Skepticism: Cartesian and Kantian

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To the memory of my sister A'zam,
who passed away when I was finalizing this dissertation.

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The first step in matters of pure reason, which characterizes its childhood, is **dogmatic**. The … second step is **skeptical**, and gives evidence of the caution of the power of judgment sharpened by experience. Now, however, a third step is still necessary, which pertains only to the mature and adult power of judgment, which has at its basis firm maxims of proven universality, that, namely, which subjects to evaluation not the *facta* of reason but reason itself, as concerned its entire capacity and suitability for pure *a priori* cognitions; this is not the censorship but the **critique** of pure reason, whereby not merely **limits** but rather the **boundaries** of it—not merely ignorance in one part or another but ignorance in regard to all possible questions of a certain sort—are not merely suspected but are proved from principles. Thus skepticism is a resting place for human reason, which can reflect upon its dogmatic peregrination and make a survey of the region in which it finds itself in order to be able to choose its path in the future with greater certainty; but it is not a dwelling-place for permanent residence; for the latter can be found in a complete certainty, whether it be one of the cognition of the objects themselves or of the boundaries within which all of our cognition of objects in enclosed. (Kant 1998, A761/B789)

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Abbreviations

AT — Descartes, Rene. *Oevre de Descartes*. Edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery. 11 vols. Paris: Librarie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1973-82.

CSM(K) — Descartes, Rene. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Edited and Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and (only vol. 3) Anthony Kenny. 3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

References to Descartes's writings are made by the volume and page numbers of, respectively, AT and CSM(K). So, (VII, 172; II, 121) refers to AT, volume VII, page 172, and CSM, volume II, page 121.

AA — Königlichen Preußischen (later Deutschen) Akademie derWissenschaften (ed.), 1900–, Kants gesammelte Schriften, Berlin: Georg Reimer (later Walter De Gruyter).

References to Kant's writings follows the standard A/B system for the first *Critique*, and to other writings by volume number following by page number. So, (A190/B235) refers to the first edition of the first *Critique* page 190 and the second edition of the first *Critique* page 235, and (4:215) refers to volume 4 of AA page 215. All translations are from The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant.

References to Wilfrid Sellars's writings follows the by now standard abbreviations which can be found in the following webpage:

http://www.ditext.com/sellars/bib-s.html

So, (KTI, §27) means paragraph 27 of "Kant's Transcendental Idealism." References to works which have more than one chapter will be given by the abbreviation, following by chapter number and then paragraph number. So, (SM, II, §26) refers to the *Science and Metaphysics*, chapter 2, paragraph 26.

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Introduction

> By way of preface let us say that on none of the matters to be discussed do we affirm that things certainly are just as we say they are: rather, we report descriptively on each item according to how it appears to us at the time. (Sextus Empiricus 2000, 3)

What is Skepticism?

Some philosophers take skepticism seriously, and some do not. The latter group sees skepticism as an error on the skeptic's part and believes that one does best by not taking it seriously. G. E. Moore, a prominent member of this latter group, takes any reason the skeptic might offer to support her position as epistemically inferior to even our most banal pieces of knowledge. Every piece of knowledge, then, counters this general claim: I know that I have a hand, and therefore skepticism is false.[1]

Many philosophers disagree. They approach skepticism with the same seriousness as any other philosophical position. Academics and Pyrrhonists go so far as to call themselves skeptics. Figures such as Sextus Empiricus dedicated numerous books to defending this philosophical stance.[2] Others, though not skeptics themselves, or at least not willing to be known as such, take it seriously enough to engage

[1] See, e.g., (Moore 1939).

[2] Probably the clearest explanation of his skeptical positions can be found in (Sextus Empiricus 2000), but see also (Sextus Empiricus 2005; 1997; 2012; 2018; 1998)

with it. They try to understand it better, to articulate it in its most daring guise, and to respond to it to save human reason. Descartes, for example, presents his skeptical problems "so that [he] could reply to them in the subsequent Meditations" (VII, 171-2; II, 121) and dedicates one whole meditation, out of six, to present them in a form that is as powerful (in his mind) as they can be. Kant goes even further and takes the skeptic to be "a benefactor of human reason" who "requires us to open our eyes well even in the smallest steps of common experience, and not immediately to take for a well-earned possession what we perhaps obtain only surreptitiously" (A377).

Neither Descartes nor Kant are skeptics, of course. But the energy they spend discussing and rejecting skepticism shows the importance of this perennial problem of philosophy in their minds. This importance has hardly disappeared from the philosophical scene. Contemporary Anglophone epistemology houses few skeptics, but skepticism drives numerous debates, prompting philosophers to define their positions in response.[3]

Throughout history, however, philosophers have understood different things by 'skepticism'. Consider the following cases, all of which would consider themselves skeptics:

i. A Pyrrhonian skeptic treats skepticism as a way of life, an ability to find equally forceful arguments for two opposing positions, to achieve *ataraxia* or tranquility. She invites me to consider two opposing views, e.g., that the world has a beginning, and that the world is eternal. She first argues quite forcefully for the former and against the latter and invites me

[3] One notable skeptic is (Unger 1975). For a representative introduction to skepticism in the analytic tradition see (Coliva and Pritchard 2022)

to counter her argument, which I find myself unable to do. Now she offers an equally forceful argument for the latter and against the former. Again, she invites me to counter her argument, but I am at a loss and cannot find any way to counter any of her arguments. As a result, she invites me to withhold my assent from both of those opposing claims to reach *ataraxia*—and live happily ever after.[4]

ii. A Ġazālīan skeptic accepts only five forms of argument (i.e., demonstrative proof, dialectical argument, rhetorical argument, fallacious argument, and poetical argument) and about a dozen materials of syllogism (e.g., primaries or necessities, sensible propositions, empirical propositions, and testimonials). She argues that the only form that might lead to certain knowledge is demonstrative proof and the only materials that might have the same status are sensible propositions and necessities. Furthermore, she posits as a criterion for certain knowledge a belief's infallibility and indubitability. Sensible propositions, however, fail to satisfy infallibility criterion, since there are actual cases of mistakes in them—say, when I see a shadow and take it to be standing still while in fact it is moving very slowly. The necessities fail to satisfy the indubitability criterion, since (by al-Ġazālī's own lights) it is imaginable that they might be false. Deprived of the only arrows in our quiver, we consequently lack certain knowledge entirely.[5]

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[4] In addition to the works cited in note 2 above, see (Burnyeat 1983; Annas and Barnes 1985; Barnes 1990; Annas 1996; Burnyeat and Frede 1997; Baily 2002; Bett 2010; 2019; Fine 2021)

[5] For al-Ġazzālī's own account of the problem, see (al-Ġazālī 2000). For additional secondary sources, consult (Najm 1966; Bargeron 2003; Menn 2003; Albertini

iii. A Cartesian skeptic asks me to consider the best example of a belief that I take to be true: that I am sitting here by the fire with a piece of paper in my hand. Then she describes her dream hypothesis: I have been dreaming in the past—such a dream that I could not tell from wakefulness. How do I know that I am not now dreaming right now? I am at a loss and cannot find any way to tell that I am not dreaming now, hence my belief is doubtful. But if my best candidate for a true belief is doubtful, then everything else is doubtful. Therefore, all my beliefs are doubtful, and I don't have any way to get rid of this doubt.[6]

iv. A Humean skeptic asks me to show her something more in an alleged causal relation than the mere presence of what I call "cause" and what I call "effect." She asks me if there is anything more than mere "contiguity" between these two objects or events. She dares me to show her this third thing or to find an "impression" of it. Since I cannot find anything concrete in the real world that corresponds to what I call "causal relation," she encourages me to accept that there is no such necessary relation. She agrees, of course, that I cannot help thinking this way—I could not live without such a belief. But I should know that this is just the way I think, just the architecture of my mind, and this says nothing about the real world outside my mind. This is her skeptical solution: Believe in causal relations, and live your life accordingly, but be aware

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2005; Moad 2009; Kukkonen 2010; Zamir 2010; Heck 2014; Rudolph 2018; Kukkonen 2020; Parvizian 2020; Hadisi 2022; Ranaee 2024).

[6] Descartes introduces this argument in the *First Meditation*, with foreshadowing in the *Discourse on the Method*. See below for my formulation and references to the secondary literature.

that there is nothing in the external world that corresponds to such a necessary relation.[7]

v. A Kantian skeptic asks me how it is possible that my experience bears on the external world—she asks for an *explanation* of such a possibility. As she explains, my experience is normative and can be used as a premise in the game of arguing for or against something. The spatiotemporal objects, on the other hand, are just physical objects and are not normative—I cannot use my table as a premise in an argument. Now, she asks, how is it possible that such heterogeneous items can be related? To rephrase the problem, how is it possible that the conceptual bears on the non-conceptual?[8]

vi. A Wittgensteinian skeptic asks me how it is possible that I follow a rule. She argues that for any course of action, I can offer different descriptions which match very well with that course of action. For example, consider the action of counting from 1 to 10. Every student of mathematics knows that there are infinitely many functions which satisfy this easy task. For example, it can be the function {+1} or {(+2)-1}. So, the Wittgensteinian skeptic suggests that even for myself I cannot

[7] See Hume's own account of his skeptical concern in (Hume 1975a, 86–94; 1975b, 25–39), and see his skeptical solution in (Hume 1975a, 95–105; 1975b, 40–55). To explore various perspectives on Hume and his skepticism, consult (Stroud 1977; Beauchamp and Rosenberg 1981; Fogelin 1985; G. Strawson 1989; Allison 2008; P. Russell 2008; Fogelin 2009; Ainslie 2015; De Pierris 2015)

[8] In my interpretation, Kant's explores and resolves this issue in the *Transcendental Deduction* of the first *Critique*. For my own interpretation and references to secondary literature, refer to the first chapter below.

be sure which of these functions is meant when I count from 1 to 10. I feel at a loss, and don't know how to respond.[9]

vii. An analytic skeptic asks me to consider something I think I know—for example, there is a tree outside of my window—and contends that this belief precludes the possibility of me being a brain in a vat in an empty world. Based on a version of the Closure Principle (if I know something and I know what it entails, I am also in a position to know the latter thing), however, I should be in a position to know that I am not a brain in a vat in an empty world. But, she argues, I am not in a position to know that I am not a brain in a vat—if I were a brain in a vat in an empty world, I would still think I was in the real world. A simple *modus tollens* then shows that I do not know that there is a tree outside of my window. But this can be repeated in all cases of my knowledge claims about the external world, hence I end up knowing nothing about the external world.[10]

All these philosophers take themselves to be talking about *a*, and sometimes *the*, 'skeptical problem', while talking about different, and sometimes mutually exclusive, things. The Cartesian skeptic, for example, takes for granted something the Kantian skeptic questions: How it is possible that my experience bears on the external world (more below). Arguably, the Pyrrhonian skeptic may not be ready to articulate the skeptical inquiries posed by the Cartesian skeptic, let alone those presented by the Kantian or Wittgensteinian skeptics. The existence of

[9] Wittgenstein addresses the matter scattered across his corpus, but the primary reference point is (Wittgenstein 1953, secs 185–242). For different takes on the issue in the secondary literature, see (Dummett 1959; kripke 1982; McDowell 1984; Malcolm 1989; Diamond 1989; 1991; Ginsborg, n.d.; Bridges 2014).

[10] See note 3 above.

the external world, or that my experience bears on the world, or that I can follow a rule, are things beyond any question for him.[11]

This leaves us with a problem: Given the diversity of the use of the word 'skepticism', is it even meaningful to talk about *the* problem of skepticism? Haven't various philosophers, perhaps through misinterpretation, employed the same term for their individual issues without recognizing the fundamental distinctions in what they are addressing? I find it unduly uncharitable to philosophers. After all, we are talking about some of the greatest philosophers, and they were familiar, to say the least, with the history of philosophy. Even from this incomplete list one sees a kind of 'family resemblance'. Trying to spot the similarities and dissimilarities among them and showing that they are varieties of what is called in the history of philosophy 'skepticism', is a worthy—and ambitious—topic for a (possibly career-long) research project.[12] Delving into this is beyond the scope of this text. Here I can only provide a brief motivation to support this intuition minimally.

If we understand 'skepticism' and its cognates akin to what Aristotle means by '*aporia*' and Bertrand Russell by 'paradox', we can start cashing out the intuition that these problems are varieties of one single problem.[13] '*Aporia*' (*ἀπορία*) means being at a loss, perplexity, distress, discomfort, and in more philosophical contexts means a question for discussing, difficulty, or puzzle (Liddell et al. 1996, 215). Etymologically, it means "the absence of any issue (*a poros*), there being no way out or way forwards, and the corresponding desperate

[11] At least as Burnyeat argues (Burnyeat 1983). Cf. (Everson 1991; Fine 2003; Pasnau 2017, chap. 4).

[12] One such career-long project is Richard Popkin's, as presented in various editions of his book *The History of Scepticism* (Popkin 1960; 2003).

[13] The analogy was suggested to me by Jim Conant in a personal conversation.

mental state in which one finds oneself, having nowhere to turn one's mind to reach a definite opinion on some subject" (Laks 2009, 25).[14] Aristotle uses this term to refer to the puzzles which provide direction and motivation for metaphysical inquiry:

> *Aporia* is not a characteristic of opposite reasoning … moreover, people who define [it] in this way put effect for cause, or cause for effect … [Rather] it would seem that the equality of opposite reasoning is the cause of *aporia*; for it is when we reason on both [sides of a question] and it appears to us that everything can come about either way, that we are in a state of *aporia* about which of the two ways to take up.[15] (Topics, VI. $145^{b}4$-20)

For Aristotle, then, an *aporia* is either a particular puzzle or problem that takes the form of a dilemma—a 'whether-or-not' form—or the state of puzzlement.[16] It is the former, the particular puzzle or problem, that is important for my present purpose. In this sense, an *aporia* is a dilemmatic question, in which there are equally good arguments for both sides and this conundrum leaves us in a state of puzzlement or perplexity, which Aristotle compares to being tied up and unable to move:

> [I]n so far as one is in the state of *aporia*, one resembles people that are tied, since one cannot move forward either way.[17] ($995^{a}27$-34)

This is the feeling one gets considering the very last one of Aristotle's *aporiai*:

> Are the principles of things universals or particulars? ($1003^{a}5$-17)

[14] See also (Politis 2004, 64; Rescher 2009, 1).

[15] See (Politis 2004, 69–70)

[16] See also (Politis and Karamanolis 2017, 2).

[17] See (Politis 2004, 64).

Here we see a dilemma, in which two opposing sides both seem to be problematic, but at the same time we have good reasons to accept both. On the one hand, it seems that it is only the universals that make explanation possible, since we are doing a kind of generalization in any explanation. Therefore, the ultimate explanations or principles should be universals to allow us to frame generalizations. But on the other hand, in the Aristotelian system, universals do not have independent existence—they depend on particulars for their existence. So it seems that the ultimate explanations should be particulars.[18] Again, there is a dilemma where both sides of which have good reasons to claim truth, but where there are also good reasons not to accept either of them. So one feels dazed and puzzled, like being tied in knots and unable to move in any direction.

This is quite similar to the feeling one has facing what an early analytic philosopher would call a 'paradox', in which the two options exhaust all possible alternatives, but none can be true. Consider Russell's own paradox as a case in point:

> Let *w* be the predicate: to be a predicate that cannot be predicated of itself. Can *w* be predicated of itself? From each answer its opposite follows. Therefore we must conclude that *w* is not a predicate. Likewise there is no class (as a totality) of those classes which, each taken as a totality, do not belong to themselves. (B. Russell 1967, 124)

This, like the *aporiai* Aristotle enumerates in the *Metaphysics*, is dilemmatic in nature. Here of course the two sides do not both have the claim of truth, but they exhaust all possible options, but for various reasons one can accept neither of them. This once again leads one to

[18] See (Politis 2004, 89)

the state of puzzlement and the feeling of being tied up in knots, not being able to move in any direction.

All skeptical problems enumerated above lead to the same situation. In every case one can see different sides with equal claims to truth or to exhaust all possible options, but one can accept neither:

i. In the case of Pyrrhonian skepticism, a compelling argument can be made for both the proposition that the world has a definitive beginning and the assertion that it is eternal—a recurring theme within the annals of medieval philosophy, both Latin and Arabic traditions. However, the inherent contradiction arises as one cannot simultaneously embrace both perspectives. Consequently, one feels being tied up in knots, not being able to move in either of those two directions.

ii. In the case of Ġazālīan skepticism, if one accepts the criterion for certain knowledge (infallibility and indubitability), one ends up lacking such knowledge. On the other hand, if one throws away that criterion, one can have some knowledge, but it is not knowledge in the strict sense of the term. Neither option seems to be acceptable, but they exhaust all possible options. Therefore, one feels being tied up in knots, not being able to move in either of those two directions.

iii. In the case of Cartesian skepticism, if one accepts the possibility of dreaming, then one ends up doubting the best candidate for certain knowledge. But the other position, that it is not possible that I am dreaming now, is no more an acceptable position. Therefore, one feels being tied up in knots, not being able to move in either of those two directions.

iv. In the case of Humean skepticism, if one accepts the necessity of causal relation, one ends up with the disturbing conclusion

that there is no causality in the world. On the other hand, if one rejects necessity, the result is no less disturbing, since denying necessity equals denying causal relation *überhaupt*. Therefore, one feels being tied up in knots, not being able to move in either of those two directions.

v. In the case of Kantian skepticism, if one accepts that the pure concepts of the understanding do not bear on the external world, then one faces the problem that we lack any normative contact with the external world. But, on the other hand, if one accepts that they do bear on the external objects, one faces the problem of explaining it: How is it possible that two such heterogeneous items can enter a relation together? Therefore, one feels being tied up in knots, not being able to move in either of those two directions.

vi. In the case of Wittgensteinian skepticism, on the one hand, if one accepts that we cannot follow a rule, one faces the problem that we seem to be able to follow different rules in our everyday lives. On the other hand, if we accept that we can follow a rule, then we face a similar problem the Kantian faces: How is it possible, given the puzzles the Wittgensteinian described, that we can follow a rule? Therefore, one feels being tied up in knots, not being able to move in either of those two directions.

vii. Finally, in the case of analytic skepticism, if, on the one hand, one accepts the Closure Principle, one ends up being a skeptic, but, on the other hand, if one rejects it, one ends up not being able to explain how our body of knowledge grows. Therefore, one feels being tied up in knots, not being able to move in either of those two directions.

All these cases, i.e., Aristotle's *aporiai*, Russell's paradox, and the seven varieties of skepticism, are dilemmatic. But it is not essential for a skeptical problem to be so. There can be three or even more sides—one can, for example, face a trilemma or quadrilemma. The essential thing is that they either exhaust all possible options or that they all have equal claims to be true and make one feel as if tied up in knots, not able to move.

This of course does not mean that there is no imaginable way out of them. Aristotle's own theories in the *Metaphysics*, Russell's own Theory of Types, and all anti-skeptical arguments offered in the course of the history of philosophy, are supposed to be such answers. The problem is that it is not easy to see what a solution to this problem looks like. It is not like an ordinary mathematical question where there is only one correct answer and there is a known way to get to that answer. For instance, there is only one correct answer to 2+2=?, i.e., 4, and one normally knows what to do to reach to that conclusion. But in the case of *aporiai*, paradoxes, and skeptical problems, one does not know at first glance how to proceed to solve the problem. And, when a solution is offered, since we don't know from the beginning what the solution should look like, we cannot easily decide if the solution is acceptable or not.[19]

The analogy between '*aporia*', 'paradox', and 'skeptical problem' can help us to see that all the seven enumerated problems, and any other

[19] James Conant's distinction between "problem" and "puzzle" is relevant here. A 'puzzle' has a single correct solution that is readily apparent to anyone who observes it—think of a crossword or sudoku puzzle. In contrast, a 'problem' departs from this certainty; in the realm of a problem, the existence of a definitive answer is uncertain, and furthermore, the correctness of any proposed solution is not self-evident—think of God's existence or the meaning of life. In line with Conant's perspective, I agree that various manifestations of the skeptical problem embody the characteristics of problems rather than puzzles in this nuanced sense. Thanks to Conant for clarifying this distinction in a private conversation.

problem which might be called *skeptical*, are related to each other in this sense. This can furnish us with a working definition for 'skepticism':

> A problem characterized by two or more options that either encompass all conceivable alternatives or present equally compelling reasons and one can accept neither.

This structure is the essence of my understanding of 'skepticism'; but an additional 'sign' of the presence of such a problem is the feeling one gets facing them:

> One feels as if tied up in knots and unable to move, and one does not know where and how one should look for a solution to the problem.

This way of understanding 'skepticism', of course, does not say anything about the nature of those different problems and the possible relations they might bear to each other. Any claim about such a nature or relation is a matter of particular inquiry and argument, examples of which will be offered in the three chapters below. This definition provides a formal understanding that clarifies why the various, sometimes conflicting or mutually exclusive problems that have arisen in the history of philosophy can collectively fall under the category of being labeled 'skeptical'.

Skepticism: Cartesian and Kantian

Central to my discourse is a formal taxonomy delineating two distinct forms of skepticism—namely, Cartesian skepticism and Kantian skepticism.[20] These varieties are called in this way since the paradigm cases, or at least the best and clearest formulations of them, are to be

[20] See (Conant 2012; 2020). Robert Brandom (Brandom 2006) calls them epistemological and semantic skepticisms.

found in, respectively, Descartes and Kant. But this does not mean that these forms of skepticism cannot be found in the work of other philosophers, before or after these two. For example, as I argue below, Kantian skepticism has its roots in Hume, and Descartes himself believes that the skeptical considerations of the *First Meditation* are in fact to be found in the writings of the ancients.[21] Therefore, the terms 'Cartesian' and 'Kantian' here is meant to carry philosophical and not historical significance.[22]

Here is a formulation of a Cartesian skepticism in the *First Meditation*:

> How often, asleep at night, am I convinced of just such familiar events—that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire—when in fact I am lying undressed in bed! Yet at the moment my eyes are certainly wide awake when I look at this piece of paper; I shake my head and it is not asleep. Indeed! As if I did not remember the occasions when I have been tricked by exactly similar thoughts while asleep! As I think about this more carefully, I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep. The result is that I begin to feel dazed, and this very feeling only reinforces the notion that I may be asleep. Suppose then that I am dreaming, and that these particulars—that my eyes are open, that I am moving my head and stretching out my hands—are not true. Perhaps, indeed, I do not have such hands or such body at all. (VII, 19; II, 13)

Descartes talks about the *truth* of his beliefs and about whether or not some of his experiences are *veridical*. The objective purport of these experiences is here taken for granted, and the question is just whether or not these experiences are *actually* trustworthy. One finds a very

[21] See (VII, 171-2; II, 121). Some readers challenge Descartes's claim. See (Fine 2000) for a defense that Descartes offers a version of Pyrrhonian skepticism, (Burnyeat 1983) for the claim that it is a radical break with ancient skepticism, and (Perler 2009) for a general discussion about such a relation.

[22] As opposed to the previous section in which they were used with a historical significance in mind. See also (Conant 2020, 649).

similar worry in Kant, when he is trying to respond to what he calls Descartes's "problematic idealism":

> That whose existence can be inferred only as a cause of given perception 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 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**. (A366-7)

Here Kant formulates his own understanding of Cartesian skepticism using his own terminology. He talks about the *existence* of outer objects being *doubtful*, about the *uncertainty* of outer *appearances*. Here again, like in the case of Descartes himself, the problem is whether or not the objects of experience *actually* exist, although the objective purport of our experiences is not in doubt.

What Cartesian skepticism takes for granted constitutes the topic of another variety of skepticism:

> The categories of the understanding … do not represent to us the conditions under which the objects are given in intuition at all, hence objects can indeed appear to us without necessarily having to be related to functions of the understanding, and therefore without the understanding containing their a priori conditions. Thus a difficulty is revealed here … namely, how **subjective conditions of thinking** should have **objective validity**, i.e., yield the conditions of the possibility of all cognition of objects. (A89-90/B122)

Here the question at issue is not about the actuality or existence of some objects, but about the 'objective validity' or the 'objective purport' of the pure concepts of the understanding or the categories. Kant here asks how it is possible that these concepts bear on something which seems to be non-conceptual, i.e., physical objects. In contrast to

the previous case, Kant does not envisage doubt here;[23] the question is not whether the "subjective conditions of thinking" have "objective validity" or not, that much is taken for granted. Kant does not speak of a "question," but of a "difficulty" (*Schwierigkeit*), something for which we need an explanation. And the scenario Kant describes here is a seeming possibility (more on this in the second chapter below) in which the concepts do not bear on the object, in which case they are "merely a blind play of representations, less than even a dream" (A112).

For my present purpose, the best way to formulate this distinction is to understand it as a distinction between *if*- and *how-possible* questions. *If*-questions, or if one prefers *whether*-questions, ask whether or not something is the case. They are, therefore, questions regarding the *actuality* of some object or event, or the *veridicality* of some experience, or the *truth* of some thought. In other words, they ask whether or not such and such an object or event is *actual*, whether or not such and such an experience is *veridical*, or whether or not such and such a thought is *true*. Kantian skepticism, on the other hand, wrestles with *how-possible* questions, which ask about the *possibility*, or *intelligibility*, or the *objective purport* of something. In other words, they ask how it is *possible* that such and such is the case, or how such and such a thing is *intelligible*, or how such and such a thing has *objective purport*.[24]

I argued above that this distinction is a formal distinction in the sense that they are philosophical and not historical problems, finding different formulations in the hands of different philosophers. But they are formal in another sense, in which they are two different forms of skepticism which can be formulated in different areas of philosophy.

[23] See (Ameriks 1978).

[24] See (Conant 2012, 5–6).

Probably the best-known area in which these forms are known is in the case of perception—and this is indeed where both Descartes and Kant formulated their own versions. But they can be formulated equally forcefully in other areas of philosophy as well.

For example, they can be about other minds as well, in which case the Cartesian asks: "How can I know that the person in front of me has feelings?" whereas the Kantian asks: "How is it possible that a human body expresses feelings?". In the first case, there is an actual doubt: The person in front of me acts in a way indicating that she is happy—say, she is jumping up and down, she claps here hands, and she has some facial expressions associated with happiness. But for all I know, she might be pretending to be happy. Or worse, she might be a zombie or a humanoid, in principle incapable of having any feelings. How can I know that she is *actually* happy? But the Kantian goes further than this and asks how it is possible that such facial expressions show any feeling at all. After all, they are just some muscles moving due to some activities in a nervous system. These are purely physical or physiological events, totally different from psychological entities like feelings. That these two can be related, and there is no doubt that they are related, is something in need of explanation.

These two varieties can also be formulated in philosophy of language, in which case the Cartesian asks: "How can I know that my understanding of this linguistic unit is true?" whereas the Kantian asks: "How is it possible that some dead signs on a piece of paper have meaning?". My friend and I are sitting in a restaurant, and she tells me that she has recently published a book. How can I know that the meanings I associate with the words "recently," "published," and "book" are the *true* meanings? But the Kantian goes further than this and asks how it is possible that some sounds, which are, after all, some

physical movements in the air causing some movements in my ears, causing some nerves in my body to fire, etc. have meanings, which are normative entities? These are two totally heterogenous entities and their bearing on each other needs some explanation.[25]

One can formulate these two varieties in (almost?) all areas of philosophy, but these examples will suffice for my purpose. What is noteworthy here is that for any particular problem formulated by a particular philosopher in the course of the history of philosophy, it is a matter of research and argumentation to see to which variety of skepticism it belongs, to see whether it is an example of Cartesian skepticism, Kantian skepticism, or neither, and to see how it relates to other particular problems and other varieties of skepticism. The following chapters are meant to be examples of this kind of further exploration. They offer not only a reading of the nature and the logical structure of the skeptical problems discussed by Kant, but also offer readings of the organic relation between these problems and to other philosophers.

