Kant’s Criticism of Rational Psychology and the Existential Aspect of His Ego Theory

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Introduction

Kant’s main purpose in the Chapter “Of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason” (the Chapter on the Paralogisms) of the Critique of Pure Reason of its first edition was to radically criticize the rational psychology of Leibniz-Wolffian school. In contrast, Kant’s main concern in the Chapter on the Paralogisms of its second edition is to point out the existential (viz. ontological) characteristics of the “I think” on the basis of which the rational psychology has been constructed. In the present article, we would like to clarify the existential aspect of Kant’s ego theory, mainly by analyzing the Chapter on the Paralogisms in the second edition.

Chapter I. Kant’s references to the existential aspect of “cogito”

The existential aspect of the “I think” was sometimes referred to also in the Chapter on the Paralogisms in the first edition of the Critique of Pure Reason. The Chapter on the Paralogisms is substantially revised in the second edition. Nevertheless, the introductory part of the Chapter on the Paralogisms on pages A341–347/B399–406 is, except for a brief addition to the last sentence, not revised at all. In the Chapter on the Paralogisms in the second edition, the criticism of the psychlogia rationalis of Leibniz-Wolffian school was dealt with only in restricted paragraphs, i.e., on pages B 406–413. In the Chapter on the Paralogisms in the second edition, Kant mainly intends to develop his ego theory in connection with Descartes’ and his followers’ metaphysical theory of ego. It is noteworthy that Kant refers to the “inner perception” of ego even in the above-mentioned introductory part of the Chapter on the Paralogisms. He states as follows:

... It should not be objected that in this proposition [i.e. the proposition, I think], which expresses the perception of oneself, I have an inner experience, and that therefore the rational science of the soul, which is founded on it, can never be quiet pure, but rests, to a certain extent, on an empirical principle. For this inner perception is nothing more than the mere apperception, I think, which makes even all transcendental concepts possible, because in them we really say: I think substance, I think cause, etc. (A342f./B400f.)

Just as Descartes formulated the Cogito proposition as “ego cogito, ergo sum”, the self-consciousness of the transcendental act of the thinking I, “I think”, contains within itself a self-perception of the existence of the thinking I itself, “I am”. We cannot disregard here that Kant makes a clear distinction between “inner perception” (“perception in general”) and “empirical knowledge”.

The above-cited statement continues as follows:

This inner experience in general and its possibility, or perception in general and its relation to other perceptions, without any particular distinction or determination of them being given empirically, cannot be regarded as empirical knowledge; it must, on the contrary, be regarded as knowledge of the empirical in general, and belongs therefore to the investigation of the possibility of any experience, which investigation is certainly transcendental. The smallest object of perception (for instance, even just pleasure and displeasure), if added to the general representation of self-consciousness, would at once change rational into empirical psychology. (A342f./B400f.)

The “inner perception” is conceived here as “perception in general” or “inner experience in general”. Though the “I think” is none other than the pure formula of transcendental apperception, it contains within itself “the [inner] perception of oneself”. That is why Kant thought out his theory of egological transference. Because it is not possible to generalize “the act of appercep-
tion [der Actus der Apperzeption], I think” (B137) into the “consciousness in general” (Bewußtsein überhaupt), Kant used a somewhat complicated phrase: “the proposition, I think, (taken problematically)” (A347/B406).

Chapter II. The phrase “the singular representation, I am”

It is remarkable that in the last paragraph of the Chapter on the Paralogisms in the first edition, Kant used a somewhat peculiar phrase: “the singular representation, I am” (A405). This phrase suggests that Kant’s criticism of “rational psychology” was conducted in a close relationship with his conception of Descartes’ ego theory, because “the singular representation, I am” is none other than the “I am, I exist” formulated in Descartes’ “Second Meditation”. In the Chapter on the Paralogisms in the first edition, Kant intends to criticize the traditional-metaphysical psychology of Leibniz-Wolffian school, of which theory is systematically described in Baumgarten’s Metaphysics which was used by Kant as the textbook of his lecture on metaphysics at the university. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that Kant intends there to accept Descartes’ thought of ego as far as it is possible.

