Peirce on Kant's Refutation of Idealism

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Abstract

This chapter analyzes two short texts where Peirce sketches out an anti-skeptical argument inspired by Kant's Refutation of Idealism. I first consider why Peirce found Kant's argument interesting and promising, given that it is often regarded as problematic and unsuccessful. I will then briefly reconstruct Kant's Refutation, highlighting its most problematic passages. Moreover, since Peirce's own version of the argument relies on Kant's views regarding the temporal structure of consciousness, I will explain how Peirce tackles this issue in "The Law of Mind." Finally, I consider Peirce's own anti-skeptical argument and examine whether and how it can be seen as appropriating Kant's strategy.

Peirce's relationship with Kant is perhaps one of the most controversial issues within Peirce scholarship. While some scholars, including myself, have argued that Peirce remained a "Kantian" throughout his entire career as a philosopher (for "Kantian" readings, see Apel 1981; Hookway 1985; Pihlström 2003; Gava 2014a; Gava and Stern 2016; Chevalier 2016), others have maintained that while the young Peirce was indeed strongly influenced by Kant, he later rejected Kant's approach in favor of a totally different line of inquiry (for "anti-Kantian" readings, see Short 2007; Maddalena 2015; Colapietro 2006; Wilson 2016). Despite this divergence of views, both camps agree that Kant was an important figure for Peirce, either as a continuous source of inspiration or, at least in his later years, a target of radical criticism. Nonetheless, scholars have largely neglected two short texts from around 1890 where Peirce provides an anti-skeptical argument inspired by Kant. The first text is a discussion of Kant's Refutation of Idealism (hereafter Refutation), while the second is a sketch of an argument against external world skepticism that clearly belongs to the same set of considerations.

There are various reasons to explain why these texts have thus far been ignored. First, they are both very short and Peirce does not fully develop his argument in either of them. Second, even though Peirce directly refers to Kant's Refutation in one of the two texts, he does not really engage in an analysis of Kant's argument. Rather, he sketches his own "refutation" that, in his view, presents a

more direct route to achieving Kant's aim. Third, it is not at all clear whether Peirce's strategy could indeed be successful, that is, prove that the skeptic is wrong.

Even though these problems do exist, the texts are nonetheless interesting and worthy of close consideration. For starters, Peirce clearly expresses his appreciation for Kant's Refutation, writing that it "betray[s] an elaborated and vigorous analysis, marred in the exposition by the attempt to state the argument more abstractly and demonstratively than the thought would warrant" (W8:80). For Peirce, if there are problems with Kant's argument, they lie more in the exposition than in the reasoning itself. Kant's Refutation is often described as problematic and unsuccessful; therefore, one should ask what aspect of it Peirce considered to be promising. It is important to keep in mind that the Refutation is directed against what Kant calls "problematic idealism," which is the view that we can be immediately certain of our own existence and of the existence of our mental states, even though we can only infer the existence of outer objects from those states. Given that our inferences about the existence of external objects cannot be proven with certainty, their existence is doubtful (see B276-7; A366-7).³ As early as the 1880s, Peirce famously held that we can directly refer to external objects through indices (see, for example, W5:163). In later writings, he connects this approach to the doctrine of "immediate perception," which maintains that we can directly perceive the existence of outer objects.

Peirce links the doctrine of immediate perception to a form of "dualism," which he attributes to Kant and Reid (EP2:155). Indeed, Kant also uses the term "dualism" to describe a very similar approach. In the Fourth Paralogism in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant contrasts dualism (the view he endorses) with (problematic) idealism (the view he rejects) and writes:

That whose existence can be inferred only as a cause of given perceptions has only a **doubtful** existence:

Now all outer appearances are of this kind: their existence cannot be immediately perceived, but can be inferred only as the cause of given perceptions:

Thus the existence of all objects of outer sense is doubtful. This uncertainty I call the ideality of outer appearances, and the doctrine of this ideality is called **idealism**, in comparison with which the assertion of a possible certainty of objects of outer sense is called **dualism**. (A366-7)

Therefore, according to Kant, dualism is the view that we can be immediately certain of the existence of external objects. Given this characterization, it is possible that Peirce's own use of the term was influenced by Kant. For our purposes, however, what is important to emphasize is that

Peirce clearly valued Kant's Refutation because he considered it an expression of a project he shared with Kant, namely, the attempt to demonstrate that we can directly perceive outer objects.

