

Doubting Kant

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by

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to show that Kant's epistemology is not successful in defusing sceptical doubts. This is accomplished by arguing that, although it is useful as a tool to point out the mistakes of previous doctrines, transcendental idealism does not provide us with the means to guarantee the mind independence of the empirical world. Keeping this in mind, the thesis is divided in two parts. The purpose of the first part is to evaluate the cogency of transcendental idealism as an epistemological proposal whereby empirical realism is proved to be sound. The purpose of the second part is to assess alleged anti-sceptical proofs within transcendental idealism.

The first part is composed by 3 chapters. In chapter 1, we present transcendental idealism as a picture of the external world that is meant to overcome the failure of a kind of realism called by Kant "transcendental". In chapter 2, we characterise Kant's departure from phenomenalism by considering his defence of the a priori character of space and time. In chapter 3, we show that the notion of a priori intuition generates insurmountable difficulties for Kant to establish empirical realism by means of transcendental idealism.

The second part, in turn, is also composed by 3 chapters. In chapter 4, we survey the 'Transcendental Deduction of the Categories' and argue, contrary to Strawson and others, that it is not devised by Kant to be a response to the sceptic. In chapter 5, we examine the 'Refutation of Idealism' and show that it clashes with some of the main doctrines of transcendental idealism. Finally, in chapter 6, we claim that transcendental arguments cannot be put to work properly because they do not stop the sceptic from appealing to a transcendental realist conception of the external world.

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Professor Doutor Balthazar Barbosa Filho
without whom not

Method of Citation for Kant's works

Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View = Ant.

Critique of Judgement = C.J.

Critique of Practical Reason = Prac.

Critique of Pure Reason = A for the first edition and B for the second edition.

Dissertation on the Forms and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible Worlds = Di.

Dreams of Spirit-Seer = Dreams.

Gesammelte Schriften = Ak.

Lectures on Logic = L.L.

Lectures on Metaphysics = L.M.

Logic = L.

Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science = Met.

Prolegomena = Prol.

Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals = G.M.

On Inner Sense = Inner.

What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff = R.P.

INTRODUCTION

We sympathise with Stroud's statement that we must try to respond to the sceptical claims and to avoid sweeping them under the carpet.¹ The sceptical challenge is not merely a rational game that we play only to exercise our cognitive faculties. We should not be indifferent to his attacks because, in so doing, we may compromise the grounds of our certainties. In that way, we defend the legitimacy of studying theory of knowledge as a philosophical discipline, that is, a critical reflection about such themes as the real world, human knowledge, its possible conceptions, its sources, scope, methods, etc., traditional themes that some contemporary philosophers would prefer to commit to the flames. We believe that we are not allowed to move forward in philosophy without facing them and defining them properly, by the fact that they underlie every philosophical task, furnishing the basis of some indispensable notions like truth, justification, and so forth.

It is indubitable that Kant provides most of the roots of the contemporary reflections in this area of Philosophy. In this way, we intend to scrutinise some of the main themes of Kant's theory of knowledge. As the sceptic seems to be the demon of any epistemologist, our tactic will be to analyse how Kant copes with the sceptical demand for a proper philosophical justification of our beliefs about the external world, and what routes Kant's transcendental philosophy establishes for the making of a sound epistemology. We shall show that Kant fails to give a proper answer to the sceptic because he cannot justify the proposition "our experience in general of the external world is necessarily experience of a set of law-governed objects that are found not in me or in our thoughts, but in space outside me". This failure stems from the fact that Kant cannot harmonise transcendental idealism with empirical realism and, therefore, he cannot furnish a consistent view of the external world within his overall

¹ cf. Stroud 1989, p. 31ff.

philosophical standpoint. More precisely, we shall show that Kant does not accomplish the task that he sets himself, namely, the determination of externality within transcendental idealism. In this way, this latter will fall short of a philosophical background against which alone the sceptic's suspicions can be properly defused.

In order to achieve this goal, we shall divide this thesis in two main parts. In Part One, we shall give an account of transcendental idealism in order not only to show what it is about, but also to point out its limitations. Keeping this in mind, we shall deal, in chapter 1, with a pre-Kantian form of realism, called by him "transcendental", i.e., the doctrine that reality is constituted or already made independent of us. We shall argue that Kant's idealism is thought of as a philosophical proposal which aims at overcoming that form of realism. In chapter 2, transcendental idealism will be compared with and dissociated from phenomenalism. This approach is meant to enhance our view of Kant's epistemology. We shall maintain that, despite Kant's philosophical achievements as a critic of Berkeley, transcendental idealism has yet to produce a justification whereby the objects we have experience of through the senses are indeed mind independent items in the external world. In chapter 3, we shall be engaged in the analysis of Kant's account of space and time as intuitive a priori forms of our sensibility. It will be held that Kant's notion of space as a form of our intuition is flawed not only because of its hidden commitment to Euclidean Geometry, but also because of its clear dependence upon the notion of an affecting object that cannot be consistently characterised in transcendental idealist terms.

In Part Two, we shall survey two anti-sceptical attempts within transcendental idealism, as well as a general anti-sceptical strategy outside it. My purpose will consist in deepening our reservations about transcendental idealism by showing that anti-sceptical proofs within it suffer from Kant's failure to determine the empirical reality of the external world. Likewise, we shall contend that anti-sceptical proofs outside transcendental idealism succumb to the sceptical challenge because they are not based upon a consistent picture of the external world. Thus put, we shall focus our attention, in chapter 4, on the "Transcendental Deduction

of the Categories" - hereafter called the Deduction - in order to analyse the view that this part of the *Critique* presents an anti-sceptical argument. We shall argue that, although Kant's attempt to prove the objective validity of the categories seems sound, it does not answer the sceptic. The Deduction will then be characterised, *pace* Strawson and others, as a proof to the effect that, *if* we are justified in being empirical realists, our experience must be law-governed. However, the antecedent of this conditional will still be left open to the sceptic's concerns. In chapter 5, we shall confine our attention to Kant's argument that spatially perceptible objects distinct from our thoughts constitute the necessary presupposition for empirical self-consciousness. We shall show that such an argument, based particularly upon the "Refutation of Idealism" - hereafter called the Refutation -, does not hold water because it conflicts with some of the main points of transcendental idealism. Finally, in chapter 6, We shall analyse a recent attempt to disarm the sceptic through the use of transcendental arguments. We shall argue that these arguments fail to provide a satisfactory answer to the sceptic because they do not prevent him from resorting to transcendental realism in order to keep his doubts untouched. We shall also illustrate our overall objection against transcendental arguments through the consideration of Putnam's proof that we are not brains in a vat. We shall show that he, like any other user of transcendental arguments, produces an argument that can be circumvented by the sceptic. The vat sceptic will be presented as someone who argues for a proof whereby we are assured, not only from within, but also from outside our experiential field, that we are not brains in a vat. Since Putnam's argument does not prevent the sceptic from appealing to a non experienceable, transcendental view of the external world, it will not produce the required anti-sceptical answer.

It will be easily noticed that we sympathise with Kant as a critic of his main predecessors. This, however, does not imply that we consider his theoretical philosophy potent enough to disarm the sceptic. Kant must be taken as a man of his time, dealing with arguments of his predecessors and contemporaries, struggling to find a way out of so many unsuccessful philosophical proposals. His failure to provide a sound anti-sceptical position must not invalidate most of his achievements in pointing out the

improprieties of his colleagues. Hence, we do believe that any tactic that one can take up to confront the sceptic has to account for Kant's criticisms of preceding philosophies, and Putnam's thought seems to be a very good example of this. If Kant's philosophy seems unconvincing in its overall strategy, this does not preclude us from conceding that Kant at least sheds some lights in our efforts to justify our cognitive claims.

Finally, we would like to specify three points regarding the method employed in this thesis. Firstly, we do not intend to produce an exhaustive, section-by-section survey on Kant's first *Critique*. This is because there are already a number of these which are invaluable to the understanding of the critical philosophy, like those elaborated by Paton, Kemp Smith, Cassirer, Philonenko and, more recently, Allison, amongst others. Besides, Kant has become such a controversial figure that a step by step evaluation of his arguments and many of their consequences for philosophical problems would amount to a work far wider and more intricate than expected in a Ph. D. thesis. This suggests that most of what Kant expounds in the Transcendental Dialectic, for example, will simply be set aside, for there Kant is not so much preoccupied with the sceptic, but rather with what is to be done concerning the inevitable tendencies of reason to surpass the limits of possible experience and to speculate on some metaphysical themes like God, the soul and freedom of will. Secondly, and associated with the previous point, it is not our objective to provide an exegesis of Kant's texts, i.e., to scrutinise his arguments so as to disclose their hallmarks and thereby to reconstruct in full all his premises. This might be an important contribution in philosophy, but quite an ambitious one as well. We prefer to be a less ambitious interpreter. We prefer to draw our attention to parts of the texts which, for certain reasons, are to be taken as central to Kant's overall standpoint vis-à-vis the sceptic. Thirdly, since the search for an anti-sceptical argument is not a monopoly of transcendental idealism, philosophers who either preceded or succeeded Kant, like Descartes, Berkeley, Hume, Strawson and Stroud, among others, will occasionally be brought into play, not only because they furnish some of the roots of Kant's reflections on such a topic, but also for being interlocutors of Kant's alleged theoretical achievements.

PART ONE

Transcendental Idealism and Externality

This part aims at settling the main thrust of transcendental idealism so as to assess its adequacy as a picture of the external world wherein the sceptic can be defused. In chapter 1, we shall first focus on Kant's primary reasons for elaborating his own epistemology. This will be carried out by paying attention to his objections to a kind of realism that he calls "transcendental". Secondly, we shall present the two main interpretations of transcendental idealism, to wit, the standard picture and the 'two aspect' theory. We shall contend that, even if we opt for a revised version of the latter and thereby get rid of the difficulties of the former, transcendental idealism has yet to address two classes of reservations: on the one hand, that this doctrine consists of a mere re-edition of Berkeley's phenomenalism; and on the other, that it does not enable Kant to establish empirical realism.

In chapter 2, we shall compare Kant's idealism with Berkeley's. We shall hold that, since the latter characterises space and time as empirical, it tends to reduce spatial to temporal ordering. Kant's departure from phenomenalism is then brought to the fore by means of his defence of the apriority thesis of space and time. However, we shall point out that such a thesis by itself does not provide us with the means to claim that empirical realism is sound. In fact, the arguments devised to establish that space and time are a priori take for granted from the very beginning the givenness of the external object.

In chapter 3, we shall survey Kant's main arguments for the intuitivity unity and the ideality theses of space and time in order to determine whether or not transcendental idealism drives us into empirical realism. We shall conclude that the Kantian notion of a priori intuition is

flawed because, on the one hand, it conflicts with the development of non Euclidean geometries and, on the other, it requires the notion of an affecting object which, in turn, cannot be properly spelled out by means of transcendental idealism.

Chapter 1

Transcendental Idealism and Its Antecedents

This chapter proposes to open up the door of Kant's epistemology. This will be done, on the one hand, through analysis of Kant's reservations about transcendental realism and, on the other, through the presentation of the two main kinds of interpretations of transcendental idealism. In section 1, we shall introduce the sceptic who transcendental idealism is supposed to address. We shall depict him as someone who shares with us the same knowledge claims but at the same time who demands a rational justification as to why we trust them. In section 2, we shall define transcendental realism as the doctrine that external objects, to be external, must be conceived of as constituted completely apart from our capacity of experiencing them. This introduces a gap between the way we see the world and the way the world really is. Such a gap enables the sceptic to take refuge in the idea that we may be mistaken about what the features of the external world are "really" like. In section 3, we shall show that Kant's idealism is devised as a way out of the transcendental realist conundrum. We shall consider two basic and distinct interpretations of the former. On the one hand, the 'two world' theorists, also called members of the standard picture, argue that Kant postulates two kinds of entities, namely, appearances and things in themselves. On the other hand, the 'two aspect' theorists argue that Kant postulates just two different considerations of the same object, namely, a consideration whereby objects are thought of either in connection with our conditions of knowledge (appearances) or apart from such a connection (things in themselves). We opt for the second view because the first does not dismiss transcendental realism. In fact, the first kind of interpretation reintroduces the gap between the way we see the world and the way the world really is. Now, since we have no access to a reality already made or constituted apart

from our experience, it is not possible to match our view of the world with its allegedly inaccessible features. Once such a gap shows up, our epistemological efforts succumb to scepticism. In section 4, we shall point out that Kant's idealism still owes us two arguments: one by which we can dissociate it from phenomenalism, and another, by which we can successfully accept the empirical reality of external objects. These two arguments are conceived by Kant to be carried out in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, where he claims that, by considering space and time as *a priori* intuitions, he can at the same time avoid phenomenalism and pave the way to empirical realism.

1. The Sceptic's Problem according to Kant

The kind of sceptic that Kant is interested in, and with whom transcendental idealism struggles to deal, is someone who is not satisfied with the justification of most of his beliefs, particularly those regarding the external world. In different ways, this sceptic entertains suspicions about them and, not having found the answers, he asks us to help him. Resourceful as he is, our proposals are always brought into close examination, so that he keeps inviting us to consider counter-examples and antitheses to our alleged solutions.

This sceptic may well be a man of convictions, as we are. He may believe that, if he closes his eyes when he goes downstairs, he is very likely to fall down and get hurt, or that if he puts wood in the fire, it is going to burn.¹ He may also believe he is a human being, with a body that interacts with other bodies in the world, and that the Tower of London did not disappear because he is in Paris drinking "l'eau Perrier" at the "Deux Magots" and cannot see or touch it. He takes it for granted that the world exists even if some of its parts are unobserved.

¹ As Sextus Empiricus states, the sceptic "would not, when feeling hot or cold, say 'I believe I am not hot or cold'" (O.P., p. 11).

The sceptic's dissatisfaction arises when he reflects upon the reliability of our knowledge claims. He may share with us the same beliefs, but he is keen to question why we trust them. In this way, it is futile to show him the trees in Gordon Square in order to prove that there are external objects, or to make him raise his hands to perceive that there are at least two external objects in space, as Moore did. He is prepared to concede from the very beginning that, for the sake of our own survival, we are committed to believing in the existence of an external world. All that he is asking for is a rational justification whereby our certainty can be established once and for all. Whatever the answer to the sceptic may be, if there is one, it has to be sought out in philosophy, not in everyday life.

It is along these lines, I take it, that Kant interprets Hume's standpoint. As Kant correctly points out, Hume never doubts that our beliefs about the external world - particularly the belief on causality - should be taken for granted.² What is at issue for Hume is the basis for their justification. According to Hume, it is a pseudo-problem to ask, for example, whether "there be body or not", because this is a point "which we must take for granted in all our reasonings". The question that we can (and must) ask is what makes us "believe in the existence of body".³ Hume maintains that the answer to this question is not found by means of reason, but rather through an appeal to Nature, or Custom. Custom is for him "the great guide of human life"; without its influence, there would be "an end at once of all action".⁴ According to Hume, there is no way of providing a justification of our knowledge claims through reason, or through a priori demonstrative reasoning. Scepticism seems to be conceived of by Hume as a procedure through which, on the one hand, claims of (rational) knowledge are undercut;⁵ and, on the other hand, the pretensions of reason to erect a rational justification for our knowledge of the external world are destroyed.⁶ "As sceptical doubt arises", Hume con-

² cf. Prol. p. 258-9.

³ *Treatise*, p. 187.

⁴ *Enquiry*, § 36.

⁵ cf. *ibid.*, §§ 20-33.

⁶ cf. *ibid.*, §§ 34-45.

tends, “naturally from a profound and intense reflection..., it always increases, the farther we carry our reflections...”.⁷

I believe that it is also possible to fit Sextus Empiricus into this description of the sceptic. At first sight, it may seem odd to do so, for he propounds *epochê*, i.e., the suspension of all judgements *and beliefs*, including the empirical ones. If this is so, it seems to me that Hume’s criticism of Pyrrhonism holds, because Hume correctly states that we cannot see how it is ever possible to live without beliefs. Sextus’ repudiation of all beliefs would signify the total lack of commitment to our everyday practices, mainly those ones responsible for our own survival.⁸ On that score, it seems more reasonable to follow Burnyeat in this matter, who claims that Sextus’ idea of belief generally means a claim of (rational) knowledge.⁹ In this way, although there are several differences between Sextus Empiricus and Hume - for example, the former, unlike the latter, believes that scepticism is a way of life -, Sextus Empiricus *mutatis mutandis* turns out to be closer to Hume than Hume himself realised. They both acknowledge the inadequacy of reason as well as the necessity of relying on the force of nature. On the one hand, we can find Sextus Empiricus repudiating rational proofs and at the same time advising us to rely on “the guidance of Nature”.¹⁰ On the other hand, we see Hume claiming that Custom, as an irresistible tendency of nature, is the “great guide of human life”.¹¹ As Hookway observes, a Pyrrhonist “allows his life to be guided by the propositions that are naturally impressed upon him, while taking no responsibility for their truth or rationality”. The sceptic in this sense easily “turns his back on reason”.¹²

Described in this way, the sceptic is not necessarily an opponent of philosophy, or of the philosophers. He is, as it were, open to philosophy as well as to our everyday practices. In fact, if we take a closer look, we

⁷ *Treatise*, p. 218.

⁸ cf. *Enquiry*, § 128.

⁹ cf. Burnyeat 1983, p. 125 and 137.

¹⁰ O.P. I, 23-4.

¹¹ *Enquiry*, § 36.

¹² Hookway 1990, p. 14; cf. *ibid.* p. 106; cf. also Barnes 1982, p. 7.

may see him playing the philosophical game with great skilfulness. If the philosopher presents a solution, he investigates it, but he always tries to draw the opposite, in order to examine the steadfastness of our philosophical proposals. As Kant says, "the *scepticus* constantly inquires, he examines and investigates, he distrusts everything, but never without a ground. In this he resembles a judge, who weighs the grounds for something as well as against it, and who listens to the plaintiff as well as to the defendant, prior to and before deciding the matter and passing judgement. He postpones his final judgement quite long before he dares to settle something fully".¹³

The overall position that we shall develop in this thesis is that sceptical worries regarding the possibility of providing a rational justification of our knowledge claims cannot be neutralised by our assuming transcendental idealism. In other terms, our aim will be to show that Kant fails to produce a rational justification by means of which what we usually take to be external or distinct from our thoughts is successfully proved to be the case. A proper starting point to accomplish this task is to expose and criticise, by means of Kant's help, the philosophical approach which he opposes, namely, transcendental realism. In so doing, the very heart of the polemic which Kant struggles to solve will be highlighted, providing us with vital clues to understand what transcendental idealism is all about. That being so, we shall argue in what follows that the transcendental realist attempts to help the sceptic in the past are invariably doomed to failure, because they cannot furnish a consistent view of the external world. In the light of this, we shall analyse Kant's general strategy to overcome transcendental realism. Kant's intentions, although plausible, will be said still to leave open the problem of determining how we can furnish a rational consideration of what is to be counted as mind independent in the external world.

¹³ L.L. p. 166.

2. Transcendental Realism

Among the basic reasons that led Kant to conceive transcendental idealism, there lies his assessment of a kind of realist viewpoint that presents, he contends, a flawed view of externality. Kant usually calls this transcendental realism. Let us sketch its main characteristics by resorting to an example.

Consider a man who was born with a disease in his eyes. This disease makes him see the world quite differently from the way we do. For example, he may be in a similar position to a person who looks in one of those mirrors at the circus that distorts forms, showing fat people as skinny, short ones as tall, etc. A man who has an eye disease like this is incapable of contemplating the world as it is for us, who do not suffer from the same disease. He is able, however, to play this disability down. A healthy man can tell him the non-distorted characteristics of the external world. The objects, the story goes, are flatter, or shorter, etc., than he sees them. His view of the world is, as it were, corrected or improved through the testimony of those who see the world without distortion of any kind. Likewise, he may use glasses or contact lenses to compensate his visual limitations.

Suppose now that all of us suffered from a similar disease and that this disease also affected the other senses. In that event, all our sensory information about the world would be distorted. There would be no one to resort to, no one who could grasp a clear and genuine (non-distorted) picture of the world and *ipso facto* there would be no way of correcting our deformed visual experiences of objects outside us. In a more philosophical discourse, this collective disease may be said to be just the constitution of our cognitive capacities, i.e., our sensorial and conceptual conditions through the exercise of which alone we can obtain knowledge of objects. In that case, we would be talking about *two worlds*: one which we grasp through the constraints of our epistemic resources; and another, somewhat hidden behind the former, constituted and already made completely apart from our distorted point of view. The external object, then, would be not this printer I am seeing right now - because it is appearing within my misshapen (epistemically constrained) visual scope -, but something which can only be described from its own point of view, i.e., from a point

of view through which the object is seen as it is without the limitations of our human constraints. In a more Kantian tone, we can say that the external object would be *the thing in itself*, i.e., the thing as it would be like without our conditions of experience.¹⁴ To use a more contemporary approach, we can adapt Dancy's terminology and state that the "real" features of external objects are *evidence transcendent*, i.e., they are features which escape our sensory apparatus and may well be quite different from any evidence available to us.¹⁵ Take, for example, this table in front of me. Let us deprive it of its three dimensions, its permanence in different moments of time, its colour, its impenetrability, etc. According to a proponent of this view, what we are left with is just a W, i.e., just some "thing" whose properties are thoroughly independent of the mind, but at which the mind has to arrive somehow in order to produce knowledge of objects. We have to be careful here. To be thoroughly apart from our experience in this context means to be constituted without any reference to our being capable of experiencing them, i.e., to possess certain features which are not only pre-conceptualised, for the mind cannot exercise its synthetic capacities to describe them; but also independent of the senses.

The doctrine that reality has a character which is constituted thoroughly independent of, or apart from, our cognitive apparatus, is what Kant understands to be the cardinal claim of *transcendental realism*.¹⁶ Understood in this sense, the transcendental realist enterprise towards the knowledge of the external world, Kant maintains, portrays the knowing subject as playing a subsidiary role. In fact, the knowing subject seems to be always trying to find a way to the object, whose features have to be brought into light somehow. The subject never collaborates in the generation and order of those features by any means.¹⁷ Hence, we are entitled to say that, within this transcendental realist picture, our knowledge of the external world is to be thought of as dictated, at the end of the day, by the object alone, not by the knowing subject. It is the former that, as it

¹⁴ cf. B XX, B 64 ff., *passim*.

¹⁵ cf. Dancy 1985, p. 12 ff.

¹⁶ cf. A 369, B 518.

¹⁷ This form of realism is usually called by some contemporary philosophers 'metaphysical realism' (cf. Hookway 1990, p. 119; Bonjour 1985, p. 160; Putnam 1981, p. 49; *et alia*).

were, wears the trousers. Come what may, the 'real' world lies already made or constituted outside the limits of our experience, the knowing subject endeavouring to inspect it. Like the man with an eye disease, the transcendental realist struggles to dispense with the experienceable (distorted) features that show up in his experience, in order to focus his attention solely on the non experienceable (non-distorted) ones.

Now, if the transcendental realist assumes from the very beginning that the external world lies already made or constituted apart from our ken, it is plausible to contend that, according to him, the process of knowledge acquisition seems to consist in the *reproduction* of the features of the external world.¹⁸ This suggests that, by embracing transcendental realism, we end up confining our epistemological resources to a mere *contemplative* role. We are limited to describing the world in the hope that our perceptions match its real features. From the very start, then, transcendental realism allows for the possibility that our conception of the external world is just a fake, a distorted copy of it. In more technical terms, it leaves open the possibility that the "real" world might be otherwise. If this is so, the transcendental realist seems unable to contend that his picture of the external world is necessarily the case, or that what we sense provides us with the genuine set of features of the mind independent world. Unlike the man with an eye disease - who may be told the normal characteristics of the external world by healthy people - the transcendental realist does not have at his disposal the testimony of someone who may see the world as it "really" is apart from our sensory conditions. The difficulty arises as to whether his empirical knowledge matches or corresponds to the "real" world or is just a product of a deceiving agent, an evil demon, or a mad scientist, who has endowed him (us) with an irresistible commitment to a collection of illusions that have no "real" referent whatsoever. So, it seems that transcendental realism sets up an epistemological gap between the reality as it is for us and the reality in itself. Once this gap is established, the sceptic comes up asking

¹⁸ cf. Allison 1987, p. 158.

the transcendental realist to bridge it.¹⁹ If the latter can ever build it up, our knowledge claims may be liable to a proper philosophical foundation. Otherwise, there will be no difference between our knowledge claims and claims based on faith, pure luck or other non-philosophical sources.

It should be noticed that there are other ways of postulating transcendental realism apart from this 'two world' version. Actually, one can drop the conception of two distinct worlds inhabited by *ontologically distinct entities* and continue to be a transcendental realist. One can maintain the conception of a single world *considered* from two distinct *points of view*, to wit, one brought about by an empirical description, and the other, described by means of a privileged standpoint which is exempt from our sensory constraints. Now, the problem remains as to whether and how we can make a correspondence between these two descriptions and, in so doing, justify our knowledge claims, provided that we remain incapable of seeing the external world from that privileged standpoint. It is then clear that, as soon as one entertains this descriptive version of transcendental realism, one is forced to accomplish the unfeasible task of showing that, and how, one's point of view is in accordance with that privileged standpoint. On that score, in order to be a transcendental realist, it suffices that one inserts into one's picture of the external world a notion of mind independence that encourages a privileged standpoint whereby such reality can be considered as it is in itself, and not as it is for us. In this way, Kant is careful not to match transcendental realism with representationalism (like that of Descartes), or the doctrine that all we have at our disposal are representations of sensory unreachable things. As we shall show in the next chapter, Kant can be seen as claiming that Berkeley, who is a critic of the conception of a reality in itself, also ends up committing himself to transcendental realism.

¹⁹"The conclusion of a sceptic argument is typically that the real nature of something cannot be determined and that we must content ourselves with saying how it appears" (Burnyeat 1983, p. 128). In that sense, the most we can extract from the sceptic seems to be a proposition like "it appears to me that I am seeing my Mac", and not a proposition like "I am seeing my Mac".

Let me go back to the situation of the man with an eye disease. There is at least one source, say X, whereby he can grasp a genuine (non-distorted) description of the world. Despite his disability, he enjoys a reasonably comfortable position, for he is able to support and give legitimacy to his knowledge claims. His job is to compare his visual experiences with the descriptions that X, a reliable source, has given to him. The transcendental realist, though, cannot appeal to an X, i.e., a source that can either tell him what things in themselves are like, or vouchsafe his knowledge claims. If an X were available, say, some entity capable of experiencing things in themselves without being constrained to our human limitations, the problem would, then, shift from one point to another. The transcendental realist was not, before, in a position to know things in themselves; now, although X has this knowledge, he finds no means to acquire X's knowledge so as to incorporate it into his experience. If asked by the sceptic on what basis he is so sure that X *does* experience things in themselves, he will be in trouble. The man with an eye disease is not exempt from this challenge. But he has himself the means to verify whether X is being a reliable source or not. When X describes, say, a vase, the man with an eye disease can touch it and, if he is clever, he will be able to form a picture of the vase in his mind. In so doing, he can confirm (or not) X's description. The transcendental realist cannot do that, for his senses do not go beyond the veil of appearances. This suggests that it is not enough to resort to an agent X in order to obtain confirmation that our experience of things matches the way things really are. This is a job the transcendental realist himself has to do. He is obliged to have access to X's experiences to ensure that things for us and things in themselves go hand in hand, i.e., that the first set of things corresponds to the second.

Were X taken as a reliable source or a vouchsafer in advance, without further ado, the transcendental realist would not need to have direct access to X's experiences and the correspondence problem would be liable to a proper solution. Taking this into account, the transcendental realist might, either like Descartes, namely, let God play X's role (for He is by definition all benevolent and would never deceive us); or, like Leibniz, claim that there is a pre-established harmony between the representational world and the reality in itself, as though they were two watches

ticking in perfect synchronisation. Now, the appeal to a divine entity is less an explanation than a further complication which leads us nowhere. As Hume says, although a deductive proof based upon the intervention of God can be "so logical", it leads us to a "fairy land, long ere we have reached the last steps of our theory".²⁰ Likewise, the hypothesis of a perfect agreement between those two worlds requires either the conception of a Supreme Being, who would be thought of as ultimately responsible for the creation and maintenance of such alleged harmony - which means we would go back to the problems of the Cartesian solution²¹ - or a lucky coincidence, which can hardly be considered a philosophical argument. It seems, then, that the reality in itself and God are on the same footing: all that is required is the means to reach them so as to justify our knowledge claims.²² But each one is opaque to our experience; unless the faith in God is called into the discussion - and the sceptic would correctly repudiate this strategy straightaway - the establishing of the correspondence seems to lie beyond our cognitive capacities.

The transcendental realist may reply that we are perhaps underestimating our intellectual powers. Although we cannot know the thing in itself directly, say, through the senses, we can find ways of guaranteeing the correspondence between representations and the reality in itself by exercising our rational, conceptual powers alone. Helped by logical laws and premises based on widely accepted definitions, he claims to elaborate a proof which will satisfy the sceptic in his quest for certainty. Now, take a concept Y that allegedly describes a certain property of things in themselves. Suppose the transcendental realist can build up an impeccable proof, from a logical point of view, that Y is indeed to be found in things in themselves. The sceptic, as is predictable, will ask him how he can justify this claim, given that the senses are not a reliable source. All the transcendental realist has at hand are logical laws, particularly the principle of contradiction, and some definitions which he believes to be unproblematic.

²⁰ cf. *Enquiry*, § 57.

²¹ cf. B 330, A 391.

²² cf. B 620.

Now, definitions, contrary to what the transcendental realist may think, are always subject to reservations. Take, for example, Descartes' general claim in the third Meditation, upon which he based his first proof of the existence of God, namely, that the cause has to be as great as its effect. Descartes contends that, if we have the idea of perfection (God) in our minds, we cannot be thought of as its cause, for we are imperfect and limited beings. There has to be, in this way, a God, who planted this idea in our minds. Therefore, God exists. In other words, if the idea exists, its cause must be thought of as existing as well, according to the above mentioned principle. Descartes seems to be saying that what is counted as true of the effect has to be counted as true of its cause too. It is possible, however, to conceive of several counter-examples to that principle. For instance, if the invasion of Kuwait was the cause of the Gulf War, that does not mean what is true of the Gulf War is also true of the invasion of Kuwait. Similarly, if the sun causes green plants to carry out photosynthesis, that does not allow us to say that what is true of the sun is also true of the process of photosynthesis.

As for the principle of contradiction, it is not sufficient to describe extra-logical (empirical) facts. As Kant points out, we must distinguish a *real* from a *logical* opposition. In a real opposition, incompatible properties F - a force in one direction - and $\sim F$ - a force in the opposite direction - can be reasonably thought of as being applied to the same object O without any logical opposition (or contradiction), and the result will be that the object remains at rest. This is the case of a billiard ball being hit by two other balls in opposite directions. Both forces, although opposite to one another, are inflicted on O. As a result, they cancel each other and the billiard ball O does not move at all. Logical opposition, in turn, is contradiction, i.e., is the affirmation and denial of one and the same property of a thing. The mere application of the latter does not equip us to account for empirical events that might show real oppositions. It seems then, that logical contradiction is not generally powerful enough to give an account of real contradictions.²³ This suggests that it is necessary to

²³ cf. Ak. II 179-88. Hume's criticisms of the alleged powers of logic when applied to describe events seem to go on the same line. In fact, he correctly observed that we are always able to

add some empirical information to logical proofs in order to make them work, *pace* the kind of transcendental realist who believes that logical proofs alone can establish what the world is “really” like. Kant believes that this indicates that we cannot grasp knowledge of the external world *through reason alone*, independently of the data of our sensibility. The transition from alleged non-empirical premises to particular instances can be successfully carried out only by smuggling empirical components into the proof. The transcendental realist then, is inconsistent in arguing for a justification of his premises based upon reason alone and at the same time in allowing a subreptitious non-logical move.

Thus put, according to Kant, the transcendental realist who believes solely in the powers of reason seems to play the role of the *dogmatist*. Kant understands that the procedure whereby one tries to establish a doctrine according to concepts and principles alone, leaving aside a proper inspection of the powers and limits of human reason, i.e., leaving aside the possibility of ever having experiences about the referent of the concepts involved, is the foremost mark of dogmatism.²⁴ This is one of the basic sources of errors that can be detected in some doctrines of the past. The dogmatist, in fact, starts with the wrong presupposition that reason alone possesses the power of resolving any issue with which it may be confronted, without paying any attention to the empirical data. Lacking prudence and caution towards philosophical problems, the dogmatist believes that it is possible to answer any question, no matter what concepts and principles are involved, i.e., no matter whether these concepts can be given an empirically graspable referent or not. As a result, philosophy becomes the reign of “easy speculation” about matters which philosophers are not equipped to tackle.²⁵ An example can be Descartes, who deals with propositions about God, the immortality of the soul, etc., without first asking himself whether we can ever be capable of having experiences of them. In that sense, Kant can be seen as trying to reinstate

conceive the negation of an event, say that “the sun will not rise tomorrow”, without entangling ourselves in a logical contradiction (cf. *Enquiry*, § 21).

²⁴ cf. B XXXV and B 7.

²⁵ cf. B XXXI.

the metaphysical task by taking into account the possibility of finding empirical referents to concepts in general. Keeping this in mind, Kant claims that propositions whose concepts refer to non empirically graspable objects have to be dispatched from the field of metaphysics. In this way, Kant thinks that he is able to state a criterion for the decidability of propositions of reason. Only those propositions whose concepts are susceptible of being given an empirical referent can bear a determinate truth value.

In parallel to it, the transcendental realist seems to play also the part of the *ontologist*, who goes on formulating principles to define what there is without the previous investigation of how we can ever know the external world. Wolff is a good example of an ontologist for Kant. Wolff believed that only through the deductive method and some universal definitions, without any kind of empirical consideration, was it possible for a science to attain "secure progress".²⁶ In this way, Kant holds that the "proud Ontology" of the Ancients - which sets to itself the task of disclosing the truth value of propositions about the external world without previous determination of the limits of our cognitive capacities -, has to be repudiated.²⁷ The ontologist deals with undecidable propositions, i.e., propositions whose concepts refer to a non empirically given domain of objects. In that way, he does not have at his disposal any mechanism to determine their truth value. With the ontologists, the sceptic can never find a proper justification for his beliefs about the external world and metaphysics becomes "a battle ground quite peculiarly suited for those who desire to exercise themselves in mock combats".²⁸

In view of all these reservations, Kant claims that the transcendental realist fails to show to the sceptic *what* it is that is external, independent of our awareness, distinct from our thoughts. Since the reality in itself is not accessible, the transcendental realist puts himself in a situation where no possible description Y is satisfactory, for the things of which Y

²⁶ B XXXVI.

²⁷ cf. B 303.

²⁸ cf. B XV.

is a property are not reachable and cannot be shown to possess either Y or $\sim Y$. In this context, the sceptic finds himself just at the point we started, asking for a satisfactory answer to his demands for a justification of our knowledge claims. From these considerations, we are entitled to contend that, according to Kant, transcendental realism does not seem to be an adequate, persuasive philosophical background against which the sceptic will find his answers.²⁹

3. Two Views of Transcendental Idealism

An alternative to being rid of the problems generated by transcendental realism is to accept the two world theory, i.e., the view that there is a reality in itself - in Kant's terminology "the noumenal world" - somehow hidden behind the world as it appears - in Kant's terminology "the phenomenal world" - but to defend that it is futile to try to give a full account of the former, for our knowledge is restricted to the latter. The only point that we can make regarding the reality in itself is that its objects (things in themselves) are the causes of our representations. We are somehow *affected* by them, so that representations and things in themselves become causally linked with one another. Since Kant encourages this view more than once,³⁰ a number of commentators interpret transcendental idealism as a doctrine that, on the one hand our knowledge of the external world does not go beyond the experiential domain, but that, on the other hand the reality in itself must be postulated as the ultimate source of our representations. In fact, this is the traditional way of considering Kant's doctrine, and is described by Allison as "the standard picture" of transcendental idealism.³¹

The question arises as to how things in themselves can still determine the course of our experience and give it a content that does not

²⁹ I am here in agreement with Nagel, who also argues that scepticism is not defused once it is based upon metaphysical (for us, transcendental) realism (cf. Nagel 1986, pp. 90-2, *passim*).

³⁰ "The intelligible world", Kant says, "contains the ground of the sensible world and therefore also of its laws" (G.M. A 111).

³¹ cf. Allison p. 3-5.

come from us, provided that they have to be regarded as unknowable or inaccessible in themselves. Transcendental idealism, understood in this way, seems to carry with it a puzzling dilemma. If we suppose that the reality as it appears matches the reality in itself, our knowledge ought to be characterised as extending beyond the world of appearances, for we must be entitled to say that the noumenal world possesses at least some relevant features capable of underlying all appearances. But if, on the other hand, these appearances do not stand for anything noumenal, then nothing that is wholly independent of us can limit the arbitrariness of the mind's action in ordering sensible items so as to produce our knowledge of the external world.

Allison's account of Kant is more promising than the standard picture. According to Allison, traditional discussions of transcendental idealism have focused on the idea that Kant states not only the unknowability of things in themselves as corresponding to the "real" world, but also the limits of our cognitive claims as defined by the spatio-temporal realm of appearances. In that way, some commentators like Erdmann, Vaihinger, Prichard and Strawson, amongst others, interpret Kant to be maintaining that things in themselves are the causes of representations, on the grounds that they *affect* our minds and, as such, have to be viewed as existing, even though transcendental idealism disallows any claim about them.³² In different ways, they draw the overall conclusion that such a system is inconsistent because, amongst other motives, the notion of affection carries necessarily with it a reference to a spatio-temporal framework.

Allison acknowledges that Strawson, as well as any other proponent of the standard picture, equates "appearance" with "mere representation" and then takes Kant to be denoting by appearances the "contents of our minds" only, which is nothing but the ideas in the Berkeleian sense.³³ Kant would then be led to the following undesirable options: either representations only *seem* to be in space and time, a claim that might

³² cf. Erdmann 1878, Vaihinger 1881, Prichard 1909 and Strawson 1966.

³³ cf. Strawson 1966, p. 91-2.

direct us to an illusory world, or representations are indeed spatio-temporal, a doctrine that is unbearable inasmuch as it forces us to regard subjective contents as located in space. In Kantian terms, the question seems to be how, if the objects of our awareness are representations and, as such, dependent upon the mind - or belonging to the mind as its modifications - we can nevertheless consider them as being items of an objective order distinct from our thoughts.

These arguments raised by the supporters of the standard picture, according to Allison, are seriously mistaken. "The root of the problem", he correctly says, "is that it tends to neglect altogether, or at the very least to minimise, certain distinctions that are central to Kant's whole transcendental enterprise".³⁴ As I see it, Allison accurately calls our attention to the fact that in Kant there are two different levels of discourse about the external world, namely, the empirical or descriptive and the transcendental or reflexive. The empirical level is constituted by our "being open" to the everyday experience of the world, as say, when I acknowledge that I am writing down my thoughts here in the University of London Library, or when I am seeing some white papers on the table, or when I observe that I am surrounded by books, etc.³⁵ I do not believe Kant to be in disagreement with anyone who talks about the world this way, i.e., anyone who describes the world as having such and such features that we somehow share with one another, a world composed of objects with which we interact in determinate ways. Recall that the sceptic also takes this point for granted. He never doubts that he is capable of having an experience that is commonly taken as objective. He may say, like Hume, that we are committed, for the sake of our own survival, to believing in an objective experience.

The sceptic, however, encourages us to search for another level of discourse about the external world. It is only when we start, as the sceptic does, asking some questions like "how is experience possible?", or "what

³⁴ Allison 1983, p. 6.