Not only “Ego sum, ego exist” (AT VIII-1, 7, 9), but also “Ego cogito, ergo sum, sive existo” (AT VI, 558, cf. VII, 140), can be characterized as an existential proposition. The proposition, “I am thinking, therefore I am or I exist”, expresses the existence of the thinking I evidently. In the Discourse on Method, Descartes says: “When I noticed that this truth ‘I think, therefore I am’ was so firm and certain that all the most extravagant assumptions of sceptics were unable to shake it, I judged that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy for which I was searching.” Descartes accepted the truth “I think, therefore I am” as “the first principle of the philosophy” because it can be sustained against “all the most extravagant assumptions of sceptics” (in this case, the word “principle” is used in the meaning of “truth”). It should not be disregarded that “the first principle” is used here in the meaning of what is called Archimedean point on which the authentic philosophy should be constructed. In the Meditations on First Philosophy, “the first principle of the philosophy” is explicitly conceived as the Archimedean point. Descartes says: “Archimedes looked for only one firm and immovable point in order to move the whole earth; likewise, I could hope for great things if I found even the smallest thing that is certain and unmoved.” At the limit of carrying out the methodological skepticism, Descartes found the only indubitable fact/truth, “I am, I exist”, as the Archimedean point of his philosophy. Accordingly, Descartes’ discovery of the truth that “I think, therefore I am” was essentially the discovery of the evidence or certainty of the existence of the thinking I. Nothing but the thinking I can be the subject of philosophizing in its authentic meaning.

In the phrase “the singular representation, I am”, the words “I am” expresses not only the being or existence of the I of pure apperception “I think” (Prolegomena: “consciousness in general”), but also the existence or actuality of the singular I, i.e. the individual I. Thus, the Critique of Pure Reason of its first edition also suggests an existential aspect of Kant’s conception of ego, namely, an existential aspect of his ego theory.

Chapter III. “I think” and inner perception

In the Chapter on the Paralogisms, the distinction between transcendental apperception “I think” and inner perception of one’s own ego is not necessarily clear. In the paragraph just in front of that which concludes the introductory part of the Chapter on the Paralogisms, bearing the Cartesian Cogito proposition in mind, Kant states as follows:

The proposition, I think, however, is used in this process only problematically; it is not used in so far as it may contain the perception of an existence (the Cartesian cogito, ergo sum); but, with regard to its mere possibility, it is used in order to see what properties may flow from such a simple proposition to its subject (whether such a subject exists or not). (A347/B405)

It is obvious that in this citation “the Cartesian cogito, ergo sum” is conceived as the proposition which contains “the perception of an existence” of the thinking I itself. This is why in a foregoing paragraph Kant referred to the “inner perception” of the thinking I as “perception in general”. Especially in the Critique of Pure Reason of its second edition, “I think” is sometimes replaced with “I am”. In such cases, “I am” expresses nothing but the transcendental, pure apperception in which any “inner perception” is not contained. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that Kant conceives that “the act of apperception, I think” also is an existential proposition which expresses the self-perception, namely, the “inner perception” of the thinking I itself.

According to the “Transcendental Deduction”, it is unthinkable that “the act of [transcendental] apperception, I think” contains within itself the inner perception of existence of the I of transcendental apperception: the “I think” must, therefore, be conceived as the mere logical formula of transcendental apperception, that is, as the formula of pure self-consciousness of the
thinking I. Furthermore, in a paragraph of the “Criticism of the Second Paralogism of Transcendental Psychology”. Kant states as follows:

The proposition, **I am simple**, must be considered as an immediate expression of apperception, and what is known as the Cartesian inference, *cogito, ergo sum*, is in reality tautological, because *cogito (sum cogitans)* predicates my reality immediately. (A354f.)

In this citation, the Cartesian proposition “ego cogito, ergo sum” is conceived as a tautological proposition. Accordingly, the “I think” of transcendental apperception is conceived merely as “the [mere logical] formula of our consciousness” (A354).

Nevertheless, Kant’s conception of the “I think” of transcendental apperception is somewhat complicated. In the “Criticism of the Fourth Paralogism of Transcendental Psychology”, he states as follows:

○ Perception is a modification of inner sense, and the existence of the actual object can be added to it, as being its external cause, only in thought, and thus can only be inferred. Hence, Descartes was justified in limiting all perception, in the narrowest sense, to the proposition, I (as a thinking being) am. For it must be clear that, since what is without is not within me, I cannot find it in my apperception, nor therefore in any perception which is in reality only the determination of apperception. (A 367f.)

○ At all events, the existence of the latter ['actual external objects'] is only inferred, and is liable to dangers of all inferences, while the object of inner sense (I myself with all my representations) is perceived immediately, and its existence does not admit of being doubted. (A368)

As far as we conceive the “ego cogito, ergo sum” as an authentic existential proposition, we have to regard this proposition as being formulated upon the category of existence. The “I think” as a transcendental apperception is essentially a transcendental, pure representation. Nevertheless, in relation to the Cartesian Cogito proposition, we must admit that the “ego cogito” (I think), insofar as it signifies “I am/exist”, is necessarily related to our self-perception of our own ego existence.

