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What is the Scandal of Philosophy?

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Abstract

The central question of this paper is: what has Kant's Refutation of Idealism argument proven, if anything? What is the real scandal of philosophy and universal human reason? I argue that Kant's Refutation argument can only be considered as sound if we assume that his target is what I call 'metaphysical external-world skepticism' (rather than traditional 'epistemological external-world skepticism'). What is in question is not the 'existence' of outside things, but their very 'nature', that is, the claim that the thing outside us, which appears to us as persistent body in space, exists in itself *as a substantia noumenon*. Assuming the indirect-realist view that we only immediately know ideas and that their putative objects are known by inference, the metaphysical external-world skeptic doubts that the nature of things outside oneself is mind-independent.

Keywords

metaphysical external-world skepticism – epistemological external-world skepticism
– transcendental idealism – material idealism – transcendental arguments

1 Introduction

I believe that the first impression that everyone gets from Kant's Refutation of Idealism (B275–279) is that his argument is as sound as any sound argument can be. The existence of outside things is required to determine empirical self-consciousness in time and outer experience is presupposed by inner experience. Moreover, we enjoy immediate cognitive access to outside things rather than cognitive access mediated by inference. Now, as

epistemological external-world skepticism questions the existence of those things outside us, the same reader comes to the conclusion that Kant's Refutation is the paradigmatic successful case of what is called 'transcendental argument' in contemporary epistemology: the refutation of the epistemological external-world skepticism.

However, on closer inspection, Kant's argument against the epistemological external-world skeptic of Cartesian provenance is anything but successful. The claim that the existence of outside things is a condition for determining empirical self-consciousness is completely powerless against any skeptical scenario from the Cartesian first *Meditation*. If I do not know whether I am dreaming whenever I entertain an external-world belief, how could I know that such a belief is true? If I do not know whether I am dreaming when I confidently believe that I am seeing something permanent in space, how could I know that my belief is true rather than delusional? If we take the Cartesian skeptical scenarios seriously, Kant has no way to prove that the existence of outside things is really required to determine empirical self-consciousness in time. That is probably the reason why the original optimism regarding Kant's refutation of external-world skepticism has given place to pessimism. Today the vast majority of contemporary epistemologists and Kantian scholars have come to the obvious conclusion that Kant's attempt to refute the external-world skeptic of Cartesian provenance is doomed to fail.¹

¹ There is no evidence that Kant read Descartes's writings themselves directly. In general, he only knew Descartes secondhand, mainly from handbooks in the Leibnizian and Wolffian tradition and from Mendelssohn. Interestingly, even recognizing the irrefutability of Cartesian skepticism, both Caranti and Westphal insist on considering the Refutation as a satisfactory answer to the skeptic of Cartesian provenance. Caranti expresses his view as follows: "I contend that our inability to silence skepticism once and for all suggests an extremely important lesson for contemporary philosophy, a lesson this book tries to spell out. To begin with, this inability flows from a failure to embrace the essence of Kant's philosophical legacy—that is, transcendental idealism. In fact, as I will show, this philosophical perspective, heir to the "Copernican revolution," is truly (as Kant himself puts it) "the only refuge" against the threat of skepticism. Moreover, and even more importantly, precisely because it plays such an indispensable role in meeting the challenges of skepticism, we should approach transcendental idealism as a serious option for contemporary epistemology, however strongly it has been dismissed in recent years" (2007: 3–4). Westfall expresses a similar reaction: "They (the Anglophone commentators) charge that Kant's transcendental arguments must argue by elimination, though they fail to eliminate the possibility of Descartes's evil deceiver, or alternative forms of cognition, or the possibility

Nonetheless, if we leave aside the epistemological skeptical scenarios, Kant's argument is as sound as any sound argument can be. Again, the existence of outside things seems to be required to determine empirical self-consciousness in time, outer experience is presupposed by inner experience, and we enjoy immediate cognitive access to outside things rather than cognitive access mediated by inference. The intriguing question is: what has Kant's argument proven, if anything? What is the real scandal of philosophy and universal human reason? I believe that we can only answer these questions when we properly characterize Kant's opponent in the Refutation.

In this paper, I argue that Kant's argument can only be considered as sound if we assume that his opponent is what I call the 'metaphysical external-world skeptic' rather than the 'epistemological external-world skeptic'. For the epistemological external-world skeptic it is the 'existence' of outside things that is in question. In contrast, for the metaphysical external-world skeptic it is the 'mind-independent nature' of this existence that is in question, that is, the existence as a *substantia noumenon*. Assuming the indirect-realist's claim that we can only immediately know our own ideas and that their putative objects are known only by inference, the metaphysical external-world skeptic doubts that the 'nature' of things outside oneself is mind-independent. Thus, rephrasing the celebrated Kantian *dictum*, the scandal of philosophy and universal human reason is not that the 'existence' of outside things should have to be assumed merely 'on faith', but rather that the 'mind-independent nature' of things outside us has to be assumed 'on faith'.

However, defending this unorthodox reading of a classic text is a difficult task. Since the second edition, numerous interpretations of the *Critique* have been proposed according to the philosophical fashion of the time. Furthermore, we must remember that Kant himself was never satisfied with his own published version of the Refutation, as seen in the numerous changes and additions he proposed following its publication, from the

that the mere (individually subjective) appearances of things would suffice for the possibility of self-consciousness. In Chapter 1 I argue that these disappointments overlook three key features of Kant's response to skepticism: the decidedly non-Cartesian philosophy of mind involved in Kant's epistemology, Kant's semantics of cognitive reference, and Kant's decidedly non-Cartesian philosophical method" (2004: 2). The pressing questions are how any reading of Transcendental Idealism could "meet the challenges of skepticism" (Caranti), and how the putative Kantian non-Cartesian philosophy of mind could "respond to skepticism" (Westfall) in any satisfactory way.

preface to the second edition. Indeed, after the Refutation he continued to work for a half dozen years (Guyer 1987: 268).