Overview of the Chapters

The dissertation contains four chapters, one offering a reading of the "First Meditation," two offering readings of Kant's "Transcendental Deduction" and "Refutation of Idealism," and the last offering some responses to possible objections.

Chapter I: Cartesian Cartesian Skepticism

This chapter starts by offering a criterion of adequacy for any reading of the *Meditations*, and its central claim is that there are two distinct

[25] See (Conant 2012, 8–18) for an elaborated presentation of all these cases.

skeptical arguments in the *First Meditation*, the Veil-of-Ideas and the Author-of-My-Origin arguments, with different aims and scopes:

The Criterion of Adequacy: This is based on Descartes's own pointers, e.g., in the *Synopsis* or the second set of *Replies*, that in the *Meditations* he strictly follows the method of the geometers and that none of its arguments is based on anything for which he had not argued before. Having this in mind, I argue that any acceptable reading of the "First Meditation" cannot be based on something which comes later in the *Meditations*, or, *a fortiori*, anything from others of Descartes's works, e.g., his (in)famous Creation Doctrine.

The Veil-of-Ideas argument: This is designed to cast doubt on our perceptual beliefs. It is based on Descartes's conviction that we have direct access just to our ideas or mental episodes and only indirect access, via these ideas, to the external objects themselves—what I call "the priority of inner over outer." The meditator then argues that since these ideas can have different causes, either the external objects resembling them themselves, or some other cause like dreaming, our beliefs about them are doubtful. (This first argument in the reading offered here is of great importance, since—as I argue in the third chapter—Kant's argument is directed against our knowledge of the external world having an inferential nature.)

The Author-of-My-Origin Argument: The second argument is designed to cast doubt on a bigger set of beliefs, i.e., our *beliefs* in what Descartes himself calls the eternal truths—and not those truths themselves. I argue that, *pace* many able readers who have read this argument as based merely on the deceiving God or the evil demon scenario, it has a distinctive form. It starts from the disjunctive proposition that either there is a God or there is not. He then proceeds by arguing that if there is a God who can deceive me, then I end up having doubtful beliefs. On

the other hand, if there is no God, the situation is even worse, and I end up again with doubtful beliefs. Since with every possible disjunct one ends up having doubtful beliefs, he arrives at the conclusion that our beliefs, even about the eternal truths, are doubtful. This was a well-known form of argument among scholastic philosophers, and Descartes was certainly familiar with it. I therefore suggest that when at the end of the "First Meditation" Descartes talks about a malicious demon, he is just picking one example of such an author, and this example comes after he has claimed victory in showing all his beliefs to be doubtful.

Critique of Metaphysical Readings of the First Meditation: These readings, among which I choose James Conant's in *The Logical Alien* as being one of the most sophisticated, take the evil demon worry as being dependent on Descartes's Creation Doctrine, according to which the eternal truths are God's creations just like physical objects are. I argue that not only does this reading not satisfy the criterion of adequacy, since it bases the skeptical argument on a doctrine which does not appear in the "First Meditation" at all, but also it does not do justice to the logical form of the argument. If we read the Author-of-My-Origin argument the way I do, i.e., starting from a disjunctive proposition, then it does not depend on any metaphysical or theologically loaded assumptions.

Chapter II: Kantian Kantian Skepticism

This chapter argues for two different, but interrelated, claims:

Kant's Aim in the Transcendental Deduction: The first claim is that the *Transcendental Deduction*, as presented in the second edition of the first *Critique*, is a response to Kant's own version of Humean skepticism which is a version of what I above called Kantian skepticism. In this part of the first *Critique*, therefore, the question to be answered is a *how-possible* question regarding the relation of the conceptual, i.e., the pure

concepts of the understanding or the categories, to the non-conceptual, i.e., the physical objects. In my reading, Kant asks in the *B-Deduction* how it is possible that the pure concepts of my understanding bear on something which *seems to be* non-conceptual. The question is not about 'actuality', but rather about 'possibility'—it is a call for an *explanation*.

Kant's Response to His Kantian Skepticism: Second, I suggest that Kant's response to this *how-possible* question is to push it one level deeper and to argue that the two faculties that are respectively responsible for the conceptual and the non-conceptual, which are sensibility and understanding, cannot be separated. That is, there is no genuine possibility that sensibility and understanding can be actualized separately. Therefore, the seeming possibility that the conceptual does not bear on the non-conceptual is a pseudo-possibility.

Chapter III: Kantian Cartesian Skepticism

This chapter has three main claims:

A Criterion of Adequacy: First, based on two interpretive problems which are considered to constitute a criterion of adequacy for any reading of the *Refutation of Idealism*, I suggest that the Cartesian skepticism Kant tries to answer is not Descartes's. Descartes, being a transcendental realist, takes spatiotemporal objects to be things-in-themselves and takes them to exist in themselves. If this was the problem Kant was addressing, then his answer would not be that there actually are objects in space outside us, but that there are no such objects. But this is not what he does in the *Refutation* or the *Fourth Paralogism*. It is therefore argued that we need to offer a *translation* of Cartesian skepticism into the framework of transcendental idealism.

Kantian Cartesian Skepticism: Second, I argue that if we are to offer such a translation, we need to avoid two false dichotomies in the Kantian

system. These two false dichotomies are, on the one hand, between existence in itself—or existence *per se* in the language of the *Prolegomena*—and existence as a mere representation; and on the other hand, between things in themselves and mere representations. It is argued that Kant has a third option in both cases—'actuality' (as opposed existence *per se*) is the third option in the former dichotomy and 'substance' (as object of representation) in the latter. Having argued against these two false dichotomies, the translation of Cartesian skepticism into the framework of transcendental idealism is that the problematic idealist doubts—and the dogmatic idealist denies—the actuality of substance.

Refutation of Idealism: The last major claim is that, given that Kant argues contra Kantian skepticism that the Kantian gap between the conceptual and the non-conceptual is a pseudo-gap, here in his response to Kantian Cartesian skepticism he argues that the Cartesian gap—between inner sense and outer sense—is a pseudo-gap as well. An elaboration or example of this point—as he argues in the *General Note to the System of Principles*—is his conviction that for us human beings to grasp time is for us to grasp motion in space, or as he argues on several occasions, in order to grasp time, we need to figuratively draw a line in space. Therefore, he argues that time and space as two forms of intuition are realizable only together and there is an inviolable interdependence between the two. This argument parallels his argument in the *Transcendental Deduction* against Kantian skepticism that sensibility and understanding are realizable only together.

Chapter IV: Avoiding Some Objections

In this chapter some objections and/or different readings are considered. First, I consider Barry Stroud's famous dilemma for transcendental arguments, i.e., that they either prove a subjective, and

not objective, condition for experience, or that they assume some sort of verification principle; and I argue that his objection faces two problems. The first is that he tends to conflate two different strands of argument in Kant's first *Critique*, i.e., his argument for the objective *validity* of categories in the *Transcendental Deduction* and his argument for the objective *reality* of concepts in the *Refutation of Idealism*. The former is his response to Kantian skepticism and the latter his response to Cartesian skepticism. Another problem with Stroud's argument is that in neither of those places is the nature of Kant's argument a transcendental argument in the Strawsonian sense. As I argued, his response in both those places is that the gap is a pseudo-gap, but the Strawsonian transcendental arguments accept the gap as genuine and hence acknowledge the victory of the skeptic from the beginning.

The second objection is Richard Rorty's, in which he argues that although Kant refutes one alternative—the skeptical one—he still does not rule out other alternatives. It is argued that, if we accept the reading offered above, there are only two alternatives: Either the gap is genuine, or it is not. All alternatives Rorty considers are different versions of the former, and hence his objection does not hold water.

Another objection is Andrew Chignell's, which is that the empirical self can play the role of the persistent (*das Beharrliche*) which Kant wants to prove in the *Refutation*, and he (Kant) therefore falls short of proving the existence of something external. I argue that, first, based on Kant's arguments in the *Paralogisms* we cannot prove the substantiality of the empirical self. But, as I argued above, what is in doubt in Kant's version of Cartesian skepticism is a substance. Second, and more importantly, if we appreciate the nature of the *Refutation* which stresses motion as something that gives unity to time and space, we see that the empirical

self has nothing to do with this argument and therefore Chignell's objection is misplaced.

Chapter I: Cartesian Cartesian Skepticism

> Although the usefulness of such extensive doubt is not apparent at first sight, its greatest benefit lies in freeing us from all our preconceived opinions, and providing the easiest route by which the mind may be led away from the senses. The eventual result of this doubt is to make it impossible for us to have any further doubts about what we subsequently discover to be true. (VII, 12; CSM, 9)

Descartes's project in the *Meditations* is to establish a secure foundation for *scientia*. To that end, he believes, one should refute skepticism once and for all. This is the reason he allocates the *First Meditation* to presenting skeptical considerations in order "to reply to them in the subsequent Meditations" (VII, 172; II, 121). However, it is one of the ironies of the history of philosophy that it was his skeptical considerations that found far more currency in the following centuries. Moreover, for many generations after him, his anti-skeptical maneuvers and proposed foundation for *scientia* seemed (at least) less than plausible.

It is generally accepted that these skeptical arguments play a pivotal role in Descartes's project.[26] There is no consensus, however, as to their real nature. In a fairly standard reading, the "First Meditation" is composed of three levels or stages of doubt, i.e., the occasional fallibility of the senses, the dream hypothesis, and the deceiving God

[26] Cf. (Carriero 2009).

or the evil demon hypothesis.[27] In another, more recent, reading, Janet Broughton does not take the occasional fallibility of the senses as a ground for what she calls 'radical doubt'. Instead, she considers the "First Meditation" as consisting of four different skeptical arguments, i.e., the lunacy argument, the dream argument, the deceiving God argument, and the fate or chance argument (Broughton 2002, 22). She does not take the occasional fallibility of the senses as a ground for radical doubt, but adds two grounds that are missing from the standard reading, namely the lunacy argument and the fate or chance argument.

What both readings share, however, in taking either the occasional fallibility of the senses or the lunacy scenario as self-standing grounds for doubt is that they neglect the fact that in both cases Descartes's meditator ends the passage by rejecting that kind of doubt. In the former, he retorts right away that

> although the senses occasionally deceive us with respect to objects which are very small or in distance, there are many other beliefs about which doubt is quite impossible, even though they are derived from the senses. (VII, 18; II, 12-3)

And, in the latter case, the meditator writes that "such people are insane, and I would be thought equally mad if I took anything from them as a model for myself" (VII, 19; II, 13). In both cases, therefore, the meditator distances himself from taking those scenarios as a separate ground for doubt. This should give us pause to ask whether these two grounds for doubt support a self-sufficient skeptical argument.[28]

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[27] For some representative readings, see (Williams 1983; Bermúdez 2008; Perler 2009).

[28] Broughton is one of the few readers who take what she calls the 'fate or chance' scenario seriously. I discuss this scenario below as part of the second skeptical argument of the *First Meditation*.

The standard reading and Broughton's share another, more important, assumption. They both assume that the three stages in the standard reading and the four arguments of Broughton's reading share a logical structure. Based on this assumption, one ground for doubt is just something we replace with another one in a general argument scheme. This assumption is normally implicit in the standard reading, but Broughton makes it quite clear:

> If we step back and look at the four skeptical arguments, then, we can see them as sharing a very general structure. Each of them presents a skeptical scenario—a causal or explanatory story about how I got my beliefs, one according to which they are false—and in each case, Descartes claims, I cannot rule out the scenario's being correct. (Broughton, 2002, p. 67)

Put in a more logically explicit way, they both take the different skeptical arguments of the "First Meditation" to be *modus tollens* arguments. These arguments start with the conditional that if I am to know that P, I should rule out this or that skeptical scenario. But, they continue, since I cannot do that, I end up lacking the knowledge that P. Given that 'K(P)' denotes the proposition that I know that P, and 'SK' refers to one or another skeptical scenario, one can formulate this argument scheme as follows:

i. $K(P) \rightarrow K\neg SK$

ii. $\neg K\neg SK$

iii. $\neg K(P)$

In these readings, 'SK' may refer to the occasional fallibility of the senses, the lunacy scenario, the dreaming hypothesis, the deceiving God or the evil demon hypothesis, or finally the fate or chance scenario. But, at the end of the day, there is no difference in the logical structure of these skeptical arguments. It is just the skeptical scenario that is changed. In what follows, I argue against both these readings and

suggest that the "First Meditation" offers two essentially different skeptical arguments, which differ in their logical structure as well as the range of things they put in doubt.[29]

Already at the end of the dream hypothesis, contrary to what he does at the end of the previous two reasons for doubt, Descartes's meditator concludes his first skeptical argument by writing:

> So a reasonable conclusion from this might be that physics, astronomy, medicine, and all other disciplines which depend on the study of composite things, are doubtful; while arithmetic, geometry and other subjects of this kind, which deal only with the simplest and most general things, regardless of whether they really exist in nature or not, contain something certain and indubitable. (VII, 20; II, 14)

He accepts this argument, therefore, as giving us a genuine skeptical conclusion, although of limited domain. It is also true in the case of the deceiving God hypothesis, together with the fate or chance scenario, which he takes to constitute a ground for doubting all beliefs:

> I have no answer to these arguments, but am finally compelled to admit that there is not one of my former beliefs about which doubt may not properly be raised. (VII, 21; II, 14)

In both cases, therefore, the meditator ends his argument with a skeptical conclusion, contrary to what he does at the end of the first two, which is to reject such a conclusion. Though not conclusive, this

[29] Although not common, this suggestion is not unprecedented in the literature. Margaret Wilson (Wilson 1978), for example, although she does not make it explicit, by using terms such as "Dreaming Argument" (p. 11) and the "last skeptical argument" of the "First Meditation," and particularly by allocating two different parts to the dream hypothesis and the deceiving God scenario while not doing the same for other scenarios, seems to take these arguments to be different. James Conant (Conant 2012; 2020), however, makes it quite explicit that he takes the "First Meditation" as offering two different skeptical arguments. See below for the relevant passages.

observation gives us at least a *prima facie* reason to pause and see whether they really do what these two readings take them to be doing.

I defend this initial intuition in what follows. In my reading, the first skeptical argument starts when the meditator considers the fact that whatever he has accepted as true until now has been perceived either from or through the senses (VII, 18; II, 12), and ends when he concludes that things like corporeal nature, shape, size, and the like are doubtful. The second one starts when he considers his longstanding opinion that there is an omnipotent God who created him and ends in the paragraph in which the meditator maintains that "not God … but rather a malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me" (VII, 22; II, 15). These arguments, for reasons that will become clear below, I will call, respectively, the 'Veil-of-Ideas' and the 'Author-of-My-Origin' arguments.

This reading is in complete harmony with the *Principles of Philosophy*. In part one, the "Principles of Human Knowledge," Descartes discusses the reasons for doubt in two different principles. In "Principle Four" entitled "the reasons for doubt concerning the things that can be perceived by the senses," he discusses the Veil-of-Ideas argument, the two stages of which are the occasional deception of the senses (the so-called 'first level of doubt' in the standard reading) and the example of dreaming (the so-called 'second level of doubt' in the standard reading).[30] He then concludes that "if our doubts are on the scale just

[30] He discusses these two as "the first reason" and "the second reason" for doubt. This might seem to be evidence for the standard reading, but in fact it is not. He offers both under one single title, i.e., doubting our perceptual beliefs. He also distinguishes them from the reasons offered to doubt the mathematical demonstrations in the next "Principle." What he offers with respect to any of the two principles under discussion here are different stages of one and the same argument toward a single conclusion, i.e., doubting perceptual beliefs and doubting even mathematical demonstrations.

outlined, there seem to be no marks by means of which we can with certainty distinguish being asleep from being awake" (VIIIA, 6; I, 194).

He then turns to "the reasons for doubting even mathematical demonstrations" in "Principle Five" and gives reasons to doubt "even the principles which we hitherto considered to be self-evident" (ibid). In this principle, he discusses two different scenarios, one in which an omnipotent God created us in such a way that we are "always deceived even in those matters which seem to us supremely evident," and another in which our existence comes from something less than an omnipotent God. In the latter case, "the author of our coming to being" is less powerful and therefore we are more vulnerable to the possibility that we are always deceived. Descartes takes these two together to constitute a more powerful argument in which our doubt also applies "to other matters which we previously regarded as most certain—even the demonstrations of mathematics and even the principles which we hitherto considered to be self-evident" (VIIIA, 6; I, 194). In the *Principles*, therefore, Descartes takes the reasons for doubt to constitute two different skeptical arguments and discusses them in two different principles.

In what follows, I first set a criterion of adequacy for any reading of the *Meditations* and in particular the "First Meditation." After that, I present my reading of the Veil-of-Ideas argument and go on to formulate the second skeptical argument, namely the Author-of-My-Origin argument. I then contrast my reading of the second skeptical argument with a recent argument put forward by James Conant and end the chapter with some concluding remarks.

Before doing so, however, two caveats are in order. First, my aim in this chapter is merely to offer a reading of the skeptical considerations found in the "First Meditations." In particular, I will not enter into the

discussion of whether or not these skeptical arguments bear any relation to ancient or medieval skeptical arguments. Second, although it is of great importance what relation these considerations have to the other parts of the *Meditations*, this issue goes beyond the scope of this text. I just need to mention that, although I take the "First Meditation" to offer two independent skeptical arguments, they are parts or stages of Descartes's overall project in the *Meditations*, each contributing to different parts of that project.

A Criterion of Adequacy

The *Meditations* is a carefully crafted piece in which the style of writing plays a no less important role than the arguments themselves.[31] This is true for both the first-person perspective of the *Meditations*—more on that below—and the order of presentation. In the second set of "Replies," Descartes distinguishes "between two things which are involved in the geometrical manner of writing, namely, the order and the method of demonstration." Regarding the former, he writes that in the *Meditations* he follows a particular order of presentation:

> The items which are put forward first must be known entirely without the aid of what comes later; and the remaining items must be arranged in such a way that their demonstration depends solely on what has gone before. I did try to follow this order carefully in my *Meditations*... (VII, 155; II, 110)

This is something he already made clear in the "Synopsis," where he writes:

> I have tried not to put down anything which I could not precisely demonstrate. Hence the only order which I could follow was that normally employed by geometers, namely

[31] In this regard, it is quite like Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and—even more so—Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

> to set out all the premises on which desired propositions depend, before drawing any concussions about it. (VII, 12-3; II, 9)

Descartes is clear that anything that comes earlier in the *Meditations* should not be considered as dependent on what comes later nor, *a fortiori*, on anything else external to the context of the *Meditations*. This includes Cartesian doctrines from other writings of his as well.[32]

This I take to constitute a criterion of adequacy for any reading of the *Meditations* and, particularly for my present purpose, any reading of the "First Meditation." What Descartes argues there should depend on just what has been established in the previous stages of that very meditation, and not on the teachings presented in later meditations or what we know he adheres to from other writings of his, e.g., the Creation Doctrine regarding the eternal truths. Any reading that does so is undermined by this criterion.[33]

The Veil-of-Ideas Argument

What in the standard reading is taken to constitute the first level of doubt is the banal fact that the senses sometimes deceive us, e.g., when I see a tower from a distance and take it to be round when it is in fact square.[34] Considering this possibility, Descartes's meditator concludes that "it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once" (VII, 18; II, 12). Yet, he is very quick to retort that "there are many other beliefs about which doubt is quite impossible, even

[32] See also (Frankfurt 2007, 8).

[33] That many points in the "Replies" appear on later pages of the book does not mean that they belong to later stages. What he is talking about is the logical order of the *Meditation* itself, and thus the clarifications he gives regarding different points in the "Replies" should be regarded as belonging to their place in the main text. See also (Menn 1998, 11).

[34] The example is from the *Sixth Meditation* (VII, 76; II, 53).

though they are derived from the senses." One example of such a belief is that "I am now here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-gown, holding this piece of paper in my hands" (VII, 18-19; II, 12-13). It is true that the senses occasionally deceive us. But, from this fact and the piece of wisdom, it does not follow that the senses are not trustworthy *tout court*: It merely follows that one should refrain from trusting them in abnormal situations. One should be mad—a lunatic—not to trust them in normal situations, the meditator maintains, such as when one sees clearly that one is currently sitting by the fire holding a piece of paper.[35]

It is not easy to see at first glance what role this scenario is supposed to play in Descartes's project. It is a platitude, and the meditator does not spend much time rejecting it. Presenting it at the beginning of the "First Meditation" seems odd, then, and in need of explanation. Some readers believe that it is mentioned just to be dismissed.[36] But then, the question would be why the meditator, in the well-crafted piece that is the *Meditations*, should bother to mention such an allegedly dull scenario just to reject it out of hand. The standard reading is not better off taking it as an independent ground for doubt, because it does not seem likely that such a trivial fact could be a ground for a skeptical doubt, not to mention that the meditator himself does not take it to be such and defends the senses against it. Another possible explanation would be that it just plays a heuristic role to set the stage for the serious

[35] What exactly is "normal" is not an easy question to answer, and some readers even argue that it is culturally dependent (Broughton 2002, 62). I suggest, however, that nothing substantial hinges on our understanding of "normal." What is important is that the reader who meditates for herself take the example to be the best candidate she can think of.

[36] Harry Frankfurt, for example, writes that "he recognizes it [i.e., the occasional fallibility of the senses] as preliminary and crude, and he offers it mainly to indicate its inadequacy and to improve upon it" (Frankfurt 2007, 46).

doubts to come.[37] This explanation only goes so far, however, and does not tell the whole story.

Right after the claim that it is prudent never to trust the senses, Descartes's meditator observes that

> although the senses occasionally deceive us with respect to objects which are very small or in distance, there are many other beliefs about which doubt is quite impossible, even though they are derived from the senses. (VII, 18; II, 12-3)

He takes as objects about which doubt is possible those that are very small or at a distance, that is, that which is not an object of my experience in normal situations. The example he gives us, i.e., that "I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-gown, holding this piece of paper in my hand" (VII, 18; II, 13), is not like that. This is something we take to be the most natural thing to believe; something, the meditator believes, no sane person can doubt:

> How can it be denied that these hands or this whole body are mine? Unless perhaps I were to liken myself to madmen, whose brains are so damaged by the persistent vapors of melancholia that they firmly maintain they are kings when they are paupers or say they are dressed in purple when they are naked, or that their heads are made of earthenware, or that they are pumpkins, or made of glass. (VII, 19; II, 13)

The Cartesian meditator takes the example he gives to be—at this stage—so obviously beyond doubt that whoever denies it would be like the insane who think they are kings when they are in fact paupers. But what no sane individual can doubt is the best possible claim of truth—it is true if anything is to be true. This points to the role that I suggest the first level of doubt, together with what Broughton calls the lunacy scenario, plays in Descartes's argument. It is designed to show that the example we should choose to evaluate our beliefs should be something

[37] See (Carriero 2009, 39).

no sane person can doubt, hence *the best* claim of truth.[38] Both the first level of doubt in the standard reading and the lunacy scenario in Broughton's reading are therefore designed to show us that the example one chooses should be the best claim of truth.

There is, however, another role played by the occasional fallibility of the senses which is no less important, but Descartes's meditator does not spend much time stressing it. Below, we will see that the essence of the Veil-of-Ideas is what I call the "priority of inner over outer," i.e., that we have direct access only to our ideas and only via them, indirectly and inferentially, to the external objects corresponding to them. This is something Descartes stresses on several occasions. In a letter to Guillaume Gibieuf (1583 – 1650) dated 19 January 1642, for example, he writes that "I am certain that I can have no knowledge of what is outside me except by means of the ideas I have within me" (III, 474; III, 201). However, if we are to take the criterion of adequacy seriously, we cannot take Descartes's word regarding this epistemic priority from his correspondences. It must be something for which he argues in the "First Meditation" itself. Showing this epistemic priority of inner over outer, I suggest, is the second role the occasional fallibility of the senses is supposed to play.[39] It is true that the tower is in fact square when I take it to be round, but it cannot be denied that I have an idea, or a mental episode, of a round tower. That I have such an idea is not in doubt or denied in the standard reading's first level of doubt. What is in doubt is that the object actually corresponds to this

[38] Note that here I deliberately use "claim of truth," whereas the standard reading and many others take the argument to be directed at knowledge. Descartes and his meditator are, however, quite clear on several occasions that what is at issue is "withholding assent" from beliefs, not a lack of knowledge. Below, I discuss this issue in more detail.

[39] I am indebted to Stephan Schmid in personal conversation for appreciating this point.

idea. This idea is exactly the direct object of my perception, and it is this to which I have direct access.

Two points are noteworthy here. First, the meditator gives his example as an *instance* of the best claim of truth. He starts his sentence with "for example" to make it explicit that it is not important what example the meditator chooses. It is enough that it is the best example *one can think of*. But, there is one feature the example should have, and this leads us to the second point: The example should be in the first person. It did not go unnoticed among Descartes scholars that the meditating 'I' is not supposed to be Descartes himself. It refers, rather, to anyone who reads the *Meditations* and meditates about these matters along the way.[40] Therefore, the best candidate of truth should be in the first person; the 'I' in the example should refer to the reader who mediates rather than the French gentleman known as *René Des-Cartes*. This is a rather rich and complicated point, the consequences of which goes well beyond the scope of this chapter. For now, it is enough to say that if the example was "Descartes is sitting by the fire and has a piece of paper in his hands," the argument would not be the elegant piece of reasoning that it is, and the example would not be the best possible truth candidate.

Yet, is it really doubtful that I am here sitting by the fire and have a piece of paper in my hand? Descartes's meditator answers in the affirmative. His first challenge to this belief is to mention the fact that he has been asleep before:

> As if I were not a man who sleeps at night, and already has all the same experiences while asleep as madmen do when awake—indeed sometimes even more improbable ones. How often, asleep at night, am I convinced of just familiar

[40] This point is repeated many times in the literature. For a representative discussion, see (Williams 1990, 19–20; 2009, 246).

> events—that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire—when in fact I am lying undressed in bed!

Here, the meditator tries to find a refuge in the fact that when awake, what I see has a distinctness that a dream cannot have. However, he is quick in responding:

> Indeed! As if I did not remember other occasions when I have been tricked by exactly similar thoughts while asleep! As I think about this more carefully, I see plainly that *there are never any sure signs* by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep. (VII, 19; II, 13; emphasis mine)

Here, the meditator casts doubt on my everyday perceptual beliefs, even on the best possible candidate he found earlier, with a simple scenario. He presents the possibility that while I take myself to believe truly that I am sitting here by the fire in my dressing-gown with a piece of paper in my hand, I might be dreaming all this. And when I am dreaming, I cannot truly take myself to believe that I am sitting here by the fire in my dressing-gown holding a piece of paper. Hence, my best possible case of true belief is doubtful. Therefore, the "result is that I begin to feel dazed, and this very feeling only reinforces the notion that I might be asleep" (VII, 19; II, 13). The argument here is thus that since it is possible—it is by no means far-fetched—that I might be dreaming now, and that I cannot be sure whether I am dreaming or having a veridical experience, I can doubt such a claim.

