

## Kant and Mendelssohn about Idealism

**Roberto Horácio de Sá Pereira**

Distinguished Professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro/Brazil  

<https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/kant.100970>

Received: 15-02-2025 • Accepted: 30-08-2025

**ENG Abstract:** This paper aims to reconstruct Kant's *Refutation of Idealism* as a successful world-directed transcendental argument against Mendelssohn's "problematic idealism." Mendelssohn's problematic idealism arises from both a metaphysical and an epistemological doctrine that has an undeniable Cartesian root. Metaphysically, he assumes what we may call a "commonsense realist" view: that appearances outside our mind in space are, in themselves, material in nature, just as appearances within our mind are, in themselves, mental in nature (a position he refers to as "dualism"). Epistemologically, Mendelssohn holds that there is a fundamental hiatus between the material and mental worlds, since the inference from our internal representations to the purported external material things they supposedly copy is, at best, problematic—this is what we refer to as "indirect realism." Kant's *Refutation* challenges both aspects of this view. On the epistemological level, Kant argues that we have direct awareness of the existence of external material things in space. On the metaphysical level, he claims that the ultimate nature of external things is neither material nor mental but consists instead of mind-independent things-in-themselves—noumena in the negative sense. However, Kant's argument can only succeed as a world-directed transcendental argument if it is able to establish the truth of a persistent mind-independent thing in itself is a necessary condition for the conscious of our existence determined in time.

**Keywords:** Problematic Idealism; Transcendental Idealism; Refutation of Idealism; Transcendental Arguments.

**Summary:** Opening Remarks. 1. Mendelssohn's Dualism. 2. Searching for an Argument. 3. A Sketch of the logical form. 4. The Refutation of Mendelssohn. 5. Stroud-style Objections. 6. A Successful World-Direct TA. Works of Kant. References.

**How to cite:** Horácio de Sá Pereira, R. (2025). Kant and Mendelssohn about Idealism. *Con-Textos Kantianos. International Journal of Philosophy*, 22, 39-51.

## Kant und Mendelssohn über den Idealismus

**Zusammenfassung:** Dieses Papier zielt darauf ab, Kants Widerlegung des Idealismus als ein erfolgreiches weltgerichtetes transzendentes Argument gegen Mendelssohns „problematischen Idealismus“ zu rekonstruieren. Mendelssohns problematischer Idealismus ergibt sich sowohl aus einer metaphysischen als auch aus einer epistemologischen Doktrin, die unbestreitbar eine kartesianische Wurzel hat. Metaphysisch geht er von einer Ansicht aus, die wir als „common-sense realistisch“ bezeichnen können: dass Erscheinungen außerhalb unseres Geistes im Raum in sich selbst materieller Natur sind, ebenso wie Erscheinungen in unserem Geist in sich selbst mentaler Natur sind (eine Position, die er als „Dualismus“ bezeichnet). Epistemologisch vertritt Mendelssohn die Auffassung, dass es eine grundlegende Kluft zwischen der materiellen und der mentalen Welt gibt, da die Schlussfolgerung von unseren internen Repräsentationen auf die angeblich externen materiellen Dinge, die sie möglicherweise kopieren, bestenfalls problematisch ist – dies bezeichnen wir als „indirekten Realismus“. Kants Widerlegung stellt beide Aspekte dieser Sichtweise in Frage. Auf epistemologischer Ebene argumentiert Kant, dass wir ein direktes Bewusstsein von der Existenz externer materieller Dinge im Raum haben. Auf metaphysischer Ebene behauptet er, dass die letztendliche Natur externer Dinge weder materiell noch mental ist, sondern aus geistesunabhängigen Dingen an sich besteht – Noumena im negativen Sinne. Kants Argument kann jedoch nur als weltgerichtetes transzendentes Argument erfolgreich sein, wenn es in der Lage ist, die Wahrheit eines anhaltenden geistesunabhängigen Dings an sich als notwendige Bedingung für das Bewusstsein unserer Existenz, die in der Zeit bestimmt ist, zu etablieren.

**Schlüsselbegriffe:** Problematischer Idealismus; Transzendentaler Idealismus; Widerlegung des Idealismus; Transzendente Argumente.

## Opening Remarks

Idealism has not been a central focus of mainstream analytic philosophy for quite some time, as many philosophers regard it as implausible. Indeed, the so-called “analytic” tradition emerged from Moore and Russell’s break with British idealism. However, in recent years, there has been a renewed interest in idealism, particularly within the philosophy of mind. Scholars such as Bolender (2001), Foster (2008), Kastrup (2017), and Pelczar (2015)—to name just a few—have defended various forms of idealism. Notably, contemporary versions of idealism are often discussed in connection with the mind-body problem, particularly in relation to panpsychism. In this context, idealism can be understood as a form of metaphysical monism that posits the fundamental nature of reality (particles) as both mental and physical simultaneously. However, in contrast to this stance, Kant assumes a neutral position: he argues that human knowledge is limited to relational or structural properties as disclosed by science, while the intrinsic properties of reality (quiddities) remain fundamentally unknowable.

Kant’s primary concern in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* was addressing two other forms of idealism. In response to Feder and Garve’s review (2000), which accused him of merely reviving Berkeley’s idealism, Kant specifically addresses Berkeley’s position in the Transcendental Aesthetic (see B374). Arguably, this is why Guyer (1987) has suggested that Kant’s transcendental idealism is a sophisticated version of Berkeleyan idealism: for Kant, the external object is understood as nothing more than the unity of representations structured according to rules.

However, Kant himself does not acknowledge any Berkeleyan roots in his transcendental idealism, largely because he misinterprets Berkeley’s idealism as eliminativist, whereas it is, in fact, a form of reductionism.<sup>1</sup> But is this metaphysical reductionist interpretation of Kant’s transcendental idealism correct? I do not believe so. First, Kant explicitly and vehemently rejects this accusation in several passages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Second, there exists a straightforward alternative interpretation of Kant’s idealism—particularly as articulated in the Fourth Paralogism of the first edition of the *Critique*—which presents Kant’s position in a way that avoids the metaphysical reductionist reading. I have developed this alternative reading in detail elsewhere, but I cannot elaborate on it further here.

Nonetheless, the most insidious form of idealism remains unaddressed: the Cartesian “skeptical” or “problematic” idealism. This form of idealism is the primary target of the addendum to the second edition of the *Critique*, interpolated into the chapter on the Postulates of Empirical Thinking in General, the *Refutation of Idealism* (B275–279). In his brief introduction to the *Refutation of Idealism*, Kant attributes this problematic or skeptical idealism to Descartes’s rationalism (see B375).

Indeed, there is no doubt that, according to Descartes’s *Meditations*, our epistemic access to external objects is mediated by our prior access to representations of those objects—a position we refer to as the epistemological doctrine of “indirect realism.” Prior to the Cartesian proof of God’s existence, this mediated access to the external world is characterized as “problematic.” However, a historical issue arises here. Firstly, there is no concrete evidence that Kant engaged directly with Descartes’s works. It is arguable that Kant was familiar with Descartes through the rationalist German tradition. Additionally, it is important to consider that Descartes consistently shifts his positions throughout the *Meditations*, a process he refers to as the “order of reasons.” For instance, by the conclusion of the First *Meditation*, Descartes arrives at a level of global skepticism regarding all our beliefs that by far surpasses what Kant describes as a “problematic” stance toward knowledge of the external world. In contrast, by the end of the *Meditations*, after establishing the existence of God, Descartes abandons any semblance of idealism, affirming instead a robust realism about the external world (see, De Sá Pereira, 2020).