First, I argue that my reading is the one that best explains the historic motivation behind the Refutation. Second, I argue that my reading is the one that best makes the Fourth Paralogism compatible with the Refutation. Third, I argue that my reading is also the one that best makes the Refutation of Idealism compatible with Kant's idealism. However, as I have already mentioned, the main line of defense is the claim that only my reading makes Kant's Refutation of Idealism a sound argument. All the same, I must admit that none of these arguments is conclusive: one may contest that the historical background between the first and second edition played no motivational role for the Refutation. Likewise, one may dispute whether the Fourth Paralogism and the Refutation are compatible, by suggesting that in the second edition Kant changed his mind and gave up his Paralogism. Moreover, one could dispute whether Kantian idealism is compatible with his Refutation of Idealism. Finally, one may argue that there is no need to make the Refutation of Idealism a sound argument in order to make it comprehensible. Thus, I have no choice but to assume that the defense of my reading is a classical case of inference to the best explanation.

This paper is organized as follows. The first section provides a brief overview of the contemporary literature. In the third section, I reject the old classical school view (endorsed by Guyer 1987) that there is in fact a contradiction between the Refutation and the transcendental idealism (TI henceforth) of the Fourth Paralogism. Therein, I argue in favor of my one-world plus phenomenalism view of TI. The following section examines the role of so-called things-in-themselves in the Refutation. All of the subsequent sections show that an epistemological reading succumbs to the objections that have come to form contemporary epistemic logic. Finally, the last section presents my reconstruction of the Refutation as an argument of a metaphysical nature rather than of an epistemological nature.²

² Citations of the *New Elucidacio* (PND) and of Kant's Reflections (R) will be from *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1902), while citations from the *Critique of Pure Reason* will be from the First Edition A and the Second Edition B in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1956).

2 The Refutation in the Twentieth Century

Since the end of the last century and the beginning of this one, we have witnessed the emergence of a vast secondary literature on the Refutation of Idealism. I limit myself to mentioning only some of the works that have drawn my attention, including Almeida (2013), Aquila (1979), Ameriks (2006), Bader (2012), Bardon (2006), Chignell (2010), Dicker (2004, 2008), Guyer (1987, 2006), Hanna (2000), Longuenesse (2008), Van Cleve (1999), Vogel (1993), and Westphal (2004). According to Chignell, we can divide the recent secondary literature into two main trends. The first trend dates back to Guyer's work (1987) and proposes a "causal reading" of the Refutation. The primary focus of this reading is the causal relation between representations and external objects (Chignell 2010: 507). Besides Guyer, the most significant name is Dicker. Since Guyer, several others have also followed the same line of reading. Actually, as Caranti has convincingly argued, the causal reading can be traced back to Kant's pre-critical philosophy (2007: 10). The second trend is what Chignell (2010) calls the "semantic reading." According to the conceptual reading, the primary focus is the 'semantic' content of our experiences rather than the causal relation. In the last section of this paper, I present my own reading of the Refutation. I want to suggest that the existence of mental states is 'grounded' in the existence of permanent things outside us (see Fine 2012).

A second divide opposes those claiming that the Refutation is proof of knowledge of the existence of outside phenomena, as well as those claiming that Kant's Refutation is proof of the existence of things-in-themselves. The first group includes scholars such as Paton (1970), Allison (2004), and Ameriks (2006), among others. In contrast, the second group includes scholars such as Prichard (1909), Guyer (1987), Chignell (2010), Bader (2012), and Almeida (2013), among others.

A third, and the most important, divide concerns the relationship between the Refutation and TI. First, there are those who claim that the Refutation requires TI. The best example that I know of this is Caranti:

I suggest that an alternative refutation can be mounted by combining two points, both of which depend on transcendental idealism: (1) the abandonment of the transcendental realist's picture of perception (the result achieved in the proof of the immediacy of outer perception), and (2) a reflection on the meaning, within a transcendental idealistic perspective, of the very possibility of a super-imaginative power that generates our *entire* experience, even in its lawfulness (which

distinguishes the “big hallucination” from occasional and thus non-problematic hallucinations). (2007: 100)

The second group is composed of those who claim the Refutation is compatible with Kantian TI, but who deny that TI is the solution or even required for the problem of the Refutation. Three great scholars, who are distant in time from each other, namely Paton (1936, 1970), Allison (2004), and Ameriks (2006), illustrate this position. Paton (1936, quoted from the 1970 edition, Vol. II: 380) says categorically that: “The permanent substances are phenomenal substances, dependent on the constitution of the human mind in the same way that space and time are.” More recently, Ameriks (2006: 74) states that “The Refutation has to do only with empirical externality.” I disagree with their shared assumption that phenomena rather than noumena are permanent in space. This is the position I endorse in this paper.

The third group is composed of those who believe that the Refutation and TI are incompatible doctrines. This group includes scholars such as Vaihinger (1883), Prichard (1909), Smith (1923), and, more recently, Guyer (1987). A fourth group claims that the Refutation is indifferent to TI. The best name among this group that I know is Hanna (2000). Now, whether or not the Refutation of Idealism is compatible with the Fourth Paralogism depends crucially on how TI is understood. Here it is worth remembering what Allais said:

As everyone knows, there is no agreement in interpretations of Kant’s transcendental idealism, not even a tendency to convergence, and recent publications continue to represent an astonishingly wide spectrum of views. On the one extreme, we have interpretations which see Kant as a phenomenalist or Berkeleyan idealist about things as they appear to us, and on the other extreme we have deflationary or epistemic interpretations, which do not see Kant as any kind of idealist at all. (2010: 91)

As I am writing about the Refutation, my only claim here is to find a reading of TI that makes what Kant says in both the Fourth Paralogism and the Refutation of Idealism compatible. For those that are in favor of the epistemic reading of the Refutation, it may seem that I am missing the question at issue; after all, if the Refutation aims to refute external-world skepticism, the Fourth Paralogism merely tries to avoid it. Still, I am taking Kant’s word at face value. He repeatedly denied that he changed his position

in the period between the first and the second editions and repeatedly accused his readers of having completely misunderstood his own formal idealism.

