

Phenomenalism and Kant

ROBERTO HORÁCIO DE SÁ PEREIRA*

Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Brazil

Abstract

Readings of Kant's *Critique* as endorsing phenomenalism have occupied the spotlight in recent times: ontological phenomenalism, semantic phenomenalism, analytical phenomenalism, epistemological phenomenalism, and so on. Yet, they raise the same old coherence problem with the *Critique*: are they compatible with Kant's Refutation of Idealism? Are they able to reconcile the Fourth Paralogism of the first edition with the Refutation of the second, since Kant repeatedly claimed that he never changed his mind in-between the two editions of his *Critique*? This paper addresses the key question: was Kant a phenomenalist and, if he was, in which precise sense? I propose a metaphysical but not ontologically reductionist reading of Kant as a phenomenalist. I argue for the following claims. To be sure, for Kant appearance is mere representation. Yet, appearance is representation only insofar as we take "appearance" in the *empirical sense*, namely the way that the mind-independent existing noumenon appears in space and, crucially, when we take "representation" in the transcendental sense, namely the mind-dependent way that we can cognize the same mind-independent existing noumenon. How shall I argue in defense of my alternative reading? First, I argue that my reading is pretty much compatible with Kant's Refutation (in contrast to the rivals). Second, I argue that my reading reconciles the causal with the intentional readings of the Refutation. Third, I argue that my reading makes the Fourth Paralogism of the first edition and the Refutation of Idealism of the second completely compatible.

Key-words

Ontological Phenomenalism; Analytical Phenomenalism; Semantic Phenomenalism; Epistemological Phenomenalism; Empirical Sense; Transcendental Sense; Metaphysical Phenomenalism without Reductionism.

* Pesquisador CNPQ. E-mail de contato: Robertohsp@gmail.com

Introduction

It is common currency in scholarship that Kant was rejecting Berkeley's ontological phenomenalism when he wrote his Refutation of Idealism: if the existence of something outside *mere representations in me* is required for the determination of the consciousness of my existence in time, *esse cannot be percipi*, things outside exist mind-independently, and, therefore, they cannot be reduced to mere representations. The only open question is whether Kant changed his mind in-between the first edition (Fourth Paralogism) and the second edition (Refutation). Those scholars who claim that Kant changed his mind usually also claim that in the first edition Kant was defending a sophisticated form of old Berkeleian ontological phenomenalism. To be sure, claim those readers, Kant was not endorsing Berkeley's naïve claim that *esse est percipi*, that is, the existence of outside things is nothing but the existence of mere representations in us. Still, he was endorsing what Van Cleve (2002) has recently called "analytical phenomenalism," namely the thesis that the notion of object is reducible to a rule-governed synthesis of mental representation in accordance to concepts.

Yet, entirely new readings of Kant's phenomenalism have recently emerged. By identifying appearances and representations, Kant never had ontological phenomenalism in mind (either naïve or analytical). Regarding this, at least two complementary proposals are worth mentioning. The first is what Jankowiak (2014) has called "semantic phenomenalism." Appearance is mere representation only in the sense that we can only refer to "mental representations" or in the sense that we can only refer to mind-dependent things. The second is what we may call here "epistemological phenomenalism." Appearances are mere representations only in the sense that we have cognitive access only to mind-dependent things, or mental representation. Indeed, the rejection of ontological phenomenalism is pretty much in line with Kant's blunt reaction to the Feder-Garve Gottingen review in the second edition of the *Critique* in his *Prolegomena* and in his *Correspondence*. However, the old exegetical problem remains untouched: if ontological phenomenalism is in fact incompatible with Kant's Refutation, the new readings also seem to be; after all, if we only refer to/know representations, how can Kant support his claims in his Refutation that this "persistent" thing, presupposed by the empirical consciousness of my own existence in time, cannot be an "intuition in me?"¹ Something has gone amiss.