There might also be another reason why Peirce praised Kant's Refutation. As we will see in Section 1, one important consequence of Kant's argument is that (if successful) it shows that the problematic idealist is wrong about the conditions that must obtain for successfully ordering our conscious states in time. Similarly, when devising his own "refutation," Peirce directly opposes a premise in the skeptic's argument, a premise that concerns how our consciousness is "in time." Peirce might have been sympathetic to Kant's attempt to challenge common but misleading assumptions regarding how time structures our consciousness.

Finally, upon closer scrutiny, it is also inaccurate to say that the two texts under consideration do not display *any* attention to Kant's original argument. In fact, Peirce directly refers to two passages of Kant's Refutation: "Note 1," which is the first clarificatory annotation that Kant adds after the presentation of his argument, and the footnote to that Note, where Kant presents a short argument that can be considered independent from the Refutation (see W 8:80).

At the very least, this is enough to show that Peirce's engagement with Kant's Refutation of Idealism is interesting and worthy of attention. In this chapter, my aim will be to reconstruct Peirce's anti-skeptical argument in the two texts under analysis to see how it relates to Kant's argument in his Refutation. In Section 1, I will provide a reconstruction of Kant's Refutation, singling out its main problems. In Section 2, I will present Peirce's account of the temporal structure of consciousness in "The Law of Mind," since this account forms the background of Peirce's anti-skeptical argument. Finally, in Section 3, I will provide a reconstruction of Peirce's argument, highlighting where it directly re-elaborates points made by Kant.

1. Kant's Refutation of Idealism

In this Section, I will provide a reconstruction of Kant's argument in the Refutation, focusing in particular on its most controversial premises. Additionally, I will analyze the first clarificatory Note that follows the argument and the footnote to it, since these are the two parts of the text to which Peirce explicitly refers.

Kant's argument runs as follows:

(1) "I am conscious of my existence as determined in time."

- (2) "All time-determination presupposes something **persistent** [Beharrliches] in perception."
- (3) "This persistent thing, however, cannot be something in me, since my own existence in time can first be determined only through this persistent thing."
- (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."
- (5) "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)

In the B-Preface, Kant suggests substituting premise (3) with a clearer formulation:

(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." (Bxxxixn)

The argument begins with a premise about our consciousness that the skeptic will supposedly accept; it then attempts to show that what that premise claims is only possible if the very proposition doubted by the skeptic obtains.⁶ There is a lot in the argument that needs unpacking. Let us consider each step in order.

In premise (1), it is not clear what "determined in time" means. This might simply mean that I am conscious of my existence in the present instant, or that I am conscious that there is a succession of mental states in my consciousness. Nonetheless, there is now decisive agreement among scholars that premise (1) actually asserts something more substantial: namely, it concerns our capacity to objectively order our mental states in time. This means that it asserts that we are able to order our mental states in a unique time that we share with other subjects. One can here object that we can easily think of radical skeptics who would not accept this version of premise (1). For example, think of a memory skeptic who considers it possible that our recollections (and ordering) of past states are all fallacious (on this problem see Chignell 2010: 492). However, this worry is unjustified, given that Kant explicitly says that his argument addresses a particular kind of skepticism (or idealism), which is based on the premise that there is a fundamental asymmetry between our consciousness of our mental states and our consciousness of external objects (see Bader 2017: 209).

Premise (2) rests on Kant's argument in the First Analogy. The A-version submits: "All appearances contain that which persists (substance) as the object itself, and that which can change as its mere determination, i.e., a way in which the object exists" (A182). The B-version asserts: "In all change of appearances substance persists, and its quantum is neither increased nor diminished in nature" (B224). The aim of the First Analogy is to show that the category of substance is a necessary condition for determining objective relationships in time. It is first of all the "tool" we use to determine what is "persistent" in time. In turn, the ability to determine what is "absolutely" persistent in time is also necessary for determining objective relationships of succession and simultaneity. Kant's line of reasoning seems to be the following: relating objects and their states to time as the form of intuition is necessary for determining whether those objects and states are successive or simultaneous. Time, understood as such a form, "persists" and, furthermore, it is "within" it that change is possible. However, "time cannot be perceived by itself" (B225). This means that we cannot directly represent time as an object, as that "something" within which change happens. However, if we want to determine relations of succession and simultaneity that are "objective," that is, that are determined in relation to a unique time that we share with other subjects, we need a way to be sure that we are correctly tracking that unique time. This is the role played by "substance," as that "something" that persists through all change and that, as such, allows us to indirectly represent time: "Persistence gives general expression to time as the constant correlate of all existence of appearances, all change and all accompaniment. For change does not affect time itself, but only the appearances in time" (A183/B226).