At first glance, it is difficult to identify who precisely embodies the “problematic idealist” targeted by Kant. Corey W. Dyck (2011) has persuasively argued that, even without explicitly naming him, Kant’s problematic idealist is none other than Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) (see also Guyer, 2018). As we will explore in the next section, Mendelssohn was a prominent Cartesian idealist in 18th-century Germany, and his philosophical contributions were well-known to Kant. Not only were Kant and Mendelssohn familiar with each other’s work, but they also maintained a respectful intellectual exchange, as evidenced by their cordial correspondence. We argue that there is a “silent” debate between Kant’s *Refutation of Idealism* and the sixth and seventh parts of Mendelssohn’s *Mourning Hours* (*Morgenstunden*).

This paper has two aims. First, beyond the textual evidence that Dyck (2011) mentions—evidence which I will provide and discuss in the next section—I aim to show that understanding the structure of the argument in Kant’s *Refutation of Idealism* requires examining in detail the exchanges between Kant and Mendelssohn. My second aim is to demonstrate that Kant’s refutation of Mendelssohn’s problematic idealism constitutes

1 On closer examination, however, Berkeley’s purported denial of the external world does not amount to an eliminativist form of idealism that commits him solely to the existence of minds. Rather, Berkeley’s idealism can be more accurately characterized as a form of *reductive idealism*: what we ordinarily conceive of as external objects are, according to Berkeley, nothing more than ideas or representations within our minds. Despite this reinterpretation of external reality, Berkeley’s stance toward skepticism remains unchanged—he seeks to dissolve the skeptical problem altogether. By rejecting the notion of a mind-independent material world, Berkeley renders the skeptical question about our knowledge of external objects moot.

a successful “world-directed” Transcendental Argument (TA). Kant’s refutation is not merely restricted to proving that some key concepts of our conceptual scheme are connected, as suggested by Peter Strawson (1984), Christopher Peacocke (1989, p. 4), Quassim Cassam (1999, p. 83), and others over the past three or more decades. It also succeeds in demonstrating, against Mendelssohn, the existence of a world in itself that appears to us as persistent things in space, serving as the ultimate ground for the determination of the consciousness of our existence in time.

Mendelssohn’s problematic (skeptical) idealism arises from both a metaphysical and an epistemological doctrine. Metaphysically, he assumes what we may call a “commonsense realist” view: that appearances outside our mind in space are, in themselves, material in nature, just as appearances within our mind are, in themselves, mental in nature (a position he refers to as “dualism”).

Epistemologically, Mendelssohn maintains that there is a fundamental gap between the material and mental worlds, since the inference from our internal representations to the purported external material things they supposedly copy is, at best, problematic (“indirect realism.”) Kant’s *Refutation* challenges both aspects of this view.

On the epistemological level, Kant argues that we have direct awareness of the existence of external material things in space. On the metaphysical level, he asserts that the ultimate nature of external things is neither material nor mental but consists instead of things in themselves—noumena in the negative sense. However, Kant’s argument can only succeed as a world-directed (or truth-directed) transcendental argument if it is able to establish *the truth* of the existence of noumena as a necessary condition for whatever the problematic or skeptic idealist has to assume, rather than *merely justifying a belief* in their existence as presupposition of other beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

The defense of my interpretation rests on textual evidence of a historical nature and overall considerations of a systematic nature. First, I will endorse Dyck’s reading by supporting his claim that it best fits the overall textual evidence. However, I go one or more steps further by demonstrating that Kant’s *Refutation* can only be understood as an argument, and moreover, as a valid argument when we assume that it is aimed at Mendelssohn. Finally, I will demonstrate that my reconstruction of the dense and concise passages renders the *Refutation* into sound world-directed or truth-directed transcendental argument against Mendelssohn’s idealism.

This paper is structured as follows:

The **first section** takes a historical approach. Drawing on Dyck’s (2011) and Guyer’s (2018) contributions, I present overwhelming textual evidence to support the claim that Mendelssohn is the primary target of Kant’s *Refutation of Idealism*.

The **second section** continues this historical inquiry by seeking a coherent argument within Kant’s constellation of claims. Here, I argue—again based on substantial textual evidence—that the true goal of the *Refutation* is to establish the existence (and the awareness thereof) of persisting mind-independent things in themselves, rather than merely the existence (and awareness) of enduring things in space.

In the **third section**, I outline the most plausible logical structure of Kant’s argument in a preliminary sketch.

The **fourth section** reconstructs the main premises of the argument in light of the “silence” debate between Kant and Mendelssohn. I argue that Kant’s appeal to the consciousness of my existence as enduring in time, as well as the necessitation of a ground for determining the alterations of mental states over time, becomes fully intelligible when read as a response to Mendelssohn.

The **fifth section** is decisive. Here, I redirect Barry Stroud’s (1968) objections—originally aimed at Peter F. Strawson (1959) and Sidney Shoemaker (1963)—against Kant’s *Refutation* of Mendelssohn. If Stroud’s critique holds, we would be back to square one: Ludwig Heinrich Jacobi’s common-sense realism, which asserts that in the face of idealism, one must accept the existence of mind-independent reality on faith.

Finally, in the **sixth section**, I demonstrate how Kant can easily overcome this Stroud-style objection through a simple infinite regress argument. I conclude that Kant’s *Refutation* is a successful world-directed (or truth-directed) transcendental argument against Mendelssohn’s problematic or skeptical idealism.

## 1. Mendelssohn’s Dualism

The only thing we know for sure about Kant’s *Refutation* of idealism is what Kant states in his opening remarks (B275–279):

Idealism (I mean **material** idealism) is the theory that declares the existence of objects in space outside us to be either merely doubtful and **indemonstrable**, or else false and **impossible**; the **former** is the **problematic** idealism of Descartes, who declares only one empirical assertion (*assertio*), namely **I am**, to be indubitable; the **latter** is the **dogmatic** idealism of Berkeley, who declares space, together with all the things to which it is attached as an inseparable condition, to be something that is impossible in itself, and who therefore also declares things in space to be merely imaginary. (B274, original emphases)

The quoted passage clearly indicates that Kant’s opponent is the *problematic or skeptic idealist* rather than the *immaterial idealist*. While the latter *dogmatically* denies the existence of external, mind-independent material things, the former considers knowledge of such things—without God as a guarantor—to be doubtful or problematic. The fact that Descartes is widely regarded as the founding figure of problematic

2 See De Sá Pereira, 2022.

idealism in modern philosophy, combined with Kant's frequent references to him, has led nearly all scholars to assume mistakenly that Kant's primary aim was to refute the global skepticism presented in the first *Meditation* (particularly dream skepticism). However, there is no textual evidence whatsoever to suggest that Kant ever regarded Cartesian global skepticism as a legitimate target of his *Refutation*.

The question that now arises is: who embodies the problematic idealism that Kant's *Refutation* targets? Since Descartes is frequently cited in Kant's writings, it is easy to form the mistaken impression that Kant's primary target is, if not the global skepticism of the first *Meditation*, then at least the external-world skepticism found in the third *Meditation*, which is grounded in the epistemology of indirect realism. In other words, after proving the existence of himself as a thinking being, the global skepticism of the first *Meditation* must give way to a still radical but no longer global or universal form of skepticism: external world skepticism.

