

Béatrice Longuenesse

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“Kant’s ‘I’ in ‘I ought to’ and Freud’s Superego.”

There are striking structural similarities between Freud’s notion of ‘ego’ and Kant’s notion of ‘transcendental unity of apperception,’ which for Kant grounds our use of ‘I’ in ‘I think.’ There are also striking similarities between Freud’s notion of ‘superego’ and Kant’s account of the mental structure that grounds our use of ‘I’ in the moral ‘I ought to.’ The lecture will explore these similarities on four main points: the conflict of motivations internal to the mind, the relation between discursive and pre-discursive representation of moral motivation, the unconscious character of moral motivation, the relation of the moral self to the body. The suggestion will be that Freud offers resources for a naturalized account (an account in terms of the causal development of empirical human beings) of just those features of our moral motivation that, according to Kant, seem to make it least amenable to a naturalistic explanation. How much of a revision of Kant’s analysis of moral justification is thereby entailed? This question will be discussed at the end of the lecture.