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Kant, Epistemic Phenomenalism, and the Refutation of Idealism

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Abstract: This paper takes issue with the widespread view that Kant rejects epistemic phenomenalism. According to epistemic phenomenalism, only cognition of states of one’s own mind can be certain, while cognition of outer objects is necessarily uncertain. I argue that Kant does not reject this view, but accepts a modified version of it. For, in contrast to traditional skeptics, he distinguishes between two kinds of outer objects and holds that we have direct access to outer appearances in our mind; but he still considers objects outside our mind unknowable. This sheds new light on Kant’s refutation of idealism.

1 Introduction

It is common currency in Kant scholarship that he rejects “Cartesian” approaches to epistemology. There are different kinds of them (such as infallibilism about mental content, or internalism about justification), and it is sometimes not clear what authors exactly mean when they speak about “Cartesian” approaches. The line of argument that has received most attention, however, is what I want to refer to as *epistemic phenomenalism* (“EP”, for short): we have no direct epistemic access to empirical objects outside us, but only to perceptual experiences in us, which are the causal effect of either outer empirical objects or inner imagination. As a result, the inference to outer objects is always uncertain, so that we ultimately have no secure proof of the existence of outer things. Kant allegedly opposes this to the effect that we are immediately acquainted with outer objects. Lucy Allais puts this as follows:

It is argued that one of Kant’s purposes in the Critique was to reject the Cartesian assumption that we are primarily acquainted with the contents of our own minds, and that knowledge of physical objects is not immediate (B274–9, A367–380). As Kant sees it, Berkeley and Descartes’s views have something in common: both think that we are primarily acquainted with the contents of our minds, and both think that, as a result, there is something prob-

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lematic about knowledge of external objects independent of our minds: Descartes that this knowledge is doubtful, and Berkeley that the idea of such objects is without sense, so there are none (B274–9, A367–380). Kant wants to argue, against both of them, first that we are not primarily in contact with our own minds, but rather with external objects, and second that the very external objects whose existence Berkeley denies and Descartes renders doubtful are immediately known in perception.¹

This view is widespread among Kant scholars. Apparently, all those who endorse it take it that Kant's claim that we have direct epistemic access to spatial objects is tantamount to a rejection of any kind of EP. However, I shall argue in this paper that they overlook something important. For Kant's rejection of the "skeptical idealism" he ascribes to Descartes is not tantamount to dropping the whole spirit of it.² Rather, Kant retains skeptical idealism in a way that is characteristic of his critical project. For he distinguishes between appearances and things in themselves and argues that we have direct epistemic access to the former, but not to the latter. Thus, skeptical idealism is true with regard to things in themselves, as we could only have substantial knowledge of them through causal inferences. For this reason, it is wrong to say that Kant rejects EP – he rather modifies it. I will henceforth refer to Kant's modification as *Kantian epistemic phenomenalism* ("KEP", for short). And this modified version, contrary to what is generally assumed, will show that the famous refutation of idealism does not necessarily argue for empirical objects outside our mind. Kant only gives an existence proofs for objects that are really outside us; whether those objects are spatiotemporal objects or things in themselves cannot be considered in this paper.

I will proceed as follows. Section 2 outlines EP and KEP as they are presented by Kant himself, but must leave the meaning of the distinction between transcendently inner and transcendently outer objects undecided. Section 3 considers the "causal argument" for (K)EP in the Fourth Paralogism of the A-edition of

1 Allais 2004, 662. Other proponents of anti-Cartesian interpretations include Bird 1962, 176–81; Prauss 1971, 145–58; Collins 1998, 1–7; Van Cleve 1999, 57–60; Abela 2002, 26–32; Westphal 2004, 12–15; Hanna 2006, 39; Westphal 2007; Caranti 2007, 4, 126; Nitzan 2012; Bader 2013. More than any other interpreter, Michael Forster marginalizes the role of epistemic phenomenalism in Kant's discussion of idealism and argues that he is not concerned with it apart from the Fourth Paralogism (see Forster 2008, 6–12). As it turns out, this is quite wrong.

2 While Kant ascribes EP to Descartes, he may be wrong in that. Descartes' skepticism is first and foremost methodological; in his *Meditations* he at first doubts the reliability of outer sense, but later argues that God guarantees it. Kant seems to overlook this, or perhaps did not even read Descartes himself, so his knowledge of Descartes might have been mediated by other authors (see Garber and Longuenesse 2008, 4). Descartes' own epistemology is therefore not at issue here.

the *Critique* and argues that KEP is indeed a form of skepticism: transcendently outer objects are mind-transcendent, and we can only have knowledge of transcendently inner objects because they are mind-immanent. Section 4 shows that, albeit KEP disallows for determinate knowledge of mind-transcendent objects, it does allow for indeterminate knowledge of them. Section 5 looks at the inner and outer as a pair of concepts of reflections and tries to make sense of Kant's claim that skeptical idealism is a "benefactor to human reason". Section 6 considers in detail how KEP helps us to see why the Refutation of Idealism does not give a case for mind-transcendent empirical objects and is even consistent with phenomenalism about appearances. Section 7 discusses possible objections. Section 8, finally, gives a short outline of the ontological consequences that may result from my interpretation.

Some caveats are in order at the outset. First, although my own view is that Kant accepts some sort of ontological phenomenalism,³ it will turn out in the end that this is not the only theory compatible with KEP. Moreover, there would be more and better arguments for ontological phenomenalism than can be discussed here, and many difficult questions would need to be considered. Thus, I do not intend to establish ontological, but only epistemic phenomenalism in this paper. Second, while one of my aims here is to make progress in the understanding of the appearance/thing in itself-distinction, I do not presuppose anything about it except that we can speak meaningfully about things in themselves, that we can think them through categories, and that some modest sort of knowledge of them is possible.⁴ Third, while it is common currency to think that Kant unambiguously rejects epistemic phenomenalism, I had a hard time to understand what exactly the arguments for this claim could be, or what is meant when authors write that he opposes "Cartesian" approaches. I assume that the main reasons are Kant's refutations of idealism in the two editions of the *Critique*, so I deal with them at length in this paper and hope that this adequately addresses their views. Fourth, I think that epistemic phenomenalism applies to self-knowledge as well, but there are some important differences, and this is not the place to discuss them.

³ See Oberst 2015.

⁴ All this would be harshly rejected by some authors; see for instance Nitzan 2012. But most scholars should be fine with it.

2 Kantian Epistemic Phenomenalism

In this paper, I would like to characterize Kant as an *epistemic phenomenalist*.⁵ Epistemic phenomenalism is the view that all (or most of) our knowledge is restricted to the content of our mind.⁶ I will say that an object is *mind-immanent* iff it is part of one's mental content, and that an object is *mind-transcendent* iff it is not part of one's mental content.⁷

Epistemic phenomenalism contrasts to *ontological phenomenalism*. Roughly, ontological phenomenalism holds that objects are to be analyzed in terms of mental content.⁸ Radical ontological phenomenalism would reduce all objects to mental content. Kant is not a radical phenomenalist because, as we shall see, he assumes the existence of things in themselves. But he may be an (ontological) phenomenalist about empirical objects. However, the latter does not follow from epistemic phenomenalism, so I refrain from showing phenomenalism about empirical objects. All I would like to argue for in this paper is that Kant is an epistemic phenomenalist and that his account is at least compatible with phenomenalism about empirical objects.