However, once again, this interpretation lacks textual support. There is no evidence that Kant read Descartes firsthand. Arguably, Kant became acquainted with Descartes's philosophy through the rationalist German tradition. According to Corey W. Dyck (2011), there is evidence to support the claim that Mendelssohn is the primary target of Kant's refutation. Here are some of them:

**1. Kant's Letter to Herz (1772):**

Kant confessed that Mendelssohn's objection "made him reflect considerably" (Ak 10:132).

**2. Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden* (2012):**

Mendelssohn's dialogue between an idealist and a dualist.

**3. Letter from Ludwig Heinrich Jacobi to Kant (1786):**

Jacobi suspected that a specific passage in *Morgenstunden* was "intended as an arrow aimed against your *Critique*" (Ak 10:437).

**4. Kant's Response to Jacobi:**

Kant offered a "sufficient rebuke" of Mendelssohn in Jacobi's analysis (Ak 10:450).

**5. Kant's Refutation of Mendelssohn's proof of the persistence of the soul (B413):**

As the bone of the controversy between Kant and his Cartesian opponent is what accounts for the "alternations" (*Veränderungen*) of mental states, Kant's rebuttal of Mendelssohn's belief in the persistence of the soul is indirect evidence that Mendelssohn is the target of Kant's refutation.

First, as reported by Hamann, Kant "resolved to refute Mendelssohn." However, Kant appears to have abandoned this plan a month later, as Hamann notes in another letter to Jacobi on November 28, 1785. Arguably, though, Kant certainly never forgot the idea of responding to Mendelssohn's criticism of his idealism. Ludwig Heinrich von Jacobi wrote to Kant, expressing his intention to compose a rebuttal to the *Morgenstunden*, which he believed posed a serious threat to the *Critique* (see Ak, 10:436). In his reply, Kant assured Jacobi that he had no plans to write a response and encouraged Jacobi to proceed with his own rebuttal (see Ak, 10:450).

But the crucial evidence that Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden* (2012) is the main target of Kant's refutation emerges in its sixth and seventh parts, where Mendelssohn portrays a dialogue between what he terms a "dualist" and an "idealist" (see Dyck, p. 165). Both figures share the same epistemological framework: the doctrine of indirect realism. But what is indirect realism? It is the view that we do not have direct access to material things external to our minds; rather, we have direct access only to our own mental states. Consequently, any knowledge of external things must rely on a causal inference from our mental representations of those material things to their probable existence.

The idealist in Mendelssohn's dialogue appears to represent a position derived from Berkeley's immaterial idealism. He "dogmatically" rejects the possibility of knowing external material things based on the doctrine of indirect realism, by arguing that since there is no way to justify the necessary causal inference, knowledge of the external material world is unattainable. As an antidote to skepticism, Berkeley adopts his immaterial idealism: according to this view, what we call the external material world is, in reality, nothing more than a coherent system of mental representations within our own minds (see Mendelssohn about idealism, 2012, p. 49). In contrast, the "dualist" that concerns Kant is Mendelssohn's problematic idealist, a position derived from Descartes and the rationalist tradition (see Mendelssohn, 2012, p.49). The very same opposition between idealism and dualism can be read in Kant:

Thus, the existence of all objects of outer sense is doubtful. This uncertainty I call the ideality of outer appearances, and the doctrine of this ideality is called **idealism**, in comparison with which the assertion of a possible certainty of objects of outer sense is called **dualism**. (A367. Original emphasis)

Like the immaterial idealist, this dualist uncritically accepts the epistemology of indirect realism: we do not have direct access to material things external to our minds, but only to our own mental states. Mendelssohn describes this as the opposition between *presentation* (*Darstellung*) and *representation* (*Vorstellung*) (see 2012, p. 34). Here we find all the components that support the interpretation that Mendelssohn's problematic idealism is Kant's primary target. First, as expected, Mendelssohn asserts that our direct cognitive access is not to material things existing outside us, but only to things within us (indirect realism). Therefore, these should not be termed "re-presentations" (*Vorstellungen*), but rather "presentations" (*Darstellungen*), *prima facie* without any connection to anything beyond themselves.

Nonetheless, the thinking substance also experiences "alterations" (*Veränderungen*) of its own thinking states. Mendelssohn's question is how we can account for these "alterations." The candidates would be the external material things as plausible causes of these "presentations" within the mind. The problem with such an inference is the uncertainty that undermines it (see 2012, p. 48). Thus, without assuming God's existence

as a guarantor, we are not justified in assuming that what appears to us as mere “presentations” are actually “re-presentations” of existing material things-in-themselves outside our own minds.

1. Our direct cognitive access is not to things outside us in themselves, but only to things within us as they appear to us. These cognitive entities should be termed “presentations” (*Darstellungen*), not “re-presentations” (*Vorstellungen*), as they initially appear without any connection to external things.
2. The thinking substance experiences “alterations” (*Veränderungen*) of its own thinking states (presentations).
3. The plausible candidates for causing these alterations are the external material things-in-themselves.
4. However, inferences about the existence of external objects based on sensory data are subject to uncertainty.

Both Berkeley’s immaterial idealism as well as Mendelssohn’s dualism stands in direct opposition to Kant’s transcendental idealism. To begin with, Kant resolutely rejects the core doctrine of both forms of idealism: indirect realism.

But from this it follows that **idealism**, at least, *problematic idealism*, is unavoidable in that same rationalistic system, and if the existence of external things is not at all required for the determination of one’s existence in time, then such things are only assumed, entirely gratuitously, without a proof of them being able to be given. (B418. Original emphasis is in bold, and added emphasis is in cursive).

According to Kant’s transcendental idealism, we have direct or immediate cognitive access to “material things,” but not as things-in-themselves. Rather, we are directly aware of them *as the mind-dependent way* that *mind-independent things-in-themselves* appear to us in space. Likewise, “mental states” are merely *the mind-dependent way* that *mind-independent things* appear to us in time. Thus, Kant’s transcendental idealism opposes both Berkeley’s immaterial idealism and Mendelssohn’s problematic or skeptical idealism, as it rejects their core epistemological doctrine of indirect realism.

Moreover, Kant’s references to dreams and delusions are indirect references not to Descartes’s dream global skepticism scenario from the first *Meditation*, but rather to Mendelssohn. While in Descartes, the dream scenario is a counterfactual possibility (like the evil demon) that must be ruled out to ensure that most of our external-world beliefs are true and reliable, in Mendelssohn and Kant, dreams and delusions are mental states occurring in some irregular order. Compare what Kant says in the *Prolegomena* (PROL, 4: 336-337) with Mendelssohn’s *Morgenstunden* (Mendelssohn 2012, p. 41).

What often goes unnoticed by Kant’s readers is that the bone of contention between Mendelssohn’s dualism and Kant’s transcendental idealism extends beyond the epistemological issue of indirect realism to include a significant metaphysical difference regarding the underlying nature of mind-independent things. For dualists, mind-independent things are material external objects. This is what Kant, in his *Paralogism* of the first edition, calls transcendental realism (commonsense realism):

[the doctrine] which regards space and time as something given in themselves. The transcendental realist therefore represents outer appearances as things in themselves. It is really this transcendental realist who afterwards plays the empirical idealist (A369).

Mendelssohn’s problematic idealist has two allied motivations, one metaphysical and the other epistemological. Metaphysically, he considers “outer appearances as things in themselves,” that is, material things as mind-independent entities existing outside our minds. Epistemologically, he views our cognitive access to those external mind-independent things as indirect, resulting from a problematic causal inference from our internal mental representations. In his own words:

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, only in oneself, and the whole of self-consciousness therefore provides nothing other than merely our own determinations. (A378)

In his *Fourth Paralogism*, Kant addresses this skeptical challenge by reiterating his own transcendental or formal idealism. *Metaphysically*, mind-independent things are noumena in negative sense, which appear to us as mind-dependent material objects in space. Given this ideal nature of material outer things as appearances, there is no *epistemological* barrier that could obstruct our direct cognitive access to them.