³⁵ The expression "being open to experience" is borrowed from Valberg (cf. Valberg 1992, chaps. 1 and 2.).

kind of justification do I possess to count such and such experiences as reliable, or objective?", that we step beyond a mere (empirical) description of the world and switch to a reflection on such a world. This is exactly what Kant calls a transcendental enterprise: "I entitle transcendental all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects".³⁶ "To be occupied with objects" seems to mean the empirical or descriptive talk of the external world that we have just referred to. In turn, "to be occupied with the mode of our knowledge of objects" points to a reflection upon how we can know or have experience of such a world.

It may be asked why a reflexive level has to be "transcendental". Kant's answer is this. As shown in the preceding section, transcendental realists argue, consciously or not, for the primacy of the object vis-à-vis the subject, which is to say, they conceive of the external object as something already constituted or made, that the subject has to get a grip on so as to know the external world. Seen from this point of view, the subject can only hope to match its descriptions with such a world. This situation, we have seen, revives sceptical doubts, because the subject finds itself trying vainly to match its reproduction with the "real" and pre-established features of the external world.

Thus, transcendental idealism has to be conceived as the doctrine that objects no longer stipulate the extent and general characteristics of our knowledge. Rather, it is the subject that performs the task of dictating the principles of regulation and the standards of knowledge in which the objects have to acquiesce to be objects of knowledge. Transcendental realists have "assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects". All these attempts, however, have ended in failure. Keeping this in mind, we must "make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge".³⁷ A study of what can be counted as objects, i.e., items distinct from our thoughts, has to be preceded by a study of our conditions of

³⁶ B 25.

³⁷ B XVI.

knowledge, or the subjective conditions (if there are any) by means of which we know these objects. Now, if the objects of which we are to have knowledge are objects conformed to the subject's conditions, the transcendental realist's point of view that these objects bear no subordination to our mind at all will be proved to be seriously mistaken. This strategy in Philosophy is what Kant calls a *Copernican Revolution*.³⁸

The key to understanding the importance of Allison's view is to focus on the distinction between empirical and reflexive considerations of mind independence or of externality. My Mac, the bubble jet printer, my packet of cigarettes, etc., are considered mind independent or *real* on the empirical level only. They form the collection of publicly accessible objects given to us through the senses. They are said to be external because they lie outside me and not back here in my head. In turn, the thought of my having drunk a cup of coffee some moments ago, the memory of the smiling face of my daughter, etc., are mere items in the sequence of my consciousness, just like Macbeth's dagger is supposed to be an item in his head. These data are not shared by others; they are private or, in Kant's terms, *ideal*. And since each one of us has this kind of subjective experience, the data of any individual mind is said to be ideal on the empirical level. In view of this, it is easy to understand what *empirical idealism* is all about according to Kant. The empirical idealist propounds a view of the external world by which those objects we grasp through the senses end up being acknowledged as mere items in our minds, or mental states. We shall see in chapter 2 why Berkeley's thought yields an idealism of this sort and how Kant believes to have gotten around it. In this sense, Kant will be characterised as a proponent of *empirical realism*, i.e., the doctrine that what is given to the senses is mind independent and distinct from our thoughts.³⁹

According to Allison, the tricky point in these remarks is that my Mac, my packet of cigarettes, and other items that lie outside me are nonetheless considered to be within the scope of my experience. They are

³⁸ cf. B XVII.

³⁹ cf. A 370.

not archetypes in the Platonic world of ideas, a world inaccessible to us through experience. They inhabit the collectively shareable world as it is given to us. When we shift from empirical talk about items that are either back here in my head (ideal) or right there outside me (real) to a consideration of the experiential field and to what lies within it (ideal) or outside it (real), we arrive at the reflexive or transcendental level. Hence, what is considered as real or external in the empirical sense - i.e., what is distinct from my thoughts - is considered ideal in the transcendental sense - i.e., within my experience and dependent upon my awareness. In this way, while my Mac and my packet of cigarettes are characterised as empirically real or external, they are at the same time characterised as transcendently ideal. They are so considered because they lie in the domain of the world as it is from the subject's standpoint or, in Kant's terms, they are subordinated to the subject's conditions of experience. They are subjected to the spatio-temporal framework and judged or thought of through our capacity of conceptualisation. In the wake of it, "real" in the transcendental sense refers to the object deprived of the same subjective conditions, or to features that are allegedly already made independently of our sensibility.

Taking this on board, Allison contends that, according to Kant, there are not two worlds, the phenomenal and the noumenal one, the former very well known to us and the latter beyond the reach of human knowledge. Although Kant sometimes encourages this two world view,⁴⁰ transcendental idealism, Allison believes, is properly interpreted on the basis of a 'two aspect' view which characterises things in themselves as the very objects that we encounter in our everyday experience and know so much about.⁴¹ If objects are considered according to the necessary conditions of human knowledge - what Allison calls "epistemic conditions"⁴² - they are said to be appearances. At the same time, if they are considered apart from these conditions, they ought to be called 'things in themselves'. The distinction, Allison avows, is "between a *consideration*

⁴⁰ cf. B 294 ff.

⁴¹ cf. A 251-2, B XXVI-XVII, B307; cf. Prol., pp. 289, 293, 314-5.

⁴² cf. *ibid.*, p. 10.

of a thing as it appears and a *consideration* of the same thing as it is in itself".⁴³ Kant's commitment to them is thus not a commitment to a special realm of beings for ever in principle mysterious to us; it is rather a recognition that the world is not (as the phenomenalist would maintain) the product of our minds. Objects (in the empirical sense) are genuinely independent of us and distinct from our thoughts.⁴⁴

At first sight, Allison's two aspect view seems more compelling than the standard picture. Allison interprets Kant as propounding a view of the external world wherein the mind independence of external objects cannot be considered apart from our experiential horizon. In reflecting upon our empirical beliefs, i.e., in determining how we come to have them and why we are assured that they are true of that world, we must play down the thought of a reality already made apart from us. Our view of the external world has to be constituted from within the scope of our experience. A breach in this commitment will engender a view of externality that depicts objects as being made out of features that we are not able to get a grip on. This is the mistake made by the members of the standard picture. By claiming that Kant would have proposed a two world theory of externality, they interpret Kant as holding that, at bottom the real, mind independent world is somehow hidden behind the world as it appears to our senses, i.e., the world of appearances. This approach encourages the sceptic to demand a proof that the world of which we are aware corresponds to that hidden external world. This is equivalent to saying that proponents of the standard picture end up interpreting Kant in a way that leaves transcendental idealism open to the same sort of criticism as the one raised towards transcendental realism. Since transcendental idealism, according to the standard picture, presents reality as constituted independent of us, the sceptic will have strong reasons to suspect of any proposal whereby such a correspondence can be properly established once and for all.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 241.

⁴⁴ This viewpoint is not as original as we might be inclined to believe. See for example Paton 1936, p. 61 vol. I, and Prauss 1974. Of course neither Paton nor Prauss developed it so meticulously as Allison does.

Although Allison's general characterisation of transcendental idealism is compelling, I think it still presents some complications, specially if we compare his analysis of the thing in itself with the problem of affection. Such a problem is generated by some cryptic remarks in the *Critique* where Kant states, for example, that "the receptivity of the subject, its capacity to be affected by objects, must necessarily precede all intuition of these objects".⁴⁵ The question that has plagued transcendental idealism is this: what kind of object is here said to affect the senses? It cannot be just another representation for, according to Kant himself, representations result from the causal affecting relation. To avoid an apparent circle, many commentators have identified the source of affection with things in themselves. However, this solution deepens the problem. We are led to state that things in themselves and representations (or appearances) are causally connected. If this were so, Kant would have bypassed one of his most important restrictions, to wit, that the categories (in this case, the category of cause) cannot be applied to things in themselves.⁴⁶

Allison thinks that it is possible to harmonise the 'two aspect' view with the notion of transcendental affection.⁴⁷ He starts off by saying that the cause of appearances must not be taken under an empirical description, i.e., as if it were a spatio-temporal object. The reason is that this object would be given precisely the characteristics to be explained in virtue of the relation between it and appearances.⁴⁸ Hence, the conception of such an object has to be a conception of something nonsensible, in a word, the thing in itself. In the wake of this, Allison claims that the *thought* of an object as such demands the consideration of the object apart from its empirical features, i.e., within a transcendental context. However, the 'two aspect' view introduces more than two different considerations about objects, the empirical and the transcendental ones. It also postulates an *identity* between appearances and things in themselves. Allison explains that things in themselves are to be understood as

⁴⁵ B 42.

⁴⁶ For a very detailed exposition of this problem, see Buchdall 1992, chap. 6.

⁴⁷ cf. Allison 1983, p. 254.

⁴⁸ cf. *ibid.*, p. 250.

just the objects we are familiar with, abstracted from the conditions imposed by space, time and the categories. The point, however, is that we cannot say what we are left with once we abstract from these conditions. It is by location in space and time, and by the use of our conceptual apparatus, that we identify and individuate objects.

In that event, the notion of transcendental affection does not take us away from the transcendental realist dilemma: since the sensible and intellectual conditions stem from us, we must be affected by the independent reality in some fashion that is logically prior to our conceptualising it and ordering it in space and time. In so doing, it seems that we do not eliminate the transcendental realist's idea of a pre-given (description of the) reality. This idea drives us back into the conception of knowledge as reproduction of an already made reality and, concomitantly, to insuperable sceptical reservations presented in the preceding sections.

In the wake of this, the mere notion of plurality of objects requires a spatio-temporal framework; only within such a background does it make sense to refer to different objects in different spaces at different times. The expression "things in themselves" therefore yields the dilemma about the possibility of considering them subjected to a spatio-temporal ordering.⁴⁹ More generally, if things in themselves are wholly unknown, it seems rather odd to say that we are capable of distinguishing them from one another. Furthermore, for the sake of preserving Kant's distinction between phenomenal and noumenal world, we cannot apply our human categories to things in themselves, as already stated. Plurality, for instance, is a notion bound up with the category of quantity.

To overcome these difficulties, and to do justice to Kant's later thoughts, it is best if we eradicate the notion of things in themselves and hold fast the notion of *the thing in itself*. In fact, we must bear in mind that Kant's transcendental idealism was not so complete and free from complications in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as Allison believes. It is quite clear from a reading of Kant's later works, specially the *Opus*

⁴⁹ cf. Paton 1936, p. 65 vol I.

Postumum, that things in themselves must not be mistaken for “existent entities” whatsoever. He says for example that “the object of sense is not to be considered a thing in itself (*objectum Noumenon*)”.⁵⁰

The stumbling block here, however, is how to characterise the thing in itself, given that it is not a thing in the usual sense of the term. It is not possible to discard it as meaningless, for the simple reason that, like other philosophical concepts, the concept of the thing in itself is unavoidable.⁵¹ The thought of a thing as it appears inevitably carries with it the thought of a thing considered apart from the way we experience it. When I think of the chair in front of me, I cannot but imagine what would be the case if I abstracted from my human testimony and started considering the chair viewed, for example, from God’s point of view.

In our reading, the alternative is to interpret Kant’s notion of the thing in itself as a negative definition of object, i.e., a definition of what the object is *not*. In this way, the concept of the thing in itself bears a philosophical prohibition that we have to take into account in order to guarantee the success of our epistemological endeavour, as a ‘non-trespassing’ sign on the border of our experience, i.e., a “limit of thought”.⁵² As Kant states, the concept of the thing in itself is “the thinkable (*cogitabile*) through concepts”⁵³ and not “something which is given (*dabile*)”.⁵⁴ Thus, it is best referred to as a “maxim”,⁵⁵ or a “mere principle of the synthetic a priori knowledge which contains the formal [component] of the unity of the manifold of intuition in itself”.⁵⁶

At this stage, it is possible to understand the transcendental consideration of a thing in itself as a device to guide our epistemological enterprise. It delineates a limit that we must take account of if we are to justify our knowledge of the external world. In Kant’s words, it is “merely a lim-

⁵⁰ Ak. XXII, p. 335; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 34 and 347.

⁵¹ cf. A 1.

⁵² Putnam 1981, p. 61.

⁵³ Ak. XXII, p. 24; cf. *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 37.

⁵⁵ Ak. XXI, p. 11.

⁵⁶ Ak. XXII, p. 20; cf. *ibid.*, p. 33.

iting concept" which draws our attention to the fundamental dependence of our knowledge on our experiential field.⁵⁷ This granted, it can be viewed as a warning about the only remaining alternative to transcendental idealism, i.e., what is left as soon as we do not consider the unique reality of the sensible world. In order to account for things as they appear, we must have the concept of a thing in itself, or in Walsh's words, "in order to characterise the things we know as 'appearances' we have to have the concept of that which is not appearance".⁵⁸ In unpacking the concept of things as they appear, we must also unpack the concept of the thing in itself. Thus, the concept of the thing in itself serves as a conceptual device that completes the meaning of the notion of appearances.

It is worth asking how we understand the notion of transcendental affection once the idea of the thing in itself is conceived in the way just presented. If the notion of the thing in itself is just a limiting concept whereby we determine the scope of our experience, the thing in itself must be thought of as deprived of reality, and *ipso facto* incapable of causing our representations. This granted, the notion of transcendental affection seems incompatible with our interpretation of the thing in itself. Well, since such an interpretation seems to present the most consistent view of the thing in itself, whereby alone transcendental idealism can avoid insuperable difficulties, it is advisable to distance ourselves from Kant's troublesome remarks and to discard the notion of transcendental affection.

A straightforward reservation could be raised here. Kant himself states that representation is always representation *of* something. If we regard a representation R₁ as a representation of another representation R₂, R₂ will have to represent something, say, S. If S is also a representation, it will stand in the same situation as R₂, and a *regressus ad infinitum* is established. It seems that we get embroiled again in the requirement of an item which is not just a representation. If this is so, we slip back into the idea that the thing in itself is the cause of representations. Kant seems to

⁵⁷ cf. B 310-1

⁵⁸ Walsh 1975, p. 79.

reinforce this reservation when he says that, although we cannot know things in themselves, "we must yet be in position at least to *think* them...; otherwise we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearance without anything that appears".⁵⁹

As I see it, though, it is possible to wipe out this alleged quandary by acknowledging Kant's carelessness in dealing with the term "representation". He often makes use of it in order to argue, on the transcendental level, that the object of knowledge has to be thought of as constituted by our representational capacities through some indispensable ideal features (i.e., a priori space and time, categories). He does not, however, specify the level at which this term should be understood. Hence, he encourages some commentators to interpret the term "representation" on the empirical level. When this is done, external objects are turned into mere subject-dependent items. Taking this point into consideration, it is preferable to say that, on the transcendental level, empirical objects are conceived only in connection with our conditions of experience, so that Kant's position is indeed an idealistic one.

As a consequence, the term "representation" can be best understood as a reminder, on the transcendental level, that our notion of object is correlative with that of a subject capable of representing it. We cannot conceive of an object save insofar as it is an item that belongs to our experiential field. Our notion of an object is restricted to the reality that we are able to represent, i.e., the empirical world of tables and chairs. When we try to step outside this world in order to grasp knowledge of the non-representational reality, i.e., the reality in itself, we inevitably get involved in all those insuperable problems of transcendental realism already shown in the preceding section.

In this way, the notion of the thing in itself ought to be envisaged as bearing a heuristic value only.⁶⁰ It paves the way to the very idea of object by carrying with it all the negative properties of objects, i.e., all

⁵⁹ B XXVI.

⁶⁰ cf. Paton 1936, p. 62 vol I.

those properties (charitably granting that they are properties) which are not constrained by our power of representing, allowing us to identify or to discover objects.⁶¹ That being so, particular representations that we might have of tables and chairs will not be viewed as “caused” or “affected” by tables and chairs in themselves, as is the case in Plato’s doctrine of ideas and their archetypes. Instead, in keeping with our interpretation, the notion of the thing in itself becomes just a philosophical construct in order to complete and to give sense to the very notion of object. In this way, the thing in itself is acknowledged as “a thought-thing without reality, in order to indicate a position for the representation of the subject”.⁶² If this is so, we do not need to be worried about Jacobi’s alleged paradox about Kant’s system. In discussing the notion of the thing in itself, Jacobi states: “I cannot enter into the system, yet *with* this presupposition I cannot remain in it”.⁶³ Now, while it is true that without the notion of the thing in itself we cannot enter into transcendental idealism, it is also true that, based upon what has been said so far, we can well remain in it if we revise this notion in the way just shown.

That being so, we can dispense with the notion of “transcendental affection” and at the same time preserve the main thrust of transcendental idealism. On the transcendental level, there is no way of accounting for a reality that escapes the constraints of our human experience. Our quotations from Kant’s later works suggest that Kant was, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, probably confused when he talked about transcendental affection, a confusion that generated so many misunderstandings. To sum this up, although Allison, together with some other commentators, is correct in considering Kant to be handling two different levels of discourse about one and the same world, i.e., the world of tables and chairs, he fails to acknowledge Kant’s confusions about the notion of transcendental affection, which presupposes the idea of a causal relation between non experienceable and experienceable items. Besides, Allison neglects the fact that Kant misused the expression “things in themselves” in the plural and

⁶¹ cf. B XXVI n.

⁶² Ak. XXII, p. 31; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 4, 27, 32, 37, 414, 417, 420.

⁶³ Jacobi 1815, p. 304, vol 2.

thereby encouraged distorted views of transcendental idealism, as those elaborated by the proponents of the standard picture.

In view of this, if transcendental idealism is sound, it will have to be analysed by means of the two aspect view and not by means of the standard picture. For the sake of achieving our goal in this thesis then, we shall be thinking of transcendental idealism along the lines of the two aspect theorists, bearing in mind at the same time our interpretation of the thing in itself and its incompatibility with the notion of transcendental affection.

4. Two Knots

We have managed to present a revised version of Allison's 'two aspect' view of transcendental idealism by means of which the improprieties of the standard picture can be set aside and the stumbling blocks generated by transcendental realism can be overcome. This done, we have yet to show that transcendental idealism constitutes a proper philosophical ground upon which the sceptic can be disarmed. In order to do so, however, we must untie two knots that we left untouched.

The first one is this. Kant advises us to be idealists when we reflect upon experience, i.e., to confine our knowledge claims to the experiential field. Recall that this is exactly the point in which the sceptic is most interested, since he does not question that we have experience, or that we can describe what is around us. Well, we believe that the sceptic can accept this constraint to the experiential field, but at the same time question how externality is considered within it. Kant's answer is that what is external is the empirical object, or what in our description of the world we take as outside us (and not as outside our experiential horizon).

This answer is meant to be an advance vis-à-vis transcendental realism and phenomenalism. As Stroud correctly points out, Kant rejects the traditional (empirical idealist) view that, if the object is within our

experiential field, then it is mind dependent.⁶⁴ Kant's doctrine is supposed to break up this conditional. In this way, it has to be shown that transcendental idealism and empirical realism are compatible. We can thereby reinstate the sceptic's demands by considering him as urging Kant to prove, amongst other things, that *transcendental idealism alone can drive us into empirical realism*. And this must be accomplished without our involving ourselves with the transcendental realist notion of mind independence, for in that case, as already stated earlier on, the external object will be conceived of as bearing such and such features that escape the constraints of our experiential field, and the sceptic will prevail.

Wrapping this up, the first knot consists of holding that, even if we limit ourselves to the experiential field, i.e., even if we are idealists on the transcendental level, we still have to characterise the empirical object as external or mind independent. That is, we still have to show how we can be at the same time *idealists* on the transcendental level and *realists* on the empirical one. This is exactly what the sceptic urges us to do. He concedes that he has experience commonly taken as objective; but he demands an account, on the reflexive level, according to which the empirical object is shown to be mind-independent.

As I see it, unless it is possible to furnish a persuasive argument whereby transcendental idealism is shown to be compatible with empirical realism, Kant will be viewed as missing the point against the sceptic. If he proves that we have to be idealists when we reflect upon experience, but fails to establish the mind independence of empirical objects, then transcendental idealism will entail empirical *idealism* and, as we shall see in the next chapter, nothing will stop us from being phenomenologists. If, in turn, Kant can hold the empirical reality of the objects of the external world but fails to argue for their transcendental ideality, nothing will stop us from considering the transcendental realist idea of a conception of the external world apart from our viewpoint. And since this conception

⁶⁴ cf. Stroud 1983, p. 430-1.

introduces a gap between the way we see the world and the way the world “really” is like, the sceptic will always be able to cast doubt on the legitimacy of our knowledge claims.

Kant seems to be aware of this knot. That is why he advises us to take the mind dependence of the external object as referring only to the *form*, and not to the *matter*, of what is given to the senses.⁶⁵ However, the sceptic can now legitimately ask what is matter for a transcendental idealist. It cannot be what is transcendently ideal, since only the form has to be so considered. It cannot be what is transcendently real as well, because in that case matter would have to be viewed as constituted apart from the subject, just like the transcendental realist maintains. The key point here is to prevent the idealistic thrust of the transcendental level from leaking into the empirical one. If we restrict the ideality of the empirical object to its form, then we shall have to assume that its matter is not ideal. Now, the non-ideality (or reality) of matter has to be interpreted on an empirical level only. Otherwise, we end up saying, just like the transcendental realist, that matter is transcendently real and nothing will stop us from positing a (view of the) world constituted apart from our experience. What needs to be done then, is to characterise matter as empirically real, i.e., given to the senses but (empirically) independent of us. In so doing, however, we seem to slip back into the point we started. In order to understand what is empirically real, we resort to the form-matter distinction. Hence, unless we do not mind being circular, we cannot base ourselves upon what is empirically real to understand the form-matter distinction. To say that matter is that which lies outside our minds but within our experiential field neither suffices to respond to the sceptic nor prevents us from being circular in our definition of what the external object is like for a transcendental idealist.

The Kantian solution to this problem will consist in establishing that empirically real objects are spatially ordered. Kant more than once refers to matter as “substance in space” in the *Critique*.⁶⁶ Through space

⁶⁵ cf. Prol. p. 394 ff.

⁶⁶ cf. B 322, 646, *passim*.

alone can we represent objects as beside one another and outside our minds or distinct from our thoughts. While thoughts are merely temporally ordered, external objects are said to be not only temporally, but also spatially ordered. This is equivalent to acknowledging that Kant's overall anti-sceptical strategy can be characterised as an attempt to justify the claim "my experience in general of the external world is necessarily experience of a set of law-governed objects which are found not in me or in my thoughts, but in space outside me". Of course, the justification of this proposition demands careful scrutiny. Keeping this in mind, it seems crucial for the success of transcendental idealism to give an account of what spatial and temporal orderings are for Kant and whether or not he is successful in establishing the mind independence of the external object by means of a transcendental consideration.

This brings us the second knot. Kant's warning to restrict our knowledge claims to the empirical realm is also given by the phenomenalist, who maintains that the external object is a collection of sensory data. The phenomenalist also repudiates the gap between the way we see the world and the way the world really is. Likewise, the phenomenalist never denies that the external object is spatially ordered. If this is so, transcendental idealism may seem to be nothing more than a sophisticated version of phenomenalism. But if the former is to be successful, it has to avoid any familiarity with the latter, since this latter, as will be shown in the next chapter, is impotent to block the sceptical challenge. In this way, we have to compare these two philosophical standpoints in order to analyse whether Kant can answer the sceptic without involving himself in the phenomenalist conundrum.

Unpersuasive as it seems to me, transcendental idealism is said by Kant to be proved sound through the establishment of space and time as a priori intuitions. It is also by means of this account that Kant believes to have established a clear distinction between himself and Berkeley. On that score, it is worth surveying Kant's argument regarding this topic in order to determine the cogency of his doctrine. In what follows, we shall attempt to do this. We shall show in chapter 2 that, Kant relies on the apriority thesis of space and time to avoid phenomenalism. However, we

shall see that this thesis by itself leaves transcendental idealism open to the sceptical doubts. In view of this, he struggles to prove that space and time are also intuitions. We shall show in chapter 3 then, that Kant fails to neutralise the sceptic by means of the notion of a priori intuition. The sceptic will be able to accept the ideality and intuitivity theses of space and time but at the same time doubt that objects are really to be found in space outside us.

Chapter 2

Transcendental Idealism and Phenomenalism

In this chapter we shall compare Kant's Idealism with Berkeley's phenomenalism. We shall argue that these doctrines are distinct from each other in that the latter claims that space and time are empirical while the former claims that they are *a priori*. However, although this distinction stops Kant from reducing spatial to temporal ordering, he has yet to show how we can be empirical realists by embracing transcendental idealism. In section 1, we shall show that, at first sight, Kant and Berkeley seem to hold similar views of the external world. In section 2, we will flesh out Kant's main arguments for the apriority of space and time, bearing in mind that Berkeley claims otherwise. In section 3, based upon Kant's reservations towards Berkeley's view of space and time, we show that this latter, consciously or not, makes spatial ordering dependent upon temporal ordering. However, Kant's way of escaping from this error requires the assumption that, if empirical realism is sound, i.e., if we do have access to the external world through the senses without our being committed to phenomenalism, then space and time have to be already presupposed in our thought of the external object. Thus put, the sceptic can still suspect our reasons to hold empirical realism in the first place. That we have to be empirical realists is a claim to be argued for by Kant, as we shall see in chapter 3, in his account that space and time are not only *a priori*, but also transcendently ideal intuitions.

1. Apparent Similarities between Kant and Berkeley

A number of philosophers have been determined to class transcendental idealism as a very special and sophisticated kind of phenomenalism. According to them, by denying the access to objects beyond the field of experience and by constraining our epistemological claims to sensory objects, Kant would just have repeated Berkeley's fundamental principle that existing objects can only be those capable of being perceived and *a fortiori* that the material and the mental constituents of the world are just appearances.

The idea that Kant reinstates Berkeley's main claims in different clothing is by no means a recent way of interpreting transcendental idealism. This view was held by several philosophers contemporary to Kant. Garve and Feder, for example, commenting on the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1782, presented Kant as a radical idealist whose system "equally embraces spirit and matter" and "turns the world and ourselves into mere representations".¹ Such a system is said to be based on the idea that "sensations" are "mere modifications of ourselves, whereupon also Berkeley primarily constructed his idealism...".² More recently, Turbayne argued that Kant's thought is just a variation of Berkeley's, so that "Kant's many attempted refutations of dogmatic idealism fail before they begin".³ Wilkerson, in turn, contends that Kant "is a Berkeleian", because "he wants to reduce objects to collections of perceptions".⁴ Finally, Strawson challenges transcendental idealists to distinguish their view from a phenomenistic one, whereas Kantian bodies in space are viewed as mere perceptions and, "apart from these perceptions bodies are nothing at all".⁵

A casual view of Berkeley and Kant can lead one to agree with Strawson and others. In fact, it is indubitable that there are several affini-

¹ Garve & Feder, p. 40.

² *ibid.*, p. 41.

³ Turbayne 1955, p. 225.

⁴ Wilkerson 1976, p. 132.

⁵ Strawson 1966, p. 57.

ties between Kant and Berkeley. Both, for example, criticise those ones who advocate the absolute reality of space and time. As Berkeley states in the *Principles*, the notions of absolute space and time are just abstract ideas of outerness and succession, respectively.⁶ As such, no sensory data can possibly correspond to them. In line with this, Kant says that “there is nothing in space save what is represented in it..., for space is itself nothing but representation, and whatever is in it must therefore be contained in the representation”.⁷ Some of their reasons to discard the absolute notions of space and time are almost interchangeable. Berkeley points out that the notion of pure space requires us to think of space as existing after the annihilation of all existing entities, including God. In this sense, we are led to believe that “there is something beside God that is eternal, uncreated, infinite, indivisible, immutable”.⁸ Now, since this alternative points to an inconsistent notion of *divine* space that plays the role of the primary condition of the existence of all beings (including God), the notion of pure space seems to be pernicious and absurd.⁹ As for Kant, absolute space and time, as “two eternal and infinite self-subsistent non-entities”, must be “the necessary conditions of the existence of all things, and moreover must continue to exist, even although all... things are removed”. That being the case, “they must also be the conditions of the existence of God”.¹⁰ Hence, Kant also calls those notions “absurdities”.¹¹

Kant and Berkeley seem also to be in agreement with respect to the inadequacy of transcendental realism. Philosophers who maintain this view, Berkeley contends, are deluded into thinking that they can “conceive bodies existing unthought of or without the mind”.¹² Kant endorses this idea by saying that transcendental realists are “led to the childish endeavour of catching at bubbles, because appearances, which are mere represen-

⁶ cf. *Principles*, I §§ 97-8 for time and 111-4 for space.

⁷ A 374a.

⁸ *Principles*, § 117.

⁹ cf. *ibid.*

¹⁰ B 71.

¹¹ B 70.

¹² *Principles*, § 23.

tations, are taken for things in themselves".¹³ Nothing is more pernicious to philosophy than the idea of a reality that lies beyond our ken. "It is evident", Berkeley says, that "there can be no *substratum* of ... (sensible) qualities... I deny therefore that there is any unthinking *substratum* of the objects of sense, and in that acceptance that there is any material substance".¹⁴ He explains that by material substance he means "an unknown somewhat (if indeed it may be termed *somewhat*) which is quite stripped of all sensible qualities, and can neither be perceived by sense, nor apprehended by the mind".¹⁵ Since this notion can lead us to the conclusion that we know nothing real in the world, its acceptance has to be seen as "wild and extravagant".¹⁶ This idea is given a reformulation by Kant many times in the *Critique*. Berkeley's 'material substance' is *mutatis mutandis* Kant's 'thing in itself', which cannot be known because it is by definition independent of the senses and is *ipso facto* non spatio-temporalized.¹⁷

Once the idea of objects lying outside the sphere of experience is brought into play, both Kant and Berkeley argue that Philosophy is doomed to be undermined by the sceptical assault. Kant, for example, states that, if "we treat outer objects as things in themselves", it is by no means comprehensible "how we could arrive at a knowledge of their reality outside us, since we have to rely merely on the idea that is in us".¹⁸ There is no doubt that Berkeley anticipates such a view when he claims that, "so long as we attribute a real existence... to things distinct from their being perceived, it is not only impossible for us to know with evidence the nature of any real unthinking being, but even that it exists".¹⁹ If ideas "are looked on as notes" that refer "to *things* or *archetypes* existing without the mind, then are we involved all in *scepticism*", for it is "out of our reach" to say for sure that there are such things.²⁰

¹³ *Prol.*, p. 292; cf. A 491.

¹⁴ *Dialogues*, p. 71.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁷ cf. B 45, 67, A 369, B 522 and *passim*.

¹⁸ A 378.

¹⁹ *Principles*, § 87; cf. *ibid.* § 88.

²⁰ *Principles*, I § 87.

The points of contact between Kant and Berkeley do not stop here. It is not difficult to notice a similarity between them with respect to the solution of these complications. Kant affirms that the only "refuge" that the sceptic still leaves open to us is "the ideality of all appearances".²¹ In fact, "all appearances are not in themselves *things*; they are nothing but representations, and cannot exist outside our mind".²² Taking this into account, we must see "our knowledge of the existence of things" as reaching "only so far as perception".²³ Berkeley, in turn, defends a similar thesis. "Their *esse*", he says, "is *percepti*", and it is by no means possible that "they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things that perceive them".²⁴ Sensible things are "immediately perceived; and things immediately perceived are ideas; and ideas cannot exist without the mind; their existence therefore consists in being perceived".²⁵

Consequently, both Kant and Berkeley affirm that there is no need to *infer* the reality of external objects. Since they are just those items that we encounter in our experience, they can be known immediately. This can be confirmed by recalling Berkeley's words that "I am as certain as of my own being, that there are bodies or corporeal substances (meaning the things I perceive by my senses)".²⁶ Such a statement seems to echo in Kant's assertion that "external things exist as well as I myself, and both, indeed, upon the immediate witness of my self-consciousness".²⁷ As a matter of fact, "the inference from a given effect to a determinate cause is always uncertain, since the effect may be due to more than one cause".²⁸ If this were the case, we could never be completely sure about the real causes of our picture of the external world; so our doctrine would be compromised by the possibility that something else intervened to produce the available

²¹ A 378.

²² A 492.

²³ A 226.

²⁴ *Principles*, § 3.

²⁵ *Dialogues*, 64.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 71.

²⁷ A 371.

²⁸ A 368.

effects, as is the case in some sceptical hypotheses, viz., the evil demon, the mad scientist, etc.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that Berkeley and Kant distinguish reality from illusion by invoking a similar argument. Berkeley claims that ideas perceived by the senses "have... a steadiness, order, and coherence, and are not excited at random, as those which are the effects of human wills often are, but in a regular train or series..."²⁹ Kant, in turn, is by no means far from saying the same thing. "The difference between truth and dreams", he explains, "is... decided by... the connection of... representations according to the rules that determine the combination of them in the concept of an object".³⁰ In the same way, it is evident that both Kant and Berkeley hold that the distinction at issue is not based on an alleged relation of ideas to a super-sensible world, but on the coherence and the law-like character of the empirical items.³¹

2. The Apriority of Space and Time

These points being noted, it is comprehensible that some commentators put Kant's and Berkeley's doctrines on the same footing. Kant, however, struggles to avoid this phenomenalist interpretation of transcendental idealism on several occasions. His strongest and most detailed attempt to do so can be found in the Appendix of the *Prolegomena*. There he says that, whereas Berkeley regarded space (and time) as merely empirical, he claims rather that they are a priori.³² This is tantamount to saying that, when the phenomenalist reflects upon his experience of seeing, for example, that printer over there, he argues that its extension, figure, solidity, permanence in time, its colour, i.e., spatio-temporal characteristics, are all empirical, or learned by us through the senses. In addition, the phenome-

²⁹ *ibid.* § 30.

³⁰ *Prol.*, p. 290.

³¹ cf. A 493; *Principles*, § 35.

³² cf. *Prol.*, 290-4; cf. *ibid.*, 372ff.

nalist regards the very concepts of space and time as derived from experience. Only through the observation of the interrelations of the items given in our sensibility can we get spatial and temporal orderings. Space and time are features discoverable in the already made world that is given to us through the senses. About space, for example, Berkeley states that "outness" is suggested "to our thoughts by certain visible ideas... attending vision".³³ Hume seems to go in the same direction when he states that this idea "is borrow'd from, and represents some impression, which this moment appears to the senses".³⁴ Concurrently, as concerns time, Berkeley contends that it is nothing once we abstract "from the succession of ideas in our minds".³⁵ A similar account is proposed by Hume. He observes that time is "always discover'd by some *perceivable* succession of changeable objects".³⁶

If the phenomenalist contends that space and time are obtained from our sensations, it seems reasonable to say that, according to him, the sensory aspects of objects are logically prior to space and time. In order to evaluate such an assumption, we shall take into consideration from now on Kant's account of spatial and temporal orderings vis-à-vis the thought of an object and its sensory properties. Since we have stressed from the very start that our purpose is not exegetical, we shall restrict our attention to some points of Kant's account that can be of value in our quest for a sound anti-sceptical position. We shall then be less concerned with the pros and cons of the apriority thesis of space and time than with its consequences for the establishing not only of the limitations of phenomenism, but also of Kant's overall anti-sceptical strategy.

Let us appeal to an example again. Consider an apple. When we, in reflecting upon our experience of it, leave out its colour, smell, taste, solidity, etc., we can still think of the general circular shape and extension that pertains to the apple. Let us shift from the apple to the objects in my study

³³ *Principles*, § 43.

³⁴ *Treatise*, p. 34.

³⁵ *Principles*, § 98.

³⁶ *Treatise*, p. 35.

room. If we remove from our thought of them all their empirical elements, e.g., the sound coming from my hi-fi, the smoothness of the pillow, the brown colour of my guitar, and so forth, it seems that we can also think of objects bearing different locations and spatial relations amongst one another (e.g., contiguity, depth, etc.). These examples show that, apart from particular sensory aspects, we are able to think of objects through some general spatial features, namely, extension and figure or shape. In fact, these features do not drop out when sensory aspects are left over.

Now, a word of caution is needed here. Kant is not claiming that we can peel sensations off objects and get space, as though space were a framework inherent in objects. This claim is unpalatable for two reasons. First, the conception of space as pertaining to objects would compromise the ideality thesis, i.e., the thesis that space is a subjective form imposed on objects.³⁷ Second, it would lead us to the paradoxical conception of a non-empirical spatio-temporal skeleton behind the set of sensory aspects that is nevertheless given in sensibility. The key to understanding the quotation above is to reflect upon the expression “representation of a body”. In my reading, it suggests, rather, that Kant is setting aside sensory aspects in our *thought* of bodies or objects. On that score, we have to acknowledge his account as a thought experiment, and not as a proposal to remove sensory aspects from our *experience* of objects.³⁸

Consider now the score of a musical performance. If we put aside the sound of each note, what we are left with is only the thought of the succession of notes in the score, i.e., the sequence that they constitute. The score itself is a spatial organisation and its parts are simultaneous, just like in the example of the apple. But if we consider the awareness of the act of seeing the notes in the score, we get a collection of items coming one after another in succession. This points to temporal ordering, i.e., an ordering whereby certain elements are set up in relations of simultaneity, precedence and succession. According to Kant, we have to deem as temporal not

³⁷ We shall spell out the ideality thesis in chapter 3 below.

³⁸ cf. Allison 1983, pp. 86-9.

the thing (i.e., the score) whose parts are simultaneous, but the stream of the act of seeing each note showing up one after another.³⁹ Individual things themselves, thus, do not have temporal parts. If I consider an apple, I must conceive its parts as extended, yielding a determinate shape, and simultaneous. Temporal parts, as in the case of the notes in the score, are rather properties of the process or history of an object in terms of our awareness of its presence in different moments or events.

From these comments it can be observed that, in stripping the sensory aspects of our thought of objects, we are left with the thought of a collection of spatial and temporal relations amongst them. This is tantamount to saying that, apart from their particular properties picked out through the senses, it is still possible to think of objects by considering their general spatio-temporal features (e.g., extension, permanence in different moments, etc.). Keeping this in mind, we propose now, together with Kant, to reason the other way round, i.e., to suppose, in the thought of empirical objects, not the taking away of its sensory aspects, but the taking away of the spatio-temporal ordering. If, on the one hand, it is possible to set aside temporal and spatial features while preserving the idea of an empirical object, the phenomenalist will have the last word. This is so because he argues that these features are accounted for only insofar as we observe the interrelations of our sensations. According to him, spatial and temporal orderings are derived from the sensory items that are previously given to us. If, on the other hand, it is not possible to deprive our thought of an object of the spatial and temporal structures, and in addition, if it is possible to think of the latter without the thought of the former, we shall be in a position to contend that the thought of empirical objects requires space and time, while space and time themselves can be thought of without the sensory aspects of those objects. The philosophical profit of this move, Kant claims, will be to establish the *a priori* character of space and time, i.e., the thesis that space and time are logically prior to our experience.

³⁹ cf. B 49-50.

When we abstract from all spatial and temporal features of the object, we put aside extension, figure and succession in different moments. Now, it seems that, according to Kant, no object can be properly represented or described without these components. An object is only experienced in space and time, i.e., by its filling space in a certain way, by its yielding a determinate figure, and by its abiding in time. In this sense, the thought of an angel, for example, can hardly be accounted for as bringing to our minds the idea of an object. An angel is thought of as filling no space and as capable of being in several places at the same time. This suggests that, if we take away from the thought of an object the property of filling space and abiding at different moments, we miss the very conceptions that make that object *qua* object thinkable.⁴⁰ From this it follows that, according to Kant, although we can think of space and time as empty of objects, we cannot think of objects apart from the spatio-temporal structure.⁴¹ That being so, these latter cannot be accounted for, *pace* the phenomenalist, as derived from the former. When we reflect upon our experience of an object, space and time are not eliminable. On the contrary, the thought of an empirical object requires the assumption of a spatio-temporal structure. Kant contends that we are thereby entitled to say that in our thought of an empirical object space and time are already presupposed. Now, if an item A can be thought of without an item B, but the item B cannot be thought of without A, A has to be viewed as the condition of B. Then, the spatio-temporal structure A “is not a determination dependent upon” the object B; quite otherwise, the former must “be regarded as the condition of the possibility” of the latter.⁴² It is in this sense that Kant also calls space and time *forms*, i.e., conditions of our thought of objects.⁴³ Consequently, space and time ought to be considered as a priori, and not as empirical, conditions for our reflecting upon an object.

