

THE REFUTATION OF MENDELSSOHNIAN IDEALISM

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1. Introduction

The Refutation of Idealism (B275–279) is an addendum to the second edition of the First *Critique*, interpolated into the chapter on the Postulates of Empirical Thinking in General. Interestingly, on initial inspection, it contains a clearly stated argument, at least in its general lines (which is unusual in Kant’s philosophy, especially when we compare the Refutation with the Transcendental Deduction). However, on closer inspection, the lack of clarity of the steps and the dense and confused philosophical atmosphere surrounding it mean that the correct way of interpreting and evaluating Kant’s Refutation is still a matter of great controversy.

To start with, as Guyer remarks: “Kant’s intention with his Refutation has been no more self-evident to his readers than it was to himself” (1987:280). The major problem here is to figure out who is or who are Kant’s opponents in his Refutation. As we shall see, Kant announces at least five different targets, but he certainly has even more. Second, it is far from clear whether the steps of the actual proof in the Refutation should be taken as premises of his argument and hence it is far from clear what the logical form of the argument as a whole is. Moreover, the bold asserted steps raise serious problems of interpretation. For example, the main contrast between “things outside me” and “mere representations” could be read in quite different ways, raising the question of whether the Refutation is compatible or not with Kantian idealism, whether it depends or not on the doctrine of transcendental idealism, and whether, as I will argue, it is a defense of such idealism, at least when we assume the reading of Kantian idealism that noumena and phenomena are numerically identical things¹ and that what the Refutation aims to do is prove the existence of noumena in the negative sense.² This raises the question of how we should interpret Kantian idealism.³ Now, the same contrast between

¹ Interestingly, this is also Heidegger’s claim: “The being ‘in appearance’ is that which is being as well as the being-in-itself, indeed just this. It alone can be the subject of being, though only for a finite knowledge. It reveals itself according to the manner and extent of acceptance and determination, which possess a finite knowledge” (1965:36, my translation). “Das Seiende ‘in der Erscheinung’ ist dasselbe Seiende wie das Seiende an sich, ja gerade nur dieses. Es allein kann ja als Seiendes, obzwar nur für eine endliche Erkenntnis, Gegenstand werden. Es offenbart sich dabei gemäß der Weise und Weite des Hinnehmen- und Bestimmenkönnens, über die eine endliche Erkenntnis verfügt”.

² As I will show later, the textual evidence in this regard is overwhelming.

³ See my own reading of Kantian idealism: “non-dual-epistemic-phenomenalism”, Pereira 2017. It is “non-dual” because from a strictly metaphysical viewpoint my reading rules out metaphysical mind-world dualism (one-world view). However, I prefer to call it non-dual rather than two-aspect because it does not reduce the transcendental divide between noumena and phenomena to the mere opposition between two ways of considering the same reality. Noumena limit our cognitive claims (*Grenzbegriff*), but also signify the underlying nature of reality. Even assuming that noumena and phenomena are numerically identical entities, I reject the associated claim that phenomena are the intentional object of sensible intuition and of human cognition in general. The intentional object of our sensible intuition is what Kant calls a transcendental object in the first edition and a noumenon in the negative sense. Thus, according to the reading that I am proposing, the phenomena are nothing but the way that noumena in the negative sense (or the transcendental object) appear to our human sensibility or

“things outside me” and “mere representations” also raises the question of whether the Refutation entails Kant’s rejection of his Fourth Paralogism or is compatible with it. Finally, nothing in the version published in 1987 clearly shows how the key step in the argument works: how the awareness of something persistent is required to make the awareness of the temporal determination of one’s mental states possible.

What makes things even worse for the interpreter is the fact that Kant himself was never satisfied with the version published in the second edition of 1787. His dissatisfaction with the published version already shows up in the footnote added to the preface of the second edition of the First *Critique* in 1787, where he significantly changed the formulation of one of the steps. As a matter of fact, Kant continued to rework his Refutation for at least six years after 1787. His *Nachlass* contains ten long fragments from 1788 to 1793.⁴

The aim of this paper is to present a new reconstruction of Kant’s Refutation. Even while recognizing that Kant had quite different targets in his Refutation, I shall argue that the Refutation can only be considered as a sound argument against Mendelssohnian problematic anti-realist idealism and Mendelssohnian *realist idealism*.⁵ First, Kant’s Refutation is a sound argument in favor of the claim that outer things in themselves are real; that is, they exist mind-independently as noumena in the negative sense (they are the object of our sensible intuition when we abstract from our sensible condition) (B307); in other words, they exist in themselves, affect our senses, and at the same time appear to us as persistent phenomena, when we do not abstract from our sensible condition.⁶ By the same token, it is also a sound argument against Mendelssohn’s immaterialist view of the mind as a substance that exists and persists per se without any causal interaction. Second, Kant’s Refutation of Idealism is a sound argument for a fundamental ontology of noumena in the negative sense. In this regard, I wish to claim that Kant’s Refutation can also be seen as an indirect defense of his transcendental idealism.⁷

The line of defense of my reading is based on two factors. Even while recognizing that we cannot rule out any possible reading on the basis of textual evidence alone, I will support my interpretation by first arguing that it is the one that *best* fits the overall textual evidence available. My second line of defense is of a systematic rather than historical nature. Based on the principle of charitable interpretation, I argue that my reading is the one that makes the argument of the Refutation as sound as possible.

This paper is structured as follows. The second section is devoted to exploring in a general way the various positions that Kant targets in his Refutation, namely *skepticism, idealism, Spinozism, materialism, and predeterminism*. As I shall argue in that second section, both skepticism and idealism admit quite different readings. The third and fourth sections are devoted to arguing in favor of the following conditional: if Kant’s Refutation argument was meant to refute either the Cartesian global skepticism of the first *Meditation* or the indirect-

exist inside our human sensibility as *mere representations*. Therefore, I also call it “phenomenalism” because we can only cognize things mind-dependently insofar as they appear to us *as mere representations inside our minds*. However, those things are nothing but mind-independently existing noumena. Finally, I also call it “epistemic phenomenalist” because I reject both Berkeleyan ontological phenomenism (according to which reality is a logical construction of mind-dependent representations) and non-reductionist two-worlds-plus-phenomenalist views.

⁴See Guyer 1987:287-288.

⁵Realist idealism may sound like an oxymoron, but this is only because we tend to associate idealism with Berkeleyan idealism according to which *esse est percipi*. However, Leibniz’s panpsychism is a sort of realist idealism for which the ultimate reality is mental.

⁶See A256/B311-12.

⁷See Pereira 2017.

realist based external-world skepticism of the Cartesian third *Meditation* or of Hume's *Treatise*, then it is doomed to fail. I am fully convinced that the Cartesian global skepticism of the first *Meditation* was never a concern for Kant. But I believe that Kant might have confused Mendelssohnian problematic subjectivist idealism with the Cartesian indirect-realist based skepticism that Descartes briefly adumbrates in his third *Meditation* when he makes use of the label "skeptical idealist".⁸

Even though Mendelssohn was never a skeptic, or a Spinozist, let alone a materialist (on the contrary), the third section aims to show that Mendelssohn is the philosopher with the best credentials to be Kant's opponent in his Refutation. For one thing, Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden* embodies all varieties of idealism that Kant rejects, namely problematic anti-realist idealism, anti-materialist idealism, and immaterialist idealism regarding the mind. And for another, the textual evidence that Mendelssohn is Kant's opponent is overwhelming.

2. The Various Targets

The initial question is certainly by far the most disconcerting one: what does Kant mean by such a proof of the existence of things outside us? What are his aims in his Refutation of Idealism? Who is or are the Refutation's opponents? After the publication of the second edition of the First *Critique* in 1787, in a Reflection of 1790/1791 Kant made this disconcerting statement:

But it is a particular kind of intuition in us that cannot represent that which is in us, hence existing in temporal change, because then, as mere representation, it could be thought only in temporal relations; thus, such an intuition must consist of a real relation to an object outside us and space really signifies something which, represented in this form of intuition, is possible only in a relation to a real thing outside of us. – *Thus, the refutation of skepticism, idealism, Spinozism, likewise of materialism, predeterminism.* (AA, 18:627-628, emphasis added)

The claim that the awareness of the existence of something persistent outside us is a condition for the awareness of time-determination of our own mental states is something that had attracted Kant's attention since his pre-Critical writings.⁹ Thus, it should not come as a surprise that Kant sees this claim as the refutation of such different metaphysical doctrines as *skepticism, idealism, Spinozism, materialism, and predeterminism*. Let me examine these possible opponents of Kant one by one.

3. Against Skepticism

Almost all Kantian uses of the word "skepticism" refer to classical Pyrrhonism.¹⁰ Yet, because Descartes is mentioned, several Kantian scholars have assumed that the argument of the Refutation targets either some unspecified Cartesian global skepticism, or specifically the Cartesian global skeptic of the first *Meditation*,¹¹ or even some external-world skepticism, which Descartes briefly adumbrates in his third *Meditation* and was reprised by Hume. Caranti

⁸See A377-378. Yet, regardless of whether Kant mixed one doctrine with another, I adopt Robert Hanna's suggestion (in conversation), and therefore I correspondingly prefer to read Kant's "skeptical idealist" as a *metaphysical external-world skeptic*: that is, someone who doubts whether the ultimate nature of things outside us is mind-independent (or merely ideal or mental).

⁹See 1: 411–412. I will quote this passage later.

¹⁰See for example: Axxii, Bxxxvi, B23, B128, B168, A388, A388-9, A434/B451, B452, etc.

¹¹The list is endless. I limit myself to mentioning just a few contemporary scholars: Allison (2004), Caranti (2007), and Almeida (2013).