This paper addresses the question: was Kant a phenomenalist and, if he was, in which precise sense? Following the new trend in Kant's scholarship I resolutely reject the ontological or analytical readings of Kant's phenomenalism: reality is not a mind-made rule-governed rejection of mental representation in accordance to empirical concepts and categories.² Yet, in opposition to the new trend I propose a metaphysical reading of Kant's phenomenalism as follows. To be sure, appearance is nothing but a mere representation. Still, I hold that appearance is representation but *only insofar as we take "appearance" in the empirical sense*, namely the way that the underlying noumenon appears to us as persistent in space. Even more crucially, mental representations are nothing but appearances *but only insofar as we take "representation" in the*

¹See Allais 2004, p. 662.

²The traditional idea that reality is mind-made by a synthesis rule-governed by categories is a tenet of the intellectualist reading of the *Critique*. Against this view see Pereira (2013; 2017)

transcendental sense, namely as the mind-dependent way that we can cognize the same mind-independent existing noumenon as appearance; or so I shall argue.

I argue in defense of my alternative metaphysical reading of Kant's phenomenalism abductively, namely as the inference to the best explanation. First, I argue that my reading is pretty much compatible with Kant's Refutation (in contrast to the two rivals). Second, I argue that my reading reconciles the causal with the intentional readings of the Refutation of Idealism. Finally, I argue that my reading makes the Fourth Paralogism and the Refutation compatible.

After this brief introduction, the remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In the next two sections I present and discard two main readings of Kant's phenomenalism (on similar grounds). Then, I briefly present my own view. In the subsequent two sections I argue in detail for my view.

Semantic Phenomenalism

As a general claim, Kant's alleged phenomenalism is the thesis that appearances are nothing but "mere representations." Now, even recognizing that Kant's alleged phenomenalism is controversial in Kant's scholarship, the textual evidence casts no doubt about this claim.³ The only remaining question is how we should understand such identification. The Feder-Garve Göttingen review seems to suggest that Kant's phenomenalism is nothing but the transcendental restatement of Berkeley's view:

1) Ontological Phenomenalism: *esse est percipi*.

Claim 1) expresses the most extreme form of subjectivism and solipsism: real is what appears to us as real. However, Van Clave (2002) is (conditionally) right: if Kant embraces ontological phenomenalism, this takes a sophisticated form:

2) Analytical Phenomenalism. External reality is mind-made in the relevant sense that the concept of object is nothing but a rule-governed synthesis of mental representations in accordance with concepts.

Interestingly, the mainstream scholarship is willing to accept (2), but is unprepared to accept (1); after all, that is what Kant seems to say in his famous passages at A104-105 and at B242-243 when he talks about the object.⁴ Yet, on closer inspection, the only relevant ontological difference between (2) and (1) is the additional claim that *reality is mind-made*. As reality is the *esse*, what (2) adds to (1) is that reality (the object) emerges only when the mind's intellectual activities manage to unify representations in accordance to conceptual rules. *Before* such activity, there is only a chaotic manifold of sensation devoid of reference. Is that really what Kant had in mind?

I do not believe so. Be that as it may. Ontological phenomenalism is not my concern here. I limit myself to observing that ontological phenomenalism clashes completely

³The claim is repeated *ad nauseum* in both editions of his *Critique* and in several Reflections published right after the publication of the second edition of the *Critique*. Here are just a few passages in which he clearly refers to phenomenalism as a general claim: A490/B518; A104; B164; A492/B521; Refl. AA, 17: 688, R4723; Refl. AA, 18: 379, R5902; Refl. AA, 18: 612, R6312; Refl. AA, 18: 673, R6342; Refl. AA, 18: 673, R6342; Refl. AA, 18: 687.

⁴We will come back to this point.

with the results of the Refutation. How can Kant claim at the same time that he has proven the existence of persistent things that are not “intuitions in me,” if those things are unities of “mere representations” in accordance to rules? Indeed, defenders of Kant’s ontological phenomenalism are willing to recognize the contradiction. That is why they famously claim that Kant changed his mind in-between the Fourth Paralogism of the first edition and the Refutation of the second.⁵ This blatant contradiction and Kant’s blunt reactions to the Feder-Garve Gottingen review have invited new readings of Kant’s phenomenalism. What did Kant have in mind when he claimed repeatedly that appearance is mere representation, if he was not endorsing, albeit in a sophisticated way, Berkeley’s infamous tenet that *esse est percipi*?