A key for the understanding of his account is the notion of an "outer object". Kant often speaks about it without qualification. But it is ambiguous, for it can mean that something is either *empirically* or *transcendentally* outside us:

5 Phenomenalist interpretations of Kant have been provided by Turbayne 1955, Bennett 1966, Strawson 1966, Broad 1978, Van Cleve 1999. They usually do not discriminate between different forms of phenomenalism.

6 The notion of mental content is controversial in Kant. I remain largely neutral on it here; however, it turns out in this paper that content cannot be understood in terms of relations to objects such that the objects are not only represented, but even part of the content; this would contradict Kant's epistemic phenomenalism.

7 I deliberately deviate from Kant's use of "immanent" and "transcendent". He applies these concepts to the reach of our knowledge and speaks, for instance, of "immanent" and "transcendent principles" (A295 f./B352). So "mind-transcendent objects" in my sense could still be within our epistemic reach, although it will turn out that, in fact, they are not.

8 Whilst it is standardly assumed that phenomenalism reduces all objects to (possible) perceptual experiences (or "sense-data"), this may seem inadequate with regard to Kant's specific account of experience. According to interpreters such as Longuenesse 1998, intuitions are the result of the synthetic activity of the understanding. There is something in the intuitions then that has been put into them by the understanding and is hence not reducible to perceptions. What I mean by (ontological) "phenomenalism" is thus that objects are to be reduced to any kind of mental content, not necessarily that they are reducible to sense-data.

But since the expression *outside us* carries with it an unavoidable ambiguity, since it sometimes signifies something that, *as a thing in itself*, exists distinct from us and sometimes merely something that belongs to outer *appearance*, then in order to escape uncertainty and use this concept in the latter significance – in which it is taken in the proper psychological question about the reality of our outer intuition – we will distinguish *empirically external* objects from those that might be called external in the transcendental sense, by directly calling them *things that are to be encountered in space*. (A373, all emphases are Kant's)⁹

So there are two meanings of an “outer object” – firstly, an outer object as outer appearance in space, secondly, an outer object as a thing in itself:

Empirically outer objects are outer appearances in space; *transcendentally outer* objects are things in themselves.¹⁰

Importantly, Kant asserts that outer appearances and the space in which they exist are “in us”.¹¹ I take this to mean that they are empirically outside us, but transcendently in us. We should thus introduce an analogous distinction between two senses of “in us”:

Empirically inner objects are inner appearances which are in time but not in space; *transcendentally inner* objects are (inner or outer) appearances.¹²

This results in a threefold distinction of objects, according to which objects are either:

- a) *inner appearances* in time,
- b) *outer appearances* in space and time, or
- c) *things in themselves* beyond space and time.

⁹ As is customary, I refer to the *Critique of Pure Reason* by page numbers of the A- and B-edition. All other quotes refer to volume and number of the *Akademie-Ausgabe*. I use standard translations if available.

¹⁰ Also see *MM* 6:245, where Kant distinguishes between an empirical and an intelligible sense of being outside us.

¹¹ This is made explicit elsewhere, e. g. when Kant says that “space is in us” (A370, see also A373, A375, A378), or that outer things are “representations in us” (A384–7).

¹² Empirically inner objects need not be restricted to appearances, for they also include emotional states and desires, but for ease of discussion I focus on appearances here. The noumenal self is a specific case of a transcendently outer object. It is not outside the mind, but rather the mind itself. However, it is external to the content of our mind, so it may be counted among the transcendently outer objects.

But the precise meaning of this distinction is difficult to analyze. To be sure, Kant explains that things in themselves are transcendently outside us and appearances are empirically outside us, but transcendently in us. Unfortunately, this is of little help as the notions of things in themselves and appearances are very controversial. We will return to this later. For now, let us consider how Kant makes use of the threefold distinction of objects in order to modify EP.

A first step towards understanding this can be taken by considering Kant's distinction between *empirical* and *transcendental idealism*. To start with, note that it does not belong to the meaning of an object in space and time that it is appearance. Admittedly, spatiotemporal objects are appearances according to Kant, i. e. they are transcendently in us; and objects which are neither in space nor in time are things in themselves, i. e. they are transcendently outside us. However, on his definition of *transcendental realism* (which is opposed to transcendental idealism), spatiotemporal objects are things in themselves:

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, see also A490 f./B518 f.)

Transcendental idealism and transcendental realism are both metaphysical claims about the nature of spatiotemporal objects.¹³ They can be put as follows:

Transcendental realism:

Spatiotemporal things are things in themselves, i. e. transcendently outer things.

Transcendental idealism:

Spatiotemporal things are outer appearances, i. e. empirically outer things; and non-spatiotemporal things are things in themselves, i. e. transcendently outer things.

13 Methodological interpreters, such as Prauss 1974, Robinson 1994, and Allison 2004, read the distinction between transcendental idealism and realism in an epistemic rather than a metaphysical way. So they will of course disagree with my interpretation in this respect. However, as long as they are open to mind-immanent appearances which are distinct from mind-transcendent objects (that are to be cognized either as appearance or as thing in itself, on their account), it should be possible for them to agree with me on the most important result of this investigation.

From this metaphysical distinction an important epistemological distinction concerning the existence of spatiotemporal objects follows, in Kant's view, namely the distinction between *empirical realism* and *empirical idealism*. He does not explicitly say what this distinction amounts to, but it could be formulated like this:

Empirical realism:

Cognition¹⁴ of spatiotemporal things can be certain¹⁵, and they exist.¹⁶

Empirical idealism:

Cognition of spatiotemporal things is uncertain, and it is either doubtful or impossible that they exist.¹⁷

Kant states that the transcendental idealist alone can be an empirical realist, whereas the transcendental realist is condemned to empirical idealism:

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

14 Throughout the article, I understand “cognition” (*Erkenntnis*) as aiming at truth (so my cognition can be false), and “knowledge” (*Wissen*) as cognition with certainty. (Nonetheless, “cognition” may have different meanings in other contexts.)

15 Kant argues that realism entails certainty in A367. Certainty is “objective sufficiency” (A822/B850), and as certainty is supposed to be a “necessary belief” (A824/B852), I take it that this is absolute certainty which does not allow for the possibility of error.

16 Not all empirical cognition is certain, on an empirically realist approach; for there can still be false or unjustified claims. But in contrast to the empirical idealist, the empirical realist holds that it is in principle possible to have secure knowledge of spatiotemporal things.

17 There are two kinds of empirical idealism. If empirical idealism is doubtful, it is the skeptical idealism Kant attributes to Descartes. But if empirical idealism states the impossibility of empirical objects, it is the dogmatic idealism attributed to Berkeley. Both skeptical idealism and empirical realism agree on rejecting dogmatic idealism. See A377, B70 f., B274, *Prol* 4:293. – It is worth mentioning that empirical realism does not make any claim about whether empirical objects are mind-immanent or -transcendent (see A27 f./B43 f., A35/B52).

The transcendental idealist is immediately acquainted with outer objects because those are nothing but representations.¹⁸ (I will come back in a minute to what it means that empirical objects are “representations”.) The transcendental realist, on the contrary, considers outer objects transcendently external, which is why they must remain unknown – for reasons to be explored in the next section. Kant’s distinction between the two senses of “outside us” is meant to further elucidate the distinctions of realisms and idealisms. As the transcendental realist considers space and time as pertaining to things in themselves, she equates empirical objects (i. e. objects in space and time) with those and not with appearances. On her view, empirical objects are not only empirically, but also transcendently outside us. This is why Kant says that the transcendental realist is necessarily an empirical idealist.¹⁹

We are now in a position to summarize the central claims of EP, which rest on transcendental realism and empirical idealism, and its Kantian modification, which is grounded on the combination of transcendental idealism and empirical realism. EP consists in two claims:

Epistemic phenomenalism (EP):

- a) Cognition of inner objects can be certain.
- b) Cognition of outer objects is necessarily uncertain.