(2007) is one of those scholars who seems to be firmly convinced that the Refutation specifically targets the global skepticism of the Cartesian first *Meditation*:

In fact, the Fourth Paralogism provides an anti-skeptical strategy that is clearly unsatisfactory. It does, however, offer the thesis of the immediacy of outer perception and the crucial intuition that the *Evil Genius hypothesis* amounts precisely to an illegitimate inquiry into the nature of the thing in itself. I will try to show that these two theses in combination bring us to a compelling refutation of skepticism. (2007: 5, emphasis added)

Allison (2004) also seems to hold the same belief when he considers a possible Cartesian reply to Kant's claim that the awareness of one's existence entails the awareness of time-determination of one's mental states:

The point can be expressed in more Cartesian terms. Suppose that I have just been created, together with the full complement of "memories" and beliefs about my past existence, by the *Cartesian Demon or some contemporary analogue thereof*. In that case, all my judgments about my past would be manifestly false. (2004:290, emphasis added)

Even Guyer, who proposes an alternative anti-phenomenalist reading of the Refutation, has endorsed this traditional view:

That it is possible to be wrong about the existence of the objects of particular representations, 'as in dreams and delusions', without undermining the broad claim that 'inner experience in general is only possible through outer experience in general' was of course one of the anti-Cartesian conclusions of 1787 (B278-279) and seemed attractive indeed: the reasoned ground for setting aside Descartes's worry that the possibility of error with respect to any member of a class of judgments must undermine the authority of the class as a whole would be a powerful antidote to skepticism. (1987:318-319)

To be sure, we cannot rule out the hypothesis that the Refutation targets either some unspecified Cartesian global skepticism or the global skepticism of the Cartesian first *Meditation* specifically, purely based on textual evidence. Yet, when measured against the skeptical hypotheses of the Cartesian first *Meditation*, Kant's argument in the Refutation is doomed to fail, as I shall argue here. Indeed, this is the most likely reason why only a few Kantian scholars still believe that the Refutation of Idealism is a successful argument.¹² To my

¹² The only noteworthy exceptions are Westphal (2003) and Almeida (2013). Westphal expresses his opinion as follows: "Kant's 'Refutation of Empirical Idealism' has an anti-Cartesian conclusion: 'inner experience in general is only possible through outer experience in general' (B278-279). Due to widespread preoccupation with Cartesian skepticism, and to the antinaturalism of early analytic philosophy (reflected in its basic division between 'conceptual' and 'empirical' issues), most of Kant's recent Anglophone commentators have sought a purely conceptual, 'analytic' argument in Kant's Refutation of Idealism – and then criticized Kant when no such plausible argument can be reconstructed from his text. They 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 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) Almeida: "If everything is as simple as I attempted to represent, then Kant would have succeeded in a chess game against the defenders of idealism. This interpretation, however, has a sobering effect. For in philosophy, there are seldom, if any, chess pieces. It may well be that no chess piece has succeeded him; but perhaps also one that looks different from the one I portrayed" (2012:152, my translation). "Wenn alles so einfach ist, wie ich es darzustellen versuchte, dann wäre Kant ein Schachmattzug gegen die Verteidiger des Idealismus gelungen. Diese Überlegung wirkt aber ernüchternd. Denn in der Philosophie gibt es selten, wenn überhaupt, Schachmattzüge. Es kann wohl

knowledge, though, nobody has clearly seen the main reason why the putative refutation of the Cartesian global skepticism of the first *Meditation* is doomed to fail. This is one of my aims in this paper.

Moreover, we cannot rule out the hypothesis that the Refutation targets either some unspecified Cartesian global skepticism or the Cartesian external-world skepticism that emerges from Cartesian indirect realism, which Descartes briefly sketches in his third *Meditation*.¹³ This is the reading of the Refutation of Idealism that Dicker seems to endorse:

The nominal target of Kant's Refutation of Idealism is not Hume *but rather Descartes, who is the main source of the view that our knowledge of the existence of physical objects must be based on a causal argument from our own subjective conscious states*. Kant fastens on Descartes' influential claim that the only empirical statements that are immune to all skeptical doubt are those describing one's own states of consciousness, such as, paradigmatically, the statement "I am thinking." Kant calls this view "problematic idealism," and he describes it as "the theory which declares the existence of objects in space outside us to be . . . doubtful and indemonstrable" (B274). (2004:194, emphasis added)

Even though there is no textual evidence available, a third hypothesis that cannot be overlooked is that Kant's Refutation also targeted Hume's own external-world skepticism in the *Treatise*, which is based on indirect realism. Assuming that Kant's Refutation of Idealism is the paradigm of what Strawson has called a "transcendental argument", Bardon (2004) suggests such a reading when he remarks that Hume also endorsed the epistemological doctrine of indirect realism:

So even the empiricist Hume, who thought that all ideas come from sensation, did not feel he could conclude from this that external causes resembling the images given in sensation exist; he recognized that the senses could be stimulated by other causes, and thus that any inference regarding external objects on the basis of sense-impressions would be uncertain. This is the reason why Kant feels he must show — as he tries to do both in the first edition Fourth Paralogism and the second edition Refutation of Idealism — that the experience of external objects is 'immediate' rather than inferential. (2004:68)

4. Against Spinozism

In the celebrated footnote to the second edition of the *Critique*, Kant famously declares:

No matter how innocent idealism may be held to be as regards the essential ends of metaphysics (though in fact, it is not so innocent), it always remains a scandal of philosophy and universal human reason that the existence of things outside us (*das Dasein der Dinge außer uns*) (from which we after all get the whole matter for our cognitions, even for our inner sense) should have to be assumed merely *on faith* (*bloss auf Glauben annehmen zu müssen*), and that if it occurs to anyone to doubt it, we should be unable to answer him with a satisfactory proof. (Bxxxix n., emphasis in the original)

"Faith" in this celebrated passage is meant as an indirect reference to Jacobi, a German *commonsense realist* inspired by Spinoza, Hume, and Reid. Kant accused Jacobi of irrationality because Jacobi considered Spinozism to be the perfect rational system yet demanded its

sein, dass ihm kein Schachmattzug geglückt ist; vielleicht aber auch einer, der anders aussieht als der von mir dargestellte.

¹³ I will return to this Cartesian text later.

rejection through a *salto mortale*.¹⁴ According to Kant, Jacobi claimed that the dogmatic metaphysics that inevitably results in Spinozism should be replaced by religious “faith” rather than the critique advocated by Kant.

In what concerns the proof of the external world, Kant’s accusation is unfair. According to Humboldt’s defense of Jacobi:

There is a great and important distinction between perception and sensation, between the beholding of external alterations and the feeling of internal ones, and this is a distinction that Kant denies, because, according to him, everything is only a modification of the soul itself, only sensation. We do not perceive, as usually assumed, merely the picture of external things; we perceive these very things (though, to be sure, modified according to the relation of our position to the thing that we perceive and to the rest of things in the world). This perception occurs, as Reid quite correctly says [in English], by a *sort of revelation*; hence we do not demonstrate that there are things outside us but believe it. This faith is not an assumption based on probability. It is a greater and more unshakeable certainty than any demonstration could ever afford. *We intuit the things outside us; these things are actual things, and the certainty which intuition affords us we call faith. This certainty is for us so strong, and so necessary, that every other certainty, indeed, our very self-consciousness, hangs on it.* We cannot be certain of ourselves before being certain of something outside us. Here is where Kant has gone wrong: he reduces all things to man himself; explains all things as modifications of the soul, accepts external things only in word while denying the reality itself. (1916:58-60, emphasis added)

“Faith” (*Glaube*) is the best German word that Jacobi found to translate the English word “belief”. For Jacobi, “faith” means immediate knowledge through perception in opposition to “second-order” knowledge through reason or proof. Perception occurs via some “sort of revelation” in the sense of disclosure.¹⁵ However, if Kant misunderstood Jacobi, the opposite also seems to be true. Jacobi mistakes Kantian transcendental idealism for a Berkeleyan vulgar idealism by assuming, according to Humboldt’s testimony, that according to Kant, everything is merely a modification of the soul itself, merely sensation. In Jacobi’s own words:

But these are assertions which cannot in any way be reconciled with Kantian philosophy, since the whole intention of the latter is to prove that the objects (as well as their relations) are merely subjective beings, mere determinations of our own self, with absolutely no existence outside us. For even if it can be *conceded*, under Kant's view, that a transcendental somewhat *might* correspond to these merely subjective beings, which are only determinations *of our own being*, as their *cause*, where this cause is, and what kind of connection it has with its effect, remains hidden in the deepest obscurity. (1994:336)

Now, if the Refutation succeeds in proving that we know the existence of transcendental objects or noumena in the negative sense, then we do not need to postulate the existence of outer things on the basis of mere faith.

¹⁴ See 8:131.

¹⁵At least in this sense, Jacobi’s view does not embrace any kind of irrationalism. On the contrary, he can be seen as the precursor of those contemporary direct or naïve realists who claim that there is no need for inference to prove the existence of the outside world because the outside world reveals itself to our senses. Versions of this view were popular amongst the early 20th-century Oxford Realists such as Russell (1912), but the recent work of Campbell (2002), Travis (2004), Johnston (2004, 2006), Brewer (2006), Fish (2009), and Martin (2002, 2004) have brought the proposal back into discussion. Martin (2002, 2004) calls his position “naïve realism”, while Brewer (2006) calls his own version the “object view”.

5. Against Materialism

Materialism is either a metaphysical doctrine driven by the question about the ultimate nature of reality or a physicist doctrine driven by the traditional body-mind problem. As a metaphysical doctrine in the broadest sense, Kant sees both materialism as well as immaterial idealism as the result of the transcendental realist's assumption that space and everything represented in it are things in themselves rather than mere appearances or mere representations in us:

The transcendental realist, therefore, represents outer appearances (if their reality is conceded) as things in themselves, which would exist independently of us and our sensibility and thus would also be outside us according to pure concepts of the understanding. (A369)

Kant opposes the transcendental idealism of this transcendental realist:

But in our system, on the contrary, these external things - namely, matter in all its forms and alterations - are nothing but mere representations, i.e., representations in us, of whose reality we are immediately conscious. (A371-372)

The transcendental object that grounds both outer appearances and inner intuition is neither matter nor a thinking being in itself, but an unknown ground of those appearances that supply us with our empirical concepts of the former as well as the latter. (A379-380)

Now, there is abundant textual evidence that the Refutation argues that the underlying nature of reality is not made up of material things, but rather of mind-independent things in themselves. Consider all those fragments after 1787 in which Kant left no doubt that his aim in the Refutation was to prove that the underlying nature of reality is noumenal:

But if we take the world as a phenomenon, *it proves just to the existence of something that is not appearance.* (18:305, R5356, italics added).

We remain in the world of the senses [~~crossed out~~: however], and would be led by nothing except the principles of the [~~crossed out~~: law] understanding that we use in experience, but we make our possible progression into *an object in itself*, by regarding the possibility of experience as something real in the objects of experience. (18:278, R5639, italics in the original)

We must determine something in space in order to determine our own existence in time. That thing outside of us is also represented prior to this determination *as a noumenon.* (18:416, R5984, italics in the original)

Now since in inner sense everything is successive, hence nothing can be taken backwards, the grounds for the possibility of the latter must lie in the relation of representations to something outside us, and indeed to something that is not itself in turn mere inner representation, i.e., form of appearance, hence which is something in itself. The possibility of this cannot be explained. – Further, the representation of that which persists must pertain to that which contains the grounds for time-determination, but not with regard to succession, for in that there is no persistence; consequently, that which is persistent must lie only in that which is simultaneous, *or in the intelligible*, which contains the grounds for appearances. (18:612, R6312, italics added).

Still, by far the most significant textual evidence is founded in the First *Critique*:

As to the appearances of inner sense in time, it finds no difficulty in them as real things, indeed, it even asserts that this inner experience and it alone gives sufficient proof of the real existence of their object (*in itself*) along with all this time-determination. (B519, emphasis mine)

The moral of the story is: if Kant's Refutation of idealism aims to prove that the underlying nature of reality is noumenal, that is, made up of transcendental objects or noumena in the negative sense, it is also a refutation of materialism according to which the underlying nature of reality is material.