⁴⁰ cf. *Dreams*, p. 46.

⁴¹ cf. B 38 for space B46 for time.

⁴² cf. B 39.

⁴³ cf. B 322, *passim*.

3. Berkeley's Quandary

Although the apriority thesis of space and time is an important point of disagreement between Kant and Berkeley, it is not yet clear what exactly the epistemological gain in arguing for such a thesis is. For this reason, let us take a closer look at Berkeley and Kant again. According to Kant, space can be a priori

"because it, as well as time, is present in us before all perception or experience as pure form of our sensibility, and makes possible all intuition of sensibility, and hence all appearances. From this it follows: that as truth rests on universal and necessary laws as its criteria, experience with Berkeley can have no criteria of truth because nothing was laid (by him) a priori at the ground of appearances in it, from which it then followed that there was nothing but illusion; whereas for us space and time (in conjunction with the pure concepts of the understanding) prescribed their law a priori to all possible experience, and this yields at the same time the sure criterion for distinguishing truth from illusion therein".⁴⁴

Now, Kant is not in error in distancing himself from Berkeley this way. As shown in the preceding section, Berkeley believes that space and time are empirical. However, it may seem obscure why the apriority thesis of space and time should be a key point in distinguishing these two philosophers, and in detecting which one is able effectively to separate truth and illusion. If they both have the same criterion for this distinction, we are led to suppose that Kant is here implying that such a criterion is irremediably compromised, once one takes space and time as empirical. However, this is not exactly what is acknowledged by Kant when he attempts to state the origin of illusion:

⁴⁴ Prol., 374.

“... if I venture to go beyond all possible experience with my concepts of space and time, which I cannot refrain from doing if I proclaim them qualities inherent in things in themselves (for what should prevent me from letting them hold good of the same things, even though my senses might be different, and unsuited to them?), then a grave error may arise due to illusion, in which I proclaim to be universally valid what is merely a subjective condition of the intuition of things and certain only for all objects of sense, viz., for all possible experience; I would refer this condition to things in themselves, and not limit it to the conditions of experience”.⁴⁵

If illusion arises, according to this passage, when space and time are taken as properties of things in themselves, Kant’s attempt to overshadow Berkeley somewhat fades in front of us, for Berkeley cannot be blamed for applying space and time to the super-sensible world. According to Berkeley, space and time are properties of perceptible objects (Kantian appearances) and not of material substances (Kantian things in themselves).

Now, is Kant correct when he says that Berkeley, by not considering space and time as a priori, ends up degrading bodies to mere illusions,⁴⁶ or “phantasms”?⁴⁷ Is it the case that Berkeley did not acknowledge the difference between, say, my packet of cigarettes over there and the image of a centaur in my mind? Apparently, he did. Some of our ideas are indeed said to come from without.⁴⁸ Kant seems, then, to beg the question against Berkeley. Of course Berkeley acknowledges, as I have already pointed out, that there is a difference between empirical objects and mental states. In fact, no one could possibly take seriously a doctrine that equated them without further ado.

Despite all these obscurities in Kant, we hold that it is possible to re-evaluate his account and, by means of this, to expose a gap between him and Berkeley. If I consider my packet of cigarettes in relation to the image

⁴⁵ *Prol.*, 291-2.

⁴⁶ cf. B 71; cf. *Prol.* 473.

⁴⁷ *Prol.*, p. 293.

⁴⁸ cf. *Dialogues*, p. 82.

of a centaur, the obvious difference between them is that, while the latter is just an item in the procession of my mental states, the former fills space, and bears a specific location in space (and time). On the one hand, the image of a centaur is only temporally ordered, i.e., it is an item that precedes and succeeds other items in my mind, and *eo ipso* it yields no shape, no spatial position whatsoever. On the other hand, my packet of cigarettes belongs to a temporal and spatial orderings, i.e., it has properties which allow me to characterise it as outside and alongside other objects and to distinguish it from myself and my mental states.

Well, would Berkeley say otherwise? No, he would not. However, his account is defective and encourages a view that empirical objects cannot be properly distinguished from mental states. Why is this so? Because for him space and time are empirical. As regards space, we learn about it as we learn about colours for example, by observing features of our ideas and their relations. Spatial ordering is then said to be derived from the order in which ideas are related to each other. But this order *presupposes that ideas are given to me*. I cannot speak of the relations among ideas if I do not take for granted that I am given these ideas. Now, the order whereby ideas are given to me is a successive order.⁴⁹ While Berkeley says that this succession alone allows us to get the notion of time, Kant maintains that it is the form of time which first renders possible the succession of our ideas. It is for this reason that time is not empirical but a priori. We are not given ideas and *then* arrive at the concept of time, but the other way round. The successive character of our ideas can only be accounted for through the condition of time. This suggests that, according to Berkeley, the spatial features of the external object, i.e., features that are supposed to characterise this object as something really distinct from my ideas or mental states, are paradoxically derived, at the end of the day, from the order whereby these mental states are given to me, i.e., from temporal ordering.

Thus put, Berkeley can only account for the spatial ordering through an inference from the temporal succession of the items that are given to the

⁴⁹ cf. *Principles*, § 98.

senses. Hence, he ends up treating all the data of sensibility in the same way. Empirical (spatial) objects as well as mental states can, in view of this, be ordered ultimately in a temporal way.⁵⁰ These two different classes of sensory items are thereby acknowledged to bear identical status. As a consequence, it is reasonable to say, with Kant, that Berkeley failed to explain how external, spatial objects are indeed independent of ideas or mental states. In other words, he failed to separate mental states, e.g., the image of a centaur, from the external items of the world, e.g., my packet of cigarettes.

Does Kant avoid this problem? He thinks so. According to Kant, space and time precede the objects given to sensibility. They are not learned through the observation of our ideas and their relations. Rather, space and time constitute the whole sphere of experience. Within such a picture, spatial ordering does not depend upon the order in which objects are given to the senses. In that way, spatial features of the objects can be properly accounted for as distinct from temporal ordering. Now, if it is true that my mental states are only temporally ordered, it is reasonable to say that Kant has at his disposal the means to characterise spatial features of the objects as independent of my mental states.

Such a line of reasoning leads Kant to postulate that sensibility exhibits a twofold character, which allows us to order sensory data in two different ways, namely, spatially and temporally. Our sensibility is, according to him, composed by an inner and an outer sense. On the one hand, sensibility gives me, through the inner sense, a procession of mental states that encompasses the whole sphere of my mental history. On the other hand, sensibility allows me, through the outer sense, to represent objects in different locations, alongside, external to and beside one another. Since in this chapter we are limited to attending to those aspects of Kant's thought that can produce a sharp distinction between transcendental idealism and phenomenalism, it is not worth singling out the whole problematic in-

⁵⁰ Professor Wilson reaches a similar conclusion, although she does so by means of a very different argument (cf. Wilson 1971, p. 473).

volved in the Kantian conception of inner and outer senses. For our purposes, it suffices to contend that, since as per Berkeley spatial ordering is ultimately reduced to temporal ordering, all that his doctrine allows us to conceive of, in Kantian terms, is that we have an inner sense only.⁵¹

An objection could be raised here. Even if one accepted Kant's criticism that spatial ordering is not subjected to temporal ordering, one could still reply that, for both Kant and Berkeley, space and time are mind dependent items. Although Berkeley argues that they are learned from experience and Kant argues that they are constitutive of it, both believe that space and time are features of sensibility and, for this reason, items dependent of us. Thus, it may seem that Kant is also defending the view that spatial and temporal features of objects are subject-dependent.

The answer to this is as follows. By not acknowledging the a priori elements of our experience, Berkeley cannot establish in what sense this subject-dependence is to be understood. Thus, he can be said to conflate the two spheres of discourse about experience that we discussed in chapter 1, namely, the empirical and the reflexive or transcendental levels. On the empirical level, we just describe what we experience, say, this book I am holding, the chair I am sitting on, that chessboard, etc. On the reflexive level, in turn, we examine experience in terms of the conditions whereby it takes place. Kant disagrees with Berkeley on these two levels. On the reflexive level, when we seek to determine the conditions of objective experience, space and time must be thought of as (logically) preceding it and not, as Berkeley thought, derived from it. On the empirical level, the external object is to be considered subject-independent and not just a collection of subject-dependent items, i.e., ideas. Hence, according to Kant, there is indeed a sense whereby some features of objective items that we experience are subject-dependent.⁵² However, as argued in the preceding chapter, this

⁵¹ Förster raises a slightly similar point. However, he seems to overlook the fact that the doctrine of the inner and the outer senses is based upon the apriority thesis of space and time. Hence, he mistakenly concludes that this conception of a twofold sensibility is the very heart of disagreement between Kant and Berkeley (cf. Förster 1985, p. 297).

⁵² cf. Prol. 290.

is the transcendental sense of mind dependence, whereby empirical objects are thought of only in connection with the subjective elements (space, time, the categories) that constitute our experiential horizon. Therefore, Kant is not guilty of the same fault as Berkeley. The external object, according to Kant, is not a mere set of sensations or modifications of the mind (on the empirical level), as it is for Berkeley. Although Kant is well aware of this apparent impasse, he is often unclear in trying to sort it out. As shown in chapter 1, Kant is rather careless in his use of the term “representation” and seems to be maintaining more than once that empirical objects are representations in the empirical sense, i.e., collections of sensations dependent upon the mind.

A Berkeleian philosopher could ask what this means. A Kantian answer would be as follows. When we reflect upon experience, i.e., when we consider experience on the transcendental level, we acknowledge the role played by the subject in the constitution of the objects of experience. From this point of view alone we are entitled to speak of these objects as ideal, i.e., subject-dependent. This does not mean that such objects are considered subject-dependent *on the empirical level*. What is given to the senses, this chair, my computer, the printer, etc., are said to be empirically real objects, i.e., objects independent of or outside the mind. By not being able to determine what aspects of our objective knowledge are a priori, Berkeley cannot account for the constitutive elements of experience that are contributed by the subject and are thereby dependent upon it. At the same time, he cannot account for the elements of experience that are thought of in connection with the notion of a knowing subject. Hence, he is not able to distinguish the a priori features of the object from the empirical ones. He then conflates subject-dependent features (on the reflexive level) with subject-independent ones (on the empirical level). By conceiving the external object as a mere collection of ideas dependent upon the mind (on the empirical level), Berkeley is, consciously or not, unable to characterise the outerness or mind independence of that object (also on the empirical level). Consequently, he fails to characterise the empirical items of experience as subject-independent after all.

In Kant's terminology, Berkeley fails to distinguish the *form* whereby we represent empirical objects, which is subjective, from the *empirical* aspects that are not contributed by the subject but are encountered by it. Transcendental idealism then concerns only the former and not the latter. Kant is quite clear about this in a letter to Beck:

"Eberhard's and Garve's opinion that Berkeley's idealism is the same as that of the critical philosophy... does not deserve the slightest attention. For I speak of ideality in reference to the *form of representations*, but they interpret this to mean ideality with respect to the *matter*, that is, the ideality of the *object* and its very existence".⁵³

From Berkeley's doctrine, in fact,

"an even wider scepticism has been advanced, viz., that we cannot know at all whether our representations correspond to anything else (as object), which is as much as to say: whether a representation *is* a representation (stands for anything). For 'representation' means a determination in us that we relate to something else...".⁵⁴

In other words, it is not possible for Berkeley to distinguish mere subjective aspects of objects from the actual experience of them as being outside us. For these reasons, Kant admits in the *Prolegomena* that his idealism could also be called "formal" or "critical", in order to "distinguish it from the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley and from the sceptical idealism of Descartes".⁵⁵

Because of Berkeley's view that space and time are empirical, we believe that there is a way in which he can be classed as a transcendental realist. Apparently it is odd to put Berkeley on the same footing as other tran-

⁵³ Letter to J. S. Beck of 4th December 1792, in Zweig 1967, p. 198.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Prol.*, 375; cf. B 519.

scendental realists, like Descartes, or Leibniz, for example. Descartes could be one of those described by Berkeley as arguing for archetypes behind objects. Descartes' dualism, as a matter of fact, resides in the supposition that the real world is not accessible to us because all that we have at our disposal are representations of objects. Descartes establishes, thus, a gap between our view of the world and the way the world really is. In the wake of it, he fills in this gap by appealing to God's benevolence. Now, since Berkeley dispatches such a double world view, it seems that we are not doing justice to him.

However, according to Berkeley, real objects, although accessible to us, are conceived of on the reflexive level as independent of the subjective conditions of experience in the same manner as the real objects characterised by Descartes and other transcendental realists. They are given to us already made or constituted without regard to the subject's conditions of experiencing them. They are given to us, one may say, as they are in themselves - i.e., as they are apart from the subject's intervention in generating them.⁵⁶ Thus, although Descartes believes that real objects are not accessible and Berkeley believes otherwise, they both make the same kind of mistake: on the reflexive level, these two philosophers deprive the real object of the subjective elements whereby alone it is constituted. Taking this point into account, it is understandable why Kant contends, as observed above, that Berkeley conceives space and time in connection with things in themselves. Just like any other transcendental realist, Berkeley ends up taking for granted that external objects are already made apart from us. The subject, then, cannot but learn spatial and temporal orderings from the external world and reproduce them as a "pupil" of nature. In this way, the subject can never be the "judge" of nature, as the Copernican Revolution strategy requires.

At the same time, according to Kant, Berkeley can also be classed as an empirical idealist. On the empirical level, Berkeleian objects are ulti-

⁵⁶ cf. Allison 1983, pp. 16-9.

mately derived from us, i.e., they are ideas entertained by the subject.⁵⁷ There is no way of considering empirical data as coming from without. This granted, empirical as well as subjective aspects of the object are totally subject-dependent at the end of the day. That is how we interpret Kant's description of the empirical idealist fallacy. He states that, by supposing that objects, if they are to be external, "must have an existence by themselves, and independently of the senses", the empirical idealist "finds that, judged from this point of view all our sensuous representations are inadequate to establish their reality".⁵⁸ Empirical idealism entails illusion because it claims that space and time are empirical and at the same time it preserves the view that they are ideal, i.e., subject-dependent on the empirical level. Berkeley's dualism is then fragile, for it reduces empirical objects to mere subject-dependent items or to mere mental states. What is experienced turns out to be just a modification of the mind, i.e., a mental, internal episode in the history of a subject (e.g. the image of my Mum's face, Macbeth's dagger, etc.). The tree I conceive by closing my eyes and the tree I experience and take to be outside me are said to hold the same epistemological *status* as any other item dependent upon the mind.

What has been said so far provides us with the means to determine whether or not Kant is a phenomenalist. In order to show why this is so, let us first take account of what phenomenism is. We may say that the phenomenalist argues that the external object is nothing but a collection of ideas or of sense data. Whatever features the object may have, it has to be possible to perceive them. In this way, object language statements, in order to acquire meaning, have to be translatable into sense data statements.⁵⁹ We do not need to think twice in order to characterise Berkeley as a phenomenalist. A "*cherry*", says Berkeley, "is nothing but a congeries of sensible impressions, or ideas perceived by various senses".⁶⁰ On that score, we are entitled to say that Kant is not a phenomenalist. This is so because, ac-

⁵⁷ cf. *Principles*, p. 77.

⁵⁸ A 370.

⁵⁹ This definition is borrowed from Bennett (cf. Bennett 1971, p. 136-7).

⁶⁰ *Dialogues*, p. 81.

According to him, the object is not made out of sense data, i.e., it is not a mere collection of ideas. It is said to be constructed through sensible and intellectual a priori conditions furnished by the subject. If one insists in labelling Kant as a phenomenalist, then one has either to change the meaning of the term or to realise that Kant's notion of a phenomenon or of an empirical object is very different from Berkeley's.

Now, what is the philosophical profit of this difference? The answer to this question lies in the manner each of these philosophers deals with their criterion of truth. As already argued for, they both have the same criterion, namely, the coherence or law-governed character of the empirical world. Berkeley, though, handles this criterion in a very mistaken way. Not having at his disposal the conception of a priori elements that constitute empirical objects, Berkeley can only say that the laws of regularities come with the empirical objects to our minds. These laws are encountered by us in the empirical objects and learnt in the course of our experience, i.e., they are established by means of a set of empirical propositions. Now, as Hume correctly pointed out, there is no point in justifying our experience by appealing to certain laws or principles which are themselves based upon experience.⁶¹

In Kant's view, however, the law-governed character of the external world is treated in a very different way. The apriority thesis of space and time allows him to establish the general structure of principles to be obeyed by the empirical world. More exactly, such a structure must be acknowledged as constitutive of experience and not, *pace* Berkeley, simply discovered in it, or empirically given. Accordingly, by means of sense data statements alone it is not at all possible to decide the truth value of non-sense data statements, for sense data statements must conform themselves to a structure established by a priori rules.⁶² Through the consideration of a priori subjective conditions, then, a certain class of non-empirical statements or principles that govern the empirical world is established without

⁶¹ cf., for example, *Enquiry*, § 22.

⁶² cf. B 273.

any regard to empirical statements. As a matter of fact, the former is said to provide, at the end of the day, the credentials for the determination of the truth value of the latter.⁶³ At the same time, if these non-empirical statements are to be more than just a set of logical principles, then, they must be non-analytical. In Kant's terms, they must be synthetic a priori principles, which are *ipso facto* called "the principles of the pure understanding".⁶⁴

Keeping this in mind, it is time we corrected Kant's commentaries on Berkeley. As already shown, the latter does have a criterion of truth (coherence amongst ideas). However, such a criterion is unworkable in a doctrine that considers space and time as empirical. In this way, although it is inaccurate to say, as Kant does, that Berkeley has "no criteria of truth",⁶⁵ it is rather plausible to speak of this criterion as useless in Berkeley's picture of the external world. Berkeley, at the end of the day, lacks the mechanism to dissociate subject-dependent from subject-independent items of experience. Berkeley cannot provide the means whereby we may justifiably determine what objects are like in the external world.

Based upon the considerations above we can finally dissociate Kant from Berkeley. Transcendental idealism cannot be mistaken for phenomenalism. The latter, unlike the former, drives us into the impasse of acknowledging spatial ordering only through temporal ordering, which amounts to the impossibility of distinguishing truth from illusion. In this way, transcendental idealism may seem more promising than phenomenalism to defuse sceptical doubts. Kant's idealism allows for an account of spatial ordering that is irreducible to the temporal one. On that score, the transcendental idealist seems to be heading for a proper characterisation of objects distinct from us or from our thoughts. However, the apriority thesis of space and time itself does not furnish such a characterisation. By means of such a thesis, we can only say that our thought of external objects requires spatial and temporal orderings. This is equivalent to saying that,

⁶³ cf. Walker 1985, pp. 111-2.

⁶⁴ cf. B 790.

⁶⁵ *Prol.* A 375.

granted that external objects are given to us, space and time have to be already presupposed. Now, if we want to justify our empirical beliefs and thereby be rid of the sceptic, we also have to argue for the givenness of such objects. This job is supposed to be done by Kant through his account that space and time are transcendently ideal forms of intuition. In view of this, let us take a closer look at the Transcendental Aesthetic in order to evaluate the anti-sceptical force of transcendental idealism.

Chapter 3

Space and Time as A Priori Intuitions

The results reached in the last chapter are essential to dismiss mistaken interpretations of transcendental idealism that equate it with phenomenalism. By means of Kant's apriority thesis of space and time, we can say that it is possible to make judgements about objects in space without resorting to judgements about mere sensations or mental states, *pace* the phenomenalist. However, Kant has not yet proved that, in conceiving of space and time as a priori, we are given external, mind independent objects distinct from our thoughts or mental states. As I see it, Kant's attempt to achieve this goal is found in his theory that space and time are a priori forms of intuition. The purpose of this chapter is, then, to examine such a theory. In section 1, we shall reconstruct Kant's main arguments for the intuitivity and the ideality theses of the spatio-temporal ordering. Thereafter, we shall consider two major objections to this account. The first one, presented in section 2, is the classical problem of Kant's commitment to Euclidean geometry. We shall argue that, in order to hold transcendental idealism, one has to concede that non Euclidean geometries must be thought of as reducible to the Euclidean one, otherwise they turn into mistaken descriptions of space. In section 3, we shall assess Kant's notion of intuition. We shall show that this notion drives us into the impasse of not being able to acknowledge, within transcendental idealism, what the affecting object of intuition is like. This done, we shall conclude that Kant's idealism does not enable us to characterise external objects as empirically real. On that score, the sceptic will always be able to doubt the status of our knowledge of externality according to transcendental idealism.

1. The Intuitivity and the Ideality Theses of Space and Time

The first issue we must put our finger on is what makes Kant come up with the idea that space and time are forms of intuition. A good start is to acknowledge that the apriority thesis alone does not force anyone into transcendental idealism. One might well suppose that experience is impossible apart from the spatio-temporal ordering but at the same time deny that this ordering is transcendently ideal (or, in Kant's terms, "in us"). Strawson is one who argues that space and time are a priori. However, he continues, this does not imply, as a transcendental idealist professes, that they are 'in us'.¹ Instead, Strawson proposes an austere interpretation of 'a priori', according to which it refers to "an essential structural element in any conception of experience that we could make intelligible to ourselves".² The notion of experience, he contends, "seems to be truly *inseparable from* that of space and time".³ The idea of a non spatio-temporal experience is plainly unintelligible, for experience is always successive and spatially located.

This inseparability thesis seems to entail that experience and the spatio-temporal structure go hand in hand, i.e., that not only is experience linked with the conceptions of space and time, but that the latter cannot be thought of without the former. The question arises, however, as to whether the second assertion holds, once it is based upon Strawson's austere interpretation of the a priori. It is unclear whether the notions of space and time, once considered as essential items for a consistent account of experience, can or cannot be intelligibly conceived of separated from the notion of human experience. Strawson seems not to be interested in exploring this other side of the coin. If, on the one hand, space and time can be thought of as separated from the notion of human experience, then the moments of time and the parts of space are to be conceived, respectively, as succeeding and being beside one another apart from the thought of a subject having

¹ cf. Strawson 1966, p. 49.

² *ibid.*, p. 68.

³ *ibid.*, p. 50 (my italics).

experience. This would require the assumption of a self-governing, self-contained and real space and time. If, on the other hand, space and time cannot be thought of without the notion of human experience, then we reach an account quite close to Kant's claim about the transcendental ideality of space and time, i.e., the subjective character of space and time as a priori conditions of experience.

It might be fruitful, for this purpose, to consider the Newtonian view of space and time. According to Newton, time is an entity that, of its own nature, flows uniformly without relation to anything external to itself, subsuming under itself every occurrence in the universe. It is also independent of everything, so that whereas things change, time is unchangeable. It is thus indifferent to changing things and "precedes" not only things but also any temporal quantities. Absolute space is described in a similar way. It is an entity that, by its own nature, remains unchangeable and fixed, without relation to anything external to itself, subsuming under itself every part of space in the universe.

Now, if we bear in mind that nothing could occur outside or apart from either space or time, then experience would have to be thought of as brought into play only under their auspices. Hence, experience could be conceived of as inseparable from space and time, but not necessarily the other way round. In this way, the concepts of absolute space and time seem to harmonise with Strawson's view that experience is nothing once we withdraw space and time. We can conceive of absolute space and time as essential items for our thinking intelligibly of experience and at the same time we can dispense with the transcendental idealist requirement that space and time are 'in us'. Strawson seems, then, to disregard a very important issue in this discussion. The point is not only whether space and time have to be austere classed as a priori notions that enter indispensably into the general structure of the concept of experience. It is also whether or not space and time are (transcendentally) real.

Strawson's aim is to be rid of the ideality thesis. In so doing, he inadvertently comes to a view of the spatio-temporal structure that is in

keeping with the notions of absolute space and time. However, Kant's main objection against these notions is that positions of objects in absolute space and time are not by definition perceptible.⁴ In other words, there are no means for us to have access to the correct position of objects in absolute space and time, whereby any objects can be determined without further ado. Neither does an object X come with its absolute spatial position stamped on it nor do we have an infallible procedure to measure the passing of moments in absolute time, like an eternal watch forever ticking away somewhere at the border of our experience.⁵

Kant, though, is aware of this possibility. He struggles to show that we have to acknowledge space and time to be not only a priori forms but also transcendently ideal intuitions or, in Kant's terminology, "subjective forms of intuition". Before spelling out the intuitivity and the ideality thesis of space and time in Kant, it is worth making it clear that, in order to avoid diverting the course of our investigation from the quest for a sound anti-sceptical position, we shall not entangle ourselves in the discussions over the technicalities of Kant's arguments. Rather, we shall limit ourselves to singling out the main components of these arguments and, in so doing, to assessing the adequacy of Kant's commitment to both transcendental idealism and empirical realism.

To begin with, Kant advises us to acknowledge that objects have to be conceived of as interacting within a common spatial structure. If I think of the objects of my study room as forming a collection of items contiguous to, behind, alongside and beside one another, I have to presuppose all these interactions to take place within one and the same structure. The alternative would be to regard each of these objects as belonging to different realms of space, in which case they would not share any common ground to establish relations amongst one another. It seems, thus, inconceivable to Kant that items belonging to allegedly different systems of spatial configuration can interact. For this reason, we have to think of space as a *unity* that

⁴ cf. B 245.

⁵ cf. Guyer 1987, p. 170; cf. Walsh 1969, p. 160.

fills out a pattern of relations that objects set up with each other.⁶ The same reasoning applies to time. We cannot consistently conceive of objects which obey allegedly different temporal orderings and, at the same time, take them to be in relations of simultaneity, precedence and succession amongst each other. Hence, temporal ordering must also be conceived of as unitary.⁷ In this way, the system of spatio-temporal relations has to be thought of as embracing all possible occurrences or states of affairs. This suggests that, whatever state of affairs we can think of, it has to belong to such a unitary system.

Now since our thought of an object, according to the apriority thesis, presupposes space and time, and since, according to the unity thesis just presented, any region of space wherein we locate such an object and any length of time through which the object lasts have to be part of a one and all-encompassing system of spatio-temporal relations, it seems reasonable to conclude that the constituent parts of the spatio-temporal structure require the assumption of this very structure, and not vice versa.⁸ Hence, Kant contends that the system of spatio-temporal relations must be regarded as *preceding* its spatio-temporal parts.

Let us think now of a certain magnitude of space, say, Gordon Square. There is no way of imagining it save insofar as we think it to be surrounded by more of the same space. A similar point can be made about, for example, the perimeter of Greater London. When we think of it, it is implied that such a vast area is bounded by more of the same space. In progressing to wider areas, for example, Great Britain, and afterwards Europe, etc., we come to realise that the thought of any finite extension of space, no matter how vast it is, necessarily carries with it the thought of such an extension as bounded by more space. This suggests that an end to space is something that cannot be thought of. In order to imagine space as finite we must think of it as having boundaries and, in so doing, we are

⁶ cf. B 39.

⁷ cf. B 47

⁸ cf. B 39 for space and B 46 for time.

committed to assuming these boundaries to be surrounded by space alongside them. According to Kant, it is in this way “that space is thought; for all the parts of space coexist *ad infinitum*”.⁹ Now, if it is not possible to suppose that space is finite, we are obliged to think of it as unbounded or *infinite*.¹⁰ A similar view is attributed to temporal ordering. In order to think of an end to any finite temporal succession, no matter how long it is (this month, the last three years, my wonder years, etc.), we have to think of it to be a limitation of a one and all-embracing time.¹¹ Kant claims that our thought of a certain length of time carries us further on, so that we get the idea of a “limitlessness in the progression of intuition”.¹²

On the basis of these considerations, Kant states that spatial and temporal orderings constitute a single, unitary and unbounded *totum* or structure whose parts are preceded by it. As usual, he prefers a different choice of words to spell out these characteristics. He contends that space and time are thereby said to be “pure forms of intuition”.¹³ That space and time are pure is an issue already contemplated by the apriority thesis. We have also said that, in such a context, the term “form” means “essential structure” of the givenness of objects in sensibility. In turn, the term “intuition” serves to point out that space and time are not mere concepts, so that spatial and temporal orderings are not obtainable through the application of our powers of conceptualisation.¹⁴ A concept, unlike an intuition, is a *totum* or a whole whose parts precede it, i.e., an aggregate formed by its parts. The concept red, for example, is formed through the consideration of a common feature that some objects, say, apples, tomatoes, the hardback of this edition of Eliot’s “Four Quartets”, etc., may share with one another. A concept, in this sense, functions as a connector that gathers a collection of ele-

⁹ B 39-40.

¹⁰ cf. B 39.

¹¹ cf. B 47.

¹² A 25.

¹³ cf. B 40 for space and B 48 for time.

¹⁴ It is because of this that Melnick correctly characterises the spatio-temporal ordering as pre-conceptualised (cf. Melnick 1973, p. 11). Concurrently, Kant calls it “pure manifold”, or a collection of pre-synthesised items (cf. B 102, *passim*).

ments together under a certain mark (e.g., red).¹⁵ Moreover, unlike intuition, a concept has a more complex logical form. It is a whole that cannot be infinite in its definition (intension), although it can have infinite instances under it (extension).¹⁶ The difference, thus, is that, while the intuitive whole has infinite parts *in* it, the conceptual whole has infinite parts *under* it.¹⁷

The reason for the introduction of the intuition-concept distinction and for the emphatic defence of the intuitive character of the spatio-temporal structure is to reinforce the idea that sensible data are given in space and time independently of any activity of our intellectual powers. The consequences of this account are twofold. First, we are ensured that the object of the external world is not reached through the mere exercise of conceptualisation. Our intellectual resources alone never provide us with a proper characterisation of the external object. Sensibility has to be brought onto the scene. Secondly, we are able to reject the phenomenalist assumption that there can be a purely receptive apprehension of an object without any role played by our conceptualising capacity. The object, *pace* the phenomenalist, is not given already made or constituted in sensibility. It is rather produced by the conceptualisation or the gathering together of sensory items. The sensible data constitute just a raw material awaiting to be synthesised by our conceptual powers.

It should be noticed that, for a transcendental idealist, the notions of absolute space and time violate the intuitive unity thesis. According to this thesis, the spatio-temporal structure is a whole whose parts are preceded by it. Such a structure alone renders possible the awareness of its parts. This is tantamount to saying that the structure itself antedates “in my mind all the actual impressions” that we are given in sensibility.¹⁸ But the notions of absolute space and time cannot be thought of as antedating its parts, for the simple reason that space and time so considered cannot be

¹⁵ A detail discussion about this topic will be presented in chapter 4 below.

¹⁶ cf. Allison, 1983, pp. 91-3.

¹⁷ cf. Walsh 1975, p. 18.

¹⁸ Prol. p. 283-4.

grasped by our human minds. From this it follows that, if we accept the apriority and the intuitive unity theses of the spatio-temporal structure, we have to discard the notions of absolute space and time.

The question now arises as to whether, according to Kant, it is possible to conceive of space and time as properties of either the phenomenalistic notion of external object, O_{ph} - namely, a collection of sense data - or the transcendental realist notion of the external object - namely, the thing in itself, O_{tr} - while holding that they are a priori intuitions. This is a point which merits consideration because, if the spatio-temporal structure Y is a property of either O_{ph} or O_{tr} , then Y cannot be counted as a subjective condition. The reason is that the notions of O_{ph} and of O_{tr} clash with the notion of subjective condition, for the former are said to be constituted apart from or independent of our subjective conditions. If Y cannot be counted as a subjective condition, the Copernican Revolution attempt to put the subject back to work will sail into dire straits. In turn, if Y is not a property of either O_{ph} or O_{tr} , then Y will have to be considered as a subjective condition.

Now, once we have accepted the apriority thesis, Y cannot be any longer thought of as properties derived from O_{ph} . At the same time, given the acceptance of the intuitive unity thesis, Y has to be conceived of as a constitutive condition of our sensibility and *ipso facto* of the givenness of the object. However, according to the phenomenalist, Y cannot be so considered, because Y is rather reached through the givenness of O_{ph} . Actually, the phenomenalist argues that Y is not the condition of O_{ph} but the other way round. Now, if we think of Y as an a priori and intuitive *totum*, we cannot entertain the thought of an O_{ph} being given without the constraints of our sensibility and before Y . Therefore, Y cannot be applicable to O_{ph} , because there is no O_{ph} apart from and prior to Y .

It might still be the case, though, that Y is a property of O_{tr} . However, we have long established that O_{tr} is not accessible to us. Hence, no property whatsoever can be thought of as applicable (or not applicable) to O_{tr} . In this way, it is not possible to determine whether Y or $\sim Y$ is the

case. If this is so, we inevitably end up in contradictions. Thus, Y ought to be considered as applicable to things as long as they are constrained by our capacity of sensibility.

This reasoning leads Kant to hold that if the spatio-temporal structure is not dependent upon the data found in sensibility (apriority thesis); if it is not an absolute entity, but is rather a structure or form that pertains to our sensibility (intuitive unity thesis), and if it is not applicable to the thing in itself O_{tr} , it has to be thought of as a contribution of the subject in the process of knowledge acquisition. In the light of this, it should be noticed that, according to Kant, to abstract from the notion of a subject experiencing moments and locating things in space, and concurrently to uphold the idea of space and time, is a task doomed to failure. That is to say, Kant's viewpoint seems to be that, if we strip the thought of the subject of the notions of space and time, we may be left with a transcendental realist account of them that is not deprived of contradictions. In that event, there will be no way of blocking the sceptical doubts. Thus, Strawson's interpretation can scarcely hold good because it is in keeping with the notions of absolute space and time and, on that score, with the transcendental realist approach that lies behind such notions.

Now, since space and time are not derivable from experience, for experience cannot be thought of without them, and since the consideration of the spatio-temporal structure without a subject cannot characterise the external object, the subject has to be viewed, Kant believes, as carrying with it the forms of space and time in the sense of conditions *in* it, and not in the objects *outside* it. Now, we have to be cautious here. The expressions "in it" and "outside it" should not be understood on the empirical level. Empirically speaking, the expressions "in it" and "outside it" refer to the private data of an individual mind and the publicly shareable external world, respectively. As I see it, this is Strawson's error. By being a proponent of the standard picture of transcendental idealism, as already pointed out in chapter 1, he is not able to give a proper account of the two ways by which such expressions can be classed. He is forced to reject the ideality thesis of space and time because he conflates the empirical and the tran-

scendental levels of "ideality". On the transcendental level, however, the expressions "in it" and "outside it" must be viewed as referring to what has to be considered dependent upon or in connection with the thought of a subject and what has to be considered as independent of the subject. Transcendentally speaking, "in us" has to be understood as "in (connection with) us" or in relation to our subjective capacities of knowing the world.

Now, this is nothing more than Kant's ideality thesis as concerns space and time.¹⁹ They have to be seen as 'in us' in the sense that they are derived from, or occasioned by, or conceived of only in reference to the thought of a subject, otherwise they will not make sense at all.²⁰ As Kant says, "it is... solely from the human standpoint that we can speak of space".²¹ The spatio-temporal ordering of objects "we ourselves introduce".²² From this it follows that it is not possible to maintain the apriority thesis of space and time in its Strawsonian version without maintaining the ideality thesis. More precisely, it is not possible to conceive of space and time according to Strawson's austere interpretation without adding to it the ideality thesis. This is, however, what Strawson is keen to reject, and what Kant's position is all about.

The conclusion that space and time must be (transcendentally) ideal, together with our interpretation of the notion of the thing in itself, impedes us from (wrongly) supposing that there is a third or, as it is more often called, a "neglected" alternative. This alternative stems from the consideration that space and time may be ideal, but that the thing in itself may also happen to be spatial. As Kemp Smith puts it, the notion that space is ideal does not exclude the possibility that it may also be "an inherent property of things in themselves".²³ Now, in our reading, Kant would have rejected that neglected alternative for the following reason. If the thing in itself is not an existent, but a "thought-thing" deprived of any real-

¹⁹ B 52.

²⁰ B 244-5; cf. A 127.

²¹ B 42; cf. B 51 for time.

²² A 126.

²³ Smith 1984, p. 113; cf. also Parsons 1992, p. 84 in Guyer, 1992.

ity, as argued in chapter 1, it does not make sense to attribute spatiality to it. Besides, if it is proved that space (and time) is a form of our sensibility, anything that can be grasped through the senses will have spatial characteristics. But the thing in itself, by definition, is not available to the senses. Therefore, it does not make sense to suppose that the thing in itself is spatial (and temporal).

2. Space and Geometry

Having presented a general description of Kant's arguments for the ideality and intuitivity theses of the spatio-temporal ordering, we are now in a position to assess its allegedly anti-sceptical thrust. There are quite a few questions that we can ask regarding Kant's conclusions in the Transcendental Aesthetic in connection with the problem of proving the empirical realist viewpoint by means of transcendental idealist arguments. For our purposes, though, we need only expound two of them. To begin with, the general reservation made by a considerable number of Kant commentators is that Kant's argument for the transcendental ideality of space and time is dependent upon the intuitive unity thesis, which, in turn, relies on the truth of the propositions of Euclidean geometry.²⁴ The evidence for this can be picked up in the *Prolegomena*.²⁵ There Kant appeals to the synthetic a priori propositions of mathematics, in particular those of Euclidean geometry, to draw the conclusions reached in the Transcendental Aesthetic. Because this kind of geometry has been proved to be flawed once we acknowledge the non-Euclidean geometries developed after Kant, the foundations of transcendental idealism are severely compromised.²⁶ If this is the case, we shall not be able to embrace empirical realism by means of Kant's doctrine.

²⁴ cf. Walsh 1975, pp. 25ff; Strawson 1966, p. 68; *et alia*.

²⁵ cf. Prol. 280ff.

²⁶ cf. Smith 1984, pp. 116ff.

Allison has an answer to this challenge. He says that “the argument from geometry only moves to ideality by way of an appeal to the a priori and intuitive character of the representation of space”, without any reference to the synthetic a priori propositions of geometry.²⁷ Allison then concludes that “the argument for ideality can bypass completely ... any considerations about the nature of geometry”.²⁸ Allison tries to drive a wedge between Kant’s commitment to a priori knowledge of spatial ordering in general and Kant’s commitment to a priori knowledge of Euclidean Geometry in particular.²⁹ If Allison’s argument holds, then it will be possible to say that transcendental idealism is true regardless of any reservations towards Euclidean geometry.

Guyer, however, opposes Allison’s alleged solution by arguing that Kant’s intuitive unity thesis obligates him to think of space as *fully determinate*. If space is an intuition and not a concept, there is no way of conceiving of it as only partially determinate. Now, if it is true that we impose spatial ordering on objects, then “we must impose some particular spatial form... on things. But this means that the necessary truth of Euclidean Geometry... is not an eliminable feature of his transcendental idealism.”³⁰

It is possible to think of two replies to Guyer. The first one, although merely historical, may seem compelling. Kitcher correctly reminds us that Humphrey has shown that Kant’s concerns about space and some of his main arguments for its ideality antedate his discovery of the analytic-synthetic distinction.³¹ Without this distinction, Kant cannot formulate the Critical Problem about the status of geometry, so the idea that the theory of space was developed within geometry primarily to solve that problem seems inaccurate. It is then plausible to think that Kant appeals to geometry in the *Prolegomena* because he understood that its propositions were more persuasive and could then be used in a popular presentation of his

²⁷ Allison, 1983, p. 89.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ cf. also Nagel 1983, p. 31ff.

³⁰ Guyer 1987, p. 361.

³¹ cf. Humphrey 1973; cf. Kitcher 1990, p. 50.

theory by means of the regressive argument. The second reply, in turn, is more strictly philosophical. Kant admits that other sentient beings might have a faculty of intuition quite distinct from ours.³² If this is so, he does not disallow the possibility of representing the world as spatial but not as Euclidean.