KEP, on the contrary, comprises three claims:

Kantian epistemic phenomenalism (KEP):

- a) Cognition of empirically inner objects can be certain.
- b) Cognition of empirically outer objects can be certain.
- c) Cognition of transcendently outer objects is necessarily uncertain.

The rationale is in both cases that only cognition of objects which can be immediately perceived is certain, whereas cognition of objects which are mediately given through affection is uncertain. Now the question is: to what extent does Kant depart from traditional EP? This is heavily dependent on how the distinction between empirically and transcendently outer objects must be understood. One possibility is to read it in terms of ontological phenomenalism about empirical

¹⁸ The sense of immediacy employed here is that of immediate awareness and not of causal immediacy. Depending on the interpretation of Kant’s account of perception, it may well be that we are not directly conscious of the immediate result of affection, but only of intuitions that have undergone a process of synthesis. But, contrary to some interpreters, intuition is not immediate awareness of mind-transcendent objects. Also see the discussion of the fourth objection in section 7.

¹⁹ See A370–80.

objects. This view could, among others, be supported by the fact that Kant quite often refers to appearances as representations, or that space and objects in space are “in us”.²⁰ Then objects would be “transcendentally in us” iff they are *mind-immanent*, and “transcendentally outside us” iff they are *mind-transcendent*.

However, many commentators try to escape from the “threat” of phenomenalism by a number of strategies. They hold that the term “representation” (*Vorstellung*) does not only refer to mental representations, but also to non-mental represented objects,²¹ that the term “representation” refers to mind-dependent, but -transcendent objects,²² that our perceiving of objects is subjectively dependent,²³ or that the transcendental distinction between in us and outside us reflects the empirical and the transcendental standpoint of cognition.²⁴ In all these cases, mind-transcendent objects would be transcendentally in us, and there would be no need for phenomenalism about appearances. At the same time, epistemic phenomenalism could be avoided because Kant allows for knowledge of empirically outer objects. In this case, KEP would be significantly different from its traditional form. The passage quoted from A373 is in itself compatible with both phenomenalism and non-phenomenalism about appearances; thus it cannot be immediately decided which is the right one.²⁵ But it can be decided if we take a closer look at Kant’s argument for KEP in the Fourth Paralogism, to which we now turn.

3 The Causal Argument in the Fourth Paralogism

In the beginning of the Fourth Paralogism²⁶ of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant presents the following “paralogism”²⁷:

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

²⁰ See A129, B164, A250, A371f., A375, A386, A387, FICJ 20:209, OP 22:19.

²¹ See Willaschek 2001, 682f., Ameriks 2000, 113.

²² See Chiba 2012, 178.

²³ See Collins 1999, 31–59, in particular 45, Caranti 2007, 45f., 48–55, Longuenesse 2008, 27f. Allais (2011, 383–86.) argues that empirically outer objects are a constituent of direct perception and therefore transcendentally in us.

²⁴ See Allison 2004, 24.

²⁵ Even if a phenomenalist interpretation of the Fourth Paralogism is true, there could be some loopholes for non-phenomenalists. See the end of section 3 and section 6.

²⁶ As usual, I refer to the paralogism itself by small letters, but to the chapter by capital letters.

²⁷ Unless otherwise mentioned, all quotes from this section are taken from A366–9.

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.

A paralogism, Kant tells us, is a syllogistic fallacy so that the argument is invalid, even though the premises may be true. The psychological paralogisms are all supposed to have the form of a so-called *sophisma figurae dictionis* in which a middle term is used ambiguously.²⁸ It can be put into the following scheme:

Every A_1 is B.
C is A_2 .
Thus C is B.

Unfortunately, the structure of the fourth paralogism is difficult to understand. Slightly modifying the suggestion by Karl Ameriks²⁹, I propose the following reconstruction:

- (1) Cognition of objects that can be only causally inferred is never certain.
- (2) Cognition of outer objects is cognition of objects that can be only causally inferred.
- (3) Thus, cognition of outer objects is never certain.

This is the argument – call it the *causal argument* – for the unknowability of outer things that Kant ascribes to Descartes and from which he, as we will see shortly, does not significantly depart. It argues that we can know outer objects only by means of causal inferences,³⁰ but as causal inferences are uncertain, we have no secure knowledge of outer objects. However, the causal argument is not a *sophisma figurae dictionis*, even though Kant has surely intended it to be one. For the middle term “cognition of objects which can be only causally inferred” is in no way ambiguous; the ambiguous term is rather “cognition of outer objects”. But while the argument is not a *sophisma figurae dictionis*, it is still a fallacy. For (2) is only true, on Kant’s account, if “cognition of outer objects” is read in the transcendental, but not the empirical sense; thus (2) needs qualification. Notwithstanding this, the conclusion, according to the traditional Cartesian, holds for *all* outer objects, including outer objects in the empirical sense. But this is invalid, and the conclusion is only true for outer objects in the transcendental sense.

²⁸ See A402, B411, *JL* 9:135.

²⁹ See Ameriks 2000, 111.

³⁰ By “causal inference”, I mean inferences that infer from effects to causes – for example, if we infer from the perception of a chair to the existence of the chair as the cause of the perception.

I now provide a reconstruction of what I take to be Kant's version of the causal argument. He holds that only transcendently outer objects need to be causally inferred, so the modified causal argument can be presented by replacing "outer objects" with "transcendently outer objects":

- (1) Cognition of objects that can be only causally inferred is never certain.
- (2*) Cognition of transcendently outer objects is cognition of objects that can be only causally inferred.
- (3*) Thus, cognition of transcendently outer objects is never certain.

This version of the causal argument only applies to KEP, as only knowledge of transcendently outer objects is now affected by the causal argument. It is this distinction which puts Kant in a position to overcome EP in its strict form while at the same time retaining the uncertainty of causal inferences. That he really accepts this version of the causal argument can be seen when we consider how he examines the alleged paralogism in the beginning of the Fourth Paralogism.

Kant begins his investigation (under the heading "Criticism of the fourth paralogism of transcendental psychology") with the sentence: "First we will subject the premises to examination." In A369, he begins the fourth paragraph of the section with: "Now before I display our paralogism in its deceptive illusion, I must first remark that one would necessarily have to distinguish a twofold idealism." This reveals two things: first, Kant does not aim to address the paralogistic fallacy in the first three paragraphs, but merely the examination of the premises independently of the validity of the argument. Second, Kant introduces the distinction of two kinds of outer objects and the corresponding distinction of two kinds of idealism (and realism) only in the fourth paragraph. When Kant uses the expressions "outside us" and "in us" shortly before, it is thus left to the reader to decide whether the meaning is transcendental or empirical.

We may now take a closer look at the first three paragraphs. The first paragraph reads in full:

First we will subject the premises to examination. We can rightly assert that only what is in ourselves can be immediately perceived, and that my own existence alone could be the object of a mere perception. Thus the existence of a real object outside me (if this last word is taken in an intellectual signification) is never given directly in perception, but can only be added in thought to what is a modification of inner sense as its external cause, and hence can only be inferred. Therefore Descartes also rightly limited all perception in the narrowest sense to the proposition "I (as a thinking being) am." Thus it is clear that since the external is not in me, I cannot encounter it in my apperception, hence not in any perception, which is properly only a determination of apperception.

