The Principles of Apperception

While much regarding the details and the success of Kant’s transcendental deduction[[1]](#footnote-1) is subject to dispute, there is, at the very least, something of a consensus regarding its starting point. Kant seeks to demonstrate the validity of the categories with respect to the objects of experience on the basis of a claim concerning the subject of experience, expressed in the principle of apperception which, most generally, concerns the identity or unity of the subject across the various representations that belong to it. Perhaps surprisingly, however, given its widespread currency among commentators,[[2]](#footnote-2) “the principle of apperception” is a phrase which to my knowledge Kant himself never uses, either in the published or unpublished texts.[[3]](#footnote-3) In fact, rather than referring to a single, generic principle of apperception, in the course of the deduction in A and B, Kant variously refers to the “*transcendental principle of the unity of all manifold of our representations*” (*KrV* A116), the “principle of the synthetic unity of the manifold in all possible intuition” (*KrV* A116-17), the principle that “every different *empirical consciousness* must be combined into a single self-consciousness” (*KrV* A117n.), the “principle of the necessary unity of apperception” (*KrV* B135), and the “principle of the synthetic unity of apperception” (*KrV* B136). It might of course be the case that these various expressions are reducible to a single principle, but that is by no means obvious (nor has any commentator taken up the task of demonstrating this), and in fact, Kant’s characterization of some of these expressions as synthetic in A and others as analytic in B, would suggest at the very least that the assumption that there is but a single (i.e., *the*) principle of apperception stands in need of further textual and argumentative support.

As I will argue in this chapter, however, there is good reason to think that there must be multiple *principles* of apperception that jointly constitute the foundation of Kant’s enterprise in the transcendental deduction in the *KrV*.[[4]](#footnote-4) To this end, I will begin with a (necessarily) brief overview of Kant’s argument in §16 of the B edition which, by most accounts, constitutes the first step in the argument of the deduction. On the basis of this overview I will distinguish three principles of apperception which, while closely linked, are nonetheless distinct in content and, most importantly, in their justification. Finally, I will show that my distinction between various principles of apperception coheres with Kant’s text (even if Kant does not endorse it explicitly), but also helpfully serves to resolve the apparent inconsistency between Kant’s treatments of the principle(s) in the A and B editions.

Over the course of the three short paragraphs (along with two footnotes) of §16 of the B edition, Kant constructs the foundation for his transcendental deduction. Most generally, in the first paragraph Kant will argue that the fact that it must be possible to attach the *I think* to my representations implies that the manifold of representations must be such that it can be thought in relation to a single identical subject. In the second paragraph, Kant argues that the fact that the manifold is subject to this condition implies that it must be capable of being brought into a synthetic unity, and in the third paragraph Kant traces the fact that the manifold is thus subject to such a synthesis to the type of cognizer that we are, namely, that we are beings for whom the relation of a representation to the self is not *given* but must be *thought*. Looking more closely at these passages, the incredibly dense first paragraph begins with the famous claim that “The *I think* must *be able* to accompany all my representations” (*KrV* B131). While Kant’s use of the phrase *I think* might be (and has been) taken to indicate that Kant is immediately interested in a form of *self*-consciousness that is putatively possible with respect to any representation, other passages would suggest that it is first and foremost, a consciousness of the content of the representation, and specifically a consciousness that it represents an object, that is at issue here. For instance, the justification Kant offers for this claim, that otherwise the representation “would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me” (*KrV* B132) is precisely that which he offers for a similar claim in the A edition which does not make explicit mention of self-consciousness, namely, that “[a]ll representations have a necessary relation to a *possible* empirical consciousness” (*KrV* A117n.) where this consciousness has just been characterized as involving the consciousness “of the identity of these reproductive representations with the appearances through which they are given” (*KrV* A115). Accordingly, the claim that the *I think* must be able to accompany my representations should be taken, at least initially, to amount to the claim that for every representation (that is to be in some way cognitively significant), it must be possible to become (empirically) conscious of it.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Of course, that the appending of the *I think* to a representation is not to be understood first and foremost as resulting in a form of self-consciousness does not mean that some relation to a self is not involved in this consciousness. That such a consciousness of a representation involves its implicit relation to a subject is made clear not only by the fact that Kant analyses this consciousness in the B edition in terms of the addition of the *I* think, but also by the fact that Kant takes the resulting consciousness to amount to a given representation being something “for me” (*KrV* B132), which is to say that it is taken to represent something *to* me.[[6]](#footnote-6) Accordingly, the consciousness of a representation (specifically as relating to an object) involves the thought of the relation of that representation to the subject (for whom that representation represents something). This raises a question as to who the ‘me’ is to whom these representations are hereby thought to relate, and Kant’s answer, elaborated in the remainder of the first paragraph, is that it is the single, identical subject; thus, he writes that “all manifold of intuition has a necessary relation to the *I think* *in the same subject* in which this manifold is to be encountered” (*KrV* B132—latter emphasis mine). As Kant proceeds to claim, the *I* of the *I think* must refer to the same subject in all of its instances inasmuch as the representations to which it must (be possible to) be added have already been identified as *my* representations: “the manifold of representations that are given in a certain intuition would not altogether be *my* representations if they did not all together belong to a self-consciousness” (*KrV* B132). The *I* of the *I think* is thus “that self-consciousness [...] which in all consciousness is one and the same” (*KrV* B132) or, what amounts to the same thing, the ‘me’ for whom a representation is something when it is accompanied by consciousness is just the accusative of the *I* of apperception.[[7]](#footnote-7) Accordingly, Kant’s conclusion at this stage is that the consciousness of a representation, insofar as it amounts to the consciousness of that representation relating to an object, also involves relating that representation to the single, identical subject or *I* of apperception.

