

The Semantics of Self-Knowledge in The Refutation Of Idealism

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In a recent paper, Andrew Chignell challenges the popular 'causal' reading of Kant's Refutation of Idealism on both philosophical and interpretative grounds. In his concluding paragraph he suggests that where these interpretations err is in their epistemological focus, and that a more faithful and philosophically promising reading would center instead on "semantic" concerns.¹ Chignell's comments are quite brief, and it is unclear what he thinks a 'semantic' reading of the Refutation would look like. In this paper, I want to propose one form such an account might take. On the interpretation I will offer here, the Refutation is concerned not simply with our ability to know that this or that claim about our inner lives is true, but our ability to make sense of our inner lives in general. His conclusion is that without the intuition of external objects, no meaningful interpretation of inner experience, and thus no genuine awareness of ourselves, would be possible. This reading of the argument, I hope to show, is not only supported by the text of the Refutation, it is plausible given some other central points of Kant's wider philosophy. Thus, *pace* Paul Guyer and others, there is no need to regard the B-edition Refutation as Kant's

¹Andrew Chignell, "Causal Refutations of Idealism," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 60:240 (June 2010): 507.

first, failed attempt to move away from his earlier theory of cognition, and no need to reconstruct the argument in light of later texts.

The structure of this paper will be relatively straightforward. In the first section I will lay out what I take the form of Kant's argument to be, and subsequent sections will deal one by one with the premises. I will offer some criticisms of other readings, in particular the causal reading that Chignell targets, along the way.

The Structure of the Refutation

Kant prefaces the argument of the Refutation with a discussion of two types of material idealism. Berkeley's 'dogmatic' idealism contends that the very ideas of space and matter contain contradictions and therefore asserts that the existence of spatially external objects is "false and impossible" (B274).² Kant claims that such a conclusion is an inevitable outgrowth of a transcendental realist conception of space, and, as he takes himself to have already dispatched this position in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, does not address it in the argument of the Refutation. He attributes the second form of idealism, what he calls 'problematic' idealism, to Descartes. This form of idealism defends the weaker thesis that we cannot know with certainty that spatially external material objects exist. The problematic idealist's reason for asserting this, Kant explains, is that he "declares only one empirical assertion, namely I am, to be indubitable" (B274) and reasons that any legitimate endorsement of the existence of external objects must be the

² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). With the exception of reference to Guyer's editorial notes, I will cite this work in text using the page numbers of the A and B editions.

result of an inference to the conclusion that certain modifications of this known self have external objects as their cause. However, since any such inference from effects to determinate causes can be made “only unreliably” (B276), we can never be certain whether the inferred external objects actually exist or not. The Refutation is directed specifically at this Cartesian form of idealism and its corresponding skepticism about the existence of the external world.

Though Kant undeniably affirms the existence of empirically real objects, this is not, properly speaking, the conclusion of the argument of the Refutation. This would be the case, presumably, if the Refutation were aimed at dogmatic idealism. But his target here is rather the problematic idealist, who does not deny the *existence* of external objects, but merely our ability to *know* that such objects exist. Since the thesis in question is epistemological in this respect, we should expect the conclusion of the Refutation to be epistemological, as well. Kant states the theorem to be demonstrated as: “the mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me” (B 275). This thesis is not a simple assertion of fact, but a claim about a logical entailment. It can thus be expressed as a conditional: *if* it is the case that I possess an empirically determined consciousness of my own existence, *then* there must be objects in space outside me. Descartes' position, which affirms the antecedent but not the consequent, is clearly inconsistent with this. Thus while there are obvious ontological implications that follow from the conclusion of Kant's argument, what is actually demonstrated is the incompatibility of two claims: that I know I exist and that there are no external objects.

Though it is supplemented with an introduction and three explanatory notes, the actual proof given in the Refutation is notoriously short. Kant presents it as follows:

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I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. All time-determination presupposes something persistent in perception. This persistent thing, however, cannot be something in me, since my own existence in time can first be determined only through this persistent thing. 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. (B 275)

As I suggested above, the first premise of this argument is best seen as an assumed premise and the conclusion, therefore, as a conditional. Kant takes it that his Cartesian interlocutors already agree that each of us is “conscious of [our] existence as determined in time” (though, as we will see below, this requires some qualification), and he aims to show that in virtue of this the skeptic is implicitly committed to the “the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself.” In its most straightforward form, then, Kant's argument is a conditional proof composed of two hypothetical syllogisms:

1. AP: I am conscious of my existence as determined in time.
2. If 1, then I have perceived something persistent.
3. If 2, then some real thing outside me exists, therefore
4. If 1, then some real thing outside me exists.

This argument is clearly valid, but provides only a skeleton of the actual reasoning Kant employs in the Refutation. The real argumentative work comes in the justification of the premises, to which we turn now.

Premise 1:

Self-knowledge is necessarily time-determined

Kant's first premise raises two immediate difficulties: it is not obvious what he means by “conscious[ness] of my existence as determined in time,” and it is even less clear that he is right in assuming that the problematic idealist agrees that we possess such consciousness. However, as Chignell notes, despite this lack of clarity there now exists “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.”³ In particular, this understanding of the first premise is central to the 'causal interpretation' of the Refutation⁴ first proposed by Jonathan Bennett and later reformulated by Guyer and Georges Dicker.⁵

According to this reading, the starting point of the Refutation is that we are capable of knowing, at least some of the time, in what order our past experiences occurred. My self-awareness is such that I can not only recall, for example, my experiences of driving to work this morning and of eating lunch; I can also know that the driving came before the eating. It is plausible to think that absent the ability to make these kinds of judgments my knowledge of myself would be severely diminished, if not

³ Chignell, “Causal Refutations of Idealism,” 490.