It is noteworthy that in the “Criticism of the Fourth Paralogism of Transcendental Psychology” (A edition) and the “Refutation of [Dogmatic] Idealism” (B edition) Kant explicitly conceives the “I think” as an empirical apperception. In the “Refutation of Idealism”, Kant, though dogmatically, regards Descartes’ ontological viewpoint of the world as “the theory which declares the existence of objects in space outside us as ... merely doubtful and not demonstrable”, and he defines Descartes’ “Idealism” as “the problematic idealism of Descartes, who declares only one empirical assertion to be indubitable, namely, that of I am” (B274). The words “I am” is used here in the meaning of “I am” in the proposition “I think, therefore I am”. And the “I am” is conceived here explicitly as an “empirical assertion”. On the basis of the indubitable certainty of the actuality/existence of the thinking I, that is, of the I of apperception “I think”, Kant intends to transcendental-philosophically found the reality/existence of the objects of outer sense, namely, the reality of the world of sense. Thus, he tries to find his empirical realism. The “[t]heorem” of the “Refutation of Idealism”, which expresses the empirical reality of the world of sense, is formulated as “The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside myself.” (B275)

**Chapter IV. The “I think” as a proposition including ego existence “as given”**

The criticism of rational psychology which was conducted synthetic-methodically also in the second edition (B406–413) is, after being interrupted with the “Refutation of Mendelssohn’s Proof of the Permanence of the Soul” (B413–415), followed by an analytic-methodically conducted criticism of rational psychology (B415–426). In the table on page B419, the elementary propositions of rational psychology are, being revised entirely, listed in their analytic connection. Kant states as follows:

If, on the contrary, we proceed analytically, taking the **I think**, a proposition that already includes an existence, as given, and hence also taking modality as given, and then analyzing this proposition in order to find out its content, so as to discover whether and how the I determines its existence in space and time solely through that content, then the propositions of rational psychology would not start from the concept of a thinking being in general, but from an actuality; and we should infer from the manner in which this reality is thought, after everything that is empirical in it has been removed, what belongs to a thinking being in general. This is shown in the following table: ... (B418f.)

In this statement, “the **I think**” is conceived as “a proposition that already includes an existence”, namely, as an existential proposition in its proper meaning. The first proposition in the table, “the **I think**”, is conceived there as a proposition which
corresponds to one of the categories of “modality”, i.e. the category of “existence”. In the footnote to the table named “The topic of the rational science of the soul” (A344/B402), in which four elemental propositions of rational psychology are systematically listed in their synthetic connection, the proposition, “It is in relation to possible objects in space” (ibid.), is related to the category of “existence” (A344f./B402f. footnote). The “possible objects in space”, of course, corresponds to the category of “possibility”. Accordingly, the possibility of “possible objects in space” is contrasted there with the existence of “the soul” which is in reality none other than the I of the “I think”. Kant’s main purpose in the “Criticism of the Fourth Paralogism of Transcendental Psychology” (A366–380) was the refutation of the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley and that of the sceptical/problematic idealism of Descartes (cf. A377, B274). It is in “The Postulates of Empirical Thought in General” (B265–287) that Kant conducted his criticism of dogmatic idealism and formulated the above-mentioned theorem: “The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence [which can be formulated as ‘I am’] proves the existence of objects in space outside myself.”

In the introductory part of the Chapter on the Paralogisms, Kant says as follows: “I think is, therefore, the sole text of rational psychology, out of which it must develop all its wisdom.” (A343/B401); “We shall therefore follow the guidance of the categories, with only this difference, that since it is a thing that is given first here, namely, I as a thinking being, we must begin with the category of substance, by which a thing in itself is represented, ....” (A343f./B401f.) In the second edition, on pages B406 – 413, Kant accomplished his criticism of the rational psychology of Leibniz-Wolffian school, especially the radical criticism of the substantialistic aspect of the rational psychology, on the basis of which criticism, Kant clearly recognized the existential aspect of the “I think”. Kant insists that in order to make an analytic-methodically listed table of the elemental propositions of rational psychology, “everything that is empirical in it [i.e., in ‘the concept of a thinking being in general’]” must be removed (B418f.). Nevertheless, he does not intend to reject every empirical aspect of the “I think” entirely. At the beginning of the footnote to the paragraph on pages B421–422, he says: “The I think is, as has been stated, an empirical proposition, and contains within itself the proposition, I exist.” (B422)