Having in mind that Kant later states the immediacy of the cognition of outer appearances, it is very difficult not to get the impression that he is merely speaking on Descartes' behalf here.³¹ But this is not the case, as closer scrutiny reveals. For Kant says that he is *examining* and not exhibiting the premises. Consequently, he begins the second sentence by "We can rightly assert" and a later sentence by "Descartes also rightly". This is indeed an examination and not a presentation of Descartes' premises. But it is comprehensible how Kant can assent to Descartes' view that "only what is in ourselves can be immediately perceived" if we read "in ourselves" in the transcendental sense.³² Outer appearances are transcendently in us then, so they can be immediately perceived despite being spatial objects.

Likewise, the limitation of all perception to the proposition "I (as a thinking being) am" is correct for Kant because he seems to read "I am" not as the mere claim of my own existence, but as the claim that I am such-and-such constituted,³³ and because outer perceptions are states of my mind.³⁴ When Kant argues that outer appearances are immediately perceived, this might be considered inconsistent. But Kant says "a real object outside me (if this last word is taken in an intellectual signification) is never given directly in perception". Here Kant himself indicates by the parenthetical phrase "if this last word is taken in an intellectual signification" that he is considering outer objects as mind-transcendent objects.³⁵ It should come as no surprise that Kant even accepts the Cartesian claim that an outer object "can only be added in thought to what is a modification of inner sense as its external cause, and hence can only be inferred". Once again, Kant is not speaking about outer appearances, but mind-transcendent objects. So the immediacy of empirical cognition of outer objects is consistent with his restriction of all immediate knowledge to transcendently inner objects.

The next paragraph confirms Kant's general support of EP:

Thus I cannot really perceive external things, but only infer their existence from my inner perception, insofar as I regard this as the effect of which something external is the proximate cause. But now the inference from a given effect to its determinate cause is always

³¹ The claim that Kant is merely reporting Descartes in the first three paragraphs is explicitly held in Heimsoeth 1966, 130, and implicitly in Abela 2002, 30. However, this is rightly contested in Bird 1965, 21, and Chiba 2012, 168 n. 245. Kalter 1975, 158 f., argues that Kant's endorsement of EP is due to the alleged patchwork of the Fourth Paralogism. But he does not realize that Kant partly agrees with (his) Descartes.

³² See Chiba 2012, 166 f.

³³ See Kant's claim in the footnote to B422 that "I think" is an empirical proposition.

³⁴ Also see Kant's endorsement of the *Cogito, ergo sum* in A370.

³⁵ Note that this cannot be a report of Descartes because Descartes does not distinguish between different kinds of outer objects, at least in Kant's view.

uncertain, since the effect can have arisen from more than one cause. Accordingly, in the relation of perception to its cause, it always remains doubtful whether this cause is internal or external, thus whether all so-called outer perceptions are not a mere play of our inner sense, or whether they are related to actual external objects as their cause. At least the existence of the latter is only inferred, and runs the risk of all inferences; by contrast, the object of inner sense (I myself with all my representations) is immediately perceived, and its existence suffers no doubt at all.

Kant considers perceptions as effects that have a cause. But an effect “can have arisen from more than one cause”, which is why we cannot decide “whether this cause is internal or external”, i. e. whether an outer object or our imagination is the cause of a perception. Kant thus denies the possibility of knowledge through causal affection because we cannot get behind the effects. He thereby adopts a skeptical position.³⁶ Here “external” must again be understood in the transcendental sense. But at the same time he asserts the certainty of knowledge through inner sense. I take it that “inner sense” does not refer to the capacity of having representations through inner causes here, but stands for the sum-total of all representations, including outer ones.³⁷

There is then no obstacle to assigning the characterization of skeptical idealism in the third paragraph not only to Descartes, but also to Kant – albeit with the important qualification (which Kant adds later) that Descartes is an empirical idealist who takes cognition of empirical objects to be uncertain, whereas Kant is a transcendental idealist who accepts knowledge of empirical objects, but denies the possibility of knowledge of external objects in the transcendental sense:

By an *idealist*, therefore, one must understand not someone who denies the existence of external objects of sense, but rather someone who only does not admit that it is cognized through immediate perception and infers from this that we can never be fully certain of their reality from any possible experience.

In summary, Kant argues that we cannot reach beyond the content of our mind; however, empirical objects belong to that content, hence we can know them. This reveals that the meaning of the “transcendentally in us/outside us”-distinction is the same as that between “mind-immanent” and “mind-transcendent”. If empiri-

³⁶ Also see A372, where Kant argues that we could know transcendently outer objects only through doubtful causal inferences. This is why he says there that psychologists are consistent in giving great importance to empirical idealism as long as they “cling” to transcendental realism.

³⁷ “Inner sense” must thus be read in a transcendental way. See the discussion of the first objection in section 6.

cally outer objects were mind-transcendent, Kant could not assent to Descartes in the way he does. We can thus reformulate the causal argument as follows:

- (1) Cognition of objects that can be only causally inferred is never certain.
- (2**) Cognition of mind-transcendent objects is cognition of objects that can be only causally inferred.
- (3**) Thus, cognition of mind-transcendent objects is never certain.

As a result, Kant accepts epistemic phenomenalism.³⁸ This means that he does not deviate from traditional EP in regard of skepticism about mind-transcendent objects. As Kant identifies transcendently inner objects with appearances and transcendently outer objects with things in themselves (see the previous section), it also follows that phenomenalism about appearances is true: appearances are mind-immanent, and the only mind-transcendent objects are things in themselves. However, out of fairness to non-phenomenalist interpretations, I am willing to concede that it cannot be excluded without further considerations that Kant acknowledges mind-transcendent appearances in addition to mind-immanent ones; and even if one agrees that there are no mind-transcendent appearances in the A-edition of the *Critique*, one might argue that things are different in the B-edition. I will come back to it in section 6. Now we shall see that, despite KEP, Kant allows for a specific kind of knowledge of mind-transcendent objects, namely the indeterminate knowledge that some mind-transcendent objects exist and are the ground of mind-immanent objects.

4 Determinate and Indeterminate Knowledge

The central epistemological assertion of (K)EP is that we have no knowledge of mind-transcendent things, as an inference from an effect to its causes is uncertain in virtue of the fact that a cause is not determined through an effect. However, Kant does not say that we have no knowledge of mind-transcendent objects whatsoever. For we can still have *indeterminate* knowledge of them:

³⁸ In contrast to most interpreters, Beiser 2002, 64, and Chiba 2012, 168, 196–98, recognize that the Cartesian causal argument affects appearances as well if they are thought as mind-transcendent. Whereas Beiser's Kant construes appearances out of perceptions, Chiba sees a problem for Kant's empirical realism in his epistemic phenomenalism. However, this worry is unnecessary if empirical objects are mind-immanent.