Premise (3) and its alternative (3') introduce the fundamental step in the argument. They establish that the persistent thing that is essential for determining objective time relationships among our mental states must be something external to consciousness. These premises are also the most controversial. It is not clear why the persistent thing that represents time must be something "outside" of the subject. Couldn't the conscious subject itself play the role of the persistent thing in reference to which we can determine objective time relationships (for this objection see, for example, Walker 1978: 114)? Couldn't the conscious subject be considered that "something" that "persists" through its changing mental states? Of course, Kant thinks that we cannot regard our selves as "substances" that persist,⁸ but why should the external-world skeptic that Kant is refuting buy into his theory of the self at this point?

In order to avoid this problem, there have been attempts to make premises (3) and (3') work without appealing to Kant's own theory of the self. In this respect, one strategy is to deviate from the letter of Kant's argument in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and appeal to some reflections where the

emphasis is not on the need to refer to an outer persistent object, but rather on the need to refer to causal relationships between outer objects (see, for example, *Refl* 6313, 18:614). The idea is that, in order to determine "objectively" the temporal order of my mental states, I need to be able to relate those states to objects or states that exist in space and stay in a causal relationship (proponents of this reading are, for example Guyer 1987: Ch. 13 and Dicker 2008; for a criticism of this approach, see Chignell 2010). Therefore, according to this strategy, the point of premises (3) and (3') is better achieved when one focuses not (or at least not only) on a persistent thing that needs to be external, but rather on causal relationships between things or states that must be external.

One of the downsides of the latter strategy is that it partially departs from the argument published in the B-edition of the Critique. However, there are scholars who defend premises (3) and (3') while maintaining the focus on the published text. For example, Dina Emundts has argued that the First Analogy already shows that the "persistent thing" that we need for determining objective temporal relations must be spatial (Emundts 2010: 172-6). This is the case because the "absolute persistent" must be something that lasts through its changes. As such, this something must have "one magnitude that stays the same while it changes with respect to all its other determinations. This is only possible with respect to something that has not only an extension in time but also in space" (Emundts 2010: 176). By contrast, Ralf Bader has insisted on the fact that the persistence of the object we use for objective temporal determinations is something that needs to be proved. We need this proof for our application of the category of substance to be legitimate. But it is only for outer objects that this proof is possible: "The difference between the inner and the outer on which the Refutation relies is that one can prove permanence¹⁰ for outer objects (for matter) and hence subsume them under the schematized category of substance, but that one cannot likewise prove permanence for inner objects (for the mind). This difference is due to the fact that any decrease in the intensive magnitude (reality) of outer objects goes together with a compensating adjustment elsewhere in space, such that if the intensive magnitude of some objects is diminished, then that of others is increased in a way that conserves the overall quantity of matter" (Bader 2017: 217). This relationship between the intensive and extensive magnitudes of matter allows us to grasp how substance "persists" while its states change. Obviously, we cannot establish a similar relationship between intensive and extensive magnitudes for the self and its states. I will here remain neutral on the issue whether and how premises (3) and (3') can be made to work. What I hope is clear is that if we want to render them plausible, they need substantial interpretative work.

Steps (4) and (5) present the conclusions of the argument. Step (5) concludes that, given that we need to relate to an existing persistent in space in order to determine objective temporal

relationships among our mental states, that determination is only possible if outer objects exist and I can perceive them. But since premise (1) assumed that we are able to determine objective temporal relationships in our consciousness, it follows that (some) outer objects must exist. As for step (4), it is not clear how it should directly follow from premise (3). However, it does follow from step (3'), since this version of the premise explicitly excludes that the persistent element used for time determination could be a representation. Of course, this does not mean that what Kant says in premise (3') about excluding representations as candidates for the role of the persistent thing is convincing. In fact, it seems that the aim of the footnote to Note 1 is to provide an independent argument for ruling out that we could only have representations of outer things. Let us move to our discussion of the Note and the footnote.