There are at least three main readings of TI in the contemporary literature. The first one emerges with Feder-Garve's critical assessment of the first edition *Critique*, but was made popular by Friedrich Jacobi. This is a metaphysical view in two ways. Appearances (*Erscheinungen*) and things-in-themselves are 'numerically distinct things', that is, appearances are "mere representations." Yet, this view opposes two worlds—the phenomenal world and its noumenal substrate—and embraces an ontological reductionism of the material world to the mind-dependent phenomenal world (Guyer 1987). In this reading, TI and the Refutation are in fact incompatible. In accordance with the literature, let us call this the two-worlds reading of TI.

However, there are two noteworthy variations of the two-worlds reading of TI: existential phenomenism and reductionist phenomenism (Aquila 1975). According to the latter, the reality of material things could be reduced to *logical constructions* out of mental states. Van Cleve (1999) is the best example that I know in the literature of such ontological reductionism: "objects in space and time 'are logical constructions out of perceivers and their states'. That makes Kant a phenomenalist" (1999: 11; emphasis added). In contrast, according to the existential phenomenist, "Kant is only offering a sense in which material objects can be said meaningfully to exist" (Aquila 1975: 108). However, in both variations, TI and the Refutation are in fact incompatible if we assume that in the Refutation Kant aims to prove the existence of noumena. In light of the two-world views the disambiguation of the two meanings of "things outside us" goes as follows. In the transcendental sense 'things outside us' means the 'existence' of mind-independent things. In contrast, in the empirical sense 'things outside us' means the 'existence' of mind-dependent, however, perception-independent things. Let me provide an example. The tomato that I see does not exist independently of my mind. However, as a unity of sensible representations of a tomato according to rules of synthesis, it exists independently of my sensible representations (a logical construction out of sensible representations). As I reject the two-world views I must also reject this reading of Kant's disambiguation of the two meanings of 'things outside us'.

The second main reading of TI is Langton's (1998). This view is also based on a metaphysical divide. However, instead of opposing two realities, this view of TI opposes two classes of properties of the same reality. Appearances and things-in-themselves are numerically identical. Nevertheless, they possess quite different properties: 'relational' properties (appearances) and

‘intrinsic’ properties (things-in-themselves). Thus, appearances would be relational properties of the same things whose intrinsic properties in-themselves remain unknown. In light of this view, TI is not a form of phenomenalism, but a form of epistemic humility. Let us call this the two-properties view.

An interesting variation of this two-properties view is Hanna’s (2001, 2006) two-concepts view. According to him, TI requires the existence of one world, the phenomenal world of appearances. Thus, appearances and things-in-themselves are numerically identical. However, they are seen from different sets of concepts: phenomenal concepts (i.e., actually instantiated concepts of real empirical things) and noumenal concepts (i.e., non-empirical concepts or properties that are logically possibly instantiable but cannot be known by us to be instantiated) (Hanna 2006: 5).

The third view is deflationary, as promoted by Paton (1970), Prauss (1974), Allison (2004), and many others. It conceives TI as a consistently epistemological doctrine according to which appearances and things-in-themselves are numerically identical things that could be considered from two perspectives: the human perspective and the absolute, God’s eye perspective, *sub specie aeternitatis*, so to speak. From the human perspective, the single reality as the object of our representations takes the form of appearances, while from the God’s eye perspective the same reality takes the form of things-in-themselves. In accordance with the literature, let us call this the one-world-two-perspectives reading of TI.

Now, I want to propose a fourth reading that, to my knowledge, is new. It can be considered as a combination of the two-worlds view and the two-perspectives view. In contrast to the two-worlds view, I reject the metaphysical divide between two worlds. There is only one numerically identical object. Yet, in opposition to the standard two-perspectives view, I claim that this object is the transcendental object (first edition) or noumena in the negative sense (second edition)—“a thing so far as it is not an object of our sensible intuition” (B307). Therefore, in contrast to the standard two-perspectives view and two-properties or concepts view, and in agreement with the two-worlds view, I claim that appearances are in fact representations: they are the way we immediately refer to things-in-themselves as they appear to us. According to Kant’s TI, we cannot know any intrinsic properties of noumena in the negative sense. Still, Kant left no doubt that we do know their existence *as* the external things that affect our sensibility. Given this, in light of my reading the disambiguation of the two meanings of ‘things outside us’ takes a quite different form. In the transcendental sense ‘things outside us’ means the ‘existence’ of mind-

independent noumena. In contrast, in the empirical sense ‘things outside us’ means the same noumena, however only insofar as they appear to us as ‘mere representations’. The main opposition is not between the existence of mind-independent and mind-dependent things or even between two senses of ‘mind-independent’ things. Rather, the opposition is between ‘mind-independent existence and mind-dependent knowledge’ of this same existence. The same object that ‘exists mind-independently’ can only be ‘known mind-dependently’ as a mere representation. My view combines the ontological monism of the two-perspective views with the ‘epistemological’ phenomenalism inspired by the two-world views. I call this the two-perspectives plus phenomenalism view.