However, whether false or true, plausible or implausible, Kant’s transcendental idealism is a metaphysical and epistemological doctrine rather than an argument or proof. To effectively rebut Mendelssohn’s problematic or skeptical idealism, we need an argument in the contemporary sense of a truth-directed or world-directed transcendental argument. Such an argument cannot be restricted to merely showing the connection between the major claims within our conceptual scheme for example, that the consciousness of my existence determined in time is conceptually connected with the claim that we must be aware of persistent things in space. Instead, the argument must prove that one could not be conscious of one’s own existence *unless it were true* that one is aware of mind-independent things.

## 2. Searching for an Argument

The Refutation of Idealism (B275–279) is an addition to the second edition of Kant’s *Critique*. This concise and dense section, situated within the chapter on the postulates of empirical reasoning, initially appears to present a clear argument. However, upon closer examination, the claims that seem to serve as the premises of this argument are as obscure as its goal and its logical form or structure.

The problem begins with the very terms that Kant uses to state the issue requiring the *Refutation of Idealism* in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the celebrated footnote, Kant complains that is a scandal of philosophy and human reason that we must assume the existence of external things “merely on faith” (Bxxxix, n.) Kant uses the word “faith” in this celebrated passage as an indirect reference to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, a German “commonsense realist” inspired by David Hume and Thomas Reid. In the introductory notes to his work *David Hume*, Jacobi employs the same word in a similar context when he states:

With this claim, however, I am forced to admit that that any assertion of the existence of a thing *in itself*, outside my representation, can never be of this kind or carry absolute certainty with it. *So an idealist, basing himself on this distinction, can compel me to concede that my conviction about the existence of real things outside me is only a matter of faith.* But then, as a realist I am forced to say that all knowledge derives exclusively from faith, for **things** must be **given** to me before I am in a position to enquire about relations (1994, pp. 255-256. Emphasis is added, my translation)

“Faith” (*Glaube*) is the German translation that Jacobi suggests to the English word “belief.” For Jacobi, “faith” means immediate knowledge based on perception, as opposed to “second-order” knowledge through reason or proof. Perception, according to Jacobi, occurs via some “sort of revelation” in the sense of disclosure. However, Jacobi’s view does not embrace any form of irrationalism, as Kant accused him of doing. On the contrary, Jacobi can be seen as a precursor to contemporary direct realists who assert that there is no need for inference to prove the existence of the outside world, as it reveals itself directly to our senses.

Kant’s *Refutation of Idealism* aims to establish our knowledge of “the existence of a thing in itself outside my representation” that goes beyond mere belief. Given this, regardless of what Kant and Jacobi mean by “the existence of a thing in itself outside my representation,” we must understand Kant’s proof as a “world-directed” or “truth-directed” Transcendental Argument (TA) in the contemporary sense. In other words, Kant aims to show that the belief in the existence of a thing in itself outside our minds is necessarily connected with some other key beliefs within our conceptual scheme, as suggested by Peter F. Strawson (1984), Christopher Peacocke (1989, p. 4), Quassim Cassam (1999, p. 83), as a modest form of TA. Instead, Kant aims to prove that we have knowledge of that existence, not merely a belief.

After addressing the first question, the indirect reference to Jacobi raises an even more disconcerting question about the nature of “the thing outside my representation” that Jacobi calls “a thing in itself.” The majority of Kant’s scholars—championed by Henry E. Allison (2004)—resolutely reject the claim that Kant ever aimed to prove the existence of a thing in itself. According to Allison’s celebrated epistemological reading of Kant’s idealism, “the thing in itself” is only the concept of an absolute theocentric perspective of reality, as opposed to our relative anthropocentric perspective of the same reality, our “epistemic conditions” (2004, p. 75). However, the textual evidence against Allison’s metaphysically deflationary reading is overwhelming (see Refl. Ak, 18: 305, R5356; Refl. Ak, 18: 278, R5639; Refl. Ak 18: 416, R5984, Ak, 18: 612, R6312; etc.).<sup>3</sup>

But the most significant textual evidence is founded in the *Critique*: However, ↓ Kant argues ↓ this enduring element “cannot be an intuition within me.” (Bxxxix, n.) Since all the determining grounds of my existence that can be found within me are representations, and as such, they themselves *require something persistent that is distinct from them*. It is in relation to this persistent element that their changes, and consequently my existence during the time in which these changes occur, can be determined. (Bxxxix, n.)

Therefore, the aim of Kant’s proof is not exactly the appearance or representation of something persistent in space within us, but rather the existence of a thing in itself, a noumenon in the negative sense (A280/B372-373), that appears to us as something persistent in space as the ground of all appearances (*Erscheinungen*). Now, our question is: how is Kant supposed to prove that we know—and not merely believe—that there is a thing in itself that, as a noumenon in negative sense, is the ultimate ground of all our appearances in space and time against the problematic idealist?

### 3. A Sketch of the logical form

Let us take a first look at what Kant presents as a proof against *problematic idealism* in his *Refutation of Idealism*. The goal of the proof is the following:

The empirically determined awareness of my own existence demonstrates the existence of objects in space outside of myself. (B275).

Kant states the following in support of his claim:

- I. I am conscious of my existence as determined in time.
- II. All time-determination presupposes something persistent in perception (B 275).
- III. Yet, this enduring element cannot be an intuition in me. (B XXXIX, n.).
- IV. Therefore, the perception of this enduring thing is possible only through a thing outside me and not through the mere representation of a thing outside me. (B275-276).
- V. Therefore, [consciousness in time] is also necessarily linked with the existence of the things outside me, as the condition of time-determination (B276).

3 Against Allison’s reading, see Chignell (2010, 2011). Unfortunately, in German scholarship, Kant’s refutation continues to be interpreted in the context of German Idealism, as highlighted by Luft (2023), Förster (2021), and Schnädelbach (2021).

Since these steps are not clearly formulated as premises, I believe that the best way to regiment Kant's alleged argument in the *Refutation of Idealism* is to begin with the simple sketch inspired by Dicker (2004) a two decades ago:

1. I am conscious of my own existence in time, that is, I am aware that my experiences occur in a determined time-order (E).
2. I can be aware of my own experiences occurring in a determined temporal order only if I am aware of something permanent relative to which the temporal order in question is determined ( $E \supset P$ ).
3. No representation or mental state in me can work as this determinant of temporal order ( $\sim C$ ).
4. Time itself does not provide this determinant ( $\sim T$ ).
5. Now assuming that (2), (3), and (4) are true, then I can be aware of my experiences occurring in a determined temporal order only if I am aware of a mind-independent thing in itself in relation to which the temporal order of my experiences is determined  $\{[(E \supset P) \& (\sim C \& \sim T)] \supset (E \supset O)\}$ .

-----

6. I am aware of a mind-independent thing in itself in relation to which the temporal order of my experiences is determined ( $E \supset O$ ) (Dicker, 2004, p. 196. What appear in cursive is what I changed in Dicker's original sketch). (see, De Sá Pereira, 2019a)

Dicker's sketch organizes the diverse set of Kantian theses into a structured and logically valid argument by virtue of its formal or logical structure. The question that now arises is whether this sketchy argument, in addition to being logically valid, is also cognitively sound. However, any answer to this question depends crucially on how we interpret each of the premises and the conclusion.