Note 1 clarifies how Kant understood the argument of the Refutation. Accordingly, he begins by claiming that "in the preceding proof the game that idealism plays has with greater justice been turned against it" (B276). Therefore, Kant took his argument to display an internal inconsistency in the position of the (problematic) idealist, such that one of the assumptions she makes implies that she cannot in fact doubt the existence of outer object, on pain of contradiction. The result of this "turning" of the idealist viewpoint against itself is that while the idealist took inner experience to be immediate and the outer to be inferred, it is in fact outer experience that is immediate, while inner experience "is consequently only mediate and possible only through outer experience" (B777). It is easy to see why Peirce was sympathetic to these claims.

It is in the footnote to Note 1 that Kant introduces some new considerations. First of all, it emphasizes that the fact that we have an "**immediate** consciousness of the existence of outer things is not presupposed but proved in the preceding theorem" (B276n). Furthermore, it explicitly argues against the view that all our representations of outer objects could be solely the product of our imagination. Kant contends that in order for us to imagine outer objects, we must presuppose that we have an outer sense, that is, a way of immediately perceiving outer objects through our sensibility: "But it is clear that in order for us even to imagine something as external, i.e., to exhibit it to sense in intuition, we must already have an outer sense, and by this means immediately distinguish the mere receptivity of an outer intuition from the spontaneity that characterizes every imagining" (B276-7n). Kant's point seems to be that when we assert that all our representations of outer objects could be only the product of our imagination, we in fact render inconceivable what "imagining" outer objects could mean. We can only make sense of what this "imagining" could be if we hold fast to the distinction between what "imagining" outer objects and "perceiving" outer objects is. But to make this distinction, we must assume that at least some of our representations of

outer objects are actual perceptions. This seems to be the idea behind Kant's remarks. ¹¹ It is unlikely that the argument in the footnote can work against the problematic idealist. For our purposes, it is interesting because Peirce re-elaborates this idea in his own attempt at a refutation of external world skepticism.

2. The Temporal Structure of Consciousness in "The Law of Mind"

Before we move to our analysis of Peirce's own "refutation," it is useful to briefly present his account of the temporal structure of consciousness. Providing an account of time was very important for Peirce. As is well-known, the idea of continuity was central to his philosophy and he regarded time as "the continuum *par excellence*" (CP6.86; RLT:216, 1898). However, a comprehensive reconstruction of Peirce's views on time is still missing (some useful explorations are: Helm 1983; De Tienne 2015; Colapietro 2017; Schmidt 2020). This is unsurprising given that his views are both very complex and scattered across different texts. In this Section, my reconstruction will be limited in two ways: I will only focus on Peirce's views regarding the temporal structure of consciousness and the consciousness of time, avoiding any consideration of how these relate to his account of the nature of time as such. Additionally, since his views evolved considerably, I will only take into consideration his position around the time he composed the two texts inspired by Kant's Refutation. In particular, I will focus on his position in "The Law of Mind," which was written only a couple of years after those texts.

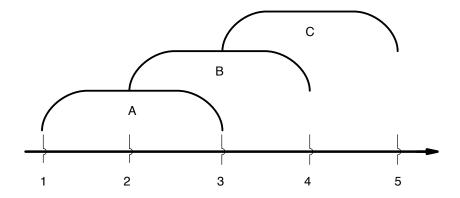
But what does it mean to focus on the "temporal structure of consciousness" and the "consciousness of time"? These problems are closely related in the current debate over the consciousness of time. Roughly, when one speaks of the "temporal structure of consciousness," one is considering how our consciousness is temporally determined. Are episodes in our consciousness "instants" with no temporal extension, or do they occupy a span of time? If we answer positively to the first horn of this question, it becomes particularly apparent how the question of "the consciousness of time" can develop into a problem. If our consciousness were indeed constituted by instantaneous episodes, how could we be aware of temporally extended events and objects? Peirce's contribution to answering these questions is both interesting and elaborate. Moreover, it anticipates an approach that is still widely debated today (for an overview of the debate see Dainton 2018). Peirce defends an "extensionalist" position. He maintains that the "episodes" that form our consciousness are temporally extended. This makes it easier to understand how we could be aware of a temporal succession.

To clarify Peirce's view, let us begin by introducing a terminological distinction. He uses the term "instant" to mean "a point of time" and the term "moment" to mean "an infinitesimal duration" (W8:138). As a point of time, an instant has no temporal extension. Because time is fundamentally continuous, an instant should be understood as a "fiction" or an "ens rationis" (R295:102-3, quoted in Schmidt 2020: 6). We can refer to it through a process of abstraction that begins with continuous time. However, it is not the case that our consciousness can really be "instantaneous." By contrast, saying that a moment has infinitesimal duration means that it is itself continuous. According to the theory of infinitesimals, infinitesimals are the ultimate "parts" of a continuum. They are quantities that are greater than zero but smaller than any assignable quantity. For our purposes, it is sufficient to keep in mind that "moments," as parts of a continuum that are themselves continuous, have a temporal extension.