⁴ Chignell simply refers to this as the 'causal refutation,' and for the sake of brevity I will follow him in this.

⁵ Dina Emundts also interprets the first premise in this way, though she construes the rest of the argument very differently than the causal refuters do. See “The Refutation of Idealism and the Distinction between Phenomena and Noumena,” *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), 185. I will address Emundts account below in the discussion of premise three.

outright destroyed. It is also reasonable to think that the problematic idealist, who affirms that we can have certain knowledge of our own existence, would also acknowledge that such ordering knowledge is possible. According to the causal refutation, however, this acknowledgement raises a problem for the skeptic. For, while the skeptic thinks that introspection is the only trustworthy form of 'sense' we possess, introspection alone is insufficient to justify judgments about the order of our remembered experiences. Dicker, following Guyer, presents the difficulty in this way:

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.⁶

Introspection gives us recollective access to our past experiences, but there is nothing about these experiences, *qua* recollected, that could justify the claim that one of them preceded another in time.⁷ And since introspection is the only sort of

⁶ Georges Dicker, "Kant's Refutation of Idealism," *Noûs* 42:1 (2008): 83. The corresponding passage is found in Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 306-7.

⁷ Guyer and Dicker disagree with respect to whether this is a problem only for remembered inner states. Guyer claims that the same difficulty exists for present states, specifically, that through introspection alone we cannot tell whether a given experience is occurring *now*, or whether we are merely remembering a past experience (307). Dicker, however, claims that this "only detracts from [the] plausibility" of Guyer's argument (85). I will stick to discussing only cases of past experience, since this weaker claim is sufficient for the purposes of the causal

sense available to the problematic idealist, it seems he is left with no way to account for the obvious fact that we *can* determine the order of these experiences.

The inability of introspection to deliver the ordering knowledge that we all clearly have is, on this reading, what shows the necessity of an external world. Inner sense alone cannot account for our ability to order our memories, but outer sense can. I can know that I drove to work before eating lunch if, and only if, I can correlate the experiences with external states or events – say, with the rising of the sun and with its being directly overhead – that occurred in a known order. Thus “the argument's core idea is that one class of memories, namely memories of the order of one's subjective experiences, rests on another class of memories, namely memories of the order of successive states of an enduring reality.”⁸ The external objects I remember having experienced constitute the 'persistent' demanded in Kant's second premise. The modifications of the states or properties of these persistent things serve as the 'clock' that is needed to order my subjective experiences, but which is lacking in these experiences themselves.

I am not concerned here with the philosophical prospects of this argument. It may be that the causal refutation is an effective way to respond to skepticism,⁹ but there is good reason to doubt that it is *Kant's* way of responding. Not only does Kant not state in the Refutation (nor in any other section of the first *Critique*) that introspection is insufficient to determine the order of our memories; he makes no mention of memory *at all* in the

refutation.

⁸ Dicker, 84

⁹ Chignell and Anthony Brueckner, however, give good reasons to doubt that this form of the argument can ultimately succeed. See Chignell, *op. cit.*, and “Causal Refutations of Idealism Revisited,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 61:242 (January 2011): 184-6; Anthony Brueckner, “The Anti-Skeptical Epistemology of the Refutation of Idealism,” *Philosophical Topics* 19:1 (Spring 1991): 31-45.

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Refutation. Defenders of the causal refutation are fairly upfront about the fact that this view is only tendentially related to the actual text of the Refutation in the first *Critique*. Bennett notes that his version of the causal refutation is inspired most directly by Wittgenstein, and he admits that it “certainly cannot be found in Kant's words, and ... may not have been what he 'had in mind' in writing the Refutation.”¹⁰ Guyer contends that “Kant's intentions in the refutation of idealism have been no more self-evident to his readers than they were to himself,” and even that these intentions “*must* be obscure” in light of the fact that the conclusion of the Refutation is fundamentally at odds with many of the transcendental idealist claims defended elsewhere in the first *Critique*.¹¹ For this reason, we cannot understand what Kant was *really* trying to say in the Refutation (i.e., the causal version of the argument) from this text itself. We must look, rather, to passages in the *Nachlass* written later, after Kant had come to abandon or at least significantly revise his conception of transcendental idealism, to see what Kant really intended to say, but did not, in the B-edition Refutation.¹²

¹⁰ Johnathan Bennett, *Kant's Analytic* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1966), 203-4.

¹¹ Guyer, 280, emphasis added.