If I posit a consequence, then it is also posited that there must be a ground, but the ground is never determined; but if I posit a ground, the consequence is exactly determined [...]. Now the question arises: Cannot I also conclude from the consequence, e. g., [...] if a human being loses the head, then he is dead; a human being is dead, but I cannot therefore say: Consequently, the human lost the head. Through a ground, a consequence is posited determinately; the consequence posits the ground indeterminately.³⁹

At least in this context, “grounds” are causes and “consequences” effects.⁴⁰ That a ground posits a consequence determinately means that, if something is the ground of something else, then the consequence is necessitated by the ground.⁴¹ If I thus know that somebody lost her head and that losing one’s head causes death, I know she is dead. But the converse does not hold: a consequence does not necessitate a determinate ground. So if I know that something is a consequence, I merely know that there is some ground, but I cannot determine it. Someone is dead, but I do not know the cause of her death with certainty – she could have also died by hanging, by illness, and so on. Thus, if I am causally affected by outer objects, I do not know the cause of the affection.⁴² Nonetheless, the consequence necessitates an *indeterminate* ground. This means that there is necessarily a ground if there is a consequence, and I know this even though I have

39 C 11, n. 40, *Metaphysics Volckmann* 28:401 f., see *Metaphysics v. Schön* 28:486, *Metaphysics L2* 28:552, *Metaphysics Dohna* 28:628, *Metaphysics Mrongovius* 29:818.

40 Kant distinguishes between logical and real grounds as well as between logical and real consequences, and it cannot be taken from the quote in which sense the terms “ground” and “consequence” are used. However, at the beginning of the section from which the quote is taken, Kant says that logical grounds are dealt with elsewhere, namely in his lectures on logic (see *Metaphysics Volckmann* 28:399). At the same time, Kant identifies real grounds with causes and he would probably equally identify real consequences with effects (see *Metaphysics Volckmann* 28:399 f., also *Metaphysics L2* 28:549). All occurrences of “ground” and “consequence” in this quote could hence be replaced by “cause” and “effect”.

41 A cause “determines” an effect if it is the sufficient ground of it. Determinations are (positive or negative) properties of a thing (see, e. g. *Metaphysics Herder* 28:23 f.), and they are the effect of causation. Thus, I take it that a cause determines a thing iff it effects determinations in it. Determinate knowledge can then be understood as knowledge of the determinations of a thing, whereas in the case of indeterminate knowledge we have no knowledge of concrete determinations, but only know that there is something that affects us and is thereby the cause of determinations.

42 The epistemic and the metaphysical issues are connected by the a priori/a posteriori distinction. To know something from grounds means to know it a priori, and to know something from consequences means to know it a posteriori. It is now easy to see why knowledge a priori has the necessity that knowledge a posteriori can never reach. For through a ground a determinate consequence is posited, but through a consequence merely an indeterminate ground is posited. See Smit 2009 for further discussion of the a priori/a posteriori distinction.

no further knowledge of the ground. Hence, my knowledge of transcendently outer objects is not nonexistent, but indeterminate. This gives rise to a new reformulation of the causal argument:

- (1*) Determinate cognition of objects that can be only causally inferred is never certain.
- (2***) Determinate cognition of mind-transcendent objects is determinate cognition of objects that can be only causally inferred.
- (3***) Thus, determinate cognition of mind-transcendent objects is never certain.

KEP can also be formulated in a more precise way:

Kantian epistemic phenomenalism:

- a) Cognition of empirically inner objects can be certain.
- b) Cognition of empirically outer objects can be certain.
- c) *Determinate* cognition of transcendently outer objects is necessarily uncertain, whereas indeterminate cognition can be certain.

The possibility of indeterminate knowledge of mind-transcendent things reveals that Kant's commitment to things in themselves does not violate KEP. He says, for instance, that he "by all means avow[s] that there are bodies outside us, i. e. things which, though completely unknown to us as to what they may be in themselves, we know through the representations which their influence on our sensibility provides for us" (Prol 4, 289). Or he argues that "it also follows naturally from the concept of an appearance in general that something must correspond to it which is not in itself appearance" (A251), which gives rise to "the concept of a *noumenon*,⁴³ which, however, is not at all positive and does not signify a *determinate* cognition of any sort of thing, but rather only the thinking of *something in general*" (A252, second and third emphasis mine). Kant's argument is thus that appearances are the effect of a mind-transcendent cause (at least mediately), so we have indeterminate knowledge of things in themselves.⁴⁴

⁴³ I take it for granted that the noumenon (in the negative sense) is the same as the thing in itself.

⁴⁴ My account may seem similar to Rae Langton's interpretation of the appearance/thing in itself-distinction (see Langton 1998). However, there is an important difference. According to Langton, the unknowability of things in themselves follows from the irreducibility of relations to intrinsic properties. As forces are relations, she argues that they cannot be reduced to intrinsic properties, and therefore the cause must remain unknown. But although I generally agree with her irreducibility claim, I think that the unknowability of mind-transcendent things does not straightforwardly follow from it. For if we knew the ground of a force and the interacting forces, then we would know what is necessitated by it; in this case we would know the consequence despite the irreducibility of forces. Only once we add that we are never acquainted with more

5 The Inner and Outer as Concepts of Reflection

The concepts of reflection of the inner and outer give support to an ontologically phenomenalist reading of the transcendently in us/outside us-distinction. As Kant explains the concepts of reflection of the inner and outer, “that is internal that has no relation (as far as the existence is concerned) to anything that is different from it [i. e., from a determinate object]” (A265/B321).⁴⁵ In turn, the outer is that which has a relation to something different from a given object, or is perhaps itself a relation, such as forces or spatial relations. These concepts of reflection are applicable to all kinds of objects, including non-spatial ones (such as souls or things in themselves); so an outer object in the sense of the concept of reflection is different from an empirically outer object in space. Although Kant does not explicitly make a connection between the concepts of reflection and the transcendently in us/outside us-distinction, the latter is apparently a specification of the former. Then appearances would be transcendently in us because they belong to the inner of the soul (according to the concept of reflection).⁴⁶ Things in themselves, on the contrary, would be transcendently outside us because they are objects different from the soul and thus outer (equally according to the concept of reflection).

The following passage from the Fourth Paralogism suggests that this is indeed the transcendental sense according to which appearances are “in us”:

If we let outer objects count as things in themselves, then it is absolutely impossible to comprehend how we are to acquire cognition of their reality outside us, since we base this merely on the representation, which is in us. For one cannot have sensation outside oneself, but only in oneself, and the whole of self-consciousness therefore provides nothing other than merely our own determinations. Skeptical idealism thus requires us to take the only refuge remaining to us, namely to grasp the ideality of all appearances, which we have already established in the Transcendental Aesthetic [...]. (A378)

than the effects of forces and that a ground cannot be determined through effects, do we have sufficient warrant for the claim that no determinate empirical knowledge of the affecting object is possible.

⁴⁵ See Longuenesse 1998, 140–7. To be sure, Kant says this only about an “object of the pure understanding” and not about appearances. But, in fact, he appears to make two claims: first, an inner determination is that which has no relation to outer objects; second, objects of the pure understanding do have inner determinations (in contrast to phenomenal substances). For this reason, the distinction of the inner and outer is not restricted to pure objects of the understanding.

⁴⁶ One might object that space is relational and thus not transcendently inner. However, this would mean to conflate the content of representations with representations themselves. Spatial relations as the content of representations are certainly outer determinations, but those representations themselves are inner. The same holds for forces.