But how does Peirce describe the "episodes" that form the parts of our consciousness? Clearly, they are "moments" with a temporal extension within which, by means of a process of abstraction, one can identify different "instants." Let us see how Peirce describes the structure of these moments and how they relate with one another:

In an infinitesimal interval we directly perceive the temporal sequence of its beginning, middle, and end,— not, of course, in the way of recognition, for recognition is only of the past, but in the way of immediate feeling. Now upon this interval follows another, whose beginning is the middle of the former, and whose middle is the end of the former. Here, we have an immediate perception of the temporal sequence of its beginning, middle, and end, or say of the second, third, and fourth instants. (W8:138).

First, the passage makes clear that an "episode" of consciousness has a temporal extension with a complex structure, with its beginning, its middle point, and its end. These can be taken as three "instants" identifiable through a process of abstraction that starts from the "moment" encompassing them in an immediate episode of consciousness. Second, the passage illustrates how episodes of consciousness are not simply successive, but partially overlap with one another, so that the middle point and the end of the first episode are respectively the beginning and the middle point of the following episode and so on. ¹² We can represent Peirce's model of the temporal structure of consciousness with the help of the following figure.



The arrow represents consciousness, as time passes. The numbers 1, 2, 3, etc. identify instants that we can abstract as "points" within that time. The letters A, B, C, etc. represent "moments" of consciousness that are temporally extended. The "episodes" of our consciousness are formed by such moments through which we are immediately conscious of a span of time. In the figure, instants 1, 2, and 3 constitute the beginning, middle and end of moment A, whereas instants 2, 3, and 4 are the beginning middle and end of moment B. In this way, instant 2 is both the middle of A and the beginning of B and instant 3 is both the end of A and the middle of B (and the beginning of C).

Peirce argues that the "overlap" model explains how we can have a "mediate perception" of the temporal sequence within multiple moments. In his picture, we have an "immediate perception of the temporal sequence" (W8:138) contained in each moment, for example in A and B. "From these two immediate perceptions, we gain a mediate, or inferential, perception of the relation of all four instants. This mediate perception is objectively, or as to the object represented, spread over the four instants; but subjectively, or as itself the subject of duration, it is completely embraced in the second moment" (W8:138). We can be aware of past mental episodes because we can capture mediately the chain of these moments.

At this point, it is interesting to ask how we should characterize the "present" in this picture. Extensionalist models describe the present as "specious." In general, "specious present" views maintain that we are directly aware of a temporal sequence in our "present" state of consciousness. Defending a particular version of this view, extensionalists maintain that we are able to have this awareness because the present state of consciousness is itself temporally extended (see Dainton 2018: Sect. 5.1). How does Peirce describe the present? I think Peirce has two ways of describing it. First of all, since a "moment" of our consciousness must be present at some point, he clearly believes that the present is "specious" and encompasses a temporal lapse. As a "specious" present, the present will have something in common with the immediate past and the immediate future. Taking moment B in our figure as the "present moment," it will have something in common with

the moment that just passed (that is, instant 2), and with the moment that is about to come (that is, instant 4). But the present could also be an "instant" that we abstract from the "specious" present. As such, it would be the "instant" in which past and present intersect. Again, taking B as the present "moment," instant 3 would constitute the "point" of this intersection. As we will see, the nature of the "present" will play a central role in Peirce's own "refutation of idealism."

3. Peirce's Refutation of Idealism

As we saw above, Peirce considers Kant's Refutation "an elaborated and vigorous analysis," even though the argument is stated "more abstractly and demonstratively than the thought would warrant" (W8:80). In his "[Note on Kant's Refutation of Idealism]" he therefore sketches an argument that not only avoids the problems of exposition that he identifies in Kant's Refutation, but also tries to achieve a similar conclusion by taking a different path. Peirce's idea is to attack the conception of the temporal structure of consciousness presupposed by the problematic idealist. According to him, this line of argument provides a more straightforward way to refute the idealist. Let us see how this strategy proceeds.