In the topic (Topik) of the rational psychology peculiar to the second edition, the elemental propositions of rational psychology are tabled in the following order: 1. “I think,” 2. “as subject,” 3. “as simple subject,” 4. “as identical subject, in every state of my thought.” (B419) It must be noticed that this table begins with a simple proposition which expresses nothing but one’s own self-consciousness: “I think”. In this table and related explanations, Kant does not refer to the “possible objects in space” (A344), in other words, the possibility or probability of the reality/actuality of the objects in space. The proposition “I think” presented here is none other than the “I think” of the Cartesian proposition “I think, therefore I am or I exist”. In this table and related explanations, the “I think” is conceived not merely as “the sole text of rational psychology, out of which it must develop all its wisdom”. (A343/B401) Essentially, the “I think” is conceived there as the proposition which immediately expresses “an actuality” (B418), that is, the actuality (Wirklichkeit) of the I of the “I think”. Conforming to Descartes’ formula “I think, therefore I am or I exist”, in which the “I think” immediately expresses the actuality/existence of the thinking I, Kant takes the “I think” “as given”, in other words, as actual (wirklich). Accordingly, Kant conceives there the “I think” in itself as an existential proposition: “I am” or “I exist”. In comparison with the first edition, Kant’s conception of the “I think” in the Chapter on the Paralogisms is radically converted in the second edition. Generally speaking, in the second edition, except in his epistemological argumentation in the “Transcendental Deduction”, the “I think” is referred to mainly in terms of the aspect of ego existence of the egological existential proposition: the “I think” is referred to in terms of the aspect of ego existence in the meaning of the Cartesian “I think, therefore I am or I exist”. Also in the paragraph on pages B418–419, as is suggested in the phrase, “after everything that is empirical in it has been removed”, the “I think” is clearly conceived as the pure consciousness of the actuality/existence of the thinking I. In the following paragraph, Kant states his opinion about the second, third, and fourth proposition in the above-cited table of the topic of rational psychology, conceiving each of them as an a priori proposition. He states as follows:

As it is not determined in the second proposition whether I can exist and be thought only as a subject, and not also as a predicate of something else, the concept of the subject is here taken merely logically, and it remains undetermined whether or not we are to understand by it a substance. In the third proposition, however, the absolute unity of apperception — the simple I in the representation to which all combination or separation that constitutes thought refers — has its own importance, although nothing is established as yet with regard to the constitution of the subject or its subsistence. Apperception is something real, and its simplicity is already contained in its possibility. In space, however, there is nothing real that is simple; for points (the only simple things in space) are merely limits, and not themselves something which, as a part, serves to constitute space. From this follows the impossibility of explaining the constitution of myself,

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as merely a thinking subject, in terms of materialism. (B419f.)

Except for the reference to the real simplicity of “apperception” and to “materialism”, Kant states here the essentials of his conception of rational psychology and procedure of the criticism of rational psychology which are described on pages B406–413. It must be noticed, however, that his reference to the real simplicity of apperception is in this case essentially connected with his conception of the “I think”. Kant conceives the I of the “I think” as the I of the “I am” or “I exist”. Accordingly, for Kant the actuality/reality of the act of pure apperception, “I think”, is in itself none other than an indubitable self-evident fact.

As regards to the phrase, “we proceed analytically, taking the I think, a proposition that already includes an existence, as given,” we cannot disregard an irrationality of Kant’s conception of rational psychology of which fundamental scheme is presented in the introductory part of the Chapter on the Paralogisms common to the first and the second edition. The above phrase evidently signifies that in this case the “I think”, which is taken “as given”, is an empirical synthetic proposition that contains “an existence”. For Descartes himself, not only “ego cogito”, but also “sum cogitans” is the proposition which is deduced non-empirically, that is, metaphysically. In Cartesian philosophy, of course, the distinction between things in itself and appearances is not taken into consideration. In contrast, in Kantian philosophy, a transcendental-philosophical distinction is presupposed between the “I think” of transcendental apperception, which is defined as the intelligible self-consciousness, and the “I think” of empirical apperception, which is defined as the sensible self-consciousness. According to Kant’s epistemology, it is impossible for us to apply the categories to things in themselves, namely, to the intelligibles (noumena). Insofar as we conceive the “I think” as the intelligible self-consciousness, we cannot apply the category of “existence” to it. In the Chapter on the Paralogisms in the second edition, however, Kant identifies the “I think” taken “as given” with the “I think” in the Cartesian proposition “I think, therefore I am or I exist”, without taking the non-empirical property of the latter into consideration. As a result, Kant emphasizes the empirical property of the “I think”. The above-cited paragraph runs as follows:

As, however, in the first proposition my existence is taken as given, for it is not said in it that every thinking being exists (this would predicate too much of them, namely, absolute necessity), but only that I exist as thinking, therefore the proposition itself is empirical, and contains determinability of my existence merely with regard to my representations in time. (B420)

In the Chapter on the Paralogisms, hereafter, Kant repeats his opinion that the “I think” is an empirical proposition. In the “General Note on the Transition from Rational Psychology to Cosmology” (B428–432), for instance, he states as follows: “The proposition, I think, or, I exist thinking, is an empirical proposition. Such a proposition is based on empirical intuition, and is therefore also based on the object which is thought, taken as appearance.” (B428); “The proposition, I think, insofar as it means the same as I exist thinking, is not a mere logical function, but determines the subject (which then is at the same time an object) with respect to its existence; and it cannot take place without inner sense, the intuition of which always supplies the object, not as a thing in itself but merely as appearance. Here, therefore, we have no longer mere spontaneity of thought, but also receptivity of intuition, that is, the thinking of myself is applied to the empirical intuition of the same subject.” (B429f.) Nevertheless, also in the “General Note on the Transition from Rational Psychology to Cosmology”, the I of “I think” is clearly conceived as the intelligible (noumenon). However, in order to apply the category of “existence”/“actuality” to the I of the “I think”, it was also necessary for Kant to conceive the “I think” as an empirical proposition.

