

Brazilian Neo-Pyrrhonism

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Oswald Porchat and his followers define his neo-Pyrrhonism as a philosophy that strives to rethink, update, and extend the old Pyrrhonian skepticism, reformulating the classical notions of truth, reality and even knowledge in "skeptical" or "phenomenal" terms. This paper has two aims. First, I will show that such Brazilian neo-Pyrrhonism is nothing more than an updated version of Kant's transcendental idealism (when read metaphysically, as Paul Guyer did or what Barry Stroud idiosyncratically calls "verificationism". Since at least Berkeley. This has been a recurrent pattern in the modern history of external-world skepticism: whenever skeptics suspend their ordinary belief in a mind-independent reality while still having to make sense of their ordinary lives, they ultimately embrace some form of idealism—one that they should have questioned in the first place. The second aim of this article is to show that Kant's refutation of idealism is a transcendental argument that is both ambitious (truth-directed) and successful against neo-Pyrrhonism.

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Introduction

Neo-Pyrrhonism: A brief Introduction

Oswaldo Porchat and his followers define neo-Pyrrhonism as the doctrine or as a philosophy that strives to rethink, update, and extend the old Pyrrhonian skepticism, reformulating the classical notions of truth, reality and even knowledge in "skeptical" terms. Here is Porchat on his neo-Pyrrhonism:

It is time to return to the philosophy of Skepsis. Indeed, I will defend the idea that it is entirely fitting, even while remaining fully faithful to the original inspiration of Pyrrhonian skepticism, to speak of *a skeptical truth, as well as a skeptical realism associated with it*. (...) (I)t becomes clear then, at least so it appears to me, that the Pyrrhonian skeptic would have no reason not to resort, within the phenomenal framework, to the old vocabulary of truth. We can now allow ourselves to redefine 'truth,' introducing a notion of *phenomenal truth*, just as Sextus did with the notions of doctrine, dogma, and criterion. And this phenomenal truth will then be understood as correspondence between our words and things, meaning: as phenomenal correspondence between our phenomenal discourse and things in our phenomenal world (2006, 202-203, my translation, emphasis added).

It now seems to have become clear how *(neo)Pyrrhonism* accomplishes this task, by developing its notion of phenomenal truth, made possible through its suspensive procedure. Beyond any particular philosophical interpretation, we can finally speak of a *skeptical truth*, undoubtedly susceptible to various philosophical readings—like any and every phenomenal item—but neutral and, in itself, indifferent to all of them (2006, 207, my translation, original emphasis)

The famous passage of the *Hypotyposes Pyrrhonian* (1976) that gives rise to all reinterpretations of ancient Pyrrhonism is *HP 1.13*. In this section, Sextus clearly distinguishes two possible meanings of the term "belief" or "dogma:"

When we say that the skeptic does not hold beliefs, we are not using "belief" in the sense that some use it in the broadest possible way, where believing means approving something. For the skeptic assents to appearances because they confer assent to the *pathé* (affections) that are the necessary result of sensory impressions, and they would not say, for example, when feeling hot or cold, "I do not believe that I am not hot or cold." Rather, when we say that the skeptic does not hold beliefs, we are using "belief" in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to non-evident objects of scientific inquiry about some non-evident subject investigated by the sciences. For the Pyrrhonian philosopher does not assent to anything that is not evident. (*HP 1.13*, 1976)

Sextus tells us that the same Pyrrhonian skeptic holds beliefs that are outside the scope of his suspension of judgment (*epokhê*). The crucial distinction lies in the opposition between evident and non-evident objects (*ádelá*). According to the cited passage, Sextus seems to

suggest that this opposition should not be understood in terms of two distinct propositional attitudes but rather in terms of the opposition between two propositional contents. Thus, according to the well-known example from Sextus, due to his affection or pathos, the skeptic cannot help but passively and involuntarily assent to the proposition that honey *appears* sweet to him. Nevertheless, since the truth or falsity of the proposition that honey is *really* sweet transcends mere appearance ("an object non-evident of scientific inquiry," in Sextus's words), the (neo)Pyrrhonian skeptic would suspend his judgment regarding it; that is, he would abstain from believing both the proposition that honey is *really* sweet and its negation.

In these terms, the skeptic would suspend judgment regarding the truth value of a particular proposition, for example, "honey is *really* sweet," but would believe in the truth of another, distinct proposition, such as "honey *appears* sweet to me." This thesis is known in the literature as the "urbane" interpretation of Pyrrhonism, proposed by [Michael Frede \(1984\)](#). The urbane interpretation gains plausibility when we consider, first, that Pyrrhonian skeptics claim to live following ordinary costumes, and that such doxastic attitudes (along with conative states) would constitute the "primary reasons," without which skeptical conduct would lack intentionality. According to a well-known example from Sextus, the skeptic decides to eat because they assent to the proposition that "it *appears* to them that they feel hunger."

But what is phenomenal truth or phenomenal reality? Porchat grounds his neo-Pyrrhonism on the explicit Pyrrhonian rejection of the so-called "apophantic logos" (see [Porchat, 2006, 120, 126, 133, 139, 160, 161, 198](#)). Skeptical discourse would not be *thetic* in the sense of asserting what appears as real, that is, as true or false. The phrase "it appears to me" should instead be understood as a sentential operator whose function is precisely to suspend the usual assertoric force that would convey a truth claim about a proposition. Thus, when experiencing hunger (pathos) and consequently being led to eat, the skeptic is assenting to phenomenal truth.

But this raises two main questions: can we really redescribe the key notions of truth, reality, and knowledge within this phenomenal framework? Are we eternally trapped in the web of appearances with no access to anything beyond? This paper has two aims. First, I will show that Brazilian neo-Pyrrhonism is nothing more than a version of Kant's transcendental idealism (when read metaphysically, as [Paul Guyer 1987](#)) or what Barry Stroud idiosyncratically calls "verificationism" (see [Stroud, 1968](#); [Pereira, 2022b](#)). Since at least Berkeley (see [Berkeley, 1710/1998](#)), this has been a recurrent pattern in the modern history of external-world skepticism: whenever neo-Pyrrhonic skeptics suspend their ordinary belief in a mind-independent reality while still having to make sense of their ordinary lives, they ultimately embrace some form of idealism—one that they should have questioned in the first place. The central aim of this article is to demonstrate that Kant's refutation of idealism is a transcendental argument that is both ambitious (truth-directed) and successful.

How will I proceed? This introduction is followed by three main sections. In the second section, I will show that Brazilian neo-Pyrrhonism is nothing more than a new form of idealism—according to Porchat's own definition of idealism. This new neo-Pyrrhonic idealism is inspired by Kant's transcendental idealism of the Fourth Paralogism when traditionally read as a metaphysical doctrine, according to which the being or the object is nothing but a synthetic unity of appearances according to conceptual rules. Brazilian neo-Pyrrhonism is also similar to what Stroud idiosyncratically calls "verificationism" (see [Stroud, 1968](#)). This is why neo-Pyrrhonists show sympathies for Stroud's modest transcendental arguments.