¹² *Ibid.*, 287-8. Even these later passages, however, yield Guyer's version of the argument only under considerable hermeneutical pressure. Guyer notes that the *Nachlass* “includes no fewer than ten lengthy fragments” that “could only have been intended as improved versions” of the 1787 Refutation (288). The only reason given, however, for why we should think that these 'only could have been intended' in this way, is that the original version of the argument is so obviously unsound that the only reason Kant could have had for revisiting it was to improve it. Guyer admits, however, that even among these supposed corrections to the earlier argument, many “contain no notable advance over the text of 1787” (305). And the one passage that *is* supposed to contain the improvement – R6313, 18:614 – mentions neither memory nor the idea that inner states are caused by external objects whose temporal order we can know. In short, all of the later passages Guyer cites seem to resemble the argument of the *Critique* much more closely than they do the causal argument he proposes. Thus, if we do not come to these later passages with the assumption that the 1787 version of the argument is

Dicker follows Guyer in this, claiming that “Kant's Refutation of Idealism as he presents it in the *Critique of Pure Reason* ... is a failure,” and that we can salvage something philosophically interesting from it only by “extract[ing] Kant's argument” from later *reflexionen*.¹³

Further, as Chignell argues, it does not seem that the causal refutation is even the right *kind* of argument to serve Kant's purposes. The claim that introspection cannot determine the order of past experiences, that there is no 'clock' attached to each of our memories, “if it is true at all, ... is only contingently true.”¹⁴ It may be that introspection turns out to be impoverished in the way Bennett, Guyer, and Dicker claim, but there is no reason to think that it *must* be. As Chignell points out, this calls into question the Kantian credentials of the causal refutation.

Does Immanuel Kant, the great anti-psychologistic defender of *a priori* armchair philosophy, really mean to refute the sceptic by pointing to the brute fact that we do not happen to have anything sufficiently clock-like in our experience? Can it really be *a posteriori* knowledge of a bare contingency that 'proves' the existence of an objective order of external spatial objects, and thus saves philosophy from the age-old 'scandal' of external-world scepticism?¹⁵

The causal refutation is the kind of refutation of idealism one would expect to find in post-Wittgensteinian analytic philo-

a failure, there is no reason to see them as 'improvements' to this argument in any stronger sense than that they are attempts to spell out the reasoning of the first version more clearly and explicitly. There is certainly no reason to think they articulate an argument as drastically different from that of the first *Critique* as is the causal argument Guyer proposes.

¹³ Dicker, 80, 82.

¹⁴ Chignell, “Causal Refutations of Idealism,” 493.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 501.

sophy, but it simply doesn't sound like Kant. Considered *qua* argument, this may be a mark in its favor, but *qua* interpretation, it is a serious problem. We should conclude, then, that however strong the causal refutation is, it is at best only *a* refutation of idealism, not a presentation of *the* Refutation of Idealism, i.e. the argument Kant actually makes in the first *Critique*.

If we want to understand what Kant is saying in the Refutation proper, we must construe its first premise differently than do defenders of the causal refutation. Specifically, I want to argue, we must give a different account of what sort of common ground Kant takes himself to share with the Cartesian. We can safely assume that the latter agrees with Kant that each of us is conscious of our own existence. However, as Kant points out, this claim by itself is not sufficient to get the Refutation argument off the ground. He explains in the first note,

Here it is proved 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. (B 277)

The Refutation, Kant says, does *not* prove that outer sense is required for 'the consciousness of our own existence' or for 'the representation I am.' If this were all that the problematic idealist acknowledged, he would be untouched by Kant's argument. The idealist, however, affirms more than this; he holds that we

have *knowledge*, indeed, indubitable knowledge, of our own existence. And for this, Kant thinks, a merely conceptual representation is not enough. *Cognition* of one's own existence requires both a concept and an intuition – in this case, an inner intuition. Since the form of inner sense is time, this means that knowledge of one's own existence is necessarily knowledge of it 'as determined in time.'

The skeptic, of course, would likely contest this account. There is little reason to think that Descartes accepts the idea that empirical cognition always requires a concept and an intuition, and there is even less reason to think that problematic idealists in general would accept it. Kant, however, takes himself to have already shown why this is the case (in the *Transcendental Logic* and, indeed, throughout the first *Critique*), and therefore does not repeat the argument in the Refutation.¹⁶ There is not space here to recount Kant's arguments for this thesis. It is sufficient for present purposes to point out that, according to the first note, the first premise of the Refutation argument can function as an assumed premise only given a wider theory of cognition that the problematic idealist does not necessarily share with Kant. Thus, if we want to restrict the assumption of the argument only to what the skeptic would immediately grant, we would have to unpack the first premise into an argument of its own. Such an argument would go something like this:

¹⁶ This is also suggested, albeit subtly, by the way Kant phrases the theorem to be proved in the Refutation. Rather than expressing this simply as, 'the mere fact of self-consciousness proves the existence of objects in space outside me,' he writes, "the mere, *but empirically determined*, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me." This, I think, is Kant's way of saying that the starting point of his argument is 'mere,' but not *as* 'mere' as the claim explicitly affirmed by the idealist. The theorem can be glossed: 'the skeptic's mere affirmation of self-knowledge, *provided, mind you, that we acknowledge the conditions of this knowledge*, proves the existence of an external world.'

- 1a. AP: I have knowledge of my own existence
- 1b. If 1a, then I have an intuition of my own existence
- 1c. Intuition of one's own existence can come only through inner sense
- 1d. Items given to inner sense are determined in time (i.e., time is the form of inner sense), therefore,
- 1e. If 1, then I am conscious of my existence as determined in time

The first note suggests that advocates of the causal refutation are wrong to think that Kant's claim about time-determination in the first premise must be interpreted in such a way that the problematic idealist would agree with it. It also suggests that causal refuters employ an overly narrow understanding of what the phrase 'determined in time' refers to. As we have seen, according to Bennett, Guyer, and Dicker, to be capable of determining one's inner states in time is to be capable of having *knowledge* of the specific *order* in which past experiences occurred. In the first note, however, Kant equates temporal determination with *inner experience itself*,¹⁷ not simply with knowledge of this or that particular claim about inner experience. If this is the case, then the difficulty Kant is attributing to the solipsist is much deeper than that identified by the causal refutation. According to the latter, the idealist's problem is that inner intuition, by itself, provides no evidence that could justify claims about the order of our experiences. According to Kant, however, the idealist's problem is that, without outer intuition, inner intuition itself would simply be impossible.