Peirce accepts Kant's claim in Note 1 (B276) that the Refutation "beats idealism at its own game" (W8:80). This suggests that his argument also starts with an assumption made by the idealist and shows how this assumption implies that the proposition questioned by the idealist must obtain. In Kant's argument, the idealist's assumption is that we are able to objectively order our mental states in time. The task of the Refutation is to show that in order for that ordering to be possible, we must be able to perceive existing objects in space. But it does not seem that Peirce's argument proceeds in a similar way. Rather than showing that one assumption of the idealist implies the doubted proposition, Peirce's strategy is to reveal that there are problems with her fundamental assumption, namely, that we can only immediately know what is absolutely "present" to our consciousness (see W8:78, 80).

Let us first see how Peirce characterizes the idealist's argument such that the existence of outer objects is uncertain. Peirce writes: "The idealist says that all that we know immediately, that is, otherwise than inferentially, is what is *present* in the mind; and things out of the mind are not so present" (W8:80). Therefore, in Peirce's reconstruction, the problematic idealist assumes that we can only be certain of what is "present" to the mind. Since, however, we are not aware of the existence of outer objects in this way, and we rather infer their existence from what is "present," the belief that outer objects exist is problematic.

But what does Peirce mean when he speaks of the "present"? Does he mean the present "moment" of consciousness, which is an actual state of consciousness that is temporally extended, or the present "instant," which is only an abstraction and a "point" of consciousness with no temporal extension? Given that Peirce's first move against the idealist is to argue that her starting point renders us incapable of capturing the flow of time in our ideas, he clearly intends "present" to mean the present "instant."¹⁷

Here is Peirce's first "move" against the idealist:

the first move toward beating idealism at its own game is to remark that we apprehend our own ideas only as flowing in time, and since neither the future nor the past, however near they may be, is *present*, there is as much difficulty in conceiving our perception of what passes within us as in conceiving external perception. (W8:80)

How should we read this first move? In our characterization of problematic idealism at the beginning of the chapter, we have seen that it rests on the assumption of a disparity between our consciousness of our own mental states and our awareness of outer objects. It is only the existence of outer objects that is inferred. Peirce and Kant agree on this general characterization. In Section 1, we added that, in Kant's view, the idealist assumes that we are able to objectively order our mental states in time. Peirce does not speak of a capacity to temporally *order* our mental states.

Nonetheless, at least provisionally, Peirce's idealist accepts that our mental states follow one another in time. In Peirce's words, she accepts that "we apprehend our own ideas only as flowing in time." However, Peirce argues, when we assume that we are only conscious of what is "instantly" present, there is no guarantee that our belief in a temporal succession of ideas is correct. The existence of our prior mental states, as well as our future ones, would be as uncertain to us as is the existence of outer objects. Therefore, Peirce's first move shows that by following the idealist's assumptions, it is not only the existence of outer objects that should be questioned, but also some facts about the temporality of consciousness that the idealist, at least initially, is not so prone to doubt.

Peirce anticipates what could be the idealist's reaction to this objection: "If so, replies the idealist, instead of giving up idealism we must go still further to nihilism" (W8:80). The idealist could thus respond by endorsing a stronger version of skepticism which doubts not only the existence of outer objects, but also the existence of a flow of ideas in time. How can we reject this form of skepticism? It is here that Peirce appeals to Kant's footnote to Note 1 in the Refutation. As we saw in Section 1,

in that context Kant argues that our representations of outer objects cannot all be products of our imagination because, if that were the case, we would in fact be unable to tell what "imagining" outer objects could mean. We can only make sense of what this "imagining" is if we hold fast to the distinction between what "imagining" outer objects and "perceiving" outer objects is. But this means that we must accept that at least some outer objects are "actually" perceived. Peirce takes inspiration from this line of reasoning and devises a version of it that applies to the idealist's doubt regarding the succession of ideas in time: "it is impossible we should so much as think we think in time unless we do think in time; or rather, dismissing blind impossibility, the mere imagination of time is a clear perception of the past" (W8:80). Peirce clearly tries to appropriate Kant's argument here, namely, that in order to make sense of the idea that we imagine outer objects, we must assume that we also perceive outer objects. Similarly, Peirce suggests, in order to make sense of the idea that we can think or imagine that we think in time, we must assume that we do think in time.