One could say in Guyer's defence that, according to Kant, it remains impossible *for us* to do so, which is to say, transcendental idealism inevitably collides with the discovery of non-Euclidean Geometries. Space is given in *our* intuition as Euclidean. When we reflect upon space, we necessarily reflect upon Euclidean space. As Kemp Smith says, according to Kant, Euclidean space "is *given* to us as an unyielding form that rigidly resists all attempts at conceptual reconstruction".³³ It is a point of honour for Kant to guarantee that the understanding does not provide us with sensory data. This is the job of sensibility. The understanding can only order and gather together these sensory data in different ways.

As I see it, Kant does not rest his case here. He reminds us that, although space is given as a fully determinate unity in intuition, the ground of the unity of space is not found in intuition, but it is rather provided by the understanding. It is the latter that determines space "to assume the form of a circle, or the figure of a cone...". Thus, "the understanding is the origin of the universal order of nature..." and thereby of the regularity of all objects in space.³⁴ If this is so, Kant may be taken as arguing for the relative independence of the understanding vis-à-vis sensibility, which allows further conceptual developments in geometry towards a non-Euclidean space.

Now, this remark is only acceptable if we depart from the view that, according to Kant, space is strictly Euclidean. This seems to be Risjord's view of Kant. Since Kantian space is an intuition and not a concept, it cannot be understood in the same way as the modern uses of the notion of

³² cf. B 43, 72, 139, 148, *passim*.

³³ Smith 1984, p. 118.

³⁴ Prol. 321-2.

space. In the case of non-Euclidean geometries, space is defined by systems of concepts. "It is a mistake", Risjord then concludes, "to read Kant as claiming that space is Euclidean. Since it is a form of intuition, not a conceptual system, space is neither Euclidean nor non-Euclidean".³⁵

Such an interpretation, however, is not sustainable for two reasons. First, mathematical knowledge in general for Kant is obtained not through conceptual analysis, but through the construction of concepts.³⁶ In this way, although Kant might have recognised non Euclidean geometries as consistent conceptual developments, he would not call them geometries.³⁷ Second, Risjord's account tends to enlarge the notion of the form of intuition to a point that Kant himself would not allow.³⁸ Risjord acknowledges Kant's resistance to this.³⁹ But he does not acknowledge that such a resistance would stem from the fact that Kantian space *is* Euclidean in character. The mind is constituted in such a way that whatever is constructed in pure intuition must be at least compatible with the synthetic a priori propositions of Euclidean Geometry. Otherwise, the construction is simply not possible at all.⁴⁰ But this takes us back to Guyer's objection that, at bottom, the way we intuit objects and Euclidean geometry have to go hand in hand for a transcendental idealist.

From these remarks it is possible to acknowledge that, for a contemporary transcendental idealist, Kant's notion of a priori intuition, because of its Euclidean background, can hardly persuade us. A contemporary transcendental idealist may, on the one hand, stick to the Kantian notion of form of intuition, trying to bypass its appeal to geometry in order to give place for the conception of non-Euclidean geometries. However, since transcendental idealism discards any description of space that clashes with the principles and postulates of Euclidean geometry, he can only do so by al-

³⁵ Risjord 1990, p. 136.

³⁶ cf. B 742.

³⁷ cf. Walker 1978, p. 60.

³⁸ cf. Parsons 1992, p. 96.

³⁹ cf. Risjord 1990, p. 137.

⁴⁰ cf. B 744.

lowing the understanding to work on sensibility in such a way that the latter either ends up in conflict with itself or succumbs to the former. Unless he can explain how it is possible to bypass Kant's distinction between sensibility and understanding, and the fact that the latter just works on the material furnished by sensibility, whose forms are necessarily (Euclidean) space and time, the contemporary transcendental idealist will have to reject the development of non-Euclidean geometries if he wants to keep the notion of a priori intuition.

If, on the other hand, he allows for conceptual modifications in our notion of space, he can pave the way to non-Euclidean Geometries, but then he ends up facing the problem of harmonising essentially Euclidean principles with non-Euclidean ones. He cannot bypass the fact that, not having at his disposal alternative Geometries, Kant conceives of space inevitably in Euclidean terms. In view of this, the possibility of alternative geometries can only be acknowledged by a transcendental idealist through a reduction to Euclidean Geometry. But Euclidean and non-Euclidean Geometries are mutually exclusive in their most basic principles and cannot consistently function in harmony.⁴¹

An evidence of this dilemma can be found in Kitcher. Along with Allison, she also struggles to minimise the role of Euclidean geometry in Kant's arguments for the intuitive unity thesis of space (and time).⁴² She claims that the argument from Euclidean geometry comes after Kant has already established that space is a form of intuition. In view of this, she acknowledges that Euclidean geometry rather confirms than grounds the Kantian notion of space. I take it that this is unobjectionable. However, in her attempt to dismiss the alleged dependence of the latter on Euclidean geometry, she concedes that spatial properties found in perception have to match those properties stated in geometrical, synthetic a priori propositions. Finally, she concludes that Euclidean geometry must be viewed as "a

⁴¹ cf. Griffin 1991.

⁴² cf. Kitcher 1990, pp. 49 ff.

true description of the pure form of intuition".⁴³ This statement does not exclude the possibility of alternative (non-Euclidean) descriptions of space that are compatible with, and thereby true of, the form of intuition. But such an alleged solution can only be consistently held under the presupposition that these alternative descriptions do not conflict with the Euclidean one. If this is so, it has to be granted that, in order to be in tune with Kant's theory of space, any geometrical description has to be in principle reducible to Euclidean principles and postulates. Hence, if one wants to hold transcendental idealism, one has to discard any alternative geometrical description of space that is not so reducible. Well, this result will not do. At bottom, it leads the contemporary transcendental idealist to deny that any non Euclidean geometry that is irreducible to the Euclidean one is a correct (or true) description of space.

In conclusion, what has been said so far raises suspicions about the adequacy of the transcendental idealist view of space. Now, since it is by means of the spatial ordering that Kantian external, mind independent objects are said to be given to us, Kant's very notion of externality seems to go by the board and with it his attempt to accommodate transcendental idealism and empirical realism. The contemporary transcendental idealist has to decide between two alternatives, each of which presents insurmountable difficulties. He cannot reject Kant's commitment to Euclidean geometry, because this would imply the inability to characterise space within transcendental idealism. At the same time, the transcendental idealist cannot accept such a commitment either, because this would put his doctrine in conflict with non Euclidean conceptions of space that undermine the truth of Euclidean geometry.

⁴³ cf. *ibid.*, p. 52, my italics.

3. Intuition and Its Affecting Object

Thus far we have explored a historical reservation to Kant's notion of a priori intuition. If we stick to this notion, we will find it hard to cope with the development of non-Euclidean geometries. In turn, if we reject the view of space and time as a priori intuitions, we deprive transcendental idealism of its very heart and, as a consequence, we will be left at the mercy of the transcendental realist. There is, though, a deeper reservation. One may wonder whether Kant's argument for the transcendental ideality of space and time entails the justification of the empirical reality of external objects. Recall that this is the same question as that one with which we were faced at the end of the last chapter. Kant seems to be saying that only insofar as we establish that the spatio-temporal ordering is a priori, intuitive and (transcendentally) ideal, can we at the same time establish that objects are mind independent items within the scope of our experience, i.e., that they are empirically real. It seems inevitable to ask in what way this is so. How is it that the notion that what is the formal is ideal warrants the thesis that what is material (or empirical) is real? Since the apriority thesis by itself does not accomplish this task, as shown in chapter 2, the answer has to be sought out in the view that space and time are a priori forms of intuition. We do not beg the question against Kant by raising this issue. Kant holds that, while transcendental realism leads to empirical idealism, his transcendental idealism leads to empirical realism.⁴⁴ So, it seems legitimate to attempt a derivation of empirical realism from the very premises that drive us into transcendental idealism.

In Kant's view, the key to achieving this goal resides in the fact that the kind of intuition argued for by him in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* is sensible or merely receptive, and not intellectual or creative. The idea of an intellectual sensibility is discarded by Kant for two reasons. First, it eliminates the distinction between to think and to sense, or to judge and to be given sensory items. This is so because an active sensibility would perform

⁴⁴ cf. A 369 ff.

these two tasks as though they were one only. Now, if this were the case, we could say that the act of thinking would be, at the same time, the "act" of sensing. This is equivalent to saying that the mere act of thinking would suffice for the object to be given. In this way, if we possessed an intellectual sensibility, our minds would be creative. To think, for us, would be to give objects to ourselves. As a consequence, our thought of an object could not be distinguished from the actuality of the object. In other words, it could not be possible to distinguish between the possibility and the actuality of objects.⁴⁵ In conceiving, for example, of a centaur, I would at the same time 'give' myself the object conceived. For these reasons, an intellectual sensibility can be no other than the divine one. Only God would be capable of giving to Himself the object by just thinking of it and thereby of creating it in all its determinations.⁴⁶ But since, Kant claims, we are able to think of what is not (or cannot be) actual, it follows that we must presuppose, in any account of our knowledge, a capacity that is distinct from our thinking. We must presuppose, therefore, the capacity of receptivity and, apart from it, the capacity of conceptualisation or understanding.

Second, if our sensibility were intellectual, it would have to give us objects without resorting to the understanding. The latter is only necessary when we assume the passive character of sensibility. That being so, intellectual sensibility would have to give us objects immediately, without appeal to concepts. Now, if objects were given to such a sensibility in this way, they would be said to be pre-conceptualised. Thus, in order to know them, it would not be necessary to subsume them under some general description. This suggests that an intellectual sensibility would provide an object as a fully determinate and unique individual, and not as just a member or an instance of a species in a set of other related individuals. Well, keeping these considerations in mind, it is not difficult to say what the data of an intellectual sensibility would have to be. Since they are neither sensible nor conceptualisable, these data have to be given to us already constituted or made, without the sensible and discursive constraints imposed on

⁴⁵ cf. Ak. V, pp. 401-2.

⁴⁶ cf. B 72.

them by the subject. Thus, the data given through intellectual sensibility could be no other than the thing in itself. Now, we have already warned in chapter 1 that, if we postulate knowledge of the thing in itself, we arrive at insoluble complications. Therefore, the idea of an intellectual sensibility seems quite unpalatable, and is of no use in our quest for the justification of our knowledge claims.

Our intuition being merely receptive or sensible, we cannot create external objects. But we have seen that, according to Kant, the *a priori* intuitions of space and time are mere forms of our sensibility, i.e., they are modes by which alone we are given objects. Hence, our faculty of sensibility does not produce objects. It "takes place insofar as the object is given to us".⁴⁷ On that score, our "mode of intuition", Kant says, "*is dependent upon the existence of the object*", and is therefore possible only if the subject's faculty of representation is *affected by that object*".⁴⁸ If we assume that the object given in intuition is (empirically) dependent upon us, i.e., if we assume that this object is merely empirically ideal, we cannot help but think of sensibility as creative and the power of intuition as intellectual. According to Kant, since sensibility is passive, the object given therein has to be thought of as (empirically) mind independent. That being so, Kant seems to be implying that only by showing that our intuition of space is (transcendentally) ideal are we allowed to establish that spatial objects given in this intuition are (empirically) real.

There is, however, a straightforward difficulty here. Kant says on and off that an intuition presents a particular. Intuition is that by which we get in direct contact or "in immediate relation" to a thing. So, we can say that we obtain an intuition of a thing by being affected (causally) by it. What is it, then, that affects us and that gives us an *a priori* intuition? If we cannot, for the sake of the apriority thesis, think of space as dependent upon empirical objects, we must hold that we possess the capacity of ordering things in space and time *independently of any relation with them*. But

⁴⁷ B 33; cf. B 195, B 298.

⁴⁸ B 72 (my italics).

if this is so, then, we are not allowed, after all, to say that our intuition is 'dependent upon the existence of the object', as the above quotation states so clearly. To say that our intuition is dependent upon the existence of the object is to make the former somehow dependent upon being related to the latter.

It could be said that this difficulty stems from the conflation between form of intuition and formal intuition. The latter is a determinate or particular intuition of an object, e.g., the intuition of a triangle. The former is the manner by which we are given objects in sensibility or, as Allison says, the "manner of *intuiting*".⁴⁹ So, the objection goes, the "formal intuition" alone stands in immediate relation to a particular object (of pure intuition, e.g., a mathematical object). If this is granted, we may be inclined to say that space and time consist in the manner whereby we grasp mind independent, external objects, i.e., that space and time consist in the form whereby objects distinct from us or our thoughts show up within our experiential horizon.⁵⁰ However, in the passage quoted above, Kant clearly states that the *mode of intuition itself is possible only insofar as we are affected by the object*. In Kemp Smith's terms, it is our way of sensing that "is dependent upon given matter".⁵¹ So, it seems that not only the formal intuition but also the form of intuition stand in causal connection with alleged mind independent objects. In this way, the distinction between formal intuition and form of intuition is not of much value for us. We still have to determine what it is that causes us to intuit things spatially (and temporally), i.e., what it is that our mode of intuition is dependent upon and, at the same time, what it is that is mind independent.

It should be noticed that we are not here urging Kant to determine *why* space and time are our forms of intuitions. If this were the question, there would be no difficulty circumventing it. Kant says that such a ques-

⁴⁹ cf. Allison 1983, p. 97. Allison also detects another sense of the expression "form of intuition" in Kant, namely, the form, "or essential structure, of that which is *intuited*". For my purposes, though, I shall omit this latter sense.

⁵⁰ cf. Lipson 1992, p. 85.

⁵¹ Smith 1984, p. 109.

tion “transcends all the powers of our reason”. There is no point in asking why we are given “intuition in *space* only and not some other mode of intuition”.⁵² Our question, though, is rather *what* is the cause of our mode of intuition. If we cannot establish what this *something* is like, we shall not be able, as Kant expects, to claim that, by limiting the ideality of the external world to its form, we are entitled to establish its empirical reality or its mind independence.⁵³ That is to say, we shall not be able to get empirical realism by assuming transcendental idealism. In that case, the very idea that space and time are forms of intuition will become useless in our quarrel against the sceptic. The transcendental idealist account by which we can properly characterise the mind independence of the external world will be acknowledged as untenable.

One might say that we are being a bit too harsh with Kant. In fact, the reply goes, we do not need to know what the affecting object of intuition is like. It suffices to acknowledge the intuitive and passive characters of our sensibility in order to ascertain the existence of something outside us, and hence distinct from our thoughts. However, we are worse-off without a proper account of such a thing. The sceptic can assert that, not knowing what it is that is mind independent, we can never be sure that our view of externality is the case. It may well be that the mind independent world is not as we represent it. That is to say, we can be mistaken with respect to what the external world is like. And if this is the case, our knowledge claims will lack a proper justification.

In view of this, let us consider some candidates for playing the role of this affecting object. First of all, it cannot be the empirical object. We have seen that, according to Kant, our conception of such an object already presupposes space and time. We cannot make use of the notion of empirical object as the cause of our mode of intuition for the simple reason that

⁵² cf. B 585.

⁵³ Recall that, as shown in chapter 2, Kant’s critique of Berkeley brings up the assumption that only the form, not the matter, of empirical objects is (transcendentally) ideal.

the former requires the latter. Hence, to avoid a vicious circle, we must impugn this candidate.

It might be objected that this circle is only apparent. When we say that the empirical object is dependent upon our mode of intuition, we use “dependence” here on the transcendental level, i.e., we state that such an object is an item to be found within the experiential realm. So, the objection goes, the circle would only hold if we stated that our mode of intuition is “transcendentally” dependent on the (empirical) object. This cannot be the case because, transcendently speaking, the latter depends upon the former, i.e., the empirical object is thought of, on the transcendental level, as dependent upon us, or in connection with our capacities of knowledge. To hold the opposite, i.e., to hold that space and time are “transcendentally” dependent upon the empirical object, is to think of Kant as departing from the Copernican Revolution and as reinstating the object as the maker of nature. Hence, there is no circle once we avoid characterising the notion of dependence in the quotation above on the transcendental level.

The problem with this objection, though, is that it forces us to search for another sense whereby our mode of intuition is said to be dependent upon the empirical object. If we are prohibited from interpreting the notion of dependence in this context on the transcendental level, what is left is just the empirical level. But to hold that our mode of intuition is “empirically” dependent on the object is to hold that space and time are (empirically) caused by the object. Now, this solution is unpalatable to a transcendental idealist, for it turns him into a phenomenalist. Recall, the phenomenalist believes that space and time are picked up from experience. For this reason, we have to take the statement ‘our mode of intuition is dependent upon the object’ as a transcendental claim, which means that we go back to the place where we started, i.e., we bump into the vicious circle again.

Let us now take account of another candidate for playing the role of the affecting object of intuition, namely, the thing in itself. But such a can-

didate will not do. The assumption that the thing in itself is the ground of our representations has been already discarded in chapter 1. On the one hand, 'thing in itself' has to be viewed as just a negative notion, i.e., a notion of what objects are not. The thing in itself cannot be thought of as an existent and *ipso facto* cannot stand in a causal connection with anything. On the other hand, the assumption that the thing in itself is the cause of our representations would bring back the unpalatable notion of transcendental affection. Thus put, it is quite objectionable to claim, as Gram does, that the "notion of intuition admits a perception of things in themselves but that such an admission is *harmless*".⁵⁴ As shown in chapter 1, the positive notion of the thing in itself would leave open the possibility for the sceptic to challenge how we can establish a causal connection between the world as it appears and the reality in itself.

In this way, the weakness of the notion of a priori intuition seems to consist of the fact that it carries with it the requirement of an affecting object which is not liable to a proper interpretation in transcendental idealist terms. Such a requirement generates philosophical complications that cannot be disentangled within Kant's epistemology. The notion of a priori intuition does not allow us to say that our knowledge of the world is indeed knowledge of objects distinct from our thoughts, or in space outside us. We thereby remain unable to characterise externality within the experiential field. This is tantamount to saying that transcendental idealism does not license us to be empirical realists after all.

Some interpreters tend to dismiss the problems just alluded to by contending that we have not yet considered a third candidate to play the role of the affecting object of intuition, namely, the transcendental object.⁵⁵ The major difficulty here, though, is to make sense of such a notion. Kant insists that the transcendental object "cannot itself be intuited by us",⁵⁶ so that it must be considered as "unknown".⁵⁷ From this it follows that the

⁵⁴ cf. Gram 1984, p. 33, my italics.

⁵⁵ cf. Stern-Zweig 1981.

⁵⁶ A 109; cf. B 522.

⁵⁷ B 236; cf. A 251, A 372; B 506.

transcendental object cannot be mistaken for the empirical object, which is given in intuition and which is known by us. In view of this, Kant sometimes equates the transcendental object with the thing in itself.⁵⁸ But this cannot be accepted, for the former has to be thought of as the “ground of appearances”.⁵⁹ As shown in chapter 1, in order to think of something as grounding appearances, we have to consider this something as causally related to the former. This violates one of Kant’s principles, to wit, that the category of causality (as well as all other categories) must not be applied to the thing in itself. On that score, a number of commentators try to distinguish the transcendental object from the thing in itself.⁶⁰ This attempt, however, does not shed lights on the problems we are facing. On the contrary, it reinforces them. If the transcendental object is neither the thing in itself nor, as we have just seen, the empirical object, it is not liable to a proper interpretation in transcendental idealist terms. What kind of object is it that is the ground of appearances but cannot be intuited by us and at the same time cannot be a thing in itself?

Taking these points on board, Kant’s notion of the transcendental object seems useless to resolve our dilemma. By means of such a notion we cannot determine what the affecting object of intuition is like. And if this is so, we cannot say that the notion of a priori intuition allows us to know what the external object is like, i.e., it does not allow us to determine what externality is like. Thus, Kant’s effort in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* to demonstrate, by means of the notion of a priori intuition, the truth of transcendental idealism, is far from promising in our quarrel against the sceptic. Even if we conceded that he has shown that transcendental idealism is sound, it would not necessarily follow from this that we are justified in being empirical realists. So, although he disagrees with transcendental realists and phenomenologists, he has not yet been able to build up an epistemology capable of defusing the sceptic. In other words, if it is true that Kant rejects transcendental realism and phenomenism altogether, and if

⁵⁸ cf. A 358, A 366.

⁵⁹ B 344; cf. A 379-80, B 522, *passim*.

⁶⁰ cf. Allison 1983, p. 242 ff.

it is also true that he is unsuccessful in proposing a better epistemology, transcendental idealism seems to drive us into a no-man's land.

Kant's most promising attempt to show that we are bound to uphold empirical realism if we are transcendental idealists is found in his doctrine that we have an outer sense, whose form is space, that is different from the inner sense, whose form is time, as stated in chapter 2. Through the outer sense alone are we given external, mind independent objects distinct from our thoughts. The inner sense by itself presents just items temporally ordered. It is the outer sense that allows us to get spatial ordering without passing through temporal ordering, *pace* Berkeley. However, Kant gives us no clue in the Transcendental Aesthetic how to establish once and for all that our sensibility is twofold, or at least that we must think of it in this manner. A proper argument to settle such a requirement will only be given in the Refutation, wherein Kant argues that inner sense presupposes outer sense, or that the perception of the permanent is required for us to perceive ourselves in time. However, we shall see in chapter 5 that the Refutation also falls short of a proper determination of the empirical reality of external objects because it clashes with some of the main points of transcendental idealism.

Finally, even if successful, the arguments of the Transcendental Aesthetic require a proper completion. As already argued, the idea that space and time are a priori, subjective forms of intuition precludes us from thinking of the external object in the way the phenomenalist thinks of it, i.e., as a collection of sense data. This is so because, according to Kant, such an object is said to be the product of both sensibility and understanding. Without an account of the faculty of understanding, the sceptic can reasonably say that a commitment to the fact that our thought of an object presupposes space and time does not necessarily involve a commitment to the external world being law-governed. And if this possibility is open, he can still say that this spatial and temporal world might not obey certain rules, for example of causality. In Kant's terms, unless it is shown that objects in space and time conform to the categories, we do not fully overcome phenomenalism. On that score, Kant has to provide us with an account of our

capacity of conceptualisation and, in so doing, to show that law-governedness as the criterion of truth does not come with the objects, as Berkeley claims, but stems from us. Therefore, Kant's position that transcendental idealism is proved to be sound in the Transcendental Aesthetic is inaccurate. Without the results of the Transcendental Analytic and the approach of our powers of conceptualisation, the *corpus* of transcendental idealism is yet to be completed.

PART TWO

Transcendental Idealism and the Sceptic

The purpose of this part consists of the examination of some allegedly anti-sceptical arguments within transcendental idealism. In so doing, we shall evaluate the cogency of transcendental idealism as an anti-sceptical philosophical background. We shall show that Kant's idealism does not, at bottom, block the sceptic from suspecting the certainty of our knowledge claims. In chapter 4, we shall survey the Deduction in order to determine whether or not this part of the *Critique* has any bearing on our quest for the justification of our knowledge of the external world. We shall argue, contrary to Strawson and others, that the Deduction is not meant to be a response to the sceptic. It is rather an argument for the law-governed character of our objective experience. However, the Deduction scores against the sceptic in that it prevents him from supposing that our experience can be otherwise. In chapter 5, we shall follow what we understand to be Kant's best shot against the sceptic, to wit, the Refutation. We shall show that the premises of this argument, in particular the requirement of a permanent in perception, clash with some of the main doctrines of transcendental idealism. As a consequence, we shall conclude that, since it is made out of transcendental idealism, the Refutation cannot work either within or without it. Finally, in chapter 6, we shall focus on some recent attempts to build up anti-sceptical arguments inspired by the proof structure of the Refutation but apart from transcendental idealism. We shall claim that these arguments, usually called "transcendental", cannot be put to work properly because they do not stop the sceptic from appealing to a transcendental realist conception of externality, which allows him to protect his suspicions about our ever being able to justify our objective knowledge.

Chapter 4

The Unity of Experience and the Sceptic

We have seen in chapters 1 and 2 that transcendental idealism is meant to depict an alternative view of the external world, one wherein the errors of transcendental realism and phenomenalism are expurgated. However, as shown in chapter 3, the sceptic can still find a seaport alongside the transcendental idealist's territory by claiming that Kant's notion of a priori intuition is undermined once we unravel its dependence on either Euclidean Geometry or the notion of the affecting object as the cause of our mode of intuition.

Notwithstanding the failure of transcendental idealism in determining once and for all the empirical reality of the external world, a number of commentators have attempted to detect allegedly anti-sceptical proofs in the *Critique*, particularly in the Deduction and in the Refutation. In this chapter, we shall begin to analyse the cogency of these attempts by focusing our attention on the Deduction. We shall claim that the Deduction is not, *pace* Strawson, an anti-sceptical argument. In order to carry out this task and to keep track of our main objective in this thesis, to wit the assessment of Kant's attempt to debunk the sceptic by means of transcendental idealism, we shall limit our account to an outline of the key moments of the Deduction, without engaging ourselves in a paragraph by paragraph exegesis that would demand a thorough and exhaustive consideration of the pros and cons of each step adopted by Kant there. Bearing this in mind, our tactic will consist in claiming that, despite Kant's obscurities, the argument of the Deduction enjoys a reasonable success, since it is meant to establish merely the law-governedness of our experience of objects.

That being so, we shall analyse, in section 1, the so called first part of the Deduction (§§ 15 to 21). We shall endeavour to make sense of Kant's account of the transcendental unity of apperception. We shall show that Kant agrees with Hume that the unity of self-consciousness cannot be substantial. Therefore, they both agree that Descartes' view of the soul is flawed. Kant, however, repudiates Hume's conception of the mind as a bunch of representations. A representation is always *mine*, which means that it is always in a connection of some sort with other representations by means of the primary unifier α . After going through a list of possible candidates to play the role of this unifier, we conclude that the only intelligible way of understanding α is to equate it with the unity of the thinking activity. In section 2, we shall establish the link between the unity of apperception and the categories by means of Kant's theory of judgement. We shall claim that the categories represent the different ways by which the unity of apperception synthesises representations. In section 3, we shall examine the so called second part of the Deduction (§§ 22-26). We shall show that this part is meant to bring the argument of the first part into the transcendental idealist realm by arguing that the unity of space and time is also subjected to the unity of apperception. The second part will thereby stop the sceptic or anyone else from supposing an objective order that just happens to match the order imposed by the unity of apperception. In section 4, we shall conclude that the Deduction, despite this anti-sceptical achievement, cannot work effectively against the sceptic, *pace* Strawson and others. We shall maintain that the Deduction produces an argument whereby we can merely establish that, *if* we are justified in being empirical realists, or *if* we know for sure that we do have experience of objects distinct from our thoughts, such experience has to be acknowledged as being law-governed. But since the argument for empirical realism is dependent upon the flawed arguments for transcendental idealism devised by Kant in the Transcendental Aesthetic, as we have characterised in chapters 2 and 3, the Deduction will be presented as lacking a proper philosophical background to be considered as an effective anti-sceptical argument.

1. Unity

It has almost become a commonplace among recent Kant commentators that the Deduction can be divided in two main parts; the first comprising paragraphs 15 to 21, and the second comprising paragraphs 22 to 26.¹ This division seems to be countenanced by Kant himself, for in paragraph 21 he contends that so far “a beginning is made of a *deduction* of the pure concepts of the understanding...”,² which suggests that another move, starting in paragraph 22, will be added up to the overall argument of the Deduction. Despite this widely accepted division however, there is little agreement as to what role these parts are supposed to play. We shall advance an interpretation according to which the first part is shown as contending the main argument of the Deduction; to wit, that every sequence of representations, to be a sequence at all, has to bear a certain unity which is ultimately subjected to the unity of apperception. Such a unity will be characterised as combining or synthesising representations in different ways expressed by the categories. In turn, the second part will deal with the very unity of the spatio-temporal structure as a unity brought about by the unity of apperception. In that sense, the latter part will function as a device by means of which we can bring the results of the first part into the transcendental idealist standpoint. On such a basis, we shall claim that the Deduction as a whole is meant to show that, if transcendental idealism is sound and if by means of it alone can we be empirical realists, our experience has to be considered as law-governed. The anti-sceptical import of this conclusion will be that the sceptic can never suppose consistently that experience could be otherwise.

Let us, then, start off by taking into consideration the first part. Consider a movie, e.g., “Gone with the Wind”. We all know the basic techniques involved in the making of a movie. Thousands of frames are generated and run in a fast sequence, giving the impression of movement. Well, imagine that a frame displays Scarlet in her underwear in Southern California and the subsequent frame displays her wearing night

¹ cf. Henrich 1969; cf. also Allison 1983, chapter 7 and Hymers 1991; *et alia*.

² B 144.

clothes in Washington D.C., and each other frame varies her clothes, the colour of her hair, the features of her face, and the place where she is. Imagine also that all other characters and places, and dialogues, vary in the same chaotic way. In that case, it will be hard to say that the movie has a story, or a unity. In fact, each one of these frames can be easily picked up and taken out of the sequence; they can therefore be said to be independent of the sequence. By the same token, any other frame can be inserted into the sequence, say, Clint Eastwood playing "Dirty Harry", Humphrey Bogart playing his role in "Casa Blanca", etc., so that virtually anything can happen in the sequence. In that case, hardly any judgement about the movie (or this disorderly series of frames put together) can be made. For example, if I say "Scarlet is in Washington", or "Scarlet is blonde", these judgements will make no sense, once it is acknowledged that the sequence lacks cohesion. However, I can still make some definite judgements about the sequence of frames. As a last resort, I can consider the place where I watched it for example, and state "I went to Odeon Cinema to watch *something*", or "a sequence of juxtaposed frames, a very weird sequence, appeared on that screen", or "changing images were shown for 2 hours without interruption", or even "*something* happened at Odeon Cinema within the last two hours".

Now, suppose that, instead of appearing on one screen only, each frame appears on different screens possibly in different places. Imagine that image A, say Scarlet dancing, appears on screen one in London, image B, say, Scarlet taking care of the wounded soldiers, appears on screen two in Paris, image C, say, Scarlet kissing her lover, appears on screen three in Rio de Janeiro, and so on and so forth. Am I entitled to speak of a sequence of images in this case? It is only possible to characterise the images A-screen-one, B-screen-two, C-screen-three, etc., as a sequence if all these screens compose a unitary whole, i.e., as a single screen. Unless screen one, screen two, screen three, etc. are gathered together or considered somehow as interconnected, it will be impossible to refer to a "movie", or to a succession of unconnected images running one after another, or even to *one* procession of images that constitutes *one* experience that I once called a "movie". No definite judgement can be made about a

happening or an event which lacks any coherence and unity, and *ipso facto* it can be hardly called a happening or an event. I can only properly refer to a sequence of images if they appear in a certain order of succession, which requires a determinate connection previously established amongst its members. If, on the contrary, one image of Scarlet appears on one screen and another on a different screen, and if these screens do not bear any kind of interconnection, there will be no sequence or succession.

In my first example, although the sequence of frames appeared to be chaotic, there was something putting them together, so that it was still possible to talk about the movie as a weird sequence. In the second example, however, it was only possible to refer to a sequence if the scattered screens were gathered together and taken to be a single screen. Otherwise, a fundamental connection amongst them would be missing. If this were the case, there would be no sequence, not even of weird images, because there would be no group of images to which I could refer as a sequence. Now, since each image can only be an image *of* a sequence, in the absence of this latter, the former simply cannot be accounted for as such. This implies that, once the screen, or the a collection of screens considered as a single screen, is left out, the images themselves cannot be acknowledged as images any longer.

Switching from these examples to our case of knowledge or experience, we may say that, once we deal with representations as a bunch of non-connected, scattered and independent items not bound up together and without any coherence, no sequence can ever take place. The idea of a succession of elements, whatever kind they may be, is dependent upon the idea of a unity holding them together. In turn, if we cannot account for a sequence, we cannot account for its items either, since they are always items *of* a sequence. Just like the items of any succession, representations have to be always acknowledged as pertaining to the succession that constitutes my experience. Just like any succession, my experience presupposes a certain unity among its items, i.e., among representations. If we dispense with this presupposition, our conception of experience collapses and, consequently, the very conception of representation crumbles. Now, to say that representations have to belong to the succession of my

experience in order to be properly characterised as representations is to say that these representations, to be representations at all, have to be acknowledged from the very start as *mine*. That is to say, if I am to give an account of my experience, I have primarily to be able to become aware of all the items or representations that can form its whole, i.e., I have to think of these representations first of all as *belonging to me*. Considering my second example, before searching for the story that constitutes the movie, I have to account for all its parts or images to be presented on a single screen.

That being so, representations have to be thought of as linked together, otherwise they could not be acknowledged as representations themselves. I have to think of representations as mine, as occurring on one screen only, for them to be considered representations. The possibility that other different selves are thinking them will render impossible my acknowledgement of them as representations, or as anything at all. That is the way I understand the following celebrated passage of the Deduction:

"It must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be *nothing to me*... All the manifold of intuition has, therefore, a necessary relation to the 'I think' in the *same subject* in which this manifold is found... For representations... would not be one and all my representations, if they did not all belong to one self-consciousness. As my representations... they must conform to the condition under which alone they *can* stand together in one universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not all without exception belong to me".³

I can only think of a sequence of images if I presuppose these images to be showed on a single screen, otherwise there will be no percep-

³ B 132 (the two first italics are mine).

tion of a sequence, i.e., otherwise from the very start the awareness of those images will be blocked. Scattered representations would compromise the very idea of representation because they would show no unity, no connection, no awareness of them at all and, therefore, they “would be for us *as good as nothing*”.⁴ Representations would not belong to any experience that I can possibly have, and “consequently would be without an object, merely a *blind play* of representations, *less even than a dream*”.⁵ I can never be aware of a representation save as long as I am aware of it as mine, or, in Kant’s words, if I did not “have before” my “eyes the identity of” this act.⁶

Let us stop here and take stock of what we have. When I state a sequence A, B, C, ..., what I mean is that certain items related in a certain way show up one after another. Items that display no order of precedence and succession cannot be possibly characterised as belonging to a sequence. This suggests that these members are gathered together or connected somehow so as to form a sequence. Let α be the connector, or the adhesive which primarily unifies the items for the procession to be constituted as such. Thus put, it seems reasonable to say that α itself cannot be a member of the sequence. The unifier α is the precondition for the sequence to occur in the first place and not just another unified element in the sequence. If the sequence were A, B, α , C, ..., then we would have anyway to find an α' to unify them and to constitute the flux of items A, B, α' , C, ... By the same token, there has to be only one α to do the desired job. Even if w, y, z, ... were thought of as being unifiers as well, it would be required, at the end of the day, that an allegedly sequence wA, yB, zC, ... - i.e., ‘A unified by w’, ‘B unified by y’, ‘C unified by z’, ... - displayed an order of precedence and succession for the sequence to be a sequence. That is, for the sequence wA, yB, zC, ... to be a sequence, a certain connection amongst its members must be presupposed from the very beginning. This would require us to search again for an α to unify or to connect them somehow.

⁴ A 111 (my italics); cf. Ak. XI 52.

⁵ A 112 (my italics); cf. B 299 and Ak. XVIII 621.

⁶ A 108.

At the same time, α has to be thought of as one and the same. This can be explained as follows. Imagine that β , ϕ and γ are the unifiers. If, on the one hand, they unify all items $r_1, r_2, r_3, \dots, r_n$, it will not be possible to distinguish β , ϕ and γ from one another. In this way, just like in the case of different frames showing up in different screens, there will only be a movie, or a sequence $r_1, r_2, r_3, \dots, r_n$, if β , ϕ and γ are acknowledged as different designations of a single unifier. If, on the other hand, β unifies $r_1, r_2, r_3, \dots, r_k$, ϕ unifies $r_{k+1}, r_{k+2}, r_{k+3}, \dots, r_m$ and γ unifies $r_{m+1}, r_{m+2}, r_{m+3}, \dots, r_n$, given that $k < m < n$, the whole sequence $r_1, r_2, r_3, \dots, r_n$ will be considered as a single sequence only insofar as a second order connection takes place by means of a second order unifier α , otherwise the overall order of precedence and succession amongst the members of $r_1, r_2, r_3, \dots, r_n$ will be disrupted and, as a consequence, the very sequence $r_1, r_2, r_3, \dots, r_n$ will fall apart.

So far, so good. Let α be Kant's 'I think'. For any representations A, B, C, \dots , α must be presupposed, so that $\alpha A, \alpha B, \alpha C, \dots$, i. e., 'I think' A, 'I think' B, 'I think' C, If α is not presupposed, there will be nothing to hold the members of the sequence together. Hence, in the absence of α , there will be no sequence, that is to say, in the absence of the 'I think', there will be no procession of representations or thoughts. Now, α cannot be just another representation or another item in the procession, such as A, B, α, C, \dots . If this were so, α would lack any role in the constitution of the sequence and nothing would be accounted for as unifying A, B, α, C, \dots . Where there is a sequence, there has to be presupposed something that is the source of connection. Kant prefers to say in his jargon that "*analysis* always presupposes [synthesis]. For where the understanding has not previously combined, it cannot dissolve, since only as having been combined *by the understanding* can anything that allows of analysis be given to the faculty of representation".⁷

If we try to include α in the sequence, the result seems disastrous: pure apperception or the 'I think' negates its character as the primary

⁷ B 130.

connector that holds the items of the sequence together. As a result, α starts dealing with itself as though it were an object of knowledge, which will then require further assistance from some other primary connector and then a *regressus ad infinitum* is introduced. This is the case of conceiving α' as the unifier of the sequence A, B, α, C, \dots . If I go on considering α' as a member of the sequence such that $A, B, \alpha, \alpha', C, \dots$, then I will have to find α'' to perform the task of gathering the sequence in the first place, and so on and so forth.⁸

By means of this reasoning, Kant is able to say that pure apperception is *not knowable*.⁹ The reason is this. If I were to have any knowledge of self-consciousness, I would turn my own self into an object of my awareness. Now, since this self-consciousness is ultimately responsible for any awareness that I can possibly entertain, I cannot be aware of this condition without being involved in a *petitio principii*, for in that case the condition would be at the same time the conditioned, i.e., what makes the sequence possible in the first place would be turned into another item of this very sequence. Kant is very clear about this in the following passage:

“The subject of the categories cannot by thinking the categories acquire a concept of itself as an object of the categories. For in order to think them, its pure self-consciousness, which is what was to be explained, must itself be presupposed”.¹⁰

The unity of apperception is not describable as an item in the flux of representations of which we are aware because these representations are only possible through that unity. We can only say that, if there is a sequence of frames, then it necessarily follows that there is a screen - or a collection of screens that are considered as a single screen - holding images together and making this sequence a sequence. On that score, the

⁸ cf. A 402.

⁹ cf. B 422.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

unity of pure apperception is called a "necessary unity",¹¹ i.e., a unity without which no representation and no sequence are possible at all. In the wake of it, without the sequence, no knowledge can ever be possible. That is why Kant also calls α a "transcendental unity".¹²

Bearing all these considerations in mind, a single, unitary synthesiser α must be thought of as linking every representation with one another without itself being a member of the sequence. This point is cryptically stated by Kant. He says for example that the 'I think' is "indeed in all thought, but there is not therein... the least trace of intuition",¹³ or that "I cannot have any representation whatsoever of a thinking being...".¹⁴ Since it yields no intuition - in my terminology, since it is not an item in the series of representations or thoughts -, the 'I think' is neither knowable nor substantial. Recall that a knowable substance, i.e., the object of possible experience in Kant's terminology, must not be defined as belonging to a non-sensible (non-intuitable) domain, otherwise transcendental realism re-emerges in our picture of the external world and, with it, the sceptic. It is therefore a mistake to confuse the unity of apperception with the Cartesian Cogito, i.e., the thinking substance whose existence is established in the beginning of Descartes' Second Meditation.

From the fact that α cannot be a substance it does not follow that α should be discarded. Without α no succession of representations is possible and hence, no representation itself is possible.

"In other words, only in so far as I can grasp the manifold of the representations in one consciousness, do I call them one and all *mine*. For otherwise I should have as many-coloured and diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious to myself".¹⁵

¹¹ B 134.