However, further clarifications are needed. First, in opposition to Allison’s standard two-perspective view, my view is not metaphysically deflationary in any sense. Second, I am not retaining the representational model of the two-worlds view. Let me explain both claims. In several pages, Allison characterizes the Kantian transcendental divide as holding between two opposite ways of considering the same reality: from God’s eye perspective, *sub specie aeternitatis* so to speak, (*qua noumenon*), and from the human perceptive (*qua phenomenon*):

As I shall argue at greater length, this epistemologically based understanding of transcendental idealism requires that the transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves be understood as holding between two ways of ‘considering’ things...In this regard it may be characterized as the ‘two-aspect’ reading. (2004: 16)

This could mistakenly suggest that with his two-aspect reading of TI Allison could have in mind a metaphysical monism in connection with the mind-body problem in contemporary philosophy. To avoid such misunderstanding, he adds the following remark:

Nevertheless, this label requires a careful qualification in order to avoid serious misunderstandings. The basic problem is that dual- (or multi-aspect) theories are themselves metaphysical in nature. In fact, they typically arise in connection with treatments of mind-body problem, where some version of ‘dual aspectism’ is something proposed as a viable alternative to both dualism and materialism...

The problem of interpreting transcendental idealism on the basis of such metaphysical model is that it loses sight of its fundamental

epistemological thrust... (2004: 16; emphases in the original)

But the crucial point transcends a possible monistic reading of Kantian idealism. Allison famously argues that:

First, there is an ambiguity in the notion of consideration of something that exist in itself, which helps fuel the familiar misunderstandings and criticisms. On the one hand, it might be thought that to consider something as it is in itself is to take something to exist in itself, that is, as a *substantia noumenon*, equipped with intrinsic properties in the manner suggested by Langton. On the other hand, it might be taken to mean considering it as independently of its epistemic relation to human sensibility and its condition. (2004: 52)

According to Allison, Kant is not committed to the existence of the thing in itself as a *substantia noumenon*, but only to the idea of noumenon, which we cannot avoid. Kant's transcendental divide between appearances and things in themselves should be understood in terms of the opposition between things considered from 'our epistemic conditions' and 'the idea' of things considered 'apart from such conditions'. Thus, according to Allison's deflationary two-aspect view, TI is not a metaphysical position in any possible sense, but rather a methodological and epistemological standpoint.

In contrast, according to my two-perspective plus phenomenalism view, the noumenon in the negative sense is the ultimate nature of reality. In other words, I endorse the reading of TI according to which the thing in itself exists as *substantia noumenon* that affects our sensibility and appears inside our minds as phenomenon. Therefore, a phenomenon is not the object of any representation, but rather the way that the noumenon appears inside our minds as a 'mere representation'. Thus, I am also committed to the monist claim that the noumena in the negative is the same thing (phenomena) as appear inside our minds. Thus, I reject both the deflationary view and the representational model.

Given this, there is no incompatibility between the aim of the Fourth Paralogism and the aim of the Refutation. In the Fourth Paralogism Kant aims to avoid some indirect-realism based external-world skepticism by arguing that his opponent is mistaking 'mere representations' in our mind for noumena (a Paralogism). Again, mere representations are nothing but the way noumena appear and are mind-dependently known by us. Thus, there is no problem of epistemic access. In contrast, the Refutation is meant to prove that the nature of things outside us is transcendental or our noumena in the

negative sense (B307). Again, even existing mind-independently, noumena can be known not as such, but instead mind-dependently insofar as they affect our sensibility and appear to us as mere representations and are causally responsible for the alterations of our mental states in time.

3 The Fourth Paralogism

Traditional scholars of Kant (Vaihinger 1883; Smith 1923) between the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century believe that the Refutation is incompatible with the Fourth Paralogism. Kemp Smith (1923: 301), for example, states that the Refutation “proves the opposite of what is stated in the first edition,” saying that there is a “flagrant contradiction between several of Kant’s refutations of idealism.” Similarly, Vaihinger (1884: 131–2) says it is impossible to find an interpretation able to reconcile the “stark contrast” because the two “relate to each other as yes and no, as affirmation and negation, as A and not-A. They were, are, and remain irreconcilable.” Indeed, this traditional reading is quite appealing because in the Fourth Paralogism, Kant explicitly says that material objects are nothing more than “species of representations” (A370), and “If I remove the thinking subject, the whole corporeal world must vanish” (A383). In contrast, the Refutation of Idealism aims to prove the existence of mind-independent things (B275).

Interestingly, the position that gradually became hegemonic was that of the opposition, which claimed that there is in fact no contradiction between the Refutation and Fourth Paralogism. For example, all appearance notwithstanding, Kant’s TI is not a form of phenomenalism, as is claimed in the two-worlds reading of it by Feder-Garve. Instead, TI is a formal or critical idealism according to which appearances and things-in-themselves are numerically identical: the two-perspectives view. Thus, while in the Fourth Paralogism Kant assumes without proof that we do have immediate access to objects as appearances, in the Refutation Kant moves forward and provides proof that we do have immediate access to objects as appearances. This is the interpretation defended later by important historians such as Paton (1970), Allison (2004), and Ameriks (2006).

For the sake of argument, let us assume the standard two-perspectives view as the Kantian view of his TI in the Fourth Paralogism. In this view, Kant’s solution to the Fourth Paralogism is, so to speak, to ‘restore’ our common-sense belief that by means of our representations, our cognitive apparatus, we can know objective phenomena in space. The natural

conclusion is that Kant's 'sufficient proof' is very much like Moore's (1993) infamous proof of the external world. To avoid the skeptical embarrassment, all the Kantian must do is persuade his opponent, the problematic idealist, to look straight ahead to his own hands.