Recently, two suggestions have come under the spotlight in the recent debate over Kant’s phenomenalism, namely the semantic and epistemological readings. The first suggestion is to construe Kant’s identification between appearance as a claim about semantic reference and ontological commitment. In a recent paper, Jankowiak (2017) suggests the following reading of Kant’s phenomenalism:

- 3) Semantic Phenomenalism. The only things to which the subject can make *content-laden reference* in experience are the subject’s own representations. (2017, p. 209, emphasis added)

By identifying appearances with representations Kant is claiming that we can only refer to mind-dependent entities (the own subject’s mental representations). According to Jankowiak, semantic phenomenalism does not entail ontological phenomenalism (couched either in sentence 1) or in sentence 2)). What paves the way from 3) to ontological phenomenalism is the following additional claim:

- 4) Presence Phenomenalism. The only things that are immediately present to consciousness are sensations.

According to him, though, presence phenomenalism is not a Kantian doctrine (see 2017, p. 209). Yet, if we assume semantic phenomenalism--again the assumption that we can only make content-laden reference to our own representations--it is hard to see how we avoid presence phenomenalism, that is, the “Cartesian theater” or the “veil of ideas,” ensuring that we do refer directly to mind-independent things. Be that as it may. Without assuming presence phenomenalism, Jankowiak sustains that semantic phenomenalism only entails what he calls:

- 5) Epistemological Phenomenalism. *Knowledge* of physical things is exhaustively *knowledge* of their ways of appearing, i.e. of the ways they do and would appear to us under various conditions. (2017, p. 167, emphasis added)

Forster (2008), Chiba (2012), Oberst (2018), and Stang (2018) presented quite similar proposals as readings of Kant’s phenomenalism. The idea is quite clear. By identifying appearance with representations Kant is not endorsing any Berkeley-like ontological reduction of external reality to representations. Rather, what he is claiming is we can only cognize (whatever it is) mind-dependently. To be sure, Kant’s phenomenalism

⁵Regarding this, see Guyer 1987.

contains this epistemological claim. The only question is whether that is all that Kant has in mind when he identifies appearances with representations. I do not believe that this is the case and in the remainder of this paper I shall argue that Kant's phenomenalism has a clear unequivocal metaphysical commitment.

Now, regardless of whether epistemic phenomenalism entails "semantic phenomenalism" or not, Jankowiak's suggestion raises a red flag. It is false that the subject can only refer to his own representations in Kant's theoretical philosophy. There are a number of passages in which Kant clearly states that mental states *do refer to things in themselves* rather than to anything mental.⁶ Indeed, Jankowiak may like it or not, but what he calls "the content-laden reference to mind-independent things in themselves" is exactly what Kant aims to prove in his Refutation: the acknowledgement of the mind-independent existence of noumena is the ultimate condition for the consciousness of my own experience in time.⁷

But Jankowiak's proposal raises another red flag. The idea that we can only make content-laden reference to our own mental representations ends up *reifying the notion of mental representation*, as if it were the very object of cognition. That opens up the doors to the old ontological phenomenalism: the object of our human cognition turns out to be a logical construction built out of those mental representations, namely a *necessary unit of those mental representations* in accordance to conceptual rules.

Epistemological Phenomenalism

Oberst (2018) offers a much more interesting way of reaching an epistemological reading of Kant's phenomenalism. Phenomenological phenomenalism is a Cartesian claim (viewed from Kant's own perspective, of course) according to which only cognitive access to states of one's own mind can be taken as *certain*, while cognitive access to outer objects is *uncertain*. Kant retains from Cartesianism what he finds valuable for his critical project, namely the transcendental divide between appearances and things in themselves and the claim that we can only have certain cognitive access to appearances, but certainly not to things as they exist in themselves. Cartesian epistemology is supposed to be the combination of two claims. Oberst summarizes

⁶See B XXXIX, 121n, AA, 18: 230, R5554, AA, 18:416 Refl 5984, and so on.