Does Peirce's countermove work? He does not provide any support for his claim. Moreover, if we consider the argument from which he draws inspiration, it does not seem very strong. Of course, in order to make sense of what "imagining to perceive" is, we must be able to distinguish between "imagining" and "perceiving." However, this does not mean that what we regard as actual perception needs to be such. Rather, our idea that we can distinguish between "imagining" and "perceiving" can itself be an illusory product of the imagination. To put the thought differently: in order to explain our capacity to form the idea of what "imagining to perceive" is, it is necessary that we *take* some of our mental states as actual perceptions. But it does not seem to be necessary that they actually *are* such perceptions.

We can try to read Peirce's countermove differently: rather than focus on the relationship between perceiving and imagining to perceive *in general*, we might instead focus *specifically* on the characteristic way that we represent time. The idea could be that merely thinking or imagining that we think in time is impossible, since this thinking and imagining already presupposes a representation of time, where this representation must be temporally structured, thus implying the reality of time. However, the idea that a representation of time is itself temporally structured presupposes an extensionalist model of the consciousness of time and it is not clear, at this point in the argument, why the skeptic would have to accept that.

Perhaps, this countermove is not so essential to Peirce's strategy. This becomes clear when we consider the conclusion of Peirce's "Note."

Hamilton stupidly objects to Reid's phrase "immediate memory"; but an immediate, intuitive, consciousness of time clearly exists wherever time exists. But once grant immediate knowledge in time, and what becomes of the idealist theory that we immediately know only the *present?* For the present can contain no time. (W8:80)

Any skeptical argument builds on the intuitive appeal of its starting point. This is also the case for the "idealist" targeted by Peirce. That we can only know immediately (and be certain of) what is "absolutely present" to our consciousness seems *prima facie* sound and in agreement with the phenomenology of our conscious states. However, if a consequence of this assumption is that we cannot know immediately (and be certain) that our consciousness is in time, the soundness of that assumption starts to waver. This occurs because the assumption that we are forced to give up – the immediate knowledge that our ideas flow in time – is at least as intuitively appealing as the assumption on which the idealist's argument builds, namely, that we only know immediately what is absolutely present. Indeed, Peirce's point is that it is even easier to give up the very assumption on which the whole idealist's argument rests.

Clearly, Peirce's argument presupposes that when the idealist claims that we know immediately only what is "present" to the mind, she endorses an "instantaneous" view of consciousness according to which an episode of consciousness is not temporally extended. At this point, one might wonder why the idealist should be depicted in this way. Why cannot she be an extensionalist? In her view, "present to the mind" could simply mean "immediately available to it," but this does not necessarily have to be related to a particular way of understanding the temporal structure of consciousness. After all, extensionalists also maintain that a span of time is immediately available to consciousness. Therefore, why couldn't she be open to an extensionalist model of consciousness?

I think there is a way of defending Peirce's assumption here. Obviously, the idealist cannot be ready to assume immediate knowledge of whatever one might want to describe as "immediately available" to us. Given that "immediate perception" accounts of outer experience claim that we directly perceive outer objects, she would have to be open to the idea that these objects could be "immediately available" to us, too; but, of course, this cannot be the case. Therefore, the idealist cannot remain neutral regarding what is "immediately available." In general, her strategy is to accept as actual knowledge only what is as secure as possible from a skeptical point of view. In this spirit, if we take her perspective, it seems reasonable to think that she would more easily assume that we have immediate knowledge of what is "instantly" present to consciousness than that we have immediate knowledge of a conscious time span.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to make sense of Peirce's appreciation of Kant's Refutation of Idealism. I suggested that his positive evaluation of it was due to the fact that Peirce read the Refutation as an argument supporting the immediate perception of outer objects. I also reconstructed the antiskeptical argument that Peirce develops with inspiration from Kant's approach. In fact, the line of reasoning followed by Peirce is different from Kant's strategy in important respects. Kant attempted to show that an assumption made by the skeptic – that we can objectively order our mental states in time – implies the very proposition that she doubts – namely, that outer objects exist and that we can perceive them. Even though Peirce claims that his "refutation" similarly tries to "beat the idealist at her own game," his strategy contains important differences. He first shows that the assumption on which the idealist's argument rests – namely, that we can only immediately know (and be certain of) what is absolutely present to our consciousness – implies that we must give up another assumption we commonly make – namely, that we can immediately know (and be certain) that our consciousness is in time. In a second step, Peirce submits that the assumption that we can immediately know that our consciousness is in time is more fundamental than the assumption that we can only immediately know what is absolutely present to our consciousness. If this is the case, the idealist's argument fails because its most fundamental premise fails. Peirce's argument is more "modest" than Kant's in at least one respect: he does not aim to show that the proposition doubted by the skeptic must be accepted given her very premise. Rather, his strategy is to show that the starting point of the argument is not that obvious, after all. This strategy might sound disappointing to many, but it might have a greater chance of being successful.¹⁸