Here a clarification is in order. To say that outer intuition is required for inner intuition is not to say that it is required for

¹⁷ He writes, "only by means of [outer experience] is possible not, to be sure, the consciousness of our own existence, but its determination in time, i.e., inner experience."

inner *impressions*. To enjoy the latter it would be sufficient that one sensibly affect oneself, and Kant's argument gives us no reason to think that this could not occur in an isolated mind. Inner impressions amount to inner *experiences* or *intuitions*, however, only if they are cognitively significant, and cognitive significance is the result of their empirical determination in time. Kant's central claim is that without the experience of outer objects, the passing show of self-affection could never achieve this empirical determination. Inner sense could never be organized or interpreted in such a way that it contained representations fit, as genuine intuitions are, to be taken up into judgments. It is in this sense that Kant's argument is 'semantic' rather than epistemological. His contention is not that something outer is needed to justify certain claims about the inner, but that something outer is needed to render the inner intelligible. Without outer experience, we could not make meaningful judgments at all about our inner lives at all, let alone justified ones.¹⁸

Premise 2:

Time-determination requires intuition of persistence

According to Kant's account of cognition, the organization of a sensory manifold into determinate representations is carried out in the “figurative synthesis.” This synthesis is an exercise of the understanding (specifically, of the transcendental imagination) and thus involves the categor-

¹⁸ In this I follow Henry Allison, who argues that Kant is not “concerned with the conditions of justification or verification of particular knowledge claims about the self and its states. His concern is rather with the conditions of the possibility of making such judgments (judgments of inner sense) at all.” [*Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 297.] However, below I will argue that Allison's account of what these judgments are like, and why external objects are required if we are to make them, is somewhat flawed.

ories. It is not yet a full-blown application of the categories, however. The figurative synthesis does not yield judgments, it yields determinate representations capable of being the objects of judgment. The upshot of premises two and three of the Refutation argument is that experience of external objects is required for this synthesis to be carried out with respect to the impressions of inner sense.

In the Analogies of Experience Kant discusses nature of the figurative synthesis, and thus it should not surprise us that the second premise of the Refutation hearkens back to this earlier analysis. Specifically, premise two reasserts one of the primary conclusions of the first Analogy: that in order to perceive two states or events as temporally successive or simultaneous, some unchanging substratum must also be intuited in terms of which their temporal relationship can be represented.¹⁹ Kant's argument for this begins with the claim that time, as a form of intuition, must be a unity. Judging that x succeeds, or is simultaneous with, y assumes that x and y belong to a single objective time-order. If they did not, if they belonged to two distinct, parallel times, then we could not meaningfully relate them to one another at all (B 231-2). For this reason, any apprehension of appearances in time requires a representation of the unity of the time-order as the "substratum" which remains the same amid the constant temporal flux of impressions. However, since "time cannot be perceived by itself," this representation must have its intuitive basis in the particular entities that are perceived. Kant writes, "it is in the objects of perception, i.e., the appearances, that the substratum must be encountered that

¹⁹ Most commentators agree that the second premise refers to the first Analogy: Allison, 298; Emundts 170ff; Guyer 332; Adrian Bardon, "Kant's Empiricism in his Refutation of Idealism," *Kantian Review* 8 (2004): 70; Robert Hanna, "The Inner and the Outer: Kant's 'Refutation' Reconstructed," *Ratio* XIII (June 2000): 153.

represents time in general and in which all change or simultaneity can be perceived in apprehension through the relation of the appearances to it” (B 225). This substratum, he claims, is the proper referent of the concept of 'substance.' The claim of the Refutation's second premise is that the temporal determination of experience requires the intuition of a persistent substance.

Kant's argument in the first Analogy easily lends itself to misinterpretation. It would seem that his claim is simply that in order to perceive the alteration of a thing, we must perceive its successive states against the background of something that is unchanging – for example, that I can perceive the motion of a fly buzzing across the room only against the background of a wall that is stationary. While this may be true, it cannot be the primary point Kant is making in the first Analogy. Kant's claim there is that the perception of a persistent substance is a condition of the possibility of relating any two appearances in time. He also asserts, throughout the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, that *all* appearances are relatable in this way. So if Kant's claim is that substance is analogous to the wall against which the fly's motion can be perceived, then he would be committed not only to the idea that there exists some absolutely unchanging object, but that each of us is constantly perceiving it. This is an obviously absurd thesis.