What remains to be determined, at least for the purposes of §16, is what exactly is required in order to think the relation of the representation to the identical subject of consciousness, and Kant turns to just this in the remaining paragraphs of the section. In the second paragraph, Kant argues that the relation of a manifold of representations to the identical subject is only brought about through the synthesis or combination of that manifold into a single representation. This is on account of the fact that the simple consciousness, or perception, of some representation within that manifold does not suffice to relate it to an identical subject since these instances of perception are, taken on their own, unrelated to one another. What is required, rather, in order to think the identity of the subject with respect to a given manifold is to take each element in that manifold and bring it together into a single conscious representation. As Kant writes, “it is only because I can combine a manifold of given representations *in one consciousness* that it is possible for me to represent the *identity of the consciousness in these representations* itself” (*KrV* B133). The resulting unity in the manifold of representations is further characterized as synthetic inasmuch as it is effected without regard to the similarity (or dissimilarity) of the contents of the representations; rather, it is only insofar as these representations are taken together as belonging to a single consciousness, and not insofar as they share common marks or features, that they are taken to constitute a unity.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Following this, in the third paragraph Kant contends that the fact that we are required, in thinking the relation of the manifold of representations to the identical subject, to combine or synthesize our representations, is a function of our specific cognitive limitations, and in particular to the fact that we are not given an intellectual intuition of the self as an identical subject of representations. In the B edition, Kant draws attention to the paucity of our existing representation of the self, namely, that through the *I* “nothing manifold is given” (*KrV* B135), which is to say it is wholly without content (or “simple”—cf. *KrV* A355, A443/B471) and, consequently, there is nothing that it might contribute to the content of a representation such that we could recognize it as the same across diverse elements of a manifold. The operative distinction, then, is between the kind of cognizer that could *intuit* the relation of a manifold to the identity of the self, inasmuch as the manifold is in some way *given* through such a subject’s self-consciousness, and the kind of cognizer that must *think* this relation to the self, that is, represent it through the act of *combining* given representations (cf. *KrV* B135). In this way, then, the fact that a manifold of representation must be thought in relation to the identity of the subject requires that the manifold be brought into a synthetic unity, which in turn requires, as Kant will try to demonstrate, a synthesis in accordance with the categories.