¹² B 132.

¹³ A 350.

¹⁴ B 405.

¹⁵ B 134.

What has been said so far gives us a clear idea of what it would be like to have a “many-coloured and diverse self”: the succession that my experience is made of would not be possible. Although awkward, this is, I take it, what Hume contrived to defend in his account of personal identity:¹⁶

“What we call mind is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and suppos’d, tho’ falsely, to be endow’d with a perfect simplicity and identity. Now as every perception is distinguishable from another, and may be consider’d as separately existent; it evidently follows, that there is no absurdity in separating any particular perception from the mind; that is, in braking off all its relations, with that connected mass of perceptions, which constitute a thinking being”.¹⁷

Since for Hume every idea must be derived from an impression,¹⁸ and since we have no impression of a single, substantial mind like the Cartesian Cogito, it follows that it is an absurd to hold the idea of a substantial self.¹⁹ When the mind looks at itself, what it contemplates is just a procession of separated perceptions (representations). Likewise, he observes:

“... I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement”.²⁰

¹⁶ We found Bencivenga’s account most inspiring to deal with the relation between Kant and Hume regarding self-consciousness. However, his overall strategy seems unsatisfactory, since he tends to adopt a view of the role and the intentions of the Transcendental Deduction in a way which is pretty much similar to Strawson’s, i.e., he endeavours to show that this part of the *Critique* establishes that the presupposition of spatial objects distinct from our thoughts is a prerequisite to self-consciousness (cf. Bencivenga 1987, pp. 150 ff.).

¹⁷ *Treatise*, p. 207; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 456, 634.

¹⁸ cf. *Enquiry*, sec. IV.

¹⁹ cf. *Treatise*, p. 232, *passim*.

²⁰ *Treatise*, p. 252; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 251, 436, 633.

The mind cannot perceive any real bond between perceptions, so that these perceptions seem to be distinct and separable from each other, and may be thereby considered as independent existents. In this way, there is no need of anything else to support their existence.²¹ According to Hume, the idea that the mind is a substance is plainly wrong. This is a classical case of the dispensability of the 'I think' stated above. Perceptions can carry on in a constant flux without the mind, which passively notices such a succession. In that sense, Hume continues, it can be viewed as a theatre wherein representations take place.²² This theatre, however, is completely unknowable.

"The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos'd".²³

In the appendix to the *Treatise*, however, Hume shows dissatisfaction towards his own account of the mind. There he says that he recognises this account to be "very defective", for perceptions do form a whole. Nevertheless, the connections amongst them can only be *felt* by us and cannot thereby be acknowledged as necessary connections.²⁴ Well, I think Hume concedes more than he intended. He steps towards a criticism of his own account and goes far enough to admit a point stressed earlier, namely, that a sequence of images, to be a sequence anyway, requires at least the presupposition of their being shown on one screen only, and not on several. In fact, the conception of the mind as a bundle of representations carries with it the idea that, at least, there is a bundle that

²¹ cf. *ibid.*, p. 233.

²² cf. *ibid.*, p. 253.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ cf. *ibid.*, p. 635.

was previously formed somehow, and its parts cannot be thought of as thoroughly scattered in different minds.

Hume probably comprehended that there is something wrong with an account that casts doubts on the existence of a mind and at the same time that compares it with a theatre. One might not find it difficult to be sympathetic to the idea that this mind is unknowable, but one cannot sustain the idea that there is no mind, on pain of losing the very idea of a sequence or bundle. As in the case of my having watched a procession of non-connected images at Odeon Cinema, I can still say that there was *something* wherein representations took place. Although they formed an erratic group of allegedly disconnected items, their procession happened within *something*. Hume realised he was being inconsistent in holding the idea of a theatre for representations and at the same time the idea that this theatre was expendable.

By the same token, Hume's concession that we only feel a connection compromises his criticism of the unitary character of the mind. The reason is this. Even in order for us to feel a connection of some sort among representations, it is necessary to presuppose them as belonging to a single mind. Otherwise, there will be always the possibility that they are scattered in different minds. Such a possibility brings with it the annihilation of the very idea that representations are felt to be connected. This is made clear when we consider Hume's account of personal identity in parallel with his view of causality. While he casts doubts about the idea of a single mind, he at the same time deals with the fundamental connection of causality in terms of a merely instinctive expectation of effects from their causes. The tension between these two accounts in Hume is that *I* see an A, and then *I* expect B to occur. If B does not belong to me, but to someone else, then there will be in me no expectation of a B, which is to say, *I* will never get the concept of cause. Going back to my previous examples, if one frame appears in one screen and another frame in another, and if these two screens are not thought of as bound together somehow, the frames will compose no kind of bunch or heap of images and, according to Hume himself, not even the idea of a constant conjunction would be brought into our minds. The perceptions of A and B *have*

to belong to the same mind in order for the concept of cause to come about. Nevertheless, Hume's view of personal identity heads for the elimination of this very idea. If representations did not belong to a single, unitary mind, they could not be even felt (or instinctively expected) by us and, as a consequence, they would not be representational.²⁵ In other words, totally unconnected Humean impressions would not be impressions at all, in the same way that scattered images appearing on different and unconnected screens cannot be considered a succession.

Although Hume fails to elaborate a consistent account of self-consciousness and thereby to devise a sound criticism of the Cogito, he nevertheless points to a deep problem. Even granted that the idea of a substantial self is unsustainable, there remains the question how to understand the unity α required to form the succession of our experience in the first place. In order to give a proper account of α , let us take a breath and conjecture on what can be inferred from the remarks above. First of all, α cannot be a particular person, a single mind empirically determined, or rather an empirical self, because α is not an empirical substance capable of being pointed to. In fact, α is not a substance at all. I can indeed refer to myself on an empirical level as "that being who is now writing up his thesis on a computer". The problem with this answer is that, in defining myself this way, I inevitably include myself in the succession of my experience. When I do this, however, what is implied is a thought of myself that already demands the application of the 'I think'. As any other member of the sequence, the thought of myself requires the unifying act of α . That is why Kant states that empirical consciousness presupposes pure consciousness.²⁶ The fact is that if pure apperception is required in every thought or judgement, any judgement that may be used to refer to pure apperception presupposes pure apperception. This is the case when α is conceived of as belonging to the sequence that α itself is supposed to constitute. As a member of the sequence, α would be already conditioned by or dependent upon pure apperception, so that we get stuck in a *petitio*

²⁵ cf. Kitcher 1990, p. 101.

²⁶ cf. B 139-40.

principii. Rather, the unifier α has to be thought of as constituting the sequence and not as belonging to it. Actually, in trying to define pure apperception, we “can only revolve in a perpetual circle, since any judgement upon it has already made use of its representation”.²⁷ The requirement of attaching the ‘I think’ to any item of my consciousness should not mean that, in being aware of anything, I am also aware of myself, as if I could include the item *non-empirical me* in a full inventory of my mental states. To do so is to deprive α of its role as the constitutive unifier of the sequence, and to make of it a combinable element within the stream of my consciousness. I cannot speak of the ‘I think’ as I do of any other member of the sequence. What I can say is that, if there is a thought or a representation of any kind - including the representation of myself as the being in front of my Mac - it was brought about by the primary synthesiser α , or the ‘I think’.

Now, to say that the unifier α cannot be a particular person is to say that α cannot be empirically determined and then that it must be acknowledged as a priori. As a consequence, α does not originate from empirical sources. That being understood, the unifier α cannot also be the sum of all particular persons, the set of human beings. If a set is constituted by empirical elements, the set itself has to be viewed as empirically given, i.e., formed only under the auspices of experience. The set of all persons is the set of substances with empirically detectable features and *ipso facto* cannot be counted as a priori.

Someone might interpret this as pointing to the idea that α is rather an *impersonal self*, a non-particular mind. Apparently, this view is encouraged by Kant himself when he misleadingly refers to the “transcendental subject”:

²⁷ B 402.

"Through this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of the thoughts = X. It is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever..."²⁸

It is plausible, however, to say that Kant is confused about the status of the unifier α when he equates it to the transcendental subject. It is indeed possible to speak of a 'subject in general = X', e.g. if we say "for every x, if x is a subject, then x is capable of judging". In doing so, however, I cannot claim to have identified *something* behind the sequence that plays the role of the unifier and that keeps its items bound up together. The statement in question is innocuous and bears no epistemological import. If we hold the idea of a thing on the other side of our consciousness, we may indeed continue to stick to the idea that the unifier is unknowable, but nothing would prevent us from thinking of α as a substance. What is then left can only be characterised as bearing the status of a thing in itself. The stumbling block here is that, in so doing, we reinstate the two world theory alluded to in the first chapter and, with it, the transcendental realist picture of the external world. In this way, we are led to the idea that something beyond our ken is ultimately responsible for the making of the unity required for the items of my consciousness (my representations or mental states) to first form the succession of my experience. If this were what is meant here, I could not see Kant overcoming any kind of scepticism whatsoever. The sceptic would always be able to challenge us with respect to the status of this unreachable and unknowable unifier which builds up the sequence of representations from without our ken. He would easily explore the inconsistency of maintaining that, albeit *outside* the borders of our experiential field, α would be thought of as performing a fundamental role *inside* it.²⁹ As observed in

²⁸ B 404; cf. A 355, 427, 441, *passim*.

²⁹ Allison seems to make this sort of mistake when he alludes to Wittgenstein's metaphor of the eye, that sees everything but itself. This is not a good metaphor to characterise pure apperception, for it reintroduces the idea of a transcendental subject and hence it encourages us to

the first chapter, however, the concept of the thing in itself is just a concept of limit, and bears no property that we can possibly attribute to it. Therefore, any reference to the thing in itself can only be made consistently in a negative way, i.e., by denying to it all possible (empirical) properties found in the objects of our awareness.³⁰

Taking these points into consideration, it seems also incorrect to resort to the conception of a great, divine mind, forever omniscient of our thoughts and ultimately responsible for their synthesis. If this were so, we would get stuck again in the possibility that a supersensible, almighty subject executed the required connection amongst the items of the sequence. This suggests that, if Kant were talking about God, he would be forced to accept that α is a substance, a divine one, and all those difficulties stemming from the account of the substantial self would be brought about once more. Besides, it would be impossible to distinguish his view from Berkeley's, who maintained that all existing things are nothing but ideas in the mind of God.³¹

Nevertheless, one will not be convinced perhaps that α cannot be a substance. He might say that a very important aspect of α has not been dealt with yet. It appears that α endures from one item of the sequence to another, i.e., that α abides in the flow of items. Permanence or endurance is a distinctive character of a substance. Therefore, it would seem that, after all, α is a substance, *pace* Kant and Hume. If this were so, Kant could never be seen as overcoming the idea of a Cartesian Cogito and, with it, the transcendental realist picture that lies behind it. What then, is the way out of this?

A hint could be the fact that, if α endures, or is in time, then it is a member of the sequence. Well, α cannot be thought of as a member of the sequence. Therefore, it is imperative to avoid characterising α as being in time. This, however, does not solve the problem, but makes it worse. The

think of the 'I think' as something external to our ken, an unreachable thing in itself (cf. Allison 1983, pp. 290 ff.).

³⁰ cf. chap. II, sec. 2.1.

³¹ cf. *Dialogues*, p. 65.

Cartesian sceptic can easily say that this commitment seems inevitable, but that does not prevent him from asking: "what is it that is not in time but all the same has to be thought of as accompanying and linking all items of the sequence?"

The clue to solving the impasse of determining a referent for α is to try to find a third alternative that can avoid the Cartesian, substantial soul and at the same time the Humean view that the mind is a mere bundle of representations. But what is it that is at the same time non-substantial, but yet *something* that unites representations and primarily forms a sequence? The most plausible way to make sense of α is to get a grip on what we have. We know what is done, namely, the constitution of the sequence as a sequence; but we do not know what α is because α must be neither substantial nor knowable. What is, then, the nature of the self that Kant is talking about? What does the 'I' of the 'I think' designate?

Well, we have spent some time arguing that, on the non-empirical, i.e., on the transcendental level, the 'I' cannot designate *anything*. If it could, we would have to go back to the idea that this talk about mind is a talk about substance. But if we go back to a substantial self, or mind, or the 'I' of the 'I think', we get entangled in insurmountable difficulties and nothing fits the transcendental idealist picture, so that we do not overcome the sceptical challenge.

What remains when we chase away the question about the referent to the 'I' is, then, just the presupposition of the coherence of the judgmental activity, the requirement of the unity whereby alone the job of acquiring knowledge through judgements is executed. Given two representations, say, "cat" and "is on the mat", a judgement such as "the cat is on the mat" can only be made under the previous assumption that a single unifier is linking them. It is true that this does not tell us much. However, to seek out more than that is to request the assistance of the transcendental realist. If we ask, for example, "what is it (the thing) that thinks?", or "what is the 'I' of the 'I think'?", these questions already demand an ontological response, i.e., they require us to determine the "thing" that unifies the synthesising activity. However, since after the first chapter, we know

that the transcendental realist cannot help us out of scepticism. Hence, transcendental idealism requires us to think otherwise, to change the kind of question to be asked about self-consciousness. The question is not "what is it?" but, perhaps, "by what means does the judging activity and *eo ipso*, our experience, take place?". Whenever we ask the what-question, we ask for a definition of pure apperception in terms of a substance, and not as an essential presupposition for the judgmental activity to take place. That it is vain to ask about the referent of the 'I' is made clear by Kant in a clear-cut passage of the *Critique* that is much forgotten:

"We have here a case where the common saying holds, that no answer is itself an answer. A question as to the constitution of that something which cannot be thought through any determinate predicate - inasmuch as it is completely outside the sphere of those objects which can be given to us - is entirely null and void".³²

The 'I' of the 'I think' cannot be thought "through any determinate predicate" because it cannot be thought of as belonging to the sequence, as observed above. The 'I think' is thus the expression of the unity of any judging act that has to be one and the same for knowledge to come about. If α is missing, there will be no glue linking representations with each other. Although we cannot, on the transcendental level, determine the object that the 'I' stands for, we can still say that, given a representation or thought r , r is an item in the succession of my experience and *ipso facto* is unified with other representations only because the 'I think' is attached to it. Therefore, the 'I' of the 'I think' is not a proper name that designates a thing or a substance. We are here in agreement with Miss Anscombe that the 'I' does not refer at all:

³² B 506-7n.

"This dispute is self-perpetuating, endless, irresoluble, so long as we adhere to the initial assumption, made so far by all the parties to it: that 'I' is a referring expression. So long as that is the assumption you will get the deep division between those whose considerations show that they have not perceived the difficulty... and those who do - or would - perceive the difference and are led to rave in consequence. 'I' is neither a name nor another kind of expression whose logical role is to make a reference, *at all*." ³³

The unity of pure apperception has to be acknowledged as the unity of the thinking activity, rather than a thing that thinks, i.e., rather than the Cartesian substantial soul. More precisely, it is the coherence of the sequence, the necessary unity of the judging function whereby alone the members of the sequence are first incorporated into the stream of thoughts. *A fortiori*, as the original activity of thought or, in Kant's words, as a "transcendental ground", ³⁴ the 'I think' is responsible for the generation of whatever concept we may conceive. It is then useless to try to give a proper concept to the 'I'.

"the 'I... has no content... In order that it should be possible, by pure reason, to obtain knowledge of the nature of a thinking being in general, this 'I' would have to be an intuition... This 'I' is, however, as little an intuition as it is a concept of any object; it is the mere form of consciousness, which is in a position to elevate them to the rank of knowledge only in so far as something else is given in intuition that provides material for a representation of an object". ³⁵

The 'I' cannot be given a concept because the 'I think' is that through which alone the act of conceptualisation of the items of the sequence first takes place. In that event, as Allison says, this 'I' "must be

³³ Anscombe 1981, p. 32.

³⁴ A 106, *passim*.

³⁵ A 382.

thought of as already on the scene, doing the conceptualising".³⁶ The alternative is to suppose that something else conceptualises the 'I', and this would oblige us to renounce the idea that the 'I think' is the primary connector. Besides, the 'I' cannot be given a proper concept because, if this were possible, then it would also be possible to give an intuition to it or, in my reading, to regard it as a member of the sequence.

Hence, the 'I think' is best referred to as the presupposition which first draws the borders of our conceptual field, constituting the totality of our conceptualisable experience in general. Consequently, α cannot be dealt with as though it were an entity or a thing, so that it does not make sense to think of it as having temporal properties. The unity of the thinking activity has to be thought of as logically prior even to time determination, for through the former alone can the latter occur in the first place.

The distinction between substance and unity of the sequence seems to be indicated by Kant himself several times. Let me point out two instances. The first one is when he characterises the 'I' of the 'I think' as purely formal.³⁷ I cannot suppose that it has content because this would transform it into an element bearing the same status as any other data of my consciousness. The second is when he says that the 'I think' is said to be an act of *spontaneity*.³⁸ What does that mean? One of the reasons English philosophers usually feel uneasy in reading Kant is that he is very often laconic at crucial moments. Now, according to Kant, sensibility is a faculty of receptivity, whereby objects are given to us, and the understanding is the faculty of spontaneity, whereby objects are thought. Thus, the 'I think', by being an act of spontaneity, cannot be an act of sensibility, but it is rather exerted upon its data. Kant seems thus to be maintaining that the act of unification of the items of the sequence - i.e., the sensorial data - cannot be grounded in these items themselves because such an act is responsible for the constitution of the sequence in the first

³⁶ Allison 1983, p. 292.

³⁷ cf. B 135 *passim*.

³⁸ cf. B 132.

place.³⁹ And if we carry on trying to determine some other ground wherein the act of unification takes place, such an act would lack its unifying character, for something else would have to be thought of as ultimately responsible for the unity. Therefore, the act of gathering together the items of the sequence must be thought of as thoroughly ungrounded. Now, an act which is ungrounded can also be said to be spontaneous, i.e., brought about by its very activity.

An example would be in order here. Let me suppose a play with one character only. At a certain moment, she starts referring to the play wherein she is acting. Trivially, she can only do so from within the play, i.e., by using the resources she has as a character in a play, for example the way she sees the world according to the author's conception, the language she speaks, etc. Her description, in this way, is part of the play. She cannot step back from the play to refer to it, for this would imply the cessation of her performance and therefore she could not even be thought of as defining the play within the play. She can say, for example, "I am a character in the play", "the play deals with love, passion and hatred", or "the play is about a loser who made the grade". But there can be no *play* without a certain unity. Thus, she can only describe what is played under the presupposition that this unity is already there. This unity is not a thing. The actress cannot point to it as she points to tables and chairs. It is rather the whole thematical context, the singleness of the story in the course of which the character brings about her description. By the same token, the actress can resort to the expression "scene *s* belongs to the play" in order to convey the idea that the scenes and acts of the play are gathered together. In so doing, she at the same time alludes to the unity of the theme which encompasses all occurrences in the play. Whenever she says "this scene belongs to the play", she takes account of the fact that such a scene is an item of the sequence. The expression "*s* belongs to the play" is then a mark, an emblem which means "whatever *s*, *s* is unified", or "whatever *s*, *s* is subordinated to the unity of the story". Otherwise, *s* cannot be acknowledged as a scene that belongs to the play.

³⁹ cf. Schwyzer 1990, p. 101.

Now, as I see it, we are in a similar situation to the actress when we try to speak of the unifier 'I think'.⁴⁰ Suppose that the play in question is our experience as a whole, i.e., the totality of representations or thoughts we can entertain. Just like the actress, who speaks of herself as a character in the play, we can say (on an empirical level) that I am a member of the sequence, or that I perceive myself in time. While she may describe the contents of the play, I am likewise able to talk about the contents of my mental states (i.e., my representations, either pure or empirical). The possibility of an actor in a play making judgements *about* the play can be viewed as an analogue of our capacity of making judgements about our experience. We also have to presuppose the unity of the act of making judgements about our experience, just as she has to presuppose the unity of the play in her description. This unity cannot be dealt with either by pointing to it as we do to the objects we are aware of; or by picking it out from the stream of our consciousness. Finally, like the actress, the only way we have to speak of the 'I think' (or the unity of apperception) is to appeal, from within, to the unity of our experience, that is to say, to the singleness of the whole sphere of intelligible thought. We can say of any representation or any thought we can possibly entertain that the expression 'I think' accompanies it. By means of that the expression 'I think' can similarly be viewed as an emblem of the unity that is manifest from within. We use the 'I think' to draw to our attention the manifest unity required for every act of judging or thinking, a unity which encompasses the totality of our experiential field. In that sense, it is understandable why Strawson detected a transcendental story in the Deduction. Kant seems to be telling a story because there is no other way of speaking of pure apperception.⁴¹

From these remarks it can be inferred that, according to Kant, the account of pure apperception cannot be handled on the empirical level,

⁴⁰ Kant himself encourages us to apply this metaphor: "in all knowledge of an object there is *unity* of concept, which may be entitled *qualitative unity*, so far as we think by it only the unity in the combination of the manifold of our knowledge; as for example, the unity of the theme in a play, a speech, or a story" (B 114).

⁴¹ cf. Schwyzer 1990, p. 93.

but must be dealt with on the transcendental one. Transcendentally speaking, we can only state that the unity of our experience is the precondition of thought and, consequently, of knowledge. Descartes's error is to suppose that it is possible to define this unity by reference to a substantial self which he calls the soul. Hence, he can be viewed as characterising α on the transcendental level as we characterise ourselves on the empirical level. Hume is right in pointing out the impossibility of carrying out this philosophical task. As observed above, we have no idea of a substantial mind because no impression (or, in Kant's terms, because no intuition) corresponds to it. However, Hume fails to acknowledge, on the transcendental level, that there has to be a unity amongst items in order for them to form a succession (or a bundle, as he calls it). Moreover, he wrongly holds that, on the empirical level, we are not justified in thinking of ourselves as objects, i.e., that we are just collections of unconnected perceptions and not substances.

In view of this, it seems that, if we stick to Kant's account, Hume's conundrum of personal identity can be viewed as originating from a conflation between the sequence of representations itself and the presupposition of the unity which first links these representations with one another and thereby makes them a sequence. The awareness of the sequence itself is one thing; the presupposition of the unity of the sequence is quite another. The awareness of the sequence may be said to be the history of the succession of our mental states and is called by Kant "inner sense",⁴² or "empirical apperception",⁴³ or even "subjective unity of consciousness".⁴⁴ The presupposition of the unity of the sequence, in turn, is the reflexive act of thought by means of which the sequence is acknowledged as mine and is called by Kant "pure apperception".⁴⁵ They have to be distinguished from one another, inasmuch as the presupposition of unity of the sequence is to be considered the source of all the gathering together of representations - or, as Kant calls it, "combination" -, while the

⁴² cf. B 37, 49, 66, A 386, *passim*

⁴³ cf. A 107.

⁴⁴ cf. B 139; cf. also Allison 1983, p. 260.

⁴⁵ cf. B 220 *passim*.

awareness of the sequence itself contains just the passing by of those representations one after another.⁴⁶ In other words, through inner sense I become aware of a representation r_1 which precedes another representation r_2 and so on, but through the pure apperception I presuppose that r_1 and r_2 display some sort of connection. That is why Kant also says that through inner sense I can say “merely *I am*”, while through pure apperception we can go on saying “I was, I am and I will be...”.⁴⁷ This suggests that pure apperception is a “consciousness of what we are doing”, i.e., of the act of the mind whereby representations are combined, an act which belongs “to the power of thinking”, while inner sense can be properly described as a “consciousness of what we undergo insofar as we are affected by the play of our own thoughts”.⁴⁸ If I had only the propensity to observe the sequence and not the capacity to reflect upon the sequence as forming a certain whole, I could not even become aware of the fact that it is a sequence that is going on.⁴⁹

Kant’s philosophical account of the unity of pure apperception is meant to wipe out the idea that representations or objects can be counted as such without a connection of some sort. Hume can only suppose that the mind is a mere bundle of representations because he himself is a transcendental realist. He can only produce an account of the mind as an aggregate by defending the primacy of objects (or, in his case, impressions) vis-à-vis the subject. He then defines the latter through the former, as we define a house through the bricks that compound it. For a transcendental idealist, there are no objects to start from, no bricks logically antecedent to the house; they can only be made objects if they are subordinated to the condition of the thinking activity, i.e., if the bricks are bricks *of* a house.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ cf. B 154.

⁴⁷ Inner, p. 255.

⁴⁸ cf. Ant. § 24.

⁴⁹ cf. Ak. XI 52.

⁵⁰ cf. Bencivenga 1987, p. 157.

Kant seems at first sight to be in agreement with Hume that the mind is not substantial. However, he can be seen as advising us not only to make the necessary distinction between empirical and pure apperceptions, but also to deny substantiality to the latter. This does not mean that, according to Kant, Hume is correct in doubting the unity required amongst certain items for them to form a sequence. In his attempt to get rid of the Cartesian Cogito, Hume goes further and also gets rid of the presupposition of unity amongst the members of the series of representations (or perceptions); a very good example of throwing out the baby with the bath water.

2. Synthesis and the Categories

The analysis carried out in the preceding section sheds new light on the notion of pure apperception. This provides us with the means not only to determine Kant's main intentions in the Deduction but also to assess the anti-sceptical thrust of the Deduction. Before doing so, however, we still have to explore in more detail Kant's account of our judgmental capacity. The reason for this move lies in the fact that the unity of apperception has been characterised as the unity of our thinking activity. If this is so, the notion of pure apperception still requires further clarification. Only insofar as this notion is broadened can we check out the cogency of those interpretations, according to which the Deduction is viewed as an argument devised to debunk the sceptic. Now, since Kant's theory of judgement is found especially in the Metaphysical Deduction of the Categories, we shall highlight the main steps of this part of the *Critique* so as to enhance our overall account of the unity of apperception. In so doing, we shall point out the link between the table of judgements and the table of the categories.

As already stated in the preceding chapter, according to Kant, while sensibility gives us an individual or set of individuals, the understanding orders and classifies them by means of concepts. This is equivalent to saying that, by means of concepts, we are able to bring different

individuals into a single set, i.e., we can gather them together under a general description or, in Kant's words, under a certain "mark" which is common to them. Such an act can be called an act of conceptualisation or, as Kant calls it, synthesis.⁵¹ Concurrently, if concepts order, direct and enjoin unity to classes of individuals, they may be referred to as rules.⁵² In other words, a concept serves as an instruction for thinking a number of individuals as united or connected in a certain way by our pointing to a common feature picked out in each of these individuals. In this way, if I consider the objects of my study room, I may figure out that some of them are bearers of the same features. I see, for example, the mat under my Mac's mouse, the blanket over the bed, the towel beside the sink, and realise that they all have the property of being red. Through the rule of synthesis prescribed by the concept 'red', then, I am allowed to unite these objects in a single set. In so doing, I am also allowed to make judgements by means of such a concept, for example, "some objects of my study room bear a feature which falls under the concept 'red'", or "that towel is red", etc. Similarly, in considering the item on which my baby daughter is sitting, the item on which I am sitting, and the items in the living room that surround the table, I realise that they have similar features and shapes, so that I can, through the rule of synthesis prescribed by the concept 'chair', think of all these items as belonging to a single set. Moreover, I can make judgements by means of such a concept, for example, "that chair is black", "all chairs are solid", etc.

It is worth mentioning that the concept 'furniture', for example, differs from the concept 'chair' in that the former points to a property and the latter to a bearer or bearers of properties. Besides, the latter is less general than the former. The concept 'chair' refers to a class of individuals which form a subset within the set of individuals whose property is referred to by the concept 'furniture'. The same claim can be made about the concepts 'wood' and 'chair'. They also differ from each other in that the former is more general than the latter, or that the latter refers to a subset

⁵¹ cf. B 102, 130, *passim*.

⁵² cf. A 106.

of the set of individuals that share a property referred to by the former. Accordingly, the concept 'body' is more general than the concept 'wood'. The concept 'wood' points to a property common to certain individuals which form a subset within the set of individuals referred to by the former.

Now, if this is the case, a concept is always considered by Kant as related, in different degrees of generality, to an X, i.e., an individual or set of individuals, of whatever kind they may be, which is to say, a concept is such that it always involves a cognition of an X. As for the concept 'red', I picked it out from my experience of seeing the individuals of my study room. In the case of the concept 'chair', of considering some individuals in my whole house. The same applies to concepts whose referent is not found in experience. For example, if 'angel' is to be a concept, I have to be able at least to think of an X through it. Otherwise, I will not be able to conceive of 'angel' as gathering different individuals together in a single set, which is to say, I will not be able to acknowledge 'angel' to be a concept at all. Accordingly, if I cannot think of an X through a concept, I will not be able to formulate judgements by means of it. I can only state that "angels have wings", or "angels wear always in white clothes" in virtue of the fact that some individuals, though imaginary ones, are thought of by means of the concept 'angel'.

If an alleged concept does not allude to an X, or if there is no relation between the alleged concept and the elements to which such a concept refers, we can say that this concept is not applicable to anything and *ipso facto* that it is not in any sense a concept. For example, let us invent a concept, say, 'crypish'. If, through this concept, I cannot think of an individual or set of individuals X, regardless of whether or not X is given empirically, I will not be able to recognise 'crypish' as possessing the distinct characteristic of any concept, namely, the gathering together of certain individuals X. This is tantamount to saying that I cannot consider 'crypish' to be, in fact, a concept. By the same token, if I cannot think of an individual or set of individuals X through the concept 'crypish', then I will not be able to make any judgements by means of this concept. I can only state, for example, "crypishes are round", or "this is a crypish" if and

only if I presuppose that some individuals *X* fall under the concept 'crypish'.

Thus, it seems that, according to Kant, to possess a concept is to be able to use it as a rule to unify individuals. Besides, when I say that I possess a concept, for example 'table', what I am saying is that I can apply it in a certain way. But I can only apply a concept if I can make judgements by means of it. To conceive of certain individuals or their properties as falling under a concept is to acknowledge that these individuals or properties are judgeable under such a concept. I can only conceive of the concept 'red' as applicable to the individual referred to by the concept 'mat' through the judgmental act "that mat is red".⁵³ Accordingly, to say that I possess the concept 'table' means that I can state "the object in front of me is a table", "that thing in the other room is a table", "the table I am writing on is brown", etc. Thus, to say that I possess a concept is to say that I am able to make judgements by means of it. As Kant says, "the only use which the understanding can make of ... concepts is to judge by means of them".⁵⁴

In turn, to be able to make a judgement is to be able to think of an individual or set of individuals and their attributes as connected in a certain way (for example, by the copula 'is').⁵⁵ But I can only think of an individual or set of individuals in relation to their properties by means of concepts. For example, the judgement "all bodies are impenetrable" can only be made if I think of the individuals that fall under the concept 'body' and if I attend to the property referred to by the concept 'impenetrable'.⁵⁶ These remarks license us to acknowledge that concepts and judgements go hand in hand. I cannot have the former without the latter and vice-versa. They are not definable separately, as though concepts could be understood without our attending to their role in a judgement, and judgements could be understood without our attending to

⁵³ cf. Ak. II, p. 92.

⁵⁴ B 93.

⁵⁵ cf. Ak. II, p. 47.

⁵⁶ cf. *ibid.*, p. 93.

what a concept does.⁵⁷ Thus, we are entitled by Kant to say that every act of conceptualisation, i.e., every act of holding common features together, is an act of judging.⁵⁸ For this reason, it is not difficult to understand Kant's statement that "all acts of the understanding" can be reduced "to judgement, and the understanding may therefore be represented as a faculty for judging".⁵⁹ This is why Kant says that "all combination [or synthesis] - be we conscious of it or not, be it a combination of the manifold of intuition, empirical or non-empirical, or of various concepts - is an act of the understanding".⁶⁰ What is implied here is that any kind of individual or class of individuals is thought of through the same judgmental act. The individual Socrates is thought of as a bearer of a property referred to by the concept 'mortal' through the judgement "Socrates is mortal" in the same way that the individuals designated by the concept 'angel' are thought of as bearers of the property referred to by the concept 'immortal' through the judgement "angels are immortal". In Kant's terminology, "the same function which gives unity to the various representations in a judgement also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations in an intuition".⁶¹ This link between concepts and judgements is the "clue" used by Kant to the discovery of the categories or the pure concepts of the understanding.⁶²

In my reading, this is accomplished by Kant in the following way. If every judgmental act is also an act of conceptualisation, i.e., of bringing representations under a certain concept, it has to be possible to find a concept underlying each kind of judgement. This suggests that every judgement must use a concept to carry out some sort of connection between the subject concept and the predicate. To think otherwise is to eliminate the conceptual instruction whereby the terms of the judgement will be connected and, hence, to eliminate the very possibility of connection. As

⁵⁷ cf. Pippin 1982, p. 97ff.

⁵⁸ cf. Paton 1936, p. vol. I. 251.

⁵⁹ B 93-4.

⁶⁰ cf. B 135.

⁶¹ B 105.

⁶² cf. B 91ff.

Allison says, although we “become explicitly aware of such concepts only by a reflection on the nature of judgement, we become aware of them *as presuppositions* of this activity”.⁶³ This granted, once in possession of a class of the most general judgements, we will be able to determine which concept underlies each of these judgements. The philosophical point behind this approach is to determine the class of concepts that serve as rules for our making judgements in general. If it is possible to determine which ruling concepts govern our judgmental activity, we can get to the intellectual conditions whereby alone knowledge can be obtained.

What will do the trick here is the setting up of a list of judgements that assert the most general characteristics that we have to take into account for our thinking of an individual X. In this way, we may consider, to begin with, that in order to make a judgement about X, we have to take X either as an individual of a certain class, say “Socrates”, or as a collection of individuals, say, “Britons”, or as a totality of individuals, say, “mankind”. This suggests that every judgement involves *quantity*. We cannot make judgements about X without considering it either as individual, or as a collection of individuals, or as a totality of individuals. Likewise, when we think of X, we always either affirm or deny some property or properties to it, say “Socrates is a man”, “Socrates is not immortal”. In so doing we specify what is and what is not the case as regards X. This allows us to acknowledge that every judgement also involves *quality*. Moreover, in every judgement we have to point to some elementary features of X or to several. But in order to do so we have to think of X as being the referent of a subject concept in a judgement and of items which are predicate terms in this judgement. At the same time, we have to assign determinate relations between these constituent parts of judgements. This suggests that we have to discriminate between the antecedent term and the consequent term and to specify how the former relates to the latter. This implies that every judgement involves *relation*. Finally, we have to regard X in such a way that it can be referred to either

⁶³ cf. Allison 1983, p. 117.

in an apodeictic, or in an assertoric, or in a problematic way. In other words, every judgement involves *modality*.

If concepts and judgements go hand in hand, it has to be possible to find the ruling concepts that underlie those general judgements. Now, in order to think of X through the judgmental modes of quantity we have, in fact, to consider X either as a *unity* which is an instance of a certain collection, or as a *plurality* of instances, or as the *totality* of instances. In turn, in order to think of X through the judgmental modes of quality, we have to consider X either as a *reality*, or as a *negation*, or as a *limitation*. Likewise, X is to be thought of in judgements of relation as either *substance* carrying some *accident*, or as *cause* producing a certain *effect*, or in interaction or *communion* with other substances. Finally, as regards modality, X is to be viewed either as a *possibility*, or as *existence*, or as *necessity*.

Well, the concepts singled out above cannot be acknowledged as empirical. Empirical concepts are those picked out in our experience, as the concept 'red', of which I have just made use. On the contrary, we do not take account of our experience to get concepts like 'totality' or 'possibility'. If they are not empirical, they must be a priori. However, they constitute a unique class of a priori concepts. As rules or guide-lines for our judging or thinking of any individual X, these concepts seem to instruct us how to make judgements even about a priori or mathematical individuals X. Hence, these concepts seem to rule mathematical a priori concepts as well (e.g., 'triangle', 'circle', etc.). By the same token, since they are rules for concepts and judgements in general, they may be said to be 'intellectual' conditions of our thinking of individuals X, whatever kind X may be. This suggests that, without these concepts, we cannot make judgements about any individuals whatever. Well, we have seen that our knowledge is dependent not only upon sensible, but also upon intellectual conditions. Therefore, these concepts are conditions of our knowledge, i.e., they are *transcendental* concepts. Thus put, we are entitled to say that these concepts are nothing but the categories. The categories, Kant says, "are concepts of an object in general [our X], by means of which the intuition of an object is regarded as determined in respect of

one of the logical functions of judgement",⁶⁴ or "pure a priori modes of knowledge which contain the necessary unity of the pure synthesis of imagination in respect of all possible appearances".⁶⁵

Now, since the unity of apperception is required for the execution of every act of gathering representations together, i.e., the act of judging, as established in the preceding section, and since according to the present section such an act is governed by the categories as its general conceptual instructions, it follows that for Kant the unity of apperception has to be considered as uniting the members of a sequence or, in Kant's terms, the manifold of intuitions, by means of the categories. Taking this on board, the latter can be said to be the instruments used by the unity of apperception to perform synthesis. The unity of apperception carries out synthesis in different ways, each of which is prescribed a priori by the categories.

It has often been objected that Kant makes the table of the categories dependent upon the table of judgements which, in turn, is dependent upon the unsophisticated Aristotelian logic. From what has been shown, though, it is possible to get the categories without going through the table of judgements. It suffices to think of the conceptual conditions of our thinking of an object in general X. Kant would probably feel uneasy with this jump, because the link between the two tables is supposed to guarantee the completeness of the table of the categories. We shall not, however, pursue this problem of completeness, since this would certainly make us deviate from our main concern, namely, the quarrel against the sceptic.

Finally, there is a misinterpretation about the categories which is worth commenting on at this stage, since it seems to be widespread amongst Kant scholars. The mistake consists in thinking of the categories as devices which allow us to establish objective judgements in contrast to subjective judgements. Some commentators hold that, without the categories, we would only be able to make "subjective" judgements like "I

⁶⁴ cf. B 128.

⁶⁵ A 119.

see the sun shining and the wax melting". We would never be able to arrive at a judgement like "the sun melts wax". This position is held, for example, by Körner.⁶⁶ Our objection to this interpretation is as follows. We have shown that concepts and judgements, whatever kind they may be, cannot be thought of as separated from each other. If we maintain that the categories govern all judgements, which is to say, the various ways of synthesising representations, or of thinking, the categories have to be thought of as governing "subjective" judgements as well. These judgements would not be possible if the categories were not already presupposed in them.⁶⁷ Thus put, it seems that the difference between the tables of judgements and the table of the categories is this. In the first, the different kinds of syntheses among individuals are highlighted by considering the logical structure of the connection of the terms involved in judgements. In the second, these different syntheses are highlighted by considering the objects to which the judgmental terms refer. The two tables are, in view of this, two aspects of the same list of different syntheses or combinations that we are capable of performing through our thinking activity.

3. The Categories and the Spatio-Temporal Ordering

What has been argued for in section 1 can help us to understand the central thrust of what has commonly been regarded as the first part of the Deduction (from § 15 to § 21). There Kant argues that the unity of apperception must be presupposed as the primary unifier for every sequence of representations to be a sequence. In section 2, we focused our attention on Kant's account of the judgmental activity in order establish the link between the unity of apperception and the categories or the pure concepts of the understanding. We have claimed that through such a unity alone representations are combined or connected in different modes expressed a priori by the categories. On that score, we are

⁶⁶ cf. Körner 1984, p. 53.

⁶⁷ cf. Allison 1983, p. 116 ff.

constrained to think of objects in general according to some set of pure a priori concepts that are the necessary (intellectual) conditions of the possibility of knowledge in general.