Yet, there are also passages that suggest that the transcendental object/negative noumenon is just a conceptual placeholder (something = X) for something essentially unknown in itself. Consider this:

The pure concept of this transcendental object (which in all our cognitions is really always one and the same = X) is that which in all our empirical concepts in general can provide relation to an object, i.e., objective reality. Now this concept cannot contain any determinate intuition at all and therefore concerns nothing but that unity which must be encountered in a manifold of cognition insofar as it stands in relation to an object. (A109)

All our representations are in fact related to some object through the understanding, since appearances are nothing but representations, the understanding thus relates to a something, as the object of sensible intuition: but this something is to that extent only the transcendental object. This signifies, however a something = X, of which we know nothing at all nor can know anything in general (in accordance with the current constitution of our understanding), *but is rather something that can serve only as a correlate of the unity of apperception for the unity of the manifold in sensible intuition, by means of which the understanding unifies that in the concept of an object.* (A250, emphasis added)

There are several different readings of both passages. First, we may understand the key quoted phrase ("something that can only serve as a correlate of the unity of apperception") as a *metaphysical surrogate* of the forever lost transcendental object. The traditional reading is so old that it traces back to the Feder-Garve Göttingen review. The idea is simple: the transcendental object is just a conceptual placeholder (something = x) *for some unachievable supersensible reality*. To be sure, insofar as this reading opens up space for the traditional Two-worlds reading of Kantian transcendental idealism, it is incompatible with my claim that in the Refutation Kant opposes materialism as proof that the ultimate nature of reality is noumenal rather than material. Now, if this is what Kant meant, why did he feel outraged by the Feder-Garve Review? After all, according to this traditional reading of Kantian idealism, Kant is embracing a slightly more sophisticated form of Berkeley-like metaphysical idealism. Having replaced the forever lost transcendental object with the unity of representations according to categories, Kant should be happy with his new metaphysical idealism.

According to a second metaphysically deflationary reading, as a conceptual placeholder (something = x), the function of the Kantian transcendental object is only to demarcate the bounds of cognition. Kantian idealism is not metaphysically loaded. It is not committed either to the two-world view or to any additional metaphysical claim about the nature of the transcendental object. Again, if this deflationary reading of the transcendental object as a mere placeholder is correct, my claim that in the Refutation Kant opposes materialism as proof that the ultimate nature of reality is noumenal rather than material is pointless.

To be sure, as simple *Grenzbegriff*, the Kantian notion of transcendental object plays a crucial role throughout the Transcendental Dialectic. That is certainly why he claims at A109 that as such this concept contains no determinate intuition. Still, there is a question lurking behind such a deflationary reading: if this is all that Kant meant, why had he insisted so long on a Refutation of Idealism? Assuming that for Kant appearances are mere "representations in

me”, why does he insist in the preface of the second edition that the existence of things outside me

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? (Bxxxix, boldfacing in the original, italics added)

Thus, as a simple conceptual placeholder (something = X) whose function is only to demarcate the bounds of cognition, the Kantian concept of transcendental object does not fit well with his Refutation at all. On the contrary, the Refutation requires the assumption that the physical world is the way that the noumenal world appears to us:

If the (physical) world were an epitome [*ein Inbegriff*] of *the things in themselves*, so would it be impossible to prove the existence of a thing outside the world; [...] But if we take the (physical) world *as appearance*, it proves just to the existence of something that is *not appearance*. (Refl 5356, 18:305; trans. amended)

However, there is an alternative reading of the quoted passage, namely my own *Non-dual Epistemic Phenomenalist Reading of Kant’s Idealism*.¹⁶ The transcendental object is not only a placeholder that limits our cognitive claims (*Grenzbegriff*), but also signifies the underlying nature of reality. To be sure, we positively know almost nothing of the things as they are in themselves *except that they must exist and causally affect our sensibility*. Nevertheless, if we know almost nothing of things as they are in themselves, we know the same things insofar as they affect our sensibility appear to us as “mere representations” that are unified according to the concept of object. That is what Kant states here:

We remain in the world of the senses [~~crossed out~~: however], and would be led by nothing except the principles of the [~~crossed out~~: law] understanding that we use in experience, but we make our possible progression into *an object in itself*, by regarding the possibility of experience as something real in the objects of experience. (Refl 5642, 18:280–281, italics in the original)

“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. (Refl 5554, 18:230, italics added)

The idea is that the unity of representations according to concepts is nothing but the mind-dependent way that we know the mind-independent noumenal world. Following this reading, any possible contradiction between Kantian idealism and his Refutation of Idealism evaporate. Even though almost all we know from the transcendental object is the fact that it exists, regarding the challenge represented by idealism it is important to prove such existence.

6 Against *harmonia praestabilita*

The argument of the Refutation is repeated in a Reflection from 1790-1791:

Leibniz’s *harmonia praestabilita* necessarily brings idealism with it: since according to it each of two subjects exists in its play of alterations without the influence of the other, each of them is entirely unnecessary for the determination of the existence and condition of the other.

¹⁶ Available online at URL = <https://www.cckp.space/single-post/2017/04/06/A-Non-Dual-Epistemic-Phenomenalist-Reading-of-Kants-Idealism>.

– But also the possibility of inner alterations cannot be comprehended without something outer, which contains its ground. (18:619, R6315, boldfacing in the original text)

This argument echoes Kant's in his *New Elucidation*, which defended dualism against Leibniz's idealism:

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. (1:411–412)¹⁷

If the Refutation is supposed to prove that the awareness of time-determinations of mental states is due to the causal affection of the transcendental object in our sense organs, which is represented in turn as a persistent thing in space, the argument is also a refutation of Leibniz's *harmonia praestabilita*, since this excludes any causal interaction between monads.

7. Against Phenomenalism

The same characterization of the goal of the Refutation in B274 reappears in Kant's later Reflection from 1790:

Idealism is divided into **problematic** (that of **Cartesius**) and **dogmatic** (that of **Berkeley**). The latter denies the existence of all things outside of the one who makes the assertion, while the former, by contrast, merely says that one cannot prove that. We will here restrict ourselves solely to problematic idealism. (18:610, R6311, boldfacing in the original text)

Both in B274 as well as in 18:610, R631, Kant made clear that his target is problematic idealism rather than Berkeleyan idealism. However, because the Refutation of Idealism is an *addendum* to the second edition, written after the Garve-Feder or Göttingen review, it is reasonable to assume that with his refutation Kant wanted, *if not to refute Berkeley's idealism, then at least to differentiate his own transcendental from Berkeley's*. Consider this:

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, 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*, 11:395)

¹⁷ The similarity between this argument against idealism in the broad sense and the argument of the Refutation should not come as a surprise: in both cases, it is claimed that the perception of alterations of the mind entails the existence of something mind-independent.

In this regard, Guyer seems to be right when he says that refuting Berkeley was also one of Kant's concerns in his Refutation.¹⁸

8. Against Realist Idealism

In the Kant-literature about the Refutation of Idealism, it has been overlooked that "idealism" is an umbrella term that ranges over related but distinct metaphysical doctrines. The first is driven by the metaphysical issue regarding the underlying nature of reality. In this broad sense, idealism must be understood as the assumption that the underlying nature of the universe is mental. Idealism/immaterialism opposes materialism (and is called "spiritualism" by Kant B420), but not realism. Indeed, it is a sort of realist idealism. Consider this:

The proof by Leibniz, who takes the world *intellectualiter*, of the representative power of the monads, isn't bad, except it proves more than it says: it leads to an idealism (17:685, R4716).

Kant-scholarship has overlooked that the Feder-Garve review not only accused Kant's idealism of being similar to Berkeleian idealism (*esse est percipi*). The main accusation was not that the reality of outer things are mere representations, but rather that Kantian idealism

[i]s a system that encompasses spirit and matter in the same way, and transforms the world and ourselves into representations, that has all objects arising from appearances as a result of the understanding connecting the appearances into *one* sequence of experience, and of reason necessarily, though vainly, trying to expand and unify them into *one* whole and complete world system. (Feder and Garve 1989:193)

According to the review, Kantian transcendental idealism encompasses spirit and matter in the same way; that is, it assumes that the underlying nature of reality (both spirit and matter) is mental. Kant vehemently rejected this realist reading of his own idealism as a misunderstanding:

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 their object (in itself, with all this time-determination). (B519)

If the awareness of my existence in time is conceptually bound up with the existence of non-mental noumena that appear to me as persistent bodies in space, realist idealism must be false.

9. Against Physicalism

Moreover, idealism is also a metaphysical doctrine about the nature of the mind that opposes physicalism, driven by the traditional metaphysical mind/body problem. Consider this:

Why do we have need a doctrine of the soul grounded merely on pure rational principles? Without doubt, chiefly with the intent of securing our thinking Self from the danger of materialism. But this is achieved by the rational concept of our thinking Self that we have given. For according to it, so little fear remains that if one took matter away then all thinking and even the existence of thinking beings would be abolished, that it rather shows clearly that *if I were to take away the thinking subject, the whole corporeal world would have to disappear, as this*

¹⁸ See Guyer 1987.

is nothing but the appearance in the sensibility of our subject and one mode of its representations. (A383, emphasis added)

According to Kantian transcendental idealism, material things are just the ways that things in themselves appear to our outer sense. If we take away the thinking subject, the whole corporeal way would have to disappear, but certainly not the noumenal world. The idea is that if the argument of the Refutation of Idealism succeeds, that is, if the awareness of one's existence in time presupposes the awareness of the existence of ontologically distinct (mind-independent) noumena, physicalism must be false.¹⁹

10. Against Material Idealism

Yet, idealism also means the metaphysical doctrine driven by the epistemological doctrine that we have at best an indirect, inference-based cognitive access to things outside our own minds. In this sense, idealism is opposed to realism. Kant is quite explicit about this anti-realist sense of idealism in the *Critique* and in his latter *Reflections*:

Idealism (I mean material idealism) is the theory that declares the existence of objects in space outside us to be either merely doubtful and indemonstrable, or else false and impossible; the former is the problematic idealism of Descartes, who declares only one empirical assertion (*assertio*), namely I am, to be indubitable; the latter is the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley, who declares space, together with all the things to which it is attached as an inseparable condition, to be something that is impossible in itself, and who therefore also declares things in space to be merely imaginary. Dogmatic idealism is unavoidable if one regards space as a property that is to pertain to the things in themselves; for then it, along with everything for which it serves as a condition, is a non-entity. The ground for this idealism, however, has been undercut by us in the Transcendental Aesthetic. Problematic idealism, which does not assert anything about this, but rather professes only our incapacity for proving an existence outside us from our own by means of immediate experience, is rational and appropriate for a thorough philosophical manner of thought, allowing, namely, no decisive judgment until a sufficient proof has been found. The proof that is demanded must therefore establish that we have experience and not merely imagination of outer things, which cannot be accomplished unless one can prove that even our inner experience, undoubted by Descartes, is possible only under the presupposition of outer experience. (B274-275)

Material idealism. It is based on this, that we are **immediately conscious of our own existence**, but are conscious of **outer things only through an inference** from the immediate consciousness of mere representations of things outside us to their existence, which inference, however, is not self-evident in its conclusion, as is proven by the well-known property of our imagination, which is a faculty for intuitively representing objects even without their presence. (18:306, R5653, boldfacing in the original text)

Kant's use of the expression "outer things" in the quoted passage raises the question about the scope of his realism. "Outer things" can be taken as if Kant was *only* after proof of mind-dependent substance phenomena. Still, "outer things" can also be taken as mind-independent noumena (which of course appear to us as persistent things in space). I am convinced that the first reading is ruled out by the *addendum* in the preface of the second edition:

¹⁹ However, Kant distinguishes his dualism from the Cartesian one: "Now if one asks whether dualism alone holds in the doctrine of the soul, the answer is: of course, but only in the empirical sense, i.e., in the connection of experience, matter as substance in appearance is really given to outer sense, as the thinking I is given to inner sense, likewise as substance in appearance; and in the connection of our outer as well as our inner perceptions, appearances on both sides must be connected among themselves into one experience according to the rules that the category of stance brings in" (A379).