Up until now, however, the meditator has shown us that at most just one belief is doubtful. How does he manage to cast doubt on all our perceptual beliefs? One possible suggestion is that we might be dreaming all the time, and another is that it offers an argument scheme which is supposedly applicable to all our beliefs. I suggest that both readings miss the real point, since they both ignore the role the so-called "first level of doubt" plays in the argument. That level, as we

have seen, shows us that the example we choose should be the best candidate for truth. Moreover, the dream example shows us that this best possible candidate is doubtful. Yet, if the best truth candidate is doubtful, everything else is doubtful as well.

This is of course plausible because all the meditator is talking about is being *doubtful*, not being false. That is, the meditator is trying to find a reason to *doubt* a belief, to be justified in treating it *as* false, not to find evidence that it *is* false.[41] If the reasoning was that since the best candidate for truth is wanting everything else is *false*, it was implausible or even outright wrong. However, it is quite reasonable that if the best possible candidate for truth is doubtful, then everything else is 'doubtful' as well. Therefore, to repeat, the general structure of the Veil-of-Ideas argument is that I find the best possible candidate for truth (for me) and then find a reason (the dream hypothesis) to doubt it. Then, if the best possible candidate for truth is doubtful, everything else is doubtful. Hence, I have a reason to withhold my assent from everything I gain via my senses.[42]

Still, this was not the only role the first level of doubt in the standard reading, plus the lunacy scenario in Broughton's, is supposed to play. I argued above that it is also designed to show the priority of inner over outer, i.e., that we have direct and non-inferential access to our ideas and only indirect and inferential access, via these ideas, to external objects. I suggest that this priority plays a pivotal role in the Veil-of-Ideas argument. The force behind this argument is that, since we have direct and non-inferential access only to our ideas, we need to infer the existence of external objects from these ideas as their causes. Such

[41] See below for textual evidence for this claim.

[42] For a similar reading of the role played by the occasional fallibility of the senses and the way Descartes's meditator generalizes his doubt from the single example to everything he gained from the senses, see (Stroud 1984, 9–10).

inference is doubtful, however, since every effect can have different causes—the actual object resembling that idea, say, or my dream of seeing such object.[43]

This way of reading the argument is also consistent with textual evidence. Before going into the details of the "Third Meditation," the mediator first gives a summary of the Veil-of-Ideas argument that doubts "the earth, sky, stars, and everything else that I apprehended with the senses" (VII, 35; II, 24).[44] He asks, "what was it about then that I perceived clearly?" and responds:

> Just that these 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. (ibid, emphasis added)

In this passage, the meditator clearly maintains that the things of which he has clear perception, or to which he has direct access, are his ideas. And his mistake was to take the source of these ideas to be the external objects resembling them, which is a doubtful inference.

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[43] Though not quite common, this reading is not unprecedented in the literature. A notable example is Myles Burnyeat, who makes the case that it was Descartes who initially saw that we can enjoy access to our mental realm, and this was what provided him with resources to erect a skeptical problem more radical than that of the Greeks. This more radical argument is arguably that we must infer, doubtfully, the existence of the external objects from our mental episodes. See (Burnyeat 1983). As will be argued below, Kant as well, in his "Refutation of idealism," reads the argument in exactly this way.

[44] He then goes on to offer a summary of the second skeptical argument of the "First Meditation," proving once again to be quite conscious of submitting two separate arguments.

To understand the meditator's move here, one should note that, in the Cartesian system, there are three kinds of ideas, i.e., innate, adventitious, and fictitious:

> My understanding of what a thing is, what a truth is, and what a thought is, seems to derive simply from my own nature. But my hearing a noise, as I do now, or seeing the sun, or feeling the fire, come from things which are located outside me, or so I have hitherto judged. Lastly, sirens, hippogriffs and the like are my own inventions (VII, 37-8; II, 26).

Some ideas are innate in me as a human or rational being. Some of them are supposed to have their sources in the things outside and independent of me. And some of them are merely fictional. The force behind the Veil-of-Ideas argument is that it is doubtful whether there really are ideas belonging to the second class, or whether I merely "have hitherto judged" them to be so when they really are fictitious ideas that "are my own inventions." The meditator of course maintains that I have a "natural impulse" to take them to be so:

> but I have often judged in the past that they were pushing me in the wrong direction when it was the question of choosing the good, and I do not see why I should place any greater confidence in them in other matters. (VII, 39; II, 27).

It is true, the meditator admits, that I have these ideas whether I want to or not, but "it does not follow that they must come from things located outside me," and "even if these ideas did come from things other than myself, it would not follow that they must resemble those things" (ibid). Descartes's first skeptical argument runs, therefore, as follows: I have ideas of things outside me, but since I cannot, as it were, go outside myself and compare them with the things allegedly resembling them, I cannot be sure whether these ideas are coming from things outside me or whether I just made them up. Further, even if they

are coming from things outside me, I cannot be sure whether or not they really resemble these ideas, hence the *veil of ideas*.

As it stands, the argument is designed to show that the anti-skeptic commits the fallacy of affirming the consequent, i.e., the invalid inference of P from the fact that P entails Q and Q:

i. $P \rightarrow Q$
ii. Q
iii. P

This argument is not valid, since even if P is false and Q is true, $(P \rightarrow Q)$ could still be true and therefore its conjunction with Q, $((P \rightarrow Q) \& Q)$, could turn out to be true where its conclusion, P, is false. Looking at the problem in this way, one can see that even if P is true the inference is still invalid, and one cannot infer P from those premises. Translated to the problem of causation, it is not possible to infer a determinate cause from an effect, unless it is true that there is no other possible cause for that effect.

Back to the Veil-of-Ideas argument, the Cartesian priority of inner over outer is the thesis that the only things to which I have direct access are my ideas. Further, since the ideas can have different causes, such as real external objects or my dreaming, I cannot infer the existence of the external objects from my having ideas of them; therefore, my belief in them is doubtful. Given that B(P) stands for 'I believe without any doubt that P' and I(P) for 'I have an idea of P,' the argument would be formulated as follows:

i. $B(P) \rightarrow I(P)$
ii. I(P)
iii. B(P)

It is granted that the conclusion might still be true—I might be sitting by the fire in my dressing-gown with a piece of paper in my hand. However, the anti-skeptic's argument from her ideas to that conclusion is invalid, hence her conclusion is not granted.

As mentioned, however, other writers tend to read this argument as an instance of the logical law of *modus tollens*. They perceive it as claiming that to know that P, one should know that I am not dreaming, and since we lack that piece of knowledge, by a simple *modus tollens*, we lack knowledge that P as well. Given that K(P) stands for 'I know that P' and K(¬D) for 'I know that I am not dreaming', the argument would be as follows:

i. $K(P) \rightarrow K(\neg D)$

ii. $\neg K(\neg D)$

iii. $\neg K(P)$

The first thing to note about this reading is that, by taking the argument to be a threat to 'knowledge claims' as opposed to 'beliefs', it makes the argument weaker than the one suggested in my reading. If my belief is undermined, then my knowledge claim is *ipso facto* undermined—but not vice-versa.[45] Descartes's meditator obviously wants to make us withhold our beliefs and treat them as false. For example, already at the beginning of the "First Meditation," the meditator writes:

> Reason now leads me to think that I should *hold back my assent* from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable, just as carefully as I do from those which are patently false. (VII, 18; II, 17; emphasis added)

Additionally, near the end of the *Meditation*, when he has concluded his skeptical arguments, he writes:

[45] See (Burnyeat 1983, 118–19).

> So in the future I must *withhold my assent from these former beliefs* just as carefully as I would from obvious falsehoods… (VII, 21-2; II, 15, emphasis mine)

This theme repeatedly appears in Descartes's corpus, most forcefully probably in the seventh set of "Replies" in response to Father Bourdin, but quoting all of these instances would take us too far afield. It is enough to say that, if we read this argument as undermining only our knowledge claims, then we make it useless to Descartes's overall project.[46]

This reading also differs from mine in its logical form. My reading takes the Veil-of-Ideas argument as claiming that the anti-skeptic commits the fallacy of affirming the consequent. However, this reading takes the argument to be an instance of *modus tollens*. This difference, again, shows that my reading gives the argument more philosophical force. In my reading, the skeptic does not put forth an argument but reveals a fallacy on the part of the anti-skeptic. One is more vulnerable when putting forward an argument than when pointing out a mistake in another's argument.

The meditator now turns to a possible move against the Veil-of-Ideas argument, which delimits the scope of things doubted:

> Nonetheless, it must surely be admitted that the visions which come into sleep are like paintings, which must have been fashioned in the likeness of things that are real … For even when painters try to create sirens and satyrs with the most extraordinary bodies, they cannot give them natures which are new in all aspects … or if perhaps they manage to think something so new that nothing remotely similar has ever been seen before … at least the colors used the composition must be real (VII, 19-20; II, 13).

[46] Robert Pasnau also argues quite forcefully that Descartes is not even trying to propose a theory of knowledge. See (Pasnau 2017), in particular *Lecture One*.

The objection is that it is not possible to create our ideas from nothing: As it is in the business of painting, one must have some previous ideas based upon which to create new ideas. The meditator concedes this point. Many commentators tend to ignore this move altogether.[47] In my reading, this move is supposed to determine the scope of things subject to doubt in the Veil-of-Ideas argument. The conclusion he draws from this analogy is that, just as it is not possible to paint something utterly new and the painter needs to first have some simpler ideas to then be able to mix them and thus make more complicated things, I cannot make all my ideas myself. That is, although it is possible that the complex ideas come from me, it is not possible in the case of the simplest ideas. Yet, the scope is limited to the simplest ideas and then complex ones could come from me—as shown in the Veil-of-Ideas argument. Therefore, he concludes that

> a reasonable conclusion from this might be that physics, astronomy, medicine, and all other disciplines which depend on the study of composite things are doubtful: while arithmetic, geometry and other subjects of this kind, which deal only with simplest and most general things, regardless of whether they really exist in nature or not, contain something certain and indubitable" (VII, 20; II, 14).

This shows that the meditator takes the Veil-of-Ideas argument to be completed, but as shown with the painter analogy, with a limited domain. What remains to be done, with the help of the Author-of-My-Origin argument, is to doubt "the simplest and most general things."

[47] One notable exception is (Carriero 2009, 46ff), who offers a nuanced reading of this passage, and I think he would agree with my reading that this passage plays the role of delimiting the scope of doubt offered in the dreaming worry, although he does not accept the dreaming worry as a 'worked-out argument' (40).

The Author-of-My-Origin Argument

The conclusion the meditator reaches at the end of the Veil-of-Ideas argument is that we can doubt physics, astronomy, and medicine, i.e., "the disciplines which depend on the study of composite things." However, in order to clear his mind of all beliefs, the meditator needs to go further and doubt "arithmetic, geometry, and other subjects of this kind, which deal only with the simplest and most general things" as well (VII, 20; II, 14). The meditator achieves this with what I call the 'Author-of-My-Origin' argument. Here again, the point to be made is not that one should try to show that one's beliefs regarding the simplest and most general things are false. Rather, it should be shown that they are doubtful, and one should suspend one's beliefs regarding them to treat them *as* false.[48] He begins doing so by considering a 'firmly rooted' notion in his mind:

> And yet firmly rooted in my mind is the long-standing opinion that there is an omnipotent God who made me the kind of creature that I am. How do I know that he has not brought it about that there is no earth, no sky, no extended thing, no shape, no size, no place, while at the same time ensuring that all these things appear to me to exist just as they do now? (VII, 21; II, 14)

Shape, size, and place are among the things that the meditator takes to be safe from doubt in the Veil-of-Ideas argument. He now considers the possibility that God, who based on his long-standing belief exists and is omnipotent, not only made it the case that there is no earth, no sky, or the like, but also made sure that he makes a mistake every time he performs a very simple mathematical calculation or something even simpler. The meditator, however, seems to think that considering this

[48] See (Menn 1998, 234).

second possibility might be difficult on the part of the reader. To make it more conceivable, he offers the following example:

> [S]ince I sometimes believe that others go astray in cases where they think they have the most perfect knowledge, may I not similarly go wrong every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square, or in some even simpler matter, if that is imaginable? (ibid)

Other people make mistakes doing the simplest things like very easy calculations and believe they have done them correctly. Why should it seem far-fetched, the meditator asks, that I might do the same?

This is, however, just one of the two possibilities the meditator considers. He continues:

> Perhaps there may be some who would prefer to deny the existence of a so powerful God rather than believe that everything else is uncertain. Let us not argue with them, but grant them that everything I said about God is a fiction. According to their supposition, then I have arrived at my present state by fate or chance or a continuous chain of events, or by some other means; yet since deception and error seem to be imperfections, the less powerful they make the *author of my origin*, the more likely it is that I am so imperfect as to be deceived all the time. (VII, 21; II, 14; translation amended and emphasis mine)

He here considers the possibility of being deceived under the assumption that there is no such God. Here, the possibility is that the "author of my origin" is less powerful than a supreme God, and therefore unable to create me in such a way as to be able to do these small calculations. The assumption here is that the less powerful the author of my origin is, i.e., the less perfection it has, the more likely it is that I lack perfection—including my inability to get those simple things right.

This is consistent with what Descartes does in the *Principles of Philosophy*. In the "Fifth Principle," which is designed to show that "even mathematical demonstrations" are doubtful, he first considers

the possibility of an omnipotent God deceiving us and then goes on to consider the following possibility:

> We may of course suppose that our existence derives not from a supremely powerful God, but either from ourselves or from some other source; but in that case, the less powerful we make the author of our origin (*originis noftrae authorem*), the more likely it will be that we are so imperfect as to be deceived all the time. (VIIIA, 6; I, 194; translation amended)

Given the textual evidence, a picture of the second skeptical argument begins to emerge. Descartes's meditator starts by assuming that either the author of my origin is powerful enough to deceive me or lacks the power to do so. In the former case, since I might be deceived all the time, all my beliefs are doubtful, hence my lack of certainty. In the latter case, I lack certainty because the less powerful the author of my origin is, the more likely it is that I am being deceived all the time, as my creator lacks the perfection to supply me with the ability not to be deceived. Since in both possibilities I end up with dubious beliefs, I lack certainty, and hence the conclusion of the skeptical argument.[49] Given that 'OG' refers to the possibility that my creator is the omni-God, 'LG' to the possibility that it is less-than-God, and 'LC' to a lack of certainty, the logical structure of this argument is as follows:

i. $OG \vee LG$

ii. $OG \rightarrow LC$

iii. $LG \rightarrow LC$

iv. Therefore, LC

[49] Carriero (Carriero 2009, 55), by taking the main point of this argument to be "how I have been created," comes quite close to seeing the real nature of the Author-of-My-Origin argument, but since he considers what he calls the 'imperfect-nature doubt' to be different from the 'evil genius' doubt (58), misses the real nature of the argument.

This is a quite common form of argumentation among the scholastic philosophers. Furthermore, given that the '$\vee$' operator in (i) is exclusive, and they cannot be true or false at the same time, the argument is formally valid.[50] And the way I read the argument, the first premise does not need to be limited to just two alternatives, and the disjunctive can have any number of disjuncts. In fact, Descartes himself is aware of this fact and enumerates a few examples such as fate and chance as different possibilities for the latter disjunct, as he mentions a deceiving God or—in the later stages of the "First Meditation"—a malicious demon for the former. This means that both OG and LG refer to a spectrum of possible authors of my origin, rather than referring to single entities. Either way, I end up lacking certainty, hence the meditator's conclusion:

> I have no answer to these arguments, but am finally compelled to admit that there is not one of my former beliefs about which a doubt may not properly be raised (VII, 21; II, 14-15).

The conclusion, however, comes before when the meditator mentions the malicious demon hypothesis, when he writes:

> I will suppose therefore that not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. (VII, 22; II, 15)

This way of summarizing the argument has led many commentators to call the argument the 'malicious demon' or the 'evil demon' argument. This is misleading and veils the real nature of the argument. The

[50] As such, it is an instance of the following formally valid argument:

i. $P \vee \neg P$

ii. $P \rightarrow Q$

iii. $\neg P \rightarrow Q$

iv. Therefore, Q.

meditator has already concluded his argument before even mentioning this possibility. He just wants to have one such possibility at hand to continue his project and chooses an example from the spectrum of possibilities in the first premise to do so. This does not mean, therefore, that the argument is based on this possibility alone.[51]

Conant's Reading of the *First Meditation*'s Second Argument

Let me contrast my reading with James Conant's to make it more explicit. Conant in various places makes two major claims about this argument: first, that it is an incipient Kantian skepticism, and second, that it is based on Descartes's Creation Doctrine. In what follows, I argue against both claims.

In "Reply to Hamawaki" (Conant 2020), he writes:

> At first blush, just as the dreaming worry raises the question whether what (in relying upon my senses) I take to be actual is really actual, so, too, the evil demon worry is apparently concerned with raising the question of whether what (in relying upon my reason) I take to be possible is really possible (and whether what I take to be necessary is really necessary). Yet, as Descartes's meditator presses on with this worry, this preliminary way of construing its import proves unstable. For in calling into question whether I can rely on my capacity for thought in the search for truth, this worry—unlike the dreaming worry—calls into question the very capacity that I must be able to exercise in order to be able to so much as frame a worry in the first place. As things become increasingly clear, Descartes's meditator finds himself at the threshold of the Kantian problematic, confronted by this question: what are the conditions of the possibility of that capacity—the very

[51] See (Menn 1998, 234). It is also noteworthy that this way of reading the argument is consistent with the way Descartes's meditator proceeds to refute it. At the end of the "Third Meditation" he refutes the second disjunct by proving that there is a God, and in the *Fourth Meditation* refutes the former by showing that God has the property of benevolence.

> one I must be already exercising—in order to be able to engage in philosophical reflection at all? (Conant 2020, 665)

Lurking behind this passage is the distinction between Cartesian and Kantian skepticisms discussed above in the Introduction. To recall, Cartesian skepticism is an *if*-question, which asks about the actuality of something, e.g., whether there actually is an external world. Kantian skepticism, on the other hand, is a *how-possible* question, which asks for an explanation as to the possibility of something, e.g., how it is possible to experience those external objects. In the passage quoted above, Conant applies this distinction to the "First Meditation" and argues that the first skeptical worry—what he calls the "dreaming worry"—is an instance of Cartesian skepticism and the second one—the "evil demon" in his terms—is an incipient of Kantian skepticism. That is, he maintains, the first worry is a doubt about the actuality of physical objects and the second one raises some concerns regarding my capacity to experience such objects.

Reading the second worry of the "First Meditation" as an incipient of Kantian skepticism, Conant perceives it as a kind of *how-possible* question regarding the very capacity of thinking by means of which we are trying to mobilize our skeptical worry. In the quoted passage, he assumes that one cannot use a capacity to destabilize the very same capacity. He uses this assumption to argue that the evil demon worry is not a doubt, and hence to secure his reading of it as an embryonic Kantian problematic:

> The dreaming hypothesis is animated by a doubt; the evil demon hypothesis, once fully clarified and thought through, reveals itself to be animated by a deeper worry—a worry as to whether I am so much as able to doubt. To enter to this worry is not to raise a further doubt—or meta-doubt—about my capacity for doubt. For whether or not I

> am able to doubt is not something that I am able to doubt. (Conant 2020, 666–67)

Conant quotes the following passage from the *Rules* to support his reading:

> If, for example, Socrates says that he doubts everything, it necessarily follows that he understands at least that he is doubting, and hence that he knows that something can be true or false, etc.; for there is a necessary connection between these facts and the nature of Doubt. (Conant 2020, 667; X, 421; I, 46)

He takes this example to show that if Socrates says that he doubts everything, he cannot be said to doubt "the capacity of doubting"—he cannot doubt the exercise of that which makes him able to doubt anything at all.

What Conant quotes from the *Rules* in fact parallels the *Cogito* reasoning of the "Second Meditation," in which Descartes famously argues that if I am deceived about everything, this "everything" cannot be taken literally, since at least I should exist at the time of deceiving to be deceived:

> But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. 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. (VII, 25; II, 17; bold emphasis mine)

In both cases there is 'something' that cannot be doubted as long as we are doubting. However, the main question concerns the nature of this 'something'. Conant takes the indubitable something to be some capacity and, in particular in the case of doubting, to be the capacity for doubt. There is, however, another alternative he disregards, which can destabilize his reading. The hint suggesting that alternative can be

readily found in the *Cogito* passage (emphasized in bold), where the meditator clearly states that *the proposition* 'I am' or the proposition 'I exist' cannot be doubted as long as I am thinking or asserting it. This is also the case in other places where Descartes touches on the *Cogito*, such as in the *Discourse*:

> But immediately I noticed that while I was trying thus to **think everything false**, it was necessary that I, who was thinking this, was something. And observing that **this truth**, '*I am thinking, therefore I exist*' was so firm and sure that all the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were incapable of shaking it, I decided that I could accept it without scruple as the **first principle** of the philosophy I was seeking. (VI, 32; I, 127; bold emphasis mine)

In this context as well, what Descartes means by "think everything as false" and "this truth" and "the first principle" are best understood as propositions rather than a capacity.

It is of course true that there is an obvious relation between maintaining that there is one proposition about which doubt is impossible and that one cannot doubt a capacity while using it. In fact, it seems that seeing what Descartes sees about the indubitable proposition that I am doubting now is just one step removed from Conant's insight about our capacities. Yet, Descartes never takes this next step. It remains for later philosophers, most notably Kant, to push the insight further. The Cartesian meditator is of course at the *threshold* of Kantian worry, but never crosses it. It is Kant in his "Transcendental Deduction" (which is the topic of the next chapter) that takes this step and envisages full-blown Kantian skepticism.

Appreciating this fact helps us to see the nature of doubt offered in the Author-of-My-Origin argument. Above, I quoted several passages referring to Descartes's aim, which is to offer reasons to doubt everything he takes himself to know to 'withhold his assent' from them.

This already shows that he is trying to offer arguments to doubt a set of propositions and does not differentiate in this respect between the two arguments of the *First Meditation*. This gives us initial evidence that, in the Author-of-My-Origin argument as well, he is trying to doubt a set of propositions and not, pace Conant, a capacity or faculty. The target of the Veil-of-Ideas argument is, as we saw, the set of perceptual propositions about physical objects which, as Conant puts it, we take to be actual. Further, the Author-of-My-Origin, I argue, is designed to cast doubt on a larger set of propositions that includes even mathematical propositions or what Descartes calls 'eternal truths.'[52]

Conant, however, not only takes the second skeptical argument of the "First Meditation" to be a worry regarding a capacity rather than a doubt about a set of propositions. He also assumes that it is based on Descartes's Creation Doctrine, i.e., the doctrine according to which the eternal truths are, in the same way as everything else, creations of God. It is worth quoting a rather long passage in which Conant makes this case:

> The evil demon hypothesis therefore arguably involves the most vivid and immediate version of an imagined encounter with a logical alien. For in this case, the individual to be encountered (whom we are asked to imagine might be a logical alien) is not someone else. The alien turns out to be no one other than yourself. Where you have to go in order to arrange an encounter with such a being is: nowhere at all. The form of the thought experiment of the evil demon is in this sense the strict inverse of the logically incomprehensible divine creative act. The seeming possibility that God could have created an alternative set of eternal truths appears to require of us

[52] It is of course a matter of grave controversy how to delimit this set: Is the proposition that I exist, for example, also in this set? I shall remain silent about this rather important question, as it does not bear on my reading. What is important for my reading is just that the set of propositions the second worry doubts is bigger than the one the first worry put in doubt, and that, as Descartes explicitly says, it contains mathematical propositions as well.

> that we imagine a universe in which (in order for us *then and there* to think what is true in *that* universe) we would *then and there* need to be able to think in accordance with a form of thought logically alien to the one we presently have. With the evil demon this problematic turned inside out, as it were: the evil demon worry requires of me that I try to imagine that in the world in which I *already* live (in order for me *here and now* to think what is true) what I *here and now* need to do is to think in accordance with a form of thought that is logically alien to the one I presently have. The evil demon worry requires of me that I try to imagine that (in order for me here and now to be able to think in logical accordance with the truth) what I here and now need to be able to do is to think in a manner that my own form of thought debars me from being able to do. That is, it requires me that I take myself *not* to be doing that which I take myself to be doing *in the very act of doing* such a thing. (Conant 2020, 670)

In this complex and insightful piece, Conant makes many different points. One that is of great importance to my present aim is the relation he sees between the problem of the logical alien and the evil demon hypothesis. The problem of the logical alien, roughly put, asks whether or not there can be any form of thinking other than what we call thinking.[53] That is, put in a more Cartesian language, whether or not the eternal truths could be false.[54] It has been historically assumed that Descartes believes that there could be logically alien thought, i.e., that God could create the eternal truths other than they are now, or at least one cannot say that God cannot create the eternal truths otherwise.[55] Conant's suggestion is that the second skeptical problem in the *First Meditation* is the problem of the logical alien backwards: Whereas the problem of the logical alien searches for someone who could be thought

[53] For Conant's original formulation of the problem, see (Conant 1992).

[54] There is a sense in which formulating this problem and the role and possible meaning of 'could' is problematic. I set this worry here aside.

[55] For the first kind of reading see (Frankfurt 1977; Conant 1992) and for the second see (Conant 2020).

of as possessing a way of thinking that differs from mine, here Descartes asks what would happen if I myself were the logical alien. Reading the skeptical worry in this way, Conant associates it with Descartes's Creation Doctrine. In particular, he takes the worry to be a question about whether and how it is possible to assume that I might be having some form of thought that is alien to the way the world is created. In this sense, to appreciate the force of the evil demon worry, it is necessary to assume a powerful God—or demon—who could create the eternal truths in any way He wishes, or at least I cannot say that he could not do that, and hence I could be wrong about them.

The initial point to make about this assumption is that the second skeptical worry of the "First Meditation" does not have to do with the way the eternal truths are or could be, but rather our entitlement to believe them. It can well be true that the eternal truths are not only necessary, but also necessarily necessary, and that God as well as His creations are bound to all these rules, while at the same time I end up the victim of the Author-of-My-Origin argument if I am created in such a way that I lack the power to get these things right. Descartes himself talks about "being deceived," not that any change in the eternal truths would be possible. Put another way, this skeptical worry does not need to show or assume that God could make the eternal truths otherwise, but that I could be misled about them. Yet, a defender of Conant's reading might well argue, while admitting that it is possible to have a Cartesian skeptical argument independent of the Creation Doctrine, that it is Descartes we are talking about and he was a die-hard defender of the Creation Doctrine. Therefore, it is this doctrine to which we should turn in order to appreciate the nature of the second skeptical argument of the *First Meditation*.

Reading the skeptical argument in this way, however, violates the criterion of adequacy we set forth above. Based on textual evidence, I argued that Descartes maintains that nothing in the earlier stages of the *Meditations* is based on what comes later, or, *a fortiori*, what is outside the *Meditations*. This point alone shows that Descartes himself does not take the skeptical considerations of the *First Meditation* to be dependent on the Creation Doctrine, as there is no mention of said doctrine anywhere in the meditation. This lack of explicit reference to this doctrine is notwithstanding the fact that Descartes held this view well before and after crafting the *Meditations*. Perhaps one of the first moments where he declares this opinion is in a letter to Mersenne dated 6 May 1630:

> As for the eternal truths, I say once more that they are true or possible only because God knows them as true or possible. (I, 149; III, 24)

Some fourteen years later, he writes in another letter, this time to Mesland, dated 2 May 1644 that

> the power of God cannot have any limits, and that our mind is finite and so created as to be able to conceive as possible the things which God has wished in fact to be possible, but not be able to conceive as possible things which God could have made possible, but which he has nevertheless wished to make impossible. (IV, 118; III, 235)

He makes remarks along these lines on different occasions, which shows that he consistently believed the theory well before and after the writing and publication of the *Meditations*. To my knowledge, however, he does not mention it in the *First Meditation* or the *Replies* which are related to that stage of the argument. This shows that Descartes does not take the second skeptical argument to be dependent on the Creation Doctrine and that taking it to be so violates the criterion of adequacy we set for ourselves above.