In the third section, I introduce the notion of a transcendental argument and the main distinction between the ambitious, world- or truth-directed form and the modest, belief-directed form of transcendental arguments. The idea here is to demonstrate that if ambitious, truth-directed transcendental arguments are destined to fail and belief-directed transcendental arguments prevail, we return to square one: what Kant referred to as the scandal of philosophy and of human reason in general (see [Kant, 1781-1787/1998, Bxxxix](#)).

In the fourth section, I outline Kant's argument in his *Refutation of Idealism* and redirect Stroud's classical objections to Strawson's original argument toward Kant's *Refutation* (see [Strawson, 1959](#)).¹ My aim here is neither to defend or to discredit Kant's argument outright but rather to clarify in what sense gaps or missing premises in the *Refutation of Idealism* might undermine its status as a successful *ambitious transcendental argument*—that is, one that is either *world-directed* or *truth-directed*.

In the final section, I present my reconstruction of Kant's argument in the *Refutation* as an ambitious (truth-directed) yet successful transcendental argument, one that is completely immune to Stroud's criticisms.

1. Skeptics or Idealists?

In the introduction, I have raised two key questions: can we really redescribe the key notions of truth, reality, and even knowledge within this phenomenal framework? Are we eternally trapped in the web of appearances with no access to anything beyond? In this section, I will deal with the first question.

Smith and Porchat claim that there are two ways of reading "real" or "in itself," corresponding to the way in which we "pre-philosophically" and "metaphysically" (in) understand these words. As we saw, Smith phrases it as follows:

When we say that tomatoes are red, *the truth of this statement can be understood in two ways*: either according to the trivial conception of an everyday world or according to the

¹ Indeed, Stroud never examined the Kantian argument contained in the *Refutation of Idealism* in detail. He mentions it in passing in his seminal work as an example of what should be a truly transcendental argument in Kant (see Stroud, 1968, 242), and in a confusing manner, conflating the *Refutation* with the Fourth Paralogism of the first edition in his 1984 book (see Stroud, 1984, 139).

philosophical conception of a 'real' or 'in-itself' world—that is, as correspondence to an objective reality independent of us, *as philosophers understand it*. (Smith, 2023, 62–63; *emphases in italics are mine, in bold by the author. My translation*)

As the author of this claim, Porchat asserts the same in several passages:

By attentively adhering to phenomena, it is crucial for us to clearly distinguish between the phenomenon itself and 'what is said about the phenomenon' (see Sextus Empiricus, H.P. I, 19–20, 1976), that is, *the (philosophical) interpretation made of it* or the discourse that expresses it. For instance, we say that honey is sweet, or that such an event was simultaneous with another, or that ingratitude is a serious flaw. In saying so, we report how things appear to us, describing the phenomenon while *making trivial use of common language*. We understand 'is' as 'appears,' or, more precisely, it is as if we were saying: '*It appears to us* that honey is sweet' (Porchat, 2006, 125, *emphasis added*).

However, by far the most significant passage is the following:

By demonstrating, therefore, that rejecting a metaphysical interpretation of our experience of the world does not prevent adopting a stance that, in many respects, can rightly be called "realist," Kant showed that within this empirical domain, it remains entirely possible to speak of correspondence between our knowledge and objects, and to define the notion of truth in these terms. He made it clear that it is not essential for realism to be metaphysical, and that the corresponding notion of truth can be adequately conceived without any metaphysical dimension (Porchat, 2006, 185–186, *emphasis added*).

Upon a closer inspection, the neo-Pyrrhonian solution to Cartesian external-world skepticism is far from original: it is nothing more than adopting transcendental idealism (in its controversial metaphysical reading), as stated in the Fourth Paralogism, merely reformulated in different terms:

But since the expression outside us carries with it an unavoidable ambiguity, since it sometimes signifies something that, as a thing in itself, exists distinct from us and sometimes merely something that belongs to outer appearance, then in order to escape uncertainty and use this concept in the latter significance—in which it is taken in the proper psychological question about the reality of our outer intuition—we will distinguish empirically external objects from those that might be called "external" in the transcendental sense, by directly calling them "things that are to be encountered in space" (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, A 373, *emphases in italics are mine, in bold by the author*).

Neo-Pyrrhonians almost literally reproduce Kant's distinction between "two senses"—one empirical and the other "transcendental." What they call the "trivial conception of common sense" is, in essence, nothing more than what Kant referred to as "empirical sense" of

externality, and what they call "metaphysical interpretation" is nothing more than what Kant calls "transcendental sense" of externality.

It is in the "transcendental sense," but certainly not in the empirical one, that Kant usually identifies "appearances" (*Erscheinungen*) with "mere representations" (*blosse Vorstellungen*). We find this identification in numbers of passages in both editions of his *Critique* and in several *Reflections* published right after the release of the second edition (2005). Here are just a few passages: see [1998, A490/B518; A104; B164; 1998, A492/B521](#); 2005, Refl. AA, 17: 688, R4723; 2005, Refl. AA, 18: 379; 2005, R5902; 2005, Refl. AA, 18: 612, R6312; 2005, Refl. AA, 18: 673; 2005, R6342; Refl. AA, 18: 687. Interestingly, we find a similar identification within Neo-Pyrrhonism between the terms "phantasía" and "phainómenon:"

What, then, are we to make of representation? Understood as something intermediate between the intellect and external objects, it is said to be an impression or alteration in the ruling part of the soul. However, such a representation is inconceivable and ungraspable (...) ([Porchat, 2006, 106](#), emphasis added)

However, precisely because the alleged representativeness is called into question, there will be less talk of phantasía and more of phainómenon, and it is this notion that will now be regarded as fundamental. In short, phantasía becomes merely phainómenon, and Sextus Empiricus identifies the phainómenon—that which appears to us, which involuntarily moves us to assent in accordance with passive representation (*katà phantasían pathetikén*, see, [1998, I, 19](#))—with what would virtually be a representation, namely his own representation (see, [Porchat, 2006, 22; Porchat, 2006, 108](#), emphasis added)

It is simply striking how the above passage finds an almost identical parallel in the first edition of the *Critique*. Here is Kant on the issue:

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

It is clear however that since we have to do only with the manifold of our representations, and that X which corresponds to them (the object), because it should be something distinct from all of our representations, is nothing for us, the unity that the object makes necessary can be nothing other than formal unity of the consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of representations. ([Kant, 1781-1787/1998, A 104-105](#), emphasis added.)