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, boldfacing in the original, italics added)

The very same line of reasoning is reiterated in a later Reflection:

Now since in inner sense everything is successive, hence nothing can be taken backwards, the ground of the possibility of the latter must lie in the relation of *representations* to something outside us, and *indeed to something that is not itself in turn mere inner representation, i.e., form of appearance, hence which is something in itself.* (Refl 6312, 18:612, italics added)

Now, material idealism is clearly an anti-realist or subjectivist form of idealism. In the Fourth Paralogism of the first edition, Kant famously claimed that the epistemological indirect realist is rooted in some deeper metaphysical doctrine, namely transcendental realism:

Thus, the transcendental idealist is an empirical realist, and grants to matter, as appearance, a reality which need not be inferred, but is immediately perceived. In contrast, transcendental realism necessarily falls into embarrassment, and finds itself required to give way to empirical idealism, because it regards the objects of outer sense as something different from senses themselves and regards mere appearances as self-sufficient beings that are found external to us; for here, even with our best consciousness of our representation of these things, it is obviously far from certain if the representation exists, then the object corresponding to it would also exist; but in our system, on the contrary, these external things - namely, matter in all its forms and alterations - are nothing but mere representations, i.e., representations in us, of whose reality we are immediately conscious. (A371-372)

The material idealist is the metaphysician who first thinks of space and everything in it that appears to us bodily as things in themselves. And assuming the premise that we have only direct cognitive access to what happens in our own mind, he hastily concludes that bodies are doubtful. However, as is well known, Kant distinguishes Berkeleian dogmatic material idealism from Cartesian problematic material idealism: the first denies what the second sees as problematic, namely the assumption that outer things in space are real rather than ideal, that is, mere representations in us, since we cannot rule out the possibility that they are caused by our own thinking being. The open question is who this problematic idealist of Cartesian provenance is.

To begin with, there are several reasons to be suspicious about the assumption that the Refutation targets the Cartesian skeptical scenarios of the first *Meditation*. First, Kant probably never read Descartes firsthand. His acquaintance with Descartes's work was secondhand, mainly from handbooks in the Leibnizian-Wolffian tradition. Second, Kant was never very concerned about giving an accurate account of any other philosophers. Third, there is no single piece of textual evidence that Kant ever addressed the Evil-Demon hypothesis, by far the most important skeptical scenario of the Cartesian first *Meditation*. He probably overlooked its role as a skeptical hypothesis or never took it seriously. Finally, all of Kant's possible allusions to the Dream hypothesis of the first *Meditation* are at best oblique. I say *at best* because Kantian allusions to dreams are certainly direct references to the Mendelssohnian *Morgenstunden*. Moreover, as I will argue below, either Kant never cared about the Cartesian skeptical hypothesis or he never took it seriously.

Still, if Kant's problematic idealist is probably not the Cartesian global skeptic of the first *Meditation*, it seems quite plausible that he is the skeptic that Descartes briefly conceives

in his third *Meditation*, and also Hume’s own external-world skeptic in the *Treatise*. For one thing, they are based on the same epistemological doctrine that I am calling indirect realism. And for another, they all assume that the reality of outer things represented in our minds is somehow “problematic.”

Indeed, at least in the Fourth Paralogism of the first edition, Kant uses the awkward label “skeptical idealist” to characterize his Cartesian opponent, clearly suggesting that there is no distinction between the problematic idealist and the external-world skeptic:

The dogmatic idealist would be one who denies the existence of matter, the skeptical idealist one who doubts it because he holds it to be unprovable ... The *skeptical idealist*, however, who impugns merely the grounds of our assertion of the existence of matter and declares insufficient our persuasion of it. (A377, emphasis added)

Also, consider this:

That whose existence can be inferred 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**. (A367, boldfacing in the original text)

This passage requires two comments. First, in opposition to the passage quoted above in the footnote (A379), Kant uses “dualism” not only to oppose idealism as a doctrine driven by the traditional body/mind problem. “Dualism” here opposes the idealism driven by the epistemological doctrine of indirect realism. In this sense, “dualism” is another name for Kant’s own idealism in the Fourth Paralogism:

The transcendental idealist, on the contrary, can be an empirical realist, hence, as he is called, a **dualist**, i.e., he can concede the existence of matter without going beyond mere self-consciousness and assuming something more than the certainty of representations in me, hence the *cogito, ergo sum*. (A370)

As regards this, it is noteworthy that in a later reflection Kant considers his Refutation of Idealism as proof of dualism:

The proof of dualism is grounded on the fact that the determination of our existence in time by means of the representation of space would contradict itself if one did not regard the latter as the consciousness of an entirely different relation than that of representations in us to the subject, namely as the perception of the relation of our subject to other things, and space as the mere form of this intuition. For if the [~~crossed out~~: representation] perception of space were grounded merely on our self without an object outside us, then it would at least be possible to become conscious of these representations as containing merely a relation to the subject. But since in the latter way only the intuition of time ever comes about, the object that we represent as spatial must rest on the representation of something other than our own subject. (18:310, R5653, italics in the original)

Second, and most important, the problematic idealist assumes that we cannot immediately cognize outer things through perception and infers from that, that the *reality* of outer things is uncertain. Regarding this, to claim that the reality of outer things is *problematic*

is the same as assuming that outer things might be *ideal, mental, or subjective*. Thus, regardless of what Kant had in mind with “skeptical idealist”, we have strong reasons to distinguish anti-realism or subjective idealism as a metaphysical doctrine about the underlying nature of things outside our minds from the external-world skepticism either of Cartesian or Humean provenance, even if both are driven by the same epistemological doctrine of indirect realism. What is in question is not whether we can *know* the existence of outer things, but rather whether they are *real or subjective*. What distinguishes problematic from dogmatic anti-realist idealism is that while the dogmatist assumes that outer things *are subjective* (mere representations in us) the problematic cautiously suspends his judgment about the existence of outer things. Following Hanna’s suggestion (made in conversation), we could perhaps say that anti-realist problematic material idealism is a kind of *metaphysical* external-world skepticism: Kant’s concern is not about our *knowledge or belief* regarding the existence of outer things, but rather about the commonsensical assumption that the underlying nature of outer things is real rather than ideal/subjective.

Now, if Kant embraced all those goals in his Refutation (an open question that can never be settled by means of exegetical analysis or textual evidence alone), the only remaining question is which of them the Refutation has achieved, if it has successfully proven anything.

11. Kant against the Cartesian Global Skepticism of the first *Meditation*

The easiest way of regimenting the Cartesian Dream scenario of the first *Meditation* is as follows:

- (1) If I cannot rule out the hypothesis that I might be dreaming as false (D), then I cannot know that most of my beliefs are true (K). ($D \supset K$)
- (2) I cannot rule out the dream hypothesis as false. (D)
- (3) Therefore, I cannot know whether most of my ordinary beliefs are true. [*modus ponens*, from (1) and (2)].

Any skeptical argument in the Cartesian first *Meditation* relies heavily on the principle that knowledge is closed under known entailments:

CP (Closure): If S knows that p, and comes to believe that q by a correct inference of q from its prior belief p, then S knows q.

But for the sake of simplicity let us assume this formulation:

CP (Closure): If S knows that p, and knows that (p entails q), then S knows q.

The question is how Kant’s argument in the Refutation is supposed to refute this global skepticism. Let us first look at what Kant states. The conclusion of the proof takes the form of a theorem:

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

Kant states the following steps in support of his theorem:

I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. (B275)

All time-determination presupposes something persistent in perception. (B275)

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, boldfacing in the original)

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, boldfacing in the original)

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)

Now, before proceeding, we must face the same question again about the meaning of Kant's expression "objects in space". One could reasonably complain that the noumenon could not be in space; after all, what is in space is appearance rather than noumenon. Consider this:

But since the expression outside us carries with it an unavoidable ambiguity, since it sometimes signifies something that, as a thing in itself, exists distinct from us and sometimes merely something that belongs to outer appearance, then in order to escape uncertainty and use this concept in the latter significance - in it is taken in the proper psychological question about the reality of our outer intuition - we will distinguish empirically external objects from those that might be called "external" in the transcendental sense, by directly calling them "**things that are to be encountered in space.**" (A373, boldfacing in the original)

Still, assuming that both appearance and noumenon are numerically the same, for pure logical reasons (Leibniz's law) we must assume that noumenon *insofar as it appears to us* is to be encountered in space. Indeed, that is exactly what Kant claims in Reflections after the second edition. Consider this:

That thing outside of us is also represented prior to this determination as *noumenon*. (Refl 5984, 18:416)

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

Yet, the ultimate textual evidence that Kant considers the persistent thing in space as the appearance of the noumenon is found here:

What matter is, as a thing in itself (transcendental object) is of course entirely unknown to us; *nevertheless its persistence will be observed as appearance as long as it is represented to us as something external.* (A366, italics added)

Now let us come back to the argument. Since they are not clearly premises, I believe that the best way of regimenting Kant's argument in the Refutation is the one inspired by Dicker a few years ago²⁰:

- (1) I am conscious of my own existence in time; that is, I am aware of experiences that occur in a specific temporal order (E).
- (2) I can be aware of having experiences in a specific temporal order only if I perceive something permanent by reference to which I can determine their temporal order (E \supset P).
- (3) No conscious state of my own can serve as this permanent frame of reference (C).
- (4) Time itself cannot serve as this permanent frame of reference (T).
- (5) If (2), (3), and (4) are true, then I can be aware of having experiences that occur in a specific temporal order only if I perceive persisting objects in space outside me by reference to which I can determine the temporal order of my experiences. $\{[(E \supset P) \& (\sim C \& \sim T)] \supset (E \supset O)\}$.
- (6) I perceive persisting objects in space outside me by reference to which I can determine the temporal order of my experiences (E \supset O). (Dicker 2004:196)

But the crux of the argument can be summarized as follows:

- (7) If I perceive something permanent by reference to which I can determine their temporal order, then I can be aware of having experiences that occur in a specific temporal order only (E \supset P).
- (8) I am aware of having experiences that occur in a specific temporal order (E)
- (9) Therefore, I perceive something permanent by reference to which I can determine their temporal order. [*modus ponens*, from (7) and (8)].