Chapter V. Interpretation of the footnote on pages B422 – 423

The footnote, which begins with a sentence: “The I think is, as has been stated, an empirical proposition, and contains within itself the proposition, I exist.” (B422–423), relates not only to the statement in the paragraph just in front of the footnote, in which paragraph Kant does not refers to his opinion that the “I think” is an empirical proposition at all, but also refers to the whole statement in the antecedent paragraphs on pages B418–422.

Next to the above-quoted sentence, the footnote runs as follows: “I cannot say, however, Everything which thinks exists; for in that case the property of thinking would make all beings which possess it necessary beings. Therefore, my existence cannot, as Descartes supposed, be considered as inferred from the proposition, I think (for in that case the major premise, Everything that thinks exists, would have to precede it), but is identical with it.” (B 422) In order to make clear the close relationship of Kant’s ego theory to Descartes’ ego theory, we would remember the syllogism theory of the Cartesian proposition: “Ego cogito, ergo sum, sive existo”. Kant thinks that Descartes deduced “I am or I exist” from “I think” by an enthymeme, which presupposed “the major premise, Everything that thinks exists”. According to Kant, this major premise cannot be proved in any way. In the
paragraph to which the footnote relates, Kant says: “As, however, in the first proposition [namely, the proposition ‘I think’] my existence is taken as given, for it is not said in it that every thinking being exists (this would predicate too much of them, namely, absolute necessity), but only that I exist as thinking, therefore the proposition itself is empirical, and contains determinability of my existence merely with regard to my representations in time.” (B420) The words “absolute necessity” means here that the presupposed major premise, “every thinking being exists”, must be absolutely necessary in order to infer my existence from my act of thinking, namely, “the act of apperception, I think” (B137). It is remarkable that here Kant refers to the major premise of the syllogism which is supposed to be necessary to deduce the formula “I think, therefore I am or I exist”. Descartes himself did not necessarily affirm that “I think, therefore I am or I exist” is a proposition which must be inferred by using what is called “a hidden major premise”. In the “Second Replies”, he states as follows:

... However, when we avert to the fact we are thinking things, that is a primary notion, which is not deduced from a syllogism. Even if someone says, ‘I think, therefore I am or I exist,’ they do not deduce existence from thinking by using a syllogism, but they recognize it by means of a simple mental insight as something that is self-evident. This is evident from the fact that, if they deduced it by using a syllogism, they would first have to have known the major premise, ‘that everything which thinks is or exists’. But they learn that much more from the fact they experience, in themselves, that it is impossible to think without existing. The nature of our mind is such that it generates general propositions from its knowledge of particulars.9

As is clearly stated here, for Descartes “I think, therefore I am or I exist” is essentially a proposition formulated “by means of a simple mental insight”. However, we should not disregard the duality of the proposition “it is impossible to think without existing” with the proposition which is postulated as the major premise for deducing the formula “I think, therefore I am or I exist” by syllogism. In addition, we cannot deny that Descartes’ main purpose in the above statement is to make clear the intuitive or experiential (empirical) characteristics of the proposition “I think, therefore I am or I exist”. In such a respect, Kant’s conception of “the first proposition” of rational psychology, “I think” (B edition), is closely relevant to Descartes’ existential conception of ego.

As is mentioned by Kant, in a certain aspect Descartes accepts the syllogism theory of the Cartesian principle: “I think, therefore I am or I exist”. Nevertheless, for Descartes himself what is called “a hidden major premise” of his formulation of the Cogito proposition is essentially a simple notion of our mind. In the “Part One” of the Principles of Philosophy, he states as follows:

... I have often noticed that philosophers go astray by trying to explain in logical definitions things that are very simple and self-evident, and in doing so they make them more obscure. And when I said that the proposition ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ is the foremost and most certain of all those that could occur to anyone who is philosophizing methodically, I did not thereby deny that, prior to that, one needs to know what thought is, what existence is and what certainty is; also, ‘that it is impossible that that which thinks does not exist’, and similar things. But because these are very simple notions and, on their own, provide no knowledge of anything that exists, I therefore did not think that they should be mentioned.10

That which are enumerated here as “very simple notions”, in which “that it is impossible that which thinks does not exist” is included, are the notions acquired by our simple mental insight/intuition. The “very simple notions”, therefore, signify the “general propositions” referred to in the “Part one” of the Principles of Philosophy. The “general propositions” are used there in the meaning of primary notions, that is, epistemological facts intuited by our simple mental insight.