Within the domain of the empirical sense, Kantians can reintroduce the notion of truth as correspondence, the notion of empirical reality and of cognition (*Erkenntnis*). Like the Neo-

Pyrrhonians, Kantians can claim—in the empirical sense, but not in the transcendental one—that the ball is twenty meters from the goal (in a football field); the airplane is flying over eight hundred thousand feet above sea level, etc. The unsuspected author who ultimately confirms this transformation of skepticism into a reluctant form of phenomenal idealism is none other than Stroud himself:

Kant believes that the second—his empirical realism—can only be true if the first—his transcendental idealism—is also true. ... We must see how these words can be interpreted or understood in different ways—one "transcendentally," the other "empirically." The distinction may be best understood as a difference between two different ways of speaking or using our words, or two different perspectives from which things can be said. ... The expression "independent of us," for example, can be used in two different ways, according to Kant. Using it "empirically" is choosing a class of things that can be found in experience as distinct from another class of things to which this term does not truly apply (Stroud, 1984, 149, *emphases added*).

The question that naturally arises is whether, by embracing Kant's transcendental idealism in the Fourth Paralogism, Stroud would not be ontologically committed to the existence of an "empirical" world of appearances in contrast to the "transcendental" or noumenal world of things-in-themselves. Smith addresses this question in an unsatisfactory manner. Let us examine what he has to say:

All of this seems to suggest a form of 'non-metaphysical or phenomenal realism,' as if there were a single reality that appears to us, as if all experience pertained to a single phenomenal reality, to use Porchat's words (Porchat, 2006, 212-2017). This does not seem to me to be Stroud's position, nor does it seem to be one of the necessary consequences of his analysis. At no point was any particular type of fact granted ontological privilege over others. The idea of a 'non-metaphysical realism' or a 'phenomenal realism' does not suggest that, in any sense, there is a privileging of one type of fact ... over others (Smith, 2023, 65).

Indeed, I am ontologically committed to a category of entities (appearances, sense data, things-in-themselves, etc.) whenever the truth or falsity of a statement in my theory depends on the assumption of the existence of entities in that category. If, as Smith asserts, interpreting Stroud, everyday beliefs would be true relative to what appears to us and not to what exists in itself, there is an undeniable commitment to the ontological reduction of "things" to "the appearing of things." This is what we call idealism or phenomenalism: in Kantian jargon, the existence of mind-independent external objects would be ontologically reduced to a "synthetic unity of appearances" (see Pereira, 2021).

The implicit trivial argument is as follows: when so-called "dogmatists" claim to know the in-itself being of things, the neo-Pyrrhonians suspend their judgment. But this does not prevent us from continuing to believe in the existence of "external objects" when these are ontologically

reduced to a unity of appearances, i.e., the unity of the consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of representations.

As interpreted by Stroud and important Kant scholars such as Guyer (see Guyer, 1987), transcendental idealism in the Fourth Paralogism is a form of "phenomenal idealism," quite similar to Berkeley's (see [Berkeley, 1710/1998](#)). What Kant apparently proposes in the Fourth Paralogism of the first edition seems to be the same "idealist solution" that Berkeley also advocated: if we reduce the external reality of things in themselves to their phenomenal appearance, there is no reason to be skeptical since our immediate epistemic access to such appearances would be guaranteed. For example, my belief that ripe tomatoes are red is fully supported by this world reduced to appearances, in which something appears to me as bulgy and red, barring illusions and hallucinations.

On the other hand, if we conceive of reality as constituted by entities that exist in themselves, knowledge becomes problematic since I do not have immediate epistemic access to the supposed existence of things-in-themselves. For example, my empirical belief that ripe tomatoes are red finds no support in reality when metaphysically conceived as a reality constituted by things-in-themselves.

Needless to say, it matters little whether this appearing is something private and internal to a single mind or something external and shared by multiple minds (what Stroud curiously calls "verificationism" and what Porchat refers to as "phenomenal realism"). What matters is that there is no possible knowledge of a mind-independent reality. In the jargon of Kant's Copernican revolution, roughly speaking, a priori cognition of objects is only possible on the assumption that objects conform to our cognitive faculties, not the other way around (see [Kant, 1781-1787/1998, Bxvii](#)).

However, the reader may wonder whether the broad sense of "idealism" I am referring to—one that is not limited to solipsism but extends to the domains of thought and even language—is acceptable to Brazilian neo-Pyrrhonians. Porchat leaves no doubt that he understands idealism in this broad sense: I consider any philosophical stance that prioritizes knowledge over its object, thought and discourse over things and facts, to be idealist. It turns the reality of the World into a problem and condemns itself to losing it, for failing to recognize it. The shadow of idealism has obscured Western reason for centuries. The disdain for the Object and the Fact, in the strong and metaphysical sense of these terms, has been the corrupting vice of modern philosophy. Like a hidden but omnipresent paradigm, manifesting its protean nature in diverse domains, the idealist spirit has permeated our entire culture. Countless scientific projects, somehow affected by it, have seen their desired scientific rigor compromised. The idealist denial of the World has culminated in the abusive cult of language, which contaminates such a large part of contemporary thought and threatens to sterilize it. ([Porchat, 2006, 36-37](#), emphasis added)

But to ascribe to Neo-Pyrrhonians the bold Berkeleyan ontological reductionism of objects to appearances is perhaps overhasty. After all, Neo-Pyrrhonians are concerned with *philosophical/metaphysical* "interpretations," "readings," and "ways of understanding" what appears rather than with the ontological reduction of objects to appearances. Interestingly, we find the same debate within Kantian scholarship: in opposition to Guyer's phenomenalist reading of Kant's idealism (see [Guyer, 1987](#)), Allison has proposed a methodological and epistemological reading (see [Allison, 2004](#)) of the distinction between appearances and noumena. The proposal is quite simple: phenomena and noumena do not mark off *two opposed dimensions of reality*, but rather two different viewpoints of the same reality, namely *God's detached viewpoint* (noumena) that abstracts from our human cognitive conditions and the human viewpoint (phenomena) that considers that same reality *from our human epistemic conditions*.

Even though I believe that Allison's epistemological reading is closer to the truth, I reject his completely deflationary view. Even if the transcendental distinction between phenomena and noumena marks off different viewpoints rather than different dimensions of reality, it seems undoubtable that Kant's idealism is ontologically committed. If not with the reduction of objects to appearances, at least to the existence of an irreducible dimension of reality constituted of noumena. I shall argue for my view in my own reading of Kant's refutation of idealism.

The question is: is something along the lines of Allison's deflationary view what Neo-Pyrrhonians have in mind? It is hard to say because, on one hand, they openly talk of "ways of understanding," "interpretations," and "readings," while on the other hand, they are still attached to the claim that Neo-Pyrrhonians follow "phenomenal truths," "phenomenal reality," etc. We must distinguish several claims:

- A. *Ontological Phenomenalism*. *Esse est percipi*.
- B. *Analytical Phenomenalism*. External reality is mind-made in the relevant sense that the concept of object is nothing but a rule-governed synthesis of mental representations in accordance with concepts.
- C. *Semantic Phenomenalism*. The only things to which the subject can make content-laden reference in experience are the subject's own representations.
- D. *Epistemological Phenomenalism*. Knowledge of reality is exhaustively knowledge of their ways of appearing, i.e. of the ways they do and would appear to us under various conditions.