Nevertheless, accepting the Kantian conditional (E \supset P), what is *modus ponens* for the Kantian is *modus tollens* for the sceptic:

- (7) If I perceive something permanent by reference to which I can determine their temporal order, then I can be aware of having experiences that occur in a specific temporal order only (E \supset P).
- (8*) I am *not* aware of having experiences that occur in a specific temporal order (\sim P)

²⁰ I say "inspired by Dicker" because he, Caranti, and Almeida misconstrue Kant's inner experience as a sort of propositional knowledge, roughly I am aware *that* my experiences occur in a specific order (fact-awareness) rather than I am aware *of* my mental states (object-awareness). For one thing, if for Kant introspection is a matter of fact-awareness rather than object-awareness of our internal states, Kant could never claim that *inner experience* entails external experience. Indeed, he should have abandoned the very idea of an *inner experience* of our own mental states, that is, the etymological model of introspection as inner sense.

(9*) Therefore, I *do not* perceive something permanent by reference to which I can determine their temporal order. [*modus tollens*, from (7) and (8*)].

The Cartesian global skeptic of the first *Meditation* can easily reject Kantian conclusion (9) by denying premise (8). If I can never know whether the dream scenario of the Cartesian first *Meditation* is epistemically possible or not, then I can never know whether my mental states are determined in time. What I know for certain are contemporaneous cogito-like thoughts.

This move enables us to identify the bone of contention between Kantians and Cartesians, namely premise (8). However, I can imagine a Kantian struggling to block the skeptical *modus tollens* by claiming that premise (8) is of Cartesian provenance. Bryan Hall, in his excellent comments on an earlier version of this paper, reminded me that in the third *Meditation*, Descartes uses the example of his mental states occurring in a specific temporal order as generating his (clear and distinct) ideas of duration and number, ideas that he could then transfer to corporeal things. However, in his third *Meditation* he also states the following:

Again, I perceive that I now exist, and remember that I have existed for some time; moreover, I have various thoughts that I can count; it is in this way that I acquire the ideas of duration and number which I can then transfer to other things. (CSM II, 30-31, AT VII, 44-45) (Descartes 1996:16)

However, we should never forget the Cartesian order of reasons. In his third and sixth *Meditations*, Descartes proves God's existence and hence rules out all the skeptical hypotheses of the first *Meditation*. Regarding this, Caranti is quite precise when he reminds us that:

Descartes claims that “I am, I exist”, is necessarily true each time I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it. The reference to its being true “each time” seems to indicate that the validity of the cogito does not go beyond each instant in which the cogito is performed. More importantly, regardless of whether Descartes interpreted the cogito in this way, arguably he should have. For the extension beyond the validity of the cogito seems to imply reliance on memory. Since this faculty could very easily be deceptively triggered by the Evil Genius, it seems that Descartes should not have extended the validity claim of the cogito beyond the instant. If this is so, couldn't the sceptic simply ignore the Refutation by denying that I am conscious of my own existence through the experience of a succession of representations over time? (Caranti 2017:315)

Indeed, this is exactly what Descartes states:

So, after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true **whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind**. (CSM II: 16-17, boldfacing added, and my translation).²¹

Moreover, Descartes notoriously claimed that the past, present, and future parts of time are independent of each other:

²¹The Latin text makes the temporal uncertainty regarding one's own existence even more clear: “Haud dubie igitur ego etiam sum, se me fallit: et fallat quantum potest, nunquam tamen ef ciet, ut nihil sim **quamdiu** me aliquid esse cogitabo. Adeo ut, omnibus satis superque pensitatis, denique statuendum sit hoc pronuntiatum, *Ego sum, ego existo*, **quoties** a me profertur, vel mente concipitur, necessario esse verum” (AT, VII, 5, emphasis added). Some Kant-scholars, however, misread this key passage as the Cartesian concession that the awareness of one's own existence is temporal *in a loose sense*. Thus, according to Almeida, for example: “The temporality of the consciousness empirically determined of oneself is, therefore, a necessary consequence of that which makes undoubtable the certainty that I have to exist and it cannot be refused by those who accept that I have an ‘empirically determined consciousness of my own existence’” (Almeida 2013:28, my translation).

I do not escape the force of these arguments by supposing that I have always existed as I do now, as if it followed from this that there was no need to look for any author of my existence. For a lifespan can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the others, so that it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I must exist now, unless there is some cause which as it were creates me afresh at this moment— that is, which preserves me. For it is quite clear to anyone who attentively considers the nature of time that the same power and action are needed to preserve anything at each individual moment of its duration as would be required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence. Hence the distinction between preservation and creation is only a conceptual one, and this is one of the things that are evident by the natural light. (CSM III:48-49)

Now, several scholars have taken his passage as an argument for the putative Cartesian metaphysical assumption that time is composed of indivisible temporal atoms, and hence there is no continuity between these temporal atoms or anything that we could call duration, persistence, or permanence.²² If this is right, then the first premise of my reconstruction inspired by Dicker must be unacceptable for Descartes. According to Chignell, though, there is “a near-consensus among commentators” that this premise is to be understood as “the claim that I can ‘correctly determine’ (i.e., have a justified judgment or knowledge) that a series of mental states occurred in a specific temporal order” (Chignell 2010:490).

And herein lies the problem. As Guyer and Dicker have correctly remarked, inner experience gives us introspective access to our past experiences, but there is nothing about these experiences, *qua* recollected, that could justify the claim that one of them preceded the others in time.²³ Dicker is quite insightful when he remarks:

Experiences [do] not come adorned with little clocks, like the ones in the corner of a television sportscast, which would enable you to date or order them. Nor do recollections of your earlier experiences, considered purely as subjective conscious states or “seemings”, come with a greater feeling or sense of “pastness” than recollections of your more recent ones; *a fortiori* the recollected members of a series of increasingly temporally remote experiences do not exhibit a progressively greater feeling of pastness. (Dicker 2008:83)

Moreover, Kant also recognizes that the simple consciousness of one’s existence in time is not enough to get his argument off the ground:

Here it is proven that outer experience is really immediate, that only by means of it is possible not, to be sure, the consciousness of our own existence, *but its determination in time*, i.e., inner experience. Of course, the representation **I am**, which expresses the consciousness that can accompany all thinking, is that which immediately includes the existence of a subject in itself, *but not yet any cognition of it, thus not empirical cognition, i.e., experience*; for to that there belongs, besides the thought of something existing, intuition, and in this case inner intuition, i.e., time, in regard to which the subject must be determined. (B277, italics added)

What we know for sure is that the Cartesian hypothesis cannot undermine the cogito and cogito-like contemporaneous thoughts. Yet, the time-determination of mental states is a quite different issue insofar as it seems to depend on memory. Descartes made it quite clear that his skeptical hypotheses make the reliability of memory suspicious:

I will suppose then that everything I see is spurious. I will believe that my memories tell me lies, and that none of the things they report me ever happened. I have no senses. Body, shape,

²²The most influential of all is certainly Gueroult 1953.

²³See Guyer 1987:306-307 and Dicker 2008:83.

extension, movement, and places are chimeras. So, what remains true? Perhaps just the one fact that nothing is certain. (1996:16)

I rest my case and leave that question to Descartes scholars.

However, the assumption that time-determination of one's own mental states in some precise order is a condition for the Cartesian dream hypothesis is also unacceptable from the historical viewpoint of Kant-scholarship. Since both Kant and Mendelssohn agree that the dream condition is opposed to the "waking condition", precisely because in the first condition one's mental states are disposed in an irregular order, while in the second condition there is an ordered connection, the question is: how can the determination in time of one's own mental states in some specific order be a condition for the skeptical dream hypothesis? Compare Kant's fragmentary Reflection 5400 with Mendelssohn's passage from his *Morgenstunden*:

Dreams are in analogy with wakefulness. Except for waking representations that are consistent with those of other people I have no other marks of the **object** outside me; thus, a *phaenomenon* outside me is that which can be cognized in accordance with rules of the understanding. Yet how can one ask whether there are really external *phaenomena*? We are certainly not immediately conscious that they are external, i.e., not mere imaginings and dreams, but we are still conscious that they are the originals for all imaginings, and are thus themselves not imaginings. (18:172)

The waking condition is what we call the mental state in which the objective interconnection of ideas is the ruling one. By far the greater portion of mental representations in our waking state follow after and together with one another not in accordance with the associative laws of our mental faculties—that is, not because we happened once before to have experienced that conjunction of representations, or because our wit has noticed a similarity among them, or because our reason finds that they are only thus and in no other way able to be the objects of our thinking. (Mendelssohn 2012, 41, italics added)²⁴

²⁴ Kant reaffirms this same thought in his third note to the Refutation and in his later Reflections about the Refutation:

Note 3. From the fact the existence of outer objects is required for the possibility of a determinate consciousness of our self it does not follow that every intuitive representation of outer things includes at the same time their existence, for that may well be the mere effect of the imagination (in dreams as well as in delusions); but this is possible merely through the reproduction of previous outer perceptions, which, as has been shown, are possible through actuality of outer objects. Here it had to be proved only that inner experience in general is possible only through outer experience in general. (B278-279)

Dreams can represent things to us as external, which do not exist just then; but we would not even be able to dream of something as external if these forms were not given to us by means of external things. That one would have to believe in the reality of external things if we could not prove it would not be necessary; for that has no relation to any interest of reason. (18:171, R5399, italics added)

The idealist concedes that actual extension and bodies outside us could exist, but are not actual, thus are merely a *dream* in us. We assert that these are purely representations and can only exist in us, but that their objects may nevertheless exist outside us, although we know nothing of what they may be in themselves. (18: 281-282, R. 5642, italics added)

That a *dream* produces [~~crossed out~~: the same sort of] illusion of existences outside of me does not prove anything to the contrary; for outer perceptions must always have preceded it. To have originally acquired a representation of something as outside of me without in fact having been passive is impossible. (18:307, R5653, italics added)

It is also not an objection that in *dreams* and vivid fantasies it is possible to [have] the subjective side of these representations without the reality of the object. For without an outer sense, whose representations

If Kant's opponent in his Refutation is the dream skeptic, then by assuming (8) he is begging the question at issue in terms of his and Mendelssohn's own theory of dreams. However, my main point is not historical, but conceptual. Anyone who properly understands the *modal* nature of the Cartesian skeptical hypotheses of the first *Meditation* must recognize that any knowledge of the time-determination of one's existence is not a condition for formulating those skeptical hypotheses. To assume that I cannot know whether I am dreaming whenever I have beliefs and, hence, that I cannot know whether those beliefs are true, does not presuppose that I must know that those dreams are my mental states ordered in time! Why do I have to know that my mental states are determined in some specific time-order just to conjecture that I might be dreaming or that I might be deluded by some Evil-Demon when I believe that I have hands?