To begin, this reading of Kant would involve a naïve realism according to which we would have direct access to empirical reality. To be sure, Kant clearly states in the Refutation that we have immediate access to things in space. Nonetheless, according to Kant: "we are acquainted only with their appearances, that is, with the representations that they produce in us because they affect our senses" (*Pröl.*, AA, 4: 289). Moreover, Kant the idealist is a transcendental realist (A369), in light of the two-perspectives view, for this realist knowledge is only possible from God's perspective. The question is, how could Kant possibly think he was refuting the idealist in this way, à la Moore?

From the perspective of the two-world views, Kant is charging the idealist of mistaking the empirical sense for the transcendental one by unconsciously mistaking his own representation of bodies in space for the world outside his consciousness. However, from the perspective of the standard two-perspectives view, Kant's charge that the idealist mistakes the empirical sense for the transcendental one makes no sense. When the skeptic launches his challenge, he is quite aware that he requires proof of knowledge of the outside world from the absolute perspective, *sub specie aeternitatis*. Stroud's (1984) is the best illustration of this kind of epistemological external-world skepticism. He characterizes this skepticism by opposing the ordinary standards for knowledge of everyday life to his own higher standards (1984: 40). Thus, in light of the two-perspectives view, Kant's criticism of problematic idealism in the Fourth Paralogism makes little sense.

I think the same criticism can be extended to Langton's two-properties view and Hanna's two-concepts view: there is only one reality with unknown intrinsic properties and knowable relational properties. If appearances/phenomena are real relational properties rather than mere representations in us, it is hard to understand Kant's charge that the transcendental realist mistakes the empirical for the transcendental sense. Indeed, it is hard to understand how mistaking knowable relational properties for intrinsic properties could give rise to problematic idealism, through which the existence of the mind-independent outside world is seen as problematic or suspicious.

Guyer is the first Kantian scholar to have resumed the old-school view that "Kant's new Refutation of Idealism was meant to break with his reductionism of 1781" (1987: 288). According to Feder-Garve, Kant's TI is quite similar to

Berkeley's phenomenalism: "An idealism that embraces the spirit and matter, and turns the world and ourselves into mere representations" (1989: 193).

Nonetheless, Kant vehemently rejected that reading as a misunderstanding of his own idealism. In the *Critique*, he states quite clearly:

One would do us an injustice if one tried to ascribe to us the long-discredited idealism that, while assuming the proper reality of space, denies the existence of extended beings in it, or at least finds this existence doubtful, and so in this respect admits no satisfactorily provable distinction between dreams and truth. As to the appearances of inner sense in time, empirical idealism finds no difficulty in regarding them as real things; indeed, it even asserts that this inner experience is the sufficient as well as the only proof of the actual existence of its object (in itself, with all this time-determination). (B519)

In the *Prolegomena*, Kant's reaction is even blunter:

The reviewer therefore understood nothing of my work and perhaps also nothing of the spirit and nature of metaphysics itself, unless on the contrary, which I prefer to assume, a reviewer's haste, indignant at the difficulty of plowing his way through so many obstacles, cast an unfavorable shadow over the work lying before him and made it unrecognizable to him in its fundamentals.

PROL., AA, 4: 377

Thus, assuming Kant is right, the intriguing question is what Feder-Garve misunderstood. We find the answer in Kant's well-known letter to Beck:

Messrs. Eberhard and Garve's opinion that Berkeley's idealism is the same as that of the critical philosophy (which I could better call 'the principle of the ideality of space and time') does not deserve the slightest attention. For I speak of ideality in reference to the 'form of representations', but they interpret this to mean ideality with respect to the 'matter', that is, the ideality of the 'object'.

LETTER TO BECK, AA, 11: 395

In light of Allison's (2004: XV) deflationary view, TI is free of metaphysics and is 'metaphilosophical'. We have no metaphysical divide between two worlds,

but rather the same reality considered from different viewpoints. Thus, according to him:

This idealism is “formal” in the sense that it is a theory about the nature and scope of the conditions under which objects can be cognized by the human mind. It is “critical” because it is grounded in a reflection on the conditions and limits of discursive cognition. (2004: 35–6)

I disagree. Even though I also embrace a version of the two-perspectives view (plus phenomenalism), I do not think that ‘formal’ here means the conditions of human knowledge. What Kant is denying here is not phenomenalism, or the claim that we can only know mere representations. Instead, he is denying reductionism and the claim that the existence of mind-independent things can be ontologically reduced to the existence of mere representations. It is in that precise sense that his idealism is ‘formal:’ although we know only mere representations, we assume the existence of representation-independent things as they in themselves produce those representations and are intentional objects.

This is what I call the two-perspectives plus phenomenalist view. To be sure, noumena and phenomena are the same things. Moreover, the reference is direct rather than based on some questionable causal inference. Nevertheless, appearances are not the objects of our sensible representations. Appearances are in fact mere representations: the way noumena appear to us. When we refer to noumena in our outer sense, they appear to us as spatial and permanent material things. In contrast, when we refer to noumena in our inner sense, they appear to us as mental states in time. Yet, I do not know whether they are in themselves spatial material things. I base this view on this clarifying passage from the Reflection R5554:

‘Noumenon’ properly always means the same thing, namely the transcendental object of sensible intuition (This is, however, no real object or given thing, but a concept, in relation to which appearances have unity), for this must still correspond to something, even though we are acquainted with nothing other than its appearance. (AA, 18: 231, R5554; emphasis added)

That is what Kant is saying in the Fourth Paralogism by claiming controversially that matter is nothing more than “a species of representations” (A370), and that “if I remove the thinking subject, the whole corporeal world must vanish” (A383). Spatial material things are the way

noumena appear to our outer sense. That said, if we remove the subject, the corporeal world vanishes, but not the mind-independent world of noumena in the negative sense.