On the basis of this outline of the main argument of §16, I would contend that it is possible to isolate three principles relating to apperception which play key roles in Kant’s discussion. What might be identified as the first principle of apperception is expressed in Kant’s assertion of the necessary possibility of consciousness with respect to all of our representations, a claim with which Kant opens both versions of the transcendental deduction proper. This principle, which I will call “principleC” (where ‘c’ denotes cognition, for reasons we will see) can be formulated as follows:

*principleC*: for any manifold of my representation, it must be possible to become conscious of it insofar as it is to figure in a cognition

This is the principle, I take it, expressed in the famous statement with which Kant opens §16, that it must be possible for the *I think* to accompany all of my representations,[[9]](#footnote-9) but it is also clearly the basis for the narrower claim with which Kant opens the corresponding A edition passage, namely that “All *intuitions* are nothing for us and do not in the least concern us if they cannot be taken up into consciousness” (*KrV* A116—my emphasis). Moreover, while it is unstated in both of these versions of the principle, it should be clear that Kant is not contending that it must be possible to be conscious of *all* mental representations in all contexts, but rather that the scope of this principle (and those that follow) is limited to representations insofar as they might figure into *cognition*.[[10]](#footnote-10) Indeed, recognizing that this principle is limited to representations taken in cognitive contexts is crucial for understanding how Kant takes it to be justified. While this principle (or something close to it) might be taken to be self-evident on the basis of a sort of Cartesian introspective certainty,[[11]](#footnote-11) in fact the principle’s assertion of the possibility of becoming conscious of a representation insofar as it is to figure in cognition follows directly from an analysis of the mere concept of ‘a being capable of cognition,’ and specifically of the component concept of ‘cognition’. This is already suggested by Kant’s claim, immediately following his statement of the principle in A, that “through this [relation to possible consciousness] alone is cognition possible” (*KrV* A116), but Kant’s various definitions make it clear that he takes consciousness to be a key mark of *cognitio*. So, in the *Stufenleiter* passage, Kant identifies *cognitio* as an “objective perception,” where a perception (*perceptio*) is identified generally asa “representation with consciousness” (*KrV* A320/B376), an account of cognition to which Kant adheres throughout his logic lectures and in various *Reflexionen*.[[12]](#footnote-12) This is to say, then, that this principle of apperception is an analytic proposition: to allow a representation of which we could not be conscious to count as cognition would be inconsistent with the definition of cognition as a representation accompanied with (objective) consciousness.

Significantly, it is by means of reflection on the nature of the consciousness involved in this first principle that the remaining two principles of apperception are yielded. As we have seen, the sort of consciousness proper to a cognition is analysed by Kant in terms of an awareness of a representation as being something *for me*, or as representing something *to me*, and so involves an implicit thought of the relation of a representation to the self. Moreover, inasmuch as it is only *my* representations that are at issue here, it follows that the self to which my representations must bear some relation is the *same* throughout my various representations. These considerations yield a second, distinct principle of apperception which Kant himself refers to in B as the “principle of the necessary unity of apperception” (*KrV* B135) and which can be formulated as follows:

*principleNUA*: for any manifold of representation that belongs to me, it must be possible to think the identity (or unity) of the subject with respect to it

A version of this principle can be found in the A edition claim that “We are conscious *a priori* of the thoroughgoing identity of ourselves with regard to all representations that can ever belong to cognition” (*KrV* A116). Yet it is given its clearest formulation in B where Kant not only asserts the identity of the subject across its representation but also stipulates the need to actively consider the manifold in relation to the identity of the subject: “all *my* representations in any given intuition must stand under the condition under which alone I can ascribe them to the identical self as *my* representations” (*KrV* B138).

With respect to its status, principleNUA is clearly an analytic proposition, as can readily be shown by denying that it holds. Were it the case that a manifold of representations that amounted to a cognition were such that we could not think them in relation to the identity of the subject, then that would be, for Kant, as much as to say that those representations could not be anything *for me*, and this would mean that I could not possibly be conscious of them and so they could not constitute a cognition (in accordance with the first principle). Indeed, principleNUA follows directly from principleC, and consequently is likewise contained in the notion of a being capable of cognition, inasmuch as it is yielded through elaborating what is required to relate a manifold to a subject which is required for that manifold to be involved in a cognition. Significantly, that (the claim that I identify as) principleNUA is analytic would seem to be widely-shared; yet commentators are also apparently unified in dismissing this claim as “trivial” and an “obvious tautology” that representations are subject to whatever conditions govern their ascription to me.[[13]](#footnote-13) Nonetheless, if it is a tautology, this principle is hardly an *obvious* one given that the representation of the identity of the subject was not widely recognized as a condition of cognition before Kant’s exposition in the Deduction. In any case, much of what motivates this dismissive reaction to principleNUA is the concern that a principle that makes a comparatively modest claim would not be worthy of the title of “supreme principle of all use of the understanding” (*KrV* B136).