This misinterpretation is avoided if we note that substance, for Kant, is not straightforwardly an 'object' of perception. Rather, it is a logically separable moment of all perceived objects. As Kant puts it, substance is that “of which everything that belongs to existence [i.e., perceivable entities] can be thought only as a determination” (B 225).²⁰ Kant's claim in the first

²⁰ Guyer appears to agree on this point. He states in a footnote to his translation of the first *Critique*, “as this remark [A189/B232] suggests, permanence and therefore substantiality is not itself something that is directly perceived” (730,

Analogy is not that there must be some persistent object, 'substance,' that is perceived alongside every temporally finite empirical appearance. It is not as if the perception of the simultaneous existence of a table and chair requires that I also perceive some third, enduring thing. His point is that in order to locate the table and chair in a single objective time order, I must *take them to be* two determinations of one underlying substance (in this case, of matter.) Thus, in any given experience the direct objects of my perception are particular, changeable, things with a finite duration. However, it is a necessary condition of their appearing as such that they are represented as so many determinations of substance.²¹ The representation of substance as the persistent substratum of appearances, then, is a product of the understanding's initial interpretation of the intuitive manifold. Specifically, it is the product of the "synthesis of apprehension," the exercise of the figurative synthesis responsible for "distinguish[ing] the time in the succession of impressions on one another" (A99). The second premise of the Refutation asserts that this synthetic activity is a condition of the possibility of the inner intuition specified in the first premise.

note 73). He makes little mention of this point in his discussion of the Refutation, however.

²¹ As Kant puts it: "persistence is accordingly a necessary condition under which alone appearances, as things or objects, are determinable in a possible experience" (A189/B232).

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Premise 3:

Experience of the persistent entails the existence of outer objects

Jonathan Vogel points out that Kant's claim in the second premise of the Refutation argument appears to doom his prospects of ever establishing the conclusion.²² For, according to the first Analogy, *all* empirical appearances, including those of inner sense, must be represented as determinations of substance. And since Kant would almost certainly deny that inner objects are material, the best candidate for the substance of which they are determinations is the empirical self. If this is the case, however, then there seems to be no reason why the need for “something persistent in perception” should amount to the requirement that there exist “actual things that I perceive outside myself.” Why couldn't the self, whose existence the idealist affirms, function as the required persistent? To “complete” the Refutation Kant must rule out this possibility. To do this, Vogel notes, “Kant needs to establish some disparity between inner and outer sense, such that outer sense give us direct knowledge of enduring objects, while inner sense does not.”²³ It is not immediately clear that Kant's theory of sensation allows for any such disparity.

As Vogel explains, Henry Allison attempts to avoid this difficulty by denying that we have intuition of the self as persistent substance at all. According to Allison's interpretation, neither the transcendental nor the empirical self can fill the required role of a persistent. With respect to the transcendental

²² Jonathan Vogel, “The Problem of Self-Knowledge in Kant's 'Refutation of Idealism': Two Recent Views,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53:4 (Dec. 1993), 876ff.

²³ Vogel, 878

self, we have an idea, but no intuition. This transcendental idea of the I “does not refer to anything determinate which can itself serve to determine the existence of the self and its states in time.”²⁴ At the empirical level, we do have intuition, but not intuition of *the self*, properly speaking. Allison explains,

This follows from Kant's essentially Humean view of inner intuition or experience and its object. Once again, all that we inwardly intuit is the appearing (to ourselves) of our own representations. There is no additional intuition of a subject to which they appear (no impression of the self). Since each of these appearings is a fleeting occurrence, inner intuition or experience does not provide anything capable of determining the existence of a subject in time.”²⁵

The second premise establishes that there must be something *persistent* that is *in perception*. The transcendental self fails the second of these criteria, the empirical self the first.

Allison's reason for ruling out the transcendental self is unobjectionable and is supported by the second note to the Refutation: “the consciousness of myself in the representation I is no intuition at all, but a merely intellectual representation of the self-activity of a thinking subject. And hence this does not have the least predicate of intuition that, as persistent, could serve as the correlate for time-determination in inner sense” (B278). It is not fully clear, however, what his reasons are for ruling out the empirical self. If we look only at Allison's account of the third premise of the Refutation argument, it would seem he claiming that, unlike outer sense, inner sense does not provide us with any representation of a persistent substance. This, however, would be in conflict with his wider interpre-

²⁴ Allison, 299.

²⁵ Allison, 299; cited in Vogel, 877.

tation of Kant on inner sense. Allison is well aware that Kant's view of the self is "Humean" only in a restricted sense. Hume, as Vogel puts it, "is hostile to the notion that *anything* can be known as a substance or bearer of properties,"²⁶ and, *a fortiori*, hostile to the notion that the self can be known in this way. Kant, however, does think we can know substance; we can and must know it precisely as that of which all empirical appearances, including those of inner sense, are determinations. Allison affirms this, asserting that in inner sense, "the self regards itself as the substratum or subject in which these representations inhere."²⁷ If this is the case, however, then the asymmetry between inner and outer sense suggested by Allison's reading of premise three does not obtain. Of course in inner intuition "there is no additional intuition of a subject to which [representations] appear," but, as we saw above, there is no "additional intuition" of substance in outer intuition, either. In both cases, substance is regarded as a logical moment of temporally bounded appearances. Given this similarity, it would seem that if outer objects meet the criteria laid down by the Refutation, inner objects must meet them, as well.

Vogel's interpretation of Allison suggests a second way we might understand the latter's point concerning inner sense. We can approach this by noting the distinction Allison draws between the 'judgmental' and 'ontological' senses of substance that appear in the first *Critique*. Sometimes Kant uses 'substance' to describe the logical subject of a judgment; for example, "in the categorical judgment 'Socrates is mortal', I conceive of the subject (Socrates) as the owner of a property (mortality)" (119). This, Allison argues, is the sense Kant draws on in discussing the connection of the pure concept of substance with

²⁶ Vogel, 881.