Having established this point, Kant moves onto the second part of the Deduction (§§ 22-26). There he strives to present empirical knowledge as “really flowing” from the categories, i.e., that the categories have objective reality,⁶⁸ which means that they “must necessarily relate to objects” of our senses.⁶⁹ This reasoning is confirmed by Kant’s account of the unity of space and time presented in the Transcendental Aesthetic vis-à-vis the unity of apperception.⁷⁰ Let us sketch its general argument. According to Kant, the point of connection between these unities is the faculty of imagination and its synthesis. Since it is that by which we represent “in intuition an object that is not itself present”, this faculty allows us to form the idea of a sequence of items that either precede or succeed the item that is actually presented to us in a certain moment. If this is so, without the synthesis of imagination, we would never get the idea that space and time are (a priori) intuitions. Recall that according to the Transcendental Aesthetic, space and time are so considered because they, unlike concepts, are unities that precede their parts. This whole, however, is not actually given in intuition as an object. What is actually given is, we may say, a portion of the whole. But I can only represent this portion by considering it as a member of the sequence (or a member of the whole), i.e., by considering it as standing in connection with other antecedent or subsequent members. Now, according to our account of the first part of the Deduction, the unity of apperception must be thought of as combining or connecting items so as to constitute a sequence *qua* sequence. Therefore, the unity of the spatio-temporal ordering itself must be thought of as being made possible by the unity of apperception. In view of this, the second part can be said to be dependent upon the first part. Finally, since no perceivable (empirical) object can be given to us save insofar as it is constrained by the forms of space and time, any

⁶⁸ cf. B 148, 150-1, *passim*.

⁶⁹ B 121.

⁷⁰ cf. chapter 3 above.

cognition of empirical objects that we can possibly have is, at bottom, a product of the understanding. As Kant says, "all synthesis, even that through which perception itself is possible, stands under the categories... and [the categories] therefore hold a priori of all objects of experience".⁷¹ From this Kant infers that the Deduction argues for the legitimacy of the categories as a necessary set of constitutive rules of our empirical knowledge. This is its conclusion:

"The deduction is the exposition (*Darstellung*) of the pure concepts of the understanding, and therewith of all theoretical a priori knowledge, as principles of the possibility of experience - the principles being here taken as the *determination* of appearances in space and time *in general*, and this determination, in turn, as ultimately following from the *original* synthetic unity of apperception, as the form of the understanding in its relation to space and time, the original forms of sensibility".⁷²

A great controversy has been generated by this second part. Some commentators like Walker for example, read the Deduction through Kant's theory of judgement.⁷³ This account seems to be authorised by Kant himself.⁷⁴ It allows Walker to play down the second part.⁷⁵ Others hold that this part is necessary because it contemplates some points not covered by the first part. Henrich, for example, acknowledges that Kant's appeal to the unity of the spatio-temporal ordering is needed because, while in the first part Kant deals with intuitions (or, in my reading, items of the sequence) already united, in the second part he deals with intuitions which have not yet been united.⁷⁶ Allison, in turn, maintains that,

⁷¹ B 161.

⁷² B 168-9.

⁷³ cf. Walker 1978, chapter VI.

⁷⁴ cf. Met., p. 475n., Ak. II p. 376 and Ak. XX, p. 271.

⁷⁵ In fact, Walker acknowledges these two parts more explicitly only in a later article (cf. Walker 1985, p. 23).

⁷⁶ cf. Henrich 1969; cf. also Ameriks 1978, p. 285.

while the first part deals with a logical notion of object, the second part deals with a “weighty” notion of object.⁷⁷

As I see it, though, the second part of the Deduction can be best viewed as a transcendental idealist reminder. Its importance lies in the fact that, if we restrict our analysis of the Deduction to the first part only, we may be open to a kind of criticism which goes as follows. One may comply with the fact that every representation, to be a representation, must *conform* to the categories. However, the argument continues, it does not follow from this that the unity found in the empirical object is *produced* by the unity of apperception. It might well be the case that objects come to our minds with a unity of their own that somehow *matches* the unity prescribed by α . This would turn the first part of the Deduction into a mere acknowledgement that every unity must presuppose the unity of apperception. If this were so, there would still remain the possibility that the sequence of items that displays empirical objects is united by other means rather than the unity of apperception, although somehow the unity of the object ends up *corresponding* to the unity of apperception. If the unity of the empirical sequence were constituted independently of the categories, although obeying them in some way, it would still be possible to think that the empirical sequence is not *necessarily* ruled by the categories. In that case, we would slip back into transcendental realism, for we would be reintroducing the idea that the world has features which are independent of our cognitive resources, although it somehow matches our intellectual conditions. In order to set aside such a possibility, Kant adds the second part. He can be viewed as maintaining that the results of the Transcendental Aesthetic have to be highlighted if we are to be rid of transcendental realism once and for all.

In this way the second part of the Deduction argues, in keeping with what is said in the first part, that the unity of the sequence of empirical items, like the unity of any other sequence, is governed by, or is in agreement with, the unity of apperception *precisely because* this latter, by

⁷⁷ cf. Allison 1983, chapter 7.

means of the categories, renders the very unity of space and time possible. The unity of apperception is presented as constituting the unity of the spatio-temporal ordering wherein every object of our senses are to be found. This is Kant's final knockout blow to phenomenalism. The notion of empirical object is necessarily dependent upon intellectual (not merely sensible) conditions. The object cannot be said to be constructed out of sense data any longer.⁷⁸ As Kant puts it, "combination does not lie in the objects, and cannot be borrowed from them".⁷⁹ The required completion of the notion of empirical object left open in the Transcendental Aesthetic - and acknowledged at the end of chapter 2 - is thereby achieved.

In view of these remarks, it is worth pointing out that Kant's emphasis on the role of the unifier α marks a major difference between the A-Deduction and the B-Deduction. Although Kant acknowledges the subordination of all syntheses to α in the A-Deduction,⁸⁰ he seems to be saying that the unity of the object is not produced by, but merely conforms to, the unity of the understanding. In so doing, he countenances that what is given in sensibility is already united. The evidence for this can be found in his insistence, specially in the A-edition of the *Critique* as a whole, that the ground of empirical representations is something = X (because it is unknown) or, as he also calls it, the transcendental object.⁸¹ No doubt the very conception of transcendental object, as shown in the preceding chapter, is a contradiction in terms, because what is transcendental in Kant is what conditions the object, i. e., what makes it known to us. But what is most problematic in the notion of the transcendental object is that it is called an *object* and, as such, has some kind of unity. This introduces the idea of a pre-conceptualised object, or an object constituted logically prior to the work of the understanding. Nonetheless, as is clear by now, according to Kant objects strictly speaking can only be the result of both sensibility and understanding.⁸² If we were given already made

⁷⁸ cf. Henrich 1969, p. 657.

⁷⁹ B 134.

⁸⁰ cf. A 106-7.

⁸¹ cf. A 109, 250 and B 236, 333, *passim*.

⁸² cf. B 314.

objects in sensibility the phenomenalist, and with him the sceptic, would have the last word. It is plausible then, to contend that because of its problematic aspect, many of the references to the transcendental object are taken out of the B-Deduction, and that the role of the understanding as the maker of any kind of unity, even that of space and time, is properly acknowledged and stressed in the second part.⁸³ In fact, the B-Deduction refers to what is given to the senses as just a manifold of intuition waiting for the synthetic activity of the understanding in order to be transformed into objects of knowledge. Through such an activity alone the manifold is made *objective*.

Taking all these considerations on board, we hold that it is inaccurate to contend as Henrich does, that in the first part of the B-Deduction Kant tackles intuitions which have been already synthesised, while in the second part he tackles intuitions which have not yet been synthesised.⁸⁴ Although it is correct to speak of the first part as establishing that, if there is a unity, the unifier α has to be presupposed, it is not correct to omit the fact that this is so only because the unity of apperception is that which first forms a sequence *qua* sequence. So, the first part already tackles non unified intuitions or representations. As shown in section 1, the first part of the Deduction makes it clear that non unified intuitions are “nothing to me”, or are “as good as nothing”. The idea of non unified intuitions, or a bundle of them, clashes with the very idea of entertaining representations.

In the wake of it, we also have to discard Henrich’s distinction that, while the first part shows *that* all objects of intuition are subjected to the categories, the second part shows *how* this is so.⁸⁵ Although Henrich cor-

⁸³ The reference to the disappearance of the conception of transcendental object in the B-Deduction is made by Meyer, although he interprets the difference between the two versions of the Deduction quite differently (cf. Meyer 1992, p. 218). Assessing the part of the *Critique* entitled “Ground of the Distinction of all Objects in General into Phenomena and Noumena”, Allison also notes that Kant drops this conception in the second edition (Allison 1983, p. 246).

⁸⁴ cf. Henrich 1969, p. 645.

⁸⁵ cf. *ibid.*, p. 651. Kitcher seems to indicate the same point when she says that, through the argument at § 26, there is “some hope of *actually demonstrating* an important role for the categories in cognition” (cf. Kitcher 1990, p. 164, my italics).

rectly advises us that this distinction is not to be confused with that between the objective and subjective sides of the A-Deduction, he fails to acknowledge that, by presenting the unity of apperception as the unifier α , the first part answers not only the *that*-question, but also the *how*-question. It is only on the basis of the first part that Kant can make it clear, in the second part, the dependence of our empirical knowledge upon the unity of apperception. In view of this, it is possible to contend that Kant refers to the first part as just a beginning of the Deduction because the arrival point has to lie in empirical, not only in general, knowledge.

It is also misleading to contend, as Allison does, that the difference between the first and the second parts lies in the fact that they deal, respectively, with logical and weighty notions of object. First of all, Kant cannot be making use of a merely logical notion of object in the first part because the unity of apperception is presented there as a synthesiser of *intuitions* in general. As shown in chapter 2, the Kantian notion of (sensible) intuition, either human or not, requires the immediate presence of the object intuited.⁸⁶ Besides, Allison's account is fragile because it is based mainly on a linguistic consideration. He contends that Kant uses the term *Objekt* in the first part and the term *Gegenstand* in the second. These terms, at least in the Deduction, would be found, Allison believes, in contexts where the logical/non-logical distinction are patent. In view of this, Kant would be concerned, in the first part, with the objective validity of the categories, and their objective reality would only be dealt with in the second part. However, in §17, Kant argues that it is the relation between representations "to a *Gegenstand*, and therefore their objective validity" that constitutes knowledge. And Kant continues by defining, in the same paragraph, what an *Objekt* is, namely, "a determinate space", i.e., an object of our senses (not a merely logical object). Likewise, in a footnote to § 21, Kant contends that the first part deals with "the represented unity of intuition by which *ein Gegenstand* is given". Finally, in § 26, Kant refers to the first part as having proved the

⁸⁶ cf. A 95.

application of the categories for “*Gegenstände* of an intuition in general”. That being so, Allison’s linguistic approach on the distinction between the first and the second parts of the Deduction lacks textual support once we get to the bottom of Kant’s usage of terms like *Gegenstand* and *Objekt*.

4. The Deduction and the Sceptic

We have seen since chapter 1 that the sceptic may share with us the most common empirical beliefs, but that he at the same time urges us to exhibit our rational credentials by means of which we trust these beliefs in the first place. We have contended that the quest for these credentials can also be characterised as a demand for the justification of the proposition “my experience in general of the external world is necessarily experience of a set of law-governed objects that are found not in me or in my thoughts, but in space outside me”.

Bearing this in mind, let us conjecture about what the sceptic has to say after all that has been argued for in the present chapter. I think he can raise at least two problems. First, he can say that it is plausible to presuppose the unity of apperception, but nothing that has been said ensures that this unity *has* to be thought of in that way. The sceptic could accept the substance of the argument in section 1 but simply reformulate his riddle as follows: how can we be sure that our minds are not mere heaps of representations? The answer is this. It has been shown that the idea of a set of non-unitary representations is incompatible with the very notion of representation. Since the elimination of all kinds of connections among representations implies the negation of the idea of a certain unity amongst them, and since without the latter, representations themselves cannot be counted as representations, it follows that, according to Kant, the idea of a totally chaotic heap of representations is incompatible with the very idea of representation. The presupposition of the unity of apperception is a condition *sine qua non* for representations to be representations for us. Thus, I cannot agree with Ameriks, for example, who reads

the Deduction as a merely “sophisticated piece of conceptual analysis”, without any bearing on the sceptical challenge.⁸⁷ If the idea of self-subsistent representations of objects, i.e., representations not entertainable by me, is allowed into epistemology, the sceptic will always be able to get his teeth into any effort to provide a rational justification of our knowledge claims. This is so because he can appeal to the transcendental realist picture of the external world and thereby suppose that objects are already made or constituted completely apart from our epistemic resources. Besides, since the unity of apperception imposes different kinds of unification on the items of the sequence according to certain rules expressed a priori by the categories, and since without these conceptual rules no sequence of items, and therefore no knowledge, is ever possible, our knowledge in general has to be thought of as necessarily law-governed. If this is so, the sceptic is not licensed to suppose that our picture of the external world could be otherwise.

The second problem that the sceptic can bring into the discussion is, however, more intractable than the results reached so far could deal with. He can remind me that, if I am dreaming say, of a winged white horse that suddenly becomes red and soon after turns into a centaur and so on and so forth, notwithstanding all other possible variations, I have still to presuppose that *I* am having this oneiric experience, even if I am not aware that I am dreaming. That even in our dreams the unity of apperception has to be already presupposed, seems to be also Kant’s view. This is another way of reading that passage quoted in section 1 of this chapter that, without the unity of self-consciousness, representations would be nothing to me, “less even than a dream”.⁸⁸ It is plausible to say that, based upon such a statement, a procession of oneiric images is not only compatible with the idea of the unity of apperception, but also presupposes it. This suggests that the sceptic can accept the idea of such a unity but at the same time hold that the question of the justification of our knowledge claims has yet to be addressed. Kant’s appeal to transcen-

⁸⁷ cf. Ameriks 1978, p. 273.

⁸⁸ A 112.

dental idealism in the second part of the Deduction is supposed to do this job. However, as shown in chapters 2 and 3, the Transcendental Aesthetic is not successful in arguing for the truth of transcendental idealism because of the flawed notion that space and time are a priori intuitions. Hence, the sceptic can concede not only that the unity of apperception has to be presupposed, but also that our experience has to be law-governed (through the categories), without necessarily acquiescing in the idea that this experience is of an external world of objects distinct from our thoughts.

According to the Deduction we can say that, granted our empirical knowledge is more than a set of propositions which assert mere states of consciousness, it follows that there is no other way of knowing objects of sensible intuition but through the categories. Simply put, I have to think of a world distinct from my thoughts if I am to have knowledge of it, but this does not necessarily mean that knowledge of a world distinct from my thoughts is the case. Even in dreams or hallucinations I have to think of oneiric entities like centaurs or winged white horses as things that I observe and acknowledge to be distinct from myself. With the Deduction then, the most we can get from the sceptic is a commitment to the effect that, *if* it is the case that I have experience of an external world, I must think of such a world as law-governed. Clearly, this is not a justification of my knowledge claims. It has not yet been proved whether or not my empirical representations display what the external world is like, i.e., whether or not we can be empirical realists. A further step has yet to be taken in order to dispatch sceptical doubts. Since we have argued in chapters 2 and 3 that the Transcendental Aesthetic does not accomplish such a task, we have to look further on in the *Critique* to find an argument which allows us to be empirical realists. We believe that Kant's best shot against these sceptical reservations is found in the Refutation. However, as will be argued for in the following chapter, Kant's account of externality there conflicts with some of the main claims of transcendental idealism.

If the Deduction does not *entirely* convince the sceptic, I claim that it is precisely not meant to do this. On that score, I cannot agree with

some commentators who seem determined to argue that the Deduction is a strongly anti-sceptical argument, through which is proved that the unity of self-consciousness is only possible under the assumption of the existence of an objective world.⁸⁹ This thesis is striking not only because nowhere in the Deduction does Kant formulate it, but also because the task of fighting the sceptic is supposed to be performed in the Refutation, where Kant explicitly asserts his intentions towards the Cartesian standpoint. As is now clear, Kant's intentions in the Deduction conflict with the above thesis because he tries to build up a proof merely of the objective validity of the categories, i.e., their applicability to objects, and thereby to furnish a fundamental step towards developing his subsequent theses on the conditions of experience through the remainder of the Transcendental Analytic.

Likewise, we are entitled to contend that Strawson's reading of the Deduction is misleading. He holds that the unity of apperception requires us to entertain thoughts of objects in the weighty sense. In his own words, the unity "of diverse experiences in a single consciousness requires experience of objects".⁹⁰ However, according to our interpretation of the second part of the Deduction, this unity is rather presupposed on, and not established by, our thinking of objects in the weighty sense. It seems, then, that Walker is correct when he says that Strawson inverts the general thrust of the Deduction. What Strawson takes to be its conclusion is, in fact, its premise, namely, that we have experience of objects in the strong sense.⁹¹ Besides, even if we grant Strawson's inversion, we still have to object to his account, because he does not acknowledge the unity of apperception as the unity of the thinking activity, but as the unity of the subject, or "single consciousness".⁹² If this is so, and since he rejects any account of the transcendental subject, as we also do, Strawson seems to be speaking of

⁸⁹ cf. Strawson 1966, p. 98, *passim*; Bennett 1966, p. 131; Wolff 1963, p. 277; and Patten 1976 p. 556, *et alia*.

⁹⁰ Strawson 1966, p. 98.

⁹¹ cf. Walker 1978, p. 76.

⁹² cf. Strawson 1966, p. 97.

empirical self-consciousness. This, however, takes us back to all those problems referred to earlier on about the status of the unity of apperception in Kant. Thus, we are here in agreement with Bird, who claims that Strawson's account "suggests an empiricist construction of transcendental identity which is quite foreign to Kant's position in the Deduction..."⁹³

We might conclude from this that the task Strawson and others envisage to be accomplished by the Deduction is much stronger than is effectively shown by Kant. It is then plausible to admit that Strawson's standpoint, whether it is an authentic Kantian claim or not, must be pursued further in the "Analytic of Principles" and especially in the Refutation. To compress Kant's intentions in the Critique as a whole into the Deduction seems to transform those other parts into tautological exercises of conceptual analysis. Curiously, Strawson himself leaves this alternative open when, after establishing the objectivity thesis, he asserts that "the notion of objectivity is not clearly stated till the Principles are reached. It is necessary to anticipate them to this extent".⁹⁴

⁹³ cf. Bird 1974, p. 12.

⁹⁴ Strawson 1966, p. 98n.

Chapter 5

The Notion of the Permanent and the Sceptic

Our task in the present chapter is to analyse Kant's best anti-sceptical attempt by following his argument that the perception of a permanent in space outside us is indispensable for our perceiving ourselves in time. We shall show that this argument, found in the Refutation, is inconsistent with transcendental idealism and therefore, that Kant is, at bottom, unable to give a proper answer to the sceptic. It should be noticed that, since our intent here is to follow the line of reasoning begun in the preceding chapter - namely, the view according to which alleged anti-sceptical arguments in the *Critique* are doomed to failure -, many issues regarding the Refutation will either be sketched simply or just set aside. This means that we shall not provide an exhaustive and thorough investigation of the Refutation. Instead, we shall focus on some issues that play a vital part in our attempt to discredit the view that the Refutation is successful in defeating the sceptic.

That being so, in section 1 we shall initially reconstruct the main thrust of Kant's argument for the permanent, which is found in the First Analogy. Afterwards, we shall follow the remaining steps of the Refutation. We shall characterise Kant as denying the privileged status of inner experience with respect to outer experience, in thorough opposition to Descartes' introspective Cogito. In section 2, we shall list the various candidates which can play the role of the permanent required for all time determinations. We shall conclude that the only possible notion which is compatible with transcendental idealism is that of matter. In section 3, we shall claim that Kant cannot put the Refutation to work without clashing with some of the main doctrines of his own idealism. In section 4, we shall argue that one of the alternatives to fleeing from the

impasse just mentioned is to revise transcendental idealism. However, none of the attempts made either by Kant or by some Kant commentators is satisfactory, because they invariably drive us into transcendental *realism*. In section 5, we shall examine the proposal according to which the Refutation can be put to work apart from transcendental idealism. We shall argue that this proposal is also unsatisfactory, because it compromises the transcendental idealist foundations of the Refutation.

1. The Notion of the Permanent

In order to examine Kant's argument in the Refutation, we have to take account of the main points he struggles to establish after the First Analogy; in particular, the notion of the permanent. We shall see that this notion, in Kant's view, is meant to play a vital role against the sceptic. Roughly put, Kant's argument can be divided into two steps. First, the permanent is shown to be the precondition for the thought of temporal ordering and the representation of change. Second, as temporal ordering must be conceived of as a unity, the permanent is shown to be sempiternal, or perceptually available at all (instants of) times.

The first step can be presented through an example. Consider a play again, this time a famous one, for example, Macbeth. Imagine that, in one scene, the main character shows up properly dressed and speaking English with a Scottish accent. In another scene, he appears dressed as a twentieth-century man speaking English with a foreign accent. In yet another scene, he behaves more like Romeo than Macbeth, for example, calling Juliet beneath the balcony. Now, if the character keeps changing all the time, Macbeth¹ and Macbeth² do not hang together. Why exactly is this so? Simply put, character² does not display a single element in common with character¹. In the absence of common elements, there is no way by which I can possibly acknowledge them to be bound up together.

This suggests that I cannot say that character¹ - i.e., the character which shows up in scene¹ - is the same as character². They are indeed two distinct characters in the play. I can only reidentify Macbeth if I ac-

knowledge that Macbeth¹ depicts certain elements also found in Macbeth². This is tantamount to saying that the reidentification process is dependent upon the determination that Macbeth¹ and Macbeth² are one and the same, i.e., that they are identical. But I can only do so by detecting a common frame of elements that can be found in both of them. Apart from the fleeting character of the sequence of scenes, I have to presuppose that some elements in these two characters endure from one scene to another. In view of this, it seems plausible to say that the reidentification of Macbeth can only be carried out under the assumption that some elements remain unchanged in the course of the play. Taking all these points on board, we are entitled to say that, in the absence of remaining elements, it is impossible even to consider Macbeth² as *coming after* Macbeth¹. Without a set of abiding items, I can only say that a character appeared in scene one and another character appeared in scene two.

Suppose now that nothing at all in the play persists, so that all other characters and places and dialogues and things show up changing. In that event, the scenes themselves will not hang together. Each scene can be easily cut away from the others. If this is so, no character can be accounted for as preceding or succeeding another, which is to say, we cannot acknowledge the play as being a sequence of scenes. What makes this sequence a sequence is that the scenes are acknowledged as coming one after another. But in the absence of a set of enduring elements, i.e., elements which last from one scene to another, the perception of this order of succession and precedence cannot take place. Accordingly, we cannot say that Macbeth, or any other character, or place, or dialogue, change. Before, we knew that Macbeth was behaving strangely because, *based upon* what did not change, we could perceive his variations. Now every single element varies, so that the ground on which we could account for the changes in the sequence of scenes is missing. But if this is so, the very perception of change in the play cannot be properly characterised. Change can only be acknowledged *in the sequence* of scenes, i.e., under the assumption that the scenes come one after another bearing certain elements not found in the preceding scene. Thus, a set of enduring items is also required to characterise any change in the play.

Consider now our experience in general. Just as in the case of the play, our experience is successive. It presents us with items preceding, succeeding or being simultaneous with one another. As shown in chapter 2, any sequence is primarily acknowledged as temporally ordered. In this way, we may say that a set of abiding elements, or in Kant's terminology, "the permanent",¹ must be presupposed to render temporal ordering possible. "Without the permanent", Kant says, "there is ... no time-relation".² In the same way, we are allowed to hold that only through the permanent can we set up patterns of comparison between changing and unchanging elements. "All... change in time", Kant states, has "to be viewed as simply a mode of the existence of that which remains and persists".³ Change is nothing but the encounter, in the consecutive moment, of certain elements not found at the previous moment. These elements, however, are only said to vary against a background of abiding or unchanging elements. Hence, the very conception of change would be lacking if there were no abiding elements on the basis of which change takes place.

What Kant claims to have established so far is that a set of enduring elements, or the permanent, is an indispensable requirement for us to account for temporal ordering and to perceive change. Without this set, no temporal ordering and no change can ever be acknowledged. This is equivalent to saying that, in order that the argument for the permanent be successful, this permanent has to be *perceivable at all times*.⁴ If it lasted only within a certain length of time, it would have to be thought of as undergoing destruction, or improvement, or even reconstruction into another permanent. But if this were so, this permanent would also change and could not play the part of the precondition of change.

Kant is well aware of this conundrum. That is why he cautiously introduces a further step into his overall argument. We have to be as-

¹ cf. B 224.

² B 226.

³ B 227.

⁴ cf. B 228.

sured, on the basis of what has already been said, that the permanent required for the constitution of temporal ordering is sempiternal and not ephemeral. In Kant's terms, the permanent is defined as the "ever-abiding existence, in the appearances, of the subject proper".⁵ Kant's argument for the ever-lasting character of the permanent can be summarised as follows. Suppose that the permanent is ephemeral. This means that it comes into being and that it ceases to be. Now, the perception of the permanent, according to what has just been argued for by Kant, renders temporal ordering possible. In fact, "this permanent is what alone makes possible the representation of the transition from one state to another, and from not-being to being".⁶ Besides, whatever the permanent is, it has to be capable of being reidentified, which means that it has to display a certain identity through time, although it is liable to undergo change. As Kant says, "the identity of the substratum" is that "wherein all change has thoroughgoing unity".⁷ Well, the idea that the permanent comes into being at a certain moment brings with it the idea that, before this moment, the permanent did not exist. The same can be said about the ceasing to be. It requires us to think of a moment in time "in which an appearance no longer exists".⁸ But a moment in time when nothing permanent is found can never be perceived. In Kant's terms, "a preceding [or succeeding] empty time is not an object of perception".⁹ Now, since it has already been shown that temporal ordering must be thought of as brought about by the perception of the permanent, the idea of a moment void of permanence cannot be held consistently because it requires us to think of a moment of time taking place outside time. On that score, the thought of empty time is said by Kant to be an absurd.¹⁰

One could suggest that it is plausible to conceive of a moment of time outside time if we suppose two distinct temporal orderings which

⁵ B 228.

⁶ B 231.

⁷ B 229.

⁸ cf. B 231.

⁹ B 231.

¹⁰ cf. B 232.

"would flow in two parallel streams".¹¹ More exactly, we could suppose one temporal ordering wherein the permanent can be found, and another, wherein it cannot. However, we have long established that, according to Kant, temporal ordering has to be thought of as unitary. Recall that, in chapter 3, we presented Kant's intuitivity thesis for time and contended that, in order to think of any finite temporal succession, we have to think of it as part of a one and all-embracing time. In view of this, the idea of two distinct temporal orderings would disrupt such a unity and with it, the unity of experience itself.¹² Conclusively, according to Kant, if time is to be thought of as a unity, the permanent has to be thought of as being present in perception all the time, which is to say, the permanent has to be thought of as sempiternal and not ephemeral.

For the sake of reinforcing this Kantian point, let us appeal to another example. Consider a kaleidoscope. There is a multitude of changing images. Green triangles turn all of a sudden into yellow squares, and these squares turn into brown ellipses, and these ellipses turn into blue circles, and so forth. Apparently, no abiding set of elements is found. But if this were so, it might seem that is possible to think of change without a changeless background. And if we thought of our experience in this kaleidoscope-like way, we might say that only a set of changing elements is encountered in our experience. However, granted that our experience occurs in time, and granted also that time, as already shown, requires a permanent, experience itself would collapse if this permanent were removed.

In this way, although we can suppose that all the images are varying incessantly, we cannot suppose that these images cease to be images. I can only refer to an image in an instant t_1 and an image in t_2 by presupposing that both have certain elements in common, on the basis of which I am allowed to call them 'images'. In this way, what indeed varies is their position in the mirror, their size, their configuration, etc. This suggests that, although there is alteration, such an alteration does

¹¹ cf. B 231-2.

¹² cf. Walsh 1975, pp. 129-135.

not imply that they cease to be images, with a certain extension and figure, i.e., with a spatial configuration. From this it follows that, even if we suppose our experience to be kaleidoscope-like, we have to admit that the 'stuff' of what is experienced is preserved from one moment of time to another. As Walsh correctly points out, "we have to assume that there is a single underlying stuff whose configurations are constantly altering but which remains unchanged in quantity throughout its various metamorphoses".¹³

A considerable number of Kant commentators have claimed that the further step in the argument for the requirement of the permanent deals with a conception of absolute permanence, while the previous step deals with a conception of relative permanence.¹⁴ Such a line of criticism has led them to conclude that Kant's argument suffers from a fatal oscillation and therefore has to be discarded. As we have seen though, the conception of permanence in the previous step does not entail relative permanence. Up to that point, there was no need to determine whether it was sempiternal or ephemeral. It sufficed to emphasise the necessity of presupposing a set of enduring elements for our conceiving of temporal ordering and thereby for our perceiving change. Hence, there seems to be only one conception of permanence that is treated by Kant in two distinct but complementary ways. In the first step, Kant emphasises the link between the permanent and temporal ordering. In the second step, with this link at hand, and with the fact that temporal ordering, as already shown in chapter 3, ought to be thought of as a unitary whole, he emphasises that the permanent required for temporal ordering has to be available in perception throughout all time, otherwise the unity of time is torn apart. The notion of permanence in the latter step should, then, be viewed as a completion to that found in the former step.

Be that as it may, we shall not pursue this issue further, for what matters most for us is not so much whether Kant's argument for the

¹³ Walsh 1975, p. 195.

¹⁴ This point is defended in different forms by Bennett, Melnick and Strawson, amongst others (cf. Bennett 1966, p. 199; Melnick 1973, p. 67; and Strawson 1966, p. 128-30).

permanent is cogent, but rather whether such a notion can be successfully used as tool against the sceptic. In this way, it should be acknowledged that we are not here claiming to have resolved alleged improprieties of Kant's notion of the permanent. Our intention is limited to providing a workable interpretation of such a notion so as to determine its anti-sceptical scope, without engaging ourselves in some well-known controversies that could divert us from our main issue. Hence, in the subsequent sections it will be clear that, even if the sceptic grants that the First Analogy successfully establishes the requirement for the permanent, he will still be able to find his way in our quest for the justification of our knowledge claims.¹⁵

Kant believes that the results reached so far are invaluable for the building up of an anti-sceptical argument, which is presented by him in the Refutation. Every temporal ordering requires an ordering of unchanging, abiding elements, i.e., a spatial ordering. If it is possible to focus on a temporal ordering that the sceptic does not or cannot challenge, this will allow us to say that, granted this temporal ordering, we are bound to accept the very condition of it, namely, a permanent in space outside us. If this can be done, we shall be able to justify our empirical realist standpoint.

Now, according to Kant, we have at our disposal this undisputed temporal ordering. It is undeniable that we perceive ourselves and that these perceptions form a sequence of items temporally ordered. "I am conscious", Kant affirms, "of my own existence as determined in time".¹⁶ Each mental state pops into our minds necessarily marked as subsequent to the preceding one and as prior to the forthcoming. In Kant's words, "the manifold of representations is always successive".¹⁷ Recall that, since chapter 1, it has been understood that the sceptic does not have problems agreeing with this. His problem is, again, how it is ever possible to justify our knowledge claims. While he concedes that experiences

¹⁵ For a detailed account of this debate, see Allison 1983, pp. 207-15

¹⁶ B 275.

¹⁷ B 243.

do take place, he questions whether we are justified in taking some of them as experiences of external objects. Actually, most philosophers would accept that we have experiences, even the solipsist, who believes that only he exists for sure. The sceptic cannot consistently doubt that he actually has experience and that this experience is successive. He can well say that he might be dreaming or imagining, and then conclude that this experience is unreliable. The fact of the matter though, is that he is having experience and that this experience presents a variety of items coming one after another, i.e., items which are temporally ordered.

It may be objected that this starting point is not as uncontroversial as it seems. It is possible to think of a kind of sceptic who raises doubts not only about our objective experiences, but also about our subjective ones. As Gochnauer points out, one "might hold that the only justification which could be given for a knowledge claim about, for example, the temporal relation of two awarenesses in the past would be some impression or image here and now, and since we have no way of checking to see whether the memory impression actually corresponds to the temporal ordering of the remembered experiences, we can no more claim to *know* that the experiences occurred in that order...".¹⁸ In that case, my belief in my own existence in time would be just as dubious as my belief about externality.

As I see it though, Gochnauer misses the point. We can doubt whether an event referred to in a mental state A indeed precedes another event referred to in a mental state B. However, in order to do so, we have to give ourselves a succession of mental states such that either A precedes B, or A succeeds B, or A is simultaneous with B. Now, this is all that is required by Kant so far. If I am conscious of a succession of mental states but doubt whether events are really ordered in the way I think they are, the fact remains that there is a succession of mental states coming about in my consciousness. As Allison puts it clearly, "my con-

¹⁸ Gochnauer 1974, p. 205.

sciousness of such a succession is, at the same time, a succession in my consciousness".¹⁹

This reply also serves to set aside any scepticism towards previous mental states; for example, Russell's hypothesis that the world was created five minutes ago. Although it undermines the credibility of our memory, this hypothesis does not eliminate the fact that there is a succession in my consciousness, no matter whether this succession is compounded by mental states which were fabricated five minutes ago. The same point can be made regarding the identity of self-consciousness or the hypothesis that someone else might have, in the past, entertained the mental states that I myself am entertaining now. Simply put, even if someone else produced in the past the mental states that belong to the succession of which I am conscious, this does not undermine the fact that right now *I am* entertaining them, and thereby that I am giving myself a succession of thoughts or mental states.

So far so good. The sequence of my mental states occurs in time. That being so, my perception of myself in the course of time can only occur under the previous acceptance of the idea that there is a permanent on the basis of which alone any temporal ordering is possible. If this is so, we have to accept the fact that some of my experiences are indeed objective, i.e., that they are "bound up with the existence of things outside me",²⁰ because these things are the condition for my perceiving myself in time, or, in Kant's terms, because they are acknowledged "as the *condition* of the time-determination".²¹ This is what the Refutation is all about. It is thought by Kant to be not only an anti-idealist but also an anti-sceptical argument. The permanent has to be viewed as the pre-requisite of our awareness of a temporal sequence of experiences in general. Kant tries to show that there are some conditions implicated in what the (empirical) idealist takes for granted that he does not figure out. The overall strategy is to adopt this uncontroversial point of departure and

¹⁹ Allison, 1983, p. 305.

²⁰ B 276.

²¹ *ibid* (my italics).

to proceed regressively, from a universally accepted truth towards its conditions, i.e., from something the sceptic and everybody else concede, say X, to the truth of something, say Y, that he, although he refuses to accept it, is forced to do so, insofar as Y is proved to be a condition of possibility of X.

Kant seeks the conditions through which alone this temporal sequence wherein I perceive myself can be given to me. We have seen that all determination in time requires an *etwas* permanent. If there were nothing abiding, nothing which continued from one bit of a moment to another, there would be no awareness of coexistence or succession in a common time. Now, I am undoubtedly aware of at least one successive phenomenon, to wit, my own existence in time. Therefore, I am bound to assume something abiding as the condition of my perceiving myself in time. The next task is to argue that the idea that this something which has to endure is not a representation inhabiting my mind. Representations themselves require a permanent “distinct from them, in relation to which they change”.²² This is so because my “representations cannot be outside me, and the external object of representations cannot be in me, for that would be a contradiction”.²³

The starting point of the Refutation resembles Descartes’ First Meditation.²⁴ This resemblance is not gratuitous. Kant intends to root out the privileged access to our mental states, upon which Descartes builds up his philosophical system. The reason is as follows. In the *Meditations*, Descartes argues that the only existential claim that we can ever be completely sure of is based upon the immediate experience that ‘I exist’. In this way, the stream of my consciousness justifies belief only in my own solitary inward experience. I can doubt about the existence of a world outside me, while being thoroughly guaranteed that ‘I am’. Even if “I have persuaded myself that there is nothing at all in the world”, I am sure that “I should exist, if I were to persuade myself of some-

²² B 275 n.

²³ Ak. XVIII, p. 620.

²⁴ Although Descartes is the target here, Kant’s criticism seems to be also applicable to Berkeley, who never denies that we entertain mental states in succession.

thing".²⁵ Descartes starts from this introspective certainty and then embarks on a series of arguments in order to establish the certainty of the existence of external objects. In the sixth *Meditation*, he concludes that there must be corporeal objects causing my sense impressions. This is assured by God's benevolence, which vouchsafes my external representations (or ideas). The result of this overall strategy is that, contrary to his immediate certainty of inner states, certainty about the existence of things outside us is only reached through a chain of inferences. Experience of our mental states precedes knowledge of material reality, which is to say, the certainty of the existence of an external world is necessarily mediated by inference from whatever is at our disposal in empirical self-consciousness. This is what Kant calls "a scandal in philosophy and to human reason in general".²⁶ Keeping this in mind, Kant's intention is very clear. He may be taken as questioning the solipsism behind Descartes' point of departure. Is it correct to isolate my mental states from the external world, or to entertain only private thoughts completely detached from a consideration of objects outside us?

Now, the problem with Descartes' approach is, according to Kant, that "the inference from a given effect to a determinate cause is always uncertain, since the effect may be due to more than one cause".²⁷ What Kant alludes to here is that the sceptic may well think of other factors which can eventually produce my ideas of an external world, like a mad scientist, for example.²⁸ Taking this for granted, one might ask, what is implicated in this alleged Cartesian "internal world"? More precisely, one might ask, what are the conditions through which not only my own time-determination, but all time-determinations, are possible? Since time is the dimension of change, and change can only be conceived of as referring to something that endures, we have to assume a permanent in perception in order to properly represent ourselves in time. This perma-

²⁵ Meditation 2.

²⁶ B XXXIX.

²⁷ A 368.

²⁸ cf. chapter 2 above.

ment cannot be thought of as in me, since my mental states are only temporally ordered, and are thereby constantly changing.

The very heart of Kant's intention is that we have no power of introspection through which we could be aware of our own mental states without being primarily aware of things around us. If this is accepted, Descartes is not licensed to suppose that, based upon the certainty of the data of empirical self-consciousness alone, we can infer the reality of material things. It is only by means of the perception of the permanent that our mental states can be known.

At this stage, it is worth pointing out that Kant misconstrues his own intentions in the Refutation when he claims that he is there going to address Descartes only, because Berkeley has already been answered in the Transcendental Aesthetic.²⁹ If we attend to the fact that the aim of the Refutation is to show that a certain kind of idealism, namely, *empirical* idealism, is flawed, Kant's objections to Descartes spill over Berkeley's thought as well. This can be explained by our considering that, according to Kant, as shown in chapter 2, Berkeley ends up considering external objects as mental states and *a fortiori* he becomes, consciously or not, a proponent of empirical idealism. Therefore, a proof against empirical idealism is also a proof against Berkeley's idealism. This granted, it is plausible to suppose that Kant's mistake probably stems from the fact that he believes that the Transcendental Aesthetic has already chased away empirical idealism by means of the notion of a priori intuition, and that what remains to be proved is that Descartes' defence of the privileged status of our inner experiences is false. Nevertheless, it has been contended in chapter 3 that Kant's defence of transcendental idealism and hence of empirical realism in the Transcendental Aesthetic is unworkable. In my reading, then, the success of transcendental idealism has to lie in the Refutation's ability to impugn empirical idealism once and for all and, in so doing, to show that we can be better-off without Berkeley's idealism by embracing transcendental idealism.

²⁹ cf. B 274.