I take it, however, that principleNUA does not itself constitute this supreme principle but rather only yields that principle through a consideration of how the condition it stipulates is satisfied with respect to any manifold of representations that could possibly count as cognition. As we saw previously, the condition that the identity of the subject be thought in relation to the manifold of representations can only be fulfilled, in the case of cognizers like us, insofar as the manifold is taken together and combined into a synthetic unity. PrincipleNUA, then, yields a third, and final principle of apperception which I, using Kant’s own phrase, will call the “principle of the original synthetic unity of apperception”):

*principleOSUA*: for any manifold of representations, the identity of the subject with respect to that manifold can be thought only by bringing it into a synthetic unity through combination

This last principle is referred to in the A edition, where Kant identifies the claim that “the unity of the manifold in a subject is synthetic” as the “principle of the synthetic unity of the manifold in all possible intuition” (*KrV* A116-17).[[14]](#footnote-14) In the B edition, however, this principle is typically mentioned only in connection with the previous one, which serves as an indication of their close relation; for example, after claiming that “I am therefore conscious of the identical self in regard to the manifold of the representations that are given to me in intuition because I call them all together *my* representations,” which I take it amounts to principleNUA, Kant remarks that this is “as much as to say that I am conscious *a priori* of their necessary synthesis, which is called the original synthetic unity of apperception” (*KrV* B135).

While these latter two principles of apperception are closely related, the differences between them are significant. The first and most obvious difference is that while both principleNUA and principleOSUA mention the necessity of unity with respect to a manifold of representations, the former does so in terms of the unity of the *subject*, whereas for the latter this unity is understood in terms of the resulting unity of the *manifold*. Moreover, only the latter explicitly characterizes this unity as synthetic and as involving the synthesis or combination of the manifold. This serves to highlight another important difference between the principles, namely, that where principleNUA stipulates a general rule with respect to the manifold of representation (that it be thought in relation to the identity of the subject), principleOSUA documents the way that rule is fulfilled in the case of beings with our cognitive capacities. Given this, the relation between the two principles can be thought in roughly the same terms as that between a concept, which constitutes a (discursive) rule for the connection of a manifold of representations (marks), and that concept’s schema, or the condition of its application to a specific manifold of intuition.[[15]](#footnote-15)

I take it, however, that the primary difference between principleNUA and principleOSUA consists in their status: where the former is clearly analytic, the latter, I would contend, is synthetic. This is, of course, a controversial claim as a number of commentators have argued for the analyticity of (what I call) prinicpleOSUA, with Allison offering the most vigorous defence.[[16]](#footnote-16) Allison considers the principle “that the identity of the ‘I think’ entails the synthetic unity of its representations,”[[17]](#footnote-17) and argues that it is analytic inasmuch as there is no other way for a discursive cognizer to ascribe a manifold to itself with respect to a manifold of representations other than by taking that manifold together into a single consciousness. As Allison writes,

the possibility of becoming aware of an identical ‘I think’ clearly requires that the representations with respect to which the ‘I’ is conscious of its identity constitute a synthetic unity in a single consciousness. Otherwise, the ‘I’ could not conceivably become aware of its identity with respect to these representations.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Of course, while it is the case that every cognizer must relate the manifold of representations to the identity of the subject, it is not the case that every cognizer must do so by means of combining the manifold into a synthetic unity. As we have already seen, Kant makes this clear through contrasting the discursive understanding, which is constrained to *think* the identity of the subject with respect to the manifold, and an intuitive understanding “through whose self-consciousness the manifold of intuition would at the same time be given” (*KrV* B138). Yet, given that Kant is explicit that the sort of cognition under consideration for the purposes of the deduction is specifically *discursive* cognition, that is, as involving concepts and sensible intuition (see for instance, *KrV* A78/B103, A92/B125, B146), it would seem to follow from the mere concept of such a cognizer that the manifold of representations must be brought into a synthetic unity in order to relate it to the identity of the subject.