In this sense, Kant's solution to the Fourth Paralogism is easily comprehensible. We do not assume that the existence of matter is reducible to the existence of consciousness (Feder-Garve and Guyer's accusation). Because space is ideal, we do refer to things-in-themselves in space 'as material'. Against material idealism, there is no reason to deny that we have immediate consciousness of them. In Kant's words:

The Transcendental idealist ... 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, not as if they related to objects that are external in themselves. (A370)

The key and last question of this section is whether the Fourth Paralogism can be seen as a 'refutation' or any kind of answer to the Cartesian skeptic of the First Meditation. The answer is obviously no. Kant's opponent in the Fourth Paralogism is the transcendental realist who believes that spatiotemporal material things are things-in-themselves to which we have cognitive access by means of our representations. Kant's answer is that spatiotemporal material things are the way we immediately represent things-in-themselves in space.

Kant believes he can avoid the Cartesian embarrassment as follows. Descartes wrongly assumed that spatiotemporal material objects are things-in-themselves (Kant's exact words in A369). The Cartesian embarrassment is solved by assuming that spatial material things are nothing but the way we immediately become conscious of things-in-themselves through an outer sense. Thus, we do not need to assume any problematic causal inference whatsoever.

4 **The First Kantian Transcendental Argument**

Kant states the theorem to be proved in the following way:

The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me (B275; emphasis in the original).

- (1) I am conscious of my existence as determined in time (B275).
- (2) All time-determination presupposes something persistent in perception (B275).
- (3) 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).
- (4) Thus, the perception of this persistent thing is possible only through a thing outside me and not through the mere representation of a thing outside me. Consequently, the determination of my existence in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself (B275–6).
- (5) 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).

Because these steps are not clearly the premises and conclusion of the argument, unlike the usual procedure, I will not discuss each step without first discerning what should be its logical form.

The first step in disclosing the logical form of the argument is to identify Kant's opponent in the Refutation. There are at least two quite different forms of external-world skepticism. The first is what I want to call the epistemological external-world skepticism of the Cartesian first *Meditation*. For this classical form of skepticism, what is in question is the 'existence' of outside things (and knowledge thereof). It challenges us to prove existence of outside things under the crucial assumption that the Cartesian skeptical scenarios are actual. Assuming that I do not know whether I am dreaming right now, how could I know that my external-world beliefs that I am really writing this paper, that I have hands, and that there is indeed an external world, are true?

The second is what I want to call 'metaphysical external-world skepticism'. Here what is in question is not the 'existence' of outside things, but rather their 'underlying nature'. It challenges us to prove that things outside us are by nature mind-independent under the assumption that we have cognitive access only to what happens inside our own minds. Assuming that I cognize only my mental states, as mere representations, how could I justify the widespread metaphysical assumption that the underlying nature of this computer material is mind-independent? Again, under the assumption that I only cognize my mental representations, why should I not assume that what we call outside things is nothing but a unity of mental representations?

In this section, my aim is to assess the Kantian Refutation as an argument against the epistemological external-world skeptic of the Cartesian first *Meditation*. To start, it is necessary to make two observations. First, because the traditional assumption is that the Refutation is an argument against the epistemological external-world skeptic, the argument must start from epistemic premises to achieve an epistemic conclusion. Caranti formulates this as follows:

In the first step of the argument ('I am conscious of my own existence as determined in time'), Kant defines the kind of self-knowledge that the Cartesian is supposed to accept as absolutely certain. (2007: 123)

Thus, the first premise of the argument cannot be reduced to the statement that I exist in the form of conscious changing mental states over time, but rather that I have 'propositional knowledge' of my existence as determined in time as the conscious change of mental states. This is a tacit assumption in

all readings of the argument as proof against epistemological external-world-skepticism. The idea here is that the epistemological external-world skeptic concedes to the Kantian self-knowledge of his own existence as a conscious alteration of mental states: 'I know that' I have mental states that change over the course of time. From that knowledge, the conclusion must be that permanent things exist outside me in space.

Thus, I suggest the following logical structure for the first part of the argument of the Refutation:

- (1) (X) {[I know that TD (x) \supset I know that [\exists (y) such that PP (y)]}].
Where "TD" is time-determined, "PP" is persistent in perception, and "X" is the variable for mental states.

Now, by applying the instantiation rule to TD (x), we have:

- (2) TD I = I know that my mental states are determined in time.

Then, by applying *modus ponens* to the propositional function: I know TDI \supset that I know \exists (y) such that PP (y), we have:

- (3) Therefore, I know that my mental states are determined time \supset that I know the existence of something persistent in perception.

Let us next formalize the second half of the argument.

- (5) I know that either this is a permanent thing in me or outside me.
(6) I know that this permanent thing cannot be in me.

Therefore, by applying disjunctive syllogism to (5) and (6):

- (7) I know that something permanent exists outside me.
(1) (X) {[I know that TD (x) \supset I know that [\exists (y) such that PP (y)]}].
Where 'TD' is time-determined and 'PP' is persistent in perception.

Now, by applying the instantiation rule to TD (x), we have:

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Then, by applying *modus ponens* to the propositional function: I know TDI \supset that I know \exists (y) such that PP (y), we have:

(3) Therefore, I know that my existence as determined in time presupposes that I know the existence of something persistent in perception.

Let us next formalize the second half of the argument.

(5) I know that either this is a permanent thing in me or outside me.
 (6) I know that this permanent thing cannot be in me.

Therefore, by applying disjunctive syllogism to (5) and (6):

(7) I know that something permanent exists outside me.