In the previous section, we presented compelling evidence supporting the claim that the "persisting thing outside me" is not merely a mind-dependent appearance or a representation of something permanent in space, as described in the transcendental schema of the category of substance, which Kant explores in detail in the *Second Analogy* of his *Analytic of Principles*. Instead, the argument maintains that we are conscious of a persisting entity as a thing in itself which we empirically know as a permanent thing in space is required for "the consciousness of my existence as determined in time." But what about the premises?

To begin with, what did Kant mean by "the consciousness of my existence as determined in time"?<sup>4</sup> If one erroneously assumes that Kant's opponent is the external-world skeptic who arises after the "discovery" of the *cogito* in the *Second Meditation*, one might be inclined to interpret this phrase as referring to the introspective access provided by inner sense to one's own past and present experiences, arranged in a determinate temporal sequence. However, such an interpretation would impose an undue burden on the external-world skeptic of Cartesian that arise after the *cogito*. Prior to Descartes' proof of God's existence, there is no certainty that I know myself as a permanent thinking entity that apprehends its own existence as temporally determined. Until the proof of God's existence is secured, my awareness of existing in time remains fleeting—confined to the present moment in which I am thinking.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, since the determination of time depends on past experiences, Descartes remains skeptical about the reliability of memory (see Descartes, 1996, p. 16). Be that as it may, for Kant, the mere *cogito*—"I think, I am"—is insufficient to establish his argument on solid ground. The determination of time plays a crucial role.

But let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Kant's Cartesian opponent grants that Kant's first premise consists of *cogito*-like thoughts arranged in a determinate temporal sequence: "I know that I am seeing the light of a candle now," "I know that I was seeing the light of a candle before," and so forth. What remains unknown, however, is whether there exists a real candle—as a thing-in-itself—outside of me, enduring as a body. Based on this outline, if Kant seeks to demonstrate that we are aware of a persistent thing-in-itself, it becomes evident that the crux of Kant's argument hinges on application of *modus ponens* to the conditional:

4 In line with the advice of my fourth reviewer, I emphasize to the reader the importance of not confusing "mere awareness of my existence" in time with its "determination." Indeed, the determination of my conscious existence is an act of cognition (introspection) rather than a mere act of perception.

5 I am grateful to my first reviewer for highlighting Descartes's arguments in the First Replies to Caterus and, more extensively, in the Responses to Arnauld, as they pose a challenge to my interpretation. Indeed, that is a controversial point in Cartesian Scholarship. Undoubtedly, in certain passages, Descartes suggests that he is a thinking thing, foreshadowing his final doctrine by asserting that he is a "enduring thinking substance." However, it is crucial to note that, in claiming certainty about being a thinking thing—based on the impossibility of being deceived while thinking—Descartes does not necessarily commit to his later ontological view of this thinking thing as a substance. Rather, his assertion clearly indicates that his certainty is contingent solely upon the act of thinking and exists only while he is engaged in that thought. In Descartes's own words:

"So, after carefully considering everything, I conclude that this proposition, I am, I exist, is true whenever it is presented by me or conceived in my mind. Yet, I do not yet have sufficient understanding of what this 'I' is that now necessarily exists" (1996, p. 17, emphases added).

He continues,

"But what am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, I, I am not willing, and also imagines and has sensory perception" (1996, p. 19, emphasis added).

Upon examining the so-called "order of reasons" at the beginning of the *Second Meditation*—especially under the hypothesis of an evil demon—Descartes cannot simply conclude, through the statement "Cogito est, cogito sum," that he is an enduring substance, much less an enduring thinking substance whose nature is distinct and independent from a bodily one.

The rationale behind this assertion is straightforward: if the evil demon is capable of deceiving me about anything, then the mere act of thinking cannot guarantee my existence as an enduring thinking substance. Indeed, how can I be assured of my persistence as a thinking entity over time, particularly when everything I believe to know—including my memories—is vulnerable to the deceptions of such a formidable entity?

7. If I am aware of having experience in a successive time-order, then I aware of a mind-independent thing in itself in relation to which temporal order of my experiences is determined ( $E \supset P$ ).
8. I am aware of my experience in a temporal order (E).
- 
9. Therefore, I am aware of a mind-independent thing in itself by reference to which I can determine the temporal order [*modus ponens*: 7), 8)] (P).

As we have not yet pinpointed the precise identity of Kant's opponent in his *Refutation of Idealism*, let us assume, for the sake of argument, that—drawing on Kant's third note to his *Refutation*—his target is the Cartesian dream scenario of the *First Meditation* (an admittedly implausible reading). In that context, Kant remarks:

**Note 3.** From the fact the existence of outer objects is required for the possibility of a determinate consciousness of our self it does not follow that every intuitive representation of outer things includes at the same time their existence, for that may well be the mere effect of the imagination (in dreams as well as in delusions); but this is possible merely through the reproduction of previous outer perceptions, which, as has been shown, are possible only through the actuality of outer objects. Here it had to be proved only that inner experience in general is possible only through outer experience in general. Whether this or that putative experience is not mere imagination must be ascertained according to its particular determinations and through its coherence with the criteria of all actual experience (B 278-279).

In these terms, Kant would be arguing against the Cartesian skeptic that dreams, hallucinations, and delusions are merely mental states arranged in time, whose ultimate determination depends on the consciousness of something persistent and external to the subject—something. However, even when such experiences are ordered and temporally arranged, they do not appear to presuppose the existence of anything genuinely mind-independent. Kant's response is that, even if these experiences do not require the presence of something, they at least depend on the reproduction/memory of past experiences. Yet this *seems* to lead to a circular predicament, for memory itself is a mental state determined in time—one that likewise requires reference to something external and independent of the self.

I conclude this section with the following remark. Even if we have identified a plausible logical structure—at least for Kant's crucial steps in his argument—we are still missing the correct interpretation, as we have yet to determine his main target. Regardless of Kant's own intention, what we do know for certain is that, if his argument is directed against the global Cartesian skeptic of the *First Meditation* (the dream scenario) it is bound to fail. No one can successfully refute a global skeptic while assuming the mere consciousness of my existence arranged in time, that is, a persistent *cogito*-like thought determined within a temporal order.

#### 4. The Refutation of Mendelssohn

In my alternative reading, the target of the refutation is not any problematic idealism, particularly not the problematic idealism that Descartes assumes from his *Second Meditation* onward. Instead, the target is Mendelssohn's peculiar problematic idealism. Like Cartesian problematic idealism, Mendelssohn's problematic or skeptical idealism relies on indirect realism—the epistemological claim that we have only indirect cognitive access to things outside our mind via our direct cognitive access to their representations. Additionally, like Cartesian skeptical idealism, Mendelssohn's problematic idealism relies on the commonsense realism shared by Jacobi, Reid, and others as the metaphysical claim that bodies in space are mind-independent things in themselves.

Our initial challenge was to interpret the first premise of Kant's argument (according to Dicker's reconstruction). By all accounts, what Kant likely had in mind with “the consciousness of my existence determined in time” is a series of *cogito*-like thoughts (e.g., “I know that I am seeing the light of a candle now,” “I know that I was seeing the light of a candle before,” and so on), which together suggest the existence of an enduring thinking substance.