Back to the Chapter on the Paralogisms: The fourth sentence of the footnote concerned runs as follows:

It [‘the proposition, I think’] expresses an indeterminate empirical intuition, that is, a perception (and proves, therefore, that this existential proposition is itself based on sensation, which belongs to sensibility), but it precedes the experience which is to determine the object of perception through the category with respect to time; and existence is here not yet a category, which never refers to an indeterminate given object, .... (B422f.)

It is remarkable that here “the proposition, I think” is clearly defined as an “existential proposition” (Existentialsatz), and this “existential proposition” is conceived as a proposition “based on sensation” because it expresses “an indeterminate empirical intuition, that is, a perception”, and therefore the existential proposition, “I think”, precedes “the experience”. According to the fourth sentence of the footnote, though the existential proposition, “I think”, is an empirical proposition, it is not an empirical
In the fifth sentence of the footnote, Kant uses the words “an indeterminate perception” (eine unbestimmte Wahrnehmung). “An indeterminate perception” means, of course, “an indeterminate empirical intuition”. Both “an indeterminate empirical intuition” and “an indeterminate perception” signify the intuition/perception of non-empirically or non-experimentally intuited/perceived existence of the I of the “I think”. As is evident in the fifth sentence of the footnote: “An indeterminate perception here signifies only something real, which has been given merely for thought in general, not therefore as appearance, nor as a thing in itself (noumenon), but as something that indeed exists and is designated in general in the proposition, I think”. Kant applies the words “something real” (etwas Reales) to the non-empirically or non-experimentally intuited/perceived existence of the thinking I. According to Kant, the Cartesian proposition “I think, therefore I am” is formulated on the basis of the fact that “[the] proposition, I think,” contains “the perception of an existence”. (cf. A347/B405) It is clear that “the perception of an existence” means here the perception of the existence of the thinking I, which I is none other than the transcendental subject itself of one’s knowledge (Erkenntnis). It is not possible for the I of the “I think” to know themselves as an object of knowledge. Accordingly, it is impossible to apply the category of “existence”/“actuality” to the I of the “I think”. Though the I of the “I think” cannot be cognized as an object of cognition in any way, it can be perceived as “something real” by perception defined as “an indeterminate perception”. The “something real” is neither “appearance” nor “a thing in itself (noumenon)”. Nevertheless, in the sixth sentence of the footnote, Kant asserts that “the I” in “the proposition, I think” is in itself a “purely intellectual” representation. (B423)

Conclusion

In the present study, we tried to make an interpretation of Kant’s conception of transcendental ego mainly by analyzing the Chapter on the Paralogisms of the Critique of Pure Reason of its second edition. We clarified that in the second edition Kant is clearly cognizant that the Cartesian “cogito, ergo sum” is essentially an existential proposition formulated by “an indeterminate perception”, and developed an existential theory of transcendental ego by conducting his criticism of rational psychology. Thus, we clarified the existential aspect of Kant’s ego theory peculiar to the Chapter on the Paralogisms in the second edition.