Back to Descartes! According to the Cartesian epistemic skeptical hypotheses of the first Meditation, *dreams are not mental states belonging to the inner sense!*²⁵ If we focus on the dream scenario, this becomes quite clear:

Suppose that I am dreaming...that I am moving my head and stretching out my hands- are not true. Perhaps, indeed, I do not even have such hands or such a body at all. Nonetheless, it must surely be admitted that the visions that come in sleep are like paintings. (Descartes 1996:13, italics added)

The modals "suppose" and "perhaps" clearly indicate epistemic possibilities, namely that I might be dreaming when I believe that I am moving my head and stretching out my hands. The crucial point is the following. What follows from there, namely "that the visions that come in sleep are like paintings" is *not a presupposition* of the dream hypothesis, but rather a mere *contingent consequence*. If I am dreaming my visions in sleep are like *mental* paintings, but they could be like computer simulations made of bites projected *outside my mind* (if we are

we merely repeat and combine in a different way (as also happens with inner sense when we fantasize), we would not be able to have any *dreams* at all. (18:310, R5653, italics added)

The representations of sense *A* and *B* must therefore have some ground other than that in inner sense, but yet in some sense, hence in outer sense; consequently, there must be objects of outer sense (and as far as *dreams* are concerned, this object, which produces the illusion of the presence of several outer objects, is the body itself). 18:614, R6113, italics added)

Now the problem is whether [~~crossed out~~: and how] a sensible intuition can be distinguished from the imagining of outer objects; the idealist denies [~~crossed out~~: the first and so judged that] this without doubt on the ground that we immediately perceive our representations as inner determinations of the mind only through inner sense, but not their cause, to which we merely infer, yet the inference from an effect to a determinate cause is never certain, since there can be more than one cause for the same effect, as in this case either the outer object or the subject itself can be the cause, and in this case the latter intuition would be an imagining. The example of the latter is a dream or a hallucination, from which the outer sensible representation as such cannot be distinguished. (18:619-620, R6315)

Now the question arises, whether that intuition which has the form of outer sense, like an imagining (in dreams or in a fever), is so identical to that which also has an object of outer sense that the two cannot be distinguished from each other. The answer is that in this condition of imagining it certainly cannot be distinguished, for this is a deception of the power of judgment; but the question is properly whether it cannot be distinguished in general, i.e., whether one cannot be conscious that the one is an intuition of the senses, the other to be sure a sensible intuition, but only in an imagining, for which no object outside the representation is present. The answer is that consciousness can accompany all representations, hence even that of an imagining, which, together with its play, is itself an object of inner sense, and of which it must be possible to become conscious as such, since we really distinguish such things as inner representations, hence existing in time, from the intuition of the senses. (18: 621, R6315)

²⁵ That is Mendelssohn's view. See Mendelssohn 2012:41.

brains in the pods of The Matrix). That is why we should not confuse the global skeptic of the Cartesian first *Meditation* with the subjectivist idealist that Descartes assumed in his second Meditation prior to his controversial proof of God's existence. The Evil Genius has left us a banana peel on which all Kantians slip.

12. Kant Against Indirect-Realist-Based Skepticism

In the third *Meditation*, Descartes leaves no doubt that he was the founding father of what I am calling here "indirect realism":

Yet I previously accepted as wholly certain and evident many things which I afterwards realized were doubtful. What are these? The earth, sky, stars, and everything else that I apprehended with the senses. *But what was it about them that I perceived clearly? Just that the ideas, or thoughts, of such things appeared before my mind.* Yet even now I am not denying that these ideas occur within me. But there was something else which I used to assert, and which through habitual belief I thought I perceived clearly, although I did not in fact do so. This was that there were things outside me which were the sources of my ideas and which resembled them in all respects. Here was my mistake or at any rate, if my judgment was true, it was not thanks to the strength of my perception. (CSM II:24–5; AT VII:35, italics added, my translation)

What Descartes clearly states in this passage is that if I only indirectly experience outer things as the probable cause of their ideas that I immediately experience in my mind, then I have no means to justify such a causal inference, and therefore, I have no knowledge of outer things. However, as a reading of the global skepticism of Cartesian provenance, this is a great historical and conceptual mistake. It is a historical mistake because the reader overlooks Descartes's order of reasons in the first place. In this passage, Descartes is recapitulating his original doubts, but now in light of his new achievements: his provisory subjectivist idealism. In historical terms, it is quite likely that from his second *Meditation* onwards Descartes committed himself to some form of subjective idealism until his proof of God's existence. Moreover, it is a conceptual mistake because, again, the core of Cartesian epistemic global skepticism is the famous skeptical hypotheses of his first *Meditation*: we do not know whether the majority of our beliefs are true until we rule out the skeptical hypotheses as false. But conceptually speaking, the Cartesian global skepticism of the first *Meditation* is not committed to any sort of *subjectivism*. By the same token, any refutation of global skepticism should not be confused with proof of the *objectivity of one's representations*.

Nonetheless, Hume seems to formulate an external-world skepticism inspired by the indirect realism that stems from Descartes:

To begin with the question concerning *external* existence, it may perhaps be said, that setting aside the metaphysical question of the identity of a thinking substance, our own body evidently belongs to us; and as several impressions appear exterior to the body, we suppose them also exterior to ourselves. The paper, on which I write at present, is beyond my hand. The table is beyond the paper. The walls of the chamber beyond the table. And in casting my eye towards the window, I perceive a great extent of fields and buildings beyond my chamber. From all this it may be inferred, that no other faculty is required, besides the senses, to convince us of the external existence of body. But to prevent this inference, we need only weigh the three following considerations. First, that, properly speaking, it is not our body we perceive, when we regard our limbs and members, but certain impressions, which enter by the senses; so that the ascribing a real and corporeal existence to these impressions, or to their objects, is an act of the mind as difficult to explain as that which we examine at present. Secondly, sounds, and tastes, and smells, though commonly regarded by the mind as continued independent qualities, appear not to have any existence in extension, and consequently cannot appear to the senses as situated externally to the body. The reason, why we ascribe a place to them, shall be: considered

afterwards. Thirdly, even our sight informs us not of distance or outness (so to speak) immediately and without a certain reasoning and experience, as is acknowledged by the most rational philosophers. (THN I, 1. 4. 2. 9, italics in the original)

The external-word skeptic argues along the following lines:

- (10) If we can never perceive outer things directly, but only indirectly via inference as the most probable cause of our ideas (E), then we can be certain of their existence (P) [E \supset P].
- (11) It is a fact that we never perceive outer things directly. (E)
- (12) Therefore, the existence of things outside our minds is doubtful. [*modus ponens*, from (10) and (11)]

Remember, now, the first note to the Refutation:

Note 1. One will realize that in the preceding proof the game that idealism plays has with greater justice turned against him. Idealism assumes that the only immediate experience is inner experience, and from that outer things could only be **inferred**, but, as in any case in which one infers effects to **determinate** causes, only unreliably, since the cause of the representation that we perhaps falsely ascribe to outer things can also lie in us. Yet here it is proven that outer experience is really immediate, that only by means of it is possible not, to be sure, the consciousness of our own existence, but its determination in time, i.e., inner experience. (B276-277, boldfacing in the original)

Kant's claim is that the Refutation has turned the game that the idealist plays against him by showing that outer experience is really immediate, rather than inner experience, as the skeptic believed. The question is how Kant's Refutation is supposed to prove that outer experience is immediate rather than inferred from putatively immediate inner experience. The argument can be simplified as follows:

- (1) If I know that my mental states are determined in time, then I know that the persistent objects of my experience exist in space.
- (2) I do know that my mental states are determined in time.

Finally, by applying *modus ponens* to (1) and (2), I am entitled to conclude:

- (3) Persistent objects of experience exist in space.

Again, accepting the Kantian conditional (E \supset P), what is *modus ponens* for the Kantian is *modus tollens* for the skeptic:

- (1) If I know that my mental states are determined in time (E), then I know that the persistent objects of my experience exist in space (P).
- (2*) I do not know whether there are persisting things outside me. (\sim P)
- (3*) I do not know that my mental states are determined in time. (\sim E)

Now we are back to the same problem: whether the skeptic must or must not accept the awareness of time-determination as a condition for formulating his doubts. Again, the Kantian might retort that claim (2) is something that is accepted by the Cartesian skeptic himself. According to Caranti, for example:

Even if we grant the possibility of such a thing as an instantaneous cogito, the entity that this instantaneous activity yields would be much less than what Descartes requires. The 'I' whose existence would be proved through a certain number of occurrences of this activity would be completely unrelated. In other words, they could not be reidentified as moments of the same subjectivity. (Caranti 2007:136)

However, whosoever insists that the Cartesian external-world skeptic could have assumed (1) misses the point of the argument. Regardless of whether Descartes endorsed something along the lines of (2) or not, the assumption that occurrences of mental activity must be related is not a condition for the indirect-realism based external-world skepticism of the third Meditation. To formulate his doubt, all that the skeptic needs is to assume that he immediately experiences only his own ideas.

13. Mendelssohnian Problematic Idealism

The aim of this section is to prove that Mendelssohn, with his problematic idealism, is by far the philosopher with the best credentials to be Kant's main opponent in his Refutation. To begin with, there is an abundance of textual evidence that supports this hypothesis. First, as Hamann reports in a portion of a letter to Jacobi dated October 28, 1785, Kant "resolved to refute Mendelssohn." Apparently, however, Kant abandoned his plan a month later, as is reported by Hamann in a letter to Jacobi on November 28, 1785. Nevertheless, Kant certainly never forgot the idea of providing an answer to Mendelssohn's criticism of his transcendental idealism. In a letter from March 26, 1786, Friederich Heinrich Jacobi wrote to Kant to announce his own intentions to write a rebuttal of the *Morgenstunden* owing to the fact that it "is thought to have dealt a serious blow to the Kantian Critique" (10:436). Again, in his reply to Jacobi on May 26, 1786, Kant denies that he is still planning a refutation of Mendelssohn's criticism, and encourages Jacobi to write his own (10:450).

Yet, one might wonder: if Mendelssohn is Kant's primary target, rather than Descartes, why did Kant not name Mendelssohn? I have two hypotheses. First, in his *Morgenstunden*, Mendelssohn never criticized Kantian idealism directly. The only oblique reference to Kant is when he mentions "things in themselves". Second, what concerns Kant most is not the skeptical hypothesis that Descartes briefly adumbrated in his first *Meditation*. Rather, Kant's main concern is with Cartesian problematic idealism, based on Cartesian epistemological indirect realism. For one thing, both doctrines contradict Kant's transcendental idealism.

