrücken*) an indeterminate empirical intuition, i.e., a perception (hence it proves that already *Empfindung*, which therefore belongs to sensibility, lies at the ground of this existential proposition), but is prior to experience, which is supposed to determine (*bestimmen*) the object of perception through the category in relation to time» (*KrV*, B422-23n).

This is certainly an odd passage (henceforth B422-23n). Here, the “I think” is supposed to “express” a perception, which is accompanied by what seems, at first sight, to be a referential *Empfindung*. This statement might lead us to expect that Kant is speaking of the

⁴⁵ Kant seems to come close to characterizing the self as an *Empfindung* in one of the reflections. Kant scratches out “*Empfindung*” and replaces it with “*Anschauung*” while describing the “I”: “merely the I, which is nonetheless not a concept, rather an [*Empfindung*] intuition” (bloss das Ich, welches gleichwohl kein Begriff [*sic*], sondern eine [*Empfindung*] Anschauung ist) (AA XVII:R3921, 1769). Here, the “I” must be interpreted as the transcendental “I,” because its description is similar to the description of the “I” at IV:334n. In both cases, he says, the “I” cannot be a concept. Since the “I” at IV:334n is transcendental, it must be transcendental at R3921.

empirical self, which is the temporal object of inner sense.⁴⁶ But Kant also speaks here of the “I think” as prior to experience, which suggests that the indeterminate empirical intuition, or perception, of the “I think” refers to the transcendental self.

This difficulty can, however, be resolved if we accept my interpretation that the transcendental self should be interpreted as non-referential *Empfindung*, which is non-durational and obscurely conscious. I now provide a reading of B422-23n that enables us to interpret the transcendental self as an indeterminate empirical intuition (or perception), but also as transcendental.

First, if the transcendental self can be represented as a non-referential *Empfindung*, and if the latter must be a conscious representation, then the transcendental self must also be a conscious representation. Thus, it cannot be merely a logical concept, and to the extent it is consciously represented, it must be considered empirical, although, as I will suggest, it cannot be conflated with the empirical self.

Second, the transcendental self must be indeterminate, because, as a non-referential *Empfindung*, it can only ever be obscurely conscious. In fact, I think that it is this indeterminacy that forms the difference between the transcendental and the empirical self for Kant. The latter must be clearly conscious, and a determinate object of inner sense. On the other hand, the transcendental self can never be clearly conscious. It is always obscurely conscious, and therefore indeterminate. This way of characterizing the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical self goes counter to Sturma’s characterization of this distinction. For Sturma, the transcendental self is epistemological-abstract, while the empirical self has descriptive or representational content. So my argument *pace* Sturma is: If we take the representation of the transcendental self as non-referential *Empfindung* (=bare feeling), we can still make sense of the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical self.⁴⁷

Third, since *Empfindungen* are obscurely conscious, and *Empfindungen* always accompany perceptions (§2.2), it is not implausible to interpret *Empfindung* as an indeterminate perception. One can legitimately argue for this, since obscure (or indeterminate) *Empfindungen* always accompany clear perceptions. Thus, Kant’s claim that the transcendental self can be represented as an “indeterminate perception” seems to be just another way of saying that it can be represented as a non-referential *Empfindung* (=bare feeling).

Finally, the transcendental self as indeterminate empirical intuition (or perception) must be atemporal (=non-durational), because, at B422-23n, Kant makes it clear that it is prior to experience. In my view, the transcendental self can be considered prior to

⁴⁶ Kant says that inner sense is empirical apperception, or empirical self (*KrV*, A107); and that “I, as thinking, am an object (*Gegenstand*) of inner sense” (*ibid.*, B400).

⁴⁷ Since I am not asserting that this is the only way of making the transcendental-empirical distinction, I am not engaging the vast literature on this issue here.

experience in the same way a non-referential *Empfindung* is prior to experience, i.e., it must be non-durational.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Several other interpretations of B422-23n diverge from my interpretation here. Aquila (1983, 163) believes that a threefold classification of the self emerges in Kant's writings if we take B422-23n into account: the purely intellectual I; and the empirical self, divided into determinate and indeterminate self-consciousness, of which the latter is "genuine self-consciousness, of oneself in particular, but is still not the consciousness of a determinate object identifiable as oneself." Further, he says that "this notion of an indeterminate but empirical self-consciousness—and neither that of a purely intellectual consciousness of some kind of 'synthesis', nor that of empirical self-ascription—must be the focus of our attempt to clarify Kant's view. But at the same time we must develop a sense in which self-consciousness, on its most basic level, is indeed nothing other than the consciousness of a 'synthesis of representations'" (ibid.).