²⁷ Allison, 262.

the categories. At other times, Kant employs a “full-blown ontological sense” of substance, the idea of “something truly substantial that persists throughout all change” (207). Not all logical subjects are 'substances' in this stronger sense, as is indicated by the fact that we can predicate *mortality* of Socrates. Now, while the ontological sense of substance seems to play the same role in inner intuition that it does in outer intuition, this is not true of the judgmental sense of substance. Allison explains, “in judgments of outer experience, and therefore in outer experience itself, representations are taken as representations of the object and are predicated of the object in the judgment.” However, “in referring its representations to itself in judgments of inner sense, [the self] does not conceive of them as representations of itself in the way outer intuitions are regarded as representations of outer objects.” Rather, the self conceives of itself in these cases only as a “substratum” or “bare particular” (262). As Vogel puts it,

[Allison's] idea is that ... for outer objects, we can assign a concrete content to what those objects are. Hence, in predicating a feature of an outer object, we have something more than the concept of a 'bare substratum' to serve as the subject of the judgment. By contrast, in a judgment like 'I am having a visual sensation of a rose', the term 'I' is supposed to lack the requisite concrete content.²⁸

It is unclear whether, as Vogel suggests, Allison intends these considerations to figure into his account of the Refutation argument. Regardless, the judgmental difference between the representation of substance in inner and outer sense does not succeed in answering Vogel's objection to Kant. The reason is

²⁸ Vogel, 880.

simply that the first Analogy and, by extension, the Refutation, is quite clearly concerned with the ontological sense of substance, not the judgmental one.²⁹ The second premise of the Refutation states only that self-knowledge requires the perception of a persistent, not that we must be able to make judgments about inner sense whose subject terms possess a certain degree of conceptual content. Allison's account gives us no reason to think that inner intuition is incapable of supplying the required persistence. Thus, while Allison identifies a real “disparity between inner and outer sense,” it is not the right sort of disparity to close the gap Vogel identifies in the Refutation argument.

Dina Emundts argues that we can defend Kant against Vogel's objection without diving into the murky waters of Kant's theory of the self. According to Emundts, we can rule out the idea that the empirical self is the required persistent if we recognize that the first Analogy “not only claims that we need an absolute persistent; it also claims that we need something *spatial* for time-determination.”³⁰ Since the self is clearly not spatial, it cannot be the ultimate source of the representation of persistence; only something encountered in outer experience could do this. Emundts, in other words, suggests that the relevant disparity between inner and outer sense is the fact that the former involves only time, but the latter both time *and* space. I will argue shortly that Emundts is correct in pointing to this as the relevant difference between inner and outer sense. However, I do not think the first Analogy is the best place to locate the textual support for this claim. Emundts quotes the theorem of the first Analogy – “in all change of appearances substance persists, and its quantum is neither increased nor diminished in nature” (B224) – and immediately continues, as

²⁹ Allison also reads these passages in this way. See 204ff., 298.

³⁰ Emundts, 175, emphasis added.

if she were giving a gloss on this passage, “we can determine something as lasting though the appearances change by thinking of it as having one magnitude that stays the same while it changes with respect to all its other determinations. This is only possible with respect to something that has not only an extension in time but also in space.”³¹ It is difficult to see what the connection is supposed to be between Emundts' claim and the one cited from Kant. The argument she here attributes to him is, at best, present in the first Analogy only implicitly. Nevertheless, there are a number of other passages in the first *Critique* where Kant makes this argument more explicitly. Let's consider three of these.

First, in §6 of the Transcendental Aesthetic Kant writes,

Time cannot be a determination of outer appearances; it belongs neither to a shape or a position, etc., but on the contrary determines the relation of representations in our inner state. And just because this inner intuition yields no shape we also attempt to remedy this lack through analogies, and represent the temporal sequence through a line progressing to infinity, in which the manifold constitutes a series that is only one dimension, and infer from the properties of this line to all the properties of time, with the sole difference that the parts of the former are simultaneous but those of the latter always exist successively. (A33/B50)

Kant's claim here appears to be that inner sense, because it involves only time and not space, is intuitively impoverished in comparison to outer sense. Inner sense contains a 'lack' that must be 'remedied' by appeal to spatial representations, specifically to the idea of an infinite line. This spatial analogy forms

³¹ Ibid., 176.

the basis on which we can grasp the unique properties of time. We understand the nature of succession by way of an 'inference' from the properties of the line drawn in space.

In discussing the figurative synthesis in §24 of the B edition of the Transcendental Deduction, Kant makes this same point more directly:

Motion, as action of the subject (not as determination of an object), consequently the synthesis of the manifold in space, if we abstract from this manifold in space and attend solely to the action in accordance with which we determine the form of inner sense, first produces the concept of succession at all. The understanding therefore does not find some sort of combination of the manifold already in inner sense, but produces it, by affecting inner sense. (B155)

Inner sense does not, on its own, contain the material needed to make sense of temporal succession. Rather, we arrive at this concept by way of an 'abstraction' from the idea of motion. For this reason, the figurative synthesis can make sense of the appearances of inner experience only by borrowing conceptual material from the spatial manifold of outer sense.