Perhaps the most important textual evidence for the independence of the Author-of-My-Origin argument from the Creation Doctrine is the way the meditator himself presents the problem—and this is something blurred by the interpreters' tendency to call the problem the 'evil demon' or 'deceiving God'. In the argument sketched above, by taking it to start with a disjunctive premise in which either there is a God or there is not, and then showing that either way I end up having doubtful beliefs, there is no theological assumption at work whatsoever. In this kind of disjunctive argument, the arguer is not committed to any of the disjuncts he uses as a premise. Yet, by showing that either way one is committed to the conclusion, he avoids burdening himself with any kind of (metaphysical or theological) commitment.

Furthermore, reading this second worry the way Conant does takes the dialectic of the Meditations *backwards*. Descartes's project is to first clear his mind of everything he believes and find a firm and secure ground for *scientia*. In the unfolding of the *Meditations*, by proving the existence of God in later stages, we observe that this ground is nothing but God and His property of being benevolent. It is only after the *Third Meditation* that we first reach that conclusion. Taking the existence of God and His properties as an assumption of the Author-of-My-Origin renders the argument for the existence of God useless and makes it a mystery why Descartes should bother to prove something that was his assumption from the beginning.

Finally, reading the Author-of-My-Origin in this way also makes it very vulnerable. This argument is arguably the most important for Descartes's project. It is this one, rather than the Veil-of-Ideas, that helps the meditator to clear his mind of all previous beliefs. It is also the response to this argument that occupies the meditator in most of the subsequent meditations. If, then, the argument that occupies the

entirety of the *Meditations* is based on such a controversial doctrine that even the firmest theists such as Ibn Sina, Aquinas, or Leibniz would reject, this would make the project of the *Meditations* so unimportant that one would not see the point of so much engagement with it in the course of the history of philosophy after Descartes.

Chapter II: Kantian Kantian Skepticism

> The skeptical method is the best and only one for beating back objections by means of retorts. Does there then arise from it a universal doubt? No, but the presumptions of pure reason with regard to the conditions of the possibility of all objects are thereby beaten back. (R4469 17:563)

Kant has a very high opinion of Hume, who "is perhaps the most ingenuous of all skeptics" (A764/B792) and whose skeptical concerns regarding causality has interrupted his (Kant's) dogmatic slumber (4:260).[56] Hume argues that what we see in a so-called causal relation is just some object or event following some other object or event—it is nothing more than the "contiguity" between what is considered to be cause and what is considered to be effect. There is nothing in our experience to grant us the conclusion that there is a necessary connection between them.[57] Kant is of course "far from listening to him with respect to his conclusions" (ibid). But he takes the problem seriously enough to try to understand it better and to find a way with it. He first tries to see "whether Hume's objection might not be presented in general matter" and finds out that the concept of causality "is far from being the only concept through which the understanding thinks connections of things a priori" (ibid). Hume, who first discovers

[56] On at least one occasion, however, Kant mentions the *Antinomies of Pure Reason* as what aroused him from his dogmatic slumber (10:74). See (de Boer 2020, 47; Engstrom 1994, 377) for discussion.

[57] See (Hume 1975a, 86–94; 1975b, 25–39) and the references in note 7.

such a huge problem for metaphysics, nevertheless fails to see its real force (B19-20). It was Kant who first generalized the problem to its furthermost boundaries:

> I sought to ascertain their [i.e., the concepts'] number, and once I had successfully attained this in the way I wished, namely from a single principle, I proceeded to the deduction of these concepts, from which I henceforth became assured that they were not, as Hume had feared, derived from experience, but had arisen from the pure understanding … I had now succeeded in the dissolving (*auflösen*) of the Humean problem not only in a single case but with respect to the entire faculty of pure reason (4:260-1; translation amended).

Hume has recognized only one concept, the concept of causality, as so problematic. But Kant has 'ascertained' their number, in the "Metaphysical Deduction," "from a single principle" and showed to his satisfaction that in fact there are twelve different categories who might face such a problem. The "Transcendental Deduction of the Categories," which follows the "Metaphysical Deduction" and is the most "important [investigation] for getting to the bottom of that faculty we call the understanding" (Axvi), is Kant's way with the generalized Humean problem.[58] He shows that, *pace* Hume, those concepts do not arise from experience but rather from the pure understanding. In this way, therefore, Kant does not try in the "Deduction" to respond to Hume*'s* problem, but his own version of the *Humean* problem.

It is, however, and despite Kant's clear indications, not an agreed upon point. It is controversial even as to what the problem is which Kant wants to address in the "Deduction." There is a line of interpretation which takes it to be a response to "skepticism"—where by that term it

[58] From now on, unless otherwise specified, by "Deduction" I mean the "Transcendental Deduction of the Categories."

is meant the external world skepticism associated with Descartes.[59] Another line argues that it is not meant to respond to *any* kind of skepticism. In this reading Kant does not offer a 'progressive' argument, rather, he sets forth a 'regressive' argument an assumption of which is that there is experience.[60]

Both parties, in my view, get something right and something wrong. The former is right in taking Kant's target in the "Deduction" to be a skeptical problem, though it is wrong about which kind of skepticism it wants to address. The latter, on the other hand, is right to recognize that Kant is not trying to respond to a Cartesian doubt regarding the actuality of the external objects. But it is wrong in ruling out the assumption that it is a response to a kind of skepticism after all.

The key to understanding this is, I suggest, the distinction between Cartesian skepticism and Kantian skepticism developed above in the Introduction. To recall, Cartesian skepticism is an *if*-question regarding the 'actuality' of something—the paradigm case of which asks whether or not there is an external world. Kantian skepticism, on the other hand, is a *how-possible* question which asks for an *explanation* for the 'possibility' of something—how it is possible, for example, that my experience bears on the external world. I show below that the target of the "Deduction" *is* a kind of skepticism—so credit is due to the first line of interpretation—but it is not a Cartesian skepticism which doubts the actuality of external objects—hence credit is due to the second line of interpretation.

This interpretation is consistent with Kant's own use of "skepticism" in the "Deduction" itself. He uses the term twice in the "B-

[59] See (P. Strawson 1966; Stroud 1968a; 2017). See also (van Cleve 1999).

[60] See (Ameriks 1978). See also (Engstrom 1994).

Deduction."[61] The first, which is associated with Hume, is in §14. There, he discusses two possible reactions to the problem he is trying to address, i.e., the enthusiasm he associates with Locke and skepticism he associates with Hume, who "believed himself to have discovered in what is generally held to be reason a deception of our faculty of cognition" (B128). What Kant himself tries to do is to find a third way between these two extremes, i.e., "to see whether we can successfully steer human reason between these two cliffs, assign its determinate boundaries, and still keep open the entire field of its purposive activity" (ibid).

The second place is at the end of the "B-Deduction," at §27, when he is talking about giving the skeptic "what he wishes most." What is it that the skeptic wishes the most? It is "that I am so constituted that I cannot think of this representation otherwise than so connected" (B168). The problem with which Kant is wrestling in the "Deduction," as will be elaborated below, is how it is possible that the subjective architecture of my mind is so constituted that maps the objective structure of the world. If the response we give to this problem is that we cannot help but to think in this way, and therefore we must continue using these concepts although we cannot be sure whether or not they map to the reality, then we are giving exactly the answer Hume himself offered. He didn't deny that we use the concept of causality. Quite to the contrary: He allows that, as we cannot help but to think in this way, we should continue to use them. This is his own skeptical solution—what he wishes most.[62] Therefore, here as well, it is Hume and his brand of skepticism which is associated with the term skepticism.

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[61] (Engstrom 1994) also discusses these two places at length. I will discuss below in detail the differences between my reading and his.

[62] See (Hume 1975a, 95–105; 1975b, 40–55) and the references in note 7.

Kant's way with this brand of skepticism in the "Deduction" is by denying the skeptic what he wishes the most. The skeptic accepts the Kantian gap—that there is a gap between our mental architecture and the world—as a genuine gap. He accepts the gap and then, arguing that we cannot help but to think in this way, offers his skeptical solution by saying that we should keep going by what we have. Kant denies him of what he wishes the most by showing that the gap is a pseudo-gap: Hume cannot help but to be a skeptic since he doesn't see that the gap is not a genuine one.

In what follows, I first argue against both lines of interpretation mentioned above and present Kant's own version of Humean problem, i.e., what I call "Kantian Kantian skepticism." I then formulate the way Kant argues that the Kantian gap is not a genuine gap, and that the Kantian Kantian skepticism does not envisage a real possibility. I end the chapter with some concluding remarks.

Before that, however, it is important to note that my concern here is just limited to the "Deduction" as presented in the second edition of the first *Critique*. It is well known that Kant wrote a completely new version of the "Transcendental Deduction" for the second edition, and it is a valid question to ask whether or not both of these versions argue for one and the same thing, and also, what is the relation of these two together.[63] Trying to reply to this interpretive puzzle goes beyond of the scope of the present text. I, therefore, limit my discussion to the "Deduction" as presented in the second edition of the first *Critique*, or as it sometimes called, the "B-Deduction."

[63] See, e.g., (Conant 2016, 81).

Kantian Kantian Skepticism

In order to understand Kant's skeptical problem in the "Deduction," one should first try to see how he understands Hume's skeptical problem. He starts by crediting Hume with the discovery of what he calls 'synthetic judgment', i.e., that he "perhaps had in mind … that in judgments of certain kind we go beyond our concept of the object" (A764/B792). These synthetic judgments can be found in two kinds. On the one hand, there are those judgments in which we go beyond the concept of the object by means of experience, i.e., what Kant calls "synthetic *a posteriori* judgment" which does not pose any serious problem. On the other hand, however, there are, according to Kant, those judgments in which we go beyond the concept of an object without any help from experience, i.e., what he calls "synthetic *a priori* judgments." In Kant's view:

> Our skeptic did not distinguish these two kinds of judgment, as he should have, and for that reason held this augmentation of concepts out of themselves and the parthenogenesis, so to speak, of our understanding (together with reason), without impregnation by experience, to be impossible; thus he held all of its supposedly *a priori* principles to be merely imagined, and found out they are nothing but a custom arising from experience and its laws, thus are merely empirical, i.e., intrinsically contingent rules, to which we ascribe a supposed necessity and universality. (A765/B793)

Hume uses the example of the relation between cause and effect to elaborate this "disturbing" conclusion and believes that "he could infer from this that without experience we have nothing that could augment our concept and justify us in making such a judgment, which amplifies itself a priori" (ibid).

This is one more piece of evidence that when Kant talks about the "skeptic" in the first *Critique*, he *normally* has Hume in mind. But what

is even more important for my present purpose is how he understands the problem Hume himself addresses.[64] Hume, *Kants Meinung nach*, has a vague conception that in some of our judgments we go further than the concept of the object. But be that as it may, he lacked the important distinction between two ways of doing so, i.e., *a posteriori* and *a priori*. And for that very reason he thought that the only way we can go further than our concept of the object is by way of experience. But since the concept of causality cannot be achieved that way, that is, experience falls short of providing any basis for that concept, he ended up being skeptic regarding that concept.

This is Kant's understanding of Hume's problem, but it is not the problem he wants to address. First, as we have seen, he goes beyond the mere concept of causality and generalizes the problem to be about all pure concepts of the understanding, i.e., the twelve categories. Second, Kant, contrary to Hume, *has* the distinction between synthetic *a priori* and synthetic *a posteriori* in his arsenal. This helps him to understand the Humean problem in a different way from Hume himself. Put another way, Hume, as a good empiricist, believes that it is only the impressions which have epistemic force and can be of any help in going further than the concept of the object. But Kant is not an empiricist and believes that we can have *a priori,* as well *as a posteriori*, ways of augmentation of our concepts as well. Therefore, he generalizes Hume's problem in two ways: First, by showing that it is not a problem merely for causality, but for all the pure concepts of the understanding. And second, by freeing it from its empiricist assumptions, and posing it regarding the *a priori* ways of going further than our concept of the

[64] It could be a contentious matter how precise his reading of Hume is. My present purpose is, however, only how Kant understands it and I leave Hume exegesis aside for the moment.

objects as well. Therefore, Kant offers a *translation* of Hume's problem in his own framework, i.e., offers a *Humean* problem rather than wrestling with *Hume's* own problem: This is what I call Kantian Kantian skepticism.

What exactly is, then, the problem Kant wants to address? In order to answer to this question, it is necessary to turn to Kant's notion of a "transcendental deduction." Kant believes that a transcendental deduction is necessary in the case of both sorts of *a priori* concepts, i.e., space and time as the pure forms of sensibility on the one hand and the categories as pure concepts of the understanding on the other hand (A85/B117). Kant thinks that the deduction of the pure forms of sensibility is relatively easy, since

> an object can appear to us only by means of such pure forms of sensibility, i.e., be an object of empirical intuition, space and time are thus pure intuitions that contain *a priori* the conditions of the possibility of objects as appearances, and the synthesis in them has objective validity. (A89/B121-2)

This is what he has done in the transcendental exposition in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*. Kant defines a (metaphysical) exposition as follows:

> I understand by **exposition** (*expositio*) the distinct (even if not complete) representation of that which belongs to a concept; but the exposition is **metaphysical** when it contains that which exhibits the concept **as given** *a priori*. (B38)

Which is to be differentiated from a *transcendental* exposition:

> I understand by **transcendental exposition** the explanation of a concept as a principle from which insight into the possibility of other synthetic *a priori* cognitions can be gained. (B40)

In a transcendental exposition, as Kant defines it, one explains the possibility of something, by means of another principle—here space or

time—and they explain the possibility of synthetic *a priori* cognition. That is, it is a *how-possible* question which a transcendental exposition is supposed to answer, as evidenced by the following passage:

> Thus our explanation alone makes the **possibility** of geometry as a synthetic *a priori* cognition comprehensible. (B41)

Therefore, I suggest, the "Metaphysical Exposition" of the "Transcendental Aesthetic" parallels the "Metaphysical Deduction," and the "Transcendental Exposition," which is added in the second edition, parallels the "Transcendental Deduction."[65]

Even more importantly for my present purpose, in both the transcendental exposition of space and time and the transcendental deduction of the categories, the problem is about the "objective validity" of these concepts—in the former the objective validity of space and time and in the latter that of the categories. The matter with the latter is, however, more complicated:

> The categories of the understanding, on the contrary, do not represent to us the conditions under which objects are given in intuition at all, hence objects can indeed appear to us without necessarily having to be related to the functions of the understanding, and therefore without the understanding containing their *a priori* conditions. (A89/B122)

He repeats the same point a page later:

> [A]ppearances could after all be so constituted that the understanding would not find them in accord with the conditions of its unity, and everything would then lie in such a confusion that, e.g., in the succession of appearances nothing would offer itself that would furnish a rule of synthesis and thus correspond to the concept of cause and effect, so that this concept would therefore be entirely empty, nugatory, and without significance. Appearances would nonetheless offer objects to our

[65] See (Ameriks 1978, 51–54).

> intuition, for intuition by no means requires the functions of thinking. (A90-91/B123)

In both passages Kant envisages a *seeming possibility*, i.e., that there is a gap between the objects of sensible intuition on the one hand and the categories on the other.[66] The question here is "how **subjective conditions of thinking** should have **objective validity**, i.e., yield conditions of the possibility of all cognitions of objects" (A89-90/B122). Kant here defines the problem he wants to address in terms of providing 'objective validity' for the 'subjective conditions of thinking', where he defines the former as providing "the conditions of the possibility of all cognition of objects." He therefore defines the task of the "Transcendental Deduction" as "the explanation of the way in which concepts can relate to objects *a priori*" (A85/B117). And therefore, he defines the task of the *Transcendental Deduction* as "the explanation of the way in which concepts can relate to objects *a priori*" (A85/B117).

This is, to recall, the Kantian gap between thinking and its object. In the Kantian gap, which is the *Merkmal* of Kantian skepticism, there is a gap between the conceptual and the non-conceptual and what is at issue is to present an 'explanation' for the relation between these two. This is the problem Kant sets to answer in the "Transcendental Deduction" of the categories.

So far so good. But what to make of the claim that the "Deduction" is meant to refute (Cartesian) skepticism? Peter Strawson, for example, writes that "a major part of the role the Deduction will be to *establish* that experiences necessarily involve knowledge of *objects*" (P. Strawson

[66] Both passages have been a source of confusion for several readers, as it appears to deviate from Kant's original purpose in the *Deduction*; see, e.g., (van Cleve 1999, 78ff). See (Paton 1936, I:324n.; Kant 1998, 725n17; Grüne 2011, 465ff; McDowell, n.d.). Cf. (Hanna 2005, 259ff; Allais 2009, 387n; 2016, 7).

1966, 88). Barry Stroud, in addition, takes the "question of right," as he names it, to be directed at the scandal of philosophy Kant describes in the "Introduction" to the first *Critique*, i.e., "that the existence of things outside us … must be accepted merely on faith" (Bxl). He writes:

> The transcendental deduction (along with the Refutation of Idealism) is supposed to … give a complete answer to the sceptic about the existence of things outside us. (Stroud 1968a, 242)

In his reading, both the "Deduction" and the "Refutation of Idealism" are meant to provide us with the "objective validity" of concepts, i.e., the question regarding "our *right* to, or *justification* for, the possession and employment of these concepts" (Stroud 1968a, 241). Almost half a century later, Stroud still believes that the "Deduction" is supposed to oppose Descartes's 'problematic idealism' (Stroud 2017, 114).

This alone should give us a pause. Kant is a philosopher who cares a lot about the systematicity of work and, arguably, the structure of his work is often part of his overall argument. The very place something appears in his work, therefore, says a lot about the role that argument is supposed to play.[67] But the way Stroud cites freely, in this context, from the "Transcendental Deduction," the "Refutation of Idealism," and the "Forth Paralogism of Ideality," implies that he takes them to be addressing one and the same problem, i.e., the 'problematic idealism' of Descartes. If he is right, then, one should answer some questions.[68] Does the "Refutation" merely repeat the conclusion already reached in the "Deduction"? If so, why the repetition? And why Kant, who

[67] For example, many take the change of the place of the argument against the problematic idealism of Descartes from the "Transcendental Dialectic" in the first edition to the "Postulates of Human Reason" in the second edition has some deep reasons. See, e.g., (Sellars 1976; Chignell, n.d.).

[68] And since my concern here is just with the second edition "Deduction," I do not consider the "Fourth Paralogism," as it only appears in the first edition.

explicitly declares at the beginning of the "Refutation" that it is meant to refute Descartes's problematic idealism, fails to mention either the French philosopher's name or 'problematic idealism' in the "Deduction"? Why Kant mentions at the "B-Preface" that the "Refutation" is the only real supplement to the second edition (Bxxxixn.), but does not call the "Deduction," which is also wholly re-written for the second edition, a supplement? If it is not a repetition, then why would Kant address one and the same problem twice, once in the "Analytic of Concepts" and once in the "Analytic of Principles"? And are they two parts of the same argument, the latter finishing the unfinished business of the "Deduction," or are they two different arguments? I think there is no satisfactory answer to these questions, as they start from a false assumption. The "Deduction," contrary to the "Refutation," is not supposed to refute what Strawson and Stroud call 'skepticism'.

But what is the reason that Strawson and Stroud conflated these two parts and their target positions? The key element here is, I suggest, that they conflate the notions of "objective reality" and "objective validity" in the context of the first *Critique*.[69] Stroud seems to use these two terms interchangeably, and he tends to use the former in his paper "Transcendental Arguments" and the latter in the later "Kant's "Transcendental Deduction"." In Stroud's reading, therefore, both the "Deduction" and the "Refutation" are meant to refute Descartes's problematic idealism, and the way to do so is to prove the "objective reality" or the "objective validity" of the pure concepts of the

[69] This qualification is important because Kant uses these terms throughout his entire critical philosophy, in the context of theoretical as well as practical philosophy, and arguably they can have different connotations in these different contexts. What I say here is just limited to the context of the first *Critique*, and in particular to the context of the "Deduction" and the "Refutation." Furthermore, since Stroud elaborates more on this problem, I concentrate on his reading here.

understanding, where both of them are meant to show our right or entitlement in using these concepts.

There are, *pace* Stroud, two ways to understand the phrase "our right or entitlement in using the pure concepts of the understanding." In one, it is meant to address an *if*-question, asking about the actuality or the exemplification of one concept. In this sense, one asks, for example, if there actually is something corresponding to the concept of substance. In this sense, we have a right or entitlement to use some concept when there actually is something corresponding to it in the actual world. In a second meaning, it asks a deeper question, the *how-possible* question, which calls for an explanation for the possibility of something. In the present case, for instance, it asks for an explanation for the possibility that the pure concepts of the understanding bear on the objects of our sensible intuition. I suggest that—in the present context—Kant's use of "objective reality" is meant to address the former and his use of "objective validity" to address the latter.

The first time Kant uses the term "objective reality" in the context of the "Deduction" is when he is talking about empirical concepts, saying that for them we don't need any transcendental deduction "because we always have experience ready at hand to prove their objective reality" (A84/B116-7). Here what Kant means by "objective reality" is that the experience provides us with instances of empirical concepts in question, therefore our entitlement (in the first sense of the term) to use them is provided by their objective reality, i.e., by their being instantiated in our empirical experience. This reading seems to be further confirmed by the way Kant uses the term again in the *General Note to the System of Principles*, writing:

> … in order to understand the possibility of things in accordance with the categories, and thus to establish the

> **objective reality** of the latter, we do not merely need intuitions, but always **outer intuitions**. (B291)

Here again, Kant uses the term in the same way. That is, we have "objective reality" when we have our intuition to provide us with instances of concepts. And it is of great importance to note that "objective reality" is here associated (merely) with the "Refutation," as Kant writes that "[t]his entire remark is of great importance … to confirm our preceding refutation of idealism" (B293). What is at issue in the "Refutation" is explicitly the problematic idealism of Descartes, which "declares the existence of objects in space outside us to be … merely doubtful" (B274). In the "Refutation," in other words, we are faced merely with the instantiation of concepts, and not with the deeper question regarding the possibility of their bearing on the objects. This, I suggest, shows that "objective reality" is used only in the case of questions of 'actuality', or *if*-questions, and not in the case of *how-possible* questions.

Kant uses, however, "objective validity" in another context and with a totally different meaning for "entitlement" (*Rechtfertigung*) in mind. Cases in point for this usage are when he is talking about the transcendental deduction he offers in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" for space and time (A88/B120-1) or when he is talking about transcendentally deducing the pure concepts of the understanding (A89-90/B122). To quote the relevant passage again:

> Thus a difficulty is revealed here that we did not encounter in the field of sensibility, namely how **subjective conditions of thinking** should have objective validity, i.e., *yield conditions of the possibility of all cognition of objects*. (italics mine)

The italicized part seems to be a definition of objective validity, which states that it provides us with the conditions of the *possibility*, and not *instantiation*, of concepts. It is, therefore, a different concept than

objective reality. And it seems to be a deeper, or more primary, concept than objective reality. Whereas "objective reality" concerns just the instantiation of concepts, "objective validity" concerns a much deeper worry, i.e., the conditions of the possibility of pure concepts.

These considerations I take to approve of the initial suggestion that "objective reality" and "objective validity" each match to, respectively, the *if*- and *how-possible* questions. Understood in this way, objective reality is a response to Cartesian skepticism, Kant's response to which is offered in the "Refutation of Idealism"—as he himself makes it clear—and objective validity is a response to Kantian skepticism. Stroud's mistake is not, therefore, to take the "Deduction" to be a response to skepticism, but to take it to be a response to the wrong kind of skepticism. And the reason for his mistake is that he does not distinguish carefully between objective reality and objective validity.

There is, however, another side to this story, i.e., the second line of interpretation which argues against the suggestion that the "Deduction" addresses a kind of skepticism. It is, however, less radical than the first line, in that its adherents agree that there is something to the idea of taking the "Deduction" to be addressing something along the line of Humean skepticism. Karl Ameriks, for example, who defends a 'regressive' reading of the "Deduction," where this reading allows Kant to take our having experience for granted, writes:

> Nonetheless, my approach is compatible with allowing that Kant was concerned with skeptical problems about the *higher* faculty of reason, and that relevant skeptical difficulties can arise *after* one accepts the principles of the Critical philosophy and tries to apply them in a concrete way. (Ameriks 2003, 11)

And Stephen Engstrom, who argues that the *Deduction* neither concerns Descartes's skepticism nor Hume's, writes:

> It is much more plausible to suppose that the skepticism Kant imputes to the middle course is kindred to the skepticism associated with Hume's empiricism.

He goes on to say, however, that it "should not be inferred from this … that the Deduction aims to refute the Humean skeptic. For such an aim would not be in keeping with Kant's understanding of the character and origin of Hume's skepticism" (Engstrom 1994, 370).

This already shows that my reading and Engstrom's belong to the same species, although they differ in how to understand Humean skepticism. To be more precise, Engstrom does not differentiate between *Hume's* skepticism and Kant's *Humean* skepticism. He argues, quite justifiably, that Kant does not address Hume's skepticism. But, as I argued above, Kant gives a *translation* of Hume's skepticism in the framework of his own critical philosophy, getting rid of Hume's empiricist assumptions, and it is this skepticism—a version of what I called in the Introduction Kantian skepticism—which is Kant's target in the "Deduction." What I am doing here is, therefore, trying to make the issues Engstrom raises clearer, not to reject his argument out of hand.

One of the major terms in Engstrom's discussion is "refutation." The term can either mean opposing something "with an adversarial turn of mind," and seeking "to defeat one another in a debate" (ibid). Or it can be used "in nonadversarial contexts where the purpose of the argument is not to defend a thesis, but simply to determine a truth" (Engstrom 1994, 371). He believes that none of these meanings apply to the case of the "Deduction," as Kant neither wishes to oppose Hume nor to defend a position Hume wishes to deny. The major reason is that, in Engstrom's view, Kant sees Hume's grounds for his skeptical position 'overly hasty':

> If Hume was "overly hasty," then the empirical derivation must not have been his only available option, even if he was in a sense compelled to adopt it. (ibid)

That is, Hume's skeptical conclusion, according to Kant, was reached by him on insufficient grounds, and if Kant believes that the Scottish philosopher has insufficient grounds, then he wouldn't allocate the "Deduction," what he takes the most important part of the first *Critique*, to refuting it. But as we have seen, it is not *Hume's* skepticism which is the target of Kant, but his own version of the *Humean* worry. Therefore, although Engstrom is right in taking the "Deduction" not addressing *Hume's* skepticism, he is 'overly hasty' in ruling out the possibility that he wants to address a *Humean* kind of skepticism.