However, in order to understand the complex exchange between Kant and Mendelssohn regarding problematic idealism, we must remember that idealism means three quite different metaphysical doctrines. First, idealism means anti-physicalism driven by the metaphysical mind/body problem. Idealism here means immaterialism; that is, the view that the mind is some immaterial substance that exists and persists per se, independently of any causal interaction with anything else. Moreover, in this narrow sense, idealism opposes not only physicalism but also any kind of dualism. It is in the anti-physicalist and anti-dualist sense that Kant calls Mendelssohnian idealism "spiritualism" and sees it as a consequence of his rationalism:

Thus, if materialism does not work as a way of explaining my existence, then spiritualism is just as unsatisfactory for it, and the conclusion is that in no way whatsoever can we cognize anything about the constitution of our soul that in any way concerns the possibility of its separate existence. (B420)

Second, idealism may be driven by the epistemological doctrine of indirect realism. Idealism here is also in opposition to what Kant calls dualism. Consider those passages again:

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**. (A367, boldfacing in the original)

The transcendental idealist, on the contrary, can be an empirical realist, hence, as he is called, a **dualist**, i.e., he can concede the existence of matter without going beyond mere self-consciousness and assuming something more than the certainty of representations in me, hence the *cogito, ergo sum*. (A370, boldfacing in the original)

It is in an epistemological sense that we must understand the Mendelssohnian dialogue between his idealist and his dualist: while the dualist accepts the existence of material substances beyond thinking substances, the idealist calls this assumption into question:

The full expanse of our objective thoughts also includes ideas of inanimate substances, physical beings, that present themselves to us as located outside of us. Does this presentation also have truth on its side? “No!” the idealist answers; “it is due to the short-sightedness of our sensory perception that we think so; it is an illusion of the senses whose source lies in our natural impairments. My better reason convinces me,” he says, “that no substance can possibly be physical.” The dualist, however, believes that the idealist’s thinking has fallen into error because of his mistaken premises. The dualist believes that there are both physical and psychical substances, the former, however, being not entirely like what they seem to us to be, for the limitations of our cognitive faculties alter the way they come to be represented. (Mendelssohn 2012:49)

Third, idealism also means the assumption that the underlying nature of the universe is mental. In this case, it is driven by the wider metaphysical question about the underlying nature of reality. In this broad sense, idealism opposes not realism, but materialism. It is a sort of realist idealism.

It is in the broad anti-materialist sense that Mendelssohn assumes that the underlying nature of reality must be accounted for as an appropriate connection between ideas in opposition to dreams:

The waking condition is what we call the mental state in which the objective interconnection of ideas is the ruling one. By far the greater portion of mental representations in our waking state follow after and together with one another not in accordance with the associative laws of our mental faculties—that is, not because we happened once before to have experienced that conjunction of representations, or because our wit has noticed a similarity among them, or because our reason finds that they are only thus and in no other way able to be the objects of our thinking. Rather, their interconnection is due to the fact that they stand in a causal relationship among themselves in accordance with well-established laws of nature. How we happen to have acquired our knowledge of these laws of nature and this causal relationship has been previously explained by us. This knowledge is supported in the main by an incomplete induction—that is, a type of inference that moves from often to always and that in many cases can achieve a measure of certitude that is nearly the same as that which accompanies the most self-evident truths. The greatest portion of our ideas stands in this order and interconnectedness during our waking state. (Mendelssohn 2012:41, italics added)

Kant reiterates exactly the same idea:

Dreams are in analogy with wakefulness. Except for waking representations that are consistent with those of other people I have no other marks of the **object** outside me; thus, a *phaenomenon* outside me is that which can be cognized in accordance with rules of the understanding. Yet how can one ask whether there are really external *phaenomena*? We are certainly not immediately conscious that they are external, i.e., not mere imaginings and dreams, but we are still conscious that they are the originals for all imaginings, and are thus themselves not imaginings. (18:172, R5400)

For truth consists merely in the thoroughgoing interconnection of representations in accordance with laws of the understanding. In that consists all difference from dreams. (18:280, R5642)

Cartesian idealism therefore distinguishes only outer experience from dream, and lawfulness as a criterion of the truth of the former from the disorder and false illusion of the latter. In both cases it presupposes space and time as conditions for the existence of objects and merely asks whether the objects of the outer senses are actually to be found in the space in which we put them while *awake*, in the way that the object of inner sense, the soul, actually is in time, i.e., whether experience carries with itself sure criteria to distinguish it from imagination. (Prol, 4:336-337, italics added).

Therefore, since Descartes never claimed that lawfulness is a criterion of truth or a criterion for distinguishing the “waking condition” from dreams and imaginations, Kant’s “Cartesian idealism” has nothing to do with Descartes, but rather with Mendelssohnian Cartesianism.²⁶ Descartes’s dream hypothesis was never a concern for Kant. Kant’s opposition between dreams and wakefulness is a mirror of Mendelssohn’s opposition between dreams and what he calls “waking conditions”, namely the opposition between some non-lawful and some lawful connection of mental states or experiences. Kant is quite clear about that in his Fourth Paralogism when, without mentioning Mendelssohn, he states:

Now cognition of objects can be generated from perceptions, either through a mere play of imagination or by means of experience. And then of course there can arise deceptive representations, to which objects do not correspond, and where the deception is sometimes to be attributed to a semblance of the imagination (in dreams), sometimes to a false step of judgment (in the case of so-called sense-deceptions). In order to avoid the false illusion here, one proceeds according to the rule: **whatever is connected with a perception according to empirical laws, is actual.** (A376, boldfacing in the original)

Kant certainly realized that the only way to assert his own transcendental idealism was by refuting this Mendelssohnian problematic idealism.²⁷ According to Kantian idealism we have immediate access to *matter* as the mind-dependent way that the underlying nature of noumena appears to our minds. Again, someone might reasonably complain that the transcendental object is just a conceptual placeholder (something =X) whose function is only to demarcate the bounds of cognition (*Grenzbegriff*). However, there is enough textual evidence in support of the claim that Kant considers the transcendental object as the cause of the affection on our human sensibility. Consider this:

²⁶ Descartes recognizes as the only criterion of truth the clearness/distinction of ideas.

²⁷ That is my own reading of Kantian Idealism. See Pereira 2017. A more traditional taxonomy of idealist views distinguishes subjective idealism, objective idealism, and absolute idealism. These varieties of idealism do not have clear standard definitions, and they are often characterized as much by their appeal to paradigmatic proponents as to specific doctrines. For the purposes at hand, I will ignore such distinctions.

[T]hat same Something that grounds outer appearances and affects our sense so that it receives the representations of space, matter, shape, etc.—this Something, considered as noumenon (or better, as transcendental object) could also at the same time be the subject of thoughts. (A358)

This [intuition], however, takes place only insofar as the object is given to us; but this, in turn, is possible only [for us human beings, at any rate] *if it affects the mind in a certain manner*. (A19/B33, italics added)

Now, since the receptivity of the subject to be affected by objects necessarily precedes all intuitions of these objects.... (A26/B42)

Obviously not otherwise than insofar as it [this intuition] has its seat merely in the subject, as its formal constitution for being affected by objects and thereby acquiring *immediate representation*, i.e., *intuition*, and hence thus only as form of outer *sense* in general. (B41)

[R]ather it [our kind of intuition] is dependent on the existence of the object, thus it is possible only insofar as the representational capacity of the subject is affected through that. (B72)

If we will call the receptivity [i.e., its ability] of our mind to receive representations insofar as it is affected in some way sensibility. (A51/B75)

All intuitions, as sensible, rest on affections, concepts, therefore on functions. (A68/B93)

The [uncombined] manifold of presentations can be given in an intuition that is merely sensible, i.e., nothing but receptivity; and the form of this intuition can lie a priori in our faculty of representation without being anything other than the way in which the subject is affected. (A130/B129)

Hence if concerning the determinations of the outer senses we grant that we cognize objects through them only insofar as we are outwardly affected, then we must also concede concerning inner sense that we intuit ourselves through it only as we are inwardly affected *by ourselves*. (B156)

Finally, idealism also means what Kant called “material idealism”, namely the metaphysical doctrine driven by the epistemological doctrine that we have no direct cognitive access to the outer things of our representations (indirect realism). There is a significant amount of textual evidence in *Morgenstunden* that Mendelssohn embraced material idealism:

The first things of whose actuality I am assured are my thoughts and representations. I ascribe to them an ideal actuality insofar as they reside within me and are perceived by me as alterations of my power to think. Every alteration presupposes something that is altered. I myself, therefore, who am the subject of this alteration, possess an actuality that is not merely ideal, but real. (Mendelssohn 2012:12)

We cannot for a moment doubt that they are actually present within us, that they are alterations of our very selves, and that they at least possess a subjective actuality. Thereafter it is our own existence that is a necessary condition without which no further discoveries, indeed, no doubting and no thinking, could ever take place. Descartes correctly posits as the foundation of all further reflection the proposition *I think, therefore I am*. If my inner thoughts and feelings are actually within me, if the existence of these alterations of my very self cannot be merely illusory, then we must acknowledge the *I* to which these alterations occur. Where there are alterations, there must be present a subject that suffers these alterations. *I think, therefore I am*. (Mendelssohn 2012:38).

We have seen that our senses can only deceive us when we infer something about objects that are outside us, when our cognition is supposed to be a *presentation* [*Darstellung*] and not a mere *representation* [*Vorstellung*]. In this case our sensory cognition is liable to the same errors of inference as happen with rational cognition and on occasion lead to mistaken outcomes. Just as error is produced in this kind of cognition, so it is produced in sensory cognition: through habits of association and through tricks and illusions of the senses. So long as we remain in the realm of sensory cognition—that is, so long as we do not consider sensory cognition to be a presentation but only a representation—it admits of neither doubt nor uncertainty. (Mendelssohn 2012:34)

But as more people come to agree with me in finding things to be as I find them, the greater becomes my certainty that the cause of my belief does not lie in my particular constitution. The cause must lie either in my unimpaired cognitive power, and thus be a true representation, or in common limitations of all human cognition. The probability of this last case decreases if I come to be convinced that even animals recognize things in exactly the way that I do, although, to be sure, relative to each animal's position and perspective ... If we could be convinced that our understanding, in its highest capacity, makes present for itself the things that are outside of us as real objects, our assurance of their existence would have gained the highest level of cogency. (Mendelssohn 2012:48)

An object that we are aware of through only one sense acquires for itself merely the presumption of actuality, a presumption that is based on our habit of associating the sensation with other sensory phenomena. (Mendelssohn 2012:47)

Material idealism is a clear anti-realist form of idealism. However, in opposition to Berkeleyan dogmatic idealism, Mendelssohnian material idealism is problematic in the sense that it sees *as problematic* the assumption that outer things are real since we cannot rule out the possibility that they are caused by our own immaterial thinking substance.²⁸

14. Kant's Refutation of Mendelssohnian Idealism

Now, even while recognizing that Kant probably had several different targets in his Refutation, I shall argue that the Refutation can only be considered as a sound argument against Mendelssohnian problematic idealism. Let me remind the reader of the steps in the Kantian Refutation:

(i) I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. (B275)

(ii) All time-determination presupposes something persistent in perception. (B275)

(iii) But this persisting element cannot be an intuition in me. For all the determining grounds of my existence that can be encountered in me are representations, and as such they themselves need something persisting distinct from them, in relation to which their change, and thus my existence in the time in which they change, can be determined. (Bxxxix)

(iv) Thus, the perception of this persistent thing is only possible through a **thing** outside me and not through the mere **representation** of a thing outside me. Consequently, the determination of my existence in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself. (B275–276, boldfacing in the original)

²⁸Mendelssohn never identified *esse* and *percipi* like Berkeley did. In this sense, he never took the idealist side in his imaginary debate. Mendelssohn is here advocating the doctrine that Kant called “problematic idealism”.