I agree with Aquila that the purely intellectual "I" is merely one aspect of the Kantian self, but *pace* Aquila, I take the "indeterminate empirical intuition" to be the transcendental rather than the empirical self. I have shown that, textually speaking, Kant refers to the transcendental self when he describes the "I think" as an indeterminate empirical intuition, or perception. Further, although Kant does use the term "empirical" here, this alone does not prove that he is speaking of the empirical self. In fact, Kant does not characterize the self as merely an empirical perception, but as an "indeterminate" perception. As I have argued, it is this indeterminacy that makes for the difference between the transcendental and the empirical selves. Not all types of consciousness are empirical. Transcendental self-consciousness is not empirical, because it is obscurely conscious and therefore indeterminate; while the empirical self, as object of inner sense, is the clear consciousness of the "I." Thus, at B422-23n, Kant could be justifiably viewed as speaking of the transcendental rather than the empirical self.

Frank, too, lays emphasis on B422-23n in his interpretation of Kant's transcendental self. For Sartre, Frank says, consciousness is always consciousness of something, and the empirical existence of consciousness is not given in the "I" but comes from the objects whose consciousness it is. According to Frank, Kant says something similar: the "I" corresponds not only to an intuition (which could be divorced from existence) but rather to a perception (*Wahrnehmung*). And this perception, through which existence comes into play, is to be considered prior to the temporal data of inner sense, just like the categories are prior; and the perception of the "I" must be considered "undetermined" because the categories cannot be applied to it (Frank 2002, 226-27).

Frank's view is problematic in light of the distinction, of which I have spoken in this essay, between temporal perceptions and atemporal *Empfindungen*. Frank does not explain how a perception, which Kant considers temporal, can be viewed as atemporal when it comes to the representation of the transcendental self. In contrast, I have offered an account of why the transcendental self can be considered atemporal: it is because the transcendental self must be represented as a non-referential *Empfindung*, and *Empfindungen* are always atemporal.

Finally, Patricia Kitcher criticizes Frank's interpretation of B422-23n. She believes that the "indeterminate perception [does] not refer to the consciousness of synthesis, but to materials to be thought in abstraction from any particular kind of intuition" (Kitcher 2011, 286n15). This position is puzzling for the following reasons. First, on the basis of Kant's statement that the "I think" expresses an indeterminate perception abstracted from sensation, Kitcher concludes that human thinkers "can consider thinking through" what she calls "bare perceptions"; and in this way "imagine themselves as thinkers, but not as spatiotemporal or as any other determinate kind of thinkers" (ibid., 196). However, the textual basis for Kitcher's conflation of "thinking" and "perception" is unclear. It is also unclear why Kitcher employs the term "imagine" here.

Second, Kant says that the "I think" expresses an "indeterminate empirical intuition"—therefore, Kant takes the "I think" as representing (or expressing) an intuition. Kitcher must, however, think that the "I think" cannot be an intuition, because she says that self-conscious thought implies existence considered in abstraction from "any form of intuition—as it can be—but not from all given perceptions (which it can't be)"

Hence, the empirical self is the self perceived in inner sense. In contrast, the transcendental self can justifiably be characterized as the atemporal (=non-durational), non-referential and obscurely conscious bare feeling of self, or interchangeably as the indeterminate empirical intuition (=perception).⁴⁹ Such a characterization of the Kantian self also seems viable in phenomenological terms, i.e. seems true to our everyday experience. For instance, the “I” must be considered the empirical “I” in a statement like, “It was I who saw the Rembrandt painting.” In this case, I am clearly conscious of the “I” as a temporal moment in my realization that I had once seen a Rembrandt painting. On the other hand, if I am merely conscious of the painting at time *t*, then I cannot also make the statement “It is I who is seeing the Rembrandt painting” at the same time. Instead, the “I” must be considered obscurely conscious at time *t* when I am involved in perceiving the painting. In other words, the transcendental “I” must be viewed as built into my clear consciousness of seeing the painting, and I can never be clearly conscious of this “I.” Such would be the case with respect to all possible representations of the subject. For, as soon as I am clearly conscious of the “I,” it no longer remains the transcendental “I,” but turns into the empirical “I.”