Kant argues that we are only conscious of our own “determinations”, so we cannot have knowledge of (transcendentally) outer things. If (empirically) outer objects were things in themselves (outer objects in the transcendental sense), we could have no knowledge of them. But as they are in fact appearances (inner objects in the transcendental sense), we can have knowledge of them.⁴⁷

I would like to stress two points here. First, the fact that Kant attributes an evidential role to our inability to be conscious of objects beyond our own determinations reveals that we cannot have knowledge of appearances unless they are part of our own determinations. Therefore, the transcendently in us/outside us-distinction is clearly a specification of the transcendental concepts of reflection “inner” and “outer”. This in turn shows that a phenomenalist interpretation of the transcendently in us/outside us-distinction must be adopted. Second, it has been generally overlooked by commentators that Kant is mentioning “skeptical idealism” partly in the affirmative here. For skeptical idealism forces us to “grasp the ideality of all appearances”. Kant does not say that skeptical idealism is simply misguided; then it would have no force and could be ignored. Rather, skeptical idealism is correct with regard to things in themselves, so we must give up any hope to cognize things in themselves and “take the only refuge remaining to us”, namely appearances.⁴⁸ This shows that Kant does not substantially deviate from traditional EP.

6 The Ultimate Challenge: the Refutation of Idealism

Kant’s Refutation of Idealism (in the version of the second edition of the *Critique* at least) is usually understood to the effect that he wants to prove the actuality of mind-transcendent appearances.⁴⁹ And some interpreters are willing to agree

⁴⁷ Another passage that suggests that transcendently outer objects are outside us in the sense of the concept of reflection is in *MM* 6:245, where Kant distinguishes outer objects that are different from the subject from empirically outer objects that are in a different place.

⁴⁸ This seems to be the deeper reason for why Kant calls the skeptical idealist a “benefactor to human reason” (A377) and says that “problematic idealism” (which is the same as skeptical idealism) is “rational and appropriate for a thorough philosophical manner of thought” (B275). The skeptic forces us to investigate of which objects we can have knowledge; and it turns out, in Kant’s view, that we can have knowledge of appearances, but not of things in themselves.

⁴⁹ See Guyer 1987, 282, 290–92; Heidemann 1998, 113; Allison 2004, 300 f.; Ameriks 2006, 74; Hanna 2006, 44 f., 51; Caranti 2007, 126; Bader 2012. Beiser, by contrast, considers the aim in

that Kant is close to phenomenalism in the Fourth Paralogism of the A-edition, but insist that this is completely different in the B-edition.⁵⁰ This is the ultimate challenge for everybody who denies that Kant believes in mind-transcendent appearances – she must either show that the Refutation of Idealism aims at something different, or that it at least does not harm KEP. I want to turn the tables – instead of saying that the Refutation of Idealism shows that KEP is false, KEP supports a reading to the contrary: while Kant’s proof establishes the actuality of mind-transcendent objects, he makes merely an existence claim about them, so that it is at least possible that those objects are things in themselves.

My strategy shall be a strategy of disentanglement, and of arguing that Kant aims at a two-step proof in the Refutation.⁵¹ It is usually assumed that Kant wants to prove the existence of objects which are a) spatial, and b) mind-transcendent. If this were true, supporters of KEP were in serious troubles. For it would then be very difficult to defend that we cannot have determinate knowledge of mind-transcendent empirical objects. According to my interpretation, however, this rests on a conflation. On the first step, Kant’s claim is that there are objects which are spatial, but not mind-transcendent. Then he goes on to argue that those representations of spatial objects entail the existences of some mind-transcendent objects. But the proof does not show anything about them beyond their existence. Unfortunately, the Refutation is very complex and difficult; a full discussion of it cannot be given here, but close attention to some crucial passages and aspects is needed so as to show that the standard interpretation is mistaken.

To start with, we should note that Kant’s aim of proof in the Refutation of the B-edition of the *Critique* is different from that in the Fourth Paralogism of the A-edition. In the Fourth Paralogism, Kant argues that, in order to refute skeptical idealism, it is sufficient to show that we have immediate perceptions of outer objects, and no proof is required for that. But those outer objects, and the space in

spatial objects that are only formally distinct from perceptions, so they are mind-immanent (see Beiser 2002, 106, 117).

⁵⁰ See Guyer 1987, 280–83, and the references mentioned in Beiser 2002, 607 n. 5.

⁵¹ I am not the first to suggest a two-step reading of the Refutation. Based on the distinction of *apparentia* and *phaenomenon* as two kinds of appearances, Ralf Bader argues that the first step of the proof consists in showing that we have outer representations, and then the second step proceeds to claim that we can only have mind-immanent outer representations by virtue of mind-transcendent phenomena (see Bader 2012, 56–60). Also, he holds that, as phenomena are dependent on noumena, the Refutation in effect proves the existence of things in themselves (see Bader 2012, 69–71). However, he does not consider the possibility that phenomena are just another kind of mental representation and that the outer objects of our representations could be things in themselves, so that they are directly the ground of outer representations.

which they exist, are transcendently inner.⁵² If my interpretation of the empirical/transcendental-distinction is correct, then our determinate knowledge is restricted to the content of our mind. It should then come as no surprise that Kant makes the following note in his exemplar of the A-edition:

Pure idealism concerns the existence of things outside us. Critical idealism *leaves that undecided*, and asserts only that the form of their intuition is merely in us. (E XXVI, 23:23, emphasis mine)

Kant thus admits that we must leave the existence of “things outside us” undecided (which must most probably be understood in the transcendental sense), and this comes at least close to skeptical idealism. In any case, Kant must have seen a shortcoming in the Fourth Paralogism’s treatment of the issue, and, in fact, his account there runs counter to his explicit commitment to things in themselves that he even in the A-edition has (see section 3). It is thus no wonder that he pursues a more ambitious goal in the Refutation of the B-edition. However, it is crucial that, on Kant’s own view, the Refutation lacks clarity. For he not only advises the reader in an extremely long footnote in the preface to the B-edition to make a textual emendation, but also discusses a crucial question in it (to which we come later) of which he implicitly admits that it has not been treated adequately in the Refutation.

In approaching the Refutation, the first question should be: does Kant still endorse KEP? The answer is yes, as there is textual evidence for it (at least in part) even in the Refutation itself:

From the fact that the existence of outer objects is required for the possibility of a determinate consciousness of our self it does not follow that every intuitive representation of outer things includes at the same time their existence, for that may well be the mere effect of the imagination (in dreams as well as in delusions) [...]. (B278)

Here and elsewhere in the time of and after the Refutation,⁵³ Kant maintains that causal inferences are uncertain. However, he no longer says that this leads to idealism. This is no coincidence: he wants to prove the existence of mind-transcendent things in spite of his epistemic phenomenalism. But this is consistent with the latest version of KEP, and there is no indication that Kant now thinks that we can have determinate knowledge of mind-transcendent objects. This suggests that he

⁵² See, e. g. A375.

⁵³ See *Refl* 5653 18:306; *Refl* 6313 18:614 f.; *Refl* 6315 18:619 f. (The datings of the reflections are taken from Adickes.)

does not abandon KEP in the context of the Refutation, so we should try to find an interpretation of the Refutation that is consistent with KEP.