Claim A expresses the most extreme form of subjectivism and solipsism: real is what appears to us as real. Claim B, however, takes a sophisticated form of sophisticated ontological phenomenism, the transcendental idealism of the Fourth Paralogism according to Guyer's reading. By identifying appearances with representations, the Neo-Pyrrhonist is claiming that we can only refer to mind-dependent entities (the subject's own mental representations).

Semantic phenomenalism does not entail ontological phenomenalism. Claim D is Allison's epistemological or methodological reading of Kant's transcendental idealism.

Be that as it may, let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Neo-Pyrrhonians are only epistemic or methodological idealists in Allison's sense. What remains of the Neo-Pyrrhonian attempt to rethink, update, and extend the old ancient Pyrrhonian tradition that is worthy of the name of skepticism?¹

The last sections of this paper are devoted to demonstrating, against phenomenalists, that we are ontologically committed to the existence of a noumenal world of things in themselves as the ultimate ground of whatever appears to us.

2. Modest Transcendental Arguments

More recently, Plínio Smith—the main disciple of Porchat—has linked the notions of phenomenal truth or phenomenal reality with Stroud's endorsement of what Strawson has called "modest transcendental arguments:"

We can now understand in what sense Stroud accepts that our everyday beliefs are true. It is not merely a matter of claiming that the modest transcendental argument has established the invulnerability of these beliefs by presupposing their truth. ... When we say that tomatoes are red, *the truth of this statement can be understood in two ways*: either according to the trivial conception of an everyday world or according to the philosophical conception of a 'real' or 'in-itself' world—that is, as correspondence to an objective reality independent of us, *as philosophers understand it*. (Smith, 2023, 62–63; emphases in italics are mine, in bold by the author. My translation)

But what is "modest" in opposition to "immodest" transcendental arguments? To address this question, a brief retrospective into the recent history of the term "transcendental argument" in the last century is necessary.

The term "transcendental argument" (hereafter TA) was used for the second time by Peter F. Strawson (1959) as a characterization of a sui generis argumentative strategy.² Strawson characterizes a TA as follows:

The form of this argument might possibly be misleading. It is not that, on the one hand, we have a conceptual scheme that presents us with a certain particular identification problem; while, on the other hand, there exist material objects in sufficient richness and strength to make the solution to such problems possible. It is only because the solution is possible that the

¹ It was precisely due to the fact that he was (justly or unjustly) accused by the Garver-Feder review of having embraced a naive form of idealism that Kant removed the Fourth Paralogism from the second edition of the Critique and, in its place, presented the Refutation of Idealism.

² Austin was the first to use the term in 1939.

problem exists. Thus, with all transcendental arguments (Strawson, 1959, 40)

The nature of TA remains an open question in the literature. Nevertheless, the passage cited above identifies at least three key characteristics of TAs. First, a TA functions as an anti-skeptical argument, meaning that it aims, in some way, to "refute" skepticism. Second, a TA does not attempt to "refute" skepticism *directly*—unlike Moore's infamous proof of the external world (see Moore, 1903/2003) or the positivist dismissal of skepticism *as a meaningless question*. Instead, a TA offers an *indirect* form of "refutation" by demonstrating that the very thing the skeptic *questions* is something the skeptic themselves *presupposes*.¹ Finally, the third characteristic is what Christophen Peacocke (see Peacocke, 1989, 4) and Quasi Cassam (see Cassam, 1999, 83) describe as a "world-directed" argument: a TA must establish that a particular proposition is a truth about the world.²

Strawson's original program gave rise to an immense debate in the second half of the last century, mobilizing many researchers in contemporary analytic epistemology. However, in light of Stroud's (see Stroud, 1968) critique, the original ambition of a "world-directed" or "truth-directed" transcendental argument (TA) seems to have succumbed. According to Stroud, the most a TA could achieve is to show *that certain beliefs are necessary* if the skeptic's own challenge is supposed to make sense—a position that Stroud, somewhat idiosyncratically, labels "verificationism."³ In this way, Strawson's world-directed or truth-directed TA gave way to a modest strategy that Peacocke (see Peacocke, 1989, 4) later termed a "belief-directed" TA. As Robert Stern explains:

A modest TA is one that aims only to establish how things must appear to us or how we must believe them to be, rather than how things actually are (Stern, 2007, 143).

Indeed, the moderate version of the TA as an argument directed at the indispensability of beliefs had already been proposed by Strawson himself when he rejects authorship of the TA strategy that Stroud attributes to him:

From this perspective, how should we regard arguments of the type that Stroud calls "transcendental"? ... Even if we have an inclination toward transcendental arguments, we will

¹ In Kant's words: "the game of idealism turns against itself" (B 276).

² The great majority of epistemologists (Strawson, 1984; Peacocke, 1989; Stroud, 1999; Grundmann & Misselhorn, 2003; Grayling, 1985; Callanan, 2011; Doro'G, 2018; Wang, 2011, 2017; Scott, 2017; Giladi, 2016; Mizrahi, 2011; Stern, 2007, etc.) have yielded to Stroud's criticisms (cf. Stroud, 1968) and embraced a "modest" transcendental strategy, in Strawson's own terms: establishing the "interdependence of conceptual capacities and beliefs within our conceptual scheme" (Strawson, 1984, 53-54). In terms of the second edition of the Critique, this would precisely amount to adopting what Kant calls the scandal of philosophy and pure reason in general, namely, having to believe without ever being able to prove the existence of a world that is external and independent of our minds (Bxxxix).

³ As we will see later, what Stroud here calls "verificationism" has nothing to do with verificationism proper. I believe that Stroud's 1968 article has been widely misunderstood in the literature, including by Stroud himself.

be satisfied to accept Stroud's critique, along with others, that such arguments are based on an unacceptably simplistic form of verificationism or, *at most, can establish a certain interdependence of conceptual capacities and beliefs*. (Stroud, 1984, 53-54, emphasis added)¹

A successful TA should be limited to investigating the connections between the main beliefs of our "conceptual scheme." What makes the nature of TAs quite obscure is the fact that the "skeptic"—the opponent to be refuted—is nothing more than a mere philosophical *straw man*, making it unclear, first and foremost, what they challenge us to prove (namely, the conclusion of the argument) and, second, what the premises of the argument would be. Stroud is explicit about this:

When I speak of the "skeptic," I do not intend to refer to any person, living or dead, or even to the hypothetical defender of a fully articulated philosophical position. I use the expression merely as a convenient way of talking about the familiar philosophical doubts that have been the object of epistemology, at least since the time of Descartes (Stroud, 1968, 242, footnote).