Now, in §1.2, I had suggested that *Empfindung* can be glossed as a differential—shift of representation, or the contentual difference between representations. How do we reconcile this notion of contentual difference with the example under discussion? I do not have space to explore this question fully here, but roughly the picture is: “red” at time *t*₁ is the contentual difference (or shift of representation) that emerged in the shift from time *t*₀ to time *t*₁, say from blue (= *t*₀) to red (= *t*₁). I have argued that the transcendental self is also a contentual difference, but one that is obscurely conscious and built into all representations. Therefore, all contentual differences for the discursive intellect (here “red”) come built in with the obscurely conscious and non-durational contentual difference, which is the representation of the transcendental self.⁵⁰

(Kitcher 2011, 196). But if this is the case, then Kitcher seems to be going against the grain of what Kant says explicitly.

Third, Kitcher thinks that Kant does not wish to gloss the “I think” as an “indeterminate empirical intuition [perception]” at all. She claims that the “I think” *requires* “indeterminate perception.” But again this claim seems to explain away the fact that Kant says explicitly that the “I think” expresses (*ausdrücken*) an indeterminate empirical intuition, and that this “I think” is prior to experience, which suggests that he is speaking of the transcendental self here.

For further analysis of B422-23n, see §3.

⁴⁹ An objection can be raised at this juncture: Kant describes the representation of the transcendental self as the feeling of existence at IV:334n (*Prolegomena*), but in the B-edition of the first *Critique*, published after the *Prolegomena*, he does not. Thus, the IV:334n description cannot be Kant’s final view on the subject.

Contrary to this view, I have shown that Kant’s explication of the transcendental self as the feeling of existence at IV:334n can be glossed interchangeably as a non-referential *Empfindung* (=bare feeling); as the representation “that I am” in the B-deduction (B157); and as an indeterminate empirical intuition in the B-paralogisms (B422-23n). Hence, I have argued for continuity in Kant’s views regarding the representation of the transcendental self between 1783 (*Prolegomena*) and 1787 (B-edition of *KrV*). Klemme (2012, 207) briefly mentions the continuity between IV:334n and B422-23n.

⁵⁰ The phenomenological viability of this picture is beyond the scope of this essay.

Hence, from §§2.1 and 2.2, we conclude that the transcendental self must be viewed as an obscurely conscious (bare) feeling built into all representations of the discursive subject.⁵¹

3. Representation of the Transcendental Self as Feeling of Existence

In previous sections, I explored the question of whether Kant's conceptual vocabulary allows us to justify his claim that the transcendental self can be represented as a feeling. I argued that it does. But this is only a part of the story. At IV:334n, Kant says that the transcendental self is the "feeling of existence." Thus, a fuller account of this passage must include an exploration of what Kant might mean by the term "existence" in this formulation. I will now show that Kant thinks of the transcendental self as real (*Real*), and as a type of existence in a non-naturalistic sense.

I have suggested that the transcendental self can be interpreted as non-referential *Empfindung*, or the bare feeling "that I am." We have also seen that *Empfindung* is real (*Real*). Therefore, the transcendental self must also be considered real (*Real*). In addition, I pointed out that the term "real" is opposed to the term actual (*wirklich*). Spatiotemporal perception is actual; but it must always be accompanied by *Empfindung*, which is always real. Hence, for Kant, there seems to be a way for representations to be real without being spatiotemporal, and so it is plausible that the transcendental self could be considered a real existence of this sort. I will now show that there is some textual justification for this argumentatively derived claim.

At B421-22 of the first *Critique*, Kant states that rational psychology conceives of the unity of consciousness as the "intuition of the subject as an object," to which the category of substance is applied. In contrast, Kant thinks that the unity of consciousness is merely a "unity of thinking" in which no object is given; and since no object is given, the category of substance cannot be applied to it. Thus, the subject cannot be cognized at all.

⁵¹ One could object that my argument for the claim that obscurely conscious non-referential *Empfindungen* accompany clearly conscious perceptions rests on a dubious extrapolation. According to Kant, the *Empfindungen* accompanying perceptions are always referential. For instance, in a letter to Beck, Kant says that *Empfindung* and perception occur at the same time in an empirical sensory cognition (AA XI:315-16, 1792). In the B-deduction, while speaking of empirical representations, he says that perceptions are "accompanied" by *Empfindung* (*KrV*, B147).