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

To begin with, even though Kant never clearly stated how we should understand (i), assuming that his main opponent is Mendelssohn, it is fair to reconstruct (i) as a cogito-like claim, for example, *I know that I exist as a thinking being in time*. As we saw, the standard anti-skeptical reading confronts the problem with premise (ii). But the problem disappears if we consider that the argument is against Mendelssohn's idealism: if self-knowledge of time-determination is a problem for a global skeptic of Cartesian or Humean provenance, it is no problem for an idealist of Cartesian provenance. Indeed, Mendelssohn assumes this claim in his own doctrine. Moreover, according to Mendelssohn it is by perceiving the alterations of one's thinking being as one's mental states that one becomes conscious of one's own existence in time. In his own words:

Let us then investigate the concept of existence down to its essential kernel, not in order to explain it with a phrase, but rather in order to explore its origin and examine how it develops within us little by little. Our thoughts, considered as such, are the first things that impress themselves upon us. We cannot for a moment doubt that they are actually present within us, that they are alterations of our very selves, and that they at least possess a subjective actuality. Thereafter it is our own existence that is a necessary condition without which no further discoveries, indeed, no doubting and no thinking, could ever take place. Descartes correctly posits as the foundation of all further reflection the proposition *I think, therefore I am*. If my inner thoughts and feelings are actually within me, if the existence of these alterations of my very self cannot be merely illusory, then we must acknowledge the *I* to which these alterations occur. Where there are alterations, there must be present a subject that suffers these alterations. *I think, therefore, I am*. (Mendelssohn 2012:36, italics in the original)

Kant restates the Mendelssohnian problem using similar 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*. (18:610, R6311, italics added)

In this regard, we overcome the second obstacle: (i) entails (ii). For the problematic subjectivist idealist, but not for the global one, the knowledge that "I am" is bound to the knowledge of the alterations of one's mental states in time. But now we face the third obstacle to a traditional epistemic anti-skeptical reading: in which sense does Kant state in (ii) that the perception of alterations entails something permanent in perception? The obstacle is once more eliminated when we bear in mind that this is a claim raised by Mendelssohn himself:

Every alteration presupposes something that is altered. *I*, myself, therefore, who am the subject of this alteration, possess an actuality that is not *merely ideal, but real*. I am not merely a modification, but the modified thing itself: not merely thoughts, but a thinking being whose condition is altered through its thoughts and representations. (Mendelssohn 2012:12, italics added)

The open question is where Kant and Mendelssohn disagree. Their disagreement is about the ultimate nature of the reality of those things outside us and about the ultimate nature of the

thinking mind. Mendelssohn rejects the Kantian assumption of the noumenal nature of outer things beyond the necessary or lawful connection between our own ideas, by assuming that his mind is an immaterial substance:

“Friend,” I replied, “if this is your earnest wish, it seems to me that you ask to know something that is absolutely not an object of knowledge. We are standing at the limit, not only of human knowledge, but of all cognition in general, and you want to go still further, but you do not know where to. When I tell you what effect a thing has or how it can be affected by something else, do not ask what it is. When I tell you what concept to use in order to categorize a thing, then the further question, *What is this thing in and of itself?* has no good reason to be asked. (Mendelssohn 2102:51-2, italics added)

To this Kant replies:

So let Mendelssohn, or anyone in his place, tell me whether I can believe to have cognized a thing according to what it is, if I know nothing other of it than that it is something that stands in external relations, in which itself there are external relations, that the former can be altered in it and through it altered in others, such that the ground thereof (moving force) lies in the relations themselves, in a word, whether, since I know nothing but relations of something to something else, of which I can also only know external relations, without there being anything internal given or being able to be given - whether there I could say: I have a concept of the thing in itself, and whether the question is not completely justified: what the thing that is the subject in all these relations is in itself. (8:153-154)

Whereas for Mendelssohn this persistence is the very immaterial thinking substance that exists and persists *per se* without causal interaction with anything else, for Kant this persistent thing is the transcendental mind-independent thing-in-itself that causes the alteration of mental states and is represented by those very states (noumena in the negative sense).²⁹ In his own words:

(iv) Thus, the perception of this persistent thing is only possible through a **thing** outside me and not through the mere **representation** of a thing outside me. Consequently, the determination of my existence in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself. (B275–276, boldfacing in the original)

Here we come back to the claim that the goal of the Refutation is to prove the existence of mind-independent noumena in the negative sense. However, just like Kant, Mendelssohn also thinks that the only explanation for the alterations of the mental states of the thinking substance is the assumption that several of those states are presentations of outer things:

Just as I myself am not merely a thought that changes but a thinking being that endures, so we are permitted to believe that our various representations are not only representations within us but also pertain to external things, things that are different from us and are the anterior cause of our representations. (Mendelssohn 2012:12)

Again, the bone of contention between Kant and Mendelssohn is the metaphysical nature of those things outside of us that are presented to our mind and the metaphysical nature of our own mind. According to Mendelssohn, all that is required is *the external relation to something else that is guaranteed by some agreement between our own representations*. In contrast, according to Kant, on my interpretation of his idealism, what is required to conceive such existence is a transcendental object that appears to us as something persistent in space.

²⁹As Allais has convincingly argued, Kant admits a-temporal causality 2015.

Now, according to Longuenesse (2006), Kant never delivered on his promise to prove the existence of something ontologically distinct from our own mental states as he announces:

We remain in the world of the senses [~~crossed out~~: however], and would be led by nothing except the principles of the [~~crossed out~~: law] understanding that we use in experience, but **we make our possible progression into an object in itself**, by regarding the possibility of experience as something real in the objects of experience. (18:280-281, R5642, boldfacing in the original)

In contrast, according to Longuenesse, what Kant proved (if anything) is only that there is a necessary connection between the *awareness* of our own existence in time and the *awareness* of something persistent in space rather than the connection between the *awareness* of our own existence in time and the existence of something ontologically independent from us:

What he actually does is to progress from the *consciousness* of a specific determination of my existence (his empirical determination in time) to a necessary condition *of that consciousness*, which is itself another consciousness (consciousness of something permanent, of which Kant maintains must be the consciousness of something in space). ... The question remains whether the objects of which I am necessarily conscious *as* objects ontologically distinct from myself and my mental states are actually distinct from *me* and from my mental states. (2006:69, italics in the original, my translation)³⁰

In the same vein, Allison (2004) complains that Kant never accomplished his goal of proving the existence of something ontologically independent of our own representation as the ground for determining the alterations of our mental states in time. In Kant's own words:

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, boldfacing in the original, italics added)

According to Allison:

The previous steps have established that the cognition of one's inner state rests upon the *representation* of something persisting in space. But if Kant is to refute the skeptic, he cannot rest content with this rather modest conclusion. Instead he must show that I actually experience or perceive, not merely imagine or believe that I perceive, something persisting. ...[T]he skeptic could readily accept an entailment relation between beliefs, and thus acknowledge the necessity of outer representations. What he would not grant is the contention that this licenses a conclusion about actual experience or real existence. (2004:293, italics in the original)

To be sure, we must be *aware of* or *represent* this persistent thing. Still, that does not mean that this persistent thing is *a mere representation in me*. Thus, Longuenesse and Allison have completely misunderstood the nature of the argument. This nature is revealed by the third note to the Refutation:

³⁰[C]e qu'il fait en réalité est progresser de la *conscience* d'une détermination spéci que de mon existence (sa détermination empirique dans le temps) à une condition nécessaire *de cette conscience* qui est elle même une autre conscience (la conscience d'un permanent dont Kant soutient qu'elle doit être la conscience de quelque chose dans l'espace)[...] La question demeure de savoir si les objets dont je suis nécessairement conscient *comme* d'objets ontologiquement distincts de moi-même et de mes états mentaux, sont effectivement distincts de *moi* et de mes états mentaux (Longuenesse 2006:69)

Note 3. From the fact the existence of outer objects is required for the possibility of a determinate consciousness of our self it does not follow that every intuitive representation of outer things includes at the same time their existence, for that may well be the mere effect of the imagination (in dreams as well as in delusions); but this is possible merely through reproduction of previous outer perceptions, which, as has been shown, are possible through the actuality of outer objects. Here it had to be proved only that inner experience in general is possible only through outer experience in general. (B278-279)

The argument is a classical regress. This persistent thing cannot be a *mere representation in me* as an immaterial substance because as such it is also in time and hence also requires something persistent for its own time-determination. In this way, a regress is launched. The only way to avoid this regress, according to my interpretation of Kant's idealism, is to assume that what is causing the alterations is something external to our representations, namely, a mind-independent thing-in-itself that is cognized by us as a material substance in space. The remaining question, according to my interpretation, is how Kant proves that this thing-in-itself causing the changes of mental states in time is represented by those states.

Thus, there is no further obstacle to thinking that our sensory states are, by virtue of their own metaphysical nature representations, that is, sensible intuitions of outside things. Given this, according to my interpretation of Kant's idealism, the argument takes the following form:

- (a) I know that I exist in time. (Mendelssohn, 2012:36)
- (b) I could not know that I exist in time unless I could introspectively know that my sensory states change in time. (Mendelssohn, 2012:36)
- (c) Now, the introspective self-knowledge of this alteration presupposes something permanent in perception, namely the fact that such alterations are modifications of myself as an immaterial thinking substance. (Mendelssohn, 2012:12)

Now here is Kant against Mendelssohn:

- (d) This persistent cannot be myself as an immaterial substance or a mere representation in me, because as such it also changes in time, and so a regress is launched.
- (e) Therefore, the changing mental states are *presentations (Darstellung)* rather than *representations (Vorstellungen)* in Mendelssohn's sense of something permanent and mind-independent that is causally responsible for my perceived change in time.
- (f) What underlies my introspective self-knowledge of alterations of my mental representations over time is a reality made up of mind-independent things-in-themselves.

From (f) we drive these ontological conclusions: (1) the underlying nature of what we call "external reality" is made up of unknown mind-independent things-in-themselves, (2) we are not immaterial thinking substances that exist and persist per se, without causal interaction with anything else, and (3) the underlying nature of reality is noumenal.

15. Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to present a new reconstruction of Kant's Refutation of Idealism. I have considered several different targets of the Refutation, five of them mentioned by Kant

himself. I believe that I have shown that the Refutation of Idealism is best considered only as a sound argument against Mendelssohnian subjectivist idealism, against Mendelssohnian immaterialism, and against Mendelssohnian realist idealism. First, Kant's Refutation is a sound argument in favor of the claim that the outer things represented in our minds are real rather than *ideal*; that is, they exist mind-independently as *noumena*. And second, Kant's refutation is a sound argument for a fundamental ontology of *noumena*: the ultimate nature of reality and of our minds is neither material nor mental but made up of things in themselves.

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