I grant that principleOSUA would be analytic were it the case that we could not conceive of a discursive cognizer other than one that was constrained to *think*, rather than merely intuit, its identity with respect to a manifold of representation. Yet, while it is obvious that an *intellectual* intuition of its identity would be beyond the capabilities of such a cognizer, and so Kant appropriately rules it out, it is nonetheless quite conceivable that a discursive cognizer could be disposed of a *sensible* intuition of its own identity and indeed one which would relieve it of the necessity of thinking its identity through bringing the manifold into a synthetic unity. Rather, in such a case, a cognizer could simply intuit its identity by means of inner sense so that the subject would be recognized as persisting across the manifold of its representations. Such a possibility when it comes to the consciousness of one’s identity amounts to something of a neglected alternative on the part of the defenders of the analyticity of principleOSUA though, it bears noting that far from representing a merely abstract possibility, this is precisely the way in which Kant had taken us to be conscious of our identity before the *KrV*. As is recorded in the *Met-L1* notes,

The soul is a *single soul* (the oneness [Unität], the unity [Einheit] of the soul), *i.e., my consciousness*

*is the consciousness of a single substance*. I am not conscious of myself as several substances. For if there were several thinking beings in a human being, then one would also have to be conscious of several thinking beings. But the I expresses oneness: I am conscious of myself as one subject. (*Met-L1* 28:267)

As Kant here indicates, the consciousness of the *I* already expresses the singularity of the soul throughout its representations and, since the *I* is given “through the inner intuition of inner sense” (*Met-L1* 28:265), it is clear that at least at the time of the *Met-L1* notes, Kant had assumed that the way in which the human soul was conscious of its unity or identity was by means of a direct *sensible* intuition of the *I* as a persisting substance.[[19]](#footnote-19) Accordingly, the claim of the analyticity of principleOSUA is rendered doubtful inasmuch as it is not obviously the case that a discursive cognizer as such must *think* their identity, that is, must relate the manifold of representations to the identity of its subject only by means of bringing that manifold into a synthetic unity.

As the defender of the analyticity of (what I call) principleOSUA would likely point out, however, by the time of the *KrV* Kant would think better of the claim that inner sense discloses a persistent subject and, indeed, for reasons that would support the connection between the concept of a discursive cognizer and the necessity of synthetic unity. In an oft-quoted passage from the A Deduction, Kant writes:

The consciousness of oneself in accordance with the determinations of our state in internal perception is merely empirical, forever variable; it can provide no standing or abiding self in this stream of inner appearances (*KrV* A107)

Kant proceeds to suggest that the unavailability of a persisting subject in inner intuition is not a mere fact about us and our cognitive limitations (and so the possible basis for a synthetic claim), but rather that it would actually be impossible to intuit the identity of the subject inasmuch as that “which should *necessarily* be represented as numerically identical cannot be thought of as such through empirical data” (*KrV* A107). Kant’s presupposition here is presumably the Humean one that experience cannot supply a warrant for necessary (or universal) claims, or as Kant puts it, “[e]xperience teaches us [...] that something is constituted thus and so, but not that it could not be otherwise” (*KrV* B3). So, given that the identity of the logical subject is *necessary*, it follows that it cannot be represented empirically by means of inner sense. Accordingly, the analyticity of principleOSUA can be maintained since the putatively neglected alternative of a sensible intuition of the identity of the subject is not a viable alternative at all and, therefore, it follows directly from the concept of a discursive cognizer that must *think* its identity by bringing a manifold into a synthetic unity.

Yet, while there is no doubt that Kant comes to reject any inner intuition of the persistence of the subject with the *KrV*, the line of reasoning suggested at A107 cannot be his considered reason for doing so. For starters, the unqualified denial that the identity of the subject could be represented “*through* empirical data” would seem to also rule out Kant’s own alternative to this, namely, that the subject’s identity can only be thought by means of an *empirically* given manifold of intuition (cf. *KrV* B423n.). More problematically, to rule out the possibility of an inner intuition of the subject’s identity would be to mistakenly assume that the subject is *necessarily* identical whereas Kant’s claim in the quoted passage is merely that the subject is *necessarily represented* as numerically identical[[20]](#footnote-20) which does not obviously preclude empirical access to that identity itself.[[21]](#footnote-21) Accordingly, he typically draws attention to the simple *lack* of such an intuition, rather than its sheer impossibility, as when he asserts that “not the least intuition is bound up with this representation [the *I*]” (*KrV* A350), and that “there is no persistent intuition *to be found* in inner sense” (*KrV* B292), that in our representation of the *I* there is simply no “predicate of intuition that, as *persistent*, could serve as the correlate for time-determination in inner sense” (*KrV* B278) rather than that it would be entirely inappropriate to seek for such a predicate (cf. also *KrV* A350). Moreover, Kant later allows that the representation of the subject as “persist[ing] in existence [...] while its states are constantly changing” (*KrV* A672/B700) is an aspect of the illusory appearance of reason’s idea of the soul, which illusion could hardly be natural and unavoidable if, on the basis of Kant’s claims at A107, it were ruled out in advance as simply impossible.