⁷See again B XXXIX, 121n, AA, 18: 230, R5554, AA, 18:416 Refl 5984, etc. Perhaps the clearest statement by Kant on this is the following: "Now since in inner sense everything is successive, hence nothing can be taken backwards, the ground of the possibility of the latter must *lie in the relation of representations to something outside us*, and indeed to something that is not itself in turn mere inner representation, i.e., form of appearance, *hence which is something in itself*." (AA, 18: 612, R6312, emphasis added)

Moreover, epistemological phenomenalism does not even imply any sort of semantic phenomenalism either. Even if I have only cognitive access to my own mental representations, to what appears to me inside my mind, it does not follow that we can only make content-laden reference to those mental representations. Let's put Kant aside for a moment. An epistemological phenomenalist who claims that we have only epistemic access to our own mental representations (to our own mind) is much like an envatted brain that has only epistemic access to proximal stimulations. Given this, let us consider again Putnam's famous mental experiment and consider an envatted brain, that is, one with epistemic access only to the proximal stimulation that the unscrupulous scientist produces in it. The question is: assuming the envatted brain has only cognitive access to proximal stimulation, whenever it experiences or thinks, does it refer only to those proximal stimulations? The answer is certainly not in light of the best causal and externalist theories of reference available in contemporary semantics. Regardless of what it knows, it always refers to the distal cause of its proximal stimulation. The lesson that we learn from semantic externalism is that cognitive access does not determine semantic reference!

Kant's alleged Cartesian heritage in two claims: (a) "cognition of empirically inner objects can be certain, (b) cognition of outer objects is necessarily uncertain." (2018, p.179)

Yet, Oberst's great insight into his epistemological reading of Kant's phenomenalism is to be found in Kant's own remark about the ambiguity of the phrase "outer thing" in his Fourth Paralogism of the first edition of the *Critique*. As Oberst reminds us, in his Fourth Paralogism, Kant's phenomenalism is his way of addressing the idealist skeptic of Cartesian provenance, namely by disambiguating the notion of an "outer object." This can mean that something is either empirically or transcendently outside us. In his own words: "Empirically outer objects are outer appearances in space; transcendently outer objects are things in themselves." (2018, p. 175)

The way that Kant addresses the challenge is not supposed to be a mystery. Let me recap. The idealist skeptic claims that we cannot cognize things outside us, but only things inside us because such cognition is not immediate, but rather relies on the problematic causal inference: the existence of outside things is the probable cause of the mental representations we have of them. Therefore, there is no way of justifying this causal inference, which remains "problematic." Oberst reconstructs the putative skeptic idealist's causal argument as follows:

I-Cognition of objects that can be only causally inferred is never certain.

II-Cognition of outer objects is cognition of objects that can be only causally inferred.

III-Thus, cognition of outer objects is never certain. (2018, p. 181)

However, in arguing so, the skeptic mistakes the empirical sense of the phrase "things outside us" with the transcendental one (*sophisma figurae dictionis*); or so Kant argues. In the empirical sense, outside us are things that we encounter in space without the need to transcend the bounds of the mental realm. We have immediate cognitive access to them as mere mental representations in us. In contrast, in the transcendental sense, outside us are things in themselves, that is, noumena in the negative sense. To be sure, Kant concedes to the idealist skeptic that we cannot cognize the underlying nature of things outside us in the transcendental sense. Yet, because we do not need to transcend the bounds of the mental realm, the way is open for the cognition of outside things in the empirical sense, namely bodies in space. Yet, Oberst claims that Kant also possesses a version of the causal argument:

Cognition of objects that can be only causally inferred is never certain.

Cognition of transcendently outer objects is cognition of objects that can be only causally inferred.

Thus, cognition of transcendently outer objects is never certain. (Oberst 2018, p. 181)⁸

According to Oberst, Kant's epistemological phenomenalism is a cluster of three key claims:

(A) Cognition of empirically inner objects can be certain.

(B) Cognition of empirically outer objects can be certain.

(C) *Determinate* cognition of transcendently outer objects is necessarily uncertain, *whereas indeterminate* cognition can be certain. (Oberst, 2018, p. 181)

⁸Here Oberst is following what Chignell calls the "causal refutation." See Chignell 2010, p. 506. Just like Chignell, I have serious concerns about the "causal refutation."