This argument is valid and, under the assumption that all its premises are true, it is also sound. However, even without assessing the truth of each premise, the epistemological reading of the argument faces a fatal objection from the external-world skeptical side. According to this reading, the whole argument can be seen as conditionally connecting epistemic premises to an epistemic conclusion under the so-called 'principle of epistemic closure'. For one thing, as an epistemological argument, the assumption is that knowledge is transmitted from premises to a conclusion.

Here, I limit myself to presenting the simplest version of this principle:

(EC) I know that I have mental states that change in time, and I know that if I have mental states that change in time then I know that something persists outside me and, hence, I know that I am not dreaming, I know that there is no evil genius that deceives at will, etc.
 (2) Now, I do know that I have mental states that change in time ∴
 (7) I know that something persists outside me and, hence, that I am not dreaming, that there is no evil genius that deceives at will, etc.

First, I know that my mental states changing in time entails that I know that something persists outside my consciousness (1). Now, I do know that my mental states change in time (the factual premises) (2). Finally, by *modus ponens* to (1) and (2), I conclude that I know that something mind-independent persists outside me (7).

Nevertheless, what is *modus ponens* for the Kantian is *modus tollens* for the epistemological external-world skeptic. Based on the well-known skeptical scenarios, the epistemological external-world skeptic can easily deny the Kantian partial conclusion (7), assuming that:

(4) As I cannot know whether I am dreaming whenever I entertain some external-world belief, I cannot know whether my belief in the existence of outside things is true.

If I cannot know whether I am dreaming whenever I entertain some external-world belief, how could I know that my external-world beliefs are true? If I cannot know whether I am dreaming whenever I believe in the existence of permanent things in space, how can I know that my belief in the existence of permanent things in space is true? By applying *modus tollens* to (1) and (4), the epistemological external-world skeptic can also deny that he knows that he has mental states that change in time (2).

This objection is devastating to any reading of the Refutation as an argument against epistemological external-world skepticism. Here, the proponent of the anti-skeptical reading is grappling with an insoluble dilemma. On one hand, the Kantian has to accept epistemic closure; otherwise the argument cannot progress from evidence, knowledge in the premises to the conclusion. However, in that case, he has to concede *modus tollens* to his opponent, and Kant's Refutation becomes entirely inconclusive. On the other hand, if the Kantian rejects closure, as do many contemporary epistemologists (e.g., Dretske, 1971; Nozick, 1981), it would be impossible for him to reason from (1) to (7).

Yet, the problem goes deeper than this: if he rejects epistemic closure, the Cartesian skeptical challenge can never get off the ground and the anti-skeptical argument becomes ineffective. Without epistemic or justification closure, we have no reason to take Cartesian skepticism seriously.

I can imagine the Kantian epistemologist struggling to block the skeptical *modus tollens* by claiming that his factual premise (2) is of Cartesian provenance and hence doubtless. After all, even a Cartesian skeptic knows that his mental states change in time. Yet, that is far from being clear. What we know for sure is that the Cartesian hyperbolic doubt cannot engulf the cogito and cogito-like contemporaneous thoughts. Yet, the time-determination of mental states is a quite different issue. I leave the question to the Cartesian scholars. My point is that there is no reason to assume that knowledge of one's changing mental states over time is a presupposition of the Cartesian doubts. To assume that I cannot know whether I am dreaming whenever I have external-world beliefs and, hence, that I cannot know whether those beliefs are true, does not entail that I know that my mental states are determined in time.

This brief reflection on premise (2) is a further indication that Kant's target is not the epistemological external-world skeptic of the First

Meditation, but rather the metaphysical external-world skeptic, namely Mendelssohn:

But what then are the properties of things, of which we are able to say with certainty that they are actual realities? None other than our soul's capacities. Our cognitive faculty, for example, cannot possibly be an appearance. For an appearance is nothing other than a concept, the constitution of which must in part be explained by the ineptitude of our knowledge ... Thus, we can rightly ascribe to the Supreme Being all our cognitive capacities, if we abstract from the deficiencies and imperfections that cling to them, and we can revere in him unfathomable reason, wisdom, justice, benevolence, and mercy.

JUBA, I: 310–11

Yet, let us assume for the sake of argument that the skeptic's factual premise (2) is undeniable. Nevertheless, because (4) is an expression of the Cartesian skeptical dream scenario, it is also undeniable for the Cartesian skeptic. Ironically, here the defender of the epistemological reading of the Refutation as an argument against the Cartesian skeptic finds himself grappling with an ancient form of skepticism, namely, 'Pyrrhonian equipollence:' the reasons in favor of the anti-skeptical conclusion have the same weight as the reasons against it.

5 A Second Kantian Transcendental Argument

The celebrated Kantian *dictum* of the Preface of the Critique according to which the scandal of philosophy and universal human reason is not that the *existence* of outside things should have to be assumed merely 'on faith' is clearly addressed to Friedrich Jacobi:

an idealist ... can compel me to concede that my conviction about the existence of real things outside me is only a matter of 'faith'. But then, as a realist I am forced to say that all knowledge derives exclusively from faith, for 'things' must be 'given' to me before I am in a position to enquire about relations. (1994: 256; emphasis in the original)

At a first look, it seems that the Kantian opponent in the Refutation is the epistemological external-world skeptic of the Cartesian first *Meditation*.

However, on a closer inspection to Jacobi's disappointment with Kant's transcendental idealism, we find the following:

What we realists call actual objects or things independent of our representations are for the transcendental idealist only internal beings 'which exhibit nothing at all of a thing that may perhaps be there outside us, or to which the appearance may refer. Rather, these internal beings are merely subjective determinations of the mind, entirely void of anything truly objective' (1994: 334; emphasis in the original)

Jacobi's main complaint against transcendental idealism is that despite Kant's talk of outer experience and an external world, for the transcendental idealist the 'nature' of outer things is not made of mind-independent entities, but merely of mental representations. Thus, Kant's opponent is not the epistemological external-world skeptic of the Cartesian first *Meditation*, but rather what I am calling here the metaphysical external-world skeptic. As we saw, while the first skeptic questions the 'existence' of outside things, the second questions the widespread metaphysical assumption that the 'nature' of outside things is mind-independent.