The “theorem” and “proof” of the Refutation read as follows:

Theorem

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

Proof

I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. All time-determination presupposes something *persistent* in perception. This persistent, however, cannot be something in me, since my own existence in time can first be determined only through this persistent. Thus the perception of this persistent is possible only through a *thing* outside me and not through the mere *representation* of a thing outside me. Now consciousness in time is necessarily combined with the consciousness of the possibility of this time-determination: Therefore it is also necessarily combined with the existence of the things outside me, as the condition of time-determination; i. e., the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me. (B275 f., translation modified⁵⁴)

The astute reader will note immediately that the theorem does not qualify the expression “outside me”, so that it is undetermined if the “objects in space” are supposed to be empirically or transcendently outside me. Although the theorem is usually read as providing support for mind-transcendent appearances, the proof of “the existence of objects in space outside me” is entirely in line with the Fourth Paralogism, given that spatial objects are mind-immanent. However, what may suggest an interpretation in favour of mind-transcendent appearances, is the fact that Kant now gives a proof for objects in space. In the Fourth Paralogism, Kant argued that I just perceive outer objects immediately, and no extra-proof is required. As he now gives a proof, does this not mean that the proof must have a more ambitious goal than the mere existence of outer representations?

But this is not at all the case, at least not with regard to the first step. Some complications aside, the Fourth Paralogism failed to account for the difference between outer perception and mere imagination of outer objects.⁵⁵ Kant now

⁵⁴ The Guyer/Wood-translation translates “das Beharrliche” with “the persistent thing”. However, this may suggest that Kant is talking about mind-transcendent things, so I opted for the more neutral “the persistent”.

⁵⁵ In the Fourth Paralogism, Kant provides a coherentist criterion in order to distinguish illusion from reality (see A376). But if both real objects and illusory representations are in space and being in space is sufficient for actuality, then the coherentist criterion fails.

wants to improve on this, and his approach turns on the idea that perception and imagination are formally different, albeit subjectively indistinguishable:⁵⁶

According to idealism, it is not possible to distinguish whether an object is given together with the representation (of that object) when it is represented as existing outside me in intuition. – Against this the realist of outer intuition argues that it is possible, and rightly so for the following reason. What I represent as spatial cannot belong to the representation of inner sense, for the form of inner sense is time, which has only one dimension. Likewise, I cannot make what is mere representation into an object of outer sense, since the form of outer sense is space. (*Refl* 6315 18:620 f., 1790–1, translation mine, see *Refl* 6312 18: 613; *Refl* 6315 18:618)⁵⁷

Kant's claim is that only representations that have outer causes can have the form of outer intuition, namely space. Representations which only seem to be of outer objects do not have the form of space because they have an inner cause and their only form is time.⁵⁸ So he distinguishes between “outer sense” and “imagination”.⁵⁹ This sheds new light on the proof: Kant must show that we really have outer sense, for we cannot determine it directly. Hence he writes in the Refutation:

The proof that is demanded must therefore establish that we have *experience* and not merely *imagination* of outer things. (B275)

The *immediate* consciousness of the existence of outer things is not presupposed but proved in the preceding theorem, whether we have insight into the possibility of this consciousness or not. (B276 f. n.)

In both passages, as well as in the last sentence of the official proof of the Refutation, Kant identifies the aim of proof with the existence of the immediate consciousness (or experience) of outer things, and not with the existence of (transcendentally) outer things (though the latter is entailed by the former). In accordance with that, the “objects in space outside me” that are mentioned in the

⁵⁶ See McLearn 2017, 99 f.

⁵⁷ Immediately after that Kant argues that we can only determine through arguments whether a given intuitive representation of outer objects is outer perception or mere imagination. So they are subjectively indistinguishable.

⁵⁸ One might wonder how outer perceptions and mere imaginations can be subjectively indistinguishable, given that the former have the form of space and the latter not, and how mere imaginations can seem to be spatial without in fact having the form of space. I think it would be difficult for Kant to give an adequate response to these objections, but see McLearn 2017 for a defense.

⁵⁹ See Bxl n., Bxli n., B276 f., *Anthr* 7.161, *Refl* 6315 18:618–21.

theorem should be read in the empirical sense, and then they are the objects of the immediate consciousness of outer things.

However, Kant wants to draw a further inference from that, and in the long footnote from the preface he implicitly acknowledges that his treatment of the issue in the Refutation is unsatisfying:

Against this proof one will perhaps say: I am immediately conscious to myself only of what is in me, i. e., of my *representation* of external things; consequently it still remains undecided whether there is something outside me corresponding to it or not. (Bxl n.)

Kant discusses an objection against his refutation here: you may have proved that we have external representations, but those are transcendently in me, and you still owe us an argument for why there must be transcendently outer objects corresponding to our representations.⁶⁰ Although the existence of mind-transcendent objects follows analytically from Kant's definition of outer representations (if their presence is granted), this is not explicitly addressed in the Refutation, at least not in the proof. As a result, he goes on to explain at great length why there must be something corresponding to at least some of my representations. To be sure, Kant repeats much of what is already contained in the Refutation, but he also says that "outer sense is already in itself a relation of intuition to something actual outside me" (Bxl), and by "something actual outside me" he apparently means something mind-transcendent. So the second step is trivial, and yet needs to be mentioned.

Now to the crucial question: what is the mind-transcendent object – an empirical object in space and time or a thing in itself? I do not intend to determine the ontological status of mind-transcendent objects here, though I think that there is some textual evidence for things in themselves.⁶¹ But I want to show that such a reading is compatible with the Refutation and, more significantly, that the Refutation does not require determinate cognition of mind-transcendent objects.

To begin with, Kant merely makes an existence claim. He claims that mind-transcendent objects exist, not that we have determinate knowledge of them. As we have seen, according to KEP we cannot have determinate, but only indeterminate knowledge of mind-transcendent objects; and we have also seen that the possibility of indeterminate knowledge of mind-transcendent objects is required

⁶⁰ Caranti 2007, 147, misconceives the objection as questioning what is in fact already granted, namely the reality of the persistent. Heidemann 1998, 158, on the contrary, objects to Kant that the persistent could also be a persistent representation in me. But it is just Kant's claim that the persistent is transcendently in me.

⁶¹ See *Ref1* 5363 18:305, *Ref1* 6315 18:618 f.

by Kant's claim to the existence of things in themselves. Thus, the Refutation allows for knowledge of the existence of things in themselves.⁶²

Next, Kant's claim that the proof that "the perception of this persistent is possible only through a *thing* outside me and not through the mere *representation* of a thing outside me" may suggest that the contrast between representation and thing shows that Kant is talking about mind-transcendent empirical objects here. But most readers apparently do not consider the possibility that the outer things could be things in themselves. If they are things in themselves, there is no need for mind-transcendent appearances.

Finally, Kant seems to argue that the "persistent" must be something external to our representations, and if the persistent is not in our representations, it can be only in a mind-transcendent empirical object. For he says that the "persistent [...] cannot be something in me" (B275, see Bxl, Bxli). Later he modifies this passage such that the "persisting element cannot be an intuition in me", and adds that we need something persisting distinct from our representations (Bxxxix). In response, it has frequently been pointed out that the Refutation is tightly connected to the General Note on the System of Principles.⁶³ There, Kant claims that we need "an intuition in space" in order to have an intuition of something persistent (B291), and in the Transcendental Aesthetics he remarks that "the representations of outer sense make up the proper material with which we occupy our mind", so that representations in space precede those in time (B67). Kant thus argues that we need something persistent in our *representations*. In accordance with that, he says in the proof that we need "something persistent in *perception*" (my emphasis) (B275, see B278). For this reason, we should read the claim that the persistent cannot be "something in me", or "an intuition in me", and must be "something distinct" from my representations in the empirical sense: the persistent is not empirically in me, but empirically outside me. But then the persistent can be transcendentially in me, so there is no need for mind-transcendent empirical objects.⁶⁴

⁶² Needless to say that all interpretations I know disagree with me on that. See, e.g. Caranti 2007, 145–47.