The second point Engstrom makes is that that "we actually possess (scientific) synthetic a priori knowledge is something Kant has presumed from the start" (Engstrom 1994, 373). That is, Hume's skepticism would amount to rejecting that we have any synthetic *a priori* knowledge, e.g., in the case of causality, but this is something Kant rejects from the outset. This is akin to Ameriks's view that Kant's aim in the "Deduction" is a 'regressive' argument: Kant does not start from a doubt about something, be it our having experience or enjoying synthetic *a priori* knowledge. Put another way, Kant does not start from a doubt about our having something, but rather starts by that assumption, to accomplish something else. As Engstrom puts it:

> The argument [of the *Deduction*] is … meant to show, not that synthetic a priori knowledge is possible (its possibility is shown by its actuality), but rather that it is impossible to know that synthetic a priori knowledge is impossible. (Engstrom 1994, 374)

This is something Ameriks would also agree, replacing probably "experience" for "synthetic *a priori* knowledge." But again, this is not something I disagree. What they both conflate, however, is that they

take any kind of skepticism, be it Cartesian or Kantian, with a kind of doubt. But Kantian skepticism does not involve doubt. Quite to the contrary: It is a *how-possible* question which asks for an explanation for something its existence is not in doubt in the first place. This is something Engstrom comes quite close to admitting, when he writes that the "issue is therefore not *whether* synthetic a priori knowledge is possible, but *how* (B19)" (ibid). Here he seems in fact to be vaguely in possession of the distinction between *if*-question—which he probably would call *whether*-question—and *how-possible* question. What he misses, however, is that it is not true that any kind of skepticism involves an *if*-question. And whether Hume's skepticism is an *if*-question, whether it is a version of Cartesian skepticism or Kantian skepticism, is irrelevant here, as Kant is concerned, not with *Hume's* skepticism, but with his own version of *Humean* skepticism. As Engstrom writes:

> [W]hat is needed is "a better laying of the ground," a way of understanding the categories that will afford us "insight" into the "origin and authenticity" of the principles of pure understanding and thereby enables us to see how the synthetic propositions of the sciences are possible. This is what Kant attempts to provide in the *Deduction*. (Engstrom 1994, 375)

This is what Kant provides in the "Deduction," and this is how a response to a Kantian variety of skepticism would look like. But how exactly does he do that? I turn to this question in the next section.

Denying the Skeptic What He Wishes Most

In the final section of the "B-Deduction," §27, Kant gives an example of a way of addressing his own version of Kantian skepticism which does not work:

> [T]he concept of cause, which asserts the necessity of a consequent under a presupposed condition, would be false if it rested only on a subjective necessity, arbitrarily implanted in us, of combining certain empirical representations, according to such a rule of relation. I would not be able to say that the effect is combined with the cause in the object (i.e., necessarily), but only that *I am so constituted that I cannot think of this representation otherwise than as so connected*; which is precisely what the skeptic wishes most. (B168, emphasis mine)

The italicized part is what the skeptic wishes the most: That we are so constituted that we cannot think otherwise than, e.g., that there are causal relations in the world. The skeptic wishes us to think that that we take the world to enjoy causality has nothing to do with the world itself, but with the way we think. We just happened to be so constituted to think in this way, but this does not say anything about the world itself: For all we know, the world might contain or lack causality. In Kant's turn of phrase, the skeptic wants us to say that concepts like causality do not have 'objective necessity', but only 'subjective necessity'. This is exactly Hume's 'skeptical solution', as introduced above, in which it is true that the most we can observe in a causal relation is "contiguity," but since we cannot help but to think in this way, we have to embrace it and live with that principle.[70] We just can't help but to think in this way—that there is causality in the world. Therefore, we should continue in doing so, as it works. But at the end of the day, it does not say anything objective about the world around us—all it does is to say something about the architecture of my mind. But Kant wants to reject this, to deny the skeptic what he wishes the most, i.e., to show that it is out of *objective* rather than *subjective* necessity which our pure concepts of the understanding (like causality)

[70] See the literature in note 7 above.

bear on the objects. This is the task of a 'transcendental deduction' in the case of the categories.

Put in the terminology developed in the Introduction above, what the skeptic wishes the most is that it is only subjectively necessary that there is no Kantian gap between the conceptual (the pure concepts of the understanding) and the non-conceptual (the spatiotemporal objects). Kant, however, wants to show that it is objectively necessary that the Kantian gap is a pseudo-gap, that there is no genuine gap between the conceptual and the non-conceptual.

Kant's way to do this is by showing that the two faculties of sensibility and understanding are interdependent and cannot be separated.[71] That is, one faculty cannot be realized without at the same time the other is realized as well. This is to criticize what is sometimes called in the literature as the 'additive' as opposed to the 'transformative' conception of rationality (Boyle 2016) or the layer-cake conceptions of human mindedness (Conant 2016). In these conceptions, sensibility is assumed an independently intelligible faculty—what is shared with other sentient creatures. The only difference we have with other sentient creatures is that we enjoy a second layer, the understanding, which is added to this independently intelligible faculty, without changing or transforming it into another kind of sensibility. Kant's major argument in the "Deduction" is to reject such an additive or layer-cake conception, or rejecting the Kantian gap as a pseudo-gap: By denying the skeptic what he wishes most.

Kant's way to prove that the Kantian gap is a pseudo-gap is by arguing that there is only one unity at work in both intuition and concept. Here

[71] What I'm presenting here is meant to be follow the reading offered in (Conant 2016; 2020; McDowell, n.d.), although they might not approve every move I make here.

is one of the most explicit formulations of this argument, from §26 of the *B-Deduction*:

> But space and time are represented *a priori* not merely as **forms** of sensible intuition, but also as **intuitions** themselves (which contain a manifold), and thus with the determination of the **unity** of this manifold in them … Thus even **unity of synthesis** of the manifold, outside or within us, hence also a **binding** (**Verbindung**) with which everything that is to be represented as determined in space or time must agree, is already given a priori, along with (not in) these intuitions, as condition of the synthesis of **apprehension**. But this synthetic unity can be none other than that of the binding of the manifold of a given **intuition in general** in an original consciousness, in agreement with the categories, only applied to our sensible intuitions. (B161, translation amended)

Kant starts by reminding us that space and time are themselves intuitions. But Kant believes that *all* intuitions, and therefore even space and time, are under the spell of the categories and hence the understanding:

> This very same synthetic unity, … if I abstract from the form of space, has its seat in the understanding. (B162)

This means that space and time, and hence the sensibility itself, are not realizable unless the understanding is at work. This is because the very same unity, both in the sensibility and the understanding, is at work. In a crucial footnote Kant writes:

> In the Aesthetic I ascribed this unity merely to sensibility, only in order to note that it precedes all concepts, though to be sure it presupposes a synthesis, which does not belong to the senses but through which all concepts of space and time become possible. (B160-1n)

Every Kant scholar reads these passages in a different way, but I think a defensible way of reading them is to take them as saying that there is only one unity, through which even space and time, and hence sensibility, become possible. And this unity, as Kant makes it clear, has

its seat in the understanding. Therefore, the sensibility cannot be realized without the help of the understanding. And therefore, the Kantian gap is only a pseudo-possibility, and what described at the beginning of §13, that the appearances could be given to us without any help from the understanding, is an unintelligible scenario. This is in total consistency with what he explains as the aim of the second part of the *B-Deduction* in §21:

> In the sequel (§26) it will be shown from the way in which the empirical intuition is given in sensibility that its unity can be none other than the one the category prescribes to the manifold of a given intuition in general according to the preceding §20 (B144-5).

It is only via the categories, and hence via the understanding, that space and time and hence the sensibility itself can be realized. This is, therefore, Kant's response to Kantian skepticism, i.e. the *how-possible* question which asks for an explanation for the fact that our pure concepts of the understanding, or categories, bear on objects. Now the explanation Kant offers is that it is only via the only unity at work, and therefore only via the interplay of the understanding and the sensibility, that we can have experience. Therefore, it is in principle impossible, it is unintelligible, that there is a gap to begin with.

Chapter III: Kantian Cartesian Skepticism

> It always remains a scandal of philosophy and universal human reason that the existence of things outside us (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, and that if it occurs to anyone to doubt it, we should be unable to answer him with a satisfactory proof. (Bxxxix n.)

In the previous chapter we saw how Kant overcomes the *how-possible* question he poses in his "Transcendental Deduction" by arguing that the Kantian gap is a pseudo-gap. Kant delves not only into *how-possible* questions but also engages with Cartesian *if*-questions. A prime example of the latter is the inquiry into the existence of an external world. He recognizes two different varieties of this kind of skepticism—or material idealism, as he calls it.[72] One is the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley who denies the existence of any spatial objects, and the other is the problematic idealism of Descartes who merely doubts the existence of such objects:

> 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 … the **latter** is the **dogmatic** idealism of Berkeley. (B274)

[72] In the first *Critique*, Kant tends to employ 'idealism' to denote what we now recognize as Cartesian—and occasionally Berkeleyan—skepticism. The term 'skepticism' in his discourse is typically reserved for the Humean variation. See (Engstrom 1994); cf. (Guyer 2003, 6–8) who take Kant's use of 'skepticism' in the majority of places in the first *Critique* to be about Pyrrhonian skepticism. For general discussions about the relation of Kant and different varieties of skepticism see (Bird 2006, chap. 11) and (Forster 2008).

He takes the argument of the "Transcendental Aesthetic" to the effect that space and time are pure forms of intuition to be sufficient refutation of Berkeleyan dogmatic idealism (ibid.); and he argues against the problematic idealism of Descartes on several occasions, including the "Fourth Paralogism of Ideality" (A366-80) in the first edition of the first *Critique* and in the "Refutation of Idealism" (B274-9) in the second edition. The latter is what Kant takes to be the real addition to the second edition of the first *Critique*, although it is a supplement "only in the way of proof" (Bxxxix n.).[73] So, my exploration of Kant's anti-skeptical argument relies exclusively on the "Refutation," even though in framing the issue he aims to address, I draw from both editions interchangeably.[74]

[73] In the first edition, the refutation is in the *Transcendental Dialectic*, and in the second edition it is moved to the *Postulates of Empirical Thinking in General* in the *Transcendental Analytic*. I believe there are profound and insightful reasons for this, not the least of which is that it places the discussion within the postulate of actuality. I will discuss this point in more detail below. Note that throughout the chapter, I use "refutation" with a small 'r' to denote Kant's general anti-skeptical strategy, and "Refutation" with a capital 'R' specifically refers to the second edition "Refutation of Idealism."

[74] Some readers, such as Sellars (Sellars 1976, para. 6) and Moltke Gram (Gram 1981, 149–50), take the two refutations to be in essential agreement, but more recent readings increasingly treat them as different arguments, see, e.g., (Caranti 2007; Heidemann 2023). Whether or not the anti-skeptical strategies of the "Fourth Paralogism" and the "Refutation" are the same, I think it is fairly uncontroversial that they address the same problem, and therefore it makes sense to use both in formulating the target position. There is also a disagreement in the literature about whether this kind of skepticism is central in the making of the critical philosophy. Michael Forster cites Paul Guyer and Barry Stroud as examples of the Anglophone tradition of assuming that the "veil of perception" is the central problem of the critical philosophy, and argues against them that this version of skepticism plays "no more than a secondary role" in Kant's mature philosophy (Forster 2008, 6). I tend to agree with Forster that it is not one of the *constitutive problems* of the critical philosophy and therefore he is right to argue that it was not one of Kant's major motivations to develop his critical philosophy. However, I think he is going too far in claiming that he does not "believe that this problem *is* nearly as important as it has often been taken to be" (Forster 2008, 12), as it is nevertheless of great importance in the first *Critique*.

In what follows, I first describe two related interpretive problems and formulate them together as a criterion of adequacy for any reading of Kant's understanding of the Cartesian skeptical problem. I then proceed to offer such a formulation which I take to satisfy that criterion and then proceed to offer my reading of Kant's response to the problem as so formulated, which is a reading of Kant's proof in the "Refutation of Idealism." My aim here, however, is merely to see how Kant himself sees the problem and the way out of it. Therefore, the problem itself and the response thereto in my reading is based on his critical philosophy and in particular, as he himself argues in the "Fourth Paralogism," his transcendental idealism and the theory of the self. It is a genuine and interesting question whether and how Kant's anti-skeptical argument can be formulated as independent of Kant's own critical philosophy. Due to the constraints of space, however, I set this question aside and try only to determine how Kant himself sees the skeptical problem and the way out of it.[75] I then end the chapter with some concluding remarks.

A Criterion of Adequacy

The secondary literature often takes it for granted that in the "Refutation of Idealism" Kant is responding to the skeptical problem of Descartes. This is, of course, consistent with what Kant himself says at the beginning of the "Refutation," that he has sufficiently responded to Berkeley's dogmatic idealism in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" and

[75] Kant himself maintains that no transcendentally realist response to Cartesian skepticism is possible (A369). But for some readings which either see it as independent of "transcendental idealist premises" or try to see how this argument can be conceived as independent of that doctrine, see (Stern 2008). For readings which take the dependence of the "Refutation" on Kant's transcendental idealism seriously see, e.g., (Caranti 2007, 4; Heidemann 2023, 26ff).

wants to refute Descartes's problematic idealism in the "Refutation" (B274-5). But I show in this chapter that it is not Descartes's argument but Kant's own version of the Cartesian argument that is the target of the "Refutation." One should therefore give a *translation* of Descartes's argument in such a way that it is a problem for a transcendental idealist.

Kant puts both the problematic idealism of Descartes and the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley under the umbrella term "material idealism" (B519 n.) to distinguish it—and thereby them—from his own formal or transcendental idealism:[76]

> I understand by the **transcendental idealism** of all appearances the doctrine that they are all together to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves, and accordingly that space and time are only sensible forms of our intuition, but not determinations given for themselves or conditions of objects as things in themselves. To this idealism is opposed **transcendental realism**, which regards space and time as something given in themselves (independent of our sensibility). 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)

The understanding of Kant's transcendental idealism and the distinction between things in themselves and appearances sparks significant controversy.[77] Two key points merit attention here: First, Kant posits that the transcendental realist views space and time not

[76] Some philosophers indicate that they treat 'formal idealism' and 'transcendental idealism' differently (Conant 2020, 775n28). But Kant at least on occasion explicitly takes them to be identical (e.g., B519n.). The issue, however, is delicate and goes beyond the scope of the present chapter.

[77] Reviews of these debates can be found in (Ameriks 1982; Schulting 2011; Jauernig 2021, 4–11; Stang 2022).

merely as pure forms of intuition but as inherent properties of objects. Second, the transcendental realist regards spatial objects as things in themselves rather than appearances. Nevertheless, Kant associates transcendental realism with empirical idealism, encompassing the problematic idealism of Descartes or the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley:

> It is really this transcendental realist who afterwards plays the empirical idealist; and after he has falsely presupposed about objects of the senses that if they are to exist they must have their existence in themselves even apart from sense, he finds that from this point of view all our representations of senses are insufficient to make their reality certain. (A369)

Kant first concedes that if the spatiotemporal objects are supposed to have existence in themselves, then all our representations fall short of establishing their existence. Thus, he grants the Cartesian the truth of the following conditional: If the spatiotemporal objects are regarded as things in themselves, i.e., if they are full-blooded mind-independent objects having space and time as their own properties, then their existence is doubtful. In Kant's own turn of phrase, the transcendental realist must be an empirical idealist; and indeed, since both Descartes and Berkeley are transcendental realists, they did embrace this position quite consistently (B70-1; A372; B274). They proceeded consistently in doubting or—even more consistently—denying the existence in itself of spatiotemporal objects.[78] Having this in mind, however, one faces an interpretive problem, for Kant here seems to embrace both the truth of the conditional and the conclusion at which the transcendental realist

[78] Kant makes a parallel claim in the second *Critique* about the necessity of being a skeptic about causality when one is a transcendental realist (5: 53). See (Allison 2004, 26).

arrives—that is, he admits that there is no such a thing as a spatiotemporal object which exists in itself.[79] As Wilfrid Sellars writes:

> [I]f we mean by 'dogmatic idealism' with respect to material objects the view that they cannot have existence *per se*, then Kant is a dogmatic idealist of the first water. Indeed … Kant makes dogmatic idealism *in this sense* the very corner stone of his transcendental idealism. (Sellars 1976, para. 26)

But this is not what Kant does in his refutations of material idealism. He does not end the "Fourth Paralogism of Ideality" here, happily concluding that there are no spatiotemporal objects in themselves. Rather, he continues by offering a refutation of material idealism, and in the second edition "Refutation" he sets out to prove "**the existence of objects in space outside me**" (B275). This means that neither the objects to be proved nor their existence are as Berkeley or Descartes would understand the terms. Hence, it becomes imperative to offer a *translation* of dogmatic and problematic idealisms within the context of transcendental idealism. This is essential for articulating challenges faced by a transcendental idealist and, consequently, understanding Kant's intent in refuting them.[80]

Hermann Pistorius had posed a similar query about the "Refutation" in his review of the second edition of the first *Critique*:

> There is only one question I would like Mr. Kant to answer about this proof. Throughout his proof, are we to understand by "the existence of outer objects" an actual self-subsisting existence of things, or a merely logical, apparent existence, in the sense that for the purpose of proper thought and in order to be able to have inner

[79] Georges Dicker (Dicker 2008, 100–101) alludes to this issue, considering it a motivation for embracing what he terms "weak transcendental idealism."

[80] This stance is not as peculiar as it may initially appear. While Barry Stroud doesn't explicitly state it, he acknowledges the distinction in the problem of skepticism for Kant and Descartes. See (Stroud 1984, 157ff).

> appearances, we have to have outer appearances as well? … If the first alternative is true, then it is not only the case that the entire theory of space and time, which Mr. Kant has set up, is null and void, but he himself also violates the main critical law… But perhaps only the logical existence of things, an existence in appearance, is at issue here. But in that case the entire Refutation of Idealism is a mere word play and is an affirmation of rather than a refutation of idealism.[81] (Pistorius 2000, 180–81)

In his "Refutation" Kant sets out to prove "the existence of objects in space outside me." Pistorius now asks how to understand this. If they exist in themselves, then Kant contradicts his very own transcendental idealism which is the cornerstone of his philosophy. But if they exist merely as appearances or representations, then his argument is quite trivial. Neither Berkeley denied, nor did Descartes doubt, the existence of mere representations. It seems, then, that we are facing a dilemma, on one horn of which Kant's refutation of material idealism is substantial but inconsistent with transcendental idealism, and on the other horn of which it is not inconsistent but insignificant.

The problem is in fact twofold. One part of the problem is about the nature of the object in question, challenging the dichotomy of things in themselves and mere appearances. The other part poses the same query regarding the nature of existence, challenging the dichotomy of existence in itself and existence as a mere representation. Both combined call for a reading of both the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley and the problematic idealism of Descartes according to which they *are* problems for a transcendental idealist like Kant, and that he does seek to refute—and not embrace—them. I take the combination of these two

[81] This becomes, as Guyer argues, a general worry: "The assumption on which this traditional debate about the refutation of idealism revolves is that Kant must either advocate the reduction of external objects to subjective states of mind or permit knowledge of things as they are in themselves" (Guyer 1987, 282). See also (Förster 1985).

interpretive problems as a criterion of adequacy for any reading of Kant's refutation of material idealism.[82] In the next section, I will present such a reading of Kantian material idealism, in which both dichotomies are seen as false dichotomies, i.e., Kant proposes a middle way in both.

What Problem Kant Addresses?

This is how Kant formulates the problematic idealism of Descartes in the "Fourth Paralogism":

> That whose existence can be inferred only as a cause of given perceptions has only a **doubtful existence**. Now all outer appearances are of this kind: their existence cannot be immediately perceived, but can be inferred only as the cause of given perceptions: Thus the existence of all objects of outer sense is doubtful. This uncertainty I call the ideality of outer appearances, and the doctrine of this ideality is called **idealism**, in comparison with which the assertion of a possible certainty of objects of outer sense is called **dualism**. (A366-7)

The force behind this argument is what I call the "epistemic priority of inner over outer" according to which our knowledge of the external world is inferentially dependent on our knowing our own mental episodes.[83] Put another way, we have immediate access only to our own

[82] In presenting this view, I depart from certain scholarly interpretations of Kant, exemplified by Paul Guyer (Guyer 1987), who posits that the object to be established in the "Refutation" is thing in itself. Certain interpreters, such as Ralf Bader (Bader 2017), contend that the "Refutation" establishes not only the existence of appearances but also, by extension, the existence of things in themselves. However, for an alternative perspective that rejects the notion that the "Refutation"—and, for that matter, the "Fourth Paralogism"—prove the existence of things in themselves, refer to (Gram 1981, 150) (Gram, 1981, p. 150).

[83] Barry Stroud calls this "the 'epistemic priority' of sensory experiences, perceptions, representations, or what Descartes calls 'ideas', over those independent objects that exist in space" (Stroud 1984, 140–41). Since Kant uses the terms 'inner sense' and 'outer sense' and, as I will argue below, his anti-

mental episodes and merely indirect and inferential access to the external objects as the cause of those mental episodes. But such an inference from a determinate effect to a determinate cause is, Kant stresses on several occasions, always doubtful—hence the problematic idealism of Descartes.[84] This shows that what Kant has in mind is (a version of) Descartes's argument in the "First Meditation" which is known by the names of the 'dream argument' or the 'veil of ideas argument' in the literature.[85] In this argument, Descartes offers the following picture:

Subject → Idea → object.

In this picture, the subject has access only to ideas and via them indirectly to the objects, where there is no shortcut directly from the subject to the objects—what I called above the priority of inner over outer. The second arrow is the doubtful inference about which Kant warns us—it is possible that the cause of my idea is something other

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skeptical strategy is to refute this very priority by showing the interdependence of the inner and outer senses, I think "epistemic priority of inner over outer" is more apt. Note that the same diagnosis appears in several places in both editions, e.g., A368 and B276.

[84] Hence Kant's use of "indemonstrable" in his second edition formulation of the problem (B274). He uses the term deliberately, since in this kind of skepticism we must doubtfully infer the existence of the external objects from our own mental episodes, hence the indemonstrability of the external objects. Andrew Chignell (Chignell, n.d.) claims that this has something to do with Kant's talk of proving possibility by means of actuality in the "B-Preface" (B xxvi n.), where he writes "to cognize an object, it is required that I be able to prove its possibility (whether by the testimony of experience from its actuality or a priori through reason)." I find this interpretation implausible. In the quoted passage, Kant addresses possibility (*Möglichkeit*), while the "Refutation" focuses on actuality (*Wirklichkeit*). Cartesian skepticism doesn't cast doubt on the possibility of spatiotemporal objects, unlike Berkeleyan skepticism where, according to Kant, such possibility is denied.

[85] I believe this is a different argument in Descartes from his evil demon argument, but I would not follow this line of thought further here. For readings who also take Kant's target the dream argument and not the evil demon, see (O'Shea 2012; Bader 2017). For a contrasting perspective, see (Caranti 2007).

than the object itself—and hence the existence of outer objects is doubtful.

What about Berkeley? He accepts Descartes's story up until this stage, and then further admits—with Kant—that having accepted this story, one will be committed to the skeptical conclusions Descartes derives. His difference with Descartes lies in his anti-skeptical scenario. He asserts the incoherence of the concept of material objects, consequently severing the third arrow of the chart. He equates external objects with ideas and famously proclaims "*esse est percipi*"—that existence is to be perceived. Hence the following picture:

Subject → Idea/Object.[86]

This is what Kant calls dogmatic idealism, where Berkeley "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" (B274).

But this still doesn't address how to articulate material idealism in a way that meets the aforementioned criterion of adequacy. To reiterate the criterion of adequacy, it requires the formulation of a translation for material idealism wherein the object whose existence is under scrutiny is neither a thing in itself nor a mere representation, and the existence in question is neither existence in itself nor as a mere representation. These two problems mirror each other, and it seems plausible to assume that the solutions to them do as well. I suggest that

[86] This interpretation of Berkeley is contentious. The complexity deepens with Berkeley's conviction that some ideas exist in God's mind. However, my focus here is solely on Kant's perspective of Berkeley, setting aside the exegetical challenges of interpreting Berkeley's own philosophy. For a defense of Kant's understanding of Berkeley, see (Sellars 1976).

this is the case, and hence that Kant's solution to both problems is to offer a third option for both (false) dichotomies. There is a third option in the dichotomy of being either a thing in itself or a mere representation and also there is a parallel third option in the dichotomy of either existing in itself or existing as a mere representation.[87]

The key to resolving the former issue lies in Kant's response to the query, 'what is an object of representation?' This object of representation undergoes skepticism in problematic idealism and rejection in dogmatic idealism.[88] Here is Kant's first take on the question:

> … appearances themselves are nothing but sensible representations, which must not be regarded in themselves, in the same way, as objects (outside the power of representation). What does one mean, then, if one speaks of an object corresponding to and therefore also distinct from the cognition? It is easy to see that this object must be thought of only as something in general = X, since outside of our cognition we have nothing that we could set over against this cognition as corresponding to it. (A104)

The object of representation which is the object which appears to us in the experience is something in general = X.[89] What is important in the relation of our cognition to an object is that it "carries something of

[87] The dismissal of this dichotomy also addresses Guyer's concern.: "in spite of the stress Kant places on the contrast between "thing outside me" and "a mere representation," it is not obvious what this contrast *means*" (Guyer 1987, 280).

[88] See (Sellars 1976, para. 6). It hasn't escaped the notice of interpreters that the "Refutation" is grounded in previous parts of the first *Critique*. Particularly relevant to my discussion are (Emundts 2006; 2007; 2010; Bader 2017) who, like Sellars, interpret the argument as being based on the Second Analogy. Moreover, I concur with Emundts (Emundts 2010, 172) that by understanding the "Refutation" as relying on earlier sections, the argument is complete and doesn't require further elaboration in the *Reflexionen*. Cf. (Guyer 1987). See (Hanna 2000, 153; Caranti 2007; Abela 2002, 186) for taking the argument to be based on the *First Analogy*.

[89] I am indebted to (Haag 2021) for refining my understanding of A104.

necessity with it," i.e., that "insofar as they are to relate to an object our cognitions must also necessarily agree with each other in relation to it, i.e., they must have that unity that constitutes the concept of an object" (A104-5). This unity is the "formal unity of the consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of representations" (A105). Kant explains this point by way of two examples—the example of a triangle in the "A-Deduction" and the example of a house in the "Second Analogy."[90] Here is the former:

> … we think of a triangle as an object by being conscious of the composition of three straight lines in accordance with a rule according to which such an intuition can always be exhibited. Now this **unity of rule** determines every manifold, and limits it to conditions that make the unity of apperception possible, and the concept of this unity is the representation of the object = X, which I think through those predicates of a triangle. (A105)

We represent a triangle by thinking of some predicates of that triangle, e.g., that it has three straight lines, and various representations of the same triangle, from different perspectives, are possible. Kant's point in talking about the element of necessity is that these different representations are representations of one and the same triangle and therefore they must not only agree with the triangle itself but also with each other. It is the concept of this object = X which is the unity of the rule that determines the manifold.