In the General Note on the System of Principles, Kant again makes this point, here connecting it quite explicitly with the claims made in the Refutation:

Now how it is possible that from a given state an opposed state of the same thing should follow not only cannot be made comprehensible by reason without an example, but cannot even be made understandable without intuition, and this intuition is the motion of a point in space, the existence of which in different places (as a sequence of opposed determinations) first makes alteration intuitable to us; for in order

subsequently to make even inner alterations thinkable, we must be able to grasp time, as the form of inner sense, figuratively through a line, and grasp the inner alteration through the drawing of this line (motion), and thus grasp the successive existence of ourself in different states through outer intuition; the real ground of which is that all alteration presupposes something that persists in intuition, even in order merely to be perceived as alteration, but there is no persistent intuition to be found in inner sense.” (B291-2)

To make sense of alteration we must understand how a single thing can occupy two opposed states. The understanding would not be able to grasp this were it not aided by intuition, specifically by the experience of motion, where the opposed states through which the thing passes over time are its different locations in space. Only after this is in place can we understand non-spatial alterations, such as those that appear to us in inner sense. Inner sense, is, in this respect, *conceptually dependent* on outer sense.

As a result of this conceptual dependence, the kind of persistence that appears in inner sense (the empirical self as substance) is only a derivative one. We can think of the self as that of which our inner states are modifications – indeed we must do so – but only on the basis of a prior understanding of substance arrived at through outer experience. The idea of thinking substance employed in self-cognition, in other words, is derived from the idea of material substance that belongs to outer sense.³² As Kant says in the second note to the Refutation, “all use of our faculty of cognition in experience for the deter-

³² The derivative character of the idea of the substantial self is also reflected in the fact that, while substance in the 'full-blown ontological sense' must persist through *all* time (A185/B228), this is clearly not true of the empirical self, which we represent as having a beginning in time (birth) as well as an end (death.)

mination of time agrees with this completely. Not only can we perceive all time-determination only through the change in outer relations (motion) relative to that which persists in space ... we do not even have anything persistent on which we could *base* the concept of a substance, as intuition, except merely matter” (B277-8, emphasis added). Understood in this way, Kant's third premise does not assert that the self cannot be represented as substantial. His claim, rather, is that the self is not and cannot be the *origin* of our understanding of substance and persistence, because it is based on the idea of outer, material substance. This somewhat weaker claim is still sufficient for the purposes of the Refutation, since it entails that self-knowledge is not possible apart from the experience of outer objects.

One last difficulty must be addressed before we conclude our discussion of the third premise. To prove that we must have at least some spatial representations is not to refute the problematic idealist, for he could simply claim that these representations are merely the products of *imagination*, and in this sense still 'inner.' Kant is well aware of this possibility. In the third note he grants that some “intuitive presentations of outer thing[s] ... may well be the mere effect of the imagination” (B278). The Refutation is supposed to show only that *not all* of our representations of outer things can be merely imagined. So far, however, we have not made explicit any reason for denying that the imagination could have produced all our spatial representations, including the representation of permanence.

Emundts offers an intriguing response to this difficulty, but one that is ultimately unsuccessful. She begins by rightly noting that Kant's aim in the Refutation is not to establish the existence of things-in-themselves, but only of entities that are outer and 'actual' in the sense identified by the postulate of actuality: “that which is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation) is actual” (A 218/B266). Chief among these is the

condition that an object “is determined by thoroughgoing causal relations,”³³ and for this reason Kant contends that the criterion that distinguishes actual from merely imagined objects is that the former, but not the latter, stand in thoroughgoing causal relations to one another. Thus, Emundts argues, if we could determine that the representation of substance, the existence of which Kant has already proved to this point in the argument, is also the representation of something standing in such thoroughgoing relations, then the imagination objection would be defeated. Yet we need no additional argument in the Refutation to prove this; Kant has already argued, in the second Analogy, that to represent something as a determination of substance is *necessarily* to represent it as belonging to a network of causal relationships. Thus,

If we follow the arguments given by the Analogies, we not only know that we need something absolutely persistent that is spatial for all time-determinations, but we know that whenever we refer to an absolute persistent that is spatial and that is determined by thoroughgoing causal laws, we have something that is independent of our subjective inner states. Thus ... there is no room left for a position that claims that our representations are all imagined. Assuming that the Analogies are true, the problematic idealist is refuted.³⁴

Given Kant's account of actuality, the representation of substance is objective by definition. Insofar as Kant has established the need for a representation of substance, no further work is needed to respond to the idealist.

The problem with this defense of Kant is that it trades on an ambiguity between representing something *as* objective and

³³ Emundts, 181.

³⁴ Ibid., 182.

representing something *that is* objective. When I imagine a unicorn, I necessarily think of it as spatial, and I can, if I choose, think of it as governed by the same causal laws that obtain in the actual world. But this obviously would not entail that the represented unicorn is anything more than imaginary. I would have reason to accept the actuality of the unicorn only if I had some reason to think that it *really is* in space and governed by causal laws. Kant's postulate of actuality does not contradict common sense on this point. The postulate does not state that anytime something is represented as causally-connected it is actual, but that something is actual if and only if it "is connected with the conditions of *experience* (of *sensation*.)" An object counts as actual only if its representation is rooted in the appropriate way in intuition. Emundts' appeal to Kant's claim that "a real thing can be sufficiently distinguished from a product of the imagination by the criterion that it stands in a thoroughgoing lawful connection with all other things in perception"³⁵ (183) appears to overlook that Kant's main point is one about *receptivity*. I can imagine a baseball and imagine that it is governed by the laws of nature, but when I perceive an actual baseball I *intuit* that it is governed by these laws. When I drop the actual ball, I have no say in whether or not it falls to the ground, and *this* is what indicates its actuality. Thus while Emundts is correct to point out that for Kant the idea of substance is the idea of something governed by causal laws, this is insufficient to respond to the imagination objection. The idealist can grant that we must possess a representation of a spatial, causally-connected substance while consistently maintaining that this representation is merely the product of the imagination.