However, this interpretation is incompatible with both the global skepticism of Cartesian doubt presented in the *First Meditation* and the external-world skepticism introduced from the *Second Meditation* onward. The difficulty dissipates if we consider that Kant's argument is directed against Mendelssohn. If the requirement of time-determination is problematic within the framework of a skeptic of Cartesian provenance, it is not an issue for Mendelssohn. Indeed, Mendelssohn assumes that we are aware of the alterations (*Veränderungen*) of our own mental states (see 2012, p. 36).

What clearly corroborates our reading is the fact that Kant resonates the same line of reasoning, echoing Mendelssohn's idealism when he says that the idealist assumes the awareness of alteration of mental states in time (see Refl. Ak, 18: 610, R6311). In this regard, we also surmount the second obstacle: explaining how premise 1 leads to premise 2. That being said, it is not Kant but Mendelssohn who bears the burden of demonstrating how, within the framework of his idealism, he can account for the temporal determination of the alterations in one's mental states.

However, we now encounter the third challenge: what justifies Kant's assertion in the second premise of his reconstructed argument that the perception of these alterations entails the existence of a thinking being *as enduring*? The obstacle is once again eliminated when we recall that this claim originates from Mendelssohn



himself: alternations of mental states presuppose the thinking being as an enduring thing (see 2012, p. 36). On closer inspection, Mendelssohn's reasons for thinking what Kant articulates in premise (ii) of his argument are unrelated to the Kantian notion of the transparency of time relations (*Second Analogy*). According to Mendelssohn, every change necessarily presupposes something that endures. While Mendelssohn identifies this *enduring entity* as the Cartesian thinking substance itself, for Kant, the *persistent entity* (*das Beharrliches*) is the mind-independent thing-in-itself—as we showed in Section 2. This thing-in-itself causes and grounds the alterations of mental states, which, in turn, represent it as the appearance of a permanent thing in space in successive times.

Here is the place to undo the misunderstanding about the dream discussed in the last section. As we have seen, Kant's note 3 to his *Refutation* is doomed to fail if we read it as a reply against a global Cartesian skeptic. Consider this:

Dreams are in analogy with wakefulness. Except for waking representations that are consistent with those of other people, I have no other marks of the object outside me. (Refl, Ak 18, p. 172).

Now, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the fact that Mendelssohn says exactly the same thing in quite similar words (see, Mendelssohn, 2012, p. 41). Dreams are not to be understood as Cartesian skeptical scenarios akin to the "brain in a vat" hypothesis or the "malicious demon" hypothesis—scenarios that must be ruled out as impossible or inconceivable to make knowledge in general possible. Instead, dreams are regarded as instances of illusory mental states, similar to misperceptions. As such, they exist in time, just like any other mental state. What distinguishes dreams from experiences, however, is that they lack interconnectedness with other mental states—a feature that Kant refers to as "the criteria of the whole experience" (B278-279).

The third note to the *Refutation* strongly suggests, in my view, that Kant either (i) failed to fully grasp the Cartesian skeptical hypotheses of the *First Meditation*, (ii) never regarded them as serious philosophical challenges, or (iii) was not primarily concerned with global skepticism at all but rather with idealism. From a strictly exegetical standpoint, the third hypothesis is the most plausible, and it is the one I adopt here. The focus of the *Refutation* is Mendelssohn's problematic or skeptical idealism, which must be understood as the doctrine that we know ourselves as enduring thinking substances because we are aware of alterations in our mental states, and that our knowledge of mind-independent things-in-themselves arises from problematic inference based on their representations within our minds.

The crux of the disagreement between Kant and Mendelssohn concerns what is necessary to determine the temporal ordering of the awareness of alterations in our mental states. According to Mendelssohn, all that is required is an external relation to something else, secured by some form of agreement or coherence among our representations as mental states. In contrast, Kant argues that what is needed is the existence of a persistent, mind-independent thing-in-itself.

## 5. Stroud-style Objections

According to the mainstream of Kantian scholarship, Kant never fulfilled his promise to demonstrate the existence of mind-independent, persistent things in themselves (noumena). Some scholars argue that this was never Kant's goal in the first place, since attempting to prove awareness of things in themselves would contradict his transcendental idealism, which asserts that possible knowledge and experience are confined within the bounds of our senses. Others, however, recognize this claim as Kant's intended goal in the *Refutation of Idealism*. Nevertheless, they maintain that Kant ultimately fails to fulfill this promise, as it is impossible to argue from the nature of our cognitive faculties to a conclusion about things in themselves.

We can restate the primary criticism of Kant's argument in the *Refutation of idealism* in contemporary terms as follows. Kant's argument against the skeptical idealist is, at best, a "modest transcendental argument"—that is, an argument intended only to demonstrate *how things must appear to us* or *how we must believe them to be*. Modest transcendental arguments are not directed at the world itself but rather at our beliefs, aiming to reveal the connections between the central doxastic features of our conceptual framework (see Stern, 2007, p. 143).

For instance, if we assume that we know or we are aware of our existence as arranged in a determinate temporal sequence, then *we must also believe* that things appear to us as persistent in space. However, the argument fails to establish that we are aware of mind-independent things-in-themselves as a necessary condition for the temporal determination of the alterations of our mental states. If this is the case, it is unavoidable to conclude that we are back to square one: we must accept the existence of things outside us purely *on faith* (Bxxxix, n.) as Jacobi claims (see 1994, pp. 255-256).

The distinction between "modest belief-directed" and "world-directed" transcendental arguments can be traced back to Stroud's seminal critique of transcendental arguments (Stroud, 1968). Stroud's original focus was on Strawson's "transcendental argument" in *Individuals* (1959), which aimed to defend the continued existence of particulars as bodies against an unqualified skeptic, as well as Shoemaker's (1963) argument for the existence of other minds. However, the same dialectical structure—and the corresponding objections—can be readily applied to Kant's *Refutation of Idealism* against Mendelssohn's problematic.

Kant presents the conclusion of his *Refutation* as follows:

9. The empirical conscious of my existence as temporal determined mental states proves the existence mind-independent, persistent things.

Kant's foundational premise must be something that the skeptical idealist presupposes when presenting their challenge. Accordingly, Kant begins with the claim:

1) I am conscious of my existence as mental states ordered in time. (B275)

If Kant's aim was to develop an argument against Mendelssohn's problematic idealism, he would need to show that the truth of statement 9) is a necessary condition for the initial statement 1). And indeed, this is precisely the path he takes from 2) to 5).

2) I can be aware of my own experiences occurring in a determined temporal order only if I am aware of something permanent relative to which the temporal order in question is determined ( $E \supset P$ ).

3) No representation or mental state in me can work as this determinant of temporal order ( $\sim C$ ).

4) Time itself does not provide this determinant ( $\sim T$ ).

5) Now assuming that (2), (3), and (4) are true, then I can be aware of my experiences occurring in a determined temporal order only if I am aware of a mind-independent thing in itself in relation to which the temporal order of my experiences is determined  $\{[(E \supset P) \& (\sim C \& \sim T)] \supset (E \supset O)\}$ .

-----

9) The empirical consciousness of my existence as temporally determined mental states proves the existence of mind-independent, persistent things.

Similar to Stroud's critique of Strawson, one might argue that Kant's argument contains an initial gap. One could claim that the transition from 2) to 5) does not yet provide a proof of the categorical proposition 9). At best, what Kant would have demonstrated by this point is the following conditional:

6. If the empirical recognition of an enduring element in space—as a criterion for time-determination of the consciousness of my existence in time—is successful, then we know that there is an enduring element outside me.