Such a criticism would, however, be misplaced. First, at A166/B207-08, Kant draws a general relationship between perception and *Empfindung*, and not a specific relationship between perception and referential *Empfindung*. He says, "Perception is empirical consciousness [...] in which *Empfindung* occurs [*ist*] at the same time." Here, the term *Empfindung* could be either referential or non-referential. Second, Kant's characterization of perception as empirical consciousness at A166/B207-08 need not necessarily mean that he is speaking only of referential *Empfindung*, because non-referential *Empfindungen* are also cases of empirical albeit indeterminate consciousness. Finally, Kant does not make the distinction between referential and non-referential *Empfindung* explicit, as I have done in this paper. If this distinction holds, then it is not implausible that Kant refers to *Empfindung* in general at A166/B207-08. Hence, non-referential *Empfindungen*, and not merely referential *Empfindungen*, can be said to accompany perceptions.

At this point in the text, as I discussed in §2.2, Kant adds a long footnote, B422-23n, devoted to the notion of the transcendental self. Here Kant says that the transcendental self is a real existence. But he adds that this notion of existence has nothing to do with the category of existence, because the real existence of the transcendental self is not in time, and if something is not in time, it cannot be categorized. Kant says:

«It [“I think,” or transcendental self] expresses an indeterminate empirical intuition, i.e., a perception (hence it proves that already *Empfindung*, which therefore belongs to sensibility, lies at the ground of this existential proposition), but is prior to experience, which is supposed to determine (*bestimmen*) the object of perception through the category in relation to time, and existence is here still not a category».

Later, in the same passage:

«An indeterminate perception here signifies only something real, which was given, and indeed only to thinking in general, thus not as appearance, and also not as thing in itself (Noumenon), but rather as something that in fact exists and is indicated as an existing thing in the proposition “I think.”».

From these passages, it can be concluded that Kant admits of a notion of existence that has nothing to do with the category of existence. And he describes the transcendental self in terms of the former rather than the latter sense of existence. So, in the context of Kant’s system, the representation of the transcendental self could be considered a real existence that is not in time, and therefore it cannot be categorized.⁵²

Hence, it should not be surprising that Kant characterizes the representation of the transcendental self as the feeling of *existence* in the *Prolegomena*. Moreover, on the basis of the theory I have developed here—that the transcendental self is represented as the obscurely conscious non-referential bare feeling (*Empfindung*) that non-durationally accompanies all possible representations of the subject—one can also make sense of what kind of existence the transcendental self is. We can argue that the transcendental self is not something merely abstract and logical, as some Kant commentators have argued. Instead, we can claim that the transcendental self exists, but only in an obscurely conscious manner. It can never be clearly conscious for the subject. For, as soon as it is clarified, it comes to be in time, and therefore must be transmuted into the empirical self.⁵³

⁵² Dieter Henrich might, broadly speaking, concur with this conclusion. He says that the transcendental subject “is not merely a logical condition of possible self-consciousness. It is, rather, just that which real consciousness knows to be the subject of all possible real consciousness [...]. And no philosophical reason stands in the way of comprehending a principle defined under the necessary inclusion of formal concepts as a real principle, and even as a real particular” (Henrich 1994, 184). In contrast to Henrich, I have tried to show how exactly the representation of the transcendental self can be thought of as a real existence, and also as a formal principle.

⁵³ In contrast, in Kant’s practical philosophy, the transcendental self, or “proper self” (*eigentliches Selbst*), seems without empirical content. At *KrV* B430-31, Kant says that we can “presuppose” ourselves as law-giving vis-à-vis our existence (*Dasein*), and “discover a spontaneity” through which we can determine our

If we accept this interpretation, then, *pace* Sturma, the representation of the transcendental self can be understood as both an epistemic condition of the possibility of experience, and as a real representation. First of all, the representation of the transcendental self can be regarded as transcendental in the sense of having no empirical sensory representation in it. Further, given Kant's project of providing the conditions for the possibility of experience, the transcendental self can be viewed as an epistemic condition. Finally, as I have suggested, the transcendental self can also be represented descriptively as the real, obscurely conscious feeling of existence that can never be temporally apprehended by the discursive subject.⁵⁴

4. Conclusion

actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) without requiring empirical intuition. Further, he says that the "consciousness of our existence" contains something a priori that can determine our existence in relation to an intelligible world that exists merely in thought. In his recent interpretation of these passages, Klemme (2012, 211) argues that for Kant, the consciousness of the moral law reveals (*offenbart*) to me that I can determine my existence intellectually. The categories of freedom get their objective significance through the moral law—which is present as soon as humans actualize their capacity to act according to maxims—and not through sensible intuition (*ibid.*, 216).