However, upon closer examination of the texts of Strawson and Stroud, the picture changes. Strawson's "skeptic" appears to be a philosopher of Humean lineage, who challenges us to justify our entitlement to common belief in the continuous and unperceived existence in space and time of particulars as material things (bodies). Since the epistemological justification supposedly fails, Hume proposes a "naturalistic-idealist explanation" of how this belief arises in our minds (see Hume, 1739–1740/2000).

In contrast, Stroud's "skeptic" from 1968 and 1984 is assumed to be a philosopher of Cartesian lineage (see Stroud, 1984, 8, 64, 124, 133, 140, 206, 210). But even in this sense, we find ourselves grappling with at least two possible candidates: the global skeptic who emerges at the end of the *First Meditation*—challenging us to prove that most of our beliefs are true—and the external world skeptic who emerges only in the *Third Meditation* after the "discovery" of the *cogito* and the world of ideas in the *Second Meditation*—challenging us to prove that there are things independent of and external to us that correspond to our indubitable *cogito*-like ideas.²

There is no doubt that a Kant-inspired TA cannot succeed against Cartesian global skepticism (see Pereira, 2020a). On the one hand, based on an investigation of the "interdependence of conceptual capacities and beliefs" (Strawson, 1984, 54), you will never succeed in showing that most of your beliefs are true. To address Cartesian global skepticism,

¹ The idea of a modest transcendental argument directed at belief has largely become the predominant view: see Grundmann & Misselhorn, 2003; Grayling, 1985; Callanan, 2011; Doro'G, 2018; Wang, 2011, 2017; Scott, 2017; Giladi, 2016; Mizrahi, 2012; Stern, 2007, etc. Perhaps the only dissenting voice has been that of Brueckner, 1996.

² This alone already indicates that Stroud's initial debate with Strawson was a dialogue of the deaf. Moreover, to my knowledge, even Descartes scholars—who are highly attuned to the so-called "order of reasons"—have not recognized the distinction between the global skepticism of the *First Meditation* and the external world skepticism of the *Third Meditation*.

the focus must be on the very nature of belief itself, as in anti-skeptical arguments based on Putnam's and Davidson's content externalism.¹

Moreover, there is no indication anywhere that Kant regarded the global skepticism of the First *Meditation* as a serious threat warranting a response. The same applies to Hume's skepticism about material things: there is no textual evidence whatsoever that Kant seriously entertained any doubt regarding the continuous and unperceived existence of particulars as material entities or bodies.²

3. Stroud's Objections

Porchat's indignation against idealism certainly echoes the famous protest in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique* that it is a scandal for philosophy and for pure reason to have to accept as a mere belief the existence of an external world of mind-independent objects without ever being able to prove its existence (see Kant1781-1787/1998, Bxxxix; see Pereira, 2014, 2016).³ However, it is noteworthy that Porchat, in opposition to Kant, refuses to engage in any proof, either direct or indirect in the Strawsonian sense.

If transcendental arguments (TAs) are at least inspired by Kant, the best candidate is external world skepticism [which Kant refers to as "skeptical idealism" in the first edition (see Kant, 1781-1787/1998, A377) of his *Critique* and as "problematic skepticism" in the second edition (see Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B274)]. I reiterate: the skeptical idealist is not the global skeptic of the *First Meditation*, arising from the doubt conceived in the form of an evil demon. What Kant describes as a scandal "for philosophy and for human reason in general" is not the supposition that most of our beliefs might be false, but rather the assumption that we must accept the

¹ According to both authors, the majority of our common beliefs are true by virtue of their very nature (see Putnam, 1981; Davidson, 1986).

² One might perhaps assume that Kant has this skepticism in mind when he speaks of the "persistent thing" (etwas Beharrliches) in space within temporal succession (Bxxxix). However, Kant made it clear that his target in the Refutation is the Cartesian problematic idealist, not Hume (1739–1740/2000). However, things change when we consider Hume's skepticism about the so-called principle of the uniformity of nature (1739–1740/2000). Although Hume is not mentioned, it seems quite plausible that Kant is addressing Hume's skepticism about the principle of the uniformity of nature in his Deduction-A. If this interpretation is correct, the Deduction-A can be seen as a belief-directed TA. In his Deduction-A, Kant is not proving the truth of the principle of uniformity. Instead, what he does is argue that anyone who accepts that "cognition" or "experience" is possible—such as Hume, who was an enthusiast of Newtonian mechanics—must necessarily believe that nature is uniform (gleichmassig). To express the point in Strawson's words, Kant's Deduction-A is showing a main connection between concepts and beliefs, namely, the concept of the apprehension of objects and the application of categories that express that nature is uniform. In any case, I do not have the space to explore this point here (see Pereira, 2012, 2017a).

³ However, it is noteworthy that Porchat, in opposition to Kant, refuses to engage in any proof, either direct or indirect in the Strawsonian sense. Indeed, Porchat dismisses external-world skepticism as a pseudo-problem. According to him, the problem only arises because Descartes, based on his cogito, assumes the metaphysical distinction between an internal mental world and the physical external world (see Porchat, 2006, 97). This is not the place to discuss Porchat's view on this matter.

existence of external things merely as a belief (see [Kant, 1781-1787/1998, Bxxxix](#)). In other words, a TA of Kantian provenance must address external world skepticism.

In this section, we will conduct a preliminary examination of the refutation and seek to redirect Stroud's (see Stroud, 1968) famous objections to Strawson's (see, [Strawson, 1959](#)) transcendental argument toward the Kantian argument of the refutation. The conclusion of his refutation takes the form of a brief theorem:

9) The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside of me ([Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B275](#))

The starting point must be something that the idealist presupposes when issuing their challenge. Indeed, Kant begins his argument with the following statement:

1) I am conscious of my existence as determined in time ([Kant, 1781-1787/1998/B275](#))

If we understand Kant's refutation in the manner proposed by Stroud's transcendental argument, this refutation should take the form of an "indirect" argument against idealism regarding the knowledge of the existence of an external world—in contrast to Moore's infamous direct proof (1903). In this case, Kant would need to show that the truth of (9).¹ Indeed, this is what he subsequently undertakes:

2) All time-determination presupposes something *persistent* (*etwas Beharrliches*) in perception. ([Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B275](#), original emphasis)

3) This persistent thing, however, cannot be something in me since my own existence in time can first be determined only through this persistent thing. (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B275)

4) Thus, the perception of this persistent thing is possible only through a thing outside me and not through the mere representation of a thing outside me. ([Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B275](#), original emphasis)

5) Now consciousness in time is necessarily combined with the consciousness of the possibility of this time-determination: Therefore, it is also necessarily combined with the existence of the things outside me, as the condition of time-determination; i.e., the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me ([Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B276](#))

9) The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside of me ([Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B275](#))

In parallel to Stroud's critique of Strawson, one might argue that there is (a first) gap in Kant's Refutation. It could be argued that the unfolding of the premises from 2) to 5) is still not a proof of the *categorical* proposition 9). From 2) to 5), the most Kant would have established is the following *conditional*:

¹ I am following step by step Stroud's 1968 argumentation against the supposed transcendental argument of Strawson.