Kant makes basically the same point when he is discussing the example of representing a house at the beginning of the "Second Analogy." The point is that the "apprehension of the manifold of appearance is always successive" (A189/B234). For example, when we see a house, we do not

[90] The difference between the two examples lies in the fact that the triangle, unlike the house, is not a physical substance but rather a geometrical construct. For a more detailed discussion on this aspect, see (Haag 2007, 323–31).

see its entirety at once, but we see first this part of the building and then that part and therefore represent the house successively in time. Now Kant asks "whether the manifold of this house itself is also successive" (A190/B235) and responds, in line with what he says about the example of a triangle, negatively. It is here that Kant gives again his definition of object, by writing that that "in the appearance which contains the condition of this necessary rule of apprehension is the object" (A191/B236). Sellars comments on the example of a triangle as follows:

> [T]he essential point [Kant] wants to make is that while the object of the intuitive representing is indeed a *triangle*, the triangle is not an existent *per se*, and although the content *triangle* specifies sequences of representing which count as *coming to represent a triangle*, the object of the representing of a triangle is *not* the sequence of representings which culminate in the representing of the triangle. A Triangle is neither a mental act of representing a triangle, nor is it a sequence of mental acts each of which represents a part of a triangle. (Sellars 1976, para. 41)

The same can be said about the example of a house. Kant here argues that the triangle or the house—the object itself—is neither a thing (or existent) in itself nor one or more mental acts of representations. That they are not existents in themselves is evident because they are spatial, and it is most obvious in the case of the triangle which is a geometrical figure dependent on the form of our intuition, i.e., space. And the latter, the act, is the intuitive representation of three-dimensional objects which, to borrow Sellars's term, is "point-of-viewish" (Sellars 1976, para. 42ff). We intuitively represent a triangle from different perspectives, and these representations from different perspectives are the different acts of representation. But these are not the object of representation which is non-point-of-viewish. Therefore,

> … the *object* of a representing of an equilateral triangle from a certain point of view is simply the equilateral

> triangle. But, according to Kant's position, according to which we 'construct' or 'draw' figures in space, the concept of an equilateral triangle must specify not only the sequence of representings in which we represent one line, then continuing to represent that line, represent another line at a sixty-degree angle, then continuing to represent these, we represent the third line. It must also specify in an intelligible way what it means for two representings to be representings of an equilateral triangle from different points of view. (Sellars 1976, para. 44)

This is an elaboration of Kant's point that the concept of the object = X is the concept of the unity of the rule which determines every manifold (A105). The concept of the object is that which not only determines the sequence of the representations by means of which we draw different parts of the triangle in space, but also shows how two different representations from different perspectives are representations of one and the same object. In other words, it is the concept of the object which is responsible for the element of necessity Kant talks about in A104.

Until now, I've deferred the discussion of the distinction between the -ing/-ed poles within terms like "representation" and "appearance." This distinction will prove valuable in grasping Kant's intended point in this context.[91] Kant consistently emphasizes that appearance is a mere representation,[92] and one can understand it either as representing or as something represented.[93]

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[91] Henry Allison justifiably hints at this distinction in the context of the "Refutation" by distinguishing between "the object intuited (*das Angeschaute*)" and "the intuition (*die Anschauung*)." However, he ascribes this distinction to "Kant's essentially Humean view of inner intuition or experience and its object" (Allison 1983, 299).

[92] See, e.g., A369, A491/B519, A493/B522, A563/B591.

[93] Note that "appearance" can also be seen as either appear*ing* or appear*ed*. Thanks to Jens Timmermann for pressing me on this point.

Represent*ing* is a mental act, but talk of a represent*ing* is meaningful only when there is, or can be, a talk of represent*ed* as well.[94] While Kant's use of the term is commonly perceived as ambiguous (see below for reference), I believe Kant himself is acutely aware of this dual meaning.[95] One piece of evidence in this respect comes relatively early in his discussion of the *Second Analogy*, when Kant writes:

> Now one can, to be sure, call everything, and even every representation, insofar as one is conscious of it, an object (Objekt); only what this word is to mean in the case of appearances, *not insofar as they are (as representations) objects, but rather only insofar as they designate an object*, requires a deeper investigation. (A189/B234-5, emphasis mine)

In the *italicized* part of the passage Kant explicitly shows that for him "appearance" has a twofold use. In one it is the object, and in the other

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[94] A complication arises in the effort to avoid alignment with Berkeley's perspective. To avoid it, one must acknowledge the potential existence of certain objects or substances in a genuine sense. Sellars gets around this problem by introducing the concept of "represent*able*." For the sake of brevity, I'll leave aside a detailed exploration of this complication here. See (Sellars 1967) for his own account.

[95] And not just in the "Second Analogy" and not just in passages exclusively written for the first edition or shared between the two editions, but also in a notably significant footnote to the second edition "Paralogisms of Pure Reason":

> An indeterminate perception here signifies only something real, which was given, and indeed only to thinking in general, thus *not as appearance, and also not as a thing in itself (a noumenon)*, but rather as something that in fact exists and is indicated as an existing thing in the proposition "I think". (B 423, emphasis mine)

Although in a very specific context, this passage holds great importance as it affirms the existence of a third entity between mere appearance and the thing-in-itself. Exclusively crafted for the second edition, it indicates Kant's consistent adherence to this position across both editions. This is crucial because the fact that Kant, in his copy of the first edition, crossed out parts of the "Second Analogy" discussing the object of representation (Kant 1998, 305 note d) might raise questions about whether he maintained this position. However, the inclusion of the same point in a section exclusively written for the second edition demonstrates that Kant did not alter his view regarding the existence of a third entity between representation and the thing-in-itself.

only designates an object. What he writes exactly after this passage is illuminating:

> Insofar as they are, merely as representation, at the same time objects of consciousness, they do not differ from their apprehension, i.e., from their being taken up into the synthesis of the imagination, and one must therefore say that the manifold of appearances is always successively generated in the mind.

Here Kant is obviously talking about represent*ing*s, which are identical to their apprehension, and as such they are merely mental acts successive in time. But this is not the only meaning of "appearance" for Kant. The other meaning, the represent*ed*, is the object which is not point-of-viewish. Let me quote the passage in which Kant talks about the example of the house again:

> Thus, e.g., the apprehension of the manifold in the appearance of a house that stands before me is successive. Now the question is whether the manifold of this house itself is also successive, which certainly no one will concede. Now, however, as soon as I raise my concept of an object to transcendental significance, the house is not a thing in itself at all but only an appearance, i.e., a representation. (A190-1/B235-6)

The house itself is neither a represent*ing*, as it is not successive, nor a thing in itself, as Kant quite explicitly maintains. It is, as Kant says at the end of the passage, a representation, which obviously must be understood in the sense of a represent*ed*. Once again Kant proves to be fully aware of the malevolent *-ing/-ed* distinction and, furthermore, shows that for him there is a third thing between a mere representation—mere represent*ing*—and things in themselves. And the house itself in this example is the third thing which is neither a represent*ing* nor a thing in itself but rather a represent*ed*. And this represent*ed* is what is at issue in both examples of triangle and house.

It is this represent*ed* which determines the manifold and gives the element of necessity to our represent*ing*s.[96]

I suggest that the represent*ed* at issue here, which is the object of representation or the object = X, is the substance Kant discusses in the "First Analogy."[97] In the first edition it reads:

> All appearances contain that which persists **(substance)** as the object itself, and that which can change as its mere determination, i.e., a way in which the object exists. (A182)

All appearances, in the sense of represent*ing*s, contain the substance, i.e., the represent*ed*, which is the persistent (*das Beharrliche*) itself. This provides us with some evidence that what Kant is talking about in the "Refutation," when he is talking about "something persistent" (*etwas Beharrliches*, B275), is in fact substance. Hence the object to be proved in the "Refutation" is the substance or the represent*ed* as discussed above. Given that this substance or represent*ed* is one pole of appearance, it is arguably what Kant means by "the undetermined object of an empirical intuition" (A20/B34) at the beginning of the "Transcendental Aesthetic" when he is giving his definition of "appearance"—it would be very odd if what is meant by such an undetermined object is a represent*ing*.[98] And here in the "First Analogy"

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[96] See also (van Cleve 1999; Willascheck 2001). Cf. (Stang 2022, n. 25). Clinton Tolley (Tolley 2022) cites some of the textual evidence mentioned above in defense of a distinction akin to mine, although he doesn't employ the -ing/-ed terminology. However, our interpretations diverge in crucial aspects. The most significant disagreement lies in his understanding of the represent*ed*—though he doesn't use this term—as representational, itself representing something else (resembling Fregean Senses), as opposed to being the substance, as I argue later. This not only introduces tension with the formulation of the "First Analogy" but also attributes to Kant a thesis he explicitly rejects—the notion that we have direct access only to representations and then indirect access to the objects of representations, what I term the priority of the inner over the outer.

[97] See also (Gram 1981, 145).

[98] See (Sellars 1976, para. 8).

we learn that appearance in the second meaning of the term, i.e., represent*ing*, determines this undetermined object "in a way in which it exists."

This is the very point Pistorius misses in his charge against the "Refutation." He reads Kant in a way in which for him there is a dichotomy between represent*ing*s and things in themselves. And he argues—quite justifiably—that either of them is the wrong thing to be proved. What he overlooks is that Kant, even in the first edition, is aware that this is a false dichotomy. What the existence of which he is trying to prove is the substance, the represent*ed*, or the non-point-of-viewish object of representation. In this way, the first half of the criterion of adequacy is met.

Regarding the latter half, analogous to the nature of the object under consideration, a middle ground exists between existence in itself and existence solely as representation. The question then arises: What constitutes this third mode of existence? In this context, the interpretation provided by Sellars proves beneficial:

> What then does Kant mean by dogmatic idealism? … It should be clear that the only answer … is that Kant means by dogmatic idealism the view that nothing spatial can be *actual*, where actual does not mean 'exists *per se*'. (Sellars 1976, para. 24)

As this passage suggests, what is at issue is not existence in itself or—in *Prolegomena*'s language—existence *per se*, but actuality. There is initial support for this suggestion in that Kant moved his refutation in the second edition to the "Postulates of Empirical Thought" and put it under the discussion of actuality in the second postulate.[99] But what

[99] See (Sellars 1976, para. 5; Chignell, n.d.). For perspectives critical of moving the "Refutation" to the "Transcendental Analytic," see (Bennett 1966; Caranti 2007).

exactly does actuality mean? Here is Kant's definition of actuality as in his second "Postulate":

> That which is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation) is **actual**. (A 218/B 265-6)

To better grasp Kant's move here it would be helpful to look at a distinction the *locus classicus* elaboration of which belongs to Descartes. The distinction in question is between the formal and objective reality of ideas. Sellars brilliantly puts forward the distinction:

> Descartes distinguishes between the act and the content aspects of thoughts. The content, of course, 'exists in' the act. And, of course, contents *as contents* exist only 'in' acts. On the other hand, there is a sense in which something which 'exists in' an act can also exist, to use Kant's phrase, 'outside' the act. In Descartes' terminology, that which exists 'in' the act as its 'content' can have 'formal reality' in the world. (Sellars 1976, para. 13)[100]

Having the above-mentioned *-ing/-ed* distinction in mind, one can say that for Descartes every represent*ing* has a content which is its represent*ed*. When this represent*ed* exists only in the act of represent*ing*, it has objective reality. But when it also exists outside the act in the external world, it has formal reality. Lurking in this Cartesian distinction is his transcendental realism. For Descartes, when something has formal reality, it exists independently of any mental act. That means that in

> Kant's terminology what Descartes means by 'formal reality,' and which Cartesians equate with actuality, is 'existence in itself' or, to use the Latinate term of the *Prolegomena*, existence 'per se'. (Sellars 1976, para. 15)

[100] See also (Sellars 1968, chap. 2). I consider this interpretation to be the dominant one in the literature. For an alternative view, see (Conant 2020, 486ff).

Kant therefore half-heartedly accepts Descartes's distinction between objective and formal reality. Formal reality in Descartes's sense is for Kant existence *per se*, and objective reality is when there is a represent*ing*. Kant, being a transcendental idealist, takes this to be a false dichotomy and adds a third layer. Actuality is this third layer which is not existence *per se*, but is not a mere represent*ing* either. This is a parallel move to the previous one in which Kant added a third layer to the concept of object. Not only have we in the concept of object a third option which is neither a thing-in-itself nor a represent*ing*, but also in the concept of existence we have a third layer which is neither existence *per se* nor a mere objective reality in Descartes's sense. In the former we have substance lying between those two layers and here we have actuality which occupies the same position.

By incorporating these additional layers into the notions of object and existence, Kant not only provides his unique interpretation of Berkeley's dogmatic idealism and Descartes's problematic idealism, but also enables us to address both aspects of the aforementioned criterion of adequacy simultaneously. To revisit the criterion, it aims to articulate material idealism within the framework of transcendental idealism. This entails demonstrating that the object in question is neither a thing in itself nor a mere appearance, and the asserted existence is neither existence *per se* nor merely as a representation. This formulation underscores Kant's intention to acknowledge rather than to deny the existence of objects in question. The "mere appearance" in Pistorius's query is represent*ing* which is of course in doubt neither by Berkeley nor by Descartes—neither of them deny that we do have represent*ing*s. What they deny or doubt is that these represent*ing*s or mental episodes have any object or represent*ed*. Kant's conceptual framework, which distinguishes between the represent*ed* and things in themselves, provides the necessary elements to satisfy

the first aspect of the criterion of adequacy. He analogously demonstrates that there is a mode of existence beyond both existence *per se* and mere representation, i.e., actuality. This addresses the second facet of the criterion of adequacy. Thus, the Kantian version of the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley is to deny, and the Kantian version of the problematic idealism of Descartes is to doubt, the actuality of substance. This formulation successfully meets both dimensions of the criterion of adequacy.

Refutation of Idealism

Having formulated Kant's understanding of material idealism, it is now time to turn to his refutation. The argument appears in a section added to the second edition called "Refutation of Idealism." The theorem to be proved is:

> **The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me.**

The thesis is immediately followed by a syllogistic proof:

i. "I am conscious of my existence as determined in time."

ii. "All time-determination presupposes something **persistent** (*etwas berharrliches*) in perception (*wahrnehmung*)."

iii. "**This persistent thing, however, cannot be an intuition in me.**"[101]

iv. Consequently, the determination of my existence in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things

[101] Amended in "B-Preface" (Bxxxix; original emphasis). In the original it reads: "this persistent thing, however, cannot be something in me" (B275).

(*Existenz Wirklicher Dinge*) that I perceive outside me" (B275-6).

The argument is valid, but the premises are far from obvious.[102] I argued above that Kant is trying to answer his own version of Cartesian skepticism. In Cartesian skepticism what is at issue is the Cartesian gap between our experience and the external world. The external world is—in Cartesian terms—behind the veil of ideas or—in less Cartesian terms—behind the veil of perception. Kant's refutation is designed to treat this gap according to his own translation of the problem—hence Kantian Cartesian skepticism. In this version, the question to be answered is how to be sure that to my represent*ing* actually represents the appropriate represent*ed*. And the gap is between inner sense and outer sense: How to be sure that I have outer, in addition to inner, sense?

This is of course not the only gap Kant tries to overcome. There is a more serious gap—the Kantian gap—corresponding to his famous *how-possible* question. As I argued in the previous chapter, this is the problem Kant tackles in the "Transcendental Deduction," where the question is how it is possible that my experience bears on the external world. The gap in this problem is between the conceptual and the non-conceptual, or, to use a Sellarsian turn of phrase, between items inside and outside the space of reasons.[103] I argued that Kant's treatment of this problem—the Kantian skepticism—proceeds by arguing that the gap is a pseudo-gap. There is no gap between the conceptual and the non-conceptual in the first place. But the problem Kant tries to overcome in the "Refutation" is not a *how-possible* question but rather

[102] For a valid formulation, see (Chignell 2017; n.d.).

[103] See also (Conant 2012, 15).

an *if*-question. The question now is not how it is possible that the conceptual bears on the non-conceptual—this is already established in the "Transcendental Deduction." We are now moved from the question of *possibility* to the question of *actuality* and the question is if our experience *actually* bears on the external world. The gap here is between the experience and the external world—between mind and world.[104]

This of course does not mean that the two questions are not related. The argument of the "Refutation of Idealism," as argued above, depends on the argument of the whole "Transcendental Analytic" and in particular on the "Transcendental Deduction" and the "Analogies of Experience." And in fact, Kant's way of overcoming the Cartesian gap—between mind and world—parallels his way of overcoming the Kantian gap—between items outside and inside the space of reasons. Here as well his argument is that the Cartesian gap is a pseudo-gap—there is no gap to begin with. And just as he shows that the Kantian gap is a pseudo-gap by showing an inviolable interdependence between sensibility and understanding, here as well he argues that the Cartesian gap is a pseudo-gap by showing an inviolable interdependence between time and space and hence between inner sense and outer sense. If there is no outer object in space there can be no inner sense and in fact no grasp of time, hence there is no gap between mind and world. If there is no outside world, there is no mind either.[105]

Now to the details of the argument. The first premise states that I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. This premise is

[104] See also (Conant 2012, 8).

[105] In this way of the reading the argument of the "Refutation," it need not to be a *reductio ad absurdum* argument and therefore there is no contradiction with Kant's teachings in the "Doctrine of Method." Cf. (Förster 1985, 294).

something presumably even the skeptic admits (R6311; 18:610), but it is not clear what its real force is. Kant himself takes the consciousness of our self which is admitted by the skeptic to be ambiguous between the transcendental apperception or "the mere I without the determination of my existence in time" on the one hand, and "the empirical consciousness of myself which constitutes inner sense" on the other (R5653; 18:306). It is the latter which is meant in the first premise, as "I am conscious through inner **experience** of **my existence in time** (and consequently also of its determinability in time) … yet it is identical with the **empirical consciousness of my existence**" (Bxl n.; see also R6311; 18:610-1).[106] Reading the first premise in this way is also quite consistent with the general strategy of the "Refutation" roughly outlined above in which Kant tries to overcome the Cartesian gap between inner sense and outer sense. The argument would not be effective if what the skeptic admits is only the mere transcendental apperception or the mere "I think." The problematic idealist, who is the target of this "Refutation," admits, therefore, that I have inner sense in the sense that I am empirically conscious of my self.[107]

[106] This point is now generally accepted in the secondary literature and scholars take Kant to be talking about "actual self-knowledge rather than mere awareness" (Allison 2004, 289), "judgmental awareness" (Chignell 2010, 490), or "the self that is inwardly intuited rather than just transcendentally apperceived" (Bader 2017, 208). See also (Gochnauer 1974, 197–200; Allison 1983, 297; Hanna 2000, 151–52; Abela 2002, 188; Dicker 2008, 81).

[107] This once again underscores that Kant's Refutation primarily addresses the (Kantian version of) Cartesian Veil-of-Ideas skepticism. The deeper skepticism within the Cartesian framework, namely the evil demon skepticism, isn't the focus here. Ralf Bader's analysis (Bader 2017, 207–13) stresses this point vividly. He aptly contends that Kant's target lies in arguments based on the precedence of the inner over the outer. Bader also rightly asserts that interpreting the first premise in this manner doesn't render Kant's argument ineffective, as his concern was specifically directed at this type of skepticism, not the more radical forms. Given Bader's comprehensive exploration of this premise, I refrain from delving into its intricacies. See also (O'Shea 2012, 196ff).

The main job, however, is done by the second and third premises to the effect that such an awareness is not possible unless there is something persistent in perception and that this persistent is not an intuition in me. These two assumptions are by far the most controversial and the most difficult to grasp. One important—but rather under-appreciated—place in which to seek the nature of Kant's argument here is the "General Note on the System of Principles" added to the second edition.[108] It starts by noting that "we cannot have insight into the possibility of any thing in accordance with the mere categories, but we must always have available an intuition" (B288) to find out about the objective reality of the categories. This is for Kant a remarkable fact, but

> It is even more remarkable, however, that in order to understand the possibility of things in accordance with categories, and thus to establish the **objective reality** of the latter, we do not merely need intuitions, but always **outer intuition**. … in order to give something that **persists** in intuition, corresponding to the concept of **substance** (and thereby to establish the objective reality of this concept), we need an intuition **in space** (of matter), since space alone persistently determines, while time, however, and thus everything that is in inner sense, constantly flows. (B291)

This dense passage not only refutes the problematic idealist but also carries broader significance. For my current purposes, I emphasize specific noteworthy points. First, Kant once again makes it clear that what persists in perception, which is the object to be proved in the "Refutation," is substance.[109] Second, to establish the objective reality

[108] See (P. Strawson 1966, 50–51; Friedman 2013, 7ff); cf. (Guyer 1987, 286ff).

[109] Here one might object that what Kant is explicitly saying is that in order to *give* something that persists we need outer intuition, and this doesn't rule out the possibility that something inner can be construed as persisting and thus be a substance. It is true that the passage is silent and does not rule out the possibility that the inner can be construed as persisting. But note that, for us, as will be

of this category—and in fact all (dynamical) categories—and thereby to show that there is in fact something corresponding to it—we need an intuition in space. Therefore, and this is the third point, this intuition is an intuition of matter and what is to be proved is material substance.[110] It is very illuminating that a very close passage appears in the "Preface" to the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Sciences*:[111]

> It is also indeed very remarkable (but cannot be expounded in detail here) that general metaphysics, in all instances where it needs examples (intuitions) in order to provide meaning for its pure concepts of the understanding, must always take them from the general doctrine of body, and thus from the form and principles of outer intuition; and, if these are not exhibited completely, it gropes uncertainly and unsteadily among mere meaningless concepts. (4:478)

He then continues to say that "a separated metaphysics of corporeal nature does excellent and indispensable service for *general* metaphysics, in that the former furnishes examples (instances *in concreto*) in which to realize the concepts and propositions of the latter (properly speaking, transcendental philosophy), that is, to give a mere form of thought sense and meaning" (4: 478).[112] The point is that

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argued below, its persistence cannot be proved and that's enough to rule it out as a candidate for the substance to be proved in the "Refutation." Thanks to Andrew Chignell for pressing me on this point.

[110] Thus the objection that Robert Hanna considers (Hanna 2000, 161–62) that the persistent thing can be the pure intuition of space is also blocked.

[111] See (Friedman 2013, 8).

[112] Friedman comments on this passage as follows:

> Where this matter is "expounded in detail," it appears, is precisely the general remark added to the second edition of the Critique. And there is thus a significant connection, indeed, I believe, between the argument concerning the priority of outer sense for experience developed in the refutation of idealism and the argument we have been considering from the Preface to the Metaphysical Foundation—according to which only the metaphysics of corporeal

establishing the objective reality of the pure concepts of the understanding cannot be done without any 'example' or intuition, and further that this intuition cannot be inner intuition.[113] What is needed is to rule out the Cartesian gap, and this can be done only by showing that the example in question cannot be an inner intuition. This is the point of the third premise as amended in the "B-Preface":

> **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 distinct from them, in relation to which their change, and thus my existence in the time in which they change, can be determined.** (Bxxxix n.)

Kant argues here that the gap between time and space or between inner sense and outer sense is in fact a pseudo-gap. Kant's second note to the "Refutation" is instrumental in clarifying how he accomplishes this task:

> Not only can we perceive all time-determination only through the change in outer relation (motion) relative to that which persists in space (e.g., the motion of the sun with regard to the objects on the earth); we do not even

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> nature is capable of grounding a genuine natural science. (Friedman, 2013, p. 8)

I agree with Friedman's view on the interconnectedness of the two arguments. Additionally, I find merit in his observation regarding the Refutation's connection to Kant's assertion that only corporeal nature, and not spiritual nature, forms a legitimate science. This observation appears linked to the rationale behind Kant's exclusion of the empirical self as a viable candidate for persistence in perception. See also the discussion of Chignell's objection below.

[113] Johannes Haag and Till Hoeppner (Haag and Hoeppner 2019; Haag, n.d.) take the second part of the "B-Deduction" to be doing just this, i.e., proving the objective reality of the categories. While I agree that Kant begins to address this problem in this part (especially in §24), my interpretation differs. I argue that the problem is not fully resolved until the end of the "Analytic." Support for this view can be found in the "General Note," especially when Kant mentions in the concluding part of the "Note" that it refers to the "Refutation." This suggests that Kant himself sees the problem as not fully resolved until this later section.

> have anything persistent on which we could base the concept of substance, as intuition, except merely **matter**, and even this persistence is not drawn from outer experience, but rather presupposed *a priori* as the necessary condition of all time-determination, thus also the determination of inner sense in regard to our own existence through the existence of outer things. (B277-8)

Before going into the details of this argument, I quote one more passage, this time from the "Transcendental Aesthetic":

> … that the transcendental aesthetic cannot contain more than these two elements, namely space and time, is clear from the fact that all other concepts belonging to sensibility, even that of *motion, which unites both elements*, presuppose something empirical. (A41/B58, *italics* mine)

This passage which appears in both editions introduces motion as that which unites both space and time and further states that this element presupposes something empirical. From the second note to the "Refutation" we know that this empirical something is matter. The whole point is that we can perceive all time-determination and hence we can have inner sense *only* when we are in a position to perceive motion of matter in space. This is a clear indication that time and space are inseparable from each other, that there is unity of time and space through motion of material substance, and that the ostensible possibility of having inner sense while lacking outer sense is just a pseudo-possibility—the Cartesian gap is nothing but a pseudo-gap.[114] In this way Kant rejects the Cartesian priority of inner over outer in favor of his own theory to the effect that the inner and outer are interdependent,[115] just like his theory to the effect that the two faculties

[114] *Pace* Marshall (Marshall 2019, 78), the argument does not involve magic—i.e., "to derive the existence of a robustly mind-independent world merely from the existence of indubitable subjective states." It is the ingenious argument of showing that an ostensible gap is not a genuine gap, and therefore it does not beg the question against the Cartesian skeptic. Cf. (Marshall 2019, 81–82).

[115] See also A375. Dietmar Heidemann rightly emphasizes the importance of what he calls the "material dependence of the inner sense on the outer sense" in the

of sensibility and understanding are interdependent. [116] This interdependency is of course not to be (mis)understood to mean that these two have any causal, or at any rate categorial, relation to each other. The idea is rather that time and space as pure forms of sensibility and hence inner and outer senses cannot be realized independently of each other.[117]

One place Kant comes closest to explicitly stating this is in his famous footnote to the "B-Preface." After giving the revision of the third assumption quoted above, he reiterates the Cartesian thesis of the priority of inner over outer as an objection to his argument and responds that the whole point of the "Refutation" is that there is no such priority:[118]

> … I am conscious through inner **experience** of my **existence in time** (and consequently also of its determinability in time), and this is more than merely being conscious of my representation; yet it is identical with the **empirical consciousness of my existence**, which

argument of the "Refutation," and rightly recognizes that this is an interdependence (Heidemann 2023, 31). However, he understands this dependence as the dependence of the 'content' of the outer sense on the 'content' of the inner sense-or vice versa (Heidemann 2023, 30). I disagree with the latter point. In my reading, as argued above, the interdependence of inner and outer sense is based on the interdependence of time and space, and thus it is the interdependence of the forms of inner and outer sense, not their contents. See also (O'Shea 2012, 200–202).

[116] See (Allais 2015, 12).

[117] Kant can argue in this way because his account of time and space diverges from both Newton and Leibniz. It is true that for Newton as well time and space are so interdependent, but since they are not pure forms of intuition, that intercedence is of no help in overcoming the gap between inner sense and outer sense. Thanks to Larissa Wallner for pressing me on this point.

[118] Dietmar Heidemann also believes that Kant rejects such a priority (Heidemann 2023, 24), but restricts it to Kant's argument in the "Fourth Paralogism" and not the "Refutation." See (Bird 2006, 500, 507) for explicitly associating the "Refutation" with a rejection of the priority of inner over outer. See also (Abela 2002, 89–90, 192).

> is only determinable through a relation to something that, while being bound up with my existence, is outside me. This *consciousness of my existence in time is thus bound up identically (*identisch verbunden*) with the consciousness of a relation to something outside me*, and so it is experience and not fiction, sense and not imagination, that inseparably joins the outer with my inner sense. (Bxl n., *italics* mine)

Here Kant talks about the consciousness of my existence in time and the consciousness of a relation to an external thing being "bound up identically" together.[119] This is a strong wording in which Kant makes it clear that not only the Cartesian priority of inner over outer is wrong, but that these two are *identisch verbunden* with each other.[120] There is another way of putting what Kant is doing here in which Kant is contrasting two conceptions of experience, i.e., thin and thick conceptions of experience. The thin conception of experience is the one in which I am conscious of just my representations. In this conception there is in fact a priority of inner over outer, since my experience does not reach beyond my representations and it is exactly for this reason that knowing that something exists outside me involves an inference from these representations to their causes. But this is a conception of experience that Kant rejects, as evidenced by his saying in this passage that my experience or inner sense "is more than merely

[119] See also A156/B195.