If the proper self is indeed without empirical content, then how does it relate to the representation of the transcendental self as bare feeling of existence? Does the bare feeling of existence relate to the moral feeling of respect? Could this felt-existence help explain Kant's curious claim—which Klemme (2012, 211) also discusses—that we cognize (*erkennen*) ourselves through "mere apperception" (*KrV*, A546/B574)? Addressing these questions requires delving into the concept of self-referentiality—here the relationship between the activity- and feeling-aspects of the transcendental self; and evaluating if the proper self has the same structure of self-referentiality as the cognizing self. It also requires a more general exploration of Kant's notions of "life," "activity," and "feeling," and their inter-relationships.

⁵⁴ Angelica Nuzzo (2008, 320) interprets the transcendental self as "embodied human subject." Nuzzo characterizes the body as having a transcendental form that marks the "dividing line between the inner and the outer sense" (*ibid.* 122). A discussion of whether Nuzzo's embodied human subject is consistent with my interpretation of the transcendental self as the feeling of existence is not possible here, especially since it requires an interpretation of "I" as activity, which I have bracketed in this essay.

Béatrice Longuenesse states that transcendental self-consciousness is "individuated" for every thinker as "clear (empirical) consciousness." Sensory states provide the content of this empirical consciousness, and their temporal order is related to the temporal order of the positions of a particular body (Longuenesse 2006, 303). Drawing on Longuenesse, Onof makes a similar argument in claiming that there is "some notion of embodiment in Kant's view of the self as subject" (Onof 2010, 164ff; also see fn 27 above).

I cannot fully discuss these views here, but Longuenesse's (and Onof's) general position seems to be at odds with my position in this paper. Longuenesse thinks of transcendental self-consciousness as clear (empirical) consciousness when it is individuated, and as related to the notion of embodiment via such an individuation. Yet, at B422-23n, Kant says explicitly that the "I think" expresses (*ausdrücken*), that is, represents, an indeterminate empirical intuition. This "I think" must be transcendental, because Kant adds that it is prior to experience. Thus, *pace* Longuenesse, I take this passage as evidence for my claim that the transcendental self can be viewed representationally as the obscurely conscious (or bare) feeling of existence, and still be considered transcendental rather than empirical.

Finally, Waxman (2014, 26-27) discusses both B422n and IV:334 in a recent work, but his analysis is very different from mine.

In this essay, I argued that Kant's claim that the transcendental self can be represented as the feeling of existence is consistent with Kant's system. I show that there exists a strand in Kant's philosophy that—without violating the contours of the Kantian system—allows us to interpret the transcendental self as the representation of the obscurely conscious bare feeling of existence that is atemporally (=non-durationally) built into all representations of the subject.

A fuller defense of this interpretation requires more work. First, further evidence from Kant's writings is required to establish that Kant was indeed thinking along the lines I have suggested here. Second, even if we accept the interpretation I have provided here, this would not exhaust Kant on self-consciousness. That would require taking into account the question of what Kant might mean when he characterizes the transcendental "I" as activity, and showing how this characterization of the transcendental "I" can be reconciled with the representation of the transcendental self as the feeling of existence. It would also require an investigation of whether the resulting account is consistent with Kant's theory of cognition. Finally, it is necessary to examine the writings of Kant's predecessors (especially Descartes, Malebranche, Hume, Tetens, Baumgarten), and contemporaries (most notably, Feder and Eberhard) in light of the questions emerging in this essay.⁵⁵

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⁵⁵ I am grateful to Rudolf Makkreel, Manfred Frank and David Carr for their comments on this material. I presented versions of this paper at the Mind-Epistemology Conference, New York University-Abu Dhabi, and at the Department of Philosophy, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. I thank the audiences at these venues for their comments and questions.

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