However, it is hard to follow Oberst here and believe that Kant could have his own version of the causal argument, unless we assume he changed his mind completely in the second edition with the Refutation.⁹ First, Kant never claimed that we can *cognize* things in themselves either as *certain* or as *uncertain*. The most that Kant explicitly admits in his Refutation is the following claim:

The consciousness of the existence of things in themselves is a condition for the consciousness of the time-order of my own mental states and, hence, a condition for the consciousness of my own existence in time.

Second, even when we assume the so-called “causal reading” of Kant’s Refutation (“causal refutation”), nowhere does Kant claim that cognition of transcendently outer objects is cognition of objects that can be only causally inferred. On the contrary, Kant claims crystal clear that awareness of the temporal determination of my own mental states is at the same time awareness of things outside me, things in themselves outside intuitions/representations in me.

Finally, if cognition of noumena is *uncertain* insofar as it can only be inferred from the cognition of mental states, then the only things to which the subject directly refers to in experience are his own representations. Yet, in this way, we are again reifying representations as a realm apart from noumena and end up embracing the two-objects view of Kant’s transcendental idealism. The question is: how can Kant avoid the skeptic idealist regarding the outside world? If we assume that the cognition of noumena is uncertain or problematic, the only alternative is to reduce the outside world to representations (ontological phenomenalism). Again, the object of our human cognition turns out to be a logical construction built out of those mental representations, namely a *necessary unit of those mental representations* in accordance to conceptual rules.

Non-reductionist Metaphysical Phenomenalism

I believe that Oberst is on the right path, but barking up the wrong tree. The ambiguity between two different ways of understanding “things outside me” is indeed the key to opening the doors to Kant’s phenomenalism. Nonetheless, the ambiguity not only concerns “outer thing,” but it naturally extends itself to the very notion of “representation.” “Representation” can also be taken in two different senses. First, in the empirical sense, “representation” means a mental state in time (as in Kant’s Refutation). Yet, second, in the transcendental sense, “representation” means that we can only cognize something in a mind-dependent way (that is the main meaning in the A-Deduction and in the Fourth Paralogism of the first edition). Given this, let me start by rephrasing both Kant’s phenomenalism and ontological phenomenalism:

(6) Kant’s Phenomenalism: appearance *in the empirical sense* (what appears in space) is mere representation *in the transcendental sense* (what we can mind-dependently cognize).

⁹Yet, I cannot enter into this debate here for a question of space. All I retain from the “causal refutation” is the idea that the noumenon affects the mind (in the empirical sense). This affection results in appearances in the empirical sense. See Chignell’s criticism in 2010.

To start with (6) does not entail (7):

(7) Ontological Phenomenalism: the object of appearance *in the empirical sense* is logical constructions built out of representations *in the empirical sense*, namely a synthetic unity of mental representations in accordance to conceptual rules.

If “representation” in the transcendental sense means what we can cognize mind-dependently, we are not allowed to infer from the fact that we cannot cognize mind-independently (anything beyond our representations) *in the transcendental sense* that the object of our cognition is logical constructions built out of representations *in the empirical sense* (namely a synthetic unity of mental representations in accordance to conceptual rules). The inference of (7) from (6) is a further case of *sophisma figurae dictionis*: the word “representation” in (6) is taken *in the transcendental sense*, while in (7) it is taken *in the empirical sense* (a mental state in time). I believe that it is all we need to distinguish Kantian phenomenalism (stated in 6) from the Berkeleian varieties (stated in 7). The lurking question is: is (6) pure epistemological phenomenalism without any metaphysical commitments as Oberst suggests?

I do not believe that this is the case. For one thing, appearance (*Erscheinung*) is always *appearance of something that appears*. Likewise, “representation” (*Vorstellung*) is always the presentation of something else before the mind. Thus, what appears in the empirical sense in space is always the appearance of something existent in itself, the noumenon. By the same token, representation in the transcendental sense is representation of something essentially unknown, the noumenon again. Regarding this, there are two ways of reading (6) in the literature. We either assume the so-called two-objects view or the two-aspects view. According to the first possibility:

(6’) Kant’s Phenomenalism: appearance *in the empirical sense* is mere representation *in the transcendental sense* and both are distinct from the noumenon.