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¹ "[Note on Kant's Refutation of Idealism]" (W8:80). I will use the following abbreviations to cite Peirce's writings: CP for Peirce 1931-52, followed by volume and paragraph number; EP for Peirce 1992-1998, followed by volume and page number; RLT for Peirce 1992; W for Peirce 1982-, followed by volume and page number; R for Peirce's unpublished manuscripts in Houghton Library at Harvard University, followed by manuscript number (according to Robin, 1967).

² "Notes on the Question of the Existence of an External World" (W8:78-9).

³ I refer to Kant 1781 and Kant 1787 with A and B respectively. Translations are from Kant 1998.

⁴ In other contexts, as for example the discussion of Cartesian substance dualism (W8:18), Peirce describes himself as an anti-dualist, but he clearly uses another understanding of dualism.

⁵ For an analysis of Peirce's renewed appreciation of Kant when he began to argue that we need indices to directly refer to objects see Gava 2014a: Ch. 4; Gava 2014b.

⁶ The structure of the argument has provided a model for much debate concerning the form of transcendental arguments (see Stern 2020, Pereboom 2019; Gava 2017; Gava 2021).

⁷ Even when we assume this stronger version of premise (1), there is space for disagreement. For example, some scholars have argued that the premise only concerns the capacity to order *past* mental states, given that it would be absurd to maintain that we cannot immediately distinguish between a present and a past mental state (see Bennett 1966: 205; Dicker 2008: 85-6). Moreover, while the majority of scholars claims that the premise asserts that we do actually determine the order of our mental states in time (or that we know how our states are objectively ordered), Bader reads it in a somewhat milder way, suggesting that it only asserts that objectively determining the order of our mental states is possible (Bader 2017: 210).

⁸ There is a complication here, since the question whether the self is a substance can be asked both at the empirical and the transcendental level.

⁹ I refer to Kant 1900– by indicating volume and page numbers. *Refl* refers to Kant's "*Rlexionen*."

¹⁰ Note that Bader translates "beharrlich" with "permanent" and "Beharrlichkeit" with "permanence". I have followed Guyer and Wood's translation by using "persistent" and "persistence".

¹¹ Ralf Bader (2017: 206n5) suggests that the argument in the footnote can be identified with a point Kant makes in the context of the A-paralogism, where he claims that we cannot only imagine outer objects because imagination is dependent on outer sense to receive materials it can work with (A373-5). I take the argument in the footnote to be different.

¹² This has striking similarities with the "overlap model" among extensional accounts of temporal consciousness and the consciousness of time. In a similar way, this model regards episodes of consciousness as temporally extended and overlapping with one another (see Dainton 2000: Ch. 7; Dainton 2018: Sect. 5.4).

¹³ Since the "mediate" perception of the complete sequence of the four instants is "subjectively" located in the second moment, Peirce seems to incorporate elements of a "retentionalist" account, too, where we attain consciousness of a sequence that spans through different moments thanks to the help of memory. The picture is complicated by the fact that since A and B are both infinitesimal durations, they can be taken together as forming a single infinitesimal duration which we immediately perceive (see W8:138). This might sound paradoxical, but it is due to the fact that these infinitesimal durations are parts of a continuum considered "in the small."

¹⁴ William James also defended a "specious" present view in his *Principles of Psychology* (see James 1890: Ch. 15).

¹⁵ An alternative specious present view is retentionalism (see Dainton 2018: Sect. 6.2). Hereafter, when I refer to the "specious" present, I mean the extentionalist specious present.

¹⁶ Helm (1983:184) and Schmidt (2020:11n10) provide two opposite interpretations of the "present," but I think they are in fact compatible when we distinguish these two different ways of referring to it.

¹⁷ In "Notes on the Question of the Existence of an External World," Peirce explains that what is immediately present is "what we have in mind at the moment" (W8:78). Given that this "moment" is not extended in time, it cannot be the "moment" according to the technical definition given in "The Law of Mind."

¹⁸ I am grateful to Marcello Garibbo and Cornelis De Waal for some very useful comments on a previous version of this paper.