Notes

1. Descartes, René, Discourse on Method and Related Writings, translated with an Introduction by Desmond M. Clarke, p. 25.
2. Descartes, René, Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings, translated with an Introduction by Desmond M. Clarke, p. 23.
3. In the “Criticism of the Second Paralogism of Transcendental Psychology”, Kant refers only to the tautological aspect of “what is known as the Cartesian inference, cogito, ergo sum”. (cf. A355) Nevertheless, according to Descartes, “ego cogito, ergo sum” is essentially a synthetic existential proposition formulated by the “simple intuition of our mind” through its insight into one’s own ego existence.
4. The “Criticism of the Fourth Paralogism of Transcendental Psychology” is, in other words, the Criticism of “The Fourth Paralogism of Ideality (With Regard to Outer Relations)” (A366).
5. According to Kant, the ultimate purpose of our theoretical/speculative reason is to construct the complete system of metaphysics of nature (Metaphysik der Natur), of which propaedeutic (Propädeutik) is none other than the Critique of Pure Reason. (A841/B869) In the Critique of Pure Reason, where Kant intends to systematically construct the doctrine of his epistemology on the basis of transcendental idealism, “the transcendental subject” (das transzendentale Subjekt) is conceived as the very subject who conducts research on the nature (Natur) as “the world of sense” (Sinnenwelt).
6. The words “as given” means here as a fact which is actually given through an “inner perception” (cf. A343/B401). In this place, Kant conceives the “I think” not as a mere logical formula of pure apperception, but as an empirical proposition which expresses the actuality/existence of the thinking I itself. The existence of the I of the “I think” is conceived here taken “as given”.
7. This paragraph relates, furthermore, to Kant’s intention of refutation of materialism and that of spiritualism. We would like to analyze the concluding part of the paragraph concerned, which runs as follows: “But as for this purpose I again require first of all something permanent, which, insofar as I think myself, is not given to me at all in inner intuition, it is quite impossible, by means of this simple self-consciousness, to determine the manner in which I exist, whether it be as substance or as accident. Thus, if materialism is inadequate to explain my existence, then spiritualism is equally insufficient for this purpose; and the conclusion is that in no way whatsoever can we know anything of the constitution of our soul, as far as the
possibility of its separate existence in general concerned.” (B240) The first sentence of this quotation is closely related to his “Refutation of Idealism” (B274–279). The “something permanent” signifies “the existence of objects in space outside myself” (B275). The first sentence also refers to the impossibility of proving the substantiality of the thinking I by rational psychology. It is noteworthy that Kant uses the expression: “the possibility of its [i.e. our soul’s] separate existence in general” (die Möglichkeit ihrer abgesonderten Existenz überhaupt). Such an expression suggests that Kant’s conception of human being is essentially under the influence of mind-body dualism of Descartes’ metaphysics. Kant’s conception of the immortality/permanence of soul as the transcendental idea of rational psychology also is closely related to Descartes’ mind-body dualism constructed on “the real distinction of mind and body”. On pages B406–413, just before the “Refutation of Mendelssohn’s Proof of the Permanence of the Soul”, Kant concisely repeats the criticism of rational psychology which was conducted in the first edition. In that criticism of rational psychology, taking the refutation of “the problematic idealism of Descartes” (B274) into consideration, Kant refers to the impossibility of proving the immortality of soul. He says: “But, whether such a consciousness of myself is even possible without things outside me, whereby representations are given to me, and whether I could exist merely as a thinking being (without being a human being), I do not know at all from that proposition [i.e. the proposition ‘that I distinguish my own existence, as that of a thinking being, from other things outside me (one of them being my body)’].” (B409) In the criticism of “[t]he [f]ourth [p]aralogism of [i]deality ([w]ith [r]egard to [o]uter [r]elations),” in which Descartes is dogmatically considered to be a “sceptical idealist” (A377), Descartes’ mind-body dualism itself was not the main subject of critical examination.

8. The second paragraph of the “General Note on the Transition from Rational Psychology to Cosmology” (hereafter “General Note”), which follows the paragraph beginning with the sentence: “The proposition, I think, or, I exist thinking, is an empirical proposition” (B428), is concluded as follows: “In the consciousness of myself in mere thought I am the being itself, but of this being nothing is thereby given for thought.” (B429) The third paragraph of the “General Note” runs as follows: “... In this intuition the thinking self would have to look for the conditions of using its logical functions as categories of substance, cause, etc., in order not only to designate itself, through the I, as an object in itself, but also to determine the mode of its existence, that is, to know itself as a noumenon. This, as we know, is impossible, because the inner empirical intuition is sensible and supplies us only with data of appearance, which furnish nothing to the object of pure consciousness for the knowledge of its own separate existence, but can serve us only for the purpose of experience.” (B430) The fourth paragraph of the “General Note” reads as follows: “Supposing, however, that we should hereafter discover, not indeed in experience, but in certain a priori established laws of pure reason concerning our existence (that is, not in merely logical rules), some ground for regarding ourselves, entirely a priori, as legislating in regard to our own existence, and as determining this existence, there would then be revealed a spontaneity by which our reality would be determinable without the conditions of empirical intuition. And we should then become aware that in the consciousness of our existence there is contained a priori something which may, with respect to some inner faculty, serve to determine our existence—which can be determined thoroughly only in sensible terms—with reference to an intelligible world (although, of course, one that is only thought).” (B430–431) Thus, in the fourth paragraph of the “General Note”, Kant proposes his concept of “certain a priori established laws of pure reason concerning our existence”, that is, the concept of moral law in its strict meaning of his critical philosophy for the first time. It is remarkable that in the “General Note” the moral law is conceived as “certain a priori established laws [Gesetze] of pure reason concerning our existence”. In the fifth paragraph of the “General Note”, “the moral law” is clearly defined as “a purely intellectual principle for determining my existence” (B431). Thus, in the “General Note”, the concept of moral law is proposed in its close relationship with one’s own existence.

9. Descartes, René, Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings, translated with an Introduction by Desmond M. Clarke, pp. 80–81.