Instead, as Kant makes clearer in the B edition and elsewhere, the unavailability of any intuition of the identity of the subject is a function of a limitation on the part of our inner sense, and its specific form (in our case), time. As Kant writes, it is in virtue of the fact that “time [...] and thus everything that is in inner sense, constantly flows,” in contrast with space which “persistently determines” (*KrV* B291), that a sensible intuition of the numerically identical subject is unavailable to us. Indeed, in *MAN*, Kant suggests that this is a result of the fact that time has only one-dimension (*MAN* 4:471) which would make the recognition of something persistent impossible given that a single dimension does not allow for the *simultaneous* recognition of one magnitude as persisting while its other determinations change.[[22]](#footnote-22) In any case, it is only with respect to cognizers constituted as we are, namely, not only as discursive intellects but also as beings with time (and space) as forms of sensibility, that principleOSUA can be taken to hold, as Kant himself seems to claim at the end of §17 in B where he limits the applicability of principleOSUA to the *human* understanding which, he claims, excludes both an understanding that “would intuit itself” and “one that, while possessing a sensible intuition, would possess one of a different kind than one grounded in space and time” (*KrV* B139). This is all just to say, then, that the connection asserted in principleOSUA between the concepts of a discursive cognizer and the necessity of its *thinking* its identity can only be *synthetic* since it is grounded in the fact that we are beings with time as the specific form of inner sense and, only for this reason, are constrained to combine the manifold of representations in order to relate it to the identity of the subject.

Allowing that such a distinction between these principles of apperception, and particularly between principleNUA and principleOSUA can be drawn, it might be wondered whether it can be made consistent with Kant’s text. After all, not only does Kant repeatedly insist on the analyticity of the principle of apperception in B, but he also claims, in §21 that the first step of the deduction had proceeded in abstraction from “the way in which the empirical intuition is given in sensibility” (*KrV* B144) which, presumably, would render Kant’s apparent reliance in the account of principleOSUA on the character of time, as the form of inner sense, out of bounds.[[23]](#footnote-23) Significantly, however, this distinction between principles can be shown to be consistent with Kant’s pronouncements regarding apperception and its principle in the Deduction (and elsewhere), even if Kant never makes it explicit. Regarding the first apparent inconsistency, a consideration of the relevant texts makes clear that the principle which is identified as analytic is what I have labelled principleNUA, or the claim that any manifold of intuitions must be such that the identity of the subject can be represented with respect to it where this principle falls short of stipulating the *way* in which that identity is to be represented. So, in the two instances in which Kant makes the analyticity claim in the B Deduction, he seems to distinguish the analytic principle from its *consequence* for beings with our discursive intellect and forms of sensibility:

Now this principle of the necessary unity of apperception is, to be sure, itself identical, thus an analytical proposition, *yet it declares as necessary* a synthesis of the manifold given in an intuition, without which that thoroughgoing identity of self-consciousness could not be thought. (*KrV* B135—my emphasis)

This last proposition is, as we said, itself analytic, although, to be sure, *it makes* synthetic unity into the condition of all thinking. (*KrV* B138—my emphasis)

Indeed, this same distinction between the analytic principle and its implication that a discursive being like us can only *think* our identity through the manifold of intuition is clearest in a passage in the B edition Paralogisms which notably does not make any mention of the need for synthesis or combination in bringing the manifold into a unity, or even of the type of unity (synthetic) that results:

The proposition of the identity of myself in everything manifold of which I am conscious is equally one lying in the concepts themselves, and hence an analytic proposition. (*KrV* B408)

Regarding the second apparent inconsistency, namely, with the strictures Kant imposes regarding the first step of the Deduction, it should be noted that Kant does not baldly claim that this part of the argument needed to abstract entirely from human sensibility and its specific forms, rather, it was required only to “abstract from the *way* in which the manifold for an empirical intuition is given” (*KrV* B144—my emphasis), that is, from the fact that time (and space) are both given as *unities* (or as a *single* time and space) already in advance of any categorial determination.[[24]](#footnote-24) Kant abstracted from the unity that already belongs to space and time, as he immediately proceeds to claim, “in order to attend only to the unity that is *added* to the intuition through the understanding *by means of the category*” (*KrV* B144—my emphases). Given that the syntheticity of principleOSUA does not turn on the singularity or unity of time (i.e., the fact that there is a single time), then, it does not overstep the boundaries Kant sets for the initial step of the deduction.