2. The Notion of the Permanent and Externality

Having brought the notion of the permanent to the fore, there remains the problem of determining what this permanent is like. Let us present a possible list of candidates to play this role. First of all, one might hold that the permanent is the very sequence of representations of which I am aware. The problem here, according to Kant, is that the permanent has to be empirically available on the basis of which alone the perception of succession and change is accounted for. But the sequence itself is not perceivable.³⁰ If we suppose otherwise, we get caught in an infinite regress. Our perception is always successive.³¹ If we perceived the succession, this very perception would be an item in a sequence. As Gram correctly asserts, the sequence "itself would be grasped by a cognitive act which precedes other such acts and is succeeded by still others".³² Now, since according to Kant, any sequence of representations is governed by the form of time, as shown in chapters 2 and 3; and since we are prohibited from thinking of an absolute notion of time, once we suppose that the sequence itself is the permanent, we end up committing ourselves to the idea that time is part of itself, which is plainly contradictory. Thus, "time by itself cannot be perceived".³³ What we perceive are things and moments coming and going, not the passing by itself. Unlike images of home camcorders, moments in time do not display a digital timer on the top.³⁴ In this way, we can only render comprehensible Kant's assertion that time "remains and does not change", if we take him as meaning that *moments in time* continue passing by, or that they remain flowing.³⁵

The second candidate to play the role of the permanent is the transcendental unity of apperception. This is easy to discard. One of the

³⁰ cf. B 226.

³¹ cf. B 225.

³² Gram 1982, p. 144.

³³ cf. B 225.

³⁴ cf. Walsh 1975, p. 138.

³⁵ B 224.

lessons of the last chapter is that this unity is not a thing, but an activity. Besides, it is not an object of perception. No permanent unity of self-consciousness is given to us in intuition, i.e., no formal unity is ever perceivable.³⁶ Keeping this in mind, we can also discard the third candidate, namely God, which is also unperceivable and thereby cannot play the role of the permanent.

The fourth candidate is empirical self-consciousness. But this is exactly what Kant believes to have characterized as dependent upon, or conditioned by, the permanent. Besides, what I perceive when I look into myself is just my mental history, a mere flux of momentary items which present me with nothing that is numerically identical through time. This suggests that the permanent has to be something other than ourselves. According to chapter 2, Kant holds that it is only through space that we are able to characterise objects as distinct from ourselves. That being so, the permanent has to be spatially ordered, which means that it cannot be empirical self-consciousness.

Keeping this in mind, let us deal with the fifth candidate, to wit, the set of illusory objects, or objects which are created by my imagination (e.g., a centaur, Macbeth's dagger, etc.). Clearly, Kant's argument has to push us away from this possibility, otherwise it could never perform the desired task of neutralising the sceptic. In order to impugn the possibility that the permanent be the set of imaginary objects, let us suppose that, although the requirement of the permanent has already been established, it is still at issue whether this permanent is given by mind independent items or is just invented by us. In fact, how are we sure that we do not have an outer imagination, a power of giving ourselves the permanent? Now, the Refutation, even if successful, would have established only that we need a permanent as the condition of subjective experience in general, but from this it would not follow that the former is really given to us and not created by our imagination.

³⁶ cf. A 349.

Kant is well aware of this problem. That is why he presents the following argument. Time is the dimension of change; so it must be conceived only through spatial ordering, which provides us with the permanent in space. Imagination "is also intuition without the presence of objects..., which can be either a production (imagination) or a reproduction (memory) of a previous given intuition".³⁷ As such, that faculty cannot provide the permanent required for all time determinations, insofar as it "can contain only succession".³⁸ In this way, its products "cannot be represented except by means of something that endures".³⁹ In fact, imagination can "create a representation of what is external only if it is affected by the outer sense, and there would be no material for external representations in the imagination if there were not an outer sense".⁴⁰ Empirical space cannot, in turn, "be a representation of mere imagination but must be a representation of sense, for otherwise that which lasts would not be in sensibility at all".⁴¹ The "representations of the outer senses constitute the proper material with which we occupy our minds..."⁴² Consequently, the permanent required for all time determinations, as well as for all products of imagination, has to be found not in our faculty of imagination, but somewhere else. Otherwise, even the possibility of dreaming or hallucinating will have to be dismissed, for "without an outer sense, whose representations we only repeat and unite in some way..., we could not indeed have any dreams".⁴³ Conclusively, according to Kant, the permanent required for my perceiving myself in time cannot be the set of illusory objects.

Kant believes that the Refutation prevents us from doubting that external objects are indeed given in sensibility. He says that "idealism can be refuted... by showing that the representation of external things must not lie merely in the imagination, but in an outer sense, because

³⁷ Ak. XVIII, p. 618.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² B 67.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 310; cf. B 278.

the *form* of representation in time would make possible no empirical consciousness of one's own existence in time, thus no inner experience, unless supplemented with [*empirical*] space".⁴⁴ Hence, Kant writes, "that we have an outer sense and that the imagination can impress pictures in us only in relation to such a sense, this is the proof [against] idealism".⁴⁵

What is to be grasped from these considerations is that in fact Kant is concerned with the *possibility* of our being somehow systematically deceived by taking dreaming or imaginative objects as real ones. His response, therefore, has to be viewed as more general than the mere distinction between truth and illusion as far as particular objects are concerned. Kant seems to be maintaining that it is *not possible* that the set of all objects of experience is *ultimately* illusory for, if this were so, there would be no abiding set of objects to underlie all time determinations and it would not be possible for us to perceive ourselves in time.

In that event, it might seem that the only remaining candidate at hand capable of playing the role of the permanent is the set of empirical objects (e.g., this ashtray, that guitar, etc.). This is so because they are spatial and perceivable, which is to say, they are found within the scope of our experience. However, there is still a problem here. Empirical objects themselves come to be and cease to be. They are created and destroyed, which means that they last only in a certain length of time. Well, we have seen that the permanent required for all time determination has to be sempiternal and not ephemeral. It must be present in experience at all times and not only within a limited set of moments in time. If this is so, the only possible way whereby we can make sense of the permanent in Kant's epistemology is to contend that it is the very *matter* of which empirical objects are made. This point is made clear by Kant in his example of the combustion of a piece of wood.

⁴⁴ Ak. XVIII 613; my italics.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 309 (my italics).

“A philosopher, on being asked how much smoke weighs, made reply: ‘Subtract from the weight of the wood burnt the weight of the ashes which are left over, and you have the weight of the smoke’. He thus presupposed as undeniable that even in fire the *matter (substance)* does not vanish, but only suffers an alteration of form”.⁴⁶

So, Kant claims that, in order to be aware of the change of the piece of wood, we have to assume that such a wood existed prior to its combustion. By the same token, we have to assume that the smoke and the ashes were not created from nothing, but from the alteration produced as a result of the process of setting the piece of wood on fire. The piece of wood itself cannot be the permanent because, at the end of the combustion, it is no longer a piece of wood. In view of this, according to Kant, the only way by which we can conceive of the whole process as being in time, and thereby as presenting change, is to presuppose the matter which at an earlier stage was in a solid state and, at a later stage, was transformed into smoke and ashes. As a consequence, empirical objects are thereby thought of as the different states or determinations of matter. As in the case of the piece of wood, they are created and destroyed, but the matter of which they are composed is always present, although in different states throughout time.

It should be noticed that, in the passage cited above, Kant equates matter with substance. Kant seems to be maintaining something like this: apply the category of substance in your thought of matter, i.e., think of matter as the ultimate subject of predication. Only by doing so can you conceive of a time relation, for no order of coexistence and succession can ever take place save in so far as the items which are either coexisting with or succeeding one another are thought of against an ever-lasting background. Likewise, only by thinking of matter as “what is substantial in things” can you account for the changes which occur in the external world through time.⁴⁷ As Kant says, “coming to be and ceasing to be are not alterations of that which comes to be or ceases to be. Alteration is a manner of existing which succeeds another manner of ex-

⁴⁶ B 228 (my italics).

⁴⁷ This expression is borrowed from Allison (cf. Allison 1983, p. 209).

istence of the very same object. Therefore, everything which alters *persists*, and only its *condition changes*".⁴⁸

Taking all these considerations on board, we are entitled to say that, according to Kant, the upshot of the Refutation is that we can only perceive ourselves in time under the presupposition that the matter which composes empirical objects is independent of us, or distinct from our thoughts. In other words, we have to be empirical realists with respect to what is material in empirical objects if we are to be aware of our own existence in time.

3. Doubts about the Status of the Permanent

Has Kant succeeded in defusing the sceptical position? We can only evaluate the cogency of Kant's argument if we can give a transcendental idealist account of matter as the permanent, which plays an essential role in the Refutation. However, as I see it, Kant's failure to rebut the sceptic resides precisely in the fact that the notion of the permanent found in the Refutation does not fit together with transcendental idealism. To spell this out, let us take into consideration a classical objection to the results of the Refutation. According to it, all that has been proved is that objects (as determinations of matter) represented in space, as long as they are representations, must be in me. In that event, we face a dilemma, since what is in me is in time and therefore changes. In other words, what seems to have been proved is just the claim that inner depends upon outer *representations*.⁴⁹

The reply to this objection may start by reminding us that, as shown in chapter 1, we have to be very careful with the term 'representation' in Kant, for he hardly specifies in what sense are we to understand it. Kant means by "representation" either the contents of our minds or the items that are subjected to our cognitive powers. The first

⁴⁸ B 230-1.

⁴⁹ cf. Lehmann 1958.

sense is restricted to the empirical level and the second, to the transcendental one. More precisely, on the transcendental level, i.e., the level of reflection upon how we come to have experience, 'representation' refers to that which is subjected to our cognitive powers or, as he says, to our a priori conditions of knowledge. On the empirical level, 'representation' refers to an item in the stream of an individual mind, i.e., a mental state.

In this way, Kant sometimes refers to objects as "mere representations" because he wants to stress the restriction of (our knowledge of) these objects to the experiential field. However, since Kant denies, in the context of the Refutation, that spatial objects are "mere representations", the only way to render this denial comprehensible is to understand "representations" on the empirical level. This suggests that, in the Refutation, Kant has to be viewed as maintaining that the permanent required for every time determination, specially that one through which I perceive myself in time, is not a mere mental state, or a product of our imagination, but something actually there outside me. Likewise, Kant cannot be referring to the thing in itself. We have long established that, if we resort to this notion, we get stuck in the hopeless task of matching the objects of our experience with the "real", mind-independent world beyond our ken. Once the gap between the way we see the world and the way the world is "really" like is brought onto the scene, we slip back into transcendental realism, upon the basis of which the sceptic constructs his safe house.

For these reasons, the permanent required for any temporal ordering can only be what is substantial in external objects and not the mere representation of it. Now, we have already been instructed by Kant to think of the external world as subordinated or *conditioned* by our cognitive powers. Otherwise, we transgress the bounds of our human standpoint and start, with the transcendental realist, dealing with the concept of a reality in itself. In that event, the sceptic would undermine all our epistemological endeavour. This suggests that, transcendentially speaking, what is substantial and perceivable in the external objects cannot be thought of as conditioning our knowledge. Recall that the general

thrust of the so called "Copernican Revolution" consists precisely in thinking the external world as constituted by us.

The problem to which I am referring now is this. Since the permanent has to be thought of as found in the appearances, and since Kant's idealism advises us to hold that appearances in general are subjected to our sensible and intellectual a priori conditions of knowledge, this permanent can only be properly acknowledged as subjected to such conditions; otherwise it will not be in the appearances, and *a fortiori* it will not be known by us. However, the Refutation relies almost entirely upon the idea that the permanent, which is itself appearance, makes a certain kind of knowledge, namely self-knowledge, possible. So, how come something which is fabricated by our conditions of knowledge can be itself a condition of knowledge? Wrapping all this up, in the context of the Refutation, Kant seems to be maintaining that matter and external objects as its determination, is a *condition* of our knowledge (or, more exactly, self-knowledge), and not, as Kant's idealism requires, something *conditioned* by our (powers of) knowledge.⁵⁰

It might be said that we are here neglecting the fact that knowledge, according to Kant, springs from both intuitions and concepts. Now, according to Kant, I have no intuition of myself, for I "represent myself to myself neither as I am nor as I appear to myself".⁵¹ It might seem then, that I have no right to say that in Kant self-awareness is synonymous with self-knowledge.⁵² And if this is correct, then the puzzle just detected loses its strength. However in the Refutation, Kant does not appeal to mere self-awareness but rather to what he calls "inner experience", through which "I am conscious of *my existence* in time". This is actually "more than to be conscious merely of my representation. It is identical with the *empirical consciousness of my existence...*"⁵³ Thus Kant cannot be taken as claiming that a permanent is required for self-aware-

⁵⁰ cf. B 428.

⁵¹ B 429.

⁵² cf. Quasam 1994, p. 7

⁵³ B XXXIX n.

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ness only. As Allison points out, Kant is best interpreted if we take him to be saying that “the consciousness of one’s existence as determined in time is a genuine bit of empirical knowledge”.⁵⁴ As a result, the permanent, in the context of the Refutation, is indeed a condition of knowledge, namely, knowledge of ourselves as determined in time. But again the permanent, in the context of Kant’s idealism, is appearance and as such, has to be thought of as conditioned by our knowledge.

Keeping this in mind, there seems to be a tension between transcendental idealism and the Refutation. Transcendental idealist premises seem to clash with any proper understanding of the externality of the permanent in perception required for my perceiving myself in time. In what sense, if any, are we to understand the externality or mind-independence of the external world in the Refutation? From what has been just said, it cannot be in the transcendental sense. Transcendentally speaking, what is perceivable and thereby knowable in the world is always considered as conditioned by, and never as a condition of, knowledge. Besides, we have already specified that, according to Kant, any transcendental reflection has to do with our a priori conditions of having experience of objects, and not with the objects themselves.⁵⁵ However, in the Refutation, Kant seems to be doing the opposite. What is contrived there is a consideration of the object itself (or, more exactly, the permanent itself) as an epistemic prerequisite. Unless we assume that we perceive objects as determinations of matter in space outside us, we will not be able to perceive ourselves in time. In a transcendental consideration, though, these objects in space outside us can only be thought of as dependent upon us or, according to what has been said in chapter 3, as standing in connection with us. In view of this, what is substantial in the external world must be conceived of only insofar as they are related to the subject, i.e., constrained by our capacities of knowing them. On that score the permanent cannot play the role of an epistemic prerequisite. It is rather through our a priori epistemic prerequisites that this permanent is possible in the first place. Thus, Kant cannot give an account of the

⁵⁴ Allison 1983, p. 302.

⁵⁵ cf. B 25.

permanent required for every temporal ordering on the transcendental level. Now, if the Refutation is to be successful, we have to find another sense by means of which the permanent, as the condition of my perceiving myself in time, is to be properly understood.

It is worth mentioning some historical evidence to support the view that Kant does not advance a transcendental consideration of the external object in the Refutation. He had tried to rebut the sceptic this way in the A-edition of the "Paralogisms". There he baffles his readers by saying that external objects are nothing but representations.⁵⁶ No doubt Kant is using 'representations' there in a transcendental sense. Otherwise, he would have to be viewed as maintaining that external objects are mere mental states. This would amount to an approach close to Berkeley's phenomenalism, a result that Kant himself is often keen to reject, as shown in chapter 2. Transcendentally speaking, experiences of either subjective or (allegedly) objective items bear the same status as items dependent upon the mind. As just argued for, this consideration, though, implies our inability to determine, within the class of (transcendentally ideal) representations, one subclass as the condition of the other. The reason is that allegedly objective items can only be considered as constructed or produced by our knowledge, so that they cannot be considered as playing the role of condition of our (self-)knowledge. Perhaps because of having noticed this puzzle, Kant thoroughly rewrote the Paralogisms in the B-edition of the *Critique* and at the same time inserted the Refutation at the end of the "Postulates of Empirical Knowledge in General".

Within transcendental idealism the only remaining sense that we can make of the permanent is the empirical one. However, such a permanent cannot, on the empirical level, function in accordance with Kant's expectations in the Refutation. On this level, we do not try to justify any kind of knowledge. We just describe the external world. If we want a justification, we have to switch from the descriptive level to the transcendental one. The Refutation requires us to think of the permanent as the

⁵⁶ cf. A 374-5.

condition of (self-)knowledge and this cannot be done on the empirical level, unless we break with Kant and start looking for epistemic conditions apart from the transcendental level. So, since the permanent cannot be acknowledged on the transcendental level, for in that event it would be viewed as something conditioned by our knowledge and *ipso facto* could not function as a condition of knowledge, as the Refutation requires; and since such a permanent cannot be acknowledged on the empirical level as well, for in this case it would be viewed as a mere describable item in the external world and again it could not be thought of as conditioning our knowledge, we are unable to understand the permanent, in the context of the Refutation, by means of Kant's idealism.

The issue here is that the sceptic urges us to give a proper account of the empirical reality of matter as the permanent. If we want to be in keeping with transcendental idealism, we must interpret the mind independent character of matter either on the empirical or on the transcendental level. If we choose the latter sense, we get stuck again in the impasse of considering what is conditioned by our knowledge as a condition of our knowledge. If we choose the former, we cannot characterise matter as a condition of our knowledge, because only in the transcendental sense can we speak of conditions of our knowledge.

Let us flesh out the tension between transcendental idealism and the Refutation by focusing on the status of our knowledge of the permanent. According to the "Analytic of Principles", it is apparent that such knowledge is *a priori*. We can know independently of experience that something empirically given must be the case if we are to know the external world as composed, say, of objects that are causally governed and that stand in determinate relations (e.g., reciprocity) amongst one another. According to the Refutation, however, our knowledge of the permanent cannot be strictly *a priori*. There we are required to think of the permanent as picked out through the experience of objects in space, so that the knowledge of what this permanent is like has to be classed as a *posteriori*.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ cf. Skorpen 1968, p. 28.

One may say that the situation here is not as bad as it seems. Kant is actually saying in the Refutation that we are able to posit a priori the permanent as a condition of self-knowledge. While this permanent is always presupposed a priori in every temporal sequence, the character of this permanent is known only a posteriori. What is a priori is just the thought of something enduring in space, and not its features, which are always revealed through their empirical determinations.⁵⁸ Allison is one who tries to salvage Kant in this way. He says for example, that the requirement of the permanent in perception is strictly a "transcendental claim, which tells us nothing about the nature of this matter. That remains a question for empirical investigation".⁵⁹

This alleged solution, however, will not do. First, in adopting it, all we can say is that the thought of the permanent - or the representation of it - is required for self-knowledge to be possible. However, Kant is keen to claim that it is not the representation of the permanent, but the permanent itself, that is supposed to play this role. Secondly, the above solution allows us only to say that the presupposition of the permanent, and not the knowledge of it, is a priori. However, as far as the Refutation is concerned, it is the empirically given permanent, and not its mere a priori presupposition, which has to be the primary condition of self-knowledge. In order to put the Refutation to work successfully against the sceptic, the permanent has to be considered as an (empirical) item in the external world, and not as an (empirical) item in our minds. If this is so, on the transcendental level, we have to class the knowledge of this permanent as a posteriori, and not as a priori.

Let me put this point in another way. What we are looking for in the Refutation is to establish the knowledge of the permanent as a priori. Only in so doing can we harmonise the Refutation with the "Principles" in particular and with Kant's idealism in general. But this knowledge cannot play the role of the condition of self-knowledge that is expected in the Refutation. We may be inclined to contend that we do know a pri-

⁵⁸ cf. Paton 1936, p. 207, vol. 2.

⁵⁹ Allison 1983, p. 209.

ori that there has to be an underlying stuff in appearances, although we do not know a priori what this stuff is like. But the Refutation seems to require more than this. In fact, there we learn that “the determination of my existence in time is possible only through the *existence of actual things which I perceive outside me*”.⁶⁰ Well, if we bear in mind that, according to Kant, what is *actual* is “that which is bound up with the material conditions of experience, that is, with sensation”,⁶¹ and if we consider that the intuition “which is in relation to... sensation is ... empirical”,⁶² then knowledge of what is sensorily given is empirical, so that we are constrained to conclude again that the knowledge of the permanent in the Refutation has to be empirical, not a priori. It is only insofar as we perceive the permanent, and *a fortiori* have empirical knowledge of it, that we perceive ourselves in time. As a result, we are left with two conflicting theses: the knowledge of the permanent is a priori in the “Analytic of Principles”, but has to be a posteriori in the Refutation.

This conflict echoes in the dilemma presented at the beginning of this section. How can something empirical which is, according to Kant’s idealism, subjected to our epistemic conditions, and whose knowledge is *ipso facto* a posteriori, be at the same time in the Refutation, an epistemic condition, and whose knowledge has to be *ipso facto* a priori? Such a riddle, taking all the remarks above on board, remains resistant to a proper solution in transcendental idealist terms. We seem to be unable, within transcendental idealism, to give a proper account of the permanent as the condition of self-knowledge. But if this is so, the sceptic can always resort to this riddle in order to shield his suspicions regarding our knowledge claims. Therefore, transcendental idealism fails to provide us with a consistent anti-sceptical argument. Even if the sceptic grants that transcendental idealism establishes the permanent as the precondition of self-knowledge, he will still be able to doubt about what this permanent is like according to Kant’s thought. This is equivalent to saying that Kant does not leave us better-off vis-à-vis the sceptic. Kant’s

⁶⁰ B 275.

⁶¹ B 266.

⁶² B 34.

anti-sceptical approach, at the end of the day, just throws us back to the drawing board.

4. The Struggle to Rehabilitate Transcendental Idealism

We seem to have been driven into a deadlock, which leaves us thoroughly empty-handed. Transcendental idealism and the Refutation are incompatible. The Refutation seems to be the “black-hole” of transcendental idealism as well as the other way round. In order to hold the former, we have to tear the latter apart. In turn, transcendental idealism seems to undermine the Refutation. If we stick to the transcendental idealist picture of the external world, we are left with no plausible interpretation of the results of the Refutation. In any case, though, sceptical misgivings cannot be discarded. If transcendental idealism alone holds, our anti-sceptical effort crumbles, for within such a picture the Refutation cannot tell us what the permanent is like. If in turn we do not restrict the Refutation to the transcendental idealist picture, we leave it open to a transcendental realist interpretation. The first possibility has to be dismissed. The Refutation is supposed to show the sceptic that we are justified in being empirical realists, i.e., in believing that the world which is grasped through the senses is mind independent. If we omit the Refutation, the sceptic will continue to undermine our knowledge claims. The second possibility, in turn, seems unfeasible. If we choose to go back to transcendental realism, we will never be able to defeat the sceptic, as shown in chapter 1. And if we try to appeal to phenomenalism, we shall not get very far, for phenomenalism, as shown in chapter 2 by means of Kant’s help, has been proven unsuitable to determine the externality of the empirical world, which is to say it fails to respond to the sceptical challenge.

At this juncture, it seems that there are three remaining alternative choices for escaping from our impasse. Firstly, we may try to hold transcendental idealism and discard the Refutation. Secondly, we may try to revise transcendental idealism in order to reconcile it with the Refutation. And thirdly, we may try to go along with the Refutation

without transcendental idealism while struggling to avoid transcendental realism.

Let us evaluate them one at a time. The first choice will not do. Bearing in mind that the Transcendental Aesthetic is unable to argue for the externality of the object of knowledge, as shown in chapters 2 and 3, if we dispense with the Refutation, what we are left with is just the results of the Deduction that, *if* we are justified in believing that we do have objective experience, this experience has to be law-governed. But this would leave us without proof that the antecedent of this conditional is valid. Since this proof is supposed to be found in the Refutation, once the latter is discarded, transcendental idealism cannot answer the sceptic.

The second choice of overcoming the incompatibility between transcendental idealism and the Refutation, i.e., the attempt to revise the former in order to make it suitable for the latter, can be divided in four attempts, each of which endeavours to furnish a reinterpretation of the notion of the permanent considered as the condition of self-knowledge.

The first one is devised several times by Kant himself after the publication of the second edition of the *Critique*, in his *Reflections*. There, however, Kant shows that he was aware not only of the impasse that we have just pointed out, but also of the fact that the only alternative to set it aside is to conceive of a mind independent object which is much in keeping with what he criticises most, namely transcendental realism. He says, for example, that temporal ordering in general requires "something outside us ... which is not ... merely representation, that is, form of that which appears, ... but a *thing in itself* [sache an sich]".⁶³ Kant also seems to recapture the general thrust of transcendental realism when he observes a correspondence between representations that are only in me and a *thing in itself* that lies outside me.⁶⁴ Apparently without considering the *Reflections*, Prichard seems to hold exactly this view of Kant when he says that the heart of the Refutation consists "in the con-

⁶³ Ak. XVIII, p. 612 (my italics).

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 648.

tention that the permanent the perception of which is required for consciousness of my successive states must be a thing external to me, and a thing external to me in opposition to a representation of a thing external to me can only be a thing in itself".⁶⁵ Paton, in turn, while conceding that Kant achieves reasonable consistency in the Refutation, allows nonetheless that Prichard may be correct because the notion of "a permanent phenomenological substance (or a phenomenal object which can be distinguished from our ideas) is a contradiction in terms".⁶⁶

Simply put, the problem with this appeal to the thing in itself is that it directly contradicts Kant's requirement in the Refutation that the permanent has to be perceivable.⁶⁷ I do not think that the 'two aspect' view of transcendental idealism, expounded in chapter 1, is of much help here. I have revised it by suggesting that the expression 'thing in itself' can only be consistently interpreted within transcendental idealism if we take Kant to be holding just a negative concept of an object, i.e., a concept of what objects cannot be. Hence if we interpret the quotations just shown on the transcendental level, we will be forced to recognise that the permanent required for all time determinations is just the negative concept of an object, in which case we shall not be able by any means to consider such a conception as a condition of self-knowledge. Rather, Kant is actually thinking of a positive conception of an object in this context, an object which is not constrained by our cognitive powers. He says, for example, that, "in order that the object appear to be outside us, there must really be something outside us, *though not constituted in the way by which we have the representation of it... (sic)*".⁶⁸ That being so, Kant seems to become a transcendental realist *malgré lui*.

Guyer apparently welcomes this revised version of transcendental idealism by saying that, in order to eliminate the above mentioned deadlock, Kant exploits "the possibility that we could know that something *exists* independently of us without knowing *what it is like* inde-

⁶⁵ Prichard 1909, pp. 322-3.

⁶⁶ Paton 1936, p. 380, vol. II.

⁶⁷ cf. B 276.

⁶⁸ Ak. XVIII, p. 613.

pendently of us".⁶⁹ This alleged solution collides with one of the main premises of Kant's thought, to wit, that transcendental idealism is an epistemological, rather than an ontological doctrine. As we know by now, Kant's idealism deals with the conditions of our knowing objects, and not with the objects themselves. Moreover, there is an insuperable problem for Guyer's claim, namely, the idea that something exists but that we *cannot know* this something which exists. By what means can we establish for sure that something exists without listing all the evidence for its existence? And even if we do have all this evidence at our disposal, how can we be sure that it is not produced by something which is not a mind independent object, but an evil demon or a mad scientist? In this way, Guyer just reinstates all those problems with which we were faced in chapter 1. If there is something that we cannot have access to, or that we can have no knowledge of, we are in the same uncomfortable position as the transcendental realist, vainly trying to get hold of the unreachable features of the external object.

The second attempt to make transcendental idealism compatible with the Refutation is to employ Kant's distinction, deepened by him in his later thoughts, between formal and material idealisms. Recall that in order to distance himself from Berkeley's phenomenalism, Kant explains that his transcendental idealism has to do with the form whereby we are given objects, and not with matter and its very existence.⁷⁰ He must be taken as suggesting that, while the form of matter is (transcendentally) mind dependent, matter itself is *not* so considered, i.e., matter is (empirically) mind independent. But if the Refutation is to make sense at all, matter cannot be considered as empirically real, because it plays the part of a *necessary* condition of self-knowledge. Now, unless Kant is willing to discard the assumption borrowed from Hume that what is empirical is always contingent, the conclusion of the Refutation cannot be properly interpreted on transcendental idealist grounds. And if we drop the necessary character of matter as the permanent required for self-knowledge, then the Refutation is rendered ineffective against the

⁶⁹ Guyer 1987, p. 414.

⁷⁰ cf. B 519; cf. also chapters 1 and 2 above.

sceptic, because in that case the perception of the permanent becomes merely contingent. At the same time, taking into account that transcendental idealism teaches us to think of the permanent as subjected to our a priori (necessary) conditions, if we do not take away necessity from the notion of permanent, we slip into the dilemma of having to consider the product of necessary conditions as itself a necessary condition. In view of this, transcendental idealism and the Refutation cannot possibly fit together.

Kant's last remarks to support the results of the Refutation are not very helpful:

"The reality of outer objects (as thing in themselves [*sic*]) can only be established if one avoids taking their intuition as an intuition of a thing in itself. Otherwise, the form of space would be considered as pertaining to the object independently of the constitution of the subject. Then, it would be possible for us to have the representation of such a thing without its existence".⁷¹

There are two ideas underlying this passage. One is that only by assuming the external object to be formally ideal can we establish that it is materially real. The second is that this assumption prevents the sceptic from raising the possibility that we may have the representation without necessarily having the object represented (or "its existence"). Well, the first idea correctly states the general thrust of transcendental idealism. A consideration of mind dependence in the transcendental sense (form) is supposed to allow us to consider mind independence in the empirical sense (matter). But the move from this idea to the second one, that only in so doing can we guarantee the objectivity of our external representations, is unargued for. We would only be licensed to make such a move if the Refutation could be put to work within transcendental idealism, so that we are left in the same situation as we started, namely, trying to harmonise them.

⁷¹ Ak. XVIII, p. 627.

The third attempt to revise transcendental idealism by means of a reinterpretation of the notion of permanent runs as follows. Commentators like Guyer for example, tend to think of the permanent necessary for empirical self-consciousness as being the enduring self (not only myself and my mental history, but also my body). This account may seem more promising, and it is indeed in keeping with Kant's later thoughts. In the *Reflections*, Kant holds that self-knowledge can only be knowledge of "myself as a being that exists in a world".⁷² And a few pages later he continues: "I am to myself an object of my outer intuition in space. Without this I could not know my own position in the world".⁷³ In this way, Allison, for example, acknowledges that a fruitful line of thought could consist in maintaining that the temporal order of my mental states has to stand in correlation with my bodily states and through such a correlation alone my own existence in time is determined in relation to the existence of other objects in the experiential horizon.⁷⁴ Förster in turn, states that the result of the Refutation is that, "if I am to determine my own existence in time, I have to constitute myself as a corporeal being which can stand in spatial relation to something outside me".⁷⁵

This alleged way out may seem compelling at first sight, but we think that it does not overcome our stumbling block. An enduring self with a body has to be thought of, within transcendental idealism, as located not only in time, but also, and specially, in space, interacting with other bodies or spatial objects. In this way, the problem we had in determining in what sense the permanent is to be understood seems to recede. If the permanent is thought of as one's bodily states, it bears the same status as any other empirical object, i.e., it is an item located in space and integrated in a network of items spatially ordered. As before, we have to think of this permanent, now understood as my body spatially determined, either in a transcendental or in an empirical sense.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 615.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 620.

⁷⁴ cf. Allison 1983, p. 303; cf. also Aquilla 1979.

⁷⁵ Förster, 1985, p. 299.

Now, transcendently speaking, the knowledge I have of my body is conditioned by the a priori ingredients lying in the subject and cannot play the role of a condition of knowledge. Empirically speaking, it is just another item in the external world that I, in tandem with the sceptic, can describe but for knowledge of which I ask a proper justification.

Finally, the fourth attempt to revise transcendental idealism, by rethinking the permanent in perception that is posited as a condition of self-knowledge, is offered by Baum. According to him, the best possible candidate for the permanent is that which “constitutes the materiality of matter”, i.e., “the impenetrability through which it fills a space”.⁷⁶ His explanation is that the permanent is thought of by Kant as that which corresponds to sensations, and this can only lead us to impenetrability, inasmuch as it is that which renders objects capable of being sensed. Now, to switch from the permanent to a feature of the permanent would not answer the sceptic. Sceptical doubts will continue to be raised not any longer towards the permanent, but towards the feature (impenetrability) of the permanent that plays the part of the condition of self-knowledge. Besides, the sceptic can reasonably say that what he knows for sure is the sensation of impenetrability and not the solid object itself, so that his sensation can well be produced by an agent other than this object.

5. The Struggle to Rehabilitate the Refutation

Since the second possibility of eliminating the deadlock between transcendental idealism and the Refutation does not hold water, let us now take account of the third, namely, to think of the Refutation without transcendental idealism. To start with, if we remove transcendental idealism, we will no longer be able to hold the results reached in the last chapter. So, although we can hold empirical realism, i.e., we can justifiably claim that empirical knowledge is knowledge of a world distinct

⁷⁶ cf. Baum 1986, pp. 98.

from our thoughts, we remain unable to hold that this world is law-governed. In that event, the sceptic will always be able to suppose that the world can be otherwise. Besides, it should be noticed that Kant thinks of the Refutation as a mere piece of clarification, for it is an addition to the B-edition of the *Critique* that affects "the method of proof only".⁷⁷ This suggests that the Refutation is an argument constructed out of the main points of transcendental idealism. In detaching the former from the latter, we are left with an argument which lacks a proper philosophical foundation.

Despite these reservations, Strawson seems to adopt this solution, since he repudiates "some doctrines of transcendental idealism". I shall reserve a detailed view of Strawson's approach for the next chapter, where I shall discuss the so called "transcendental argumentation" strategy. For the time being, it is interesting to confine our attention to Förster's standpoint, since he holds the relative independence of the Refutation vis-à-vis transcendental idealism quite explicitly. He says, for example, that the validity of the Refutation

"does not depend on the truth of transcendental idealism. Indeed, this argument can perfectly well stand on its own feet. Unlike its ancestor in the Paralogism of the A-edition, this argument does not presuppose the doctrines of the Aesthetic but focuses entirely on the conditions of time-determination. And it is for precisely this reason, namely, that it *only* presupposes what Descartes himself had asserted, that this argument is so much more potent than its A-edition ancestor".⁷⁸

Förster, however, overlooks an essential point of the Refutation, to wit, that the permanent, whatever it might be, has to be *perceived*.

⁷⁷ cf. B XXXIXn. It should be noticed that Kant seems to be inaccurate again about his own philosophical achievements. It is not at all correct to characterise the argument presented in the Refutation as a matter of clarification only. Although the Refutation is rooted in transcendental idealism, Kant introduces there the idea that objects in space are the precondition of self-knowledge. Nowhere else in the *Critique* the reader will find this move.

⁷⁸ Förster 1985, p. 294.

Unless transcendental idealism is brought into the proof, the sceptic can consider this permanent in transcendental realist terms and interpret it as being the thing in itself. In view of this, he can doubt either that the permanent is really perceived or that what we perceive does correspond to the way the external object is really like apart from our experiential field. For this reason, the possibility of reading the Refutation without transcendental idealism seems as unpromising as the alternative of holding transcendental idealism while dispensing with the Refutation. Transcendental idealism is supposed to eliminate the transcendental realist gap between the world of appearances and the reality in itself. Without transcendental idealism, we either bump into this gap again, or we are left with phenomenalism. In any case, we remain unable to rebut the sceptic.

Concomitantly, Förster seems to regard the Cartesian view assumed by Kant in the beginning of the proof as the only premise of the Refutation. But through it alone Kant would never reach the conclusion that the permanent *in space* is required for self-knowledge in time. The step from the first premise to this conclusion can only be established through hidden premises, especially the acknowledgement that the permanent cannot be "an intuition in me".⁷⁹ This is so because, according to Kant, an intuition in me is only temporally ordered, i.e., it is just a fleeting item in the stream of my consciousness. In this way, we have to think of the permanent as outside us. According to the results of the "Transcendental Aesthetic" (sic), we know that by means of space alone can we represent objects as outside each other and ourselves. Finally, if we do not think of space and time in the context of the Refutation as a priori, intuitive and ideal - just as transcendental idealism holds - we open up the door for the transcendental realist to appeal to an absolute notion of spatial and temporal orderings; in which case, as shown in chapter 3, the sceptic can come around all over again. Thus, the Refutation will only be successfully carried out if it is previously assumed that transcendental idealism holds. But since transcendental ideal-

⁷⁹ B 275.

ism seems unable to establish once and for all what the permanent required for self-knowledge is like, and since the Refutation is open to the sceptical doubts without transcendental idealism, we have to admit that there seems to be no possible way of salvaging Kant from succumbing to scepticism.

This contention is similar to that one made at the end of chapter 3. Kant's transcendental idealism at bottom does not license us to be empirical realists. There the reason for this consisted in the fact that Kant's notion of a priori intuition is undermined by his commitment to both Euclidean geometry and the notion of an affecting object of intuition. Here the reason is that the permanent in perception required for every temporal ordering cannot be accounted for within transcendental idealism.

As a conclusion to this chapter, it is worth emphasising that Kant's attempt to build up an anti-sceptical argument in the Refutation is not successful. The Refutation will only be put to work successfully if it overcomes transcendental realism. However, it has been shown that the instrument whereby Kant endeavours to do so, namely, transcendental idealism, is incompatible with the results of the Refutation. Thus, as far as the sceptical challenge is concerned, transcendental idealism does not provide us with a better option than transcendental realism. After prolonged swimming towards land, the transcendental idealist perishes at the sea-shore.

Chapter 6

Anti-Sceptical Arguments outside Transcendental Idealism

In this chapter, we shall claim that recent anti-sceptical attempts by the users of the so called transcendental arguments are inevitably doomed to failure. It will be argued that, since the users of this kind of argumentation do not give an account of the philosophical ground on which the sceptic is to be disarmed, they allow him to find refuge within some version of transcendental realism. In section 1, we shall present the basic structure of transcendental arguments. Besides, we shall acknowledge Walker's and Stroud's reservations to Strawson's point of view. In section 2, we shall focus our attention on Putnam's argument that the vat hypothesis is self-defeating. We shall contend that Putnam's overall strategy requires exactly what is being questioned by the vat sceptic, to wit, a non vat standpoint. Putnam anti-sceptical argument is thereby proven to be still open to the sceptical doubts.

1. Transcendental Arguments

Despite our conclusion in the preceding chapter that the Refutation cannot work either within or outside transcendental idealism, some philosophers, specially Strawson, have recently developed a kind of argumentation which they call "transcendental", and which is based particularly on the proof structure of the Refutation, whereby, they believe, the sceptic can be neutralised. What is striking is the fact that they think it is possible to do so without a previous commitment to some of the main points of transcendental idealism. In this sense, we shall take

the transcendental argumentation into account from now on. We shall show that, not having found any way of stopping the sceptic from appealing to transcendental realism, the users of transcendental arguments entangle themselves in the same problems as those pointed out in chapter 1. Once this is done, we shall be able to corroborate the results of the preceding chapter. It will be clear, then, that any attempt to cope with the sceptical demand for a proper justification of our empirical beliefs has to take account beforehand of the adequacy of our conception of the external world.

Recall that the sceptical challenge is very simple. We have some beliefs about the world around us, the world of tables and chairs. The sceptic then challenges us to justify these beliefs. As we understand it, he does not necessarily deny the reality of the empirical objects, say, this Mac, the table under it, this keyboard, etc. He is just asking for a justification, a philosophical one. He thinks that the justification is needed because there are some occasions where we are mistaken about what we see, what we feel, etc. Sometimes we are under the influence of alcohol and think there is an object far away that is not really there. Or we might suffer from a hallucination that excites our mind, deceiving our senses.

In the face of it, the users of transcendental arguments advise us to reason as follows: if we can prove that the beliefs we entertain about the external world serve as pre-conditions of that which even the sceptic is forced to accept, namely, experience or thought, the sceptical challenge will backfire. The sceptic's refusal to accept the truth of propositions about the beliefs he suspects will imply the denial of that which he takes for granted from the very beginning, i.e., that he has experience. Transcendental arguments can thus be said to show "not that a proposition is true, but that it must be taken to be true if some indispensable sphere of thought or experience is to be possible".¹

In that way, the problem of the justification of our empirical knowledge, for example, would be disentangled not by proceeding from

¹ Lacey 1976, p. 244; cf. Griffiths 1969, p 167.

a given premise in order to reach a certain conclusion that solves the initial problem, i.e., by deductively drawing certain conclusions from premises already known as true, as the transcendental realists used to do, but rather by proceeding in the opposite direction. Given that we have experience or thought it is asked what are the pre-conditions of this experience. In this way, propositions about certain beliefs which are under sceptical attack are to be taken as true for the sake of what is stated as a starting point, namely, that we have experience. As Strawson says, "it is only because the solution is possible that the problem exists. So with all transcendental arguments".² In other words, it is only because we have always been capable of identifying objects in such and such a way according to our conceptual scheme, that an inquiry into the conditions under which alone we can do this is possible at all.