According to the second reading that I am proposing here:

(6’’) Kant’s Metaphysical/Epistemic Phenomenalism. Appearance *in the empirical sense* is mere representation *in the transcendental sense* because (i) in the empirical sense appearance is the way that the noumenon appears to us in space and (ii) in the transcendental sense representation is the mind-dependent way that we know the noumenon.¹⁰

In both claims Kantian phenomenalism is not a purely epistemological view. It is a doctrine that is metaphysically loaded. In both cases we are committed to the existence of unknown noumena. The only difference is that in (6’’) appearance, representation, and noumenon are ontologically identical and irreducible to each other; while in (6’) noumenon is different from both appearance and representation. Now, what paves the way from 1) to 2) [ontological reductionism] is just the one-object view couched in (6’). In other words, it is by assuming that appearance and representation, on one hand, and noumenon, on the other, are numerically different things that we invite the thought that if we cannot know the noumenon, we can at least know its “surrogate,” namely a logical

¹⁰About Kant’s Idealism, see Pereira (2018a ; 2019a ; 2019b).

construction built out of mere representations, i.e. a synthetic unity of representations in accordance to rules. In contrast, if we stick to (6''), there is no threat of reductionism: appearance *in the empirical sense* is representation *in the transcendental sense* because both are the same thing *an sich* that appears in space and is only cognized mind-dependently.

But why does Kant use both expressions: “appearance” and “representation?” Well, the answer is quite clear. Kant uses “appearance” whenever he wants to stress the *metaphysical grounding*: appearance is the way that the noumenon appears in space. In contrast, he uses the expression “representation” whenever he wants to stress that we can only cognize that noumenon mind-dependently. Kant’s phenomenalism thus has complementary metaphysical and epistemic sides.

Metaphysical Phenomenalism and the Fourth Paralogism

Again, since the Cartesian skeptic idealist is a transcendental realist in the first place (A369), the skeptic is challenging us to prove that we have *cognition* of things outside us, in the transcendental sense, of things in themselves, rather than in the empirical sense, of mere representations in the outer sense. And all parties in the debate agree that such cognition is impossible for Kant: it is beyond the bounds of the senses. The question is how Kant’s controversial statements of A370 must be understood:

The transcendental idealist, on the contrary, can be an empirical realist, hence, as he is called, a dualist, i.e., he can concede the existence of matter without going beyond mere self-consciousness and assuming something more than the certainty of representations in me, hence the cogito, ergo sum. For because he allows this matter and even its inner possibility to be valid only for appearance - which, separated from our sensibility, is nothing - matter for him is only a species of representations (intuition), which are called external. (A370)

On closer inspection, by saying that matter is just a representation in us, Kant is not endorsing ontological phenomenalism. Again, “representation” here must be understood in the transcendental rather than in the empirical sense, that is, as the mind-dependent way that we cognize the mind-independent existing noumenon. By claiming that matter is just a mere representation in us, Kant is only trying to persuade the skeptic idealist that “matter” (A370) is nothing but the mind-dependent way that we cognize the mind-independent thing in itself.

Therefore, my reading of Kant’s phenomenalism is the one that best fits the argument of the Fourth Paralogism of the first edition. But what can we say about the key controversial passages of A104-105 and B242-243?

What does one mean, then, **if one speaks of an object corresponding to and therefore also distinct from the cognition (Erkenntnis)**? It is easy to see this object must be thought of only as something in general = X, since outside of our cognition we have nothing that we could set over against this cognition as corresponding to it.

We find, however, that our thought of the relation of all cognition (Erkenntnis) to its object carries something of necessity with it, since namely the latter is regarded as that which is opposed to our cognitions being determined at pleasure or arbitrarily rather than being determined a priori, since insofar as they are **to relate to an object our cognitions** must also necessarily agree with each other in relation to it, i.e., have that unity that constitutes the concept of an object. (A104-105, emphasis added)

If we investigate what new characteristic is given to our representations by **the relation to an object**, and what is the dignity that they thereby receive, we find that it does nothing beyond making the combination of representations necessary in a certain way, and subjecting them to a rule... (B242-243, original emphasis)