[120] Paul Guyer, at the outset of his discussion of the "Refutation," complains that "nothing in the published text of the refutation explains *how* its conclusion is supposed to be reached. It offers no argument at all for the premise that something permanent is needed to make temporal determinations" (Guyer 1987, 280). Later he writes that it "remains unclear why anything more than mere acquaintance with representations which in fact succeed one another in otherwise uninterpreted experience, or anything other than the mere occurrence of such representations, should be necessary for one to judge that there has been such a succession" (Guyer 1987, 285–86). Georges Dicker agrees and asks "why should one need any "persisting element" or enduring thing in order to know what this order is?" (Dicker 2008, 82). The identical boundedness which Kant talks about here is what this objection misses and there is no need to look to the later *Reflexionen* for a justification of this premise.

being conscious of my representation"—and here the representation is to be understood as represent*ing*. What he defends, on the contrary, is the thick conception of experience in which my experience gives me more than mere representations.[121] In this conception of experience, as there is no Cartesian gap between inner and outer senses, the content of my experience goes well beyond the mere represent*ing* and gives me the represent*ed*. To use the more Cartesian-flavored terminology, in this picture not only do I have direct access to my mental episodes, but also my access to the external objects is direct, and not indirect as it is depicted in the Cartesian picture. It is true that this external thing is "bound up with my existence"—and this once again confirms that it belongs to the phenomenal realm—but it is something in space outside me. This is just another way of saying the point made above that for Kant inner and outer senses are interdependent. In the Cartesian, thin, conception of experience there is no such interdependency and in fact inner is prior to the outer. But Kant has the thick conception of experience exactly because he rejects such a priority and believes in such an interdependency. In this Kantian picture, once one accepts this priority one admits the Cartesian gap and hence gives the skeptic all he wants. Kant blocks Cartesian skepticism by not admitting the existence of such a gap in the first place and taking it as having been a pseudo-gap all along.[122]

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[121] That is, for Kant, experience in the technical sense of the term is thick. I will not discuss whether or not Kant allows for thin experience.

[122] *Prima facie*, this might appear akin to the externalist positions advocated by thinkers such as Hilary Putnam and Tyler Burge (Putnam 1975; Burge 1979), and in fact Andrew Chignell (Chignell, n.d.) reads Kant's "Refutation" as externalist in this sense. See also (Hanna 2000; Mueller 2011; Heidemann 2023). I will not discuss here whether Kant's philosophy can be considered externalist in this sense. But the argument Kant develops in the "Refutation," despite their superficial similarity, is essentially different from externalist refutations of skepticism. The main points of difference are, first, the Newtonian assumption on Kant's part to the effect that time and space are unified by motion which is

One difference, however, between the "General Note" and the "Refutation" is that, as the names show, the former is more general than the latter. Whereas the "Refutation" is just concerned with the category of substance and hence proving that its objective reality cannot be established except by an example from outer experience, the "General Note" argues the same regarding the other categories of relation as well. The details of Kant's discussion regarding the categories of causality and community of course go beyond the scope of the present chapter. But some details of the arguments in that regard shed some light on the reading of the "Refutation" offered here. Discussing causality, he takes alteration as the example to be offered to prove the objective reality of this category:

> 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 drawing this line (motion), and *thus grasp the successive existence of ourself in different states through outer intuition*.[123] (B291-2; emphasis mine)

The example should be given to make alteration and hence causality even thinkable (*Denkbar*) is a very specific intuition, i.e., the intuition of the motion of a point in space. This, once more, is a clear indication

absent contemporary externalist views, and second, Kant's transcendental idealism and the externalists' transcendental realism which make even their understanding of the problem fundamentally different. Luigi Caranti (Caranti 2007, 3–4) also stresses the transcendental realism of people like Putnam.

[123] Recall, again, the examples of a triangle and house, discussed above, in which the apprehension of the triangle is successive.

of the interdependency of time and space in the sense that without outer intuition even the inner sense is unthinkable for us. This becomes even clearer in the latter half of the quoted passage, when Kant argues that even inner alteration and hence inner causation between different mental episodes needs outer intuition, and the very specific intuition of the motion of a point in space no less. Here of course is not the only, or even the first, time in which Kant argues that for us grasping *time* requires 'figuratively' drawing a line. But here its link to the argument of the "Refutation" is the most obvious. The second italicized part of the passage alludes clearly to the argument of the "Refutation." To grasp inner alteration, we need to have the outer intuition of the motion of a point in space as a straight line. Therefore, in order even to be able to grasp our own successive existence—"my own existence as determined in time"—I need that very specific outer intuition. Hence, as quoted above, it is motion which unites time and space as the forms of empirical intuition.[124]

Kant himself takes the considerations of the "General Note" to be "of great importance … in order to confirm our preceding refutation of idealism" (B293) and therefore confirms the reading offered here. Furthermore, here we start to appreciate the importance of formulating the Cartesian skepticism within the framework of transcendental idealism and in particular changing the nature of the object in question from a thing in itself which has time and space as its own properties to a *substantia phaenomenon* which is the undetermined object of empirical intuition. If the object to be proved in the is the object understood in a transcendentally realist way, then Kant would not be in a position to overcome the Cartesian gap by arguing for the interdependence of time and space and hence inner sense and outer

[124] A41/B58. See also A33/B50, B154-6.

sense. Kant's whole argumentative machinery is based on the unity of space and time, and no thing in itself is spatiotemporal. This is one of the major reasons why Kant argues in the "Fourth Paralogism" that the transcendental realist has no way to be an empirical realist, since she would not have any resources in her arsenal to overcome the Cartesian gap. One is either a transcendental idealist or an empirical idealist—there is no third option.[125]

My talk about substance up until now leaves the possibility open that there can be one single substance or a plurality of substances. Dina Emundts reads the text as arguing for one absolute substance.[126] She writes that in the context of the "Refutation" "an absolute persistence or, more precisely, an absolutely persistent substance must be presupposed" (Emundts 2010, 172) and "[i]f … we want to determine the relation of two balls in time, it is not enough to think of the balls as persistent substances. Rather, we have to presuppose something that lasts while the interaction between the balls takes place" (Emundts 2010, 173). In her reading, therefore, not only the persistence of the substance is not relative, but also there must be exactly one absolutely persisting substance. *Prima facie*, however, the textual evidence does not seem to support this reading. For example, in a note Kant himself added to his copy of the second edition first *Critique* he writes that "here the proof must be so conducted that it applies only to *substances as phenomena of outer sense*" (Kant 1998, 229n Emphasis added). Here Kant explicitly uses "substance" and "phenomena" in the plural. It is of

[125] Thus I agree with (Caranti 2007), but do not argue for it here, that Kant's refutation of Cartesian skepticism cannot be translated into a transcendentally realist framework.

[126] See also (Hanna 2000, 153) who ascribes to Kant the "quantifier shift fallacy" that "there exists one and only one unchanging substrate to which every change of attributes or relations whatsoever is ascribed, in order to buy into his original point."

course just a note, and Emundts can argue that to find Kant's considered position one must look at his published works. I argued above that what Kant tries to prove in the "Refutation" is material substance, and the place to look to understand its nature is the *Metaphysical Foundations*. There Kant defines the material substance as "that in space which is movable in itself, that is, in isolation from everything else existing external to it in space" (4: 502-3). He also writes that "the concept of substance means the ultimate object of existence, that is, that which does not itself belong in turn to the existence of another merely as a predicate" (4: 503). Talking about things existing external to something means that the material substance is not one absolute substance as Emundts argues. And the second passage makes it clear that what Kant means by substance is what we take to be independent everyday objects.

But Emundts can in fact argue that all these are consistent with Kant arguing for the absolute substance she takes him to be proving. She might posit some systematic considerations in favor of her reading, arguing that these material substances only make sense if we have an absolute substance in the picture. This is exactly how she argues:

> If … we want to determine the relation of two balls in time, it is not enough to think of the balls as persisting substances. Rather, we have to presuppose something that lasts while the interaction between the balls takes place. (Emundts 2010, 173)

The argument here is that to understand the interaction of different objects—different substances in the sense of the *Metaphysical Foundations*—there must be something absolutely persistent in order even to make sense of the interaction. This seems, however, like the position Kant, in discussing the category of community in the "General Note," ascribes to Leibniz. The only difference is that for Leibniz the absolute persistent thing is a divinity and not an absolute substance:

> Hence Leibniz, who ascribed a community to the substances of the world only as considered by understanding alone, needed a divinity for mediation. (B293)

But Kant takes the interdependence of time and space as argued for above to be sufficient ground for this community or interaction:

> But we can readily grasp the possibility of community (of substances as appearances) if we represent them in space, thus in outer intuition. For this already contains in itself a priori formal outer relations as conditions of the possibility of real (in effect and countereffect, thus in community). (ibid.)

That the real in perception or the phenomenal substance is intuited in space gives us enough ground to explain the interaction of two or more substances—or their community—and we do not need anything else, be it God or an absolute substance, to explain this community. Note that what is argued for in the "Refutation" is the priority of space over time and the thick conception of experience, and not the existence of any specific substance—absolute or otherwise. The argument is that we transcendentally know that there must be some substance for us to have inner sense or grasp time. But exactly what these substances are is known empirically.[127]

[127] Thus Kant's response to Cartesian skepticism does not face the problem that all our experiences are veridical. See B278-9 and (Allison 1983, 300). Cf. (Abela 2002, 192ff).

Chapter IV: Avoiding Some Objections

Barry Stroud on 'Transcendental Arguments'

In a fairly standard view, a transcendental argument seeks to counter skepticism by demonstrating that what the skeptic denies is a necessary condition of something else she does—or should—not doubt. Labeled as Kantian, these arguments face a well-known objection presented by Barry Stroud in his seminal paper "Transcendental Arguments" (Stroud 1968b). He argues that they face a dilemma. Either they prove the subjective necessity of the condition the skeptic is supposed to accept—that we need to *believe* in that condition and not that the condition should actually be true. Or, if one wants to prove the objective necessity of the condition, one should accept some version of the verification principle. The advocate of the transcendental argument faces, then, a dilemma one horn of which is a kind of idealism (a kind of skepticism in disguise) and the other horn is verificationism. Applied to the case of external world skepticism, for example, it is argued that having mental episodes is something the Cartesian skeptic does not doubt and then it is argued that there being actual external objects is a necessary condition of having such mental episodes. Stroud's objection then would be that we need only to *believe* that there are external objects (the idealistic horn) or, if we want more than that, we need to appeal to some version of the verification principle—the verificationist horn.

Before going into the details of the argument one point is in order. Stroud starts his paper with Kant's distinction between *quid facti* and *quid juris* questions which he makes at the beginning of the "Transcendental Deduction." Stroud takes the latter (justifiably) to be a question about "objective validity" or "justification" of the use of the concepts and (unjustifiably) takes it to be addressing the scandal of

philosophy Kant mentions at the beginning of the "B-Preface." He summarizes this point at the end of the paper as follows:

> For Kant a transcendental argument is supposed to answer the question of 'justification', and in so doing it demonstrates the 'objective validity' of certain concepts. I have taken this to mean that the concept "X" has objective validity only if there are Xs and that demonstrating the objective validity of the concept is tantamount to demonstrating that Xs actually exist. Kant thought that he could argue from the necessary conditions of thought and experience to the falsity of 'problematic idealism' and so to the actual existence of the external world of material objects, and not merely to the fact that we believe there is such a world, or that as far as we can tell there is. (Stroud 1968b, 25)

What he takes to be not merely *Kantian,* but *Kant's* transcendental argument is his argument in the "Transcendental Deduction." He rightly recognizes that what is at issue there is the question of justification or objective validity. What I take to be indefensible in Stroud's reading is that he identifies this question with the scandal of philosophy Kant discusses in his footnote to the "B-Preface." Thus he conflates Cartesian and Kantian skepticisms in his discussion of Kant's transcendental argument and hence the questions of objective validity or objective purport and objective reality. [128] Stroud seems to understand "objective validity" in the lines that I use "objective reality," i.e., the question about the exemplification of the concepts in the external world. This is a genuine question, the lack of an answer to which, for Kant, is the scandal to philosophy and human reason. But he responds to this problem in the "Refutation of Idealism" and not in the

[128] In the Kantian turn of phrase, which should not be confused with Cartesian objective reality which is merely to be a represent*ing*.

"Transcendental Deduction."[129] The Kantian skepticism, which is the question of objective validity in the sense I understand it here, is the *how-possible* question regarding the objective purport of the concept, i.e., the question how it is possible that the conceptual bears on the non-conceptual. The latter question and Kant's response to which was discussed in detail in the first chapter and the second chapter also considered in detail the response to the former question.

But it might be argued that Stroud's objection can be reproduced to be effective against the "Refutation of Idealism" as well. It is true that Stroud reads the "Transcendental Deduction" as a transcendental argument against Cartesian skepticism. But, the objection goes, since the "Refutation" can also be considered as a transcendental argument it faces the very same dilemma. This objection may be reinforced by the point made above that the arguments of the two sections in question parallel each other and if one of them is a transcendental argument the other should be as well. But a closer look shows that if we consider a transcendental argument what Stroud takes them to be, none of the arguments of the "Deduction" or the "Refutation" are transcendental arguments. In fact, they are not trying to prove that something is a necessary condition of what the skeptic does not reject. The difference lies in how transcendental arguments, as used by Stroud and popularized by Strawson in his seminal works on descriptive metaphysics,[130] view the gaps to be bridged. They treat these gaps as genuine, seeking to overcome them by demonstrating, for instance, a 'necessary connection' between the two sides or establishing that one side is a 'presupposition' of the other. However, conceding that the gap

[129] And in fact, in that very place he is talking about the scandal he takes the "Refutation" and not the "Transcendental Deduction" to be its refutation.

[130] See (P. Strawson 1959; 1966).

is indeed real seems to concede the game to the skeptic before it even begins. Once one admits that gap is a genuine gap, there is no way to escape from skeptical doubts in many different guises—it is to "give the skeptic what he wishes most" (B168).[131] But I argued above that this is not what Kant is doing. In the "Transcendental Deduction" and the "Refutation of Idealism" he argues that, respectively, the Kantian gap (between the conceptual and the non-conceptual) and the Cartesian gap (between the inner sense and outer sense) are pseudo-gaps. There is no gap to begin with and therefore it does not proceed the way Strawsonian transcendental arguments proceed.[132] Hence Stroud's objection is ineffective against Kant's own anti-skeptical arguments.

Richard Rorty and the Problem of How to Understand Modality

Richard Rorty suggests another major criticism of what is considered Kantian 'transcendental arguments'. He stands out in his discussion by having a closer to Kant understanding of the nature of these arguments. In his view the majority of "transcendental arguments are anti-skeptical and anti-reductionist, claiming that the reduced world the skeptic holds out as the only legitimate option is not a genuine option" (Rorty 1979, 77). He takes the paradigm case of this kind of argument to be Kant's against Hume and formulates it as follows:

> I think that (as Bennett's and Strawson's interpretations suggest) all the arguments of the 'Refutation' and the 'Deduction' suggest is to rule out *one* alternative—the skeptical, Humean, 'sense-datum experience' alternative. We do not have the slightest idea what the other alternative might be. (Rorty 1979, 82)

[131] See the discussion of this passage in the first chapter above.

[132] Graham Bird (Bird 2006, 242) also rejects, with different grounds, the claim that any transcendental argument can be found in Kant. Cf. (Förster 1989).

In Rorty's eyes Kant's transcendental argument rules out the skeptical alternative, but it fails to rule out other alternatives that might be possible here. The list of alternatives in the transcendental arguer's notebook is not exhaustive and therefore ruling out just one possibility is not enough to secure the conclusion.

As the passage shows, the "Deduction" and the "Refutation" Rorty has in mind here are not Kant's but Bennett's and Strawson's, and what they have in mind by "transcendental argument" is what Stroud means by that term, i.e., that there is a genuine gap at play here which the transcendental arguments are designed to bridge. But this alone does not show that the objection has no force. To show that one must see if there actually are, or if there can be, other alternatives. Note that Rorty is not vulnerable to the objection that he offers no actual alternative. The mere possibility of another option is enough to show that Kant's argument fails.

But is there the possibility of there being another alternative? The answer to this question depends on what one takes to be the alternative Kant tries to defend. If the alternative is that there is a genuine gap that the argument is designed to bridge, the possibility is not ruled out. In this picture there is a genuine gap and one way to treat this gap is to bridge it with this or that argument, another is to endorse skepticism and say that the gap is not bridgeable. The point Rorty makes is that there is no logical limit to assume other alternatives. But in the reading offered above all these constitute just one alternative, i.e., that the gap is a genuine gap. The alternative Kant wants to defend is that the gap is not genuine. Thus, it is not logically possible to have a third alternative. The gap is either genuine or not. Kant rules out all the alternatives the possibility of which is the basis of Rorty's objection by showing that they are not possible in the first place. In fact, it seems

that although Rorty himself uses the vocabulary of 'genuine alternative' he does not see the real force of Kant's argument and is not still free of Strawsonian reading of Kant.

Rorty seems to miss the real nature of Kant's argument here because he takes Kant to accept the Cartesian priority of inner over outer: "once one becomes dubious about the Cartesian notion of privileged access to one's own subjectivity, the status of transcendental argumentation becomes problematic" (Rorty 1979, 80). Here Rorty ascribes to Kant the very Cartesian doctrine he tries to undo in his "Refutation." I argued above that Kant takes the problematic idealism of Descartes to be the problem which arises because the French philosopher takes the subjective realm to be better known than the objective. The point of the "Refutation" is exactly to reject this Cartesian picture, not that the transcendental argument is based on this priority. If one takes the *Refutation* to be based on the Cartesian priority, then one admits to the skeptic that there is a genuine gap, and then one is already vulnerable to many objections one of which is Rorty's. But as a matter of fact, Kant does not do that and therefore the "Refutation" is safe.

Andrew Chignell on the *Refutation of Idealism*

Andrew Chignell (Chignell 2017) also raises a serious concern. He sees it as a serious problem for almost all readings of the "Refutation," perhaps exempting only those readings based on epistemological externalism.[133] The crux of his objection is that when Kant in the "Refutation" talks about the "persistent in perception," he moves too quickly to concluding that the persistent is something spatial or

[133] A version of which he endorses (Chignell, n.d.).

external.[134] The first two assumptions of the "Refutation"—that "I am conscious of my existence as determined in time" and that "all time-determination presupposes something **persistent** in time" (B275)—together entail that "something in my perception persisted over T." But, the objection goes, this conclusion leaves open the possibility that the persistent in question be either an object distinct from the mind—which is the desired conclusion—or the empirical self.[135] If the latter option is not properly ruled out the "Refutation" falls short of its purpose. This objection seems to be particularly pressing for the reading I offered above in which what Kant sets to prove is the actuality of substance. Chignell argues in considerable detail based on textual and systematic evidence that Kant takes empirical (though not logical or transcendental) self to be a substance. If true, this makes my reading an obvious candidate for being a victim of this objection as all Kant does in my reading is showing that there is an actual substance, and nothing seems to prevent this actual substance to be the empirical self. Reversing the order of his discussion, I first look at Chignell's systematic considerations and then consider his textual evidence. The moral of my discussion would be that neither textual nor systematic considerations he puts forward grant him the conclusion that the self can be a candidate for the persistent in perception in my reading.

The first systematic consideration Chignell puts forward is that "the self-as-mind is the *natural* candidate in any philosophical picture to play the role of that which persists through the perceived changes in mental states." Kant's innovation in this picture is just to show that

[134] See also (Gram 1981, 141; Guyer 1987, 283; Vogel 1993, 876; Bader 2017, 215–16). Cf. (Allison 1983, 298).

[135] A third option is that the persistent thing be a state of mind (Chignell 2017, 151). Since in my reading the object to be proved is a substance and a state of mind is not, I put this aside.

"the self, like any other substance, is a mere 'appearance' rather than a thing in itself." In this picture Kant accepts the default position in which "mind-as-self" is a substance and that the only change he makes is to point out that this substance belongs to the realm of appearances and not things-in-themselves. He concludes that we "would need more than a few scattered texts (like A107) to overthrow this picture" (Chignell 2017, 145).

Even if the position is admitted as being default, however, there are reasons to be doubtful that Kant approves of it. It is arguably one major theme of the "Paralogisms" in both editions that Kant tries to distance himself from Descartes's loaded conclusions from the *cogito* and a moral of such arguments is that the French gentleman is not warranted in inferring the substantiality of the self from the mere "I think." What Kant tries to do is to undo exactly what Descartes and the whole rationalist tradition did in this regard. Thus Chignell seems to assign the very same mistake to Kant that he thinks Descartes commits.

Let me elaborate. Descartes counters to the evil demon skepticism with his *cogito* reasoning in which it is argued that as long as I am thinking I cannot be deceived about my existence at that moment. He goes on to argue, at the beginning of the "Second Meditation," that from *cogito* or "I think" I can infer that I am a thing that thinks and therefore that I am a thinking substance. Kant's objection is that Descartes concludes too quickly here. What the mere 'I think' gives us is not sufficient to prove that there is substance which thinks—going from *cogito* to the existence of a *res cogitans* is not warranted.[136] Kant does not argue here

[136] Hobbes anticipates this objection and Kant, in my reading, reiterates it in the "Paralogisms." Hobbes in his second objection writes that it "does not seem to be a valid argument to say 'I am thinking, therefore I am thought' or 'I am using my intellect hence I am an intellect'" (VII, 173; II, 122). Some contemporary commentators also read Kant along the lines offered here. Daniel Warren, for example, writes: "Kant is insisting that if we start from the thought itself—the

that the self is not a substance—that would contradict the treatment of the issue in practical philosophy. The point is that, pace the rationalists, its substantiality is not provable, as Kant explicitly writes in the *Prolegomena* and that's enough for the purpose of the *Refutation*.[137]

A second consideration upon which Chignell puts so much weight is what he calls parity argument:

> In outer sense, awareness of a series of changing states over time, together with the synthesizing work of the imagination and understanding, provides cognition of those states *as* states of an empirical substance. … By parity of reasoning, it seems that inner awareness of a series of mental states should be able to provide cognition of the persisting empirical substance that *has* those states, provided that synthesis also occurs in inner awareness. (Chignell 2017, 145)

The point seems to be that since there must be empirical substance in our awareness of changes in outer perception, by parity of argument there must be such in inner sense as well. Therefore, there must be an inner substance which would naturally be the empirical self and Chignell takes it to be "hard to see what would motivate a lack of parity here" (Chignell 2017, 145). But arguably from a Kantian point of view

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effect, so to speak—we do not have the resources that could license the inference to the character of its metaphysical ground, i.e., to the character of what metaphysically underpins the thought, the substance" (Warren 2015, 47). As Warren's formulation shows, attributing the inference of substance from the mere "I think" is the same mistake the problematic idealist commits, i.e., inferring a determinate cause—here a thinking substance—from a determinate effect—here thinking. For two more recent readers who endorse the same position see (Boyle 2019, 731; Conant 2020, 584ff).

[137] The same point is made by Ralf Bader: "all that needs to be done is to establish that one cannot prove the permanence of the self, thereby ensuring that one cannot be justified in applying the category of substance to the inner" (Bader 2017, 217).

there *is* a disparity of argument here.[138] The place to look for Kant's theory of substance is, to recall, the "First Analogy" which in the first edition reads: "All appearances contain that which persists (**substance**) as the object itself, and that which can change as its mere determination, i.e., a way in which the object exists" (A182). In the second edition it is replaced by "In all change of appearances substance persists, and its quantum is neither increased nor diminished in nature" (B224) in which the emphasis is apparently on the quantum of substance and hence its limitation to just material or spatial substance. In fact, it seems that one of the reasons Kant changed the formulation of the "First Analogy" is to rule out such a misunderstanding that it has any application to non-spatial things. This point is reinforced by the marginal notes Kant added to the same place in his own copy of the first edition *Critique*:

> Here the proof must be so conducted that it applies only to *substances as phenomena of outer sense*, consequently from space, which exists at all time along with its determination. (E LXXX, p. 32, 23:30, emphasis mine)
>
> Now everything that can be distinguished from that which changes in experience is quantity (*grösse*), and this can only be assessed through the magnitude of the merely relative effect in the case of equal external relations (*Relationen*) and therefore *applies only to bodies.* (E LXXXI, p. 32, 23:30-1, emphasis mine)[139]

Although these are just marginal notes, they show that Kant takes the "First Analogy"—and hence his teachings about substance—to be applicable just to phenomena of outer sense. And the second edition

[138] In fact, there being such a disparity is the whole point of the "Refutation." But appealing to that in the context of offering an objection to the "Refutation" would beg the question against Chignell. The reasons I offer below, therefore, are intended to be independent of this observation.

[139] Both quoted from (Kant 1998, 299).

formulation suggests that Kant agrees with these two and there is no reason to doubt what he says in these marginal notes. Therefore, there *is* a disparity of argument between inner and outer in this regard, and there is no reason to assume that the states of inner sense are accidents of one inner substance.

The third consideration Chignell puts forward is based on causal relations. He argues that Kant allows a causal relation between external objects and perceptual states and that the *relata* of a causal relation are empirical substances. Therefore, in such a causal relation, e.g., seeing the movement of a ship down to the river, the *relata* are the ship considered as a material substance and mind as an empirical substance. Since there is a causal relation between the object and the subject of perception, and both the *relata* of such a causal relation must be substances, the mind considered as the empirical self should be a substance (Chignell 2017, 148–49). This is not a way of proving the substantiality of the self that Kant himself considered, but if sound it will prove that Kant was after all wrong in assuming that the substantiality of the self cannot be proved. Whether or not such an argument can be successful in the framework of transcendental idealism is not a point I wish to enter here. What is important for my present purpose is that even if this argument proves the substantiality of the self, it does not still prove its persistence. Even if it proves that the self-as-substance is one relatum of this causal relation, it still falls short of proving that it is the same substance in two different moments in time. This is what Chignell calls the Strawsonian worry in which "I can't *re*-identify my self later and say that it—the one that had that representation at t_1—is also the self that has *this* representation at t_4" (Chignell 2017, 146). As Chignell himself admits, there is a vast literature on the subject and, like him, I cannot go into the full discussion of the issue here. For the issue at hand, I just look at

Chignell's response to this worry. He argues that if we assume that the Strawsonian concern is intelligible there are two lines of response. His first point is that his concern is with the empirical self and not the transcendental 'I':

> When Kant talks about these 'switching out' scenarios in the A-edition Paralogisms, he is trying to undermine high rationalist doctrines about an immaterial, immortal substance whose continuous existence can be inferred from our experience of ourselves as conscious over time. (Chignell 2017, 147)

He seems here to argue that what Kant says in the "Paralogisms" is about the transcendental 'I' whereas the point in his objection is about the empirical self. As argued above in discussing Chignell's first systematic worry, however, I read Kant in the "Paralogism" to be arguing that the rationalists' mistake was to try to infer the metaphysical I from the transcendental I, that is, inferring the nature of the 'I'—as a *res cogitans*—from the mere 'I think'. Kant's discussion there is not limited to the transcendental I, but to disentangle a confusion in the rationalists' vocabulary by not differentiating between the transcendental from the metaphysical I. There is no such restriction in the "Paralogism" and therefore the points I made above count against Chignell here as well. His second move is to reformulate the parity argument here as well:

> It is hard to see why we can't mount another version of the parity argument vis-à-vis outer sense here. When I perceive the ship going down the river at t_1 and perceive it again at t_4, I clearly reidentify it as *the same* empirical object or substance … Here again, I want to suggest, it seems like there is parity between outer sense and inner sense. (Chignell 2017, 148)

He continues that there is no guarantee in the case of inner sense but there is no such in the case of outer sense either. He seems to conclude, therefore, that the parity of argument is here at work as well and

therefore we can reidentify the self, and hence the "Refutation is safe." But if any of the observations put forward above is in the right track, there is no parity of argument between inner and outer sense. And since the ability to reidentify is necessary for the purpose of the "Refutation," it is saved from Chignell's objection.