Against the epistemological external-world skeptic the Kantian faces the problem of assuming that we know that our mental states are determined in time. This problem disappears when we take the Refutation as an argument whose opponent is the metaphysical external-world skeptic. For one, Mendelssohn himself concedes that premise to the Kantian:

Where 'there are' alterations, there must also be a subject on hand that undergoes alteration. I think, therefore *I am*. (JubA 3.2: 43; emphasis added)

Kant restates the problem using exactly the same words:

The problematic idealist concedes that we perceive alterations through our inner sense, but he denies that we can infer from that to the existence of outer objects in space, because the inference from an effect to a *determinate* cause is not valid. 'Alteration of the inner sense or inner experience is thus conceded by the idealist'. (AA, 18: 610, R6311; emphasis added)

Now the crux of the disagreement between and Kant and the metaphysical idealist is the following. Whereas for the idealist this persistence is the very

thinking substance, for Kant this persistent thing is the mind-independent thing-in-itself that causes the alteration of mental states and is represented by those very states. In his own words:

(IV) Thus, the perception of this persistent thing is possible only through a thing outside me and not through the mere representation of a thing outside me. (Bxxxix)

To assume here that the thinking being is not a substance is begging the question. Indeed, Kant recognizes several times that we cannot a priori rule out that the thinking subject itself is the persistent thing:

Accordingly, in a relation of perception to its cause, it always remains doubtful whether the cause is external, whether outer so-called perceptions are not a mere play of our inner sense, or whether they are related to actual external objects as their cause. (A368)

... the existence of thinking beings, which in this system (of Mendelssohn) are conscious of themselves not only as independent of external things but also as being able to determine themselves from themselves (with regard to the persistence belonging necessarily to the character of a substance). (B417–B418)

The problem is how can we show that the mind-independent thing-in-itself is what causes the alteration of mental states and is represented by those very states. In the *New Elucidation* Kant states the following:

Application 1. Firstly, I find that the real existence of bodies, which a more sensible philosophy has hitherto only been able to defend against the idealists by appealing to probability, follows with the greatest clarity from what is asserted in our principle. For the soul is subject (in virtue of the inner sense) to inner changes. Since, as we have proved, these changes cannot arise from its nature considered in isolation and as disconnected from other things, it follows that there must be a number of things present outside the soul with which it stands in a reciprocal connection. It is likewise apparent from the same considerations that the change of perceptions also takes place in conformity with external motion. It follows from this that we could not have a representation, which was a representation of a body and which was capable of being determined in a variety of ways, unless there was a real thing present to hand, and unless its interaction with the soul

induced in it a representation corresponding to that thing. For this reason, it can easily be inferred that the compound, which we call our body, exists.

PND AA 1: 411–412

Kant argues as follows: “A simple substance, which is free from every external connection and which is thus abandoned to itself and left in isolation, is completely immutable in itself” (PND AA 1: 410). Let us assume that the thinking being is a substance. However persistent the putative thinking substance might be, being identical to itself all along, it cannot account for what the idealist concedes, namely, that I know that my mental states change in time. The awareness of change in my mental states in time requires the awareness of something different from my thinking self that causes the changes. Thus, the metaphysical idealist who claims that the underlying nature of reality is mental cannot account for the alterations and for the diversity of his own mental states.

In the Refutation, we find a different argument for the same causal connection between changing mental states and things-in-themselves. The permanent thing required to the time-determination of my changing mental states cannot be a “mere representation in me”:

For all the determining grounds of my existence, that which 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)

The argument here is a classical regress. This permanence cannot be a mere representation in me because as such it is also in time and hence it also requires something permanent for its own time-determination. In this way, a regress is launched. The only way to detain this regress is to assume that what is causing the alternations is something external to my representations, namely, the existence of mind-independent substantia noumenon, the thing in itself, that obviously appears to me as bodily appearance in space. The remaining question is how Kant proves that this thing in itself causing the changes of mental states in time is represented by those states.

What forces the metaphysical idealist to assume that our mental states are mere representations in us was the assumption that we know outside things only as a plausible cause of our mental states. However, based on the regress

argument, Kant has proven that our epistemic access to outside things in space is direct rather than indirect or inferential. Thus, there is no further obstacle to thinking that our sensory states are by their own metaphysical nature representations, that is, sensible intuitions of outside things. Given this, the argument takes the following form:

- A. I know that I exist in time.
- B. I could not know that I am a thinking being in time unless I could perceive alterations in myself as changing mental states.
- C. The awareness of this alteration presupposes something permanent in perception.

Now Kant against the idealist:

- D. This permanent could not be a mere representation in me, because as such it also changes and so a regress is launched.
- E. Therefore, we must assume, first, that the changing mental states are of something permanent and mind-independent, second, that is causally responsible for my perceived change in time.
- F. What underlies my perception of alternations of my mental representations over time is a reality made up of unknown mind-independent things in themselves.
- G. Therefore, the underlying nature of reality is made up of unknown substantia noumena.

Obviously, when Kant in G concludes metaphysically that the underlying nature of reality is made of noumena in the negative sense he is not claiming that we do know them as such in the positive sense. We know them or are aware of them only in so far as they appear to us persistent bodies in space. Nonetheless, we know that their underlying nature is made of things in themselves (noumena in the negative sense) because that is the only available explanation for the alteration of our mental states that avoids or detain any infinite regress.³

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