⁶³ See Guyer 1987, 305–16, Heidemann 1998, 141–60, Caranti 2007, 138–44.

⁶⁴ Against this, it might be objected that Kant emphasizes the distinction between a "representation of something persisting in existence" and a "persisting representation" (Bxli). However, it would be wrong to read it as the distinction between something persisting that is mind-transcendent and a representation of something persisting. Not the latter, but the former is a representation of something persisting; a persisting representation is a mental state, regardless of its content.

7 Objections

There are of course some objections that readers might have.

First objection: Though it is generally agreed that Kant regards inner and outer knowledge as equally immediate in the A-edition of the *Critique*,⁶⁵ he argues in the B-edition that outer sense has primacy over inner sense.⁶⁶ This is at odds with the restriction of “all perception in the narrowest sense” to the proposition “I (as a thinking being) am” (see section 2), which reveals that Kant drops KEP in the B-edition.

This objection rests on a conflation of inner states in the empirical and in the transcendental sense. When Kant says that inner knowledge is not immediate, “inner” is probably used in the empirical sense; and when he restricts our perception to states of our mind, “inner” is most likely used in the transcendental sense. The mediacy of inner cognition is hence consistent with KEP.

Second objection: Kant accepts probabilistic knowledge (i. e., knowledge that something is true by a certain degree of probability) of mind-transcendent objects. For he has a coherentist criterion of actuality in order to distinguish reality from illusion: according to the postulate of actuality, actual is “which is connected with the material conditions of experience”.⁶⁷ This is a probabilistic criterion in order to determine the predicates of actually existing outer things. So we can have determinate knowledge of mind-transcendent things, albeit only by a certain degree of probability.

This rests on a misunderstanding of the postulate of actuality, which is a criterion of an entirely different kind, namely a criterion to decide if a representation has objective reality, i. e. if there is a corresponding object. For, if one investigates whether something is actual, one already takes some determined representations as given and considers only if they have a corresponding object or not, without determining their properties.⁶⁸ The mere fact that a representation has a corre-

⁶⁵ See A370 f.

⁶⁶ See B67–9, B276–8, B291–4.

⁶⁷ A218/B266, see also B278 f., A376.

⁶⁸ According to Kant, “the categories of modality have this peculiarity: as a determination of the object they do not augment the concept to which they are ascribed in the least, but rather express only the relation to the faculty of cognition. If the concept of a thing is already entirely complete, I can still ask about this object whether it is merely possible, or also actual, or, if it is the latter, whether it is also necessary? No further determinations in the object itself are hereby thought [...]”. (A219/B266) Hence, a criterion for actuality already presupposes a determinate representation of a thing.

sponding object does not entail anything about the object's properties.⁶⁹ The postulate of actuality is hence a criterion for indeterminate and not for determinate knowledge of the existence of mind-transcendent objects, which poses no difficulty for KEP.

Third objection: Affection is the process through which outer objects are given to us.⁷⁰ This is characterized as causal in this paper. But affection cannot be causal because the affecting things are things in themselves, causality is a category, and categories cannot be applied to things in themselves.⁷¹

I agree that things in themselves affect us, but argue that the objection is not compelling. First, it is wrong that we cannot apply categories to things in themselves; we only cannot do this so as to have synthetic knowledge of them because intuition would be required. But no intuition of things in themselves is required to have indeterminate knowledge of them.⁷² Second, even if noumenal causality were at odds with Kant's restriction of the use of categories, it would be a problem for Kant and not for my interpretation, as he clearly understands affection in a causal way.⁷³

Fourth objection: Kant is a relationist about perception who thinks that perception is a direct relation to outer objects. It may be admitted that our empirical knowledge is mediated by sensations. But although empirical knowledge is "causally mediate", it is at the same time "psychologically immediate". Thus, while Kant may accept epistemic phenomenalism, the uncertainty of causal inferences is no obstacle to knowledge of mind-transcendent objects because we have direct intuition of them.

The problem about this objection is that Kant clearly presents KEP not only as an obstacle to knowledge from causal inferences, but as an obstacle to knowledge of mind-transcendent objects in general. Otherwise he could not have assented to Descartes, and skeptical idealism would not force us to restrict our empirical knowledge to appearances. Furthermore, we would expect him to be explicit about the distinction between causal mediacy and psychological immediacy in

⁶⁹ At this point one might object that it is just clear how the object must be constituted, namely in such a way as we are affected by it, or as we represent it. But, according to KEP, we cannot infer from the properties of a representation to the properties of its object. So the objection already presupposes the falsehood of KEP. Moreover, Kant argues that a cause does not need to be equal to the effect (see *Metaphysics Herder* 28.39, *Metaphysics L2* 28:573).

⁷⁰ See A68/B93, B129, A253/B309.

⁷¹ See, for instance, Paton 1936, 62, Longuenesse 1998, 22 n. 11.

⁷² See Ameriks 2000: xxiii–xxx, or Chignell 2010 for related accounts.

⁷³ See B1, A197/B234, A278/B334, A372, A393, A494/B522.

connection with KEP if he adhered to it; but he says nothing about it. So there is no warrant for the claim that Kant believes we can entertain a psychologically immediate relation to mind-transcendent objects.

8 What Could Be the Results for Kant's Transcendental Idealism?

If my arguments so far are successful, we have reached two important epistemic results: first, Kant denies the possibility of determinate knowledge of mind-transcendent objects; second, at the same time he accepts the possibility of indeterminate knowledge of mind-transcendent objects. But what are the ontological consequences of it? What does follow from it for the understanding of things in themselves and appearances? I cannot deal with it in this paper as the results are not straightforward, and so far I have been more or less neutral on it. But I shall give some indications for what might be the outcome of further research.

The discussion of the causal argument for (K)EP has shown that there must be mind-immanent appearances, or at least some kind of sense-data as the immediate result of affection. This rules out relationist approaches to Kant, according to which we directly perceive mind-transcendent empirical objects. For they deny that we have mental content that could not be analyzed in terms of relations to mind-transcendent objects.⁷⁴

The other crucial question concerns the existence of mind-transcendent appearances. The challenge for those who believe in mind-transcendent appearances is that KEP has shown that we could not have any determinate knowledge of them. Phenomenalists about appearances simply deny the existence of mind-transcendent appearances, so they are well off. However, it is also possible to reconcile KEP with mind-transcendent appearances as long as one accepts that one cannot have determinate knowledge of them. This may seem particularly attractive to some versions of metaphysical two-aspect interpretations (which think that there is a metaphysical appearance- and in-itself-aspect of numerically identical things). For example, in Rosefeldt 2007 it is argued that the appearance-aspect consists in dispositions to appear to us in a certain way, and as we have no knowledge of the categorical bases of the dispositions, this may be considered consistent with KEP. But it is not in principle impossible for proponents of

⁷⁴ See Robinson (1994), Allais (2004, 2007) and McLear 2016, also Collins (1999).

methodological two-aspect or two-world interpretations to meet the restrictions imposed by KEP as well.⁷⁵

- Anthr *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*
 C *Correspondence*
 FICJ First Introduction to the *Critique of Judgement*
 JL *Jäsche Logic*
 MM *Metaphysics of Morals*
 OP *Opus Postumum*
 ProI *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*
 Refl *Reflexionen* from Kant's *Handschriftlicher Nachlaß*. In *Akademieausgabe*, vol. 14–19.

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