6) If the empirical recognition of something persistent in space—as a criterion for the temporal determination of the consciousness of my existence in time—is successful, then we know that there is something persistent outside of me.¹

In close analogy to Stroud's critique of Strawson, one might suggest that something is missing between the conditional statement 6) and the categorical existential conclusion 9). For starters, we cannot rule out the possibility that the recognition of something persistent in space might fail. Following Stroud's objection to Strawson in parallel—to avoid such an objection, we need to assume that some tacit premise along the following lines is missing from Kant's original argument:

7) If we can know that the recognition of persistent things in space does not fail, then we know that persistent things exist outside of us.²

Stroud would term, as before, the unfolding of premises 1) to 7) as the "verification principle" (see Stroud, 1968, 247). The argumentative gap would lie between the conditional and the categorical conclusion of the argument: if we are conscious of our own existence in time, then we must be able to recognize persistent things in space. From this broad conditional, the categorical conclusion 9) still does not follow. We need an additional factual premise to apply *modus ponens*:

8) Sometimes we are successful in recognizing the existence of persistent things based on the best criteria we possess, such as the transcendental schema of the category of substance, the permanent.³

Now, 8) is the *factual premise* that instantiates the antecedent of the conditional, and by *modus ponens*, it yields the desired categorical conclusion 9). However, instead of refuting once and for all the external-world skeptic (the skeptical or problematic idealist), Kant's Refutation finds itself confronted with a dilemma.⁴

On the one hand, without the factual premise 8), which instantiates the antecedent of the conditional 7), the argument does not get off the ground. It cannot reach the desired categorical conclusion 9) and is therefore powerless against idealism. On the other hand, the factual premise 8) and the "verification principle" [1) to 7)] render the indirect argument *superfluous*, since we now have what Stroud calls a *direct refutation*. If we successfully recognize the existence of persistent things, then we know that persistent external things sometimes exist and sometimes do not.

But a new criticism emerges. Even if we set aside the "verification principle" [1) to 7)], the gap between statement of the conclusion 9) and the argument that unfolds from 1) to 5) remains open. What 9) asserts would only be inevitable if the content of 9) belonged to what Stroud

¹ Compare this with Stroud's statement: 1968, 246.

² Compare this with Stroud's statement: 1968, 246.

³ Compare this with Stroud's statement: 1968, 247.

⁴ Compare this with Stroud's statement: 1968, 256.

calls the "privileged class" of propositions—propositions that establish very general conditions for thought or meaning:

There are some propositions [of the privileged class] whose truth can never be denied by any particular person. For example, Descartes cannot truly assert that Descartes does not exist—his assertion guarantees that it is false. Moreover, there are some propositions whose truth cannot be questioned by a specific person in a certain way or through a certain language. (...) But the "self-guaranteeing" character of the members of the privileged class is more general than that of any of these [for example, the existence of bodies]. There is no one, whoever they may be, who can truly deny any of the members of the privileged class of propositions (Stroud, 1968, 253).

Prima facie, the statement of theorem 9 does not seem to belong to such a "privileged class." Indeed, theorem 9 is not sufficiently general to be considered a necessary condition for thought or meaning. Nonetheless, Kant regards it as a *transcendental* proposition—one that makes the *experience* or *cognition* of objects possible (see Kant, 1781-1787/1998, A737/B765). Even so, Stroud could still add the following:

The most that could be proven by considering the *necessary conditions* of language is that, for example, *we must believe* in the existence of material objects and other minds if we wish to speak meaningfully (Stroud, 1968, 256, *emphasis added*).

Starting from the consciousness of our own existence in time 1) and reaching the necessity of recognizing the existence of persistent things outside of us in space, we are not authorized to conclude that we know the truth of 9). Once again, something is missing. Stroud's final objection amounts to the following opposition:

- 10) I (must) *believe* that there are things that persist outside of me.
- 9) I *know* that there are things that persist outside of me.

In short, what follows from 1) to 5) is 10). What 9) asserts is a sufficient condition, but not a necessary condition for 1) (the consciousness of my own existence in time). In this sense, the Refutation is, at most, a successful argument as a "modest" transcendental argument—that is, the most that can be established is the conceptual connection between 1) (the consciousness of my own existence) and 10) (the belief in the existence of external things), in the sense that Smith endorses.

Thus, just as Strawson's transcendental argument "directed at truth or the world" fails, Kant's refutation of idealism would also fail, since the refutation does not achieve its original intent of proving that we know the existence of things external to our minds (9). In the end, we are back to square one—namely to what Kant calls "the scandal of philosophy and human reason in general" and Porchat as "the corrupting vice of modern philosophy." We must resign ourselves to a form of idealism and accept the existence of external things merely as an act of faith.

4. A Successful Truth-directed TA

The Refutation of Idealism (see Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B275–279) is an addendum to the second edition of the Critique that replaces the Fourth Paralogism of the first edition. What emerges is a new anti-skeptical transcendental strategy: instead of providing an idealist compromise solution to the skeptical challenge regarding our knowledge of external things (Fourth Paralogism), the anti-skeptical strategy now aims to refute external-world skepticism indirectly. This becomes clear in the first note to the Refutation:

Note 1. One will realize that in the preceding proof the game idealism plays has, with greater justice, been turned against it. Idealism assumed that the only immediate experience is inner experience, and that outer things could only be inferred from it, as in any case where one infers from given effects to determinate causes, albeit unreliably, since the cause of the representations that we perhaps falsely ascribe to outer things can also lie within us. Yet here it is proved that outer experience is truly immediate, and that only through it is it possible to have sure consciousness of our own existence and its determination in time, i.e., inner experience (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B276-277, original emphasis).

Whereas in his Fourth Paralogism Kant assumes without argument, relying solely on the doctrine of his idealism, that we are directly aware of the existence of external things as *appearances/representations*, now Kant intends to prove, rather than presuppose, that we are directly aware of external things as things in themselves. Moreover, whereas in his Fourth Paralogism Kant presented an "immediate proof" (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, A371–A375) of the existence of the external world, he now aims to provide an indirect proof, "turning the idealist game against itself," that is, showing that what the skeptic assumes to be indubitable—namely, the existence of our internal experience—is only possible under the assumption of what the external-world skeptic seeks to dismiss: that I am directly aware of the existence in itself of something persistent (*etwas Beharrliches*) outside of me, which I empirically know, however, based on the transcendental schema of the category of substance—that is, as a substrate of various properties (see Pereira, 2017a, 2017b, 2018b, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2020b, 2022a).

But let us consider Kant's proof once again with closer attention.