Significantly, thus distinguishing between the analytic principleNUA and synthetic principleOSUA also allows us to resolve the apparent inconsistency between the A and B editions, where Kant refers to a “synthetic proposition” as the principle of apperception in the former, in contrast to the analytic principle of the latter. Among the commentators who have acknowledged this discrepancy, Guyer (who first brought it to general attention) contends that in fact both versions of the principle in A and B must be synthetic for Kant’s aims in the deduction,[[25]](#footnote-25) whereas Allison takes the analytic principle in B as sufficient for Kant’s purposes, though Allison thinks Kant rightly identifies the principle mentioned in A as synthetic given its “connection with time and possible experience” in virtue of the general framework of the A deduction (cf. *KrV* A99).[[26]](#footnote-26) Yet, turning to the notorious footnote in the A edition, we can see that a compromise position becomes possible:

The synthetic proposition that every different *empirical consciousness* must be *combined* into a single self-consciousness is the absolutely first and synthetic principle of our thinking in general. (*KrV* A117n.—latter emphasis mine)

While this statement of the principle, like principleNUA relates the manifold of representations (of which we are empirically conscious) to the identity of the subject (“a single self-consciousness”), it clearly goes beyond that principle in explicitly specifying that this is accomplished through the synthesis or combination of the manifold. *This* principle then, amounts to an expression of (what I have called) principleOSUA and, in accordance with the foregoing, it is appropriately identified by Kant as synthetic. With respect to the critical standoff, we can see that Allison is right to stress that this principle is synthetic as a result of the invocation of time, the form of inner sense, in its justification (rather than for the reasons which Guyer supplies), but Guyer is likewise correct to emphasize the synthetic character of this principle of apperception in both editions, a fact which Allison overlooks in his reconstruction of the first step of the B Deduction wholly on the basis of a putatively analytic principle. Ultimately, then, the only change in Kant’s presentation with respect to the principle(s) of apperception between the A and B editions is a change in emphasis—from the synthetic principleOSUA to the analytic principleNUA that yields it. Such a shift was, in all likelihood, motivated by Kant’s concern that laying emphasis in the deduction upon a synthetic claim regarding the way in which the subject must think its identity might be, and indeed was, mistaken as a new basis for synthetic *a priori* cognition of the self in spite of Kant’s warnings against such an enterprise in the Paralogisms.[[27]](#footnote-27)

In the end, I hope to have shown that there are substantial grounds, both philosophical and textual, for such a distinction between the principles of apperception. Distinguishing between the various principles of apperception that are involved in Kant’s argument in the transcendental deduction helps elucidate key steps at the outset of Kant’s Deduction in the B edition version and also serves to resolve an apparent inconsistency between the A and B editions. On its own, of course, merely obtaining clarity with respect to the principles of apperception, and their differing roles in Kant’s argument, would seem a rather modest result though few, I think, would dispute the importance of a better grasp of the foundations of Kant’s transcendental deduction for any understanding, and evaluation, of the imposing argument constructed upon it.[[28]](#footnote-28)