Is Kant thereby stating that *the object* is nothing but a rule-governed synthesis of mental representations in accordance to concepts? That is only the case if we assume that “representation” is taken here in the *empirical sense* of the mental states of a person. However, if “representation” is taken here in the transcendental sense (and appearance in the empirical sense), what we have is something quite different. What Kant is stating is that the fact-awareness (*cognition/Erkenntnis*) of what appears in space simultaneously or successively as necessarily connected relies on categories as the ultimate principles of the lawlike connection of appearances.¹¹ Kant’s claim is not that *reality is mind-made*, but rather that the *cognition* of the mind-independent existing reality *an sich* is mind-dependent on categories of human understanding.¹²

Metaphysical Phenomenalism and the Refutation

Some scholars are willing to agree that Kant is closer to ontological phenomenalism in the Fourth Paralogism of the A-edition, but insist that this is completely different in the B-edition. The underlying assumption is that Kant changed his mind probably after the attack of the Göttingen Feder-Garve Review.

Regardless of whether Kant changed his mind or not, one thing is for sure: ontological phenomenalism is incompatible with the Refutation of Idealism. Now, is the metaphysical reading of Kant’s phenomenalism (6’’) compatible with the Refutation of Idealism? That is what I will argue for now (i). I shall also argue in addition (ii) that (6’’) is the only reading of Kant’s phenomenalism that makes the causal and the intentional readings of Kant’s Refutation compatible and (iii) that (6’’) is the reading of Kant’s phenomenalism that best makes the Refutation in the second edition compatible with the Fourth Paralogism. Let me briefly recap the steps in the Refutation:

- i. I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. (B275)
- ii. All time-determination presupposes something persistent in perception. (B275)
- iii. But this persisting element cannot be an intuition in me. For all the determining grounds of my existence that can be encountered in me are representations, and as such they themselves need something persisting distinct from them, in relation to which their change, and thus my existence in the time in which they change, can be determined. (Bxxxix)
- iv. Thus, the perception of this persistent thing is only possible through a **thing** outside me and not through the mere **representation** of a thing outside me. Consequently, the determination of my existence

¹¹Kant’s examples leave no doubt that he is concerned with representation in the transcendental sense = appearances in the empirical sense:

“If the cinnabar were now red, now black, now light, now heavy, if a human being were now changed into this animal shape, now into that one, if on the longest day the land were covered now with fruits, now with ice and snow, then my empirical imagination would never even get the opportunity to think of heavy cinnabar on the occasion of the representation of the color red...” (A100)

¹²This mind-dependent cognition of the mind-independently existing reality in accordance to the categories of the understanding is what Kant calls “nature:”

“Thus we ourselves bring into the appearances that order and regularity in them that we call **nature**, and moreover we would not be able to find it there if we, or the nature of our mind, had not originally put it there. For this unity of nature should be a necessary, i.e., certain unity of the connection of appearances. (A125, original emphasis)

in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself. (B275–B276, original emphases)

v. Now consciousness in time is necessarily combined with the consciousness of the possibility of this time-determination: Therefore, it is also necessarily combined with the existence of the things outside me, as the condition of time-determination; i.e., the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me. (B276)¹³

Let me start with claim (i). For the defense of the compatibility between (6'') and the argument of the Refutation, besides the first note, steps (iii)-(v) are also crucial. In (iii), Kant makes the famous addendum in the preface: “this persisting element cannot be *an intuition in me*” (Bxxxix, emphasis added). In (iv), he reiterates the same by stating that: “the perception of this persistent thing is only possible through a thing outside me and not through *the mere representation* of a thing outside me” (B275–B276, emphasis added). As I have already remarked, the very same idea reappears in several Reflections right after the publication of the second edition of the *Critique*.¹⁴

The question now is: why is the addendum in the preface Bxxxix needed? The answer is quite clear from the very text itself: to avoid an infinite regress. Now, this step only makes sense if “representation” is understood in the empirical sense as a mental state in time (rather than in the transcendental sense). Again, that is what my metaphysical reading of Kant’s phenomenalism in (6'') stresses: one should never confuse the empirical with the transcendental sense of “representation.” Let us suppose that this persistent thing in space were a mere “intuition in me” (representation in the empirical sense). Yet, as a mere representation in me, it would also be in time and, hence, would also require a “determining ground” and hence indefinitely, representation after representation. The only way of stopping the infinite regress is to assume that the cognition of my own representations in the empirical sense in time presupposes the existence of noumena (that empirically appear as persistent in space). Thus, the consciousness/cognition of my own existence in time forces me to acknowledge the mind-independent existence of a thing in itself.

