

Abstract of “The Representation <I Think> and Its Origin in Pure Apperception”

Kant opens Section 16 of the B-edition Deduction with the famous claim “The **I think** must be able to accompany all my representations [*Das: Ich Denke muss alle meine Vorstellungen begleiten koennen*]” (B131-2). This claim is not easy to understand. What is the representation <I think>? What is it for the <I think> to accompany one of my representations? What is the modal force of this ‘*koennen*’? Kant goes on to tell us that pure apperception is “an act [*actus*] of spontaneity” that “brings forth” the representation <I think> (B132). This implies that the representation <I think> and pure apperception are not the same representation. But then what is pure apperception, and what is it for pure apperception to bring forth the representation <I think>? And why is this the only possible origin of the representation <I think>? Key to answering these questions, I propose, is to see that Kant conceives of the <I think> in a way that is, in a crucial respect, continuous with Descartes, Augustine, and Plotinus. Pursuing this proposal sheds light on what the intrinsic unity of pure apperception – which Kant dubs ‘the original synthetic unity of apperception’ – is supposed to be and thereby on the sense and motivation of the central theses of Section 16: that the original synthetic unity of apperception is the capacity of understanding itself (B134n), and that the principle Kant names ‘the principle of the synthetic unity of apperception’ is the highest principle in all human cognition (B135-6).