If sound, these considerations show that Chignell's systematic points are not forceful against the reading offered above. But he also quotes several passages to the effect that Kant takes the empirical self to be substance that seem to support his criticism of the "Refutation." He first quotes some passages that seems not be consistent with what he tries to establish as Kant's position (A107, A22/B37, 4:336, A350) and tries to explain them away. I would not dispute his points regarding these passages. What I try to do is to show that the passages he quotes in defense of his own position can be read in different ways. He quotes passages "in which Kant explicitly says that inner sense *does* allow us to be 'conscious of' or cognize a 'self', 'soul' (*Seele*) or even inner empirical 'substance'" (Chignell 2017, 142–43). Since only the self being a substance pose a threat on the reading offered above, I just comment on some of the passages he takes to show that the self can be a substance. One such passage is from the last paragraph of the "First Paralogism":

> Meanwhile, one can quite well allow the proposition **The soul is substance** to be valid, if only one admits that this concept of ours leads no further, that it cannot teach us any of the usual conclusions of the rationalistic doctrine of the soul… (A350-1)

Chignell reads this passage as allowing the soul to be in fact a substance. But Kant continues:

> … such as, e.g., the everlasting duration of the soul through all alterations, even the human being's death, thus that it

> signifies a substance only *in the idea but not in reality*. (A351; my emphasis)

This is admittedly a very dense and difficult passage. But it seems that, given what Kant says at the end, he takes the position that the soul is a substance as a mere empty idea—and using the word 'idea' in the context of the *Transcendental Dialectic* is telling.[140] But even if we assume that he allows the soul to be a substance, he is quite explicit—even in the part Chignell quotes—that none of the traditional properties of substance can be ascribed to it. And persistence, or as Kant himself writes, "the everlasting duration of the soul through all alteration," is one of the things that cannot be ascribed to soul. But the whole problem to be solved in the "Refutation" is to find such a persistent in alterations, to find such a thing that the category of substance with those properties can be predicated to it.

In fact, the considerations above to the effect that Kant tries to undo Descartes's mistake in deducing a *res cogitans* from the bare *cogito*, undertaken in the *Paralogisms* in both editions, show that we must be careful not to read too much into decontextualized passages. One example of such a project on Kant's part is as follows:

> I do not cognize *any object* merely by the fact that I think, but rather I can cognize any object only by determining a given intuition with regard to the unity of consciousness, in which all thinking consists. Thus I cognize myself not by being conscious of myself as thinking, but only if I am conscious to myself of the intuition of myself *as determined in regard to the function of thought*.[141] (B406, emphasis mine)

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[140] One should compare the language here with that of the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Sciences*, where Kant calls "absolute space" a "mere idea," see (MAN 4: 559).

[141] Also:

> In the latter science [i.e., the doctrine of bodies] much can be cognized *a priori* from the mere concept of an extended impenetrable being, but in the former science [i.e., the doctrine of

Here Kant distances himself from Descartes by saying that *no object*—presumably even my self—is cognized by the mere fact that I think, and that I do not cognize myself by the *cogito*. But he still recognizes a genuine insight in Cartesian reasoning by reaffirming his teaching in the "Transcendental Deduction" that the 'I think' must accompany every thought I have—"I can cognize any object only by determining a given intuition with regard to the unity of consciousness." I can cognize myself, in this picture, only when I have an intuition of myself, and this can only be determined when there is a spatial substance, a persistent in my perception, out there.[142]

Another passage Chignell quotes is as follows:

> … in the connection of experience matter as substance is really given to outer sense, just as the thinking I is given to inner sense, likewise as a 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 substance brings in. (A379)

This is a difficult passage to fit in in the picture I am trying to draw. But there are some points one can make to show that it is not conclusive. First, as Chignell himself argues in explaining away the passages which are not consistent with his reading (Chignell 2017, 141), it is removed from the second edition. But more importantly, this passage appears after the above-quoted from A350-1 and should be read in its light. Even if we allow that the self can be a substance, it can be so as an

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> the soul] nothing at all can be cognized *a priori* from the concept of a thinking being (A381).
>
> Yet this I is no more an intuition than it is a concept of any object; rather it is the mere form of consciousness, which accompanies both sorts of representations… (A382)

[142] See also (Conant 2020, 586).

empty idea without any of the traditional features ascribed to substance. Recall that what is needed for the empirical self to count as an alternative to material substance in the "Refutation" is its permanence. And Kant explicitly in the A350-1 passage says that it does not have that feature, and he does not mention anything in that regard in the passage in question as well. This is also true regarding other passages Chignell mentions like 4:335. I conclude that his textual evidence, even if (and that is doubtful) prove that the self for Kant is a substance, they are not helpful against my reading of the *Refutation*, since what is important there is the persistence and the passages Chignell quotes does not grant that.

Conclusion

The four chapters above presented readings of the *First Meditation*, the *Transcendental Deduction*, and the *Refutation of Idealism*, and responded to some objections. The first chapter argues that Descartes, in the *First Meditation*, puts forward two essentially different skeptical arguments—what I called the Veil-of-Ideas and the Author-of-My-Origin arguments. Both arguments are Cartesian, in the formal sense of the term defined in the Introduction, i.e., they are *if*- or *whether*-questions asking whether such and such is the case. I argued that although they both belong to the Cartesian brand of skepticism, they differ in the scope of the things they put in doubt: The former asks about the actuality of external, spatiotemporal, objects, and the latter asks whether we are in a position to have reliable beliefs regarding a set which includes empirical as well as mathematical propositions.

In the course of the first chapter, I also engaged in detail with James Conant's reading of the *First Meditation*, which is quite close to my reading in taking it to present two different skeptical arguments—what he calls the 'dream worry' and the 'evil demon worry'. Where my reading differs from Conant's is that he takes the second skeptical worry to be a version, or at least to be an "incipient," of Kantian skepticism, in the sense of being a *how-possible* question which asks for an explanation for something. I argued that although it is true that Descartes comes quite close to the *threshold* of Kantian skepticism, he never crosses that threshold, and the Author-of-My-Origin argument is still an instance of Cartesian skepticism. The reason for this difference in reading is that Conant and I read the argument itself differently: He takes the argument to be based on Descartes's Creation Doctrine and does not consider the second move of the argument, i.e., that I might be created by fate or chance.

What I did not do in the chapter, however, is evaluate these arguments. I argued that the major assumption of the Veil-of-Ideas argument is the epistemic priority of inner over outer, i.e., the thesis that we have direct access only to our ideas and via them, indirectly and inferentially, to the external objects we take to be the causes of these ideas. I believe this Cartesian assumption is the most vulnerable. This is what, as described in the third chapter, Kant takes issue with, and I find Kant's opposition to this doctrine plausible. However, I suggest, even if one does not accept this Kantian move, it is possible to counter the Veil-of-Ideas argument by one version or another of direct realism.

The matters are different when we consider the Author-of-My-Origin argument. Conant and other metaphysical readers of the argument take it to be based on Descartes's theological or metaphysical teachings such as his Creation Doctrine.[143] This way of reading the argument, as argued above, renders it quite vulnerable, since even die-hard theists such as Ibn Sina, Aquinas, Leibniz, and arguably Kant would not accept the Creation Doctrine, not to mention that the metaphysical reading is at odds with the textual evidence. But this does not mean that there is no way to attack the Author-of-My-Origin argument, as formulated above. Descartes does not spend much time arguing for his implicit assumption that the weaker the author of my origin is, the more cognitively vulnerable I am. Probably one reason for this is that at the time he was writing the *Meditations*, this assumption seemed quite reasonable, and no one would have put forward serious objections against it. But today, of course, evolutionary biologists would attack such an assumption by arguing that in the course of evolution we have

[143] Another example of the former reading is Stephen Menn (1998). Michael Della Rocca (2007), in addition, takes the argument to be based on the principle of sufficient reason.

adapted to be better able to navigate our environment, and part of that ability is to have reliable beliefs. This would mean that, in their view, Descartes's implicit assumption is false. Although I still have sympathy for Descartes's assumption, trying to argue against the evolutionary biologists' objection takes me far away from my main concerns. Therefore, I adopt an agnostic position here regarding this delicate matter and intend to take issue with this objection on another occasion.

The second chapter presents some considerations regarding the *Transcendental Deduction*, as presented in the second edition of the first *Critique*. The first major claim of the chapter is that what Kant does in the *B-Deduction* is to respond to his own version of Kantian skepticism—i.e., the problem of how it is possible that the conceptual bears on the non-conceptual. This interpretation goes against two major trends in the Kant literature. The first reading, espoused by, among others, Strawson and Stroud, argues that in the *Deduction* Kant wants to address Descartes's external world skepticism. And the second, advocated by, among others, Ameriks and Engstrom, argues that the *Deduction* is not meant to address any kind of skepticism. I argue that the former trend is right in taking the *Deduction* to be a response to a kind of skepticism, and the latter is right in taking it not to be a response to *Descartes's* skepticism.

The second major claim is that Kant's way with this brand of skepticism is to argue that the Kantian gap between the conceptual and the non-conceptual is a pseudo-gap, by arguing that the sensibility and understanding are interdependent and that one cannot be realized without the other also being realized. That is, reading Kant as advocating a layer-cake conception of human mindedness (Conant's terminology), or an additive as opposed to transformative conception of mind (Boyle's turn of phrase), is mistaken. My reading follows the

one presented by John McDowell, James Conant, and John Haugland, and I find this reading quite plausible.[144]

The third chapter takes on Kant's response to his own version of Cartesian skepticism, what he calls Descartes's "problematic idealism." The chapter has three major claims. First, by setting a criterion of adequacy for any reading of the "Refutation," I argue that one should present a 'translation' of Descartes's Veil-of-Ideas argument in the framework of transcendental idealism. Descartes, arguably a transcendental realist, identifies spatiotemporal objects with things-in-themselves, and therefore the conclusion of his Veil-of-Ideas argument is that the existence of spatiotemporal objects considered as things-in-themselves is doubtful. If this is the problematic idealism, then Kant would be, to use Sellars's turn of phrase, a material idealist of "the first water." But this is not what he does in the "Refutation," since he argues that the existence of the spatiotemporal objects is not doubtful. The 'translation' I offer, and this leads us to the second major claim, is that Kantian Cartesian skepticism is a doubt regarding the 'actuality'—as opposed to 'existence *per se*'—of 'material substances'—as opposed to things-in-themselves. The third claim is that Kant's way with (his own version) of Cartesian skepticism parallels his way with (his own version of) Kantian skepticism. In the "Deduction" he argues that the Kantian gap between the conceptual and the non-conceptual is a pseudo-gap, and here in the "Refutation" he argues that the gap between time and space, and therefore between inner sense and outer sense, is a pseudo-gap.

I then considered, in the fourth chapter, some objections by Barry Stroud, Richard Rorty, and Andrew Chignell, and argued that they are

[144] See (Conant 2016; 2020; McDowell, n.d.).

ineffective against my reading of the "Deduction" and the "Refutation." But this does not mean that there cannot be any objection to the "Refutation," as formulated here. Kant's own lifelong engagement with the problem—as evidenced by the number of *Reflexionen* on the issue in the years after its appearance—shows that he himself was not totally satisfied by the argument.[145] What Kant's own concerns about this argument were is the subject of a long and detailed essay, and goes far beyond the scope of this already long text. What I want to do here is to raise another concern.

One advantage of distinguishing the forms of skeptical problems by dividing them into Cartesian and Kantian varieties is that this shows that each of them can come in many different versions in many different areas. The most famous and most widely discussed version is probably the problem about the perception or the existence of the external world, in which a gap is posited between mind and world. Kant's way to deal with this version, as presented above, is to show that the gap is a pseudo-gap by appealing to his Newtonian conviction regarding the interdependence of time and space or inner sense and outer sense. But the very same problem can be formulated in many other areas of philosophy.[146] To Kant's credit, some versions of Cartesian skepticism seem to be vulnerable to an argument parallel to Kant's own in the "Refutation." Consider the case of Cartesian skepticism regarding other minds in which the "gap the Cartesian seeks to bridge … is from the other's outer bodily movements to his inner states" (Conant 2012, 9). Here it seems possible to use the Kantian conviction regarding the inseparability of time and space, and, based

[145] See R5653-5 and R6311-7. See also Guyer/Wood translation, p731n83.

[146] See (Conant 2012).

on a parity of reasoning between myself and other, to argue that the other person's outer bodily movements couldn't be there unless they also had inner states. Whereas in the perceptual version of Cartesian skepticism what is needed from the interdependency of time and space is the dependence of time on space, here in the other minds version what is needed is the other side of the interdependency, i.e., the dependence of outer bodily movement on time. This is of course just a caricature of an argument and there remain many gaps to be filled. But at least it seems promising that the material Kant provides us with in the "Refutation" can be used to refute the other-minds version of Cartesian skepticism as well.

The story in other areas is, however, different. Consider, for example, the Cartesian skepticism regarding art in which the gap is "between objecthood and art" (Conant 2012, 14), or Cartesian skepticism regarding language in which the gap is between "understanding the meaning of the sign and what the sign actually means" (Conant 2012, 11). It is not clear to me how the interdependency of time and space via motion can help to overcome these gaps. I do not mean of course that one cannot solve the Cartesian skepticism regarding perception unless one solves it in other areas like the philosophy of art or language. This would be a very strong position which, although I feel some sympathy towards it, I do not wish to endorse here. But, of course, it gives some reason to pause and think about what goes wrong in a solution to a problem in one area which is not at the same time a solution to the very same problem in another area. As such, my position regarding Kant's "Refutation of Idealism" is an agnostic one.

Zusammenfassung der Arbeit

Die Arbeit besteht aus vier Kapiteln, einer Einleitung und einem Fazit.

Einleitung

Die Einleitung gliedert sich in drei Teile:

A) Sie behandelt zunächst die Bedeutung von „Skeptizismus“, wie er in dieser Arbeit verstanden wird. In diesem Zusammenhang hat er eine weitere Bedeutung als in der analytischen Erkenntnistheorie. Er kommt dem sehr nahe, was Aristoteles unter „Aporie“ oder Russell unter „Paradox“ verstehen würde.

B) Zweitens wird zwischen cartesianischem und kantischem Skeptizismus unterschieden. Während ersterer eine Wenn-Frage nach der Realität von etwas ist—der paradigmatische Fall fragt, ob es eine Außenwelt gibt—, ist letzterer eine Wie-möglich-Frage nach der Möglichkeit von etwas. Ihr paradigmatischer Fall fragt nach einer Erklärung für die Tatsache, dass das Begriffliche auf das Nicht-Begriffliche einwirkt. Diese Unterscheidung wird als theoretische Grundlage für die gesamte Dissertation definiert und entwickelt.

C) Der letzte Abschnitt der Einleitung gibt einen Überblick über die gesamte Dissertation.

Kapitel I: Cartesischer Cartesischer Skeptizismus

Im ersten Kapitel entwickle ich meine Lesart der Ersten Meditation. Das Kapitel entwickelt ein Adäquatheitskriterium für jede Lesart der Meditationen. Die zentrale Behauptung ist, dass es in der Ersten Meditation zwei verschiedene skeptische Argumente mit unterschiedlichen Zielen und Reichweiten gibt:

A) Das Kriterium der Adäquatheit beruht auf Descartes‘ eigenen Hinweisen, z.B. in der Zusammenfassung der Sechs folgenden

Meditationen oder in den Zweiten Erwiderungen, dass er in den Meditationen strikt der Methode der Geometer folgt und dass keines seiner Argumente auf etwas beruht, für das er nicht zuvor argumentiert hat. In Anbetracht dessen argumentiere ich, dass jede akzeptable Lesart der Ersten Meditation nicht auf etwas basieren sollte, das später in den Meditationen auftaucht, und erst recht nicht auf etwas aus anderen Werken von Descartes, wie z.B. seiner Schöpfungslehre.

B) Das „Argument des Schleiers-der-Ideen“ soll Zweifel an unseren Wahrnehmungsüberzeugungen wecken. Es basiert auf Descartes‘ Überzeugung, dass wir nur zu unseren Ideen oder mentalen Episoden direkten Zugang haben und zu den äußeren Objekten selbst nur einen indirekten Zugang, nämlich über diese Ideen. Ich nenne diese Lehre den „Vorrang des Inneren vor dem Äußeren“. Der Meditierende argumentiert dann, dass unsere Überzeugungen in dieser Hinsicht zweifelhaft sind, da die Ideen verschiedene Ursachen haben können, nämlich entweder die äußeren Objekte, die ihnen selbst ähnlich sind, oder eine andere Ursache wie Träume.

C) Das zweite Argument, das ich das „Urheber-meines-Ursprungs“ Argument nenne, zielt darauf ab, Zweifel an einer größeren Gruppe von Überzeugungen zu wecken, nämlich an unserem Glauben an das, was Descartes selbst die „ewigen Wahrheiten“ nennt—nicht an diesen Wahrheiten selbst. Es beginnt mit der disjunktiven Aussage, dass es entweder einen Gott gibt oder nicht. Descartes fährt dann fort, indem er argumentiert, dass, wenn es einen Gott gibt, der mich täuschen kann, ich letztlich zweifelhafte Überzeugungen habe. Wenn es andererseits keinen Gott gibt, ist die Situation noch schlimmer, und ich lande wieder bei zweifelhaften Überzeugungen. Da man bei jeder möglichen Disjunktion am Ende zweifelhafte Überzeugungen hat, kommt Descartes zu dem Schluss, dass unsere Überzeugungen, auch diejenigen über die ewigen Wahrheiten, zweifelhaft sind. Dies ist eine

unter scholastischen Philosophen wohlbekannte Form der Argumentation, mit der Descartes sicherlich vertraut war. Ich schlage daher vor, dass Descartes, wenn er am Ende der Ersten Meditation von einem bösen Dämon spricht, nur ein Beispiel für einen solchen Dämon anführt, und dass dies tatsächlich geschieht, nachdem er den Sieg für sich beansprucht hat, indem er alle seine Überzeugungen als zweifelhaft gezeigt hat.

D) Das Kapitel endet mit einer Kritik dessen, was ich „metaphysische Lesarten der Ersten Meditation“ nenne. Diese Lesarten, von denen ich diejenige, die von James Conant in seinem Buch „The Logical Alien“ (2020) entwickelt wird, als eine der raffiniertesten auswähle, interpretieren die Furcht vor bösen Dämonen als abhängig von Descartes’ Schöpfungslehre. Demnach sind die ewigen Wahrheiten Gottes Schöpfung, genau wie die physischen Objekte. Ich argumentiere, dass diese Lesart nicht nur das Kriterium der Adäquatheit verfehlt, indem sie das skeptische Argument auf eine Lehre stützt, die in der Ersten Meditation nicht vorkommt; sondern sie wird auch der logischen Form der Argumentation nicht gerecht. Wenn wir das Argument des Autors meiner „Herkunft“ so lesen, wie ich es tue, d.h. ausgehend von einer disjunktiven Aussage, dann hat es keine metaphysisch oder theologisch aufgeladene Prämisse.

Kapitel II: Kantischer Kantischer Skeptizismus

In diesem Kapitel werden zwei unterschiedliche, aber miteinander zusammenhängende Behauptungen aufgestellt:

A) Die erste ist, dass die transzendentale Deduktion, wie sie in der zweiten Auflage der Ersten Kritik dargestellt wird, eine Antwort auf Kants eigene Version des Kantischen Skeptizismus ist. In dieser Version der Kantischen Skepsis ist die zu beantwortende Frage eine Wie-Möglich-Frage nach dem Verhältnis des Begrifflichen, d.h. der

reinen Verstandesbegriffe oder Kategorien, zum Nicht-Begrifflichen, d.h. den physischen Gegenständen. In meiner Lesart fragt Kant in der B-Deduktion, wie es möglich ist, dass die reinen Verstandesbegriffe sich auf etwas beziehen, was nicht begrifflich zu sein scheint.

B) Zweitens schlage ich vor, dass Kants Antwort auf diese Wie-möglich-Frage darin besteht, sie eine Ebene tiefer zu stellen und zu argumentieren, dass die beiden verantwortlichen Vermögen, d.h. das begriffliche und das nicht-begriffliche, d.h. Sinnlichkeit und Verstand, nicht voneinander getrennt werden können. Das heißt, es gibt keine reale Möglichkeit, dass Sinnlichkeit und Verstand getrennt realisiert werden können. Daher ist die scheinbare Möglichkeit, dass das Begriffliche nichts mit dem Nicht-Begrifflichen zu tun hat, eine Pseudo-Möglichkeit.

Kapitel III: Kantischer Cartesischer Skeptizismus

Dieses Kapitel besteht aus drei Hauptargumenten:

A) Ausgehend von zwei Interpretationsproblemen, die als Adäquatheitskriterien für jede Lesart der Widerlegung des Idealismus gelten, schlage ich erstens vor, dass der cartesische Skeptizismus, auf den Kant zu antworten versucht, nicht der von Descartes ist. Als transzendentaler Realist betrachtet Descartes raum-zeitliche Objekte als Dinge an sich und nimmt an, dass sie in sich selbst existieren. Wenn dies das Problem wäre, das Kant aufwerfen würde, dann wäre seine Antwort nicht, dass es tatsächlich Objekte im Raum außerhalb von uns gibt, sondern dass es solche Objekte nicht gibt. Aber das tut er weder in der Widerlegung noch im Vierten Paralogismus. Es wird daher argumentiert, dass wir eine ‚Übersetzung' des cartesianischen Skeptizismus in den Rahmen des transzendentalen Idealismus anbieten müssen.

B) Zweitens argumentiere ich, dass wir, wenn wir eine solche Übersetzung anbieten wollen, zwei falsche Dichotomien im cantischen System vermeiden müssen. Diese beiden falschen Dichotomien sind einerseits diejenige zwischen Existenz an sich—oder Existenz per se in der Sprache der Prolegomena—und Existenz als bloße Vorstellung, und andererseits diejenige zwischen Dingen an sich und bloßen Vorstellungen. Es wird argumentiert, dass Kant in beiden Fällen eine dritte Option hat—Wirklichkeit ist die dritte Option in der ersten Dichotomie und Substanz (als Objekt der Vorstellung) ist die dritte Option in der zweiten. Nachdem gegen diese beiden falschen Dichotomien argumentiert wurde, lautet die Übersetzung des cartesianischen Skeptizismus im Rahmen des transzendentalen Idealismus, dass der problematische Idealist die Realität der Substanz bezweifelt, während der dogmatische Idealist sie leugnet.

C) Das letzte Hauptargument lautet: Während Kant gegen den Kantischen Skeptizismus argumentiert, dass die Kantische Kluft zwischen Begrifflichem und Nicht-Begrifflichem eine Pseudolücke sei, argumentiert er hier in seiner Antwort auf den kantischen-cartesianischen Skeptizismus, dass die Cartesianische Kluft—zwischen innerem Sinn und äußerem Sinn—ebenfalls eine Pseudolücke sei. Eine Ausarbeitung oder ein Beispiel dieses Punktes—wie er in der Allgemeinen Anmerkung zum System der Prinzipien argumentiert—ist seine Überzeugung, dass für uns Menschen „Zeit zu erfassen“ bedeutet, Bewegung im Raum zu erfassen. Oder, wie er mehrfach argumentiert, um Zeit zu erfassen, müssen wir bildlich gesprochen eine Linie im Raum ziehen. Er argumentiert weiter, dass Zeit und Raum als zwei Anschauungsformen nur gemeinsam realisierbar sind und dass zwischen beiden eine unantastbare Interdependenz besteht. Dieses Argument entspricht seinem Argument gegen den Kantischen

Skeptizismus, das er in transzendentalen Deduktion vorbringt und das besagt, dass Sinnlichkeit und Verstand nur zusammen realisierbar sind.

Kapitel IV: Vermeidung von Einwänden

In diesem Kapitel werden einige Einwände und/oder unterschiedliche Lesarten erörtert. Zunächst untersuche ich Barry Strouds berühmtes Dilemma für transzendentale Argumente, das darin besteht, dass sie entweder eine subjektive und nicht eine objektive Bedingung für Erfahrung beweisen oder eine Art Verifikationsprinzip annehmen. Ich argumentiere, dass sein Einwand zwei Probleme aufwirft. Das erste besteht darin, dass Stroud dazu neigt, zwei verschiedene Argumentationsstränge in Kants Erster Kritik zu vermischen, nämlich Kants Argument für die objektive Gültigkeit der Kategorien in der transzendentalen Deduktion und sein Argument für die objektive Realität der Begriffe in der Widerlegung des Idealismus. Ersteres ist Kants Antwort auf den Kantischen Skeptizismus, letzteres auf den Cartesianischen Skeptizismus. Ein weiteres Problem von Strouds Argument ist, dass die Natur von Kants Argument an keiner dieser Stellen diejenige eines transzendentales Argument im Sinne Strawsons ist. Wie ich argumentiert habe, lautet Kants Antwort an beiden Stellen, dass die Lücke eine Pseudolücke ist, d.h. dass Strawsons transzendentale Argumente die Lücke als real akzeptieren und daher implizit den Sieg des Skeptikers voraussetzen.

Der zweite Einwand stammt von Richard Rorty. Dieser argumentiert, dass Kant zwar eine Alternative – nämlich die skeptische - widerlege, aber andere Alternativen nicht ausschließe. Ich zeige, dass es, wenn wir die oben vorgeschlagene Lesart akzeptieren, nur zwei Alternativen gibt: Entweder ist die Lücke eine echte Lücke oder sie ist es nicht. Alle Alternativen, die Rorty in Betracht zieht, sind verschiedene Versionen der ersten, und deshalb ist sein Einwand nicht stichhaltig.

Ein anderer Einwand kommt von Andrew Chignell, der argumentiert, dass das „empirische Selbst“ die Rolle des Beharrens spielen kann, die Kant in der Widerlegung zu beweisen versucht, und dass es daher nicht die Existenz von etwas Äußerem beweist. Ich behaupte erstens, dass wir auf der Grundlage von Kants Argumenten in den Paralogismen die Substantialität des empirischen Selbst nicht beweisen können. Aber wie ich oben argumentiert habe, ist dasjenige, was in Kants Version des cartesianischen Skeptizismus zweifelhaft ist, eine Substanz. Wichtiger noch ist der folgende zweite Punkt: Wenn wir die Natur der Widerlegung anerkennen, die Bewegung als etwas betont, das Zeit und Raum Einheit verleiht, dann sehen wir, dass das empirische Selbst nichts mit diesem Argument zu tun hat und dass Chignells Einwand daher fehl am Platz ist.

Konklusion

Das Schlusskapitel fasst die gesamte Arbeit zusammen und nimmt eine agnostische Position gegenüber Kants Antworten auf die skeptischen Probleme ein.

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