Drawing a close analogy to Stroud's critique of Strawson, one might argue that there is a gap between the conditional claim (6) and the categorical conclusion (9). Notably, it is possible that the recognition of something persistent in space could fail. Stroud might contend that, to address this potential issue, we must assume that Kant's original argument includes an implicit premise along the following lines:

7. If we know that the recognition of enduring things in space does not fail, then we know that enduring things exist outside us.

Adopting Stroud's terminology, let us refer to the progression from premises (1) to (7) as "the verification principle" (1968, p. 247). The gap exists between the conditional statement and the categorical conclusion: if we are conscious of our own existence in time, then we must be able to recognize the existence of enduring things in space. This conditional alone does not lead to (9). We need an additional factual premise to apply modus ponens, such as the following:

8. We sometimes successfully recognize the existence of enduring things.

Now, (8) serves as the factual premise that instantiates the antecedent of the conditional statement and, by modus ponens, leads to the intended categorical conclusion (9). However, instead of definitively rebutting Mendelssohn's problematic idealism, Kant's Refutation encounters a dilemma. On one hand, without the factual premise (8) that instantiates the antecedent of the conditional (7), the argument fails to take off. It cannot achieve the intended categorical conclusion (9) and, therefore, remains ineffective against the problematic idealism.

On the other hand, the factual premise (8) combined with the "verification principle" [(1) to (7)] renders Kant's Refutation unnecessary, as we now possess a direct rebuttal of Mendelssohn's problematic idealism. If we can recognize the existence of enduring things by applying our best criteria, then we know when enduring things exist when they do not, and hence Mendelssohn's problematic idealism must be false: no problematic inference is involved.

A Stroud-style criticism continues to unfold. Even if we set aside the "verification principle" [(1) to (7)], a gap remains between the claim in (9) and the argument from (1) to (5). The assertion in (9) would only be unavoidable if it belongs to what Stroud refers to as the "privileged class" of propositions—those that establish very general conditions, such as those necessary for thinking or meaning (see Stroud, 1968, p. 253). It is evident that (9) does not fall within such a "privileged class." The statement in (9) is not sufficiently general to be regarded as a necessary condition for meaningfulness of sentences or for thinking in general. Nevertheless, for the sake of argument, let us assume that (9) possesses the "self-guaranteeing" nature of Stroud's privileged class. Even in this case, Stroud might still argue the following:

[t]he most that could be proved by a consideration of *the necessary conditions* of language is that, for example, we must believe that there are material objects and other minds if we are to be able to speak meaningfully at all. (1968, p. 256, emphasis added)

Beginning with the consciousness of our own existence in time (1) and arriving at the necessity of recognizing the existence of persistent external things in space, we are still not justified in concluding that we know the truth of (9). Once again, there is a missing element. Stroud's final objection can be summarized as the following challenge:

9) I believe that enduring outside things exist.

10) I know that persistent outside things exist.

Once again, we return to square one. What follows from (1) to (5) is (9). The statement in (9) represents a sufficient condition for (1) (the consciousness of my own existence in time). Therefore, (10) is not a necessary condition. In this light, Kant's argument functions, at best, as a belief-directed argument—its primary

achievement being the establishment of a connection between (1) (the consciousness of my own existence) and (10) (the belief in the existence of external things). Consequently, since the world-directed transcendental argument does not succeed, Kant's argument ultimately fails to achieve its original aim: demonstrating that (9), the claim that we know the existence of mind-independent external things in themselves, is true. In the end, as Jacobi contends (1994, pp. 255-256), under the pressure of idealism, we are left with no choice but to accept the existence of external things *on faith* alone.

## 6. A Successful World-Direct TA

Kant's *Refutation of Idealism* (B275-279) was introduced in the second edition of the *Critique* as a replacement for the *Fourth Paralogism* from the first edition. This revision marks a significant shift in Kant's strategy: rather than attempting to provide "a direct proof" of the immediate awareness of material things (as in the *Fourth Paralogism*), the new approach seeks to refute problematic idealism indirectly. This strategic shift is explicitly emphasized in the second *Note* to the *Refutation*, where Kant clarifies that his goal is not to establish the existence of material things through direct proof but rather to show that self-consciousness necessarily entails the existence of a mind-independent, persisting *thing in itself*.

The first thing to note is that Stroud's initial objection does not carry the same force against Kant's *Refutation of Idealism* as it does against Strawson's argument. While it is true that the premises are structured as a broad conditional, the crucial point is that the first premise (a set of cogito-like thoughts) asserts a self-verifying proposition, which allows for a categorical conclusion to follow via *modus ponens*:

11) If I am conscious of my experiences in a successive time-order, then I am aware of mind-independent persistent things in itself in relation to which the temporal order of my experience is determined ( $E \supset P$ ).

12) I am conscious of my experiences in a successive time-order (E)

-----

13) Therefore, I am directly aware of a mind-independent persistent thing in itself by reference to which I can determine the temporal order [*modus ponens* 11), 12)] (P).<sup>6</sup>

Thus, in Kant's *Refutation of Idealism*, there is no gap between the conditional structure of the premises and the categorical conclusion that would disqualify it as a world-directed transcendental argument (TA). Unlike some transcendental arguments that struggle to bridge this gap, Kant's argument avoids this issue through its reliance on a self-verifying factual premise. Moreover, while the categorical conclusion does not fall into what Stroud calls the "privileged class" or "self-guaranteeing" propositions—such as the Cartesian *cogito*—the factual premise (12) in Kant's argument is *cogito*-like in nature. This resemblance allows Kant to leverage a principle of epistemic transfer akin to an uncontroversial version of the principle of closure:

- I am certain of P.
- I am certain that  $P \supset Q$ .
- I consciously infer Q from P.
- Therefore, I am certain of Q.

Applying this reasoning to Kant's argument, the certainty attached to the *cogito*-like factual premise is transferred via closure to the conclusion: *I am aware of the existence of something persistent with the same certainty that I am conscious of my experiences as occurring in a temporal order*. Thus, Kant's argument successfully establishes its intended conclusion without the kind of gap that would render it ineffective as a world-directed transcendental argument. Nothing is missing; the *Refutation* remains a successful argument in its attempt to disprove problematic idealism.

Yet, the crux of the argument lies in the conclusion (13). Here, we return to Stroud's verificationist critique of TA. Let me take stock of the situation.

First, "verificationism" is a term of art that Stroud may use as he sees fit. However, neither Strawson's original TA nor Kant's *Refutation* are mere shortcuts to dismiss skepticism as meaningless, contrary to what Stroud claims against Strawson (see 1968, p. 247, p. 256). In his original argument (1959), Strawson does not dismiss skeptical doubt as meaningless. Instead, he argues that if there were several unconnected frames of reference, the question would make no sense.

Indeed, upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that "making sense" and "meaningfulness" have nothing to do with "verificationism" as the classical meaning criterion of logical empiricism. Their primary function is to emphasize the logical gap between the premises and the conclusion.

With that in mind, I believe that what Stroud had in mind with "verificationism" is his charge against Strawson's TA along these lines:

- ❖ Verificationism is the claim that *the truth about the existence of a thing in itself* is reducible to the *successful empirical recognition* of this existence. (see, De Sá Pereira, 2014).

6 I am thankful to my fourth reviewer for highlighting the crucial distinction between external phenomena and things as they exist in themselves. This distinction is indeed striking. Kant explicitly delineates these concepts (KrV, A378). Furthermore, the reviewer suggests that without this differentiation, I risk conflating Kant's transcendental idealism with certain interpretations of what he terms "transcendental realism." See, De Sá Pereira, 2019a.