To this point in our analysis of the Refutation, we have only said that in order to make sense of inner intuition one must have

³⁵ Ibid., 183.

a representation of something persistent and spatial; we have not made explicit any reason for thinking that this representation must itself be rooted in intuition and thus actual.

Before looking to Kant's reasons for this, though, we must clear up an ambiguity. According to the first Analogy, the persistent referred to in the second and third premises of the Refutation *is* a product of the imagination – in a sense. It is brought about by the figurative synthesis, which is an operation of the *transcendental* imagination. The skeptic's objection, however, does not appeal to imagination in this sense, but rather the more 'everyday' faculty of imagination, what Kant calls the "reproductive imagination." This is the faculty at work, for example, when I imagine a dragon, or (even less realistically) imagine the Cubs winning the Series. Both kinds of imagination belong to sensibility (B151), but are related very differently to the intuitions they involve. The transcendental imagination, as we noted above, functions to organize a given intuitive manifold in such a way that it contains representations suitable to be the objects of judgment. The reproductive imagination, by contrast, takes material given in previous intuitions and rearranges these to form new representations according to the laws of association. The key difference, for our purposes, is that while the reproductive imagination depends on these previously intuited materials, it is capable of operating even when we are not presently intuiting them. To imagine a dragon I need the idea of a reptile, of wings, of fire, etc., but I need not actually perceive any of these at the time I imagine the dragon. In the transcendental synthesis of imagination, however, the representation that is 'produced' (in our case, the representation of substance) is regarded as a characteristic of *presently intuited* appearances. The figurative synthesis does not build up the idea of substance out of previously intuited data; it presents something presently intuited as a determination of substance. Thus

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the representation of substance produced by the transcendental imagination is 'in perception' in a way that the constructs of reproductive imagination are not.

The question, then, is why the representation of persistence must arise from imagination via the figurative synthesis, as opposed to arising merely from reproductive imagination. A direct response would be simply to point out that, as reproductive, the latter already presupposes the existence of intuitions in which the original forms are given, but this line of response is not terribly promising.³⁶ A more interesting reply is implicit in what we have noted above. In the above cited passage from the General Note, Kant points out that the idea of change includes the thought of a single thing occupying two opposed states. He claims that this idea “not only cannot be made comprehensible by reason without an example, but cannot even be made understandable without intuition,” specifically, the intuition of motion. Kant's point is that when it comes to certain concepts, like the concept of alteration, the understanding simply cannot get by on its own. In these cases the understanding relies on something it cannot produce itself, something *given* to it through intuition. The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for the figurative

³⁶ Apart from the fact that this puts a good deal of argumentative weight on Kant's limited analyses of the reproductive imagination, this line of response invites a rejoinder that is already present in Descartes' *Meditations*. In the Third Meditation he suggests that all outer appearances may simply be the product of the will, and he considers as an objection to this the fact that many appearances are outside our control, and thus could not be the product of the will. To this he retorts that, even if they are not produced by the will, these could be the product of some other faculty of which we are not aware. The same line could be taken with respect to imagination – even if we know that imagination cannot produce representations *ex nihilo*, how do we know that there is not some other, hidden faculty that can? This indicates that the strategy of defending the claim that the representation of persistence must come through intuition by appeal to the limited power of reproductive imagination suffers from the same weakness Chignell identifies in the causal refutation's appeal to memory. It is simply inappropriate to ground a response to skepticism in contingent facts about empirical psychology.

synthesis, which is the “first application” of the understanding to sensibility (B152). The figurative synthesis is not just responsible for organizing the spatial manifold, it also relies on what is given in this manifold in doing so. The organization of a temporal manifold in terms of simultaneity and succession is possible only on the basis of a genuine, outer experience of motion. Thus the fact that the transcendental imagination, unlike the reproductive imagination, performs its work *in the presence of intuition* turns out to be essential to its function. Without the contribution of outer intuition, neither the imagination nor any other faculty would be able to produce a representation of permanence.

Conclusion

In the above analysis I hope to have shown that the conclusion reached by Guyer and other commentators – that the Refutation as it appears in the *Critique* is an obvious failure, and that Kant responds intelligently to skepticism, if at all, only in later works – is, at the very least, deserving of scrutiny. If we understand the argument of the Refutation as motivated by the semantic question, “how can we make meaningful judgments about our empirical selves?”, Kant's conclusion there appears as a natural outgrowth of his wider theory of the relationship of intuition and understanding. This wider theory is, of course, subject to numerous objections that I have not addressed here. Nevertheless, noting the deep connection between Kant's theory of cognition and the Refutation should be of interest to us even if the latter argument ultimately fails, since it allows us to appreciate the deeply anti-Cartesian conception of mind that Kant employs. The Refutation's claim that outer experience is and must be immediate, that consciousness is not a closed sphere affected only indirectly

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from the outside, anticipates one of the central claims advanced by many externalists in contemporary discussions of epistemology and philosophy of mind.³⁷

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³⁷ My thanks to two anonymous reviewers, whose comments on an earlier version of this paper were immensely helpful.