It is worth noting that in the Refutation, Kant is not stating that some putative mind-independent *cognition* of outside things (in the transcendental sense) is a condition for the determination of consciousness of my existence in time. In contrast, he talks merely about “the *consciousness of the existence* of actual things” (B276) as a condition for the consciousness of my own existence in time. We cognize only “representations” in the transcendental sense, but as the way the noumena appear to us as persistent things in space. Thus, metaphysical non-reductionist phenomenalism is quite compatible with the

¹³About Kant’s Refutation, see Pereira (2018b ; 2019b ; 2020).

¹⁴We remain in the world of the senses [crossed out: however], and would be led by nothing except the principles of the [crossed out: law] understanding that we use in experience, but we make our possible progression into an object in itself, by regarding the possibility of experience as something real in the objects of experience. (Refl 5642, AA, 18:280–1)

We must determine something in space in order to determine our own existence in time. That thing outside of us is also represented prior to this determination as noumenon. (Refl 5984, AA, 18:416)

Now since in inner sense everything is successive, hence nothing can be taken backwards, the ground of the possibility of the latter must lie in the relation of representations to something outside us, and indeed to something that is not itself in turn mere inner representation, i.e., form of appearance, hence which is something in itself. The possibility of this cannot be explained. Further, the representation of that which persists must pertain to that which contains the ground of time-determination, but not with regard to succession, for in that there is no persistence; consequently that which is persistent must lie only in that which is simultaneous, or in the intelligible, which contains the ground of appearances. (Refl 6312, AA, 18:612)

Refutation. Even if I can only cognize mind-dependently (representation in the transcendental sense), I must still acknowledge that what I cognize mind-dependently exists mind-independently.

Let me focus now on the defense of my claim (ii). According to the causal reading of Kant's Refutation of Idealism, in order for us to make justified judgments about the mere temporal order of our inner states, those states must be caused by the successive states of objects in space outside us.¹⁵ As I have argued against Oberst, that reading *prima facie* seems to contradict claims in the criticism of Cartesian idealism; after all, in the Refutation Kant claims that we experience outer things directly rather than indirectly, namely as the result of some problematic causal inference from our putative immediate experience of our inner experience.¹⁶ Moreover, the overwhelming evidence (quoted above) clearly indicates that the acknowledgment of the mind-independent existence of the noumenon is what is required for the temporal determination of our representations in time.

Has the so-called "causal refutation" got everything wrong? I do not think so. If we have in mind that representations can be taken both in the empirical and in the transcendental sense as (6'') suggests, we can hold on to the claim that the mind-independent existent noumena is the "cause" or the ultimate ground of the temporal determination of our representations in the empirical sense (as mental states), and we can also hold on to the claim that we can only cognize them mind-dependently as a representation in the transcendental sense, namely as persistent in space.

Let me focus finally on my last claim (iii). Besides being compatible with both the Fourth Paralogism and the Refutation of Idealism, my metaphysical non-reductionist phenomenalism (6'') is the reading that best harmonizes the most reasonable reading of the Fourth Paralogism with the widely shared reading of the Refutation (without assuming that Kant changed his mind in-between the two editions).

In the Fourth Paralogism, Kant tries to persuade the Cartesian external-world skeptic that we do possess direct epistemic access to material things, because material things are nothing but representations in the relevant transcendental sense. In contrast, in his Refutation he attempts to prove that representations in the relevant empirical sense presuppose noumena insofar as they are time-determined.

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¹⁵Guyer 1987 and Dicker 2008 have prominently championed the "causal refutation." The details of the debate are beyond the scope of this paper. However, I am less interested in the causal relation between appearances in space and mental states in time, but rather in the causal relation between noumena and representations in the empirical sense.

¹⁶Chignell criticizes the causal refutation on the grounds that it is a posteriori. See Chignell 2010, p. 506.

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