However, it is essential to recognize that Kant's distinction is epistemological rather than ontological, especially when viewed through the lens of Allison's interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism, which resonates with my own reading of the one object-two perspectives. External things in space and things in themselves are not ontologically distinct; rather, they represent different ways or perspectives of contemplating the same entity. Given that Kant's *Refutation* serves as proof of the existence of something mind-independent, the epistemological distinction loses its applicability in this context. See, De Sá Pereira, 2021, 2019b; Stroud, 2016.

We find ourselves back at the heart of the controversy between Kant, on one side, and Mendelssohn and Jacobi on the other. For Mendelssohn, the “alterations” (*Veränderungen*) of mental states in time require only the enduring thinking being as an immaterial substance. In contrast, Jacobi’s common-sense realism, much like Stroud’s perspective, could concede to Kant that we must believe in the existence of a thing in itself (acceptance *on faith*). Yet, for Kant, only the existence of such a mind-independent thing in itself as a noumenon can account for the “alterations” of mental states in time. How can we resolve this impasse?

Kant’s argument has already been cited previously in (Bxxxix n.) and in Reflection R6312. Kant’s implicit reasoning here involves a regress. Since we cannot directly perceive temporal order, we require something “persistent” in the interval between X and Y to assert that X occurred before Y.

According to the verificationist interpretation, this persistent entity is reduced to something empirically recognizable in space—an additional representation within me and in time. However, this additional representation is not an object of inner perception. Consequently, we must assume that another representation within me and in time, say Z, serves as the “persistent thing in time” by means of which the temporal order from X to Y is determined. Yet, the problem re-emerges: if we do not know how to establish the temporal sequence from X to Y, how can we determine the temporal relation of Z to the sequence between X and Y? A regress ensues.

The only way to halt this regress is to posit that the persistent entity is not a representation within me in time, but rather a mind-independent thing that appears as a persistent object in space. From this, it follows that if I am aware of my own existence in time, I must also be aware of the existence of things-in-themselves outside me (which, of course, appear to me as enduring objects in space).

- I am not aware of the temporal relations between my representations.
- Something enduring persistent is required to determine temporal relations between my representations.
- Hypothesis: this something enduring could be some mind-dependent existence of what appears in space outside the mind.
- However, as the mind-dependent existence in space, this enduring thing would again be a further representation in me in time that requires determination.

- 
- Therefore, to avoid an infinite regress, the previous hypothesis must be considered absurd: this persistent entity must be something that exists independently of the mind, appearing to me as something enduring in space.
  - Corollary: I am immediately aware of the existence of mind-independent persistent noumena or things in themselves.

## Works of Kant

References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are identified by the pagination of Kant’s first (“A”) and/or second (“B”) editions. For all other passages from Kant’s works, citations are provided by the volume and page number, indicated by Arabic numerals separated by a duple point, in the standard edition of Kant’s works, *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Royal Prussian, later German, and then Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, spanning 29 volumes (with volume 26 not yet published) (Berlin: Georg Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1900–).

## References

- Allison, H. E. (2004). *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, 2nd edition. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Bolender, J. (2001). An argument for idealism. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8(4), 37-61.
- Cassam, Q. (1999). ‘Self-directed Transcendental Arguments’. In R. Stern (Ed.), *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chignell, A. (2010). ‘Causal Refutations of Idealism’. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 60(240), pp. 487-507.
- Chignell, A. (2011). ‘Causal Refutations of Idealism Revisited’. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 61(242), pp. 184-186.
- De Sá Pereira, R. (2014). Argumentos Transcendentais. In *Compêndio em Linha de Problemas de Filosofia Analítica*, João Branquinho e Ricardo Santos (eds.), Lisboa: Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51427/cfi.2021.0004>.
- De Sá Pereira, R. (2019a). ПОДЛИННАЯ ЦЕЛЬ КАНТОВСКОГО ОПРОВЕРЖЕНИЕ ИДЕАЛИЗМА, *КАНТОВСКИЙ СБОРНИК*, n.33, v.3, 7-31.
- De Sá Pereira, R. (2019b). One-object-plus-phenomenalism. *Kant-e-Print* 14 (1):6-30.
- De Sá Pereira, R. (2020). Disentangling Cartesian Global Skepticism from Cartesian Problematic External-World Idealism in Kant’s Refutation. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 102 (2):242-260.
- De Sá Pereira, R. (2021). Fichte’s Original Insight Reviewed. *Fichte-Studien* (special issue: The Enigma of Fic): 394-415.
- De Sá Pereira, R. (2022). Rejecting the Plea for Modesty. Kant’s Truth-Directed Transcendental Argument Based on Self-Consciousness of Our Own Existence. *Studies in Transcendental Philosophy* 3 (3): 1-22.
- Descartes, R. (1996). *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections From the Objections and Replies*. Translated by J. Cottingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dicker, G. (2004). *Kant’s Theory of Knowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Dyck, C. W. (2011). 'Turning the Game against the Idealist: Mendelssohn's Refutation of Idealism and Kant's Replies'. In: R. W. Munk, ed. 2011. *Mendelssohn's Aesthetics and Metaphysics*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 159-182.
- Feder, J., & Garve, C. (2000). Die Göttinger Rezension. In B. Sassen (Ed.), *Kant's Early Critics: The Empiricist Critique of the Theoretical Philosophy* (pp. 40-48). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Förster, E. (Ed.). (2019). *Transzendentaler Idealismus und die ‚Widerlegung des Idealismus‘*. Klostermann Verlag.
- Foster, J. (1982). *The Case for Idealism*. Routledge.
- Guyer, P. (1987). *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Guyer, P. (2018). 'Mendelssohn, Kant and the Refutation of Idealism'. In: C. Dyck and F. Wunderlich, eds. 2018. *Kant and his German Contemporaries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 134-154.
- Jacobi, F. H. (1994). *The main philosophical writings and the novel Allwill* (G. di Giovanni, Ed. & Trans.). McGill-Queen's University Press. (Original work published 1994; Paperback edition with new preface, 2009).
- Kant, I. (1997). *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Present Itself as a Science: With Selections From the Critique of Pure Reason* (G. C. Hatfield, Ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, I. (1998). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by P. Guyer and A. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, I. (2009). *Notes and fragments* (P. Guyer, Ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Kastrup, B. (2017). An ontological solution to the mind-body problem. *Philosophies*, 2 (2).
- Luft, S. (2023). *Das Verhältnis von Kant und Idealismus*. Akademie Verlag.
- Mendelssohn, M. (2012). *Last Works*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press.
- Peacocke, C. (1989). *Transcendental arguments in the theory of content*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pelczar, M. (2015). *Sensorama: A Phenomenalist Analysis of Spacetime and Its Contents*. Oxford University Press.
- Schnädelbach, H. (2021). *Kant und der Idealismus*. Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Stern, R. (2007). 'Transcendental Arguments: A Plea for Modesty'. *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 47, pp. 143-161; reprinted in C. Beyer & A. Burri (Eds.), *Philosophical knowledge: Its possibility and scope*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Strawson, P. F. (1959). *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*. London: Methuen.
- Strawson, P. F. (1984). *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties*. London: Methuen.
- Stroud, B. (1968). 'Transcendental Arguments'. *Journal of Philosophy*, 65, pp. 241-256.
- Stroud, B. (2016). Roberto's "Stroud and Transcendental Arguments Revisited"- *Skepsis*, n. 14, 218-233.