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1. When referring to the chapter as a whole in what follows, I will use the capitalized form ‘Deduction,’ whereas in references to the argument itself I will use the lower-case ‘deduction.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For discussions of the “principle of apperception” see, for instance, Guyer 1980 and Guyer 1987: 133-9; Allison 1996; McBay Merritt 2011; and Schulting 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As it happens, the phrase only occurs in Kemp Smith’s translation of the *KrV*. His translation of a sentence at B135 reads “The principle of apperception is the highest principle in the whole sphere of human knowledge” (Kemp Smith 1929: 154) yet the original German reads “*welcher* Grundsatz der oberste im ganzen menschlichen Erkenntnis ist” (my emphasis), where it is unclear what the principle is to which Kant is referring as none was named in the immediately preceding text. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It bears noting that Patricia Kitcher has also recently defended the posit of multiple principles of apperception; cf. Kitcher 2010: 121-6; though I differ from her on a number of points which will be discussed in due course. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See also *KrV* A120: “without the relation to an at least possible consciousness appearance could never become an object of cognition for us, and would therefore be nothing for us” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Allison 2004: 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. To signal this, I take it, Kant switches from talk of “for *us*” in A (i.e., representations are “nothing for us and do not in the least concern us”—*KrV* A116) to “for *me*” in B. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See *KrV* B131n.: “Whether the representations themselves are identical, and therefore one could be thought through the other analytically, does not come into consideration here.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Kitcher likewise identifies this as a principle of apperception (cf. Kitcher 2010: 126). In a recent paper, Melissa McBay Merritt refers to this as the “cogito *statement*” (my emphasis), in order to distinguish it from what she identifies as the (sole) “apperception principle” (cf. McBay Merritt 2011: 5). I take it that the difference between McBay Merritt and I on this point is merely terminological (though see note 14, below), and I in any case agree that principleC does not contain any mention of synthesis or combination and, for that reason, is not the principle at the focus of Kant’s argument in the deduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Allison 2004: 164. See also Carl 1997: 151-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This is, for instance, McBay Merritt’s claim; cf. McBay Merritt 2011: 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See, for instance, *Refl* 1677 16:79, *Refl* 1686 16:83, *Refl* 2836 16:538, and *Log-Pölitz* 24:565, *Log-Busolt* 24:653, *Log-DW* 24:752, *Log-Wien* 24:904u. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See, for instance, Allison 1996: 41, 44; Allison 2004: 165; Guyer 1980: 209, where this principle is identified as the mere “analytical truth that whatever representations I can ascribe to myself are subject to whatever conditions govern such ascription”; and Kitcher refers to this as the “tautological B edition principle of apperception,” cf. Kitcher 2010: 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. I take it that this is the principle explicitly identified as the main part of the principle of apperception, or simply as the principle of apperception by both Allison (cf. Allison 1996: 47 and Allison 2004: 164) and McBay Merritt (cf. McBay Merritt 2011: 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For a similar use of the analogy with a concept and its schema with respect to the principle of apperception, see Allison 1996: 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For endorsements and defenses of the analyticity of the principle of apperception other than Allison’s (which I’ll consider below), see McCann 1985; Kitcher 2010: 125-6; and Schulting 2012: 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Allison 1996: 48; for a longer version of the principle Allison is concerned with, see Allison 2004: 166. It should be noted that Allison also considers the converse claim, namely, that every synthetic unity requires a logically simple subject, though I will not take this up here. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Allison 1996: 48. See also Allison 2004: 166-7, where Allison makes a similar claim: “since the subject is being considered merely as the subject of discursive thought, its identity is inseparable from the synthetic unity of its thought.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Dyck 2014: 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Compare Kant’s formulation at *KrV* B132, which likewise avoids ascribing necessity to the subject’s identity: “all manifold of intuition has a *necessary relation* to the *I think*” (my emphasis). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. One might consult Kant’s parallel account of how we cognize the numerical identity of an external object by means of attention “to what is persisting in its appearance to which, as subject, everything else relates as a determination” (*KrV* A361-2). While the subject of the determinations could be necessarily represented as identical across its determinations, the identity of this subject would nonetheless be cognized empirically, by means of the (in this case available) sensible intuition of its persistence. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For a similar point, see Edmundts 2010: 175-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. I am indebted to Camilla Serck-Hanssen for raising, and urging me to address, this concern. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See *KrV* B160-1n.: “In the Aesthetic I ascribed this unity merely to sensibility, only in order to note that it precedes all concepts” and later in the same note: “the unity of this *a priori* intuition belongs to space and time.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Guyer 1980: 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Allison 2004: 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. On this, see Gäbe 1954: 101-111; and Horstmann 1993; esp. 410-12. It bears noting that this worry motivates a number of Kant’s other revisions to the B Deduction and the Paralogisms. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. For their helpful comments and suggestions, I would like to thank Camilla Serck-Hanssen, Dennis Schulting, and Brian Bradley Ohlman. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)