- 1) I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B275)
- 2) All time-determination presupposes something *persistent* (*etwas Beharrliches*) in perception. (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B275, original emphasis)
- 3) This persistent thing, however, cannot be something in me since my own existence in time can first be determined only through this persistent thing. (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B275)
- 4) Thus, the perception of this persistent thing is possible only through a thing outside me and not through the mere representation of a thing outside me (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B275, original emphasis).

5) Now consciousness in time is necessarily combined with the consciousness of the possibility of this time-determination: Therefore, it is also necessarily combined with the existence of the things outside me, as the condition of time-determination; i.e., the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B276).

The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside of me (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B275).

The argument can be formalized as follows:

11) I am conscious of my own existence in time, that is, within a specific temporal order (E).

12) I can only be aware of having experiences that occur in a specific temporal order if I am aware of something persistent through which I can determine their temporal order ($E \supset P$).

13) No conscious state of mine can serve as this presupposed persistent thing as a frame of reference ($\sim C$).

14) Time itself cannot serve as this persistent frame of reference ($\sim T$).

15) If 12), 13), and 14) are true, then I can only be aware of my experiences in a specific temporal order if I am aware of persistent things in space outside of me through which I can determine the temporal order of my experiences $\{[(E \supset P) \& (\sim C \& \sim T)] \supset (E \supset O)\}$.

16) I am aware of persistent things in space outside of me through which I can determine the temporal order of my experiences ($E \supset O$) (see Pereira, 2018a).

The first point to note is that Stroud's initial objection does not have the same impact against Kant's Refutation as it appears to have against Strawson's transcendental argument. Undoubtedly, the premises take the form of a large conditional. Nevertheless, the first premise states a Cartesian self-verifying proposition that allows for a categorical conclusion of the argument via modus ponens:

17) If I am conscious of my experiences in a successive temporal order, then I am aware of something persistent through which I can determine their temporal order ($E \supset P$).

From 17), however, it follows that:

18) I am conscious of my experiences in a successive temporal order (E)

19) Therefore, I am directly aware of something persistent through which I can determine the temporal order of my experiences [modus ponens 17), 18)] (P).

There is no gap in the conditional progression of the premises or in the categorical conclusion in the Refutation of Idealism that would disqualify it as a "world-directed" TA. Moreover, although the categorical conclusion does not belong to what Stroud calls "privileged" propositions—such as the Cartesian cogito—the factual premise 18) in the Refutation of Idealism is a cogito-like proposition. Given this, all we need is to invoke some uncontroversial version of the epistemic closure principle, replacing the word "know" with the expression "I am

aware of." We then have something like this (approximately): I am aware of P, I am aware that P implies Q, I consciously infer Q from P, therefore I am aware of Q. The certainty of the factual premise is transferred, via epistemic closure, to the conclusion: I am aware of the existence of something persistent with the same certainty with which I am conscious that my experiences are in a temporal order. Again, there is no gap (nothing is missing) in the Refutation of Idealism that could disqualify it as an ambitious, successful, and "world-directed" TA.

Nevertheless, the crux of the argument lies in premise 19). Here we return to Stroud's "verificationist" accusation against transcendental arguments (TAs). Let us take a brief pause before proceeding. To begin with, "verificationism" is a technical term that Stroud uses idiosyncratically. However, neither Strawson's original TA nor Kant's Refutation are "verificationist shortcuts" for dismissing skepticism as a meaningless issue, as Stroud claims against Strawson. In his original argument (see [Strawson, 1959](#)), Strawson never rejects skeptical doubt as a meaningless question in a positivist manner. He argues that if there were multiple unconnected reference systems, the question of the continued existence of particulars would not even arise. With that said, "making sense" and "meaning" are merely rhetorical expressions in Strawson's argument. Their function is solely to emphasize the implication between the premises and the conclusion.

Be that as it may, what Stroud had in mind with "verificationism" in his accusation against Strawson's transcendental argument (TA) is a form of idealism. If the idealist—such as Berkeley—assumes that the "being of things" can in some way be ontologically reduced to the "appearing of things," then verificationism is the thesis

20) that *truth* equates to *verification* or the *recognition of truth*, or even to *what-appears-to-us-to-be-truth*; for instance, the truth about the existence of something persistent means nothing but the successful empirical recognition of the existence of something persistent.¹

The key point is how we should interpret the claim that something persistent (*etwas Beharrliches*) is a condition for the temporal determination of my own consciousness of existence. If we follow Allison (see [Allison, 2004](#)) and the majority of interpreters of Kant, "this persistent" is merely what exists in a mind-dependent way—that is, what appears in space and is categorized as a substance. Let us call this position the "verificationist reading" of the Refutation. In contrast, we can interpret "this persistent" as something that exists in itself, as a condition for the determination of my own consciousness of existence, and for the temporal

¹I have no doubt that neo-Pyrrhonians endorse Stroud's verificationism. According to Porchat, for example, "the Pyrrhonian skeptic would have no reason not to resort, *within the phenomenal framework, to the old vocabulary of truth*—a vocabulary that is used trivially and spontaneously in common language. Because we have said farewell to philosophical truth and the theories that define it, and because we suspend judgment on these, *we can now allow ourselves to redefine "truth," introducing a notion of phenomenal truth, just as Sextus did with the notions of doctrine, dogma, and criterion.* This phenomenal truth will then be understood as correspondence between our words and things, that is, as phenomenal correspondence between our phenomenal discourse and things in our phenomenal world." ([Porchat, 2006, 2003-2004](#), emphasis added)

determination of any representation within me. Let us call this position the "realist reading" of the Refutation.

As we have seen, the verificationist reading places the Kantian position before a dilemma. On the one hand, if we assume that the persistent exists in itself as some mind-independent noumenon, the argument does not get off the ground. It is powerless against the skeptical idealist, who, as Kant himself recognizes in his Fourth Paralogism, is, above all, a transcendental realist who requires proof of the existence of mind-independent noumena or things in themselves. On the other hand, if we assume that what is at issue is the mere *recognition* of things that persist in space—roughly *what appears to us to be persistent*, based on our best criterion, namely, the transcendental schema of the category of substance—the Kant's Refutation of idealism becomes useless. For now, we have a direct refutation of skeptical idealism: we know that sometimes things persist in space and sometimes they do not. They persist when we can *recognize* that they constitute a unity of phenomena according to the rule of unification (substrate-properties) dictated by the transcendental schema of the category of substance. It was undoubtedly this dilemma that led Kant to abandon his Fourth Paralogism.