Works Cited


Descartes, René, Discourse on Method and Related Writings, translated with an Introduction by Desmond M. Clarke, 2003,


**Addendum**

* In the following Corrigenda to my articles, ‘→’ signifies that the former should be replaced with the latter.
* Corrigenda to my article, “Kant’s Criticism of Rational Psychology and His Theory of Transcendental Ego”, *Bulletin of Aichi University of Education*, Vol. LXII (Humanities and Social Sciences): ☆ ‘the Paralogisms Chapter’ (p. 99, l. 10 etc.) → ‘the Chapter on the Paralogisms’; ‘demonstrated ontologically ... conception’ (p. 101, l. 6) → ‘demonstrated ... conception ontologically’; ‘above mentioned’ (p. 100, l. 46) → ‘above-mentioned’; ‘sure’ (p. 101, l. 16, p. 102, l. 26) → ‘certain’; ‘other’ (p. 101, l. 37) → ‘other than’; ‘first’ (p. 102, l. 12) → ‘second’; ‘(...)’ (p. 102, l. 46, p. 104, ll. 42-43) → ‘[...]’.
* Corrigenda to my article, “The Cogito Proposition of Descartes and Characteristics of His Ego Theory”, *Ibid.*, Vol. LXI (Humanities and Social Sciences): ☆ ‘sure’ (p. 73, l. 34, p. 76, l. 29) → ‘certain’; ‘But the above citation’ (p. 74, l. 5) → ‘The above citation, moreover’; ‘the “only one firm and immovable point in order to move the whole earth”, which point was looked for by Arcimedes.’ (p. 74, l. 10) → ‘the “one firm and immovable point” looked for by Archimedes “in order to move the whole earth”’. (Cf. Descartes, René, *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*, translated with an Introduction by Desmond M. Clarke, pp. 23–24); ‘not’ (p. 74, l. 40, p. 75, l. 1, l. 9, p. 76, l. 19, p. 79, l. 6, l. 40, l. 43) → ‘none’; ‘could not’ (p. 74, l. 44) → ‘cannot’; ‘substantial ... existential.’ (p. 74, l. 47) → ‘substantialistic (実体論的) ... existential (ego-existentialistic (自我存在論的))’; ‘Cartesian’ (p. 74, l. 48, p. 75, l. 13, l. 30, p. 76, l. 24, l. 26, l. 29) → ‘the Cartesian’; ‘only one’ (p. 75, l. 1) → ‘the only’; ‘the Sum (I am)’ (p. 75, l. 18) → ‘the ego sum cogitans’; ‘But’ (p. 75, l. 31, p. 76, l. 11, p. 77, l. 3) → ‘Nevertheless,’; ‘But it is ... noteworthy’ (p. 75, l. 39) → ‘It is noteworthy, however’; ‘that’ (p. 75, l. 40, p. 76, l. 12, p. 77, l. 12) → ‘that “”; ‘thinks’ (p. 76, l. 3) → ‘thinks is’; ‘axiom” means ... not axiom ... an axiom’ (p. 76, l. 7) → ‘“axiom” means ... not an axiom ... an axiom’; ‘so ... concerned’ (p. 76, ll. 11–12) → ‘as ... is concerned’; ‘So’ (p. 76, l. 13, p. 77, l. 13, l. 29) → ‘As’; ‘every ... exists’ (p. 76, l. 16) → ‘whoever thinks is incapable of not existing while thinking”’; ‘And’ (p. 76, l. 19) → ‘Surely,’ ‘But it must be noticed’ (p. 76, l. 20) → ‘It must be noticed, however,’; ‘Elementa’ (p. 76, l. 23) → ‘Elementa’; ‘So ... concerned’ (p. 76, l. 26) → ‘As ... is concerned’; ‘Meditation” Descartes ... formulation’ (p. 76, ll. 35-36) → ‘Meditation”, Descartes ... formulation of’; ‘Descartes asserts therefore’ (p. 77, l. 14) → ‘Descartes, therefore, asserts’; ‘would’ (p. 77, l. 24) → ‘would like to’; ‘But we should not understand’ (p. 77, l. 27) → ‘We should not understand, however,’; ‘an “action” of the mind, and the action of the mind”’ (p. 77, l. 40) → ‘a pure action (act) of mind, and the pure action (act) of mind”; ‘emphasizes sometimes’ (p. 77, l. 45) → ‘sometimes emphasizes’; ‘Also Descartes’ ... theory” (p. 79, l. 2) → ‘Descartes’ ... theory also’; ‘metaphysical thought of so-called natural philosophers’ (p. 80, l. 15.) → ‘, both of which can be characterized as mathematical science, metaphysical thought of natural philosophers”; ‘As” (p. 80, l. 22) → ‘As is’; ‘Also Newton” (p. 80, l. 33) → ‘Newton also”.

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