Strictly speaking, transcendental arguments do not demonstrate the falsity of the sceptical position through merely deductive means. They show the pointlessness or idleness of his claim by arguing that certain preconditions for experience - mainly those preconditions which the sceptic is keen to undermine - are not just a matter of choice; those preconditions or beliefs are inevitable and irrebuttable if we are to have experience at all.³ Through them we are invited to suppose what would be the case as regards experience or thought provided that certain beliefs involved in it were missing. In view of this, it is worth noticing that the structure of a transcendental argument as conceived by Strawson and others shows some similarity with the *reductio ad absurdum* technique.⁴ The user of this kind of argument starts off by acquiescing provisionally in the lack of a rational foundation to our empirical beliefs and then draws an inconsistent, or unacceptable conclusion; that being done the sceptic is forced to deny the initial claim.

² Strawson 1959, p. 40.

³ cf. Strawson 1985, pp. 21-3.

⁴ cf. Förster 1989, p. 11.

Over the last few decades several arguments have been classified as transcendental.⁵ All of them resemble the *reductio* structure just mentioned, although each of them endeavours to solve a particular philosophical problem not necessarily linked with scepticism regarding the justification of our knowledge claims. Wittgenstein, for example, claims that it is not possible to obey a rule privately and hence to have a private language that no one but the speaker could understand.⁶ Davidson as well contends that a sentient being cannot have thoughts unless it is an interpreter of the speech of others. Asking whether it is possible to possess thought but not speech, he claims that thoughts are dependent upon the identification of large patterns of public beliefs entertained by the speaker. The possession of a belief, however, is linked with the possibility of being mistaken and, as a consequence, of knowing how to split truth and falsity. Such a possibility then, is said to emerge only within an interpretation. Hence it is senseless to affirm that someone has thoughts without being an interpreter of the speech of others.⁷ Malcolm, in turn, tried to prove that mechanism, or determinism as regards our neuro-physiological apparatus, cannot conceivably be true of human beings. He does so by deducing a consequence of mechanism, namely, the impossibility of intentional behaviour, hence of thought and speech. Now, if this hypothesis is true, it must be assertible. But if it is assertible, it is not true.⁸ Finally, Putnam claims to resolve the problem of the external world in his celebrated chapter about brains in a vat, with which we shall deal in the next section.

Strawson in turn, reads the Deduction as a transcendental argument, although he believes that Kant does not accomplish the necessary anti-sceptical results there. According to Strawson, the same strategy is revived by Kant in the Refutation. Strawson's reading of the Refutation may seem compelling at first sight. Kant himself refers to it as a kind of indirect proof. "It is absolutely impossible", says Kant, "to prove from

⁵ As is stated, for example, by Förster and Harrison (cf. Förster 1989, p. 9; cf. Harrison 1982, pp. 211-2).

⁶ cf. Wittgenstein 1953.

⁷ cf. Davidson 1975.

⁸ cf. Malcolm 1968.

inner perception that the ground of representation is not in me. But if I say, suppose it is always in me, no temporal determination of my being is possible".⁹ The issue here though, is whether the idea that the Refutation is a transcendental argument that dispenses with Kant's main epistemological premises can function successfully against the sceptic.

In this way we suggest that the key question to be asked about transcendental arguments, when they are applied to the problem of justification of our knowledge claims, is whether they really work without our presupposing transcendental idealism.¹⁰ We have shown in chapter 1 that transcendental idealism is supposed to overcome the transcendental realist postulation of a (viewpoint of the) world constituted independent of us, on the basis of which the sceptic raises his doubts. My reservation about transcendental arguments is, then, as follows. The sceptic seems to have little to lose by acquiescing in the commitment that he has to assume some beliefs to be true if he is to have experience. He might plausibly contend that, as far as he is concerned, he is indeed obliged to accept that the beliefs about the external world *have to be taken* as true. Even before formulating the challenge, he may take for granted that we must acknowledge these beliefs as true, either for the sake of his having experience or because of his natural instincts. He can say for example, that without empirical beliefs we would never be able to survive. Like Hume, he may point out that, when life is taken into account, when he is playing backgammon with his friends, philosophical doubts about the existence of an external world seem not only artificial but also contrary to our everyday practices. However, the sceptic may escape from the net of transcendental arguments by stating that, even if one is committed to considering some of one's beliefs as being true, this does not imply that they *really are true*. For the sake of either experience or survival, he will never reason differently. This obligation, however, is beside the point. What is at issue is whether propositions about these beliefs properly describe objective states of affairs and not whether these propositions *have to be* admitted as true.

⁹ Ak. XX, p. 367.

¹⁰ cf. Strawson 1959 and 1966, Harrison 1982 and Förster 1985.

Let us pause here for a moment. The sceptic seems to be replying to the user of transcendental arguments in the following way. It has been transcendently argued that there is a necessary connection between experience or thought and the commitment that our empirical beliefs must be taken as being true. What has not been transcendently argued though, is that these beliefs are true. So, what seems contrary to the non problematic premise that we do have experience is the negation of propositions like "we must hold that our empirical beliefs are true", or "our empirical beliefs must be taken as being true". But nothing has been said about propositions like "our empirical beliefs are true". Keeping this in mind, what still needs to be addressed is the supposition that our empirical beliefs may not be true and that the "real" world may be otherwise.

It must be pointed out at this stage that what makes the sceptic legitimately hold both the commitment and the supposition above is the introduction of the (consideration of a) reality in itself constituted apart from our experience. The commitment may hold only with respect to the (consideration of a) reality as it is for us, not necessarily with respect to the (consideration of a) reality in itself. Let me explain myself. The difference between "I am committed to maintaining that a belief B is true" and "B is true" stems from the distinction between the way we see the world and the way the world "really" is. This distinction is the hallmark of transcendental realism. Now, the user of transcendental arguments does not show us what the external world is like. In fact, he deals with a purported non problematic notion of externality. He does not determine on which philosophical standpoint we ought to base our knowledge of the external world. In the absence of such a constraint, nothing precludes the sceptic from adopting a transcendental realist view of reality. Now, the gap that necessarily comes with transcendental realism provides grist for the sceptic's mill. He, the sceptic, can concede that we are obligated to assume whatever belief we want him to assume. He can accept the fact that such and such empirical beliefs are presupposed in his doubts. He can even accept that, if he does not suppose them to be true, he will deny the uncontroversial evidence that he has experience. However, by resorting to the transcendental realist gap, he

can also say that the assumption about the truth of some of his most basic empirical beliefs does not (and can never) provide him with a privileged standpoint by means of which he can match these beliefs with the “real” features of the external world. Since it is possible for him to resort to the (consideration of a) reality in itself constituted apart from us, a connection between his empirical beliefs and his capacity of having experience or thought is limited to the (consideration of a) reality as it is for us. In the face of it, he may grant that, within the experiential field, commitments of the type proposed by the users of transcendental arguments have to be taken as true, but it is still at issue whether our empirical beliefs actually match or correspond to the (consideration of a) reality constituted apart from our conditions of experience. Hence, he can always continue to entertain the same doubts about his empirical beliefs. It is then futile to argue that we must take empirical beliefs as true. It still needs to be shown that these beliefs are true from the point of view of a reality already made independent of us.

The user of transcendental arguments may counterattack in the following way. The sceptic has requested a justification of our empirical beliefs. Well, here is the justification. If we deny that empirical beliefs must be taken as being true, then no experience whatsoever is possible. But is this a justification? This may play the part of a justification within a picture of the external world wherein *what we must take to be the case is indeed the case*, i.e., a picture of the external world that is exempt from the gap provided by transcendental realism. After all, what “if there are forms of experience which are non-spatial, or non-causal, or in which there is no need to distinguish experience from its objects?”¹¹ In other words, what if from a (viewpoint of a) reality constituted independently of our conditions of knowledge external objects can be considered as they “really” are in themselves, and not as they are for us?

Keeping these considerations in mind, the answer to the sceptic is not going to be provided by means of a special kind of proof structure alone, as the users of transcendental arguments seem to assume. The re-

¹¹ Grayling 1992, pp. 508-9.

ply to the sceptic must start by addressing the conception of the external world. Once we allow the flawed picture of transcendental realism to be brought about, our anti-sceptical efforts will take us nowhere. From this it follows that a different picture of the external world is needed, a picture that is not compromised by the inadequacies of the transcendental realist approach. This is the role played by transcendental idealism, as conceived by Kant. Keeping this in mind, any attempt to disentangle the allegedly Kantian method of proof from transcendental idealism is doomed to failure. Now, such a conclusion matches the one reached in the last chapter. If we consider the Refutation as a transcendental argument in the Strawsonian sense, i.e., as an anti-sceptical argument detached from transcendental idealism, the sceptic will always be able to play down our efforts to justify our knowledge claims.

At this stage, it should be noticed that I am here in agreement with most of what Stroud and Walker said about Strawson's earlier defences of transcendental arguments. Let us take a closer look at this discussion. In explaining the achievements of the Refutation, Strawson says:

"to... give any content to the idea of *the subject's awareness of himself as having* such-and-such an experience at such-and-such a time... we need, at least, the idea of a system of temporal relations which comprehends more than those experiences themselves. But there is, for the subject himself, *no access* to this wider system of temporal relations except through his own experiences. Those experiences, therefore, or some of them, *must be taken* by him to be experiences of things (other than the experiences themselves) which possess among themselves the temporal relations of this wider system".¹²

If the temporally ordered system encompassing non-experiential elements is not accessible, the knowing subject himself cannot help but depend on his own experiences. There is no way out of our conceptual

¹² Strawson 1966, p. 126-7; last italics mine.

scheme, within which alone can we suppose that things are independent of our experience of them.¹³ But there has to be a distinction between “what things are” and “what we experience them to be”.¹⁴ Hence, for the sake of the subject’s own awareness, we must take some experiences to be experiences of things “which possess among themselves temporal relations independent of the order in which they are actually experienced”.¹⁵ This means that we cannot help but *assume* some experiences to be of things ordered in a different way than our representations are ordered, for every representation is ultimately dependent upon our subjective temporal order. The former order *has to be* acknowledged as corresponding to a system that we cannot perceive in itself; in a word, a necessary enduring framework of things in themselves.¹⁶

Since he introduces the idea of a mind-independent domain of things constituted and already made completely apart from our awareness, Strawson can be viewed, *mutatis mutandis*, as a transcendental realist. In introducing this idea, Strawson seems committed to the standard picture of transcendental idealism and *a fortiori* leaves his account of the Refutation open to all those reservations that we pointed out in the first chapter. We have argued that within that picture, just as within transcendental realism, the conception of a reality in itself brings out the unfeasible task of matching the way we see the world with the way the world “really” is.

As a result, Strawson’s conclusion cannot be that we actually experience things outside us. Instead, he has to be viewed as maintaining that we must think, must take,¹⁷ must see,¹⁸ our empirical beliefs to be the case. In this way, it seems that the only possible conclusion we can draw from Strawsonian transcendental arguments is a statement about ourselves and our beliefs, not about the world. That is what Walker argues

¹³ cf. *ibid.*, p. 127 n. 1.

¹⁴ cf. *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ cf. *ibid.*, p. 125.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 125.

for. He claims that we might, for example, perceive tiny flashes of coloured light, located at various places within our visual field and displaying a regular pattern. If we change the field of our vision, we can have grounds "for thinking things had gone in the usual way during our absence".¹⁹ We could come to have grounds for drawing a distinction between objective patterns of flashing lights and our subjective experiences of these patterns. We would then incorporate within our conceptual scheme the concepts "objective" and "subjective", and we might also incorporate concepts like "body" and "objects". But so far we have only certain concepts and a stable pattern of flashing lights. Strawson wishes to use transcendental arguments to show what is presupposed as a condition of human experience. All that is presupposed, says Walker, are certain truths about the human mind, that it perceives stable patterns of representations and draws certain distinctions based upon these patterns, using concepts like "independent objects".

Walker seems correct in arguing that Strawson's transcendental arguments show only the necessity of concepts and beliefs, and not of an objective world. However, he believes that Kant also makes this mistake. Kant's position, Walker points out, is that these arguments "provide conclusions about our concepts and beliefs - about the world of appearances and not about things in themselves".²⁰ At this stage, it is worth noticing that Walker agrees with Stroud about Strawson's anti-sceptical achievements. Focusing his account on the *Individuals*, Stroud challenges Strawson to justify the belief that objects exist unperceived. Strawson claims that the sceptic must know what he means in expressing such a doubt. This requires him to employ a conceptual scheme whereby he is led to think of the world as containing objective particulars. The claim is to the effect that meaningfulness in general, including that of sceptical doubt, requires that the conceptual scheme in question may be granted for the sake of argument. The question, Stroud contends, is whether it follows from the nature of this conceptual scheme that the

¹⁹ Walker 1978, p. 120.

²⁰ *ibid.* p. 126.

sceptic's doubt, in order to be meaningful, must be false. The problem, as Stroud sees it, is that this requires Strawson to show that "a statement about the way things are follows from... a statement about how we think about the world", and adds, "how could such an inference ever be justified?"²¹

Stroud stretches out his objection by acknowledging that either transcendental arguments are restricted to a proof of our beliefs and concepts, or they must be based on a version of the *verification principle*. He interprets Strawson as arguing that the necessity for thinking of the world as containing objective particulars entails an ability to identify and reidentify these particulars, which in turn entails the possibility of possessing satisfiable criteria for reidentifications. But, Stroud says, we can only get the conclusion that (we can know whether) objects continue to exist unperceived by way of the following suppressed premise: if we know that reidentification-criteria have been satisfied, we know that objects continue to exist unperceived. It is this premise that justifies the inference from the way we must think to the way things are; generalised, it amounts to the verification principle, i.e., to the principle that the talk of unperceived objects is meaningful only if we have access to them. Without this principle, Stroud concludes, Strawson's argument does not succeed; but if he has the principle, he does not need transcendental arguments.

Unlike Walker, though, Stroud correctly takes Kant to be arguing not for the necessity of concepts and beliefs, but rather for the requirement of objects in space. "Kant thought", Stroud says, "that he could argue from the necessary conditions of thought and experience to the falsity of 'problematic idealism' and so to the actual existence of the external world of material objects, and not merely to the fact that we believe there is such a world, or that as far as we can tell there is".²² In this way, Walker seems to beg the question against Kant. To accept a conclusion concerning beliefs is to adopt the view that we really

²¹ Stroud 1968, pp. 245-7

²² *ibid.*, p. 256.

experience not objects but representations, some of which we believe to be representations of objects. To this a Cartesian sceptic could reply that the argument has only proved the necessity of outer *representations* and Kant is well aware of such an impropriety. "To this proof", Kant says about the Refutation, "it will probably be objected, that I am immediately conscious only... of my *representation* of outer things and consequently that it must still remain uncertain whether outside me there is anything corresponding to it, or not".²³ But Kant knows that, owing to the nature of inner sense, all representations are fleeting, so that they cannot provide the permanent necessary for inner experience. Consequently, according to Stroud, Kant would never agree that the Refutation shows merely the need for certain beliefs.

I hold that Stroud is entirely correct in claiming that Kant acknowledges his conclusion to be the necessary presupposition of objects in space. Otherwise the sceptic could indeed comply with the inevitability of a commitment to such and such beliefs about the external world, and yet still doubt that objects in space are actually to be found in our experience. By accepting a conclusion concerning merely the concept of objectivity - which must be taken as referring to a mind-independent world - Strawson has adopted an austere interpretation of Kant's doctrine that cannot perform an effective justification of our empirical beliefs.²⁴

For that reason, it is not surprising to see Stroud advocating that Kant's general argument against scepticism, i.e., the Refutation, depends fundamentally upon transcendental idealism. It is Kant's major task to demonstrate that we have an immediate perception and direct knowledge of things around us in space. Stroud then writes:

²³ B X n.; cf. chapter 5 above.

²⁴ In a more recent work, Strawson ends up agreeing with Stroud's criticism of transcendental arguments (cf. Strawson 1985, p. 21).

“to avoid sceptical idealism and thereby explain how noninferential knowledge of things around us is possible, we must view ‘all our perceptions, whether we call them inner or outer, as a consciousness only of what is dependent on our sensibility’... And to adopt that view is to adopt a form of idealism. It says that the objects we perceive around us in space are dependent on our sensibility and our understanding. It is only because that is true that we can perceive those objects directly and therefore can be noninferentially certain of their reality”.²⁵

Stroud understands very well Kant’s position *vis-à-vis* the sceptic. The sceptic will never be refuted until it is shown that our knowledge of objects in space is immediate and direct. Anything different from this will allow him to contend that our knowledge of objects is inferred and then to raise doubts about the justification of this knowledge. A transcendental realist has no choice but to assume that knowledge of objects is inferred. This is one of the reasons why Kant claims that transcendental realism leads to scepticism.²⁶ As we have seen in chapter 5, any proof from the effects to their causes countenances the admittance that other causes might be brought into play in order to produce the available effects (representations).

From these considerations it follows, on the one hand, that our view of Strawson’s transcendental arguments seems to be in keeping with Stroud’s and Walker’s. Strawson is limited to saying that certain experiences “must be taken” to be experiences of objects in space outside us and not that these experiences *are* of objects in space outside us. In other words, he can only argue for the necessity of concepts and beliefs and not for the necessity of an objective world. On the other hand, we are closer to Stroud than to Walker with respect to Kant’s intentions in the Refutation. As argued for in chapter 5, Kant intends to establish that mind independent objects are the pre-condition of self-knowledge, and not that certain beliefs about the world are somehow connected with certain beliefs about ourselves. There Kant argues for actual objects in

²⁵ in Stroud 1983, pp. 419-20.

²⁶ cf. A 369.

space because, according to transcendental idealism, we have immediate and direct access to such objects in our experience. Once aware of these observations, it seems inevitable to assert that Strawson cannot defuse sceptical doubts unless he assumes from the very beginning what he repudiates most, namely, transcendental idealism. Therefore, Strawson's proposal of stripping transcendental idealism away from Kant's theoretical philosophy cannot be held convincingly.

2. Putnam's Brains in a Vat

The conclusion just reached can be reinforced if we consider another recent, well known example of a transcendental argument apart from Strawson's. Our tactic will be basically the same as the one adopted in the last section. In other words, we shall show that Putnam leaves untouched the possibility for the sceptic to appeal to a transcendental realist picture of the external world and thereby carry on doubting about the justification of our knowledge claims.

The vat hypothesis can be sketched as follows. It is possible to imagine a world in which the sentient creatures who inhabit it, and who have ever existed, are brains residing in a vat of nutrients, perhaps controlled by a sophisticated computer created and managed by an evil scientist. What these brains observe, or feel, or hear, or touch, is in fact the result of computer-controlled electronic impulses. The experiences for each brain provided by the automatic apparatus duplicate in detail the experiences of actual human beings and other sentient creatures. Keeping this in mind the sceptic suggests, as it is predictable, that such a thought experiment might, for all we know, be not mere fantasy but *our* actual situation. How can we possibly know that we are not in the kind of situation just described?

The vat sceptic claims in the same way as the sceptic to which Kant opposes, that we have no rational guarantee that what we take to be our present situation and, concomitantly, our overall view about the world, is in fact the case. It is preferable to describe the vat hypothesis in this

manner because nowhere in his account does Putnam state that his transcendental argument is addressed to an ontological sceptic, i.e., one who doubts the existence of an external world. It seems that the sceptical challenge persists even if the sceptic complies with the fact that there are objects, computers, brains and vats. Besides, the sceptic is not concerned with whether or not I exist. Putnam says that it is self-defeating to think 'I do not exist' "if thought by me... (as Descartes argued)".²⁷ Thus, the sceptic that he has in mind is much more resourceful than the Cartesian sceptic of the First Meditation. By the same token, it seems that the assumption that Putnam would be addressing his proof to the so called Cartesian sceptic is not completely accurate.²⁸ The Cartesian sceptic is attacking *all* our beliefs, even the most fundamental of them, namely, that "I am, I exist". Putnam's sceptic does not waste time asking whether there are objects, or whether he exists; he might be willing to grant that it is ridiculous to suppose otherwise. He might even raise his hands and say, like Moore, that there are two objects in front of him. What he requires us to prove, however, is our claim that propositions about the world of tables and chairs, even this one about Moore's hands, correctly state what the world is really like. In other words, what the vat sceptic seems to be demanding from us is a rational justification of our knowledge claims. He requires us to show how it is possible to be an empirical realist, i.e., to hold that our empirical beliefs are indeed beliefs about a world distinct from our thoughts that lies in space outside us.

Putnam proposes a way of undermining the vat hypothesis that matches our general description of transcendental arguments. This hypothesis is, according to him, self-defeating. Roughly speaking, he focuses his account on the possibility of our being able to refer to objects in a vat situation. If we were a brain in a vat, then terms like "table", "chair", "elephant", as used by me would refer not to actual tables, chairs and elephants, but to whatever images the computer or the mad scientist behind the computer causes me to have. Likewise, the terms "brain" and "vat" would not refer to actual brains and vats but to those images, and

²⁷ Putnam 1981, p. 8.

²⁸ This assertion is made, for example, by Brueckner (cf. Brueckner 1986, p. 148).

the proposition "I am a brain in a vat" could not be true. Putnam claims that, if the hypothesis is true, then it is false. If it is indeed the case that I am an envatted brain, then, when I utter "I am a brain in a vat", I am not referring to "real" brains or vats, so that the proposition is to be regarded as false. In this way, as any other user of transcendental arguments, Putnam tries to reduce the vat hypothesis to an absurdity. We can only suppose that we are brains in a vat because we are not brains in a vat.²⁹

Better put, Putnam's argument resorts to the semantics of the sentence "I am a brain in a vat". If this sentence is uttered by a brain in a vat, then it cannot be true. The reason, according to Putnam, is that non envatted brains refer to things in a very different way from the way envatted brains do. Vat terms are devoid of referents in the "real" world, for there are, according to the vat hypothesis, no objects in the vat world - except brains, vats, a computer and perhaps a mad neuro-scientist. In this way, while the term "Mac", when pronounced or thought by a non envatted brain, refers to a Mac, when pronounced or thought by an envatted brain, it refers to "Mac-image". Thus, the vat utterance "my Mac is now in front of me" would be true if and only if the envatted utterer were having the experience of a non vat Mac. But since, according to the vat hypothesis, brains in a vat cannot have such experiences, the utterance is, Putnam contends, necessarily false. Now, the same observations can be made if we substitute for the vat sentence "My Mac is now in front of me" the vat sentence "I am a brain in a vat". That is the very heart of Putnam's strategy. If I am a brain in a vat, the sentence "I am a brain in a vat" is *false*. Therefore, the sentence "I am a brain in a vat" is self-defeating, for if it is true - i.e., if I am an envatted brain - then it is false, i.e., then I am not an envatted brain.

As I see it, though, there is a facet in this approach that Putnam seems to have overlooked. If, by being in a vat condition, we cannot judge in a determinate way anything about the world or about ourselves, this means that we are incapable of establishing once and for

²⁹ cf. Putnam 1981, pp. 6-9.

all the truth value of propositions in general. If this is so, then in our hypothetical vat condition, the proposition "I am a brain in a vat", as thought of by me, cannot be said to be false, much less true. As Coppock comments on, if we are brains in a vat, then "we speak vat-English, not English". Hence, the truth value of 'we are brains in a vat', "in vat-English is neither here or there, as far as the argument is concerned".³⁰ If we stick to the vat hypothesis, i.e., if we assume that *we* are in a vat condition, then anything that *we* can possibly state can make sense *to us* or to other envatted brains, but can not make sense to non envatted ones. This is the trick of the vat sceptic. In order to strengthen his suspicions, he introduces a viewpoint or a perspective of the external world that is immune to the hallucinations caused by the evil neuroscientist. Just like the transcendental realist, he appeals to the idea of a (description of the) world constituted independent of us. The core of the matter is that, *from a non vat standpoint*, our utterance could well be no more than *flatus vocis*, i.e., a mere grunt or a set of meaningless sounds.³¹ So, the problem here is that, if we are brains in a vat, "we do not really utter words and sentences, but only *seem* to do so. Now, a seeming utterance is no utterance (exactly as a fake Rembrandt is no Rembrandt)".³²

It seems then, that Putnam decides to face the sceptic within the sceptic's own territory, namely transcendental realism. Putnam is only entitled to state that the sentence "I am a brain in a vat" is false, and then to conclude that it is self-defeating, *by taking for granted in advance*, as the sceptic does when he formulates his doubt, that he is *not* a brain in a vat. Putnam envisages a way out of vat scepticism by assuming inadvertently a perspective of the world that, he believes, cannot be questioned by the sceptic. This assumption alone would allow us to regard the proposition 'I am brain in a vat' as true or false. But this is exactly what is at stake: what makes us so sure that our alleged non vat situation is not "actually" a vat one?

³⁰ cf. Coppock 1987, p. 19.

³¹ cf. *ibid.*, p. 22 ff.

³² cf. Casati and Dokic 1991, p. 93.

Now, once the sceptic introduces the thought of a reality in itself, or, in Putnam's terms, of a reality viewed from the God's eye point of view,³³ into the debate, he is able to shift the burden of proof back to his challenger and doubt that, from that divine point of view, we are not brains in a vat. It will be then up for the sceptic's challenger to prove that not only from our point of view, but also from the God's eye point of view, we are not brains in a vat. This is equivalent to saying that, once the sceptic conceives of his hypothesis by means of the transcendental realist picture of the external world, he can play down the results of Putnam's transcendental argumentation by stating that *it is only from our point of view that we can assume we are not brains in a vat*. But does this hold from an absolute perspective of the world by means of which objects might be seen as they "really" are?

In keeping with what has been said in the last section, we can imagine the sceptic replying to Putnam in the following way. From our point of view, we *must take* the referent of terms like "brains" and "vats" to be real existences and not just the results of electronic impulses. If we do not *assume* this, we will have to concede that we are indeed brains in a vat. But what do Putnam and any other user of transcendental arguments have to say once the transcendental realist perspective of the world is acknowledged? Is it the case that, *from an absolute point of view*, we are not brains in a vat and, therefore, we can really refer to the external world?

Putnam's contention that brains in a vat could not refer to "vat" but just to "vat-image" depends upon a previous determination of the meaning and the reference of the term "vat". This term has to be given a meaning in a way that would not be available to brains in a vat, i.e., in a way which could not be grasped by the vat-thoughts of envatted brains. The *leit motiv* of the vat hypothesis is just that we, allegedly non-vatted beings, are in a very similar situation to an envatted brain, namely we refer to things *from within* our experiential field. The question still remains then, as to whether we have the means to determine that we are at

³³ cf. Putnam 1981, p. 50.

a privileged non-vat standpoint, because inside our ken, our alleged non-vat experience *is to us exactly what the vat experience is for the en-vatted brain*.³⁴ We are also locked in our reality. We can never contemplate it from without.

That being so, the sceptic may contend that even if we *take to be true* that we are not brains in a vat, this claim can only be made from *our* point of view, and that it is still to be proved on what grounds we take for granted that our point of view is exempt from the sceptical threat. In other terms, we have yet to show that what we take to be real does coincide with the way the world *really* is. By not challenging the transcendental realist background in his response to the vat sceptic, Putnam allows the latter to be able to raise his doubts based upon the transcendental realist idea of a (viewpoint of the) world already made independently of our experience, bringing back all those reservations exposed earlier in chapter 1.³⁵ Putnam does not seem to try to undermine the sceptical riddle by denying such a background. He rather boasts that he has defeated the sceptic within that troublesome territory. The fact, however, is that on the transcendental realist basis, the sceptic seems unbeatable. There is no way of bridging the gap between our view of the world and the way the world really is.

One may object that the vat sceptic does not presuppose a world beyond the world of appearances, namely reality in itself. He is referring to this very world that we come across in our every day experience. So, it is beside the point to accuse him of appealing to transcendental realism. However, the fact of the matter is that he raises the logical possibility that the world which appears to us is a fake produced by an evil neuroscientist. But he can only do so if he contends that the external, "real" world may well be made out of features which are quite different from those empirically available to us. In this way, although he may not postulate a two world transcendental realist theory of the external world, the vat sceptic can still make use of the two description

³⁴ cf. Sacks 1989, p. 71 ff.

³⁵ cf. Steinitz 1994, pp. 218-9.

transcendental realist assumption to cloud our certainty about our knowledge claims. As shown in chapter 1, the latter view arises when we posit a perspective of the external world that is distinct from our point of view. In so doing the vat sceptic, just like the transcendental realist, introduces the idea of an external world apart from our cognitive capacities. If this is so, the sceptic contends, we may at bottom be deceived with respect to what externality is really like.

Our line of reasoning so far leads us to entertain suspicions about the success of Putnam's argument in rebutting the sceptic. What the sceptic attacks is our rational basis upon which we endeavour to determine what is true and what is false. Putnam struggles to drag the non vat world into the vat one, i.e., he tries to interpret a possible vat situation by means of a non vat viewpoint. The sceptic, however, reasons the other way round, i.e, he casts doubts about the soundness of our conceptualising and judging what is true or false.³⁶ The question is not from what standpoint we can judge our present situation but rather, how we can judge our present situation provided that our standpoint is under fire and seems to lack a proper foundation. If we do not have an unshaken standpoint, it might well be the case that we could not really *understand* the proposition "I am a brain in a vat" and as a consequence, we could not determine, for a given proposition whether it is true or false, since we might lack the required conceptual framework to take account of our situation. As Nagel says:

"(...) although the argument (Putnam's) doesn't work, it wouldn't refute scepticism if it did. If I accept the argument, I must conclude that a brain in a vat can't think truly that it is a brain in a vat, even though others can think this about it. What follows? Only that I can't express my scepticism by saying 'perhaps I'm a brain in a vat'. Instead I must say, 'Perhaps I can't even *think* the truth about what I am, because I lack the necessary concepts and my circumstances make it impossible for me to acquire them!' If this doesn't qualify as scepticism, I don't know what does".³⁷

³⁶ cf. Putnam 1981, p. 14.

³⁷ Nagel 1986, p. 73; cf. Sacks 1989, chap. 3, *passim*.

To be more precise, Putnam argues that, if we assume that the proposition "I am a brain in a vat" is true, then we must admit that it is false. However, he does not provide the basis of our certainty about what is true and what is false. It has yet to be proved that we are actually in possession of a well founded (non-vat) standpoint whereby we are guaranteed that what *we* can refer to is not affected by the vat sceptic's suspicions. Without such a proof, we may be unable to account for the truth or the falsity of propositions and hence, we can not be in a position to characterise the vat hypothesis as self-defeating after all. By taking refuge in the transcendental realist picture of the world, the sceptic can always suspect that what we take to be the case from our point of view can not be the case from an absolute, or God's eye, point of view.

Notwithstanding all these reservations, some commentators have tried to dismiss the kind of criticism just alluded to here by claiming that Putnam, in fact, impugns the very introduction of (a perspective of the) world constituted independent of us. As Ebbs contends, by "casting doubts on the *possibility* of entertaining certain thoughts about one's own cognitive perspective, Putnam's reflections raise doubts about the *intelligibility* of the absolute conception", i.e., the conception of a perspective of the world which shows the reality in itself.³⁸ Ebbs explains some pages later that Putnam's alleged solution to vat scepticism is devised within his theory of reference and meaning, which in turn, disallows such a perspective of the external world. According to Putnam,

³⁸ cf. Ebbs 1992, p. 245.

"a careful investigation of our ordinary concept of meaning reveals that our thoughts are partly determined by the things with which we are causally related... There is no way to conceive of a thought or belief unless we have some idea of the social and physical environment on which its individuation depends. This means that our understanding of a representation of the world and our thoughts about what the world is like are essentially interconnected. So we don't really understand the idea of a representation of the world which is radically detached from... our ability to express its content".³⁹

Although ingenious, these remarks can only be held successfully if Putnam's theory of reference and meaning itself is proved to be resistant to the sceptical assault. Putnam must show that the sceptic has no right to suspect the reliability of the appeal to the social and physical dimensions of our language. Dell'Utri, in turn, contends that it is Putnam's internal realism (which is Putnam's version of Kant's empirical realism) that supports his theory of reference and meaning.⁴⁰ Internal realism according to him, "is a good metaphysical framework on the basis of which to reject the BIV hypothesis".⁴¹ Contrary to Brueckner and to our own criticism,⁴² Dell'Utri claims that Putnam's transcendental argument seems to rest on a philosophical background which is foreign to transcendental realism.

We are well aware that Putnam is *not* a transcendental realist. He rather presents his view as a "demythologised Kantianism", without "things in themselves and transcendental egos".⁴³ Within internal realism he acknowledges that the vat hypothesis is just a fairy tale, for it can only be told from a God's eye point of view.⁴⁴ It is not our intent to analyse the cogency of either Putnam's theory of reference and meaning or his internal realism, as so many interpreters have tried to.⁴⁵ It is also

³⁹ Ebbs 1992, p. 258: cf. Dell'Utri 1990, pp. 84-6.

⁴⁰ cf. Putnam 1981, p. 49 ff.

⁴¹ Dell'Utri 1990, p. 90.

⁴² cf. Brueckner 1986.

⁴³ Putnam 1978, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁴ cf. Putnam 1981, p. 50.

⁴⁵ cf. McIntyre, 1984, Malachowski 1986, Tymoczko 1990, Stephens & Russow 1985, *et alia*.

beside the point to determine whether Putnam's anti-sceptical response is based upon internal or transcendental realism. In order to keep track of the main intentions of our overall strategy in this thesis, it is worth emphasising that the issue here is rather that, on the one hand, if it is based upon transcendental realism, Putnam's anti-vat-sceptical position will bring back all the reservations exposed so far in this chapter and in chapter 1. On the other hand, if it is based upon internal realism, we can then envisage a light at the end of the tunnel, but not any longer *within* Putnam's argument against the vat sceptic. Granted that this kind of argument depends upon internal realism, the battle against the sceptic will then have to shift from the case of the brains in a vat to the wider discussion about the philosophical ground upon which one builds up an anti-sceptical proof. As Peter Smith observes, "rejecting this notion [that of a transcendental realist perspective of the world] will require entirely different arguments to those... sketched at the outset. Certainly, the 'brains in a vat' argument does not supply *independent* support for the rejection of [transcendental] realism".⁴⁶

Well, this is precisely what we have shown in the preceding section of this chapter. Transcendental arguments cannot stand on their own feet. They fail to address the key point of our quarrel with the sceptic, namely the conception of the external world. In turn, if they are dependent upon such a conception, then they are uninteresting, for the sceptic will concentrate his efforts on undermining it instead of wasting time on what the users of transcendental arguments have to say.

These points being noted, there still remains the task of determining the legitimacy of our decision procedure; it is exactly towards this legitimacy that the sceptical doubts are directed. The sceptic would be able to accept that we are bound to believe that we are not brains in a vat, i.e., that we must assume that we are capable of properly referring to external objects. This however, does not rebut his doubts: from the fact that we are bound to believe that we can refer to external objects, it does not follow necessarily that we can indeed refer to external objects. It

⁴⁶ Smith 1984, pp. 122-3.

might well be part of the vat illusion that we are committed to maintaining that our belief in properly referring to external objects is sound. Unless means are provided for us to be sure that what we refer to is indeed an external world, we do not actually defeat the sceptic.

At the same time, the sceptic may contend that, by being incapable of viewing the world from a point of view different from ours, we may well be confused with respect to our knowledge of the "external" world and, on that score, we may be incapable of determining what is really true or false of this world. Putnam's claim to the effect that if the proposition "I am a brain in a vat" is true then it is false, when pronounced by an envatted being, cannot be sustained. Before starting his allegedly anti-sceptical argument, Putnam has to provide us the necessary and legitimate means through which alone we can determine what is external and thereby what is true and false about the world. Only insofar as externality is given a proper account can our certainties about what is true and false be said to be well founded. It is not possible however, to do so within a transcendental realist picture. And if it is possible within internal realism, then it is the latter, and not Putnam's alleged solution to vat scepticism, that must be proved as sound *vis-à-vis* the sceptic.

Keeping all these considerations in mind, we may say that Putnam's argument against the vat hypothesis, as well as any other transcendental argument, does not stop us from falling into the sceptical quicksand. The sceptic can still preserve his chain of doubts by appealing to transcendental realism. Unless we can be rid of this philosophical background before devising transcendental arguments, they cannot produce the desired anti-sceptical proof.

Conclusion

We have seen in this thesis that Kant shows us good arguments to unravel the inconsistencies of his predecessors. Transcendental realists like Descartes cannot determine what the external object is like. This object is considered, at the end of the day, as independent of the mind but as lying beyond our experiential horizon. Likewise, phenomenologists Berkeley are incapable of accounting for the mind independence of the external object. By considering such an object as constructed out of sense data, they end up reducing alleged mind independent features to mind dependent ones. We have also seen, by means of Kant's help, that Descartes' and Hume's conceptions of the mind are flawed and cannot furnish the basis for a proper conception of the unity of apperception.

However, Kant's transcendental idealism fails to present us with a proper philosophical background against which the sceptic can be answered. This is so because this kind of idealism is dependent upon the notion of a priori intuition, a notion which does not allow us to characterise the empirical object in a consistent way as shown in chapter 3. As for Kant's conception of the unity of apperception, it does seem compelling, but the overall result of the Deduction can only provide us with a conditional to the effect that, *if* it is the case that we have experience of the external world, i.e., if we are justified in being empirical realists, then this world must be conceived of as law-governed. Although it disallows the sceptic to suppose that the world can be otherwise, the law-governed character of our experience by itself cannot serve as the basis for a successful anti-sceptical position, for it leaves untouched the issue of how we are licensed to assume empirical realism in the first place.

The only part of the *Critique* in which Kant faces the sceptic head on, namely the Refutation, presents an account that makes him inconsistent with his own transcendental idealism. We have argued that, even if we concede that Kant proves the dependence of self-knowledge on the permanent in perception, he does not stop the sceptic from feeling uneasy about the transcendental idealist attempt to specify what the permanent

required for every temporal ordering is like. In other words, Kant is forced to consider the only plausible candidate to play the role of the permanent, namely the matter of which empirical objects are composed. However, by conceiving of the permanent as a condition of (self-)knowledge, Kant is unable to furnish a comprehensible interpretation of it within transcendental idealism. The permanent cannot be either a thing in itself, or empirical self-consciousness, or even God. Now, since Kant disallows any study of the status of the external object based upon transcendental realist grounds, he leaves us with no option but to give a proper account of such an object. The permanent remains indeterminable. On that score, the sceptic acknowledges that it has not yet been shown that he is wrong in doubting the possibility of a proper justification of our knowledge claims. Thus, the situation between Kant and the sceptic is more than a mere stalemate. Kant fails to address the sceptical concern.

Kant's epistemology, although relatively successful in singling out the problems of his predecessor, does not drive us into a sound anti-sceptical position. Kant builds up a powerful doctrine to deny the alleged philosophical achievements of the past, but hardly any of his results turn out to be more promising than the proposals of those whose doctrines he criticises. Despite Kant's failure though, we prefer to avoid asserting that the sceptic has the last word in epistemology, or that scepticism is sound. What we have been trying to show throughout this thesis is that one of the most influential epistemologies yet conceived is nevertheless doomed to succumb to the sceptical doubts. It has still to be shown that the sceptic has no reason to be uneasy as regards our knowledge claims. This cannot be done, as we have seen, within transcendental idealism, or within transcendental realism as understood by Kant. However, any other attempt to disarm the sceptic has to take into consideration the whole problematic involved in Kant's attempt to do so. We must learn not only from his but also from his opponents' mistakes in order to avoid making them. Just as Kant believed he had set aside the flaws of his predecessors, we believe it is necessary to set aside his flaws, if we are to find a proper answer to the sceptic.

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