However, Kant explicitly states that the goal of his Refutation of Idealism is to prove the existence of something persistent that is not an *appearance*:

(T)he perception of this persistent thing is possible only through a thing outside me and not through the mere representation of a thing outside me
(Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B275, original emphasis)

If the world were an epitome [ein Inbegriff] of things in themselves, then it would be impossible to prove the existence of anything outside the world; [...] But if we consider the world as appearance, this precisely proves the existence of something that is not appearance. (Kant, 2005, Refl. 5356, 18:305)

This Reflection is not isolated from the broader context. The textual evidence supporting the realist reading of the Refutation is overwhelming:

We remain in the world of the senses and are guided by nothing more than the principles of understanding that we use in experience, but we make our progression possible in a *thing-in-itself* by considering the possibility of experience as something real in the objects of experience (Kant, 2005, Reflection, AA, 18: 278, R5639, original emphasis).

We must determine something in space in order to determine our own existence in time. *This thing outside of us* is also represented, prior to this determination, *as a noumenon*. (Kant, 2005, Reflection, AA 18: 416, R5984, emphasis added)

Nevertheless, the most significant textual evidence can be found in the *Critique* itself:

Concerning the phenomena of inner sense in time, this idealism encounters no difficulty in admitting them as real things, for it even asserts that this internal experience is the only one that sufficiently demonstrates *the real existence of its object (in itself*, with all this determination of time). (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B519, emphasis added)

In Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B519, Kant makes it clear that the appearances of inner sense in time and internal experience itself "are proof" of the real existence of a thing-in-itself as the foundation for temporal determination. The Refutation of Idealism merely provides the essential premises for the argument of such proof. Therefore, there is no reasonable doubt that the aim of Kant's Refutation was to prove the existence of the objects of outer sense in the real sense as things-in-themselves or noumena.

Finally, the realist reading of Kant's Refutation of Idealism also finds support in Kant's dissatisfaction with the Fourth Paralogism and in his stated motivation for refuting idealism, namely the supposed "scandal for philosophy and for human reason in general that the existence of things outside of us must be accepted merely on faith" (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, Bxxxix). Kant could never have been satisfied with any proof of the existence of persistent things as "mere representation in me" (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, B275), that is, with the representation of external things in the empirical sense. Therefore, statement 19) must be read as follows:

21) I am directly aware of the existence of persistent *things in themselves*, which, however, appear to me in space and are empirically known by me as a persistent substrate in space over time.

5. The Key Final Step: From Appearance to What Appears

The key question of the entire article (as a defense of ambitious, "world-directed" or "truth-directed" transcendental arguments) is: what is Kant's argument that supports the realist reading of statement 21)? Kant's argumentative crucial step is subtle, quite simple, well-directed, but above all, very ingenious. Indeed, the argument has already been mentioned earlier in the main premise of the argument:

Now, what remains *cannot be an intuition in me*, for the grounds of determination of my existence that can be found in me are *representations*, and, as such, they require something permanent distinct from them, in relation to which their alteration, and consequently my existence in time during which they change, can be determined. (Kant, 1781-1787/1998, Bxxxix, emphasis added)

The same passage can be found in Reflection R6312:

Since, in inner sense, everything is successive and nothing can be retraced, the ground of the possibility of this latter must lie in the relation of representations to something outside us, and indeed to something that is *not itself, in turn, a mere internal representation—that is, a form of appearance—and thus is something in itself*. The possibility of this cannot be explained. Moreover, the representation of that which persists must belong to what contains the ground of temporal determination, but not with regard to succession, for in that there is no persistence; consequently, that which is persistent must reside only in what is simultaneous, or in the intelligible, which contains the ground of appearances. (Kant, 2005, AA, 18: 612, R6312; emphases added)

The final and decisive step of Kant's Refutation contains a concise and dense argument that needs to be unpacked. Kant's implicit argument here is a regress to infinity. Since we are not capable of perceiving temporal order directly, we need something "persistent" in the interval between X and Y to assert that X existed before Y and not the reverse. Now, according to the "verificationist/phenomenalist" reading, this persistent thing would be reduced to something empirically recognizable in space as yet another representation in me, located both in space and in time. However, this additional representation in me is not something permanent, nor is it an object of internal perception. Therefore, we must suppose that another representation in me and in time, say Z, is this "thing persistent in time" through which we determine the succession from X to Y. Nevertheless, the problem repeats itself: if we do not know how to determine the temporal sequence from X to Y, we likewise do not know how Z fits into the sequence of X and Y. Thus, appealing to another state within me sets off an infinite regress. The only way to interrupt it is by assuming that this persistent thing is not a representation but a mind-independent thing that appears as something persistent in space. Thus, from the assumption that I am aware of my own existence as determined in time, it follows that I am also aware of the existence of things-in-themselves outside of me (which, of course, appear to me and are known by me as persistent things in space).

But the reader may wonder how the realism of the Refutation is reconciled with Kant's own transcendental idealism. First and foremost, it is important to be clear that transcendental idealism cannot be read as a reductive phenomenalism in the manner of Guyer. On the contrary, it should be understood as an epistemic or methodological idealism in the manner of Allison (see Allison, 2004). Rather than an ontological reduction of the being of things to their appearance, what we have are two perspectives on the same object or reality: the absolute or "in itself" perspective, which abstracts from our sensible conditions, and the human perspective. Finally, we must also reject Allison's deflationism: there are not only two perspectives of the

same thing. We are also committed to the claim that this single reality exists in itself as a noumenon.

I believe that with a simple example, I can make everything clear. Where does Kant's realism come into play? Suppose I have before me something that appears to me as a ripe tomato. It can change its position in space as well as its properties over time, say from red to rotten brown. The point is that I would not be able to order the representation of red as preceding that of brown if I did not know that it is something that exists in itself and, as such, persists before me.

22) I am unable to perceive the temporal relations between my representations X (of a ripe, red tomato) and Y (of a rotten, brown tomato).

23) Something persistent is necessary to determine the temporal relations between my representations X (of a ripe, red tomato) and Y (of a rotten, brown tomato) as a succession.

24) Hypothesis: this persistent something could be the mind-dependent existence of what appears in space over time (for example, my representations of the red tomato and of the rotten brown tomato).

25) However, as a mind-dependent existence in space, this persistent thing would again be a representation in me and, as such, requires determination. _____

26) Therefore, under the penalty of triggering an infinite regress, hypothesis 25) is absurd: this persistent thing must be something that exists independently of my mind in itself, that is, independent of representations in me, even though it appears to me as something persistent in space.

27) Corollary: I am directly aware of the existence of mind-independent things that persist in existing in themselves, even though I cannot know whether these things that exist in themselves are as I represent them; for example, as a ripe red tomato transforming over time into a rotten brown tomato.

Given this, Kant's Refutation of Idealism qualifies as an ambitious transcendental argument, "directed at the world or truth," and is successful. Kant's Refutation meets all three general conditions I highlighted in the Introduction. Moreover, none of the multiple gaps (missing premises) that Stroud identifies in Strawson's original TA are found in Kant's Refutation. There is an external world beyond our representations of it. However, how it behaves in itself, we will never know